

BIOGRAPHY

In 2008, as the Olympic Games were about to happen in Beijing, Dhondup Wangchen wanted to provide the Tibetan perspective on the Games and show how Tibetans in Tibet really felt about it. Together with Golog Jigme and other helpers, he started traveling all over Tibet to interview and record ordinary Tibetans who shared their frustration and anger. Via trusted friends, the footage was smuggled out in several batches to Switzerland. The final footage was handed over on 10 March 2008, when protests erupted in Lhasa and spread all over Tibet without stopping for months.

Dhondup Wangchen grew up in the remote village of Khotse in Amdo, 2000km east of Lhasa, and had already become involved with activism before 2008. In 2001, Dhondup Wangchen started to print and hand out books about Tibetan politics and teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibetans. By 2004, they were printing up 10.000 copies at a time. This is when he first collaborated with the monk Golog Jigme. For his activism, Dhondup Wangchen was detained several times but never formally charged.

However, in March 2008, his final footage had just been smuggled out of the country, Dhondup Wangchen was arrested and interrogated by the secret police. In a hotel, he was tortured on a 'tiger chair' for seven days and eight nights, without food and sleep. At that time, his family had no knowledge about his whereabouts. During the time of detention that followed, the film was being edited and released by the non-profit Filming for Tibet, just before the opening of the Olympic Games in August. Still, in a Chinese prison, it was during an interrogation when Dhondup Wangchen saw the edited version of his film for the first time.

On 28 December 2009, Dhondup Wangchen was sentenced to 6 years in prison for 'subversion of state power' for his involvement in printing and distributing books as well as making the film *Leaving Fear Behind*. For his trial, any legal representation of his choosing had been denied. During his time in Xichuan prison, a labor camp to which he was transferred in April 2010, Dhondup Wangchen's health condition declined drastically and he contracted hepatitis B. While in prison, he did not receive appropriate medical care for this condition. Moreover, he had to suffer discriminatory harsh treatment for being a Tibetan, political prisoner.

His incarceration did not stay unnoticed and the governments of the United States, Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands publicly raised their concerns about it. Today, Dhondup Wangchen believes that this international attention had had a positive impact on how he was treated in prison and made him less likely to become subject to arbitrary beatings and punishments.

On 5 June 2014, Dhondup Wangchen was released. His freedom, however, remained limited. He was constantly monitored and contacted by the police and not allowed to meet his friends. Some three and a half years later, with the help of his cousin Jamyang Tsultrim, he secretly escaped the PRC and made it to San Francisco where he was reunited with his family on 25 December 2017.

He has now received his refugee travel documents and is planning to go on a journey through Europe with the aim to share his story and to urge the International Olympic Committee to cancel the Winter Games 2022 in Beijing.