

hair except for me. During the Cultural Revolution they made the family members cut their hair short. They even came and took away all the traditional ornaments Tibetans are fond of wearing. At school, the Chinese decided that certain letters would be omitted from the Tibetan alphabet, and certain words, be forbidden in the Tibetan vocabulary. Eventually, even teachers were not allowed to teach in Tibetan, in the usual, standard way. The Chinese allowed them to teach it, but only according to the Chinese planned way of teaching it. As a result, many Tibetans ended up speaking Chinese much better than they spoke Tibetan.” Woenser reflected, “Still, even today, it is difficult to get admitted into a school. They do not have real education there. The Chinese are forcing the destruction of Tibetan culture.”

Woenser continued, “Chinese people say that ‘Tibet is part of China’. But Tibetan people are not allowed to vote or say their opinion. Maybe the Chinese people have doubts that Tibet is not really under China. If Tibetans are allowed the right to freely vote, then they will elect Tibetans.” He thought that he could vote on behalf of Sera Monastery in a specially held election for choosing Lhasa representatives, but the Chinese did not allow him to. “If China allows Tibetans to vote,” he said, “then Chinese will lose their control.”

Woenser Rinpoche told of an interesting incident that happened in the “election” that took place in 1988. The Chinese were giving the people of Lhasa the opportunity to vote for their choices among representatives – of course, representatives who were pre-selected by the ruling communist party. “So the Chinese gave people their first opportunity to vote that year. Usually the ballot shows two candidates representing a sectioned district of Lhasa called *sheduchu*. At the conclusion of the voting, when the Chinese authorities opened the ballot boxes, they were shocked at what they saw. All the Tibetans wrote in ‘the Dalai Lama’ on their ballots!” The police became hysteric and stopped people all over to find out who was responsible for doing this. Woenser Rinpoche said Chinese police officers accosted him in the street. They were suspecting people and asked him, “Did you vote for the Dalai Lama? Did you write, ‘Tibet is Independent?’” He remained silent but then the officers started yelling at him, repeating “over and over: ‘Tibet is under China!’” He said he kept himself under control at first, but then couldn't tolerate it. Woenser yelled back, “Tibet is independent!”

At 2:00 a.m. the next morning, guards banged on the door at the monastery, asking if Woenser Rinpoche was there. He woke up and saw a large army outside. This was in the early days of March 1988, just days before more demonstrations were to take place in the streets of Lhasa (on the anniversary of the March 10, 1959, Tibetan uprising). When they first came in his room, they went through all his things. There happened to be papers left on the floor about Tibetan independence that had been used as hand-outs to foreigners. The Chinese guards picked the papers up without seeing the printed side, and threw them back down. He said that luckily, the blank side remained face up. But still, right there in Sera monastery, they handcuffed him with his hands behind his back and forced him into the police truck. There were a total of ten monks apprehended in his group and taken away with him. Woenser Rinpoche told me the names of the ten others who were apprehended with him, their age, and hometown. All of them were young adults aged nineteen to twenty-five except for Gushu Ngari Tulku, who was fifty-one. Woenser Rinpo-