A friend told me his friend's experience studying in Chengdu, which typifies higher education for many young Tibetan men studying in such cities as Xining, Lanzhou, and Chengdu who, for the first time, are away from the close supervision of relatives and teachers.

BEGINNINGS

The morning of the day Dpal 'bum first started for Chengdu City, his mother, Mtsho mo, got up earlier than usual and prepared food. His stepfather, whom he called Uncle Bzang kho, had also risen and stepped to the back of the room where he burned the leaves of an aromatic plant to beseech the deities for blessings, particularly hoping that Dpal 'bum would successfully graduate in two years. Bzang kho awakened Dpal 'bum and told him to have breakfast, which included beef, bread, and milk tea – a common Tibetan meal. Bzang kho said, "Dpal 'bum, I found a school for you to study at, where you can realize the dream you tell us about everyday. Pack up after you finish eating."

Dpal 'bum was so excited by this unexpected announcement that he could hardly believe it. He gazed at his mother, who silently nodded yes. Suspicion erased from his mind, he darted into his bedroom and hurriedly packed a bag. Bzang kho and Mtsho mo smiled at the dining table. After a few minutes Dpal 'bum rushed out of his room and shouted, "Look, I'm ready!" Bzang kho took some money from his safe, handed it to Dpal 'bum, and said, "Take care of yourself, kid!"

Dpal 'bum's mother was almost in tears as she carried her son's bag. As mother and son walked to the bus stop, she repeatedly urged him to take care of himself, chant mantras and scriptures on the way, and work hard in school. Dpal 'bum nodded, got on the bus, and left, saying, "Good bye, Mother!"