

## Dorje Lingpa and His Rediscovery of the “Gold Needle” in Bhutan

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### Introduction

Among the Buddhist ritual traditions that are still preserved and carried out as the central religious constituents of the annual festivals in Bhutan today those of Dorje Lingpa (1346-1405) stand out strikingly. This is particularly so in Bumthang area, Central Bhutan.

In 1998 and 1999, I have had the good fortune to witness these spectacular festivals in Ogyen chöling and, in 1999, at Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang itself.

Dorje Lingpa is considered as one of the five great “treasure revealers” (*tertön*) among the *Nyingmapa* and an important *Dzogchen* master by the *Bonpo* tradition. He was thus an exceptional figure who clearly adopted an impartial approach to both Buddhist practices and the *Bon*, the non-Buddhist religious tradition in Tibet, in his spiritual quest. His approach therefore made him the precursor of what is later known as the “eclectic” (*rime*) movement of the nineteenth century (Smith 1970).

Like many other Tibetan men of religion, Dorje Lingpa never settled himself in one place. He travelled around incessantly carried away by the motivation of disclosing hidden manuscripts and it was mainly because of this urge in him that he travelled to Bhutan, then known as Mönyul or Lhomön (Cf. Pommaret 1999), where he flourished particularly. He had left in Bhutan not only his ritual legacy but also his family descendants.

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Due to the studies of Michael Aris (1979: 158) and Françoise Pommaret (1997: 408, 414), the accounts of Dorje Lingpa's descendants who established themselves there as well as those of his reincarnations are now relatively well known. In a study of the *Dzogchen* of the *Nyingmapa* tradition, I myself had the occasion to deal very briefly with his revelation of *Bonpo Dzogchen* manuscripts from one of the caves of Tagtshang in Paro (Karmay 1988: 216-219).

In this article I therefore intend to take up the account of Dorje Lingpa's visit to Bhutan focusing on the question of his connection with a *Bonpo* religious establishment in Bhutan which then existed, and this, within a wider perspective of his activities in Bhutan based on my own field observations and more importantly Dorje Lingpa's own writings now available in 22 volumes. They were not all accessible to me while I was carrying out research into the *Dzogchen* tradition in the 1970s.

### **The Early Life of Dorje Lingpa**

Dorje Lingpa was born in 1346 in the district of Dra, south of the Tsangpo river in Lhokha, Central Tibet. He lost his mother, Karmogyen, at the age of 3 and father, Sonam Gyaltsen, at 7. He was brought up by an aunt. His childhood name was Ogyen Zangpo. At the age of 8 he was symbolically ordained as a novice at Lharikha. At 13 he rediscovered for the first time hidden manuscripts from the ancient temple of Tradrug. Among the manuscripts he found there were the *khachang* "guides" that indicated the existence of manuscripts concealed in other places. At 15, he disclosed a large number of manuscripts at Namchagdrag amongst which he found the text Tawa Longyang. It became the basis of his *Dzogchen* teachings in later life. In this work he held some radical views on the main *Dzogchen* theories that aroused a good deal of interest amongst his followers as well as eliciting severe criticisms from the *Gelugpa* dialecticians (Karmay 1988: 186). From the same place he also revealed the Lama Kadu amongst other ritual cycles.<sup>1</sup> The Lama Kadu is the ritual component of the annual festivals in several places in Bhutan today.

In 1362 aged 17, he became known as Dorje Lingpa for the first time and is said to have revealed more manuscripts in four volumes that contained texts on such subjects as medicine, the *Bon* religion, astrology and the *dö* rituals,<sup>2</sup> but these have not found their way into the collected writings. He continued to engage in similar ventures in various places before he made his first visit to Bhutan. His rediscovery of hidden manuscripts of texts were so numerous that Sogdogpa Lodrö Gyaltshen describes them as “the mad treasures”(ternyön)<sup>3</sup> and most of these Dorje Lingpa claims to have already achieved before the age of twenty - incredible as it may sound.

### **Pilgrimage of Dorje Lingpa to Bhutan**

In 1369 aged 24, Dorje Lingpa was staying in the hermitage of Chuwori in Yartö, Central Tibet. In this place he claimed to have obtained a “guide” to the “concealed manuscripts” by Vairocana. In a dream a monk gave him a flat bell (*shang*) and a thunderbolt (*dorje*) pointing with his finger toward the south and said “O! your wealth portion (*norkal*) and your would-be converts are down there, that way!”

Vairocana was an eighth century Tibetan Buddhist monk believed to have practised Buddhism and *Bon*, the flat bell being a symbol of the *Bon* religion and *vajra* that of tantric Buddhism. Dorje Lingpa believed himself to be an embodiment of the monk and took the dream as an indication for finding hidden manuscripts in Tagtshang Sengge Samdrub in Paro.<sup>4</sup> He therefore set out on a pilgrimage with the hope of divulging hidden manuscripts. On the way he stopped in various places such as Ralung and Phagri in Dromo from where he entered Mönnyul. When he saw Paro Chagkhar from a distance he was moved by its sight. He composed a song expressing that although he now found himself in a country that he did not know he felt very happy about everything that he could see.<sup>5</sup>

In 1370, Dorje Lingpa stopped at Paro Tagtshang and revealed for the first time a certain number of hidden manuscripts that contained religious texts of Buddhist tantras and *Bonpo Dzogchen* meditation. I shall deal with these findings below.

He continued his journey down to Changyul at the confluence of the Phochu and Mochu rivers in the Punakha valley where he met a certain number of nuns who asked him to give religious instructions (*dampa*), and he felt very sorry for them since they did not know much about Buddhism. On this occasion he improvised a song that expresses his sad feelings for the fishermen spending their lives fishing in the place.<sup>6</sup>

In the same year he was in Khothang samten rinchenling (today Kothangka) in Shar, one of the eight establishments of Longchen Rabjam (1308-1363). Dorje Lingpa describes this place like the opening of a flower and where he wrote a song whose theme is the main ventures in his own life.<sup>7</sup> He continued to search for more manuscripts and found some in Namthang Langdrag in Tang, but he did not disclose them till 1374.<sup>8</sup>

In 1371, Dorje Lingpa performed what is known as the “public revelation” (*tromter*) in at least two places: at Ugyen Yiblung Dekyiling,<sup>9</sup> accompanied by three hundred people, and at Punthang Dewa Dhenpo (Punakha).<sup>10</sup> He seems to be the first among the *Nyingmapa tertön* to initiate this tradition. It consisted in disclosing manuscripts and other sacred objects from a hidden place with the public witnessing the action of disclosure.<sup>11</sup>

When he was at Punakha he was again asked to give religious instructions by a group of nuns and on this occasion he composed a eulogy to the place as being pleasant and appropriate for practising Buddhism.<sup>12</sup>

### **Departure for Bumthang from Western Bhutan**

In 1374 he set out to go to Bumthang and tried to cross over two high passes covered with snow, but he suffered from snow-blindness and was obliged to retreat. He finally arrived at Bumthang. In the same year he revealed more hidden manuscripts from the cave Nganlung situated near the lake Durtsho nagmo located in the Upper Chökhör, Bumthang.<sup>13</sup>

Bumthang became the main seat of his activities in Bhutan. There is an old house reputed to have been his residence. In 1999, it was occupied by the Chagkhar *Lama*, a *Nyingmapa* adept.<sup>14</sup>

Dorje Lingpa spent less than three years in Bumthang. Towards the end of 1376, in which year he returned to Tibet, he went into retreat at Yangdzong Shelgyi Dragphug (probably today Shebrag in Tang, Bumthang) for seven days in the second month of the year.<sup>15</sup> In the fifth month, he gave teachings on *Dzogchen* based on the Tawa Longyang. One night he had a dream of a woman who appeared to be in Lhasa. She gave him long religious instructions and the next morning he wrote them down.<sup>16</sup> During the seventh month of the same year he again gave teachings on *Dzogchen* and this seems to have been the last teaching he delivered in Bumthang.<sup>17</sup> In the eighth month he returned to Tibet taking the ancient route of Mönla karchung from Bumthang to Lhodrag. On the way he stopped in a place called Kampotshol where again he wrote down a dream he had there. He arrived in Lhodrag in 1376.

### **The Question of Dates of Dorje Lingpa**

The dates of Dorje Lingpa have been a subject of discussion among the *Nyingmapa*<sup>18</sup> and *Bonpo* chroniclers. All the dates in this article are based on the dating 1346-1405. These dates are mainly based on *TTGL* (pp.210, 549) where fire-dog (*me khyi*, 1346) of the 6th sexagenary cycle is given as the year of his birth. The same source states that he lived till the age of sixty, hence 1405 as the year in which he died. These dates fit in with those of his contemporaries such as Karmapa Rolpai Dorje (1340-1383) and Miwang Dragpa Gyaltsan (1374-1432) and the *Bonpo Lama* Dru Sonam Lodrö (1337-1401) whom Dorje Lingpa met. Moreover, 1346-1405 perfectly corresponds to the accounts of his life given in his own writings. Some of his songs, however, give years that are inconsistent. For instance, he states that he was in Mön Dangchu (in Shar) and wrote a song in a horse year.<sup>19</sup> In the period considered, the horse year has to be earth-horse, 1378 when he was aged 33 and this is contradicted by the letter in which he says he wrote it in 1378 when he was in

Rinpung in Tibet.<sup>20</sup> In another song he gives a sheep year and says that he was in the place called Benanglung in Thed when he was 34.<sup>21</sup> The sheep would be earth-sheep, 1379 and Thed refers to the Punakha district, often known as Thelung in written sources. These dates contradict other statements in for example the song in which he says that he returned to Tibet when he was 31 (1376).<sup>22</sup>

As mentioned I intend to focus here only on the activities of Dorje Lingpa in Bhutan. In 1378 when he was 33 he revealed more hidden manuscripts and on this occasion he began to have the name Padma Lingpa, which name he often, uses thereafter.<sup>23</sup>

There is a cryptic suggestion that he returned to Paro in a monkey year which is probably 1380,<sup>24</sup> but this remains ambiguous. However, he certainly returned to Bumthang in 1388, aged 42. In this year he was in a place near Mount Kula Khari in Lhodrag from where he came down to Bumthang. He initiated a restoration of Jampa Lhakhang and assigned a person to recite the *mani* mantra at Kujedrag. During this time the chief of the people who received him were Tshomo Dorje (probably a woman) and the ruler (*tsepo*) of the four tribes in Bumthang.<sup>25</sup> The four tribes (*tshozhi*) in Bumthang are Chökhör, Tang, Chume and Ura.<sup>26</sup>

Dorje Lingpa wrote at least two letters to his people in Bhutan in his later years. One, dated 1381, was sent when he was at Rinpung in Tsang. It is addressed to Kunzanggyal who lived in the “Cypress wood forest of the South”.<sup>27</sup> This person is described as “the little boy” (*buchung*), possibly one of his own sons.<sup>28</sup>

The other letter was written in 1384 at Chuwori. A nun called Togden Sonamgyal paid a visit to him and offered to take the letter as she was leaving for Bhutan. It is addressed to all his disciples and benefactors in Paro, Thimphu, Thed, Sharchog (here it means the Shar district), Khothang (in Shar), Phurig (?) Dangchu (in Shar) and Gönyul in Thed (Punakha). In this letter he mentioned that he intended to come to Bhutan in the summer of the current year, but was worried that he might be accompanied by too many followers and that it would be too hot for them in Bhutan. He indicated that he might stay for two months if he managed to travel during the winter instead and wanted

to build a “gate” for the Khothang temple as well as to meet all his disciples.<sup>29</sup> However, it does not seem that he managed to make the visit. At any rate, there are no records of travelling after 1384 in the Collected Works.

### **Kubum, the *Bonpo* Establishment in Bhutan in the Fourteenth Century**

Kubum was the place where Dorje Lingpa spent some time when he was in Bhutan. As I mentioned above, one of the principal reasons for visiting Paro was to reveal some hidden manuscripts in one of the caves of Tagtshang. The “Gold Needle”<sup>30</sup> is the main work of the manuscript collection. It contains a remarkably original exposition of the *Dzogchen* doctrine, which he claims to be in accordance with the *Bon* tradition. In the colophon of this work he signed with the name Bonzhig Lingpa and gives the year pig, which corresponds to 1371, as we shall see.<sup>30</sup> In another work he provides a more detailed account of his finding of the “Gold Needle” and its supplementary texts. Here is a summary of the account:

“On the third of the 7th month, earth-bird year (1369) I, Bonzhig Lingpa, was 24 and was at Yartö Chuwori where in a dream I received prophetic indications of finding manuscripts of the *Bonpo* and *Nyingmapa* traditions in Tagtshang, Paro. On the 10th of the 1st month, iron-dog year (1370) I, accompanied by Togden Gyabum, went to look for the manuscripts. We found a copper box in the Dzutrul cave which is at Kyangring Chenpo near Orgyen Drubchu. From the box emerged the texts that were concerned with the Chipung tantric teachings<sup>31</sup> and *Dzogchen* texts, such as the *Serthur* (the “Gold Needle”).<sup>32</sup>

In the 7th month, iron-pig year (1371) I gave teachings based on my own text the *Damtshig Dorje Sempai Nyingthig* at the behest of the *Lama Kön-gyal* at Kubum. It was there that my disciple Rinchen Gyaltsen urged me to reveal the *Dzogchen* texts of the *Bon* tradition that I rediscovered at Tagtshang, but I hesitated since the *Bon* manuscripts were in sixteen different scripts. In a dream, I then had a vision of Padmasambhava with a swastika swirling about his crown. I thought, “this is not Padmasambhava”. At that moment the figure

said: “I am Padmasambhava. I am Tshewang Rigdzin.<sup>33</sup> I am Shakya Thubpa. I am Shenrab Miwo.... Many texts were concealed in the box that you found. The *Bon* texts are like the heart... It is now high time that you reveal them to others....” To this I replied: “From my childhood I learned only Buddhism. I have no knowledge of *Bon* and will be unable to propagate it.” The figure gave a philosophical explanation emphasizing the importance of the *Bon* and finally said: “There is nothing that you cannot know about *Bon*. The time has come. If you do not remove the cataract of ignorance from the lens of the eye, what is the use of the “Gold Needle”?<sup>34</sup>

On the 21st of the 10th month at Samling, just below Kubum, the seat of the precious *Lama* Dulwa, whilst I was giving teachings my disciples Tönpa Tsöndru Gyaltshe and Rinchen Gyaltshe urged me again to reveal the manuscripts which were in the Tibetan language, but written in sixteen different “scripts” contained in two scrolls. When I transcribed them all they came to thirty-nine sections (*Bontshen*) and a list of the sections (*themyig*).<sup>35</sup>

It is hard to know what kind of scripts they were. In fact Dorje Lingpa does enumerate them (p. 428) including Indian, Chinese and Zhangzhung scripts. I do not mean here to demystify a *terma* tradition, such as the present one. However, what is certain is that we do have a volume entitled the *Dzogchen Serthur* and it is dated 1371 and as such there is no doubt that it contains genuine writings of Dorje Lingpa.

The *Lama* Dulwa Rinpoche is well known in the *Bonpo* sources. He was known as Tshanden Dulwa Rinpoche and his full name was Dru Tshanden Dulwa Gyaltshe (1239-1293) He was born to the sacred *Bonpo* family called Dru.<sup>36</sup> A member of this family founded Bagor Wensakha monastery and it was the tradition that male members of the family often became its abbots. Bagor is the name of the district in which the area called Wensakha is located. It is to the north of the Tsangpo river and east of Shigatse.



Dru Dulwa Gyaltsen was first an abbot of the monastery. In his later life he is said to have abandoned his monastic community in order to become a recluse and pursue his spiritual quest in solitude. He took up residence in the hermitage of Kharchu in Lhodrag, and also travelled down to Bumthang and Lhoma Ngönlung in Mönyul.<sup>37</sup>

The place-name Lhoma is a misreading for Lhomön and Ngönlung corresponds to Nganlung<sup>38</sup> which is the name of a valley in Shar. The place where the temple complex is located is in a valley called Phobjikha (Pho-sbis-kha in written sources).

Dorje Lingpa enjoyed a good relationship with the Bru family whose seat was at Bagor near Wensakha monastery.<sup>39</sup> At a feast Dru Sonam Lodrö (1337-1401) sang a song on the theme of the “Nine Vehicles of *Bon*”.<sup>40</sup> Where upon in reply Dorje Lingpa sang a song called “The Buddhist song of the Nine Vehicles”<sup>41</sup> in which he proclaimed that he was also called Yungdrung Lingpa.<sup>42</sup>

On another occasion Dorje Lingpa gave teachings at Bagor Wensakha based on his *Dzogchen* text, the “Gold Needle” to eighty-seven people including Drutön Kyawa and Togden Namkha Sengge. At the completion of the teaching a feast was organised and the *Lama* Nyima of Dru said to him: “Please give religious instructions to our young disciples, instructions that are an introduction to their spiritual practices, so that they can discuss them in the public and rejoice for all of us!” The master sang a song which is in its gist a praise to *Dzogchen* doctrine.<sup>43</sup> All this indicates that in the fourteenth century there was mutual appreciation between the two religious traditions. The “Impartial Way” (*rime*) which Dorje Lingpa declared that he pursued is further proved by yet another song entitled “The mystical song of the realization of the oneness of the *Bon* religion and (Tibetan) Buddhism”.<sup>44</sup>

In another contemporary source Pa Ten-gyal Zangpo states: “this Yungdrung Lingpa of our time is said to be a descendant of a tantrist family in the vicinity of Samye. When he was twenty-three he received prophecies and went to Tagtshang in Paro from which he

extracted manuscripts of the *Dzogchen Serkyi Thurma* that had been concealed by Vairocana....”<sup>45</sup>

To the findings at Tagtshang, I should add the volume of the Tsewang Pöyul Ma which the *Bon* tradition maintains to be the *terma* of Yungdrung Lingpa. As mentioned above the most odd thing about this work is that it contains the story of Dranpa Namkha, the *Bonpo* sage, as the father of the twin sons who are Tshewang Rigdzin and Padma Thongdrol (=Padmasambhava).<sup>46</sup> However, it does not seem to be mentioned anywhere in the collected works of Dorje Lingpa so far published. The chief deity of the Tshewang Pöyul Ma ritual cycle is Tshewang Rigdzin which name, as we have seen, appeared in his dream. The ritual cycle is very popular among the *Bonpo* and it is performed with the chanting and music that has no parallel among the *Bonpo* ritual traditions.

### **Where is Kubum Then?**

It was Michael Aris (1979: 151) who mentioned Kubum for the first time in his work, but did not elaborate on it.<sup>47</sup> Researching into Dzogchen, I, in the 1980s became aware of the considerable importance of the role Dorje Lingpa had played in the development of *Dzogchen* thought. I therefore made a résumé of the “Gold Needle” and discussed the singular way in which the author has presented *Dzogchen* in accordance with what he considered as the *Bon* tradition (Karmay 1988: 216-219).

As seen, Dorje Lingpa claimed that he revealed the manuscript of the work in question and its supplementary texts from one of the caves of Tagtshang in Paro and later edited it at Samling near Kubum.

In 1999, while travelling in Bhutan, I literally stumbled over what looked like a *Drukpa Kagyupa* temple. Once inside I found the usual figures of the *Drukpa* and *Nyingmapa* orders in the form of images and wall paintings which looked to be of recent origin. The ground floor was still under renovation. On the wall high up on the right-hand side as one enters the temple, a monk is painted in the flying position in the sky with an inscription mentioning Tshanden Dulwa Gyaltsen.

On the first floor, the only storey of the building, at the west side there was a room that had the appearance of an ordinary *gönkhang*. In it an ancient drum stood beside a seat; in front of the seat there was a small table covered with thick dirt over which lay a much used manuscript of *poti* format. On the walls of the left-hand side were affixed as decoration what is known as *tsakali*, miniature paintings, normally used in initiation rites; on the wall of the right-hand side was hung with helmets, swords and shields. The room had also an inner sanctuary with wall paintings and inside it was totally dark.

I picked up the dilapidated manuscript just out of curiosity. To my great surprise it contained a long prayer to Tshanden Dulwa Gyaltsen and the main text of the *Bonpo* ritual cycle known as *Walsel*<sup>48</sup>. It was then clear to me that I found myself in a building which was formerly a *Bonpo* establishment. For some reasons the *gönkhang* was kept for the propitiation of *Bonpo* deities despite the fact that everything else has changed.

The temple complex is situated up in the valley of Phobjikha on the edge of a small village called Phobjithang and hidden away by the low ridge of a green mountain so that it cannot be seen from the distance below, but from its own position up in the valley it has a magnificent view over the whole valley with its fertile basin where there are marshes and in Bhutan it is one of the home of the black-necked cranes coming from Tibet for the winter period. It is about four kilometers to the north-west of Gangteng monastery.

Below the temple, there was the ruin of what looked like a trace of a burned temple. A half destroyed stupa still stood inside the torn and half standing walls. In the accounts of Dorje Lingpa the complex of the temple buildings had consisted of two separate establishments, one was Kubum and the other was Samling which was situated just below Kubum and that was where he said he stayed.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the ruin is the trace of the establishment called Samling.

### **Modern Bhutanese Sources Concerning Dorje Lingpa and Kubum**

Among the well known modern Bhutanese historians, Lopön Nado (1986: 73) in his exceedingly interesting work has mentioned Dorje Lingpa, but makes no remark about Kubum. Lopön Pema, who is also considered as an authority on the history of Bhutan, passes it in silence altogether. However, Gedün Rinchen, better known as Geshe Dragphupa, the 69th *Je Khenpo*, i.e. the head of the *Drukpa Kagyu*, the state religion in Bhutan, has in passing devoted a short passage to Kubum in his *BN*. It is written in the traditional style of the *chöjung* type of work and was completed in 1972, a truly monumental work on the historical development of Buddhist institutions in Bhutan. Here is a translation of the passage on Kubum:

“As the *Bon* religion was established in Tibet before Buddhism flourished there, so it was also established in Bhutan during the period of the later diffusion of the Doctrine. From the seat of Yungdrungling (monastery) in Ralag where was upheld the religious system of Shenrab, the Master of *Bon* from Zhangzhung, the *Zhabdrung* Tshanden Dewa came to this country. He gradually established his seats by founding Kubum monastery in Shar and (another seat) in Sewagang, etc. and so the religion spread (in this country). To this day, performing of the atonement rite according to the *Bon* tradition and the propitiation rite to Sri Gyalmo have continued (at these establishments).”<sup>50</sup>

Yungdrungling is one of the three *Bonpo* monastic establishments in Central Tibet. It was founded only in 1834 and is situated above the village Ralag to the north of the Tsangpo river on a plateau just across the river where the well-known ferry Tagdrukha is located. The name Tshanden Dewa is certainly a deformation of Tshanden Dulwa. In this case the term *bde ba* is simply an onomatopoeic mispronunciation of *'dul ba*. It is about Dru Dulwa Gyaltsen (1239-1293) who was often called Tshanden Dulwa and whom I have already mentioned above. The term *tshanden* (*mtshan dang ldan pa*, lit. “one who possesses marks”) is often used as a title for a master considered highly qualified. In a song Dorje Lingpa applies it to Padmasambhava as “father, the *Lama* who possesses all the marks”.<sup>51</sup> It is interesting to note that the *Je Khenpo* uses the title *Zhabdrung* for this *Bonpo Lama*

even though it is not often used among the *Bonpo* themselves and in any case never for the *Lama* in question.

Sri Gyalmo is of course Ma Sripa Gyalmo, the *Bonpo* religious protectress whose image is painted on the wall in the inner sanctuary of the *gönkhang* in Kubum. I have not been able to find any information with regard to Sewagang, obviously the name of a place.

The passage written by the *Je Khenpo* which I came to analyse suggests that Kubum would seem to have been founded by Tshanden Dulwa Gyaltsen and this agrees with the words of Dorje Lingpa who clearly stated “Kubum, the seat of *Lama Rinpoche Dulwa*”. Kubum therefore was founded in the thirteenth century by Tshanden Dulwa. The passage also suggests that the transformation of Kubum into a Buddhist temple might have been of a recent date. The *Je Khenpo* was writing his work in 1972 and he emphatically stated “to this day” implying that the place was still a *Bonpo* establishment.

### **The Songs of Dorje Lingpa**

There are no real detailed accounts of Dorje Lingpa’s life. No “biography” of the *namthar* genre exists except a sketch account called *namthar* included in the collected works.<sup>52</sup>

Apart from the bulk of the ritual texts of *terma* origin, which make up the whole of the collected works, Dorje Lingpa wrote a number of songs in verse. In this enterprise he seemed to have formed a habit of writing down as soon as the daybreak began what he could remember of religious instructions and prophecies that he believed to have received from the sages in his dreams during the night. There are other types of songs containing didactic verses. A certain number of these songs are dated. I call them simply song, but in fact they are mostly what is known as *gur*, “mystical utterance”, a connotation of the term that developed later in the Tibetan religious tradition. They are improvisations and often given on the spur of the moment when one of the faithful asked for them. While he was in Bhutan he wrote a number of them. One of these was specially aimed at the monks and

nuns for whom he seems to have developed a profound attachment,  
but comments on the behaviour of some of them in the following  
terms:

“Investigating well about the *Dharma*  
How few in fact there are here among the learned *Lamas* and monks!  
Outwardly they look like monks, but they deceive the people!  
I, Dorje Lingpa depart to meditate in solitude.

Food and wealth are offered in faith  
A prayer is said for them, but in reality they are used to feed one’s  
own family  
Blind leads the blind!  
I, Dorje Lingpa depart to meditate in solitude.

Enormous pride, but knowing little  
Great passions, but with little vision  
Called “virtuous friend”, but they undermine the Faith!  
I, Dorje Lingpa depart to meditate in solitude.

No interest in salvation from the *Samsara*,  
All they hope is for solving the immediate problem, such as illness.  
They are the benefactors who have no thoughts of hereafter!  
I, Dorje Lingpa depart to meditate in solitude.....

Learning how to write and read  
When hoping to be a learned person  
One sees them carried away by the demonic girls!  
I, Dorje Lingpa depart to meditate in solitude.

Learning and taking “refuge”  
When hoping one day to expound classics and philosophy  
One sees them sinking in the impure mud of women!  
I, Dorje Lingpa depart to meditate in solitude.

Starting to learn how to meditate  
When hoping to become a spiritual master  
Their minds are seized by the lap of women

I, Dorje Lingpa depart to meditate in solitude.....”<sup>53</sup>

Not long after his return to Tibet, he is said to have paid a visit to Chöje Barawa, a friend of his, in Shang. This is probably Barawa Gyaltshen Pelzang (1310-1391) who is known to have made visits to Bhutan on two occasions. There is an interesting story that tells how Dorje Lingpa was received by a conventional establishment after his roving about in such a country as Mönyul in the fourteenth century.

When Dorje Lingpa arrived at the Shang valley in Tibet, Barawa came to meet him bringing a pot of *chang*, a carcass of mutton and a roll of white *nambu* cloth as gifts. He said to Dorje Lingpa: “our country Shang is a place where Buddhism flourishes. You have been for too long in Lhomön, “the unlit land”. Your clothes are worn out. Tomorrow morning when you come up, the monks and nuns will pay you their respects. You must dress yourself properly. Otherwise our people will be shocked. I request you and your entourage all to come well dressed.” Barawa went home. The next morning a procession came along with the chief ladies wearing tiger and leopard masks led by *Lamas* and learned monks. Thereupon, Dorje Lingpa said: “All the Samsaric and Nirvanic elements are much alike, but men of religion here have taken the notion of acceptance and rejection as their main religion. Today I shall sing a song. Each man must hold the hands of a woman in chain fashion!” He led the *Lamas* by holding the hands of *Lama* Tongdenpa with his right hand and the hands of the chief lady wearing a mask with his left hand. The lap parts of their dresses were trussed up on their right and left hand sides and they began to dance. He started to sing a song called “The brewing of the *chang* ale using the annual provision”:

“Say that Dorje Lingpa, the chief of impostors, has come to this land.  
Say that all the (barley), the provision to last all the year round is now  
being used for brewing the *chang*.  
Say that those who have faith in him are performing the rite of the  
sacrificial cake.  
Say that those who gather here are joyous in singing and dancing  
Say that those who regard him as heretical are vexed (by the presence  
of him)”.<sup>54</sup>

This song suggests that Dorje Lingpa's behaviour must have looked scandalous especially since his friend Barawa warned him to be decent, but there is no record of what happened after the public meeting between the two. However, Barawa himself is known to have made visits to Bhutan so that they must have had a common interest in the meeting.

Dorje Lingpa has tried different poetic styles which witnesses to his being a fine writer. In a short poetic verse he gives instructions to himself in a self-deprecating tone:

“You claim to be a recluse, but you do more than anybody else;  
You claim that you do not need much, but you need more things than anybody else;  
You claim that you do not want to have a fixed place of abode, but you have more than anybody else;  
You wished to have no enemies, but you have more than anybody else....”<sup>55</sup>

The author again writes verses in six syllables on much the same theme as the previous poem, but this time he was suffering from an illness which inspired him to write a long poem. Here are five lines from it:

“You, small minded and naive,  
From the beginningless  
Up till now  
However much you suffer (being in the Samsara).  
Nothing that wearies you!”<sup>56</sup> .....

The texts of the songs are found in the collected works, Vols. 18 and 19 in *ume* scripts, each in a different hand. They are reproductions of a manuscript set preserved at Ogyen Chöling. These are beautifully executed manuscripts in the ancient style, common among the Dunhuang documents. The words, for instance, ending in a vowel have often the 'a' as suffix, e.g. *bsngo'a*. Another characteristic is the *shad* in the form of two dots one on the top of the other often found in Dunhuang manuscripts. They are called *tershe* and this is invariably



maintained throughout of the two volumes although the texts of the songs are not, properly speaking, of the *terma* revelation. The texts of the songs are again included in Vol. 21 in the *uchen* script, but this time they are arranged in a better order. This last version is reproduced in another collection.

These poetic writings certainly raise the status of Dorje Lingpa as a literary figure, a fact that so far has not been recognized. The dominant theme in his songs is of course the melancholic Buddhist detachment from the worldly life, but within this they often echo the socio-economic problems of the real life in the society.

### **The Lama Kadu and its Pre-eminence in Bhutanese Buddhist Ritual Traditions**

The rituals of Kangso and of the Lama kadu, which were formerly carried out separately on different dates, were performed as a combined ritual in the annual festival at Ogyen Chöling from the 16 to 19, October 1999. I acknowledge the gracious kindness of Ashi Kunzang Chodron and her brother *Dasho* Ugyen Rigdzin for having me there during the festival and allowing me free access to their amazing library in 1999 and 2000.

The annual festival of Jampa Lhakhang at Chökhör in the Bumthang valley was held from 23 to 27, October 1999. As stated this festival also had the Lama Kadu, as its basic ritual.

The estate of Ogyen Chöling is situated on a hilltop overlooking the Tang valley with a magnificent view. The basin of the valley is fairly level and made of green fields surrounded by mountains covered with dark forests and dense foliage. The estate itself consists of two imposing edifices with the buildings of the living quarters on three sides. It has to the north-east small village with ancient houses in a scattered layout. It is to the north-east of Jakar, the district capital of Bumthang at a distance of about twenty-five kilometers. The family which runs the estate traces its ancestry back directly to Dorje Lingpa and Ogyen Chöling is therefore considered as one of the main centres where Dorje Lingpa's religious tradition is fearlessly upheld. There

are other places such as Ling Mukha and Layag where his descendants are known to have survived and also the series of his reincarnations who established themselves in Shar Lungtsib. His religious tradition is also maintained at Chakar Lhakhang in Bumthang and Khothang in Shar.<sup>57</sup>

I do not mean to study here the ritual significance of the festivals at Ogyen Chöling and that of Jampa Lhakhang which would be out-side of the scope of the present article. Nevertheless, I should at least point out the preponderance of the Lama Kadu ritual cycle on whose pivot revolves the rituals of the festivals.

At the age of 15 Dorje Lingpa is believed to have rediscovered hidden manuscripts from Namchagdrag in Tibet. Among these revelations, there were what was known as the “four embodiments” (*dupazhi*). However, only two seem to have survived: the Lama Kadu and the Yidam Kadu.<sup>58</sup> The term Kadu is simply a contraction of Kagye Dupa. The title Lama Kadu therefore means “the *Lama* in whom the eight deities of the *Drubpa Kagye* cycles are united”.<sup>59</sup> The term *Lama* in this case refers to an aspect of Padmasambhava as is the case in many other *Nyingmapa* rituals.

According to *TR* (p.43) the practice of this ritual cycle flourished in Tibet especially in Kongpo and Khams. However, Kongtrul Yonten Gyatsho (1811-1899) observed that the tradition of the ritual cycle in fact had come to be almost extinguished in Tibet and that it was finally revived by Jamyang Khentse (1820-1892) in the nineteenth century.<sup>60</sup> Contrary to what had happened then in Tibet, the ritual practice seems to have been kept very much alive throughout the centuries in Bhutan ever since its inception. Its texts are found in Vols. 7-9 of the Collected Works of Dorje Lingpa.

### **Conclusion**

From very early times Bhutan was known as Mönyul in the Tibetan world, “country of the Mönpa”, populations who inhabit some parts of the southern Himalayan confines. In spite of the founding of Buddhist temples in the seventh century A.D. such as Kyichu Lhakhang in Paro

and Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang, the country as a whole was often described as the “unlit land” implying no light of Buddhism had ever penetrated there. This notion of the “unlit land” gave rise to the impression of its being mysterious hence a hidden land, therefore appropriate for hiding sacred “treasures”. Indeed Bhutan had been rich in legends of places impregnated with such “treasures”.

This double image of the country had a strong fascination for the Tibetan mystics who professed in one instance to go on pilgrimage and in another to reveal “treasures” hidden there and preach them to the native people. Bhutan was therefore one of the chosen places of Tibetan religious figures who travelled there from the twelfth century onwards. A number of these mystics not only left their religious imprint on the country’s cultural heritage but also their descendants who facilitated the preservation of their traditions. Dorje Lingpa was one of them.

The particularity of Dorje Lingpa is that he was the earliest who clearly formulated the theory of the “oneness of *Bon* and Buddhism” (*Bonchö Yerme*). This concept was born anew with his revelation of the “Gold Needle” in Bhutan and later was taken up by the nineteenth century “eclectic movement” in Khams as its principal attitude. It had a direct effect on the need to observe religious tolerance in Tibet whose reputation as being a country of religious tolerance was in fact a myth in all respects.

It is a long time since Bhutan was the “unlit land”. On the contrary, today it has become a shining example of a country that keeps ancient tradition and modernity in equilibrium. It is now the sole repository of the Lamaist culture that enjoys an unparalleled freedom of expression.

## **Appendix I**

*de yang bod du dam pa'i chos ma dar gong du Bon chos dar ba bzhin  
'dir yang bod kyi bstan pa phyi dar gyi skabs tsam na Bon gyi ston pa  
gshen rabs (rab) kyi ring lugs 'dzin pa'i gdan sa ra la (lag) g-yung  
drung (83b) gling nas/ zhabs drung mtshan ldan bde ba zhes bya ba  
de nyid ljongs 'dir byon te shar sku 'bum dgon dang se ba sgang sogs  
la gdan sa rim par btab ste dar ba las/ Bon lugs kyi bskang gso dang  
srid rgyal mo'i gsol kha'i rgyun da lta'i bar du snang/ (BN fol. 83a5)*

## **Appendix II**

*myang 'das chos la legs bzhigs (gzhigs) pas:  
bla ma mkhas btsun re re tsam:  
ming gzugs bzung ste 'gro ba blu (slu):  
rdor gling dben par bsgom du 'gro:  
gshin gson dad pa'i zas nor kyang:  
bsngo'a bas rgyas gtab bu smad gso'a:  
long pas long khrid byed pa mthong:  
rdor gling dben par bsgom du 'gro:  
nga rgyal che la yon tan (185) med:  
chags sdang che la dag snang chung:  
dge shes (bshes) ming gzugs bstan bshig mthong:  
rdor gling dben par bsgom du 'gro:  
'khor ba sgrol ba'i chos mi 'dod:  
nad gdon thar ba'i rkyen bzlog re:  
phyi thag med pa'i yon bdag mthong:  
rdor gling dben par bsgom du 'gro:....  
'bri klog tsam nas rab sbyangs nas:  
mkhas pa rtsug (gtsug) brgyan (rgyan) yong re dus:  
bdud kyi bu mos sad khyer mthong:  
rdor gling dben par bsgom du 'gro:  
(188) skyabs 'gro tsam nas rab sbyangs ste:  
lung rig 'chad pas (pa'i) yong re dus:  
mi rtsang (gtsang) bu mo'i 'dam tshud mthong:  
rdor gling dben par bsgom du 'gro:  
mnyam bzhag tsam nas rab rlabs (slob) ste:  
rtogs par ldan pas (pa'i) yong re dus:  
bdud mo'i spang (pang) du sems rig shor:  
rdor gling dben par bsgom du 'gro:..... (ZhD p. 184)*

### **Appendix III**

*lo rgyags chang 'tshod mazog po'i dpon por do rje gling pas (pa) sa  
phyogs 'di na sleb 'dug gyi:  
dad pa can la chos kyi 'khor lo bskor gyi 'dug go gyis:  
nyams dga'i chos bzhas bro mo che 'khrab kyi 'dug go gyis:  
log lta can tsho snying rlung glong (long) gyi 'dug go gyis/ ( ZhD p.  
424)*

### **Appendix IV**

*byar med yin par go yang bya rgyu su bas mang:  
dgos med yin par go yang dgos cha su bas bsog:  
gzhi med byed par 'dod kyang gzhi rten su bas mang:  
dgra med byed par 'dod kyang ya (dgra) bo su bas  
mang:....(ZhD p. 269)*

### **Appendix V**

*sems chung col chung khyod kyang:  
thog ma med pa'i dus nas:  
da lta'i dus 'di yan chad:  
ji tsam sdug bsngal myong yang:  
sun pa gcig kyang m' 'dug: (ZhD p. 75)*

### Abbreviations and Tibetan Sources

- BN* *Blo gsar rna ba'i rgyan, dPal ldan 'brug pa'i gdul zhing lho phyogs nags mo'i ljongs kyi chos 'byung blo gsar rna ba'i rgyan* by the rJe mkhan po dGe 'dun rin chen, composed in 1972. Xyl. edition of sGrub sde nges don zung 'jug grub pa'i dga'tshal. n.d.
- DS* *Dar rgyas gsal sgron, bTsan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal ba'i sgron me* by sPa bsTan rgyal bzang po, Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1991.
- ML* *rMi lam lung bstan, rDzogs chen ger gyi thur ma*, ST 419-432.
- RPh* *Rin chen phreng ba, rTogs ldan nyams brgyud kyi rnam thar rin chen phreng ba* (anonymous), in *A-tri thun-tsham cho-na dan cha-lak che shuk-so* (A khrid thun mtshams bco lnga dang cha lag ces bzugs so), Delhi: The Tibetan Bonpo Foundation, 1967, 5-64.
- SG* *gSung sgros, rGyal ba'i sras mchog thugs rje chen po'i rnam sprul/ rdo rje gling pa'i gsung sgros/* (Cover title: *gSung mgur sna tshogs*), *Texts of the rDo-rje gling-pa Tradition from Bhutan*, Thimphu: Kunsang Tobgeyl, Druk Sherig Press, 1984, Vol.18.
- ST* *gSer thur, rDzogs chen gser gyi thur ma*. Reproduced from a rare manuscript from Dolpo in Northwestern Nepal. Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Community, Dolanji, H.P.: Tshul khrims bkra shis, 1977. *ST* is included in the *Bonpo Tenjur* (Kvaerne 1974: T 275) and is also in the new edition of the *Tenjur*, Lhasa 1998. It is Vol. 260 of the new catalogue which is being compiled in Tritan Norbutse monastery, Kathmandu.
- ThG* *Thar pa'i rgyun lam, Nyon mongs dug lnga 'jom(s) pa'i thar pa'i rgyun lam, rDo rje gling pa'i bka' 'bum* (*The*

*Collected gter ma rediscoveries of gter chen rdo rje gling pa*, Vol. IV, Paro, Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay 1980).

- TNy *bsTan pa'i nyi ma*, *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i nyi ma* by sMin gling mkhan chen O rgyan chos grags composed in 1671. MS, Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre, Cambridge, USA; L. 1676.
- TR *gTer rabs rgya mtsho*, *sNgags 'chang pa rdo rje gling pas (pa'i) zab gter rnams dang mjal ba'i gter byang rnam thar gter rabs rgya mtsho* (Cover title: *rDor rje gling pa'i zab gter rnams dang mjal ba'i rnam thar dang gsung thor bu*), *Texts of the rDo-rje gling-pa Tradition from Bhutan*, Thimphu: Kunsang Tobgeyl, Druk Sherig Press, 1984, Vol. 21, 1-146.
- TRTSh *gTam gyi rol mtsho*, *bsTan pa'i snying po gsang chen snga 'gyur nges don zab mo'i chos kyi byung ba gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad mkhas pa dga' byed ngo mtshar gtam gyi rol mtsho* (Cover title: *rNying ma chos 'byung*) by Ngag dbang blo gros, completed in 1813 (Vol. 2, p.875). Vols. I-II. Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1992. In this new edition the work is mistakenly attributed to Thub bstan 'od gsal bstan pa'i nyi ma who has simply provided the *par byang* for the wood block print (pp. 877-879)
- TTGL *Zab mo'i gter dang gter ston grub thob ji ltar byung ba'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus bkod pa pa rin chen vaidurya'i phreng ba* by Kong sprul Yon tan rgya mtsho, Arunachal Pradesh, Tezu: Tibetan Nyingmapa Monastery, 1973.
- YM *Yid kyi mun sel*, *Slob dpon sangs rgyas gnyis pa padma 'byung gnas kyi rnam par thar pa yid kyi mun sel* by Sog zlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624), Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Literature Series, Vol. 108, n.d.
- ZhD *Zhal gdams*, *rDo rje gling pa'i rnam thar dang zhal gdams*, *Texts of the rDo-rje gling-pa Tradition from Bhutan*,

Thimphu: Kunsang Tobgeyl, Druk Sherig Press, 1984,  
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## **Index of Terms and Proper Names**

Transcriptions of terms and proper names that are used in the main body of the article. They are followed by transliteration.

Bagor: Ba gor  
Bagor Wensakha: Ba gor dBen sa kha  
Barawa: 'Ba' ra ba  
Barawa Gyaltshen Pelzang: 'Ba' ra wa rGyal mtshan dpal bzang  
Benanglung: Be nang lung  
Bonchös Yerne: Bon chos dbyer med  
Bontshen: Bon tshan  
Bonzhig Lingpa: Bon zhig gling pa  
buchung: bu chung  
Chagkhar: lCags mkhar/kha  
Chakar Lhakhang: Bya dkar lha khang  
Jampa Lhakhang: Byams pa lha khang  
Changyul: lCang yul  
Chipung: sPyi spungs  
Chöje Barawa: Chos rje 'Ba' ra ba  
chöjung: chos 'byung  
Chume: Chu smad  
Chuwori: Chu bo ri  
Damtshig Doje Sempai Nyingthig: Dam tshig rdo rje sems dpa'i  
snying thig  
dö: mdos  
dorje: rdo rje  
Dorje Lingpa: rDo rje gling pa  
Dra: Gra  
Dragpa: Grags pa  
Dragphupa: Brag phug pa  
Dranpa Namkha: Dran pa nam mkha'  
Dromo: Gro mo  
Dru: Bru  
Dru Sonam Lodrö: Bru bSod nams blo gros  
Drubpa Kagye: sGrub pa bka' brgyad  
Drukpa Kagyupa: 'Brug pa bka' brgyud pa  
Drutön Kyawa: Bru ston sKya ba

Dulwa: 'Dul ba  
Dulwa Rinpoche: 'Dul ba Rin po che  
dupazhi: dus pa bzhi  
Durtsho Nagmo: Dur mtsho nag mo  
Dzogchen: rDzogs chen  
Gangteng: sGang steng  
Gedün Rinchen: dGe 'dun rin chen  
Geshe Dragphupa: dGe bshes Brag phug pa  
gönkhang: mgon khang  
gur: mgur  
Gyabum: rGya 'bum  
Gyaltshen Pelzang: rGyal mtshan dpal bzang  
Jakar: Bya dkar  
Je Khenpo: rJe mkhan po  
kadu: bka' 'dus  
Kampotshol: sKam po 'tshol  
Kangso: bskang gso  
Karmogyen: dKar mo rgyan  
khachang: kha byang  
Khari: mKha' ri  
Khothang Samten Rinchenling: mKho thang bsam gtan rin chen gling  
Kongpo: rKong po  
Kongtrul Yönten Gyatsho: Kong sprul Yon tan rgya mtsho  
Köngyal: dKon rgyal  
Kubum: sKu 'bum  
Kula Khari: sKu bla mKha' ri  
Kunzanggyal: Kun bzang rgyal  
Kunzang Chodron: Kun bzang chos sgron  
Kurjedrag: sKu rjes brag  
Kyangring Chenmo: sKyang ring chen mo  
Kyerchu Lhakhang: sKyer chu lha khang  
Lama Kadu: Bla ma bka' 'dus  
Layag: La yag  
Lharikha: lHa ri kha  
Lhodrag: lHo brag  
Lhokha: lHo kha  
Lhoma Ngonlung: lHo ma ngon lung  
Lhomön: lHo mon

Ling Mukha: Gling Mu kha  
Longchen Rabjam: Klong chen rab 'byams  
Lopön Nado: Slob dpon gNag 'dog  
Lopön Pema : Slob dpon Padma  
Lungtsib: Lung rtsibs  
Miwang Dragpa Gyaltshe: Mi dbang Grags pa rgyal mtshan  
Mochu: Mo chu  
Mönla Karchung: Mon la dkar chung  
Mönpa: Mon pa  
Mönyul: Mon yul  
namthar: rnam thar  
nambu: rnam bu  
Namchagdrag: gNam lcags brag  
Namkha Sengge: Nam mkha' seng ge  
Namthang Langdrag: gNam thang glang brag  
Nganlung: Ngan lung  
norkal: nor skal  
Nyingmapa: rNying ma pa  
Ogyen Chöling: O rgyan chos gling  
Ogyen Drubchu: O rgyan sgrub chu  
Ogyen Yiblung dekyiling: O rgyan yib lung bde skyid gling  
Ogyen Zangpo: O rgyan bzang po  
Pa Ten-gyal Zangpo: sPa bsTan rgyal bzang po  
Paro Chagkhar: sPa gro lcags mkhar or kha  
Pema Lingpa: Padma gling pa  
Pema Thongdrol: Padma mthong grol  
Phagri: Phag ri  
Phobjikha: Pho sbis kha  
Phochu: Pho chu  
poti: po ti  
Punthang Deba Chenpo: sPung thang bde ba chen po  
Punakha: sPur na kha  
Ralag: Ra lag  
Ralung: Ra lung  
Rinchen Gyaltshe: Rin chen rgyal mtshan  
Rinspung: Rin spungs  
Rolpa'i Dorje: Rol pa'i rdo rje  
Samling: bSam gling

Samye: bSam yas  
Serthur: gSer thur  
Sewagang: Se ba sgang  
Shakya Thubpa: Sakya Thub pa  
shang: gshang  
Shang: Shangs  
Sharchog: Shar phyogs  
she: shad  
Shenrab Miwo: gShen rab Mi bo  
Sonam Gyaltshen: bSod nams rgyam mtshan  
Sonam Lodrö: bSod nams blo gros  
Sonamgyal: bSod nams rgyal  
Sri Gyalmo: Srid rgyal mo  
Tagdrukha: sTag gru kha  
Tagtshang Sengge Samdrub: sTag tshang seng ge bsam 'grub  
Tang: sTang/lTang  
Tawa longyang: lTa ba klong yangs  
Tengyal Zangpo: bsTan rgyal bzang po  
terma: gter ma  
ternyön: gter myon  
tershe: gter shad  
tertön: gter ston  
The: Thed  
Thelung: Thed lung  
themyig: them yig  
Thimphu: Thim phu  
Togden Sonamgyal: rTogs ldan bSod nams rgyal  
Togden Gyabum: rTogs ldan rGya 'bum  
Togden Namkha Sengge: rTogs ldan Nam mkha' seng ge  
Tongdenpa: sTong ldan pa  
Tönpa Tsöndru Gyaltshen: sTon pa brTson 'grus rgyal mtshan  
Tradrug: Khra 'brug  
tromter: khrom gter  
Tsangpo: gTsang po  
Tsangtrang: gTsang 'phrang  
tsepo: btsad po  
Tsöndru Gyaltshen: brTson 'grus rgyal mtshan  
tshanden: mthsan ldan (mtshan dang ldan pa)

Tshanden Dewa: mTshan ldan bDe ba  
Tshanden Dulwa: mThsan ldan 'Dul ba  
Tshe wang Pö Yul Ma: Tshe dbang bod yul ma  
Tshewang Rigdzin: Tshe dbang rig 'dzin  
Tshomo Dorje: mTsho mo rdo rje  
Tshozhi: Tsho bzhi  
uchen: dbu can  
Ugyen Rigdzin: U rgyan rig 'dzin  
ume: dbu med  
Walse: dBal gsas  
Wangduephodrang: dBang 'dus pho brang  
Wensakha: dBen sa kha  
Yangdzong Shelgyi Dragphug: Yang rdzong shel gyi brag phug  
Yartö: Yar stod  
Yidam Kadu: Yi dam bka' 'dus  
Yöntan Gyatsho: Yon tan rgya mtsho  
Yungdrung Lingpa: gYung drung gling pa  
Yungdrungling: gYung drung gling

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *TR* pp. 7-43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> *YM* p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed geographical discription of the sacred area of Tagtshang, see Pommaret 1997: 124-218.

<sup>5</sup> *SG* pp. 5-10.

<sup>6</sup> *SG* p. 352-53.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 433-449.

<sup>8</sup> *TR* p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> *ZhD* pp. 70, 389.

<sup>10</sup> *SG* p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> *TR* pp. 84-86.

<sup>12</sup> *SG* pp. 356-58.

<sup>13</sup> *TR* pp. 88-89.

<sup>14</sup> On Chagkar Lama, cf. Pommaret 1997: 396.

<sup>15</sup> *TR* pp. 99-103.

<sup>16</sup> *TR* pp. 107-124.

<sup>17</sup> *ThG* pp. 124-128.

<sup>18</sup> *TRTSh* (Vol.I, p. 682) gives the birth year as a water-dog (*chu-khyi*) which would be 1382.

<sup>19</sup> *SG* p. 64.

<sup>20</sup> *SG* p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *SG* p. 235.

<sup>22</sup> *SG* p. 118. *TR* (p.90) states that he returned to Tibet in 1375.

<sup>23</sup> *SG* p. 118.



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<sup>24</sup> *ThG* p. 322; *SG* p. 241.

<sup>25</sup> *TR* p. 134.

<sup>26</sup> *BN* mentions Chos 'khor and sTang, but not the other two names (f. 78a, 128a2).

<sup>27</sup> *lho phyogs tsan dan nags kyi khrod*.

<sup>28</sup> *ThG* pp. 244-249; *ZhD* pp. 37-42.

<sup>29</sup> *ThG* pp. 249-254; *ZhD* pp. 218-224.

<sup>30</sup> The term *spyi spungs* normally designates a group of *Bonpo* tantras (Karmay 1972: 45, n. 2) and I have not noted if this term was ever used by other *Nyingmapa* masters.

<sup>31</sup> *ST* p. 182: 'khor 'das rgya grol bon zhig gling pa ngas/ phag los (lo'i) zla ba bcu gcig pa'i tshes gsum nyin par/ bairo'i phyag yig shog ser mthong ba don ldan/ srog yig chen mo la (las)/ bla ma rin po che 'dul ba'i sku 'bum la dga par phab po (phabs pa'o). The *gSer thur* volume itself is not included in the collection of Dorje Lingpa's works that were published under the title: *Texts of the rDo-rje gling-pa Tradition from Bhutan*, Thimphu 1984. This collection has 22 volumes.

<sup>32</sup> This title must not be confused with *the gSer zhun* as is the case in certain *Nyingmapa* works such as *TNy* Vol. 2., f.264b5. The *gSer zhun* is another *Bonpo Dzogchen* text, cf. Karmay 1972: xxxii, n. 4; Blondeau 1985: 122-131.

<sup>33</sup> A *Bonpo* sage, one of "the twin sons" of Dran-pa nam-mkha', cf. Karmay 1972, p.xxxii, n. 4; Blondeau 1985:123.

<sup>34</sup> This refers to the title of the main text, the *gSer thur* (*ST*).

<sup>35</sup> *ML* pp. 420-32. *ML* is also found in *SG* pp. 386-398 and again under the title *Bon rdzogs pa chen po gser thur dang mjal tshul* in *SG* pp. 402-411.

<sup>36</sup> Karmay 1988 :217; Dondrup Lhagyal 2000: 448-452.

<sup>37</sup> *RPh* p. 38.

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<sup>38</sup> SG p. 231: *lho mon sngan long (lung)*; BN f. 73a4: *sngan lung pho sbis kha*; also 79a4.

<sup>39</sup> SG p.119: *spa khor*.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Snellgrove 1967: 24 *et seq.*

<sup>41</sup> *Theg pa rim dgu'i chos glu*. For the “Nine Vehicles” of the *Nyingmapa* tradition, see Karmay 1988: 172.

<sup>42</sup> SG pp. 119-121.

<sup>43</sup> SG pp. 206-212; another song written at dBen-sa-kha SG ff. 422-24.

<sup>44</sup> *ban bon gnyis med du rtogs pa'i 'gur* (SG pp. 208-209).

<sup>45</sup> DS p. 249.

<sup>46</sup> *Tshe dbang snyan rgyud kyi lo rgyus gsal byed* (*Tshe dbang bod yul ma, Bonpo rten 'gyur*), Lhasa: Sog sde bsTan pa'i nyi ma, 1998, Vol. 259, ff. 159-190.

<sup>47</sup> Ugyen Pelgen has also mentioned in a recent article (2000: 673, n. 6). Both M. Aris and Pelgen have derived their information from BN.

<sup>48</sup> Karmay 1977: No.32, 22.

<sup>49</sup> *bla ma rin po che 'dul ba'i gdan sa sku 'bum gyi 'dabs bsam gling du...*(ML f. 423).

<sup>50</sup> For the Tibetan text see Appendix I. Michael Aris (1979: 151) has also referred to the same passage.

<sup>51</sup> SG pp. 70, 260: *pha mtshan ldan bla ma*.

<sup>52</sup> Vol. 19, pp. 1-33.

<sup>53</sup> The title of the song is: *lho mon gyi btsun pa pho mo rnams la gdams pa*. For the Tibetan text see Appendix II.

<sup>54</sup> For the Tibetan text see Appendi III.

<sup>55</sup> For the Tibetan text see Appendix IV.

<sup>56</sup> For the Tibetan text see Appendix V.

<sup>57</sup> *BN* f.75a-b.

<sup>58</sup> *TR* ff. 35-44.

<sup>59</sup> For the eight deities, cf. Karmay 1998: 19.

<sup>60</sup> *TTGL* p. 215.

**Population and Governance in mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century Bhutan,  
as Revealed in the Enthronement Record of *Thugs-sprul*  
'Jigs med grags pa I (1725-1761)**

*John Ardussi\* & Karma Ura\*\**

**Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The present paper is a preliminary analysis of the oldest surviving census of Bhutan's population and economy. This census was used as the basis for computing the distribution of gifts to state officials, monks and ordinary citizens in celebration of the 1747 enthronement of *Zhabdrung* Jigme Dragpa I (1725-1761) as religious head of state.<sup>2</sup> He was the first of the Mind incarnations (*thugs sprul*) of Ngawang Namgyal, founder of the modern Bhutan state, to be installed in this role. The document is one of several important government records incorporated in their apparent entirety into the biography of the reigning civil ruler *Desi* Sherab Wangchuck (r.1744-1763), who sponsored the event. The publication of his biography ensured the preservation of these archival documents, whose originals were presumably destroyed in the numerous fires of the capital fortresses during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>3</sup>

A complete analysis of this census record will eventually tell us a great deal about the socio-economic architecture of the state during the period in question. For this first look, however, we will confine ourselves to a review of the governing hierarchy and a brief analysis of the population data. We will also highlight some of the document's special terminology, and suggest interpretations of certain data peculiarities. The entire document has been summarized and tabulated in a set of spreadsheets (Table 4). We are aware of the many uncertainties remaining, and hope that this preliminary study will stimulate further discussion, and perhaps the publication of related or similar texts.

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### Enthronements, Institutional Gift Giving and Census Records

The enthronement ceremony of Jigme Dragpa was concluded by a mass public gift giving to each official and tax-paying family in Bhutan. Such mass gift-giving ceremonies (*mang 'gyed*) by monastic or government authorities are recorded in numerous sources from both Bhutan and Tibet, particularly from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. They were generally staged as part of a larger event such as an investiture, funeral, or prominent monastic enthronement. The monetary value of such distributions could be significant. The total value of gifts distributed in the ceremony analyzed here, for example, exceeded 47,000 silver *ma-tam*.<sup>4</sup> At least half of this amount was given in the form of either whole *ma-tam* coins or the half *ma-tam* called *chetam* (*phyed-tam*), the balance being in gifts whose value was expressed in *ma-tam*. The magnitude of this and similar distributions in 18<sup>th</sup> century Bhutan and Tibet has implications for the study of wealth recirculation and monetization of the public economy, matters outside the scope of our study.<sup>5</sup>

From several recorded instances, it appears that *mang 'gyed* distributions were carefully documented and preserved in monastic or state archives.<sup>6</sup> If, as seems evident, their function was in part to reinforce the bond between the state (or monastic) authority and its tax-paying subjects, it explains why our document closely resembles a true population census and takes care in enumerating the titles, ranks, and number of officials and servants in the state bureaucracy, the number of monks in the state monk body, and the number and classification of tax-paying households in each administrative sub-district including Bhutan's military dependency in Sikkim. The basic unit of agricultural taxation was the household, called *threlpa* (*khral-pa*). In this document, a distinction is made between three main types of *threlpa* (excluding nomads or *'brog-pa*, and sheep herders *gnag-rdzi*), based apparently upon the nature of their land tenure. In general, *Lönthrel* (*rLon-khral*) and *Mathrel* (*Ma-khral*) households received a gift of one whole *ma-tam*, whereas *Kamthrel* (*sKam-khral*) households and various serf families received a half *ma-tam*.<sup>7</sup> Other fractional *threlpa* also existed. As we shall see, the interpretation of these terms is more than a little problematic. They bear no clear equivalence to terms used in the few Tibetan census

records that have been published, all of which are either later or much less detailed than the one studied here.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of the document's overall statistical precision, the data is noticeably fragmented; much greater detail is provided for regions of western Bhutan than for the east or south. This can be accounted for partly on the basis of regional variation of the tax structure, which we know differed from district to district and over time. Other differences, we believe, reflect the fact that the centralized Bhutanese tax system actually evolved from many localized systems, some of great antiquity that pre-existed the *Zhabdrung's* government established in 1625.<sup>9</sup> The accession of central and eastern Bhutan to the west, by conquest during the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, may have had lasting effects on the architecture of its tax system. Lastly, the primary focus of the *mang 'gyed* record was to document that each tax-paying household received a monetary gift proportional to its status, not to record the specific details of its tax obligations.<sup>10</sup> It is certainly possible that the underlying documents contained the information missing here.

The text is replete with socio-geographic and administrative terminology not found in standard Bhutanese historical works. Unfortunately, no early glossary of such terms is known to exist. We have therefore proposed interpretations based upon context, more recent Bhutanese usage, and to some extent comparative terminology from outside Bhutan. We have resisted the temptation of simple extrapolation from the present into the past, or casual interpretation based on apparent similarities between Tibetan and Bhutanese usage.

### **The State Bureaucracy**

Following a general introduction to the investiture ceremony, the work begins by tallying the gifts provided to each of the 1,821 chief celebrants and other participants in the ceremony itself. This included 661 monastic officials, monks and novices, 11 leading religious figures of state, and 1,149 ministers, lower officials and their servants. The order of their presentation roughly matches the value of their gift, and by implication their ranking in importance within the governing hierarchy.

First to be presented gifts<sup>11</sup> were images of the deceased *Zhabdrung Rinpoche* Ngawang Namgyal and his son *Gyalse Jampey Dorji*, followed by their immediate living reincarnations *Chogtrul (mChog-sprul)* Jigme Dragpa and *Chogtrul Mipham Drugdra* Namgyal. Next in order came *Chogtrul Jigme Sengge* (1742-1789), who was the reincarnation of the 4<sup>th</sup> *Desi*, *Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye*.<sup>12</sup> All three represented incarnation lineages having some claim to occupy the position of religious head of state (*rgyal-tshab*). After them is listed the serving *rJe Mkhan-po* followed by *sPrul-sku* Shakya Tenzin (1736-1778). The latter was the recognized reincarnation of the Speech principle of the *Zhabdrung Rinpoche*. The small size of his gift, and his position as last among the leading incarnations of state, starkly illustrates the fact of his relatively low esteem in the hierarchy of the period.

Another important religious personage at the ceremony was the young *Lama* of Tango monastery, located a few miles north of the capital Tashichhodzong. This individual was the reincarnation of *Lhacham Kunley* (1691-1732/3), the daughter of the 4<sup>th</sup> *Desi* and last recognized descendant in Bhutan of the Tibetan mad saint *Drukpa Kunley*.

### **The Monk Body and the Civil Service**

#### *The State Monk Body*

According to this census, the state monk body consisted at that time of 560 ordained monks and 101 novices. The highest officials, then as now, were the *rJe mKhan-po* or *mKhan Rin-po-che*, followed by the *rDo-rje slob-dpon* (Tantric Preceptor) and the *mTshan-nyid slob-dpon* (Academic Preceptor). It appears that this number included only monks resident in the principal monasteries of Punakha, Wangdiphodrang and Tashichho dzong, and did not include those living in the outlying districts, private hermitages, or those *Nyingmapa* centers that did not depend on the central authority for their livelihood.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Ministers, Servants and Functionaries*

The origin and protocol of the traditional Bhutanese civil service is a subject of great interest, yet poorly documented for early centuries. The present text is the only known pre-modern source containing such a listing of titles, numbers and relative ranking (given twice in this enthronement record, first in the context of celebrants participating in the ceremony, and again in the census of citizens to be awarded a ceremonial gift). Unfortunately, only the bare titles are listed, and the interpretations we offer below are based on traditional knowledge and interviews with Bhutanese civil servants familiar with early traditions (see Bibliography). Interestingly, we find no obvious equivalent to the title *zeenkaff* or *zeenkaub*, a class of government orderlies that was commonly mentioned in the reports of official British Indian visitors beginning with Samuel Turner<sup>14</sup>, but never in any Bhutanese text of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>15</sup>. The terms *Nyis-skal[-ma]* (modern pronunciation *Nyikem*) and *Chibs-bzhon-pa* (pron. *Chipzhön*), are well known, however. The former is still used in the sense of “Red Scarf” officials holding the top positions in government.<sup>16</sup>

This list of 1,149 functionaries seems surprisingly large for the presumed population size of 1747 and does not include all of the minor officials known to have been attached to the secondary *Dzong*. Informants have commented that 20 *Nyikem* and 160 *Chipzhön* for the two capital fortresses of Punakha and Tashichho dzong are larger numbers than seem to have existed during the 1930's and 1940's. It is perhaps an example of the situation which caused the promulgators of the 18th century legal code to adopt measures against the bureaucratisation of the state and consequent exploitation of the peasantry.<sup>17</sup>

#### *Ministers and Nyikem Officials*

Chief among the civil servants were nine state ministers (*bKa'-blon*), at the highest level<sup>17</sup>, and high ranking officials of the two governing centers of Punakha and Tashichhodzong (*Gzhung phantshun gyi nyis-skal*). Again, there exist no early written descriptions outlining the roles, responsibilities or method of selection of these officials. However, by general interpretation it is accepted that the ministers included the six principal *Dzongpön* (of Tashichho dzong,



Punakha, Wangdiphodrang, Paro, Dagana, and Trongsa), together with the *gZhung mgron-gnyer* and two others who were likely to have been the *Sde-pa'i gZims-dpon* and *gZhung bKa'-blon*. Red-scarf officials, called “Double Rank” *gNyi-skal*) included the *Dzongpön* (*Dzong* Master), *gNyer-chen*, *gZims-dpon* and *mGron-gnyer* of each *Dzong*.

*Chipzhön*

The title is an honorific meaning “horseman” and is said to be a general title for all second tier *Dzong* officials. Its origin may lie in the privilege of riding government-issued horses during the performance of their duties, including the seasonal move between the twin capitals Punakha and Tashichho dzong (known as the *gDan-sa phan-tshun*).<sup>18</sup> The tradition is that *Chipzhön* were entitled to half the perquisites of the Red-scarf officials (hence the latter’s status as “double rank”). They wore a white scarf, swords and, like the *Nyikem* they were entitled to be addressed as *Dasho* (*Drag-shos*), a peculiarly Bhutanese term of address found in writings as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century (but not in this census record).<sup>19</sup>

Although not detailed in our text, the posts at the level of *Chipzhön* in a typical *Dzong* came eventually to include the deputies of the *Nyikem* and such functionaries as *sGo-rab* (Gate Controller), *Shagnyer* (Meat Master), *rTa-dpon* (Stable Chief), *Ba-gnyer* (Cattle Master), *Tsa-gnyer* (Fodder Master), *Drung-pa* and *rDzong-bzung-pa* or masters of the satellite fortresses under a district *Dzong*.

*Tshogs-thob dKar-'dra-ma*

Servants and attendants of the *Nyikem* and *Chipzhön* were also ranked, by one classification in terms of the quantity and quality of free meals to which they were entitled from the government mess, or *söthab* (*gSol thab*). This appears to be reflected in the titles of servants in this document. *Tshogs-thob*, as their title implies, were authorized to receive all meals at state expense. The syllables *dKar-'dra-ma* may be an error for *dKar-dro-ma*, indicating their entitlement to ‘white food’, a term interpreted to mean high grade rice.<sup>20</sup>

*Dro-rgyar Thob-pa*

This class of servants was entitled to receive only breakfast at state expense.

*lTo-gzan dKyus-ma*

The *Tozen Chuma* are believed to have been villagers who performed menial tasks in the *Dzong*, as part of their labor tax obligation, but who received no food from the state in compensation. The term *Tozen* is also used today in a somewhat different sense, to refer to young boys who serve senior monks, cooking and performing domestic chores, in return for basic lessons in reading and writing. *Chuma*, however, is also the term for the lowest rank of common soldier, or sepoy, in the Bhutanese police and military systems.<sup>21</sup> Thus, at this period the term (or terms, if they are separate words) may have included the common guardsmen posted about the *Dzong*.

*bZa'-pa*

These families were hereditary serfs attached to the *Dzong*. They were an under class of worker who cleaned toilets, performed sweeping, fetching water, and cutting wood, etc. The term is also found in Tibetan documents of the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, where individuals called *bza' pa* may have played a somewhat more prestigious social role.<sup>22</sup>

*gZhis-gnyer*

Land Stewards. The compound phrase *bza'-pa gzhis-gnyer* may mean serfs working as land stewards of the monastery.

*gZhung dPon-sger*

These were households attached to a *Dzong* to fetch water and clean the *Dzong*, as their sole tax obligation. They are regarded as having been above *bza'-pa* in status. Certainly this is a very different sense than the ordinary use of these words in traditional Tibet.<sup>23</sup>

**The Tax-paying Citizens and Tributaries of Bhutan**

The largest portion of the text, ff. 35.b-41.b, relates in detail the gift presented “to each of the tax-paying family units of ordinary people, countless as the stars, whose necks were subject to the firm golden yoke of the royal laws and who paid annual taxes in money and in grain” (*Chos rje 'brug pa'i chab 'bangs la ... dmangs mi khyim*

*gnam gyi skar ma lta bu grangs kyis mi chod pa rnams kyi gnya' pa rgyal khrims gser gyi gnya' shing btsan pos mnan cing/khyad nor dang 'bru la sogs pa'i dpaya khral lo star bsdu bzhi pa...*). The text goes on to say that these families included not only residents of Bhutan proper (called here Lho-kha-bzhi) but also of the far-flung lands of Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Chumbi,<sup>24</sup> and Ma-'gor (India?) (*stod mnga' ris/bal-po/'brasmo ljongs/tsong/ma 'gor la sogs...*), “and in particular those belonging to the senior and junior ministers of Cooch Behar and other kingdoms of Kamaripa in India”.<sup>25</sup> Agriculturalists within the southern districts presumably included Indians, but they are only mentioned specifically for Dagana.<sup>26</sup> Unspecified are those families of serfs or slaves captured from the outlying districts, who perhaps paid no taxes, or at least not directly to the state.

### **The Classification into Districts and Sub-districts**

The census of tax-paying family units (*khral-pa*) was organized by sub-district and special habitational groupings such as nomadic regions, all under the control (lit: “beneath the feet” [*cha zhabs nas*] of a particular district *Dzong*. The district *Dzongs* were the same as those today, and were under the command of a *Penlop* (*dpon-slob*) or *Chila* (*spyi-bla*). In this document, four additional officials are identified as *Penlop*, whose offices have gone into disuse since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 1- The Religious Celebrants (ff. 31.b.35.a)**

<b>Rank and Title</b>	<b>Gift (value in <i>ma-tam</i>)</b>
Image of <i>Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che</i>	Coins, jewelry, clothing, ivories, jade, etc. (value not recorded)
Image of the <i>Zhabs-drung's</i> son 'Jam-dpal-rdo-rje (1631-1680)	Coins, statues, precious cloth, etc. (value not recorded)
<i>mChog-sprul</i> Mi-pham 'brug-sgra- rnam-rgya (1737-1762)	2,290 <i>ma-tam</i>
<i>mChog-sprul</i> 'Jigs-med-grags-pa (1725-1761)	2,290 <i>ma-tam</i>
<i>mChog-sprul</i> 'Jigs-med-seng-ge (1742-1789)	1,000 <i>ma-tam</i>
<i>rJe mKhan-po</i> IX Shakya-rin-chen (1710-1767)	450 <i>ma-tam</i>
<i>sPrul-sku</i> Shakya-bstan-'dzin (1736-1778)	164 <i>ma-tam</i>
Retired <i>Desi</i> (unnamed)	910 <i>ma-tam</i>
<i>rDo-rje slob-dpon</i> of the state monk body	60 <i>ma-tam</i>
<i>mTshan-nyid slob-dpon</i> of the state monk body	35 <i>ma-tam</i>
<i>Bla-ma of rTa-mgo</i> monastery	33 <i>ma-tam</i>
Rebirth of Grub-chen Kun-bzang-ras-chen	33 <i>ma-tam</i>
'Brug-rnam-rgyal	40 <i>ma-tam</i>
Individual monks of the state monk body ('Phags mchog 'dus pa rgya mtsho'i tshogs kyi dkyil 'khor chen po)	7,620 <i>ma-tam</i> including robes, prayer wheels, rosaries and coins for 560 individual monks and 202 coins for 101 novices)
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,200 <i>ma-tam</i></b>

**Table 2 - Civil Functionaries**

<b>Rank and Title</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Gift per individual (value in <i>ma-tam</i>)</b>
<i>bKa'-blon</i>	9	26 <i>ma-tam</i>
<i>gZhung phan-tshun gnyis skal</i>	20	12 <i>ma-tam</i>
<i>Chibs-bzhon-pa</i>	160	1 Bharahasti <sup>28</sup> ; 1 silver <i>dong-rtse</i> <sup>29</sup>
<i>Tshogs-thob dkar-'dra-ma</i>	140	1 Bharahasti
<i>Dro-rgyar Thob-pa</i>	160	1 silver <i>dong-rtse</i> , 1 length of <i>ras dkyus-ma</i> cloth
<i>lTo-gzan dKyus-ma</i>	480	1 silver <i>dong-rtse</i>
<i>bZa'-pa las-'ong</i> [?] of Punakha <i>rdzong</i>	60	2 bolts of cotton cloth ( <i>ras yug</i> )
[ <i>bZa'-pa</i> ] chung-pa (of Punakha dzong)	12	1 length of cotton cloth ( <i>ras yug</i> )
<i>bZa'-pa</i> of Tashichho dzong	140	2 lengths of cotton cloth ( <i>ras yug</i> )
<i>Ja-dpon</i>	1	3 silver <i>dong-rtse</i>
<i>Ja-g.yog</i>	9	1 <i>ma-tam</i>
60 <i>dPon-sger</i> of the <i>Gzhung</i> and of Punakha dzong, 6 of Tashichho dzong, and 40 of Brag-Wang <sup>30</sup>	106	2 bolts of cotton cloth ( <i>ras yug</i> )
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1149</b>	<b>1,340 <i>ma-tam</i></b>

There were approximately 140 identified tax-paying sub-districts, comparable to the unit called the *gewog*, i.e. Administrative Unit or Settlement Block, in modern Bhutan (of which 200 existed in 1998). It is interesting that nearly half of the named administrative units of 1747 still exist as such in 2000, although boundaries may have shifted. On the other hand, more than half of the older names have disappeared as settlement blocks in modern times, though they mostly persist as local village and place names.<sup>31</sup> The origins of these block names go deeply into Bhutanese history, and reflect the diversity of its population and local attributes. A grouping of administrative units was the responsibility of an official known by the title *Drung*, who functioned in the capacity of local representative of the central government.<sup>32</sup> It would appear from the main spreadsheet (Table 4) that *Drung* were appointed to sub-districts whose tax-paying households exceeded about eighty in number. Forty-eight *Drung* are individually named in this document.

One of the interesting features of this document is the simplifications and apparent omissions of certain types of data. An interesting fact already known from other historical sources, but shown here for the first time in statistical detail, is that all of the tax-paying settlement blocks of eastern Bhutan reported up first through their district *Dzong* and then through the *Dzong* of Chos-'khor-rab-brtan-rtse or Trongsa, whereas most of the *Dzong* of western Bhutan reported directly to the central authority.<sup>33</sup> The same is true of Dagana in the southwest. In both cases, all households were classed simply as *mathrel* or *wangyön* (*dbang-yon*). This additional layer of administration between the citizens of eastern Bhutan, Dagana and the central authority was a historical legacy of how these districts were incorporated by conquest into the central government, during the early decades of the *Zhabdrung*'s state-building activity.<sup>34</sup>

A perhaps related anomaly of this document is its failure to distinguish the many aristocratic families of central and eastern Bhutan from ordinary taxpayers. Known as *Zhal-ngo*, they exercised considerable economic power in different periods and districts. Interestingly, they are specifically identified in this document only for Goen (*dGon*), Damtshang, and the military dependency of Gangtok (now the capital of Sikkim).<sup>35</sup>

### **The Classification of Citizens by Tax Obligation<sup>36</sup>**

The major part of the document consists of a detailed enumeration of tax-paying households, grouped by district (*Dzong*), sub-district (*Drung*) or village, and by form of agricultural tax obligation. These are divided into three major categories, plus a few isolated classifications.

#### *Rlon-khral and skam-khral*

Very little research has been done on the subject of taxation in traditional Bhutan, and there is little written documentation that predates the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> It has been commonly accepted, however, that until about the 1960's the economy was based principally on barter or exchange, and that the vast majority of Bhutanese paid taxes in kind, generically called *lönthrel* ("wet tax"). In common parlance this means tax paid in produce or material commodities. 'Produce taxes' included agricultural products as well as manufactured items such as raw cloth and finished clothing such as *kira* (women's outer garment) which had high value as a commodity of exchange and gifting.

In the living memory of Bhutanese informants, produce taxes were levied either as *dbang-yon* (fixed in absolute terms, regardless of estate size) or as *thojo* (fixed in percentage terms based on size of the estate property). In more recent decades an increasing number of households commuted their *lönthrel* obligation into *kamthrel*, a term that in today's vernacular means coinage. As the economy became more heavily monetized, it is believed, the majority of taxes came to be paid in some kind of cash.

Elderly people from several areas of Bhutan specifically remember commuting their tax obligations in *kira*, butter, or grains into the common coinage of early times called the *ma-tam* and *be-tam*.<sup>38</sup>

The above model is greatly challenged by this enthronement record, however, which clearly shows that about 26% of the tax-paying households in western Bhutan of 1747 paid *kamthrel*. How plausible



is it that so many families of western Bhutan (about 8% of the disaggregated data for the whole country) paid taxes in coins during the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century? The legal code of 1729 contains an interesting passage that relates to this question. “It is not permitted to combine two taxpaying estates (into one). When elderly (tax-paying) patrons have no daughters or servants they should be permitted to pay whatever *kamthrel* (coinage) they can get, for as long as they live. But once they die, the tax estate must be transferred to the nearest (kin) by flesh or bone. Marriages against the wish of the parents must not be contracted. For when there exist *mathrel* estates and individual tax-paying households, to combine two or three of these (into one) and commute the tax obligation into *kamthrel* is a bad example causing injury to all.”<sup>39</sup>

This passage and its sequel clearly suggests that the combination of estates and the commuting of produce tax or *lönthrel* into the payment of coinage were practices that led to the reduction of revenues collected by the state, by decoupling the tax obligation of a particular estate from its documented productive capacity. Moreover, the substantial labor taxes (military, corvée, and community work-share) not mentioned in our document were also levied on individual estates, so that their combination resulted in the reduction by half or more of the established taxes on those landholders. Given the opposition of the government, what is surprising is the extent to which, by 1747, coinage had already become the nominal medium of tax payment in the west. The rise of a monetized economy was clearly perceived as a disruptive force in the conservative society of 18<sup>th</sup> century Bhutan, no doubt explaining why *kamthrel* taxpayers only received half the ceremonial gift as those who paid their taxes in the traditional agricultural produce or *lönthrel*.<sup>40</sup>

#### *Ma-khral and yang khral-thebs*

The third major category of tax obligation is known in this text as *mathrel*. The concept of *mathrel* is explained by informants familiar with practices of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a main or principal tax-paying household (literally ‘mother’ tax household) as opposed to a subsidiary or side household called *yang khral-thebs* or *zur-pa*. The latter are households that have split themselves from the natal

household. Normally, such units decide to separate from the main household when they get a small parcel of subsistence land (*lTo-zhing*). They set up their hearth in a room in the same house, but in a different room, or live in a small hut or house they build for themselves. Since their property is very marginal, they do not become full fledged tax payers. As it were, they are called marginal households (*zur-pa*) or side households.

Here again, the term seems to have fallen out of usage long ago, and the referent is not quite clear. It is surely significant that without exception, all of the 6,833 tax-paying households of eastern Bhutan are of this type, whereas only a small minority in the west are so categorized. Moreover, only a single tax-paying sub-district in the west, namely Phang-ya drung-pa (modern Phangyue gewog in Wangdiphodrang district) lists tax-paying families from all three categories. In every other instance, subdistricts paying *mathrel* are listed as exclusively such. *Mathrel*, then, was clearly a distinctive class of tax-obligation or land tenure. It was predominantly found in central and eastern Bhutan. Beyond that, the details must await further information.

#### *Dbang-yon*

*Dbang-yon* (literally ‘blessing offering’) is the tax category of about one percent of the population specifically documented in this survey. The term must surely go back to the era when agricultural produce and other valuables were paid voluntarily as a religious gift to the *Zhabdrung* or to the monk body. Then, at some subsequent period, this tax became fixed as an annual obligation unrelated to its original purpose.

In fact, *dbang-yon* taxpayers existed throughout Bhutan. Unlike other agricultural taxes, it was regressive in not being proportional to the size of land holdings. The pattern of *dbang-yon* taxation shown in this survey is very erratic, however. Nearly all are recorded for the single settlement block of Dagana in the south-west, another indication of the incomplete nature of our document.

#### *Dpon-sger*

*Dpon-sger*, we believe, originated as a category for families who were the private servants of high ranking officials such as the *Desi*, *Penlop* or *Dzongpön*. As such they resided near the *Dzong*. In the course of time, their status seems to have reduced somewhat into that of families who served the *Dzong* in lieu of other taxes, by becoming hereditary cleaners, sweepers and water collectors. They also raised pigs for the *Dzong* authorities. There was once a village that went by this name adjacent to Trongsa, knocked down in the 1980's, and *dpon-sger* households still exist next to Paro Dzong.

*Dgon-sde'i gras*

These may have been families of hereditary workers and servants to the monk body of the *Dzong*.

*Rdza-mkhan*

*Rdza-mkhan* or potters and sculptors were probably families who paid their principal tax obligation by providing pottery to the government. Our document only lists ten *rDza-mkhan* families in all of Bhutan, however, namely in the ICang Bar-skor sub-district of Tashichho dzong. But it is known that potter/sculptor families and villages existed widely within Bhutan, including Lhuntse in the east, as well as Paro, Thimphu, Wangdiphodrang, etc. in the west. Once again, this omission is assumed to reflect the recording clerk's lack of more specific knowledge.

*Zhal-ngo, spyi-dpon*

These are titles reflecting layers of local nobility or ruling class families with ancient origins, often Tibetan. Such status was acquired by hereditary descent from a renowned religious figure, or nobility of quasi-legendary antiquity, who settled in Bhutan and acquired property and status. There is a great need to study the origin and attributes of this class of Bhutanese families in more generic detail.

**The Population of Bhutan**

A natural question arising from the study of this data is the size of the total population during 1747. This entails three estimations, firstly the number of tax-paying households, and secondly the average household size. A third estimation is required to determine the percentage of households who would have been outside the agricultural taxation system. This would probably have included religious families and regional nobility such as un-enumerated *zhal-ngo*, *chos-rje*, *bla-ma*, etc., together with their serf or *bza'-pa*, *nang-gzan* and *grwa-pa* dependent families, which (we believe) were excluded from these enumerations.

Allowing for some ambiguity in the data, a reasonable estimate based on the 1747 enthronement record (See Table 4) gives about 27,223 tax-paying households. A late 18th century Chinese estimate of Bhutan's population was something over 40,000 households, roughly 47% more than the figure of 27,223 officially recognized in 1747.<sup>41</sup> In the biography of *Zhabs-drung* IV 'Jigs-med-grags-pa II, (1791-c.1830) a figure of 60,000 subject households (*mi-khyim*) is cited in connection with the ceremony for his official incarnate recognition in about 1795. But this number could also have been a traditional one current at the time the work was written (1831).<sup>42</sup>

Analysis of current census data indicates an average household size for Bhutan of 8. If we adopt an average value 8, and assume that this number has remained fairly constant since the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>43</sup>, then combining these data yields the population estimates listed in Table 3. The estimate for "Total Population" is based on a purely heuristic assumption that about 20% of the population consisted of families that did not fall within the agricultural taxation system. Obviously, further analysis is required of these sources, and others that may come to light, before we can assess what confidence to place in these numbers.

### **Conclusion**

The document reviewed here for the first time is important primarily for the raw data and statistical perspective that it presents from a critical period of Bhutan's history, barely two decades before the war with British India. So much changed in Bhutan in consequence of that event. It throws new light on the economy of Bhutan during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, including the use of coinage well beyond the level one would have expected based on earlier reports. It also shows clear differences in the tax structure and population between different parts of the country.

### **Table 3 - Estimates of Bhutan's Tax-paying Population**

Year	1747 Source: <i>Rtogs-brjod</i> of Sherab Wangchuck	c. 1796 Source: <i>Wei zang tong zhi</i>	1795 (1831?) Source: <i>Rnam-t h a r</i> of <i>Zhabdrung</i> 'Jig-me-grags-pa II
Tax-paying households	27,223	40,000	60,000
Tax-paying Population est.	217,784	250,000	375,000
Total Population est.	261,340	312,500	468,750

**Name Index**

<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Dzongkha</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<i>Desi</i>	<i>sDe srid</i>	The civil head of state under the traditional form of government; formally, the nominee of the <i>Zhabdrung</i> , or <i>Dharma Raja</i>
<i>Zhabdrung Rinpoche</i>	<i>Zhabs drung Rin po che</i>	Since 1625, the elegant title ('In the Presence of his Feet') of the Bhutan head of state, Ngag dbang nam rgyal (1594-1651)
<i>Dzongpön</i>	<i>rDzong dpon</i>	Lord of the Fortress, an appointed governor of a district <i>rDzong</i>
Jampey Dorji	'Jam-dpal-rdo-rje	Natural son of <i>Zhabdrung</i> Ngawang Namgyal
<i>Gyalse</i>	<i>rGyal sras</i>	Prince Reincarnate - the title of two lines of reincarnate monks tied by ancestry to the 1 <sup>st</sup> <i>Zhabdrung</i> of Bhutan
Jigme Dragpa	'Jigs med grags pa	1 <sup>st</sup> Mind Incarnation of Ngawang Namgyal
Jigme Sengge	'Jigs med seng ge	Reincarnation of Tenzin Rabgye
<i>Kalyön, Zhung Kalyön</i>	<i>bKa'-blon, gZhung bKa'-blon</i>	Minister of state and top advisor to the incumbent ruler
Mipham Drugdra Namgyal	Mi pham 'brug sgra nam rgyal	Reincarnation of Jampey Dorji
<i>Nyikem</i>	<i>[g]Nyis-skal-ma</i>	'Double Rank' – title of the highest state officials, later to be known as 'Red Scarf'
Phajo Drug Gom Shigpo	Pha jo 'Brug sgom zhig po	Early <i>Drukpa</i> pioneering <i>Lama</i> from Tibet
Sherab Wangchuck	Shes rab dbang phyug	13 <sup>th</sup> <i>Druk Desi</i> of Bhutan
Tenzin Rabgye	bsTan 'dzin Rab rgyas	4 <sup>th</sup> <i>Druk Desi</i> of Bhutan

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*AIPC* = Autobiography of *Panchen Lama* I Blo-bzang-chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan, *Chos smra ba'i dge slong blo bzang chos kyi rgyal*

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*GBYT1* = Dpal 'byor bzang po, ed. (1985). *Rgya bod yig tshang chen mo*, Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang. A history of Tibet written in 1434 by \_r\_ bhūtibhadra.

*GBYT2* = The same text in the 2-vol. edition published in Thimphu in 1979 by Kunsang Topgyel and Mani Dorji.



*rJe mKhan-po X, bsTan-'dzin Chos-rgyal (1731-'59). lHo'i chos 'byung bstan pa rin po che'i 'phro mthud 'jam mgon smon mtha'i 'phreng ba gtso bor skyabs mgon rin po che rgyal sras ngag dbang rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar kun gyi go bde gsal bar bkod pa bcas. 1731-'59, Woodblock print.*

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*SDE-SRID 4 = rJe mKhan-po VI Ngag-dbang-lhun-grub (1720). Mtshungs med chos kyi rgyal po rje rin po che'i rnam par thar pa bskal bzang legs bris 'dod pa'i re skong dpag bsam gyi snye ma (Life of the 4<sup>th</sup> Druk Desi bsTan-'dzin-rab-rgyas [1638-1696]. Woodblock print.*

*SDE-SRID 13 = rJe Mkhon-po XIII Yon-tan-mtha'-yas & rJe Kundga'-rgya-mtsho (1766). Chos rgyal chen po shes rab dbang phyug gi dge ba'i cho ga rab tu gsal ba'i gtam mu tig do shal (Life of the 13th sDe-srid Shes-rab-dbang-phyug). Reprinted in Masterpieces of Bhutanese Biographical Literature, New Delhi, 1970.*

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### Oral Information

Oral information was obtained during conversations and discussions with the following: *Dasho* Karma Gayleg, former Royal Advisory Councillor; *Dasho* Kado, a former *Dzongpön* and one of the few remaining figures to have held such a post under the old system; Chang *chimi* Ugyen, an elected assemblyman.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the joint product of the two authors, based on our individual research and collaborative efforts to interpret the historical and oral data on which it is based.

<sup>2</sup> *SDE-SRID 13*: 35.b describes this event in the words: “*mchog gi sprul pa'i sku ngag dbang 'jigs med grags pa kham gsum pa'i gtsug rgyan du mnga' gsol ba'i dga' ston...*” (“a celebration for the conferment of power upon the exalted reincarnation Ngag-dbang 'Jigs-med-grags-pa, as the diadem of the three realms.”) This is generally accepted to mean the installation as successor or *rgyal-tshab* of the *Zhabdrung* Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal, i.e. as religious head of state. As usual for such enthronements in Bhutan, the timing coincided with other consecrations, which lent importance and spiritual context to the event. In this case, the celebration marked the completion and consecration of several major architectural projects including a new golden dome and images for Punakha (*SDE-SRID 13*: 31.a).

<sup>3</sup> The “Enthronement Record” constitutes ff. 30.a – 40.a of the biography *SDE SRID 13*. This text is a woodblock print in 95 folios written in 1765-66 by the 13<sup>th</sup> *rJe mKhan po* of Bhutan Yon tan mTha' yas (1724-1784) and his brother Kun dga' rGya mtsho. It constitutes the last section (*Nge*) of the former's Collected Works (*gSung 'bum*).

<sup>4</sup> A silver coin minted in neighboring Cooch Behar state and circulated as currency within Bhutan. The term *ma-tam* may come from the Bengali letter *Ma* found prominently on the coin, or it may designate the ‘whole’ coin, as distinct from the half and third fractional pieces into which it could apparently be cut. (On Bhutanese coinage, see Nicholas Rhodes, “Coinage of Bhutan,” *Journal of Bhutan Studies* vol. 1 no. 1, 1999; N. Rhodes, “The Monetisation of Bhutan,” published in this volume).

<sup>5</sup> This topic is the subject of a forthcoming research paper, John Ardussi, “On the *mang-'gyed* as an institutional ritual of gift giving and wealth recirculation in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Tibet and Bhutan.”

<sup>6</sup> For example, an elaborate *mang 'gyed* in 1593 to commemorate the death rites for the Tibetan *Drukpa* hierarch Kun-mkhyen Padma dKar-po produced a detailed MS of recipients called *dGongs rdzogs bsgrubs pa'i deb*

*chen mo* (see Lha rtse ba Ngag dbang bZang po, *Dpal 'brug pa thams cad mkhyen pa chen po'i rnam par thar pa rgya mtsho lta bu'i 'phros cha.*: 69.b-70.b). The text has not come to light. A detailed account once existed of the *mang 'gyed* distribution of coins to Bhutanese citizens for the 1680 investiture of the 4<sup>th</sup> *Desi* Tenzin Rabgye, but seems to have been lost.

<sup>7</sup> There were several interesting exceptions. For example, each of the *lönthrel* households of the Ha valley received 2/3 *ma-tam*.

<sup>8</sup> The earliest known Tibetan census was that of 1268, which recorded the number of tax-paying households (*hor dud* or 'Mongol hearths') in each of the thirteen myriarchies (*khri skor*) under the newly established *Sakya*–Mongol central government (the census is analyzed in Schuh 1977: 82, 91, Petech 1980 *passim*, and Petech 1990: 46-50; the main Tibetan source is the historical work *Rgya bod yig tshang chen mo* written in 1434, for which two editions have been consulted: *GBYT1*: 296-304; *GBYT2*: Pt. I ff. 212.b – 218.a). A detailed tax survey of 1840, covering all of central Tibet, has also recently been published in China (see *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*. Qinghai: Krung go bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> For instance, excessive *corvée* tax obligations was a key issue that supposedly drove *Lama* Lha pa's Bhutanese followers into the camp of Phajo Drug Gom Shigpo in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Aris 1979: 168ff).

<sup>10</sup> Thus, the document says nothing at all about the substantial labor obligations required of citizens.

<sup>11</sup> The list of precious gifts presented to these individuals is extensive, and worth some study by those interested in traditional Bhutanese textiles and art. We have omitted it from this paper.

<sup>12</sup> On Tenzin Rabgye please see Aris 1979: 250, Ardussi 1999: *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to discern from the old literature the process by which independent hermitages and monasteries became gradually incorporated into the central system. By 1748, an official list of more than 240 monasteries and hermitages of Bhutan included all of the major *Nyingmapa* establishments known today (*SDE-SRID 13*: 40.a-44.b).

<sup>14</sup> Capt. Samuel Turner (1800), *An Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama, in Tibet...* London: W.Bulmer and Co., p.8fn:

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“*Zeenkaubs* are officers of government under the immediate command of the *Daeb* [sic] *Raja*, a large party of whom are always personally attendant on him, and ready to be employed, either in a civil or military capacity, as he directs.”

<sup>15</sup> The term must be from *Dzongkha phyag-sgar-pa* (pron. *changap*), still in modern use in the sense “butlers, valets, and men in waiting”. See *Driglam Namzhag* (Bhutanese Etiquette) *A Manual*, Thimphu: National Library, 1999: 249.

<sup>16</sup> The Bhutanese system of a hierarchy of colored scarves or *kabne* (*bKab-ne*) to distinguish among officials of different rank apparently emerged from the dress customs of the monastic tradition, but the practice is never referred to in early sources. (Brief description in *Driglam Namzhag*: 171-180).

<sup>17</sup> There is no common origin whatsoever between the Tibetan and Bhutanese office of this name, notwithstanding any similarity of their role. At some point, the Bhutanese *bKa’ blon* were organized into a ministerial body called *lhan-rgyas* (sometimes translated as the “Cabinet”), but that term is not used in this document. The inception of a formally constituted ministerial cabinet cannot be easily traced in Bhutanese historical records. The earliest British Indian description of the Bhutanese “cabinet” is that of R.B. Pemberton, *Report on Bootan*, Calcutta (1839): 53-54, mistaken, however, in his analysis of the ruling hierarchy.

<sup>18</sup> The term *gdan-sa* reflects the originally monastic function of the *Dzong*. The same word was used of the capital fortress – cum – monastery centers of Sakya, Phagmogru and Rinpung in Tibet, and also of Rwa-lung monastery.

<sup>19</sup> The earliest written occurrence of this term seems to be the biography of Nam mkha’ rGyal mtshan (1475-1530), the reincarnation of *Chos-rje* ‘Ba’-ra-ba (1310-1391), a Tibetan monk who established several monasteries in Bhutan. There we find a description of the latter’s encounter with “the most powerful patron of the Great One [i.e. *chos-rje* ‘Ba’-ra-ba] when he came to Bhutan, named *Dasho* Gyang-gsar-ba, the ruler (*chipön*) of Lho Paro” (*lho spa gro’i spyi dpon drag shos / gyang gsar ba zer ba’i / skyes mchog chen po lhor phebs pa’i sbyin bdag gi drag shos...*). Nam-mkha’ rDo-rje, *Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa sprul sku nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po’i rnam par thar pa dgos ’dod kun ’byung nor bu’i phreng ba*: 8.b-9.a

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<sup>20</sup> *Lho'i chos 'byung*: 109.a; Aris (1986): 149, 168: “The term *gsol-ba dkar-mo* may refer to the high grade of white rice known as *sbo-'bras*, the issue of which seems to have been a privilege of senior government officers. The lower ranks would have received the coarser grade of reddish coloured rice.” In the same text, the term *dkar dro byed* “to serve white food” occurs three times (f.112.b-113.a). Aris (fn 86) interprets this as “bloodless food.” From the context, however, it seems really to imply food served from government stores, in lieu of food commandeered from citizens in compensation for the adjudication of disputes and other official services.

<sup>21</sup> *Driglam Namzhag*: 148, 261.

<sup>22</sup> Petech translates *bza'-pa* as “table-mate” or military “retainer”, based on Tibetan documents of the Sakya – Mongol period: “They were a body of particularly trusted men, employed (it appears) as life-guards and as garrison in particularly important places” (Petech 1990: 61, 126). In *GBYT2*: 193.a we find the feminine form *bza'-mi bud-med* clearly used in the sense of a housewife within an agricultural *hor-dud* (i.e. the female spouse within a tax-paying household). *Bza' pa* also occurs in an edict of the famous prince of Gyantse, Rab brtan kun bzang 'phags (b. 1389) where it has been translated by Tucci as “married person” within a tax-paying family unit (G. Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*: 666, 703). If there is a common thread of meaning in these sources, perhaps it is that of a tax-paying agricultural ‘husbandman’, who also served as militiaman in times of need. This differs from the Bhutanese sense, where *bza' pa* were apparently serfs tied to a particular Dzong.

<sup>23</sup> In Tibetan usage, and throughout the *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*, the terms *sger-'don*, *gzhung-rgyug*, and *chos-gzhis* designate the three categories of farming household owing tax respectively to noble families, the central government and to the monasteries. The Tibetan term *sger-pa* meant an aristocrat or landed gentry family, certainly not a servant.

<sup>24</sup> The *Tsong* were the indigenous *Lepcha* peoples inhabiting Sikkim and lower Chumbi valley.

<sup>25</sup> We interpret this passage to refer to citizens from those countries residing in Bhutan. There is no specific mention of gifts to Bhutanese tax-payers

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residing beyond the frontiers proper, with the exception of the Bhutanese garrison at Gangtok, Sikkim, which during this period had been seized by the Bhutan government. Reference to the citizens of Cooch Behar and Kamaripa paying taxes to Bhutan perhaps alludes to the unstable arrangements under which Bhutan and various Indian states shared taxation rights in certain border tracts (on the history of this practice, common to several districts of Assam and adjacent hill states, see E.A. Gait, *History of Assam*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink, 1963<sup>3</sup>: 363f; Lakshmi Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*. Gauhati: Lakshmi Printing Press, 1968: 171, 204f).

<sup>26</sup> *Rgya bod zhing gzan* “Indian and Tibetan farmers” (*SDE SRID 13*: 40.a). The term could also mean farmers of mixed Indian-Tibetan ethnic origin. The text tells us that Indian peasants are specifically excluded from the census of Chirang districts (*Ibid*: 37.b). (There is no mention anywhere in this census of citizens of Nepalese origin).

<sup>27</sup> These are the mTsho-zhabs *dPon-slob* (Gasa), Byar-sgang *dPon-slob* and U-ma *dPon-slob* (Wangdi Phodrang), and the rDo-dkar *dPon-slob* (Paro district).

<sup>28</sup> Several of the names of the special gift cloth items presented at this ceremony have Indic or possibly Chinese origins. One wonders if the *bharahasti* may not be a special type of cloth, or perhaps sword, named after its point of manufacture somewhere in India.

<sup>29</sup> The coin called *dong-rtse* mentioned in Tibetan literature of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and later (e.g. Nyang-ral Nyi-ma-'od-zer, *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*: 200f [Chinese edition, 1988]. Its exact meaning in Bhutan remains to be established.

<sup>30</sup> Brag-wang cannot be identified.

<sup>31</sup> See “Administrative units with their standard spellings,” *Statistical Yearbook 1998*, CSO (Central Statistical Office of Bhutan).

<sup>32</sup> Aris (1976: 616) states that the *drung* or *drung-pa* were originally monastic officials, becoming in later times a lay sinecure and finally abolished in the 1950's. Their function was that of government representative at the subdistrict level.

<sup>33</sup> The *Dzongs* of Gling-bzhi, Brda-ling, and Gsang-sbe in the west are the three exceptions.

<sup>34</sup> The military campaign against the independent chiefs of eastern Bhutan has been described in Aris (1979): 246 and Aris 1986: 89-115.

<sup>35</sup> *SDE-SRID 13*: 40.a. The Gangtok garrison dates from Bhutanese military activity in the area during the 1725 – 1730 period. The document records gifts to 143 tax-paying families and six aristocratic (*zhal-ngo*) households, plus a local *Dzong-dpon*. But for administrative purposes it was subordinate to the district *Dzong* of Daling and not to the central Bhutan authority.

<sup>36</sup> Analysis for this section was supported by interviews with *Dasho* Karma Gayleg, former Royal Advisory Councillor, *Dasho* Kado who is one of the few remaining figures to have held the post of *Dzongpön* under the old system, and Chang *chimi* (elected assemblyman) Ugyen.

<sup>37</sup> See Karma Ura's semi-fictionalized account in the historical novel *The Hero With a Thousand Eyes* which focuses on the reign of the third king Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1952-1972), under whom the tax system was greatly simplified and tax burdens reduced.

<sup>38</sup> Bhutanese commonly interpret the *Dzongkha* word *betam* as 'Tibetan coin' (i.e. *Bod-tam*), but the term occurs in Tibetan documents spelled *Bal-tam*, i.e. 'Nepalese coin.'

<sup>39</sup> Aris (1986): 156f *de yang khral rkang gnyis sbam byed mi chog / sbyin bdag bud med dang g.yog rigs med pa'i rgan rgon sogs yod tshe / ngo bo ma yol bar du skam khral gang 'byor re byed bcug / ngo bo yol tshe sha rus gang nye'i mi phros yod pa nas khral rkang rtsa lhongs byed / pha ma mi dga' ba'i gnyen mi bya / gzhan ma khral zhing khral khyim dngos po yod bzhin du / khral pa gnyis gsum sbam zhing / de yang skam khral la thab thus kyis bsgyur nas / yongs la gnod pa'i dpe ngan gcig 'dug pa /*. Our translation differs from Michael Aris's, who did not translate the term *ma-khral*.

<sup>40</sup> The opposition of the government to a monetized economy was also rooted in traditional viewpoints of the monastic establishment. It was this factor, mainly, that bred Bhutan's resistance to the grandiose trade schemes proposed by George Bogle on behalf of Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India (Ardussi, forthcoming).

<sup>41</sup> *Wei-zang tong-zhi*: 15, 11.a. (Reprint) Taiwan: Wen-hai Publishing Co., 1965. This book was the work of one of the Manchu ambans stationed in Lhasa. It contains reliable information on many topics concerning Tibet and its foreign relations. It is possible that this estimate included all households, not merely the agricultural tax-payers.

<sup>42</sup> Byang-chub-nor-bu, *Dpal ldan bla ma thams cad mkhyen gzigs chen po ngag dbang 'jigs med grags pa'i rnam par thar pa byang chen spyod pa rgya mtshor 'jug pa'i gtam snyan pa'i yan lag 'bum ldan rdzogs ldan dga' char sbyin pa'i chos kyi sprin chen po'i dbyangs*, vol. Ga: 38.b. We have used a microfilm duplicate from a film in the Snellgrove Collection.

<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, the Mongol-Tibetan census of 1268 used six persons as the average size of a Tibetan household (see *GBYT1*: 270-271; *GBYT2*: 193.a-b).



## **The Monetisation of Bhutan\***

*Nicholas Rhodes\*\**

### **Introduction**

The objective of this paper is to describe how Bhutanese society has become monetised over the years, at first very slowly, but rapidly during the last half century. I will briefly comment on the effect that monetisation has had on Bhutanese Society, and the potential conflict that exists between traditional values in Bhutan, which are largely non-monetary based, and so-called “modern” values, which are almost entirely money oriented.

Since the idea of coinage was first developed in Asia Minor around the year 600 B.C., money has played an increasingly important role in every “developed” country and society in the world. In many ways, monetisation has become a necessary accompaniment, not only to economic modernisation and development, but also to the democratisation of political processes. Money gives a person economic freedom of choice, and the ability to make a living without depending on the goodwill and patronage of his political lord and master. However, lack of money in a monetised society, can be a greater hardship, because it can be accompanied by feelings that the individual concerned has mismanaged his finances. In a non-monetised society, on the other hand, poverty can usually be blamed on outside forces, such as famine, drought, war or political mismanagement.

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Bhutan has been a very latecomer to the concept of money. It is only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that currency has started to play a significant role in the fiscal policy of the state and in the wider economy. Bhutan provides an interesting subject for research into the social, political and economic effects of monetisation as the country continues its development process.

### **Historical Background**

The first mention of coins in Bhutanese sources occurs during the time of the first *Zhabdrung*, Ngawang Namgyal. In his biography, it is recorded that in about 1619, the people of Chhuka presented him with some coins, and these were melted down and to build a silver reliquary for the ashes of his father.

The earliest coins that I have seen in Bhutan are silver tangkas of Lakshmi Narayan of Cooch Behar, datable to the period 1587-1626. However, the earliest Cooch Behar coins date from the reign of the previous king, Nara Narayan (1555-87), and as a trade route to Tibet through Bhutan certainly existed before 1583,<sup>1</sup> coins probably reached Bhutan in or before the 1580's.

The initial use made of the coins by the *Zhabdrung* implies that at this early period, they were treated as bullion, with no regular monetary use, other than as a store of value, exchangeable for goods if necessary. This can be compared with the situation in Tibet, where there is no evidence that coins were used in commerce until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, whereas in Bengal, and the area to the south of Bhutan, silver coins were used from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

### **Developments in the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, mention is made in several Bhutanese chronicles (known by this time as *Ma Tam*, of coins being given as gifts from the *Desi* to monks and/or to the people in a particular ceremony called a *Mang-gyel*.<sup>3</sup> Also, gifts offered by the people to officials were sometimes valued in terms of *Ma Tam*. The

term *Ma Tam* refers to the silver coins of Cooch Behar, and derives from the letter *Ma* at top right of these coins. These coins were called Narayani rupees in the plains of northern Bengal.<sup>4</sup>

During the period between about 1640 and 1750, much of the bulk transit trade between Tibet and India passed through Nepal.<sup>5</sup> However, in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, King Prithvi Narayana Shah of Gorkha started his campaign to conquer the Kathmandu Valley. His ultimate success in 1768 was achieved by laying siege to the Valley, starting in about 1744, and cutting off all contact with the outside world. As a result, this transit trade had to seek other routes, and it is very likely that some of it passed through Paro. Assuming this trade was merely a re-routing of the trade that had previously passed through Nepal, it would have involved sending gold, musk, silks and wool from Tibet to India, in exchange for cotton, rice and other grains, with the balance made up of silver coin.<sup>6</sup>

There is evidence that during the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the *Desi* sent silver to the Cooch Behar mint to strike into coin. As there were no silver mines in Bhutan, the bullion must have been acquired as a result of trade, and it is interesting that the *Desi* did not think of striking his own coinage. Comparison can be made with Tibet in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which sent silver to Nepal to be struck into coin, rather than strike its own coinage.<sup>7</sup>

The economy of Bhutan at this time was essentially agricultural, often on a subsistence basis, with small scale trading of surpluses between neighbours. Taxes were largely payable in goods, in the form of crop sharing, and in labour. The taxes collected were stored in the *dzongs* and in times of need, surplus grain could probably be bought from the *dzongs*, using coins or in exchange for other goods. Any increase in transit trade may have benefitted the local people who would have provided transport in exchange for cash or a share of the goods being transported. It would have also presented the Bhutanese with opportunities to sell surplus local rice or other agricultural produce to Tibet, and hence retain some of the silver that was flowing northwards. When there was surplus silver in the economy, taxes could be collected in coin, but not otherwise.

Coins must have played some role as currency in Bhutan during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They certainly made trade with Cooch Behar easier, as they could pay for the use of the Terai land, and for imports of foodstuffs and other goods from Bengal. The coins that were used in Bhutan were all made of silver during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, too large a denomination for day-to-day market transactions, so they had comparatively little practical role in the internal economy of the country, where they were mainly used as gifts and as store of wealth. When trade resulted in people building up stocks of surplus silver, the Government may have permitted the taxes, normally due in the form of labour, crop sharing, or cloth, to be settled in cash.<sup>8</sup>

When the bulk transit trade between India and Tibet did not pass through Bhutan, the export to Tibet of rice and other surplus agricultural produce exceeded in value the import of wool, gold, silks and salt, resulting in a net flow of silver into Bhutan from the north. There would also have been some religious donations received from the *Drugpa* monasteries in Tibet. Some of the rice exported may have been surplus to State, or rather *Dzong*, requirements, sold to relieve storage problems; but some privately owned grain may also have been exported. Although many Bhutanese engaged in trade to a certain extent, very few were full-time traders. By contrast, those Tibetans or Bengalis who visited the country would have relied entirely on trading activities for their livelihood.

In contrast to Bhutan, Cooch Behar struck silver coins as a way of raising revenue from transit trade. Traders carrying silver, had to take it to the mint to strike into local coins, before it could be exported, and local taxes and expenses paid. When there was significant transit trade from Tibet, there was a net influx of silver coins from Cooch Behar into Bhutan. It is interesting to note that hardly any coins were struck in Cooch Behar between 1681 and 1695, a period coinciding with the rule of the 4<sup>th</sup> *Desi*, so it is likely that very little transit trade was conducted at this period. By contrast, the coins of Devendra, Dhairyendra and Rajendra are particularly common in Bhutan, all struck during the period 1763 to 1783, so this must have been a period of considerable trade. Apart from coins of Cooch Behar, some Indian

silver rupees also entered Bhutan from the south, including French Arkot rupees, struck in Pondicherry, which came from the French trading station that was located at Goalpara.<sup>9</sup>

The use of coins seems to have been restricted to the Drugpa population in the west of the country, as I have not personally found evidence of the use of coins in the east, prior to the influx of Tibetan silver coins in the 1880's and later. Interestingly, Samuel Davis, who visited Bhutan in 1783, commented on the lack of coinage in his diary, and I will quote the passage in full:-

“That the absence of money in a society excludes, in a proportionate degree, depravity of morals and vices of various kinds, is in some measure exemplified in Boutan, where there is no other coin than the Beyhar rupee, which finds its way into the country in so scanty a portion, as to leave the natives possess almost of the same advantages with those to whom money is wholly unknown. Under these circumstances, the governors of districts, and others employed under the Rajah, have not the same means of massing wealth, which in other countries excite speculation and proves the source of the most destructive crimes: for had they ever so much a natural propensity to such practices, insurmountable obstacles would arise to the gratification of their views. An exorbitant levy on the produce of the land would be a transaction impossible to conceal; or if practised with success, the different commodities must perish upon hand, as no means would occur of turning them into money but by exportation, which would require the Rajah's authority and passport. Wealth is, besides, less valuable to an individual in Boutan, than in countries where it not only procures the conveniences of life, but the distinctions due to merit. In Boutan it might create envy, but could not raise the possessor above the rank assigned to him in one of the classes before described. The pride of dress and attendants is unknown to all except a few public officers, employed immediately under the Rajah, and the mass of the inhabitants are here more nearly upon an equality than they are in most other civilized parts of the world.<sup>10</sup>

This paragraph is particularly interesting, as it shows that, at least in 1783, Samuel Davis did come across tax payments in coin, and at that time, Bhutanese officials had to obtain a passport before travelling and trading out of the country. He also points out how lack of coinage can contribute to the happiness of the general population, by making it difficult for unscrupulous local officials to exploit the people. The incentive for corruption had been effectively removed.

### **Developments in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

After 1788, the British were consolidating their control over northern Bengal, and closed the mint in Cooch Behar, as they wanted to enforce a uniform British coinage. This left Bhutan with no source of new coins to satisfy their few monetary requirements. With silver continuing to arrive in Bhutan as a result of the bilateral trade with both India and Tibet, the *Desi* and the Penlops decided to strike their own coins. This presumably involved persuading metal workers with the necessarily skills to come from Cooch Behar to work the mints in Bhutan. The coins these artisans produced were copies of the old Cooch Behar types, and Bhutan made payments to Assam and Cooch Behar with these locally made coins. Initially the Bhutanese coins were struck from silver of better quality than the old Narayani rupees, and they were readily accepted in the plains.

Until the 1830's, the Narayani rupee remained the common currency in the plains area to the south of Bhutan, even though Bhutan was the only source of new supplies after the closure of the Cooch Behar mint<sup>11</sup>. By 1835, the British realised that the Bhutanese were striking coins with a lower silver content, and they refused to accept them at more than bullion value. After 1840, the Narayani rupee gradually disappeared from use outside Bhutan, as they were withdrawn by the British authorities, and replaced by British Indian rupees. There was then no incentive for the Bhutanese to strike a coin that was acceptable for trade with India<sup>12</sup>. During the 1830's, the Bhutanese coins appear to have had about 50 per cent silver content, but the alloy rapidly deteriorated, and while some coins had a silver wash, it was not long before they became unashamedly copper.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons behind this debasement. It could be that the political instability in Bhutan would have made it difficult for Tibetan and Bengali traders to visit the country safely to conduct transit trade. The political situation may have resulted in a fall in crop production, with a reduction in the volume of rice and other crops available for export to Tibet, and may have also disrupted the collection of taxes on crops. Any fall in the trading of crop surpluses with Tibet would have reduced the supply of silver received, whether by the *Desi* and the *Penlops*, or by other Bhutanese people, so that the supply of silver available for striking into coin would have fallen. By this time, the Cooch Behari metal workers had probably located copper ore in Bhutan, and had commenced mining activities, so local copper could be struck into coins. These base metal pieces could be used in local markets, but had no value in foreign trade. The fact that the first copper coins were coated with a silver wash implies that they were intended to circulate alongside the pieces that had silver in their alloy. However, Gresham's law certainly applied, and their owners probably hoarded the silver specimens until their higher value was appreciated.

Between 1835 and the 1880's or later, no silver coins were struck in Bhutan, but an ever increasing number of base metal coins were struck in the west of the country, mainly by the *Penlops* or other local rulers. Some pieces, however, may have been privately struck by anyone with commercial acumen, and access to copper. The disturbed political situation at this period meant that control could not be effectively exercised over minting activities, and the copper coins satisfied a growing demand among the people for a convenient currency to facilitate local small scale market trading. It seems, however, that the circulation of these base metal coins was limited to the area from Tongsa westwards. In the east of the country there is no evidence that any locally produced coins circulated at all.

After 1865, the British made payments to the Bhutanese Government for the Duars that they had annexed. These payments were made in silver rupees, so that once again, the Bhutanese rulers had access to a supply of silver. The payments amounted to Rs.50,000 yearly until

1910 when they were increased to Rs.100,000, then to Rs.200,000 in 1942 and finally to Rs.500,000 annually in 1950.

During most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century trade between Bhutan and both India and Tibet remained at a relatively low level, compared to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, trade increased at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the political situation stabilised. As a result there was little need for a coinage that was acceptable outside Bhutan. Coin was rarely, if ever, used as a medium for the payment of taxes, or for other fiscal purposes, which contrasts with the way that Nepal utilised coinage in their economy. It is clear that the nature of the traditional state in Bhutan was fundamentally different from that in Nepal and India. More similarities can be drawn with Tibet, which also did not use coins for fiscal purposes, and only struck coins in significant volumes from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Political stability returned to Bhutan after the 1880's, when Ugyen Wangchuck, the Tongsa *Penlop*, emerged as the undisputed ruler of the country. This enabled trading contacts with both British India and Tibet to recommence. Until the 1950's, the volume of trade was modest, but around 20,000 tons of rice were apparently sold to Tibet each year, in exchange for salt, soda, wool and silver dollars.<sup>14</sup>

Ugyen Wangchuck struck his own silver coins, called Norbhu Phubchen, mainly for use as ceremonial gifts, and he also struck similar copper coins. As an example of the use to which these coins were put, three copper coins had to be offered to the King by a newly appointed attendant. A single silver coin could be given by a high-ranking traveller to his host, in appreciation for hospitality received.<sup>15</sup> The copper coins were widely used in the west of the country for small scale purchases.<sup>16</sup>

Fine silver half rupees and pice were struck for Bhutan in the Calcutta mint between 1928 and 1930. Only about 50,000 silver coins and 10,000 copper coins were produced in total, as there was still little use for cash money in the country. There were no permanent shops, and only a few regular markets. The reason behind the small number of



copper coins struck was presumably the cost of manufacture, which must have been prohibitive, compared with the cost of making such coins locally.

At this time government officials were still not paid regular cash salaries, and taxes were rarely payable in money.<sup>17</sup> When large sums of money were required for bulk purchases or land transactions, either Indian rupees, Tibetan base silver *tangkas*, or Chinese silver dollars, were used. Since these coins had a trading value outside the country, the Bhutanese considered them more practical than the local silver coins. There were no roads then, and little to spend money on, so the volume of coin in circulation was not great. However, some families built up a store of the foreign silver coins in case of future need, and even today, some people still keep bags of these old silver coins as a store of wealth.

### **Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who succeeded his father in 1952, instituted a very gradual modernisation of the country. The King had had more exposure to the outside world than his father, and he developed a vision of how he would like to see his country move into the modern world. Early in his reign the capital was moved permanently to Thimphu, where the old *Dzong* was substantially rebuilt as the new centre of Government. Soon after he ascended the throne, government officers received regular salaries in cash for the first time, instead of rations of grain and cloth, and other irregular royal gifts.

From about 1954, taxes in kind were gradually reduced or abolished, and replaced by taxes payable in cash. Exports of rice to Tibet continued, but in the late 1950's, the Chinese began to pay for their imports with "worthless" paper money, instead of with silver coin. Trade with Tibet ceased in 1959, and the Bhutanese trade representative in Lhasa was withdrawn in 1960. This meant that India became the sole trading partner of Bhutan. In the early 1960's, the Indian army helped build new roads from the Indian border up to Thimphu in the west, and to Tashigang in the east, which facilitated

trade with India. Wherever the roads reached, the volume of cash transactions increased, and it became worthwhile establishing shops.

In the 1950s, and particularly after 1959, Tibetan refugees began to arrive, and sought refuge in Bhutan. They were traders by nature, and they opened some of the first full time shops in the country, relying on the cash economy for their livelihood. In 1959 there were three shops in Punakha, two of them run by Tibetans. *Yab* Ugyen Dorji was only the second Bhutanese to open a shop there.<sup>18</sup> In these early days of the modernisation of Bhutan, Indian currency played a large role. Indian traders began to sell small goods to the Bhutanese public for cash, which they took back to India, causing a shortage of small change in Bhutan. In 1950 and 1954, a total of about 50,000 half-rupees had been struck in the Calcutta mint with a Bhutanese design. In an attempt to ensure a sufficient supply of small change in Bhutan, a further 1 million similar half rupee coins were struck in Calcutta in 1967. These were not popular with the Indian traders who preferred payment in Indian coins.

In 1963, a Royal Finance Secretary was appointed for the first time (*Lyonpo* Chogyal), and he became Finance Minister in 1968, when the State and Royal Household functions became separated.

When Father Mackey arrived in Tashigang in 1963, it was initially felt that the traditional approach to civil servants could apply to him. He was not paid a salary, but all his requirements were provided from the *Dzong*, such as food rations, candles, clothes, and even cash, if he needed to make purchases. However, because of the inconvenience of having to apply continually to the *Dzong* for whatever he needed, he was given a cash salary after a few months. Indian teachers at that time, who were employed on a contract basis, were already paid in cash.<sup>19</sup> Only in 1972, did the Bank of Bhutan open its first branch in the east of the country, at Samdrup Jongkhar. Before that, anyone in the east of Bhutan who wanted cash in significant quantities, had to go to the State Bank of India in Gauhati.

The practice of monasteries being granted the produce of certain designated Government lands ceased in 1968, and was replaced by an

annual cash subsidy of Rs.500,000, payable by the Government to the Central Monk Body.<sup>20</sup> Over time, the use of Indian currency increased considerably, but I have not been able to locate any statistics for this part of the money supply. Until the 1980's, most transactions, particularly in southern Bhutan, were conducted in Indian currency. This currency has always circulated freely in Bhutan, and is often preferred by traders, who can use it directly to buy imports from India. In 1968 the first permanent shops were constructed in Thimphu. Prior to that, traders, including some Bhutanese, operated from tents or temporary huts located in Changlingmethang. Bhutanese banknotes were first issued in 1974. Initially only small numbers were produced, in denominations of Nu.10, 5 and 1. One of the main reasons behind the issue was to ensure that small change remained available in the country, as Indian traders continued to remove any Indian small change. However, there were certainly political considerations also, since Bhutan had joined the United Nations in 1971, and as a sovereign independent country it was appropriate to have a separate currency.

The coronation ceremonies of the present King in 1974 provided the infrastructure to enable the country to cope with foreign visitors. Foreign aid commenced about that time and aid workers, paid high salaries, arrived in Thimphu and elsewhere, bringing more cash into the economy. This produced opportunities for some property owners in Thimphu, to let their properties to foreigners for good rents. Tourism started after 1974, and brought yet more cash into the economy.

As the effects of universal education come to fruition, many Bhutanese from outside the capital come to Thimphu to join the civil service. They are paid cash salaries, which they have to use for living expenses, and in this way, yet more cash enters the economy. Over time, more Bhutanese have opened shops and have started trading ventures. Improved communications make specialist production increasingly viable, accompanied by the need for cash transactions. Virtually everybody in Bhutan now has to have access to cash, if only to purchase the school uniforms, which are required in every school.

Many imported goods are available in Thimphu, for those who can afford to pay cash.

Bhutanese currency outside banks has risen from Nu.3.1m in 1980, to Nu.149.1m in 1988 and to Nu.720.9m in 1997. The growth rate of nearly 20 per cent p.a. over the last nine years is slightly distorted, as no account is taken of the Indian rupees that continue to circulate in an uncontrolled manner, but the growth has been dramatic. The *Ngultrum* has remained linked to the Indian rupee, and there has been tight control over the money supply. Inflation has been generated, more as a result of price increases in India, which have inevitably filtered through to Bhutan, than because of excess cash in the Bhutanese economy. Bhutan has therefore suffered from imported inflation, with corresponding hardship for those who depend on the cash economy.

Another feature of modernisation is urbanisation, and the need for money in an urban environment is very much greater than in a rural environment. The population of Thimphu is already about 50,000, and is growing at about 5,000 each year. Phuntsholing is of similar size, and although other towns are rather smaller, their population growth is also rapid.

As Aristotle, the Athenian philosopher, noted in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, democracy is only possible in a monetised society, since the elected servants of the people need to be rewarded for their work on behalf of their constituencies. This is as true today in Bhutan, as it was in ancient Athens, and it is a tribute to the way Bhutan has planned its political development that monetisation did indeed precede the introduction of democratic institutions. However, money is not an unmitigated blessing, and is one of the few commodities of which one can never have too much. There is scope for growing dissatisfaction among those who do not have enough cash to satisfy their material aspirations.

The traditional Bhutanese values are based on non-monetary principles, so if these values are to survive, then people will have to truly realise that there is more to life than money. This is what Gross National Happiness is all about, and all Bhutanese development goals

are Designed with this objective in mind. For those Bhutanese who remain, even today, outside the cash economy, traditional values remain very strong. The challenge for Bhutan is to satisfy the aspirations of the increasing number of people, especially the younger generation, who are now exposed to the cash economy, and to foreign goods, and this can most effectively be done by moulding aspirations, rather than trying to satisfy every demand.

Monetisation is a necessary corollary to “modernisation”. However, even today many Bhutanese still live a life virtually free of cash, with rice and other agricultural produce coming from family or communal lands, and weaving much of their own cloth. The people often live in joint families in family owned houses, built with communal help on family owned land. In order to attempt to ensure that this way of life is not completely eroded by the relentless advance of the cash economy, laws have been passed to ensure that landowners cannot dispose of land that leaves them with less than a minimum smallholding. In this way, most Bhutanese still live according to traditional values.

Monetisation does, however, increase opportunity. Simple macroeconomics draws the link between savings and investment, and specifies investment as the key to the stimulation of growth. The banks in Bhutan do, however, have a problem over liquidity, with not enough borrowing, public or private, to make maximum use of the cash being saved.

Some people in Bhutan, particularly those who have undertaken business or trading ventures in the urban centres of Thimphu and Phuntsholing, have benefitted more from the cash economy than others, and this trend is likely to continue. The transition from a society free of money to a monetised society is not easy, and provides an important subject for academic research by both economists and social scientists. It is inevitable that a new division of society is developing, stratified by access to different levels of monetary affluence. The traditional divisions of society could be threatened, and young people may begin to aspire more to wealth, rather than to traditional positions of respect. This presents a fascinating

juxtaposition of traditional and modern values, where materialism and compassion exist in tandem. Ruthless behaviour is forgiven, possibly encouraging further ruthlessness. New checks and balances may need to be introduced, to encourage traditional values, and impose penalties, with the force of law, on unacceptable behaviour. One of the most obvious examples of the conflict between traditional religious values and faith, and the attraction of money, is the theft of treasures from *lhakhangs* and *chortens*. Such sacrilege would have been unthinkable thirty years ago.

However Bhutan is fortunate in being perhaps the last country in the region to be monetised. The Bhutanese people can see what unrestrained materialism has done to their neighbours in Sikkim and Nepal, and much of this can be put down to the abandonment of traditional principles in favour of the attractions of money. It is doubtful whether the institutional structures in Bhutan are suitably geared up to cope with abuses of capitalism. The banks rarely foreclose on bad debts, and people who engage in unacceptable business practices are rarely penalised. Unless appropriate laws are introduced and enforced, it is likely that the old adage, “money is the root of all evil” will apply as much to Bhutan as it does in so many other countries today.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have traced the development of the monetary economy in Bhutan, explaining that monetisation of the Government sector only commenced after 1950. It is only since the 1970's that the effects of monetisation and modernisation, have started to be felt. The challenge for Bhutan in the future will be to introduce institutions that are capable of initiating and enforcing checks and balances in the financial and business sectors. It would indeed be a great achievement if traditional values can be maintained, and the economy truly built, and universally appreciated, on the concept of Gross National Happiness, rather than measured on the monetary based Gross National Product.

## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> C.f. the account of the English adventurer, Ralph Fitch in Hakluyt's Voyages

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, in Bengal, the coinage was restricted to silver, with only a very few gold coins, until the British times in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when copper was gradually introduced. For small change, cowrie shells circulated widely in both Bengal and Assam, in the absence of a formal coinage, but I have found no evidence that cowry shells were ever used in Bhutan.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to John Ardussi for this information.

<sup>4</sup> C.f. "Coinage in Bhutan", *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol.1, No.1, 1999, pp.84-113.

<sup>5</sup> In the early 1640's, Bhima Malla, a brother of Pratap Malla of Kathmandu, led a successful military expedition against Tibet, and one of the articles agreed in the peace treaty stipulated that "Tibet agreed that all trade with India, even though conducted by other than Newari merchants, would be channelled through the Kathmandu Valley in preference to the routes to the east (i.e. via Sikkim, Bhutan or Tawang)". *Strategy for Survival*, by L.E.Rose, Berkeley, 1971, pp.13-14.

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<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the volume of wool traded between western Tibet and India through Garhwal, to the west of Nepal, seems to have increased, as witnessed by an increase in the volume of silver coins struck at Srinagar.

<sup>7</sup> In Nepal, and in many mother countries, taxes on imports were collected in local coinage. Traders had to take their bullion or foreign coins to the mint. The mint then charged an explicit fee of perhaps 5% for supplying new coins, but there could also be a hidden charge of perhaps another 5%, levied through the alloy added to the metal content. In this way the mint became a very useful source of revenue for the State, and the currency an important factor in fiscal policy.

<sup>8</sup> C.f. the situation when taxes were levied in Tibetan and Chinese silver coin, from the people of Merak Sagten in the years prior to 1950.

<sup>9</sup> The ten examples of French rupees I have found in Bhutan date from the period 1748 to 1773.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Aris, (1982). *Views of Medieval Bhutan: The Diary and Drawings of Samuel Davis*, 1783, New Delhi: Roli Books Int./Serindia.

<sup>11</sup> The Cooch Behar mint only opened sporadically after 1788. The records are not complete, but it was certainly closed between 1789 and 1795. In 1799 it was working, but it was again closed in 1800, apparently as a temporary measure. There is no evidence that it was ever opened to strike currency coins after that, and requests from the Raja to the British authorities were turned down in 1805, 1821 and in 1828. C.f. "Excerpts from a Report on Kooch Behar", by Major Francis Jenkins, Apr. 1849, in *Selections from the Records of the Bengal Government*, Calcutta 1851.

<sup>12</sup> 'Demonetisation of Narayani Coins in Assam and N.E.Rangpur', c.f. S.K.Bose in *The Coinage of Cooch Behar* by Nicholas Rhodes and Shankar K.Bose, Dhubri, 1999, pp.30-48.

<sup>13</sup> The change in alloy seems to have occurred rather quickly, with the same pair of dies sometimes being used initially to strike coins with quite a high silver content, some with a silver wash, and finally coins with no pretence of being silver.



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<sup>14</sup> Pradyumna P. Karan (1967). *Bhutan: A Physical and Cultural Geography*, Univ. of Kentucky, Lexington, p.79, quoting *The New York Times*, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1960.

<sup>15</sup> Karma Ura (1995). *The Hero With a Thousand Eyes*, Thimphu, p.34.

<sup>16</sup> According to *Dasho* Karma Gayleg, 1 *Ma-tam*, a copper coin, would buy two apples, one cup of milk, or a pile of pan leaves.

<sup>17</sup> Adam Pain drew my attention to one early example of taxes levied in coin. Before 1950, taxes in Merak Sagten taxes were levied in silver *Be-tam*, or Tibetan coins. Presumably the people of Merak Sagten had accumulated significant surplus of such coins, as a result of trading activities with Tawang area, so it made sense for the taxes to be collected in such coins.

<sup>18</sup> Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck (1998). *Of Rainbows and Clouds*, London: Serindia Publications, p.89.

<sup>19</sup> Howard Solverson (1995). *The Jesuit and the Dragon*, Quebec: Robert Davies Publishing, p.103.

<sup>20</sup> Leo E. Rose (1977). *The Politics of Bhutan*, Cornell Univ. Press, p.177.

## On the Two Ways of Learning in Bhutan\*

Karma Phuntsho\*\*

Bhutanese folklore has it that the bat would show its teeth to the birds to evade the bird tax, and show its wings to the beasts to evade the beast tax. But come winter, when the food supplies are distributed, the bat would show its wings to the birds and teeth to the beasts to claim its share from both, although often it is rejected and ostracized by both parties. This paper is an outcome of my role as a bat-like scholar involved in both traditional and modern systems of learning and scholarship, with some of the academic teeth of the modernist beasts as well as the spiritual wings of the traditionist birds, and at times, like the bat, being disowned and despised by both, by the traditionists as an unfaithful, agnostic cynic, and by the moderns as a narrow-minded, *sutra*-thumping fanatic. This double role, however, to my advantage, has given me the opportunity to study my own religion and culture from the various perspectives using different tools, and revealed to me the privileged position in which one can blend the varying approaches and methods of the modernists and traditionists. It is from the vantage point of such position that I shall present a case study of the encounter of the two systems of education – traditional and modern – in the Kingdom of Bhutan.

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\* This paper is a written version of my presentation during the conference of South Asian Studies, Edinburgh, 2000, entitled, *Traditional Scholarship in Modern Bhutan, Current Educational Trends and their Impact on Traditional Learning*. My primary thanks go to John Guth and the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard, for the fellowship during which I worked on this. Many other persons are also to be thanked for their contributions. For easy reading, names of people and places are only transcribed but other *Chökey* (*chos skad*) and *Dzongkha* (*rdzong kha*) words are separately transliterated according to the Wylie system. However, I have transliterated even names in the endnotes and diacritics are used for Sanskrit spelling. The dates are mostly based on the database of Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center set up by E. Gene Smith.

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It may not be an exaggeration to claim that of all the changes and developments that the Kingdom of Bhutan saw in the last half of the twentieth century the ones in education are the most evident, momentous and far-reaching. The introduction of modern education toward the end of the 1950s opened a new chapter in the history of learning and scholarship in Bhutan. Although there is no denying that improvements were also made in other facets of living such as health, agriculture, communication, trade, transport, governance, etc., progressive changes in education were far more dramatic and far-reaching. Educational means, including the number of academic institutions, teachers, students and the rate of literacy have increased since 1959 by leaps and bounds, affecting all sections of society. This rapid development in modern education has brought about unprecedented changes in the social, cultural, political and economic structures, and has in particular revolutionized the education system.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to study the socio-cultural, political and economic dimensions of the impact the growth of modern education has had on Bhutanese society. My primary aim here is to discuss the encounter of the two systems of education, and to appraise the various ramifications their conflicts with and contributions to each other have engendered. Owing to various constraints, this paper is far from being a piece of thorough research. It is mainly a reflective account of my own experiences, gained, as mentioned earlier, from formal participation in the two systems.

Before delving further into the issues of traditional and modern education in Bhutan, a brief analysis of what we mean by “traditional” and “modern” may not be amiss here. “Tradition” comes from the Latin verb *tradere*, to deliver, hand over and pass down, and “modern” derives from *modo*, just now. In general, the two are understood as contrasting sets of human behavioural styles and methods of living, learning, thinking, speaking, writing, etc. While tradition is frequently seen as an indigenous culture of a particular society inherited from its past, modernism is viewed as a more recent development strongly influenced by innovative and scientific methodologies. Temporally, the former is considered old and the latter new and current, and spatially speaking, the former is local and the latter global, although it is often associated with the Occident. But this

is a rather simplistic understanding of the two systems and to bifurcate our styles of living and learning into traditional and modern on the basis of such difference would be an oversimplification. Hence, one must not overlook the complexities that underlie both systems and the nuances involved in the usage of the terms.

In this paper, I shall not try to define tradition and modernity, but by “traditional education and learning” shall arbitrarily mean the learning and pedagogical practice passed down to the present day Bhutanese by the indigenous scholars and adepts either in written or in oral form in the medium of classical or vernacular languages of Bhutan.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, “modern” shall denote the recently established system of learning, which consists of various strands of western methods of education and pedagogy received either directly from the West or through India and transacted mainly in the medium of English. Hence, it mainly constitutes a western import introduced during the commencement of modernization in the last half of the twentieth century. The former mainly thrives in the religious centres such as *shedras* (*bshad grwa*), *dratshangs* (*grwa tshang*) and *drubdras* (*sgrub grwa*) and the latter flourishes in schools and colleges.

Because of the fairly recent introduction of modernization and the historic isolation and conservatism that Bhutan maintained, the concepts of modernity, and of tradition as opposed to modernity, are relatively new to the Bhutanese. Nonetheless, the dichotomy of tradition and modernity, their conflicts and convergence, has manifested in various fields of music, art, health, etc. and the encounter of the two can nowhere be more vivid than in the sector of education and learning. The advent of modern education brought heterogeneity to the otherwise largely homogenous Bhutanese educational system. It made available to people not only the opportunity of having education, which to a degree was a privilege of elites and clerics, but of having several options to choose from. It is this encounter and the Bhutanese reception and acceptance of heterogeneity in education that will form the theme of this paper. The encounter of the two systems and their impact on each other and on the society in general has to be understood in the light of their general features and characteristics. Understanding rudimentary principles and perspectives enshrined in the two systems is pivotal to a proper

evaluation of their conflicts and contributions inter se. However, the two systems merits more elaborate study than this paper can contain. Suffice it here to outline the major difference between the systems.

The following table studies the two systems by contrast, juxtaposing the main purposes, perspectives, approaches, contents, media and methodologies used. The differences illustrated here however are mainly in emphasis and priority and the similarities between the two systems, which I am not enumerating here, should not be overlooked.

The primary factor that determines the difference in outlooks and approaches between the two systems is the ultimate goal they aim to achieve. Learning is not an end in itself in either system.

	Traditional Training	Modern Education
Purpose:	Mainly Introvert Spiritual Training culminating in Omniscience	Mainly Extrovert Skills for Human Development
Content:	Religion or Religion Oriented, Liberal	Secular and Scientific, Technical
Approach:	Mostly Passive Reception, Static, Conservative	Mostly Active Innovation, Creative, Progressive
Perspective:	Faith, Reverence, Sanctity, For Religious Edification	Interest, Curiosity, Rationality, For Acquiring Knowledge and Skills
Medium:	<i>Chökey / Dzongkha</i>	English
Methodology:	Buddhist monastic methods of memorization, debates, contemplation, exposition, etc.	Systematic Western educational techniques of critical scrutiny, statistics, experiments, etc.

In the case of traditional learning, which is laden with religious content, even lessons on linguistics and dialectics are viewed as indirect means of achieving the omniscience of the Buddha.<sup>2</sup> Each session of dharmic lessons begins with the imperative to generate the noble intention (*kun slong*) of Bodhicitta (*byang chub sems*), the benevolent thought of seeking enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Education is to be viewed as a process of edification and knowledge as a tool for benefiting the world. Although human development and worldly happiness are sought to an extent, they can only be temporary goals and are secondary to the soteriological goal of inner enlightenment.

In contrast, modern education is generally aimed at human development and improving living conditions in this world. Very often, it is for the purpose of obtaining happiness and material comfort for oneself. Unlike the traditionists, who view learning as spiritual training which can culminate in the omniscient wisdom of the

Buddha, modernists consider education as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills which in turn can contribute towards the development of individual or communal standards of life. Hence, it is strongly influenced by materialism, and spiritual endeavours, if any, are marginal. A student is encouraged even at an early stage of learning to opt for subjects through which he or she can develop skills to earn a better living or choose professions that are financially lucrative and socially beneficial.

In brief, the ideal purpose of most traditional training is introverted spirituality whereas the extroverted pursuit of worldly happiness remains at the heart of the modern system. Although one certainly cannot attribute the materialistic attitude to all modernists and the spiritual inclination to all members of the traditional institutions, the ideological difference in the objectives, as enshrined in the two systems and promulgated by their institutions, is quite clear. In Bhutan, this difference in objectives is particularly evident in the reasons students and their parents give for their choice of monastic or modern education. It is the goal of education which determines the candidates', or often their parents', choice of traditional or modern training.

The disparity in objectives is directly connected to the discrepancies in the content of teachings given in the two systems. Formal education in the tradition is largely training in religious philosophy and religious arts such as liturgy, monastic music, dances, sculpture, painting, etc. Thus, the content of teaching is mainly Buddhist philosophy, soteriology, metaphysics, monastic discipline and other subjects related to Buddhism. Due to the dominant role of religion, other subjects such as ethnography and political history are neglected and often despised as subjects without any soteriological value. When common sciences (*thun mong gi rig pa*)<sup>3</sup> such as epistemology, logic, language, poetry, prosody, astrology and history are taught, it is with a strong religious orientation. However, it may be noted here in passing that the tradition of thirteen crafts (*bzo rig bcu gsum*), the concept of which is unique to Bhutan, is less associated with religious education and is often practised outside religious institutions.

The content of modern education varies from the traditional in that it encompasses many disciplines which were not covered by the traditional curricula. The domain of learning, classified into humanities and sciences, with sub-categories and further sub-categories, encompasses a wide range of subjects. In comparison, traditional scholars, following the Indo-Tibetan typology, classify fields of learning (*rig pa'i gnas*) into five or ten kinds of sciences.<sup>4</sup> However, not all five or ten sciences are formally taught in traditional institutions and the emphasis is laid on religious subjects, and also on language and astrology in some cases.<sup>5</sup> Thus, traditional training is almost exclusively a liberal education, strongly embedded in Buddhist moral values and generally aimed at making the student wiser and more enlightened, while modern education comprises both liberal and technical training, and is less value-oriented and aimed at making the student more skilful and productive.

This disparity in defining the goal and the content of education subsequently led to differences in perspectives, outlooks and approaches. Traditional education, as dictated by religion, is conducted in an atmosphere of awe and reverence. A solemn and rigorous classroom code of conduct is observed with each session, beginning with prayers to Manjushri and concluding with a dedication of merits for the sake of sentient beings. Before the lesson, the teacher, in a preliminary sermon on religious etiquette, reminds the students to cultivate benevolent intention, adopt the proper behaviour, and eschew unbecoming and mundane attitudes and acts.<sup>6</sup> Students are asked to view themselves as patients, the teacher as a physician, the teachings as medicine, and cure as resulting from the careful adoption of teachings.<sup>7</sup> Faith and devotion to the teacher and the teachings are important and the subject and the texts that contain it are to be treated with respect. Education, viewed as religious training in itself, is taken as a virtuous activity leading to a higher spiritual plane of enlightenment, and knowledge acquired through it is seen as a tool for benefiting the world.

On the contrary, such faith and devotion to the teacher and teachings are not required in the modern system. Instead, it invites rational enquiry and critical scrutiny. Besides, learning a particular discipline in modern institutions is mostly instigated by personal interest and



curiosity or driven by a Desire to acquire knowledge and skill in the field, which in turn would fulfil some other goals. Hence, a devotional treatment of the teacher and his discourses is not required or even recommended. Although rationality is not unknown in traditional education as reasoning and logic form a major component of Buddhist philosophy, the student is generally obliged to accept the authority of the teachers and texts, at least of those that are regarded as authoritative in that particular tradition, because they serve as standard guides and guidelines in the quest for freedom from samsaric existence. Thus, the authority of the tradition is seldom questioned and no attempt is made to surpass the existent theories and practices through new discoveries. At best, one can reformulate the existent doctrines with some novel interpretations to explicate the otherwise abstruse, or to elaborate condensed teachings.

In this way, the traditional approach is characterized by passive reception and repetitive exposition, an enterprise to receive and uphold, to preserve and prolong rather than innovate and invent. Modern education however is marked by innovation and development and is by nature progressive learning aimed at discovering more and inventing something better. The fast changes in electronics and information technology today are an excellent example of this modern pursuit of novelty and improvement. Corresponding to this kind of outlook and approach, modern education uses scientific and creative methods of learning. Courses and syllabuses are carefully Designed, instructors are trained professionals, and instruction is imparted proficiently using skilful pedagogical techniques. All kinds of educational equipment and methods are used for making learning faster, easier and enjoyable.

The traditional system of education lacks such stimulating and exciting methods and techniques. Learning in the tradition is a solemn and onerous undertaking demanding a lot of intellectual concentration. Of the methods used, memorization, exposition, contemplation and debate are the most common, although the last one is used less in Bhutan than in Tibetan monastic colleges. Lectures called dharma sessions (*chos thun*) form the main component of traditional training but they are often cumbersome and too long to retain uninterrupted attention. Debates and discussions are more

stimulating. Generally speaking, religious training consists of the triadic activities of learning (*thos pa*, literally hearing), reflection (*bsam pa*, literally thinking) and meditation (*sgom pa*, literally practising), of which the first two constitute scholarly activities. These three are also sometimes presented in the binary sets of reading (*klog pa*), which includes the first two, and renunciation (*spong ba*), which corresponds to the third activity of practice or meditation.

Scholarly activities in tradition are classified into exposition (*'chad pa*), debate (*rtsod pa*) and composition (*rtsom pa*), but the last is used more as a means of scholarly output than as a method of learning. Exposition and debates are common methods of learning, the first being prevalent in the *shedras* of *Nyingma* (*rnying ma*), *Kagyü* (*bka' brgyud*) and *Sakya* (*sa skya*) schools and the latter in the *seats* (*gdan sa*) of the *Gelug* (*dge lugs*) school. It is typical in the *shedras* of *Kagyü* and *Nyingma* schools for a teacher to give a lesson in the form of exegetic monologues, which at times can last hours, and assign the student to repeat it the next day. In certain cases, meditation is also used as a method of scholarly learning. In the tradition of *Dzogchen* *\_r\_siha Shedra* (*rdzogs chen srisimha bshad grwa*), a text such as *Bodhicaryavatara* is read verse by verse, and students are encouraged not only to learn by listening to the explanations and to memorize the text but also to meditate on the content of the verse in order to gain steadfast certainty in the subject.

Unlike the modern system, traditional training involves mostly verbal expositions and debates, and education in writing, for instance by assigning homework, is limited to learning grammar and poetry. This lack of learning through writing can be explained by the paucity of stationery resources, although there were also other reasons. For instance, the study of writing, that is grammar and poetry, was officially restricted in the major *dGe lugs pa* monasteries in the old days, in order to curb secular interests in students. Besides, traditional syllabi are not well structured to be comprehensive and lack a systematic and graduated approach. Although a gradual process of learning, especially in the case of meditation, is incorporated, modern curricular structures and methods by far excel the traditional styles.

Similarly, limit on the size of classes are not defined and lectures can be public sermons with thousands of people in the audience or one to one instruction between the master and disciple. Feedback from the teacher is not regulated or formal, but because of the master-disciple *Bond* (*bla slob kyi 'brel ba*) in the traditional set-up, the teacher pays ample attention to the student's welfare, both academic and otherwise. Likewise, there are many other subtle differences between the two which cannot be dealt with here. It is also these differences in perspective, approach and methodology between the two that distinguishes the modern academic study of Buddhism from the study of the same discipline by traditionists.<sup>8</sup>

Having sketched in the major discrepancies between the two systems, I shall now turn to briefly survey the history of their development in Bhutan. It hardly requires mentioning that until the end of the 1950s Bhutan remained an isolated country enclosed within its towering mountains and rustic valleys, and had very little interaction with the outside world. Although it was a self-sufficient society, most of the people being subsistence farmers, basic social services including educational facilities were scarce. Formal training in institutions such as *shedras* and *lobdras* (*slob grwa*) was rare and access to it was the prerogative of the monks and the upper strata of the society. The *dratshangs* mainly served as centres for training in monastic liturgies and rituals and rarely provided training in philosophical or linguistic subjects. However, a lot of people sought their learning by studying under a private master, who would impart informal discourses on religion, language, poetry, etc. to his group of disciples. Aristocratic families often had their children educated in basic literacy and numeracy by such masters. Most of these masters were themselves trained in Tibet, which to the Bhutanese then represented the hub of Buddhist learning and scholarship.

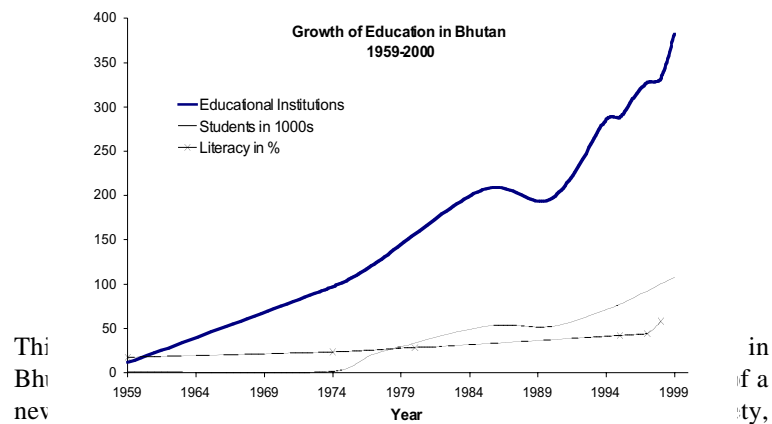
The introduction of formal school education in 1959 marks a watershed in the modern history of education in Bhutan. Eleven schools were established and a total of four hundred and forty students are recorded to have been enrolled in them.<sup>9</sup> Prior to this, only a few Bhutanese received formal schooling in the British public schools in India established by the Raj. Although during its inception most people viewed modern education as an alien system intruding into a

traditional Buddhist system and approached it with cynicism and reluctance, in the following decades Bhutan saw unabated proliferation of modern education. The rapid propagation of modern education brought about unprecedented changes to the learning patterns and the social structures across the country.

Initially, most Bhutanese misunderstood the scientific and secular aspect of modern education for non-Buddhist heretical doctrines, and labelled it *phyi pa'i chos*, a term that Buddhists used to refer to the non-Buddhist religions in ancient India.<sup>10</sup> Unlike texts written in *Chökey* (*chos skad*), those in English were looked down on as profane, and parents preferred to send their children to monasteries rather than to schools, or even chose to keep them on the farm rather than be 'converted to an alien system'. In some cases, parents even went to extent of bribing school heads and officials to take their child, who has been conscripted by the government officials for school, out of school. Opposition came mainly from the conservative traditionists in the monasteries. Against all odds, the government, under the farsighted and dynamic leadership of the Third King, continued with the campaign of propagating free school education for all youths in the country.

Such opposition from traditional conservative group was not unique to Bhutan. In Tibet, the thirteenth *Dalai Lama* introduced modern secular education in the beginning of twentieth century and even sent four Tibetan boys to Rugby School in England in 1912. Few years later, Frank Ladlow, a British educationist, was invited to start a school in Gyantse, and later a certain Mr. Parker started a school in Lhasa in 1944. All attempts however were thwarted by opposition from the conservative groups in the clergy and aristocracy.<sup>11</sup> By comparison, Bhutan's story is one of success and jubilation, as the number of schools increased to ninety-seven and students to ten thousand three hundred by 1974, when the present king ascended throne.<sup>12</sup> The opposition to and scepticism about school education began to diminish as the first school graduates entered the public arena as prominent people. Although the misunderstanding of school education as pursuing *phyi pa'i chos* continued, the worldly value of school education became self-evident.

According to the Human Development Report in South Asia, there were 122 educational institutions and 20,435 students enrolled in 1977, 206 and 51,835 respectively in 1985, and 288 and 77000 in 1995.<sup>13</sup> By the beginning of the new millennium, there were 26 high schools, 55 junior high schools, 148 primary schools, 133 community schools, 8 private schools and 10 other institutions. The rate of adult literacy increased from the estimate of 17% in 1959 to 23% in 1984, 35.2% in 1991, 47.5% in 1995, 54% in 1998, and to over 58% by 2000.<sup>14</sup> Enrolment of the children in a given age range has also made a drastic climb from an estimate of 5% in 1959 to around 74% in 2000. Bhutan has also made steady progress on the general Human Development Index ranking, standing 155<sup>th</sup> in 1995 and 142<sup>nd</sup> in 1998. The following chart illustrates the development of modern education in Bhutan from 1959 to 2000.



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albeit in the medium of English, and an atmosphere conducive to modern learning and intellectual interaction. It is in such a favourable climate that modern learning found another dimension during the last decade, with the publication of several works in English by Bhutanese authors such as Karma Ura, Kunzang Choden and Sonam Kinga. The establishment of the Centre for Bhutan Studies in 1998 is yet another milestone in the development of modern learning in Bhutan. Despite a fairly late start, modern education has made great progress in Bhutan, often leaving one to wonder the direction and the degree to which it will shape and reshape the Bhutanese nation in the years to come. Let

us now turn to look briefly at the developments of traditional education.

While the sporadic data from diverse sources provide a clear picture of the growth of modern system, there is hardly any statistical information available to study the trends of traditional learning. Given the scarcity of statistical information, much of what is said below will be personal accounts and private opinions. Some form of traditional education in religion could be assumed to have started with the introduction of Buddhism to Bhutan by the master Padmasambhava. During Padmasambhava's second visit, the great scholar Denma Tsemang (c. 750 AD), who was a translator (*lo tsaba*) and one of the twenty-five accomplished disciples of Padmasambhava, is said to have accompanied him to Bhutan, and Bhutanese students such as Monmo Tashi Kheudron (c. 750) and Mongom Haminatha (c. 750) are said to have followed Padmasambhava to Tibet and learnt dharma.<sup>16</sup> There is no available record of whether or not Denma Tsemang taught in Bhutan but Bhutanese have often claimed that the *gyo yig* (*mgyogs yig*) script, which is now considered the national script and thus known as *druk yig* (*'brug yig*), was designed by Denma Tsemang.

In the centuries after Padmasambhava's visit, Bhutan witnessed the arrival of many Tibetan missionaries such as Nyos Demchog (1179-1265), Longchen Rabjam (1308-63), Barawa Gyaltshen Palzang (1310-91), some of who carried out scholarly activities in different parts of the country, leaving some impact on religious learning in Bhutan. However, the earliest Bhutanese author, whose *oeuvre* we have with us today is *Terton* Padma Lingpa (1450-1521), a treasure discoverer and a saint of great eminence in the *Nyingma* school. The institutions he founded later became some of the liveliest centres of Buddhist education in Bhutan.

A new phase of traditional learning and scholarship began, especially in western Bhutan, with the unification of Bhutanese regions into the *Drukpa* (*'brug pa*) state by *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651?) in the seventeenth century. The Central Monk Body (*gzhung grwa tshang*) was founded with the plan to provide formal training in Buddhist philosophy, liturgical chanting, dialectics and linguistics

under the four masters (*slob dpon bzhi*). That was followed by establishing several branches of monastic bodies of *rabdeys* (*rab sde*) and *drubdeys* (*sgrub sde*) in different districts. However, most of these *dratshangs*, including the Central Monk Body, did not provide much training in philosophy, language or dialectics, but came to emphasize monastic arts and rituals. As they were involved in performing countless ceremonies for the state and public, active scholarship remained outside the focus of their routines. Most monks became only literate enough to read monastic liturgies and perform rituals.

Nonetheless, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Central Monk Body and its branches saw quite a few of its monks emerge as outstanding scholars and authors. Among them were Shakya Rinchen (1710-59), the ninth *Je Khenpo* (*rje mkhan po*), Tenzin Chögyal (1701-66), the tenth, Yonten Thaye (1724-84), the thirteenth to name a few. In the east, there were a few scholars such as the genealogist Ngawang of Tashigang Dzong (c. 1700), but nothing definite can be said about scholarly activities there before the twentieth century. In general, learning and scholarship from the formation of the *Drukpa* state until the middle of nineteenth century seems to have thrived uniformly with no significant changes. But literary activity seems to have declined between the middle of the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, probably due to the political anarchy and transitions going on in the country. It is plausible that the rate of literacy from *Zhabdrung's* time through the *Desi* (*sde srid*) period until the second king's reign was somewhere around 15%, excluding people with semi-literacy who could read texts but not write. *Chökey* was undoubtedly the main medium of written communication.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Bhutan had a renaissance of traditional scholarship. It saw the development of an active literary scene to which an unprecedented number of Bhutanese virtuosi contributed simultaneously and of their own accord. The development of this literary activity was a direct outcome of several intellectual, social and political trends. Michael Aris argued the underlying cause of this literary revival to be the opening of Bhutan's border to the outside world, which 'encouraged the intelligentsia to turn back to the country's traditional heritage on a quest of rediscovery'. He also

credited the state for creating a climate conducive to the growth of such literary activity. However, it may be noted that the state, under the visionary leadership of the third and fourth kings, not only created a good atmosphere but actively promoted the development of this literary scene. The proliferation of modern education also stimulated this development in traditional learning as a movement vis-à-vis modern education. The movement in no small measure was also due to the unfortunate exodus of the Tibetans into Bhutan and neighbouring regions. Exiled Tibetan masters such as Dilgo Khyentse and Gyalwang Nyima played active roles in this literary renaissance.

Bhutanese scholars in this renaissance included the late *Je Khenpo* Gedun Rinchen, *Lopen* Norbu Wangchuk, *Lopen* Nado, *Lopen* Pema Tsewang, *Dasho* Lam Sangak, *Lopen* Gombo Tenzin, *Dasho* Tenzin Dorjee, et al. They and others contributed mainly in the fields of history, language, and religion.<sup>17</sup> At about the same time and under the supervision of some of the religious virtuosi, intellectual monastic centres of *shedras* multiplied throughout the country. The establishment of Semtokha Lopdra (*sems rtogs kha slob grwa*) under the supervision of Dilgo Khyentse in 1961 was a milestone in the development of traditional education. The school produced a large number of graduates, and was, until recently, a renowned alma mater of traditionally trained scholars, teachers and bureaucrats. Another event that is connected to traditional learning but which had the most far-reaching impact on the Bhutanese population was the propagation of *Dzongkha* as the national language and efforts to put it into a formal written form. The inclusion of *Dzongkha* text books, first in *Chökey* and later in *Dzongkha*, in the school curriculum as a major subject brought a drastic rise in the number of people who can read and write the Bhutanese script, although only very few became proficient. Many traditional virtuosi such as *Lopen* Pemala, *Lopen* Nado and *Lopen* Gombo Tenzin pioneered the project of promoting *Dzongkha*. However, most traditionists saw the efforts to promote *Dzongkha* as a modern endeavour to assert political and cultural uniqueness and even questioned the feasibility and need to develop *Dzongkha* in place of *Chökey*, the then medium of scholarship.



The last quarter of the twentieth century saw yet another chapter in the history of traditional scholarship, when hundreds of Bhutanese monks travelled to India and Nepal in pursuit of training in Buddhism in the newly established Tibetan academic centres and monasteries. Just as the Bhutanese scholars in old days ventured to Tibet, young Bhutanese scholars travelled to Tibetan monasteries, many of them as peripatetic students learning different aspects of Tibetan Buddhism from different masters and monasteries. This perforce was made easier than in former times by the easy access to and free training in the monasteries granted by the exiled *Lamas*, and by the availability of modern conveyances. This outflow of students from both monasteries and schools to Tibetan centres has continued for the last two decades and has borne remarkable fruit. By the end of the last millennium, this movement had produced an unprecedented number of Bhutanese religious virtuosi, many of whom have also become respected abbots and well known authors in Tibetan scholarly circles. As the adepts of the last century are dying out, Bhutan is beginning to see another wave of scholarship in the field of Buddhology and related fields through a large number of *khenpos* (*mkhan po*) and *lopens* (*slob dpon*) of outstanding calibre and experience.

Having briefly looked at the historical development of the two systems, let us now turn to study the interaction between the two systems, their initial encounters and the changing phases of their relationship during the past four decades. As mentioned earlier, modern education during its inception was viewed as an alien system embodying heretical doctrines, *phyi pa'i chos*, impinging on the established system of sacred Buddhist tradition. While some, especially among the clergy, shunned school education, viewing it as opposed to monastic hegemony, others were simply indifferent because they were reluctant to change and preferred the status quo. A few may have seen modern education as a threat to their social position and privileges, having predicted the changes modern education would bring to the social structure and stratification. As modern education spread steadily in the next two decades, many parents were bewildered by the dilemma of whether they should, on the one hand, send their children to schools or, on the other, send them to monasteries or keep them at home on the farms. Thus, the tension

between the two systems as felt by many people then was very much an internal conflict of the choice of education.

However, neither the indifferent attitude nor the dilemma outlasted the swift proliferation of school education. By the beginning of the 1980s, the sceptical reception of the 1960s was long gone and modern education had started to gain the upper hand over monastic training in the choice of education.<sup>18</sup> Although both modern and traditional learning were progressing as distinct systems in their own domains, on the national level, modern education gained predominance both in the number of institutions and adherents and in the priority placed by the government. The dominance of modern education transformed the general patterns of education in the country. The change, as discussed earlier, was not merely that of pedagogical technique but also of purpose, content, perspective, and approaches. It was a shift of focus from the endogenous, sacred religious training, which emphasized spiritual development, to the exogenous, secular and technical education, which aimed at enhancing material and economic development.

With this change, people's concept of education and literacy also began to change. Linguistically, English supplanted *Chökey*, inasmuch as most educated Bhutanese could read and write fluently in English but not in *Chökey* or *Dzongkha*. To a large number of the modern educated Bhutanese, literacy came to be equated with knowing English, and education and scholarship came to be judged by western standards. By the 1980s, conflicts between the two institutions became more apparent and vehement. While the traditionists continued to see modern education as a profane non-Buddhist pursuit, the new class of modern educated youth looked down on the traditional system as a resilient leftover from the past, rendered inefficacious by time. Monastic communities were viewed in economic terms as non-productive consumers and as social parasites hindering the material progress of the nation. Traditional education as represented by monastic learning, from their viewpoint, was a repetition of rituals and non-reflective chanting. This perhaps was influenced by the then typical view espoused by western modernists, the view that traditions, especially non-western ones, are static and repetitive sets of unthinking habits.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, many of the educated youth developed little or no faith in Bhutanese Buddhism, which in their eyes was at best very deteriorated form of Buddhism and at worst a superstitious and ritualistic dogma based on blind faith, an empty house whose existence previous generations did not question, as Prakke puts it.<sup>20</sup> Beguiled by their adoration of modernity and by a *prima facie* impression of some of the wayward monks in the *dratshangs*, they overlooked the profound philosophy and principles enshrined in the Bhutanese religion. This misunderstanding is very similar to the misconception the early travellers and western scholars at the turn of the twentieth century, who lacked the linguistic skill to acquire a proper understanding of Tibetan Buddhism, had of Tibetan Buddhism, which led them to give it the rather derogatory name of Lamaism.<sup>21</sup> But it is matter of deep regret that many educated Bhutanese, even at the end of the century, had similar misconceptions regarding their own heritage, and ironic that this occurred when the western world was coming to appreciate Tibetan Buddhism both for its exotic nature and for the role it performed as a repository of original Indian Buddhism, preserved in precision and detail in the translated corpora of *Kangyur* (*bka' 'gyur*) and *Tangyur* (*bstan 'gyur*).

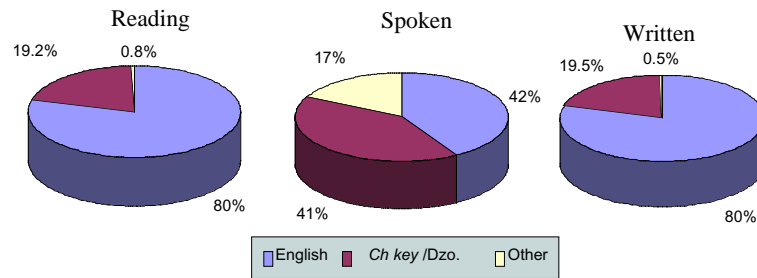
In spite of good progress on both sides, and the nationwide reinforcement of tradition in the middle of 1980s to accentuate the cultural and religious identity of the country, the rift between the two systems in Bhutan remained as wide as ever. The endeavours of the King to blend the two by recruiting monks from schools in 1986 failed to yield the expected results, and the proposed university of traditional studies did not see the light of the day.<sup>22</sup> This lingering rift and failures to bridge the two systems despite earnest wishes and frequent attempts could be ascribed to two major educational factors, which I shall call here (1) the linguistic gap and (2) the cultural gap. It was mainly the disparity in the medium and mode of communication and the lack of common ground and mutual respect that polarized the two worlds of the traditional and modern and made the type of sparking dialogue, which Prakke suggests,<sup>23</sup> difficult if not impossible to bring about.

Since the beginning of modernization, English has surpassed *Chökey* as the medium of written transaction in both government administration and private communication.<sup>24</sup> In schools, learning in *Chökey/Dzongkha* formed only one eighth of the entire education. This can be largely attributed to the unavailability of *Chökey/Dzongkha* textbooks and terminology for scientific and technical subjects, which were new to the Himalayan world. Besides, Bhutan, unlike some of its neighbours, had no residues of colonial resentment and hatred, and thus embraced English with no reluctance or misgivings. Moreover, a lot of Bhutanese youth received their education outside Bhutan and returned home only able to communicate fully in English. Thus, several causes contributed to the emergence of English as the dominant language in both education and administration.

While English was gaining prominence, the government took the initiative in promoting *Dzongkha* as the official language and make it the lingua franca of Bhutan, although in reality English was beginning to play that role. By supplanting *Chökey*, which was already suffering due to the proliferation of English, with *Dzongkha* in schools, the last link between the traditional and modern came to an end. With no English in the traditional centres and no *Chökey* in the schools, the thin linguistic connection they had in the written language was severed. The reconciliation of the two expected in the development of *Dzongkha* and the implementation of *Dzongkha* itself became difficult. Although the introduction of *Dzongkha* in written form and its promotion as the national language embodies a nationalistic imperative to accentuate linguistic independence and national uniqueness, it still remains an uphill task. Beside the daunting problems faced in inventing a standard set of grammatical rules for a language diversified by numerous dialects, people could not be inspired to use it. Instead, many traditionists viewed it as a superfluous effort and criticized the initiative, while modern scholars had no intellectual spur to learn it because of the hegemonic presence of English. Some western scholars began to worry that if *Dzongkha* fully superseded *Chökey*, the literary charm of the Bhutanese tradition might be lost.<sup>25</sup>

Against all these odds, the development of *Dzongkha* has endured under the directorate of the *Dzongkha* Development Commission, which continues the promotion of *Dzongkha* to this day. However, the preponderance of English among the modern educated elite is yet unchallenged, while the use of *Chökey* remains limited to the monastic compounds. A recent survey shows that around 80% of the educated Bhutanese can read, write and speak good English but, in the case of most of them, their knowledge of *Chökey* or *Dzongkha* can only be ranked as semi-literacy.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, in traditional *shedras* and *lopdras*, almost all written communication is in *Chökey*, and *Dzongkha* and other vernaculars are often used as spoken media of instruction but English is only beginning to be studied. The following pie charts show the average usage of languages by literate people from diverse background.

Language Usage in Bhutan-2000



The second gap I wish to discuss is a cultural one, particularly in the field of educational and pedagogical practice. The linguistic gap, one can argue, is to a large extent of Bhutan's own making. Modernization and development, even in the sector of education, could have happened, perhaps at a slower pace, without the introduction of English as a major language, as it did in Japan and parts of Europe.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, the differences constituting the second gap, which I call "the cultural gap", are ingrained in the two systems due to their disparate cultural backgrounds. It is a conflict of ideological and methodological differences, as shown earlier, between the modern and the traditional, and between what is global and local or between what is Eastern and Western. Hence, in a society where the two systems are vying with each other, this gap is inevitable unless the two are bridged through a meaningful dialogue.

Unfortunately, neither traditionists nor modernists have made any significant effort to engender some substantial initiative to promote such a dialogue. Maintaining their status quo with rigidity and stubbornness, most traditionists, especially among the ecclesiastical institutions, have made no effort to modernise in tune with the currents of changing times. Among them, *dratshangs* such as the Central Monk Body remain bastions of religious ritual and art, but offer merely basic, if any, training in Buddhism. Most of the monks are doubtlessly good artists, forming what could be considered a grand state choir, but, engaged in constant performance of ceremonies which the state and public sometimes demand as an obligatory service, most of them know very little about the Buddhism of

philosophy and principles, and also lack the opportunity to obtain the learning and practice their status behoves.<sup>28</sup> The liturgical rather than pastoral role that *dratshangs* perform in society was sufficient for most of the old generation, who out of their piety accepted the religion without questioning, but to the majority of modern educated youth, who, unlike their parents, approach everything with a rational inquisitiveness, the *dratshangs* no longer appear attractive.

In comparison, the *lopdras* and *shedras* are usually better for they teach courses, often, intensive ones, in language and Buddhist philosophy. As the main custodians of traditional learning and scholarship, they not only contribute through the preservation and dissemination of moral and philosophical teachings enshrined in the Buddhist canon, but also fulfils some liturgical and pastoral roles. In these centres, one can also see sporadic changes in pedagogical techniques with inclusion of modern methods such as systematic curricula, written examinations, etc., although no deliberate effort is being made to blend the traditional with the modern method of learning. Most of the traditional scholars remain enclosed in monastic compounds (some still insisting that the earth is flat) and have no intellectual interaction with the modern scholars. As a result, they lack the communication skills to articulate their erudition in a manner comprehensible and convincing to modern educated youth.

Simultaneously, the modernists, with an air of self-importance (some inflated with pride for knowing the earth is round), did no more to close the gap, although it has been the judicious intention of the government to incorporate Buddhist values into the liberal and technical training given in modern education. School routines include morning and evening prayers, and syllabi cover some Buddhist lessons and texts such as *rGyal sras lag len*. These facets of school education have significantly influenced the lives of some students. However, on the whole, the study of secular subjects in English has dominated school education and the training students have received in their own language and religion has been too slight to have any strong and lasting impact. Moreover, as modern university degrees became a major asset for career prospects, western education came to be portrayed as superior to traditional learning.

Carried away by adoration of the modern education associated with the West, they have failed to recognize the erudition of the traditional scholars. Some would even treat the learned *khenpos* and *lopens* with contempt as know-nothings, partly because they cannot speak English.<sup>29</sup> Besides showing contempt to persons, some of them, out of ignorance or misunderstanding, have also viewed Bhutanese Buddhism as degenerate and ridiculed the religious institution as a whole.<sup>30</sup> This attitude has begun to change during the last decade and interest in Buddhism has begun to grow among the educated Bhutanese, although it has also come as an influence from the West, where Buddhism has become popular. Unfortunately, instead of turning to the Bhutan's own traditional adepts, many English-speaking Bhutanese started to turn to the West for Buddhism. While western Buddhologists stride to Thimphu to lecture on Buddhism, and their books fill the shelves, the real upholders of *Buddhadharma* – *Lamas*, *khenpos* and *gelongs* – and their teachings remain unrecognised and unheard, except when required to read a prayer or burn a corpse.

However, whether in imitation of Western interest in Buddhism or inspired by a genuine quest for spiritual edification, as is the case with some, this growing interest in Buddhism among the educated Bhutanese is generally a positive trend. The recent proposal by college students for a degree program in Buddhist studies at Sherubtse College, for instance, is a sign of the growing interest, although it would be outrageous if western literature on Buddhism were to take the place of Buddhist classics in *Chökey* for this program. We can at least hope that such developments may create some common ground on which modernists can recognize the value of traditional thinkers and traditionists can quench the spiritual thirst of the modernists.

Finally, both traditional and modern education is thriving in Bhutan beyond all precedent. On the modern front, education is free and enrolment is increasing every year. The government aims to achieve universal enrolment in primary education by the year 2002 and on the secondary level by 2007. Bhutanization of the school curricula is progressing and a national university is to be established by 2007.<sup>31</sup> Although voices are heard that the quality of school education is deteriorating while the quantitative coverage is increasing, old



systems are being reevaluated and new approaches introduced to further quality education.<sup>32</sup> On the average, around 10% of national budget was expended on modern education during the seventh and eighth five year plans.<sup>33</sup>

In comparison, the government has contributed financially less towards fostering and promoting traditional education. Many of the centres of traditional training in the country are privately funded and most scholars receive no state support. The total sum allocated to the Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs, Special Commission for Cultural Affairs and *Dzongkha* Development Commission during the eighth five-year plan amounts to 1.78% of the total budget.<sup>34</sup> State policies and planning on the preservation and propagation of tradition seem to lack clear definition of objectives and strategies, compared to other sectors. However, traditional education is thriving in Bhutan, mainly driven by the strength of faith in Buddhism and Buddhist institutions. The total number of clerics, including Sanskrit pandits in southern Bhutan, at the beginning of this century is estimated to be 15,000.<sup>35</sup> With the establishment of numerous *shedras*, and the emergence of a large number of Buddhist scholars from monasteries both inside and outside Bhutan, traditional education today has found renewed expression.

With the growing interest in Buddhism and Bhutanese culture among the modernists and increasing exposure to the modern world among the traditionists, prospects for a successful marriage between the two systems are certain, although compromises may have to be made. Modernists may have to give up their domineering attitude and the view that tradition is a degenerate system to be superseded by more technologically advanced modern system, and turn to the traditional experts to learn more about their language, religion and culture. Unless the current prevalence of English and modern education are balanced by what is really Bhutanese, the *Drukpa* tradition, amid the rhetoric about traditionalism and patriotism, would become what Prakke calls, “Buddhist topping on an essentially western pizza”.<sup>36</sup> Besides, there is a growing concern among the Bhutanese about declining moral values in schools leading to youth delinquency and other social problems. Incorporating more traditional features of

Buddhist values and philosophy in modern education, as Priesner proposes,<sup>37</sup> may help curb such unfavourable social trends.

The traditional institutions, on their part, may have to come out of their conservative isolation and open up for a meaningful dialogue with the modernists. A lot particularly can be learnt from modern systems in terms of pedagogical technique. It may also be humbly suggested that religious figures who give enlightening discourses on Buddhist theory and practices elsewhere also bestow such philosophical teachings on the local devotees. Today, there is great number of educated Bhutanese, armed with modern intellectual curiosity and methods, who seek real meaning in Buddhism and are searching for spiritual guidance. It is also important that educated Bhutanese devotees, unlike most people in the past, who, being illiterate and faith-driven, were satisfied with the *wang* (*dbang*) of a mere touch on the head and the *lung* of recitations they did not understand, seek the true Buddhism of philosophy and principles.

At this juncture, one can only say with the utmost optimism that the “sparking dialogue between Bhutan’s modern and traditional heritage, making the best of both available in modern terms”<sup>38</sup> that Diederik Prakke suggests may soon happen, and Michael Aris’s anticipation that Bhutan will begin “to produce scholars who combine a knowledge and appreciation of its traditional heritage with the new perspectives and methodologies of our own age”<sup>39</sup> may soon come true. Then may arise a time when bat-like students like me can benefit a lot more from both modernist beasts and traditional birds.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I am not discussing here the traditional education in southern Bhutanese communities, which consist of Nepali culture and Hindu religion. This topic deserves a case study on its own and I am unfortunately not capable of doing this at the moment. Hence, the scope of traditional education here is deliberately confined to the northern Bhutanese communities, which share a Buddhist culture.

<sup>2</sup> This ethos of traditional education is explicit in the common practice of citing the following verse by Maitreya before the lessons. *Maahyana sutra lan kara / Theg pa chen po mdo sde rgyan*, XII/58: rig pa’i gnas lnga dag la

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brtson par ma byas na // 'phags mchog gis kyang thams cad mkhyen nyid mi  
'gyur te // de lta bas na gzhan dag tshar bcad rjes bzung dang // bdag nyid  
kun shes bya phyir de la de brtson byed // If [one] does not persevere in the  
fields of five sciences, even the supreme exalted beings will not become  
omniscient. Therefore, one should persevere in them in order to refute and  
lead others and to become omniscient oneself.

<sup>3</sup> Common in the sense that these sciences are cross-religious topics, not  
confined to one particular creed.

<sup>4</sup> The five sciences are arts and crafts (*bzo*), medicine (*gso ba*), language  
(*sgra*), logico-epistemology (*tshad ma*) and soteriology (*nang don*). The ten  
sciences are the previous five and poetry (*snyan ngag*), synonymy (*mngon  
brjod*), prosody (*sdeb sbyor*), dramaturgy (*zlos gar*) and astrology (*dkar rtsis*),  
which are considered sub-categories of language and soteriology.

<sup>5</sup> Semtokha (*Sems rtogs kha*) for instance provided what is primarily a  
linguistic training giving intensive courses on grammar and poetry;  
Tshangkha Shedra (*Tshang kha bshad grwa*) at one time was the centre of  
astrological studies under the aegis of sLob dpon Nor bu dBang phyug.

<sup>6</sup> On the dos and don'ts during lessons, see dPal sprul Orgyan 'Jigs med Chos  
kyi dBang po, *rDzogs pa chen po klong chen snying thig gi sngon 'gro'i khrid  
yig kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*, preliminary chapter on the ways to listen to  
the dharma, p. 6-24; Tsong kha pa Blo bzang Grags pa, *Byang chub lam rim  
che ba*, preliminary chapter to actual teachings, p. 20-32; Bu ston Rin chen  
grub, *bDe bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa'i gsal byed chos kyi 'byung gnas gsung  
rab rin po che'i mdzod*, Chapter I, p.43-51; Kun bzang dPal ldan, *Byang chub  
sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i tshig 'grel 'jam dbyangs bla ma'i gzhal lung  
bdud rtsi'i thig pa*, Part I on exposition of subsidiary features, p. 152-58. On  
the rules of teaching, see the fifth chapter of *Bodhicaryavatara* and the  
sections in *vinaya* texts on the twenty faults of teaching within the category of  
a hundred and twenty faults.

<sup>7</sup> *Gaavy hastra* as cited by dPal sprul O rgyan 'Jigs med Chos kyi dBang po in  
*rDzogs pa chen po klong chen snying thig sngon 'gro'i khrid yig kun bzang  
bla ma'i zhal lung*, preliminary chapter, p. 19-20: rigs kyi bu / khyod kyis  
bdag nyid la nad pa'i 'du shes bskyed par bya'o // chos la sman gyi 'du shes  
bskyed par bya'o // dge ba'i bshes gnyen la sman pa mkhas pa'i 'du shes  
bskyed par bya'o // nan tan nyams su len pa ni nad nye bar 'tsho ba'i 'du shes

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bskyed par bya'o / / This is cited and commented on by several Tibetan authors including the above authors in the sections of the books already mentioned.

<sup>8</sup> I have dealt with this matter in my paper *A Comparative Study of the Methods and Presuppositions in the Tibetan with those in the Western Study of Buddhist Texts*, a paper on methodology submitted in partial fulfilment of M.Sc at Oxford, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> *Bhutan National Human Development Report 2000*, p. 30. See also *Human Development in South Asia 1998*, p. 65-66.

<sup>10</sup> The term *phyi pa'i chos* (literally, outsider's religion) can be understood as "a foreign system"; the modern system can rightly be called so because it came from foreign countries (*phyi rgyal*), but this was obviously not the case here.

<sup>11</sup> Bass (1998), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Kuensel (Dzongkha)* 6 June 1999 issue, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> See Haq (1998), p. 65-66; Government sources however vary and give slightly different figures.

<sup>14</sup> *Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness*, p. 17, 19 gives 17.5% in 1977, 28% in 1984 and 54% in 1999 while *Bhutan National Human Development Report 2000* has an estimate of 10% in 1970, 21.1% in 1984 and 47.5% in 1994. *Kuensal (Dzongkha)* 5 June 1999 issue, p. 3 gives 23% in 1985 to 54% in 1999. *Human Development in South Asia 1998* gives 42% in 1995. See Haq (1998), p. 179.

<sup>15</sup> The stratification of Bhutanese society into educated and uneducated can be argued to be the outcome of the introduction of education. Bhutanese society was earlier stratified according to social status and religious roles.

<sup>16</sup> See Padma Tshe dbang (1994), 44-45.

<sup>17</sup> For a synoptic survey of their works, see Aris (1990).

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<sup>18</sup> However, it must be noted that parents still sent their children to monasteries for religious training, which they saw as a source of benefit in the long term future.

<sup>19</sup> See E. Durkheim (1961), p. 52; Dreyfus (forthcoming book), p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Prakke (1999), p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> See Lopez (1998), p. 15-45.

<sup>22</sup> Most of the monks recruited from schools under His Majesty's initiative and placed in Tango, Cheri and Phajoding have dispersed now, finding their own paths. The university plan is still on the government agenda, but this time it is planned to be in Taktse in Tongsa district after considering several venues such as Taba, Wangdichoeling and Domkhar.

<sup>23</sup> See Prakke (1999), p. 60, 90 for his suggestion of sparking dialogue between the traditional and modern factions.

<sup>24</sup> Hindi was also adopted as the medium of instruction until 1964. Since then English has become the main medium of instruction.

<sup>25</sup> See Aris (1990), p. 1; Prakke (1999), p. 104. John Ardussi, a historian of Bhutan, reiterated this point in a personal conversation.

<sup>26</sup> Their weakness in *Chökey* or *Dzongkha* is evident in many areas. The DDC chief said to me in a personal conversation that one important official, in a desperate search for a certain *Dzongkha* term during a speech, resorted to English saying "*nga bcas English nang 'bad ba can'*" (in our English), considering English rather than Bhutanese as 'his language'. This Freudian slip betrays how deeply rooted English is in the minds of some of the modern educated Bhutanese. Such an instance lends credence to allegations from some traditional scholars that the government resolutions on implementation of language and culture are games with double standards, played scrupulously with hypocrisy. However, a large number of modern educated Bhutanese sincerely wish to master their language but get carried away by the currents of dominant English.

<sup>27</sup> I do not mean to insinuate that the introduction of modern education and English is altogether negative. It has come with lots of blessings, but as far as

Bhutanese languages and traditional education are concerned, it has an undermining effect.

<sup>28</sup> There is a story that when an old monk in the Central Monk Body was asked what are the Three Jewels (*dkon mchog gsum*), he is said to have answered, Gonpo (*mgon po*), Lhamo (*lha mo*) and Legon (*las mgon*), the trio of Bhutanese Dharma-Protectors (*chos srung*). Another story has it that when *shedras* teaching such things as *Gyelselaglen* (*rgyal sras lag len*) began to spread and monks in *dratshangs* started to leave for *shedras*, an old monk in Thimphu remarked: “There is this thing called *Gyelselaglen* spreading from Tongsa nowadays. It must be a sign of decline in the Buddhадharma.”

<sup>29</sup> Stories of contempt shown by modern educated youngsters towards scholarly monks, out of their abhorrence for monasticism as a whole, are often heard in the monasteries.

<sup>30</sup> A striking example of this is a reference by a certain modern graduate to Nagarjuna’s *Malamadhyamakakarika* as fools’ book, unaware that this classic forms the source of two thousand years of Middle Way philosophy.

<sup>31</sup> *Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness*, p. 52-56.

<sup>32</sup> NAPE or New Approach to Primary Education is the major innovation for improving the pedagogical system in primary education.

<sup>33</sup> *Ministry of Planning Report, Eighth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002)*, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> *Eighth Five-Year Plan 1997-2002: Ministry of Planning Report Presented to the 75<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Assembly*, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> *Bhutan National Human Development Report 2000*, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Prakke (1999), p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> Priesner (1999), p. 42.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, 90.

<sup>39</sup> Aris (1990), 27.



## Recent Bhutanese Scholarship in History and Anthropology

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This paper would like to present the recent scholarship on Bhutan by the Bhutanese themselves and to show that the studies of these scholars are the offsprings of a long tradition of Bhutanese scholarship but that they also demonstrate new trends, which are in tune with the socio-cultural changes in the country.

My topic today is Bhutanese scholarship<sup>1</sup> in what are generally called "the Human Sciences", that is history and anthropology, but will not deal with sociology, political studies, development studies or religious studies, fields in themselves. In brief reference to this last discipline, suffice it to mention here *Khenpo* Phuntsho Tashi, assistant director of the National Museum, Karma Wangchuk, who works at the National Library in Thimphu, and Karma Phuntsho in Oxford and Dorji Wangchuk in Hamburg, both doing their Ph. Ds.

Largely bibliographical, this paper will also fully indicate the recent Bhutanese publications to interested researchers. The mentions of publications, which are often too unknown outside Bhutan because of problems of distribution, therefore aim at broadening the scientific knowledge of Bhutan on specific subjects.

While ethno-history and anthropology,<sup>2</sup> are still in their infancy in Bhutan - I will come back to that subject a little later - history has always been one of the subjects that has made Bhutanese scholars famous among academics working on the Himalayas and Tibet. Their contribution, not only to the history of Bhutan but to the history of the Himalayan region as well, is very important.

Among the many scholars of past centuries, there are a number we can name more particularly: the 4th *Je Khenpo*, Ngawang Lhungrub<sup>3</sup> who wrote the monumental biography of the 4th *Desi*, Tenzin Rabgye; the

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13th *Je Khenpo*, Yonten Thaye, who wrote the biography of the 10th *Je Khenpo* Tenzin Chogyal and that of the 13th *Desi*, Sherab Wangchuk. This latter work provides an invaluable insight not only into *Desi* Sherab Wangchuk's achievements, but also the politico-economic context of Bhutan in the middle of the 18th century.

The 9th *Je Khenpo*, Shakya Rinchen, brought from Tibet what is still the only known original copy of the Collected Works of the great *Sakyapa* scholar Shakya Chogden (1428-1507). However, Shakya Rinchen was himself a prolific author, writing the biography of this Tibetan master as well those of several important Bhutanese figures of that period, including Mipham Wangpo who, as the 10th *Desi* and reincarnation of Tenzin Rabgye (Gyalse Tulku), was involved in the internal strife and negotiations with Tibet.

In the first half of the 18th century, the monk Ngawang produced two comprehensive texts on the history of Eastern Bhutan, the only ones that have come to light so far on this topic. The 10th *Je Khenpo*, Tenzin Chogyal, wrote the biographies of the 6th *Je Khenpo* and of the 1st Gantey Tulku, as well as "The History of Bhutan" ("*Lho choejung*"/*lho' chos 'byung*) in which he included the code of Laws.

It is impossible to mention here all the historical works, mostly biographies, that were produced in the 17th and 18th centuries by Bhutanese scholars. The 17th and 18th centuries, especially the 18th, were truly the Golden Age of Bhutanese historical literature. Conversely, the 19th century - perhaps because of problems such as political instability, though the 18th century had its share of strife as well - saw very few writings produced, but among them are the Collected Works of the 4th *Zhabdrung*, Jigme Norbu, and the biography of the 3rd *Zhabdrung*, Jigme Dragpa. These authors were all religious figures because they were the ones who possessed the command of classical Tibetan (*Chökey*). Their writings often stressed the achievements of persons who were religious figures as well, as it would not have been proper or even thinkable to write about laymen or non-religious subjects. They carried on a scholastic and literary tradition that found its roots in Tibet.

The first half of the 20th century does not seem to have produced any major historical works, but perhaps they have just not surfaced yet. The second half of the 20th century saw a real revival of the historical tradition, and Bhutanese, including laymen who started to emerge, continued the work of their illustrious predecessors. However, they did not concentrate so much on the biographical accounts and achievements of individuals but rather on the history of Bhutan in general, or of a lineage.

These scholars contributed greatly to the knowledge of a larger public about the history and culture of Bhutan at a time when more people were able to read the classical Tibetan (*Chökey*) and especially the national language *Dzongkha*, in which the first books to be published in the 1970s were folktales and history.

One thinks, for example, of *Dasho* Tenzin Dorje, who published several booklets on Prince Tsangma, the monastery of Rangjung in Eastern Bhutan, as well as on marriage customs of Eastern Bhutan. Also to be mentioned in this context is *Gelong* Nyerchen Grep, whose manuscript on the history of Bhutan written in the 1970s remains unpublished.

I would name the following as the most important contemporary historians: *Dasho Lama* Sangnga, who untangled the web of Pemalingpa's lineages in the Nyoerab (smyos rabs: 1983); *Lopen* Nado, who presented a cultural history of Bhutan in his "Druk Karpo" (*Brug dkar po*: 1986); *Lopen* Pemala<sup>4</sup>, whose *History of Bhutan* ("*Druk gyeirab*" / "*Brug royal rabs*: 1994) remains our best source on the Bhutan's recent history and the advent of the monarchy; and this list would not be complete without the 69th Je Khenpo, *Geshe* Draphu Gedun Rinchen, who died in 1997. Besides writing numerous religious treatises, he composed the "New History of Bhutan" (*Lhoi Choejung Sarpa/IHo'i chos 'byung gsar pa*: 1972), as well as the famous biography of the much beloved cultural hero, Drukpa Kunley (1455-1529).

These historians who wrote in *Dzongkha* or in *Chökey* are prestigious models for the present generation. Educated in English, the new historians now write in this language with a very different style, more inspired by Western methodology and modern narrative approaches. As they write about history, they provide the socio-economic and cultural background that was often lacking in the works of their predecessors.

Her Majesty *Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck's* recently published book, *Of Rainbows and Clouds*, tells the life story of her father, *Yab Ugyen Dorji*. This biography provides a fascinating account of Bhutanese society in the early and mid-20th century, along with a wealth of previously undisclosed information on famous religious figures.

Karma Ura, in *The Hero With a Thousand Eyes* - which he has referred to as oral history - gives us, through the life story of *Dasho Shingkarlam*, a detailed picture of life at the court of the Second King, as well as background on Bhutan's economy, administration and tax system at that time. It is, so far, the only information available on these subjects, which are crucial to any study of Bhutan in the 20th century.

C.T. Dorje has produced several books that are useful compilations of historical texts. As for Ugyen Pelgen from Sherubtse College, he published, with Tenzin Rigden, a historical and cultural survey of the *Zhemgang dzongkhag*. This study, *Khengrig Namsum: a Historical Profile of Zhemgang Dzongkhag* (1999), brings forth valuable information on the history of this little-known district. One could only wish such a survey be taken up for every district in Bhutan.

Mynak *Tulku* has written several articles on the history of religion, on the international relations at the time of the 13th *Desi* Sherab Wangchuk, and the history of the Bhutanese texts in the National Library.

Also at the National Library, which has a research project with the Royal Library of Denmark, Yonten Thaye is working on a translation

of the life of Phajo Drugom zhig po (1208-1275), the *Lama* who brought the *Drukpa* school to Bhutan, while Gyonpo Tshering has compiled, in *Dzongkha*, a book of songs subtitled in English *A Treasury of Bhutanese Songs* (1997). He is following in the footsteps of both *Dasho* Sherab Thaye, who compiled a series of *Dzongkha* proverbs and sayings in the 1980s, and Mani Dorje and Kunzang Tobgyel who published "280 Folk songs of Bhutan", also in *Dzongkha*, in 1985. The mammoth publication of a version of the famous Gesar Epic in thirty volumes by Kunzang Tobgyel in 1979-81 was also a landmark in the history of epic literature, both oral and written.

In 1999, Tsewang Nidup and Per K. Sørensen published, in a bilingual edition (*Dzongkha* and English), "Sayings and proverbs from Bhutan" ("Jigten pey pche tam" / 'Jig rten pai dpYE gtam, thus adding to the corpus of oral literature that has now been recorded in written form.

These publications have brought us to the related fields of ethnography, ethno-history and anthropology. Although several of the writers do not have formal academic training, the interest, awareness and pride in their own culture is such among Bhutanese that they are producing, often unknowingly, works that could be classified as ethnographic. A feature that is particularly interesting in the Bhutanese context is that the people who record the traditions are not mostly foreign researchers, as is often the case in other parts of the Himalayas, but Bhutanese themselves. Furthermore, they do not do it in an academic context or for comparative studies, but with the intention of passing the traditions on to the new generations and contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of their own culture by the Bhutanese. This is rendered possible by better standards, in both English and *Dzongkha*, and by education now reaching out to the large majority of the population.

The best recent examples are the two books on Bhutanese etiquette (*Driglam namzha*), both published in 1999. One, in *Dzongkha*, (*Driglam namzhag gi debther norbu threngwa*"/*sgrigs lam rnam gzha gi deb ther nor bu'i 'phreng ba*) is the result of years of work by the

Royal Chamberlain, the *Gyalpo Zimpon*, Dorje Gyaltsen. The other, *Driglam Namzhag: a Manual in Dzongkha* and English, and with explanatory drawings, is a collective work of the National Library. These books, which are intended to teach modern Bhutanese the traditional and proper code of conduct in all circumstances of life, are in fact invaluable ethnographical testimonies on this aspect of Bhutanese culture, the recording of which had previously remained oral.

A collective work *An Introduction to Traditional Architecture of Bhutan* by the Department of Works, Housing and Roads (1993) was one of the first attempts by the Bhutanese to compile data on a specific topic and it provided a cultural as well as technical background on Bhutanese architecture.

With the same aim, to document a tradition, and on royal command, *Dasho* Nagphel, who at the time headed the Royal dance troupe, wrote in the early 1970s a guidebook on religious dances performed in Bhutan by laymen, and in 1982, the Department of Tourism published a small guidebook on the dances of the Paro *Tshechu*.

Tshering Gyeltshen has put in writing a collection of popular stories which have a ribald and humorous tone ("Jigten gepey trotam" *'Jig rten rgas pai spro gtam*: 2000), and the *Dzongkha* Development Commission, besides translating, from *Chökey* into *Dzongkha*, the life of the *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyal and the life of Phajo Drugom zhig po, has produced a story-book on "monkey and bird" ("Ja prel tsoe tam" / *Bya 'prel rtsod gtam*: 2000) and a booklet on the official festivals of Bhutan ("Zhungprel Duchen ngelso namshey" / *gzhung 'brel dus chen ngal gsoi rnarn bshad*. 1999).

Karma Ura and Sonam Kinga have recorded and translated two *Lozes*, adding lengthy informative introductions to them. This oral genre is a ballad in which ordinary Bhutanese can express emotions and speak about social conflicts. *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi* (1997), first recorded in written form by the Late *Lopen* Gyompo Tenzin in the 1960s, was translated and beautifully illustrated by Karma Ura. It

tells the story of a commander going to war and death out of loyalty to his lord, and expressing his sorrow and attachment to his village and family. In the same way, The ballad of *Gaylong Sumdar Tashi* translated by Sonam Kinga, tells the story of a man who has to leave his family and become a monk in order to fulfill the monk-tax requirement. Dating from the 19th and 18th centuries respectively, these poetic ballads, full of sorrow, reveal the conflict between attachment to families and sense of duty, as well as providing a glimpse of Bhutanese society and its ways of thinking, strongly embedded in Buddhist values.

Besides his books, Karma Ura has published several articles on contemporary social issues and is currently the director of the newly formed - by the Bhutanese government-, Centre for Bhutan Studies funded partly by Danida, which specializes in socio-political topics, although some of its young researchers, such as Sonam Kinga and Phuntsho Rabten, are also interested in popular beliefs, folk stories and aspects of material culture.

On the study of people of Bhutan, Jagar Dorji, working at the Education Department, has published the first research paper on a very small population living in south-western Bhutan, the *Lhopa* (also called *Doya*) of Samtse, but his heavy professional schedule does not, unfortunately, leave him much time to pursue his research interests.

A new phenomenon is the emergence of female writers and researchers in the field of ethnography and anthropology. It can only be regretted that Sonam Wangmo and Sonam Chhoki did not pursue their studies, which were the bases of their published articles on the *Brokpa* of Merak Sakteng for the former, and on the sacred and obscene for the latter, and that Sonam Chhoki's Ph.D dissertation at the SOAS was not published.

Kinley Wangmo has collected *Tales from Rural Bhutan* which she published in 1997, but she had previously published, in 1995, a longer *Dzongkha* version ("*Druk gi Loze dang Tamgyu natsho ge*" / '*Brug gi blo ze dang gtam rgyud sna tshogs dge*') in which three short versified ballads (*Loze*) appear. One is a witty exchange between a bald man

and a lady from Laya; the second is a highly metaphorical dialogue between a young lady and her suitor; the third expresses good wishes for a village. She is now working on the stories of *Ap Wang Drugye*.

Kunzang Choden is Bhutan's best-known female writer on various aspects of popular culture, and she takes great care to set folk stories in the local context. Her *Folk Tales of Bhutan* (1993) and *Tales of the Yeti* (1997) have contributed greatly to the knowledge of oral literature. She has also written several articles, especially on women's issues and local beliefs, which reflect her keen powers of observation and analysis.

Kunzang Choden has participated in several academic seminars, as have Tandin Dorje and Ugyen Pelgen, both history lecturers at Sherubtse College. Tandin Dorje is for the time being the only Bhutanese who has formal training in anthropology, as he obtained his MA at the University of Provence in France. He and his colleague, Ugyen Pelgen, have attended three international conferences in the last year, including the prestigious International Association of Tibetan Studies Seminar in June 2000 (IATS). On each occasion they delivered papers - which are forthcoming in the proceedings of the seminars - on their areas of research, which are, respectively, local beliefs and rituals of Eastern Bhutan and the Shar (Wangduephodrang) region.

Through a small cooperation project financed by the French government, Tandin Dorje and Ugyen Pelgen each went for a month's training in France in 1999 and 2000, and for the past two years two researchers from the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) in Paris have gone to Sherubtse College for two weeks. They follow up on the Bhutanese researchers' work and give workshops to interested students and lecturers on research methodology in history and ethno-history through lectures and field trips. A workshop on the same topic was also given at the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies in Semtoka in 1998.

The purpose of this project is to create awareness of, and interest in, these scientific fields, to introduce international methods of research



and existing western academic literature on the Himalayan regions, as well as to encourage the students to take up studies in different aspects of Bhutanese culture.

The next generation is now coming up finishing their studies in Bhutan or abroad. There is therefore hope that more Bhutanese will take up this vocation, as Bhutanese anthropologists are much needed to research and write on their cultural heritage, oral traditions and material culture. Ethno-history and anthropology have become specialised fields of studies that can no longer be pursued on an ad hoc basis. Bhutanese scholars have to represent their country in international forums and they need to be conversant with research tools and methods to be able to take their place, academically, alongside other researchers from around the world. Although viewed by some and especially the Japanese anthropologists<sup>5</sup> as "hegemonic" and a legacy of colonialism, English and French are the most important languages in anthropology and especially in Himalayan studies<sup>6</sup>. The fluency in the English language that Bhutanese researchers demonstrate gives them a tremendous advantage over many Asian scholars, and this should be matched by academic content, especially when one has to stand up to the renown of previous Bhutanese scholars.

Interested students should receive formal training through degree courses, which would include *Dzongkha*, *Chökey* and the knowledge of the western academic literature that is abundant on Tibet and the Himalayas. The resources of the National Library of Bhutan, which has an extensive collection of Tibetan and Bhutanese works and Western books on the Himalayas should not be overlooked. The soon to be completed catalogue will be of great help to researchers, and it is hoped that the catalogue will be available on-line in the near future so that it can be consulted by other institutions in the country as well as abroad.

The publication of a scientific journal such as the *Journal of Bhutan Studies* by the Centre for Bhutan Studies will give great impetus to research in Bhutan by providing a forum where researchers can make

their work known not only to Bhutan, but to the outside academic world as well.

The upgrading of the curriculum of ILCS in Semtokha and the establishment, in the years to come, by the Royal Government with the assistance of UNESCO, of a new Institute of Language and Culture is a formidable step in the conservation of Bhutanese culture. This institution of higher education with a comprehensive curriculum which would be a challenge and a dream come true as it would blend traditional learning and international modern methodology and information technology. It should be able to train a small number of Bhutanese researchers in the specialised fields of history, ethnography and anthropology, and could give Bhutan an important role in Himalayan Studies.

The conception of this soon to be established Institute demonstrates the awareness, on the part of the Bhutanese, of the need to preserve their culture and to pass it on to future generations, as they see globalization as a potential threat to their cultural identity. It also expresses their Desire to contribute to the world heritage by informing the outside world about their country's cultural wealth. This is a recent and positive trend that is emphasised by the establishment of the Folk Heritage Centre with funding from the Swiss Development Corporation, and the Textile Museum and the Centre for Bhutan Studies both with funding from Denmark. The Bhutanese government's keen interest in having scholars trained and participating in international conferences in subjects like anthropology, activities that were unheard of twenty years ago, is a huge step in the right direction of strengthening studies on Bhutan by the Bhutanese themselves.

One of the challenges now facing Bhutanese academics and that I have briefly mentioned earlier, will be to try to reconcile their studies with respect to religious beliefs embedded in their culture and with the critical, and often iconoclastic for traditional minds, approach of international style and norms of research.

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### **Table of Equivalences Transcription-Transliteration**

The names and terms appear in the order they appear in the article.

Khenpo: mkhan po  
Phuntsho Tashi: Phun tshogs bkra shis  
Karma Wangchuk: Kar ma dbang phyug  
Karma Phuntsho: Kar ma phun tshogs  
Dorji Wangchuk: rDo rje dbang phyug  
Je Khenpo: rJe mkhan po  
Ngawang Lhungrub: Ngag dbang lhun sgrub  
*Desi*: sDe srid  
Tenzin Rabgye: bstan'dzin rab rgyas  
Yonten Thaye: Yon tan mtha' yas  
Tenzin Chhgyal: bstan 'dzin chos rgyal  
Sherab Wangchuk: Shes rab dbang phyug  
Shakya Rinchen: Shakya rin chen  
Mipham Wangpo: Mi pham dbang po  
Gyelse Tulku: rgyal sras sprul sku  
Shakya Chogden: Shakya mchog ldan  
Ngawang: Ngag dbang  
Tenzin Choegyel: bstan 'dzin chos rgyal  
Gantey Tulku: sgang steng sprul sku  
Zhabdrung Jigme Norbu: Zhabs drung 'Jigs med nor bu  
Zhabdrung Jigme Dragpa: Zhabs drung 'Jigs med grags pa  
Chökey : chos skad  
*Dasho* Tenzin Dorje: Drag shos bstan 'dzin rdo rje Tsangma: gtsang ma  
Rangjung: Rang bymg  
Gelong Nyerchen grep: dGe slong gnyer chen gregs  
Dasho Lama Sangnga: Drag shos Bla ma gsang sngags  
Pemalingpa: Padma gling pa  
Lopen Nado : slob dpon gnag mdog  
Lopen Pemala: slob dpon Padma tshe dbang  
Geshe Draphu Gedun Rinchen: dGe shes brag phug dGe 'bdun rin chen  
Drukpa Kunley: 'Brug pa Kun legs  
Dzongkha: rdzong kha

Choke: Chos skad  
Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck: Azhe rDo rje dbang mo dbang  
phyug  
Yab Ugyen Dorje: Yab 0 rgyan rdo rje  
Karma Ura: Karma Ura  
Dasho Shingkarlam: Drag shos Shing mkhar bla ma  
C.T. Dorje: Chen mehog'phrin las (?) rDo rje  
Mynak Tulku: Mi nyag sprul sku  
Yonten Thaye: Yon tan mtha' yas  
Phajo Drugom zhig po: Pha jo 'brug sgom zhig po Drukpa: 'Brug pa  
Gyonpo Tshering: mgon po tshe ring  
Dasho Sherab Thaye: Drag shos Shes rab mtha' yas  
Mani Dorje: Mani rdo rje  
Kunzang Tobgye: Kun bzang stobs rgyal  
Tsewang Nidup: Tshe dbang dngos sgrub  
Gyalpo Zimpon Dorje Gyaltzen: rgyalpo'i gzimdpon  
rDorje rgyalmtshan  
Dasho Nagphel : Drag shos Nag'phel  
Paro Tshechu : sPa gro tshes bcu  
Tshering Gyeltsen: Tshe ring rgyal mtshan  
Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal: Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal  
Sonam Kinga: bsod nams kun dga'  
Loze: Blo ze / Blo bsal  
Lopen Gyompo Tshering: slob dpon mgon po tshe ring  
Phuntsho Rabten: Phun tshogs rab brtan  
Jagar Dorji: rgya gar rdo rje  
Brokpa: 'Brog pa  
Merak Sakteng: Me rag Sag steng  
Sonam Wangmo: bsod nams dbang mo  
Sonam Chhoki: bsod nams chos skyid  
Kinley Wangmo: Kun legs dbang mo  
Kunzang Choden: Kun bzang chos sgron  
Tandin Dorji: rTa mgrin rdo je  
Ugyen Pelgen: Orgyan dpal rgyan  
Tenzin Rigden: bstan'dzin rig Idan  
Ugyen Choden: Orgyan chos sgron Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck:  
Azhe Sangs rgyas chos sgron dbang phyug

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In the body of the paper, the *Chökey* and *Dzongkha* titles are given in both transcription and transliteration. The names of the scholars are in transcription for easy reading but are listed with their transliteration equivalent at the end of the paper.

<sup>2</sup> The titles of Bhutanese works and the names of the scholars are given in the bibliography, which is at the end of the paper, in transliteration for research purposes. The dates of the scholars are also given in the bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> The exact delimitation of these terms varies according to the user and the time. It has been an endless topic of debate. Anglo-saxons call anthropology cultural or social anthropology. Continental Europeans used to prefer the word ethnology but now anthropology is more used and both mean broadly the study of cultures. In European Himalayan studies, ethno-history is also frequently used as it takes into account, to a much greater extent, the rich literature and the need to know it before starting any work.

<sup>4</sup> As ethnology/anthropology was born in the colonial era, it is for some scholars connected to this past and seen as a legacy of it. See for example, Akitoshi Shimizu, "Does anthropology exist in Japan?" in *Minpaku Anthropology Newsletter* n° 10, Osaka, June 2000, 5-8; and A. Shimizu & J. van Bremen (eds.), *Anthropology and Colonialism in Asia and Oceania*, Cuzon Press : Surrey, 1999. The place of sociology is debated but in Europe, it is considered a different field from anthropology and sociology students follow a different university course.

<sup>5</sup> A table of equivalence transcription/transliteration for all names and terms is at the end of this paper. The terms appear in the order they appear in the article.

<sup>6</sup> Both these historians were promoted to the rank of "Lam" (*bla ma*) but their writings are published under their title "*Lopen*" (*slob dpon*).

<sup>7</sup> See Shimizu 2000:7: "The general reluctance, or rather negligence, of Western anthropologists to refer to anthropological works published in minor languages show that the claim of universal validity, and hence of universal authority, has not been examined even by Western anthropologists themselves." Although I agree with parts of Shimizu's argument, which is valid for the past, I feel that on one side it reflects the particular situation of

Japanese anthropologists who write in Japanese and therefore feel neglected. On the other side this general comment cannot be applied to all fields. Anthropologists working on the Himalayas and Tibet know the locally produced historical and anthropological studies and Tibetan, with all his dialectal forms, is one of the three official languages (with English and French) of the International Association of Tibetan Studies and of most conferences on Tibet and the Himalayas.

## **From Living to Propelling Monument: the Monastery-Fortress (*dzong*) as Vehicle of Cultural Transfer in Contemporary Bhutan**

*Marc Dujardin\**

“I gave a dinner party in the evening, at which the Tongsa *Jongpens* and other officials were present, and seemed to enjoy themselves. They were particularly pleased with the magic lantern, and asked major Rennick to give a second display in the fort. We did so a few evenings later to a vast crowd, who, from the remarks I at times overheard, took a keen and intelligent interest in the performance. In addition to slides made from my Tibetan pictures, I had several of India and Europe, and we wetted the screen thoroughly to enable the audience on both sides to see..... After dinner I showed the Tango *Lama* a stereoscope, with views of Europe, and he so enjoyed it that I gave it to him when he called to take leave.”

Excerpt from John Claude White's diary: “My first mission to Bhutan “-1905, first published in 1909.

### **Introduction**

The object of study concerns Bhutan's state-religious architecture, embodied by the monastery-fortress or *dzong*. Designated as Bhutan's architectural tour de force, the monastery-fortress exhibits the very best of what this particular dwelling culture can achieve at a specific time juncture. To a large extent it is the majestic and monumental character that provides the monastery-fortress with its predicate of Bhutan's architectural frontispiece. The issue at stake here, however, is not prompted by typological nor aesthetic concerns. The monastery-fortress not only exemplifies the endurance of a 'lived' medieval concept; it represents Bhutan's archetype of public, political and collective architecture. Apart from the two primary functions it is traditionally associated with in Bhutan, i.e. a political and religious one, the monastery-fortress may well be approached as a 'propelling'

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monument, a culture magnet and vehicle of cultural transfer in contemporary Bhutan. To explore the 'identity' and 'dynamics' of Bhutan's state-religious architecture over a longer period of time going back as far as 1783, the built history of some historically important monastery-fortresses will be reconstructed. By studying the practice of demolition and reconstruction associated with the monastery-fortress of Bhutan's old winter capital Punakha, the identification and interpretation of some factors that enable the Bhutanese to organize the cultural transfer they need to further their quest for national identity and cultural uniqueness will be discussed. Three potential factors that may facilitate processes of cultural transfer and architectural transformation were identified: 1. the role of the most senior master builder as a source of inspiration to every village carpenter; 2. Bhutan's nailless architecture based on proportional building; and 3. the role of the *dzong* (*rdzong*) as cultural centre. It is believed that by approaching the monastery-fortress as a process rather than a product, the culture-generating force of Bhutan's monumental architecture will surface. If the process of cultural transfer, from *dzong* to farmhouse, represents a centuries-old system of cultural renewal, the case of Tashichho dzong, Bhutan's capital *dzong* is even more revelatory about the present-day role of the *dzong* as a generating force. In Bhutan, the propelling monument interacts from a distance and operates at a more morpho-typological and notional level. However, the brief comparative study of the reconstructed *dzong* at Thimphu and its impact on the capital's urbanized and modernized settlement tissue teaches that in the act of trend setting, the propelling monument itself becomes subjected to unprecedented innovations that are drawn from Bhutan's recent process of modernization and urbanization.

### **Representing the Past in the Present: What Makes the *Dzong* a 'Living' Monument?**

Fortresses and castles are among those form-expressions of material culture that, despite their culture-specific context, architectural definitions and manifestations, are evocative of a commonly shared past, namely feudalism or medievalism. At first glance, Bhutanese *dzong*-s share similarities with those monumental western 'medieval'

fortresses that, according to the British architectural historian George Mansell<sup>1</sup> embody a political and economic system of Europe between the 9th and the 15th century whereby an 'emerging sense of nationhood involved a strategy of conquering and re-conquering'. Object of veneration and conservation, fortresses usually on the one hand act as a vivid reminder of a distant heroic past; on the other they are evocative of an obscure and oppressive episode of our history. In Bhutan, however, both the term 'fortress' and the shape that is usually associated with it, are not only evocative of the nation's feudal and heroic past, but still play an active role in the country's quest for cultural uniqueness and national identity, exteriorized in material culture. In this regard, neither the term nor the form-expression are loaded with negative connotations. On the contrary, in modernizing Bhutan *dzong*-s still represent the tangible corner stones of the nation's political system of decentralized governance.

Contrary to most medieval castles in Europe that are relatively dead monuments and literally 'empty' places, Bhutanese monastery-fortresses are still in use today. The *dzong* still accommodates the same political, religious and logistic functions it was originally Designed for. Its identity and status as politico-religious stronghold relatively stands, as suggested by the same rules and protocol by which its users deal with it today. Indeed, it is the traditional-minded comportment of the Bhutanese people, reflected by patterns of traditional attire and conduct that may account for a certain degree of genuineness by which the past is represented in the present. From a praxiological point of view, a visit to any Bhutanese *dzong* may well evoke a sense of 'medieval ambience' and makes the monastery-fortress appear as a 'living' museum.

However, it is certainly not the western-like veneration of old buildings, historical monuments and even ruins, nor the demand for preservation that lies at the basis of the endurance of this peculiar concept in contemporary Bhutan<sup>2</sup>. Bhutanese dwelling culture has no tradition of architectural preservation like the way it emerged and developed in Western Europe as a movement from the 19th century onwards.<sup>3</sup> From the viewpoint of its religion (Buddhism) and its history (a continual quest for national identity and cultural

uniqueness), there were no grounds to preserve Bhutan's state-religious architecture, 'justified by the assertion that they are part of the national inheritance'.

From a religious perspective, the Buddhist doctrine of the 'impermanent' character and condition of all modes of existence has never associated buildings with eternity. Like other aspects of material culture, architecture does not escape from this same wheel of existence, the cycle of life, death and rebirth (*samsara*); architecture too is subjected to a continuous process of construction, demolition and re-erection. Thus, like various comparable Buddhist culture groups in the Himalayas, through literally deconstructing and reconstructing most of its architectural heritage, even historical monuments such as *dzongs*, Bhutanese culture celebrates a continuous process of cultural renewal as its very tradition. The underlying hypothesis is that by studying the ongoing reconstruction process of one of Bhutan's most historically important *dzongs*, Punakha Dzong, against the background of its diachronically recorded built history (1783-2000), a plurality of reasons and indications will be identified that may justify the *dzong's* predicate of 'living' monument.

### **Reconstructing Punakha Dzong: A Case in Practice**

#### *Emerging at the Confluence of Two Rivers: Punakha Dzong's Sense of Place*

The valley in which Punakha Dzong stands is situated in the southernmost part of the Punakha district (*dzongkhag*) under which it administratively resorts. Compared to many other valleys in central Bhutan, Punakha represents a relatively wide and relatively flat open environment. Although its moderate climate has attracted various rural households to settle down along the gently sloping terraces of the various side valleys, Punakha Dzong has never stimulated the development of an urban centre within its vicinity. Contrary to those *dzongs* positioned on hillsides, the old capital *dzong* of Punakha is sited at the lower end of the valley at the confluence of two rivers, commonly referred to as the 'mother' river (Mo chhu) and the 'father'

river (Pho chhu). Passing the monastery-fortress the Mo chhu and Pho chhu merge to form the Puna Tsang chhu (or Punak chhu), the main river bordering the western side of the Black Mountain range. Before their merger, the two rivers embrace a hill, known as the Jilligang. It is at the foot of this hillock that the monastery-fortress emerges like a ship.

As is the case with most historical sites in Bhutan, Punakha Dzong's spirit of place (*genius loci*) can, leaving aside the more obvious strategic considerations, be drawn from many sources and interpretations: from geomantic and metaphoric considerations to legends and foundation myths. For any early traveller, the confluence of two rivers that suddenly appears from behind a bulky mountain foot, may have served as a prominent landmark, useful for geographical orientation. From the viewpoint of oriental geomancy, the *dzong* of Punakha could not have been better positioned: embraced by two merging rivers, attributed with human feminine (*mo*) and masculine (*pho*) characteristics. Considering the prevalence of a pre-Buddhist tradition of geomantic divination and animism, it is no wonder that the most prominent spatial characteristics of this place were also thought of as having the form of a deified human or animal. In the case of Punakha, the legends and myths associated with the founding of Punakha Dzong speak of the Jilligang Hill as a 'reclining elephant'. With the help of a photograph by Philip Denwood, showing the spatial setting of Punakha Dzong in 1967, an attempt is made at a theriomorphic interpretation of the Jilligang Hill as 'reclining elephant'.<sup>4</sup> As applicable to many historical places in Bhutan, the 'taming' and founding of the setting of Punakha Dzong is ascribed to Guru Rinpoche in the 8th century.<sup>5</sup> Reference to Guru Rinpoche's prophesy is also made in connection with the founding myth of the first building associated with this place: the *Dzongchung*, literally meaning the "little fortress".<sup>6</sup>

Eight years after the construction of his first *dzong* at Semtokha at the lower end of the Thimphu valley *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel built the old capital *dzong* of Punakha in 1637 in front of the *dzongchung* as the palace par excellence to keep the Ranjung Karsapani<sup>7</sup>, Bhutan's most sacred relic. With the construction of the summer capital *dzong*

of Thimphu (Tashichho dzong) in 1641, the *Zhabdrung* and his successors adhered to the local pattern of transhumance (e.g. seasonal migration of people and livestock between the valleys of Punakha and Thimphu) until the early 1950s when the late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk decided to make the Tashichho dzong the permanent seat of the King and Central Government.<sup>8</sup> With the fundamental reconstruction of Tashichho dzong in Thimphu in the mid 1960s and the inception of planned urbanization in the new capital valley, the status of Punakha Dzong as former winter capital seemed to have lost its political authority and turned into a mere monument commemorative of a more glorious past.

*Punakha Dzong Dissolved: an Architectural Overview*

Lacking a layout plan of the monastery-fortress, the main structural and architectural features of Punakha Dzong will be explained by making use of Philip Denwood's exclusive photograph, taken of the *dzong* and its setting as viewed in 1967. As indicated above, the overall layout of the building complex comprises an oblong square of around 180 metres long and 72 metres wide. The picture is viewing Punakha Dzong from the west. This implies that the building complex developed along its north-south axis, letting the entrance of the *dzong* face the entrance gate of the little fortress (*Dzongchung*). By facing each other, the little fortress faces the east, Punakha Dzong faces the north. If one looks carefully, the *dzong* seems to look upstream (of the mother river) avoiding a direct confrontation with the Jillingang Hill. Depending on the season of the year the *dzong* literally forms an island, made only accessible by two traditional cantilever bridges, built around 1720 under the reign of Bhutan's 4th temporal ruler (*desi*) Tenzin Rabgye (r.1638-96). Standing aside and halfway the track that interconnects both bridges, the little fortress (*Dzongchung*) can be identified. A steep flight of steps provides access to a fortified entrance porch (*gorikha*) in which huge prayer wheels (*dungkhor*) and representations of the Four Guardian Kings are painted on the walls. The entrance porch opens up to the first courtyard (*doshen*) around which the civil wing of the *dzong* is accommodated.<sup>9</sup> A dark corridor leads to the second courtyard from which the access is possible to the six storeyed central tower (*utse*), which houses a series of temples and

the apartment of the first *Zhabdrung*<sup>10</sup>. As Pommaret<sup>11</sup> rightly points out, the second courtyard is hardly existing since a new temple was built there in 1983, bringing the total to 21 temples. As indicated on the picture, we finally enter the ecclesiastical wing of the monastery-fortress. The third courtyard provides access to the Machen Lhakhang, the temple in which the embalmed body of the first *Zhabdrung* is kept, along with the sacred relic he took along with him from Tibet. It is also here that the remains of the Buddhist Saint Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), another reincarnation of Guru Rinpoche is preserved. The monks' great assembly hall (*kunre*), credited to Bhutan's second temporal ruler, *Desi* Tenzing Drugda (1656-67) opens up to this courtyard.

*Punakha Dzong (1783-1999): a Pictorial Diachrony*

From various archives and collections, we were able to organize and compare two sets of pictures depicting the morpho-typological evolution of Punakha Dzong from 1783 to 1999. The first set views the *dzong* from its south/south-east elevation. The situation as depicted by Davis in 1783 shows Punakha Dzong's configuration after its reconstruction in 1750 (fire) and extensive elaborations, patronized under the reign of Bhutan's 13th temporal ruler (*desi*) Sherab Wangchuk between 1744 and 1763 (Armington, 1998:193-4). Despite four fires (1798, 1802, 1831 and 1849) and the damage caused by the severe 1897 earthquake, the configuration as viewed by Rawling in 1904 and Weir in 1931 does not seem to differ substantially from the version in 1783. In 1978, the major changes comprised the demolition of a building standing in front of the *dzong*, and the disappearance of the traditional cantilever bridges that, by then, were replaced by modern suspension bridges, built adjacent to the remains of the original structures. From the late 1980s onwards, the *dzong* was subjected to a more drastic process of demolition and renewal. The four last serial views depict the final stage of the reconstruction process which turns the *dzong* into a very complex architectural synthesis that blurs the commanding position of a single central tower (*utse*) of Buddhist temple rooms.

The second set provides a closer look at the *dzong*'s present process of architectural transformation as viewed from the south-west direction. As suggested above, one may recognize a move from a relatively simple configuration, a horizontally outlined structure dominated by one single vertical element, to a more ambiguous and differentiated complexity of clustered and juxtaposed individual buildings, densely organized within the confines of its existing external walls. Each of them, seemingly, wants to emphasize its proper (political?) importance and status.

*Punakha Dzong Reconstructed (1986-1999): a Brief Outline*

The fascinating thing about Bhutanese issues of architectural preservation, as demonstrated by the present wave of major reconstruction works throughout the nation, is the plurality of reasons that may justify an approach which goes much beyond what we understand by 'restoration' and 'renovation'. The need to demolish and rebuild a monastery-fortress, a temple, a house can be drawn from a variety of reasons: practical, technical, socio-political, cultural, religious, cosmological.... all and none of them at the same time identifiable as the ultimate motive. Considering Bhutan's geographical situation within an earthquake-prone and glacier-rich region, the process of demolition and renewal that characterizes the built history of the bulk of Bhutan's architectural heritage can be traced to a struggle between man and the caprices of nature. Like many other constructions, Punakha Dzong did not escape the toll of time and the extremity of the country's geographical situation. Calamities, such as fires, earthquakes and floods, that subjected Punakha Dzong to a continual process of demolition and renewal came to light in the pictorial analysis of the *dzong*. The most recent calamities that accelerated reconstruction works at the *dzong* of Punakha are: 1. the fire in 1986 that burnt down the south-west corner of the *dzong*, thereby destroying the winter quarters of Bhutan's head abbot (*Je Khenpo*); and 2. the enormous flash flood in October 1994 that seriously damaged the *Dzongchung* that literally protects the *dzong*'s entrance by its buffering position.<sup>12</sup>

Not all architectural transformations, however, are prompted by the caprice of nature. The present importance accorded to the old capital *dzong* of Punakha is demonstrated, not only by the scale and standard of the present reconstruction works initiated in the late 1980s, but even more by its historical and national state of affairs.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in Buddhism, the contribution to the realization of a spatial environment complying with Buddhist ideas about life and after-life is considered a deed of virtue, irrespective of one's rank, position or talent. As is the case with the commissioning of painted scrolls and other works of religious art and architecture, an elaborated system of patronage lays at the basis of many architectural handling as a cultural practice. It is a system that may make all those who are involved in the 'act of building' spiritually better. The initiator and patron for his or her enlightened idea, devotion and sponsorship; the master-carpenter (*zorik-lapon* and or *zow*) for his profound expertise of iconometric building and artisanal craftsmanship; the Buddhist monk for his wisdom, talent of mediation and astrological knowledge; the unskilled labourers for their physical involvement; and the users for being blessed with yet another earthly place that is spatially and spiritually ordered and made inhabitable. All have distinguished themselves by their own 'deed of virtue' and the structure will always commemorate this united effort of cultural belonging.

The historical importance of the Punakha Dzong has always attracted the highest level of patronage.<sup>14</sup> The fire in the mid eighties seemingly provided the present King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, with the opportunity to demonstrate his personal exemplary attitude and religious devotion by commanding the total reconstruction of the Machen Lhakhang, one of the most sacred temples within the *dzong* complex, the monk's great assembly hall or Kunre; and more recently the little fortress or *Dzongchung* following its 1994 total destruction.

The first of the three reconstructions, the new Machen Lhakhang is erected by the best qualified artisans recruited from all over the country after having proven their expertise during earlier reconstruction works of the important village temple at Ura and the construction of the new Kurje temple in Bumthang. The morpho-typological resemblance between the two temples is very conspicuous.



The ornamental refinement of the Machen Lhakhang completed in 1991, however, is even more impressive. Attracting immediate attention are the introduction of new building materials such as cement concrete and the application of new techniques such as the concrete casting method in function of a traditional architectural configuration, inherent to timber-architecture. Frescoes and sculptures, traditionally built with timber, are now being cast and sculpted out of concrete cast in situ. The most interesting aspect of this building experience, however, is the assessment of the flexibility and easiness by which this peculiar play of do-thinking all of a sudden results into unexpected and ‘last-minute’ alterations. A visit to the site, a brief discussion between patron, master-builder and or ritual master suffices to alter, change or all together reverse the position of prefabricated and already installed building components.

The second building concerns the monks' great assembly hall known as the Kunre is located in the southernmost section of the *dzong*. Known as the ‘hundred-pillar’ congregation hall three pictures taken prior to its ultimate demolition, demonstrate the exceptional architectural standard and historical value of this particular monument. Lacking a tradition of (architectural) documentation, it is obvious that a considerable amount of valuable objects of art such as mural paintings and cosmic *mandalas* were about to get lost as historical evidence. From the ruins of the old Kunre, the new one literally emerged from scratch. The construction of the new Kunre unveils how the Bhutanese, despite the involvement of foreign ‘conservationist’-minded expertise, go their own way when it comes to architectural decisions.

The third major reconstruction work concerns the re-erection of the historically important “little fortress” or *Dzongchung*. After the necessary river training works, needed to consolidate its site, the *Dzongchung* was built twice its original size, incorporating all architectural features that were introduced in the *dzongs* of Thimphu and Punakha. In so doing, a major step is being achieved in the country. With the installation of the golden pinnacle (*serto*) on the rooftop of the *Dzongchung* (Sept.'96) and the Kunre (Oct.'96), followed by the consecration ceremony of the Machen Lhakhang and

its *Kudung chörten*<sup>15</sup> in which Bhutan's three most sacred relics were installed on November 2, 1996, one of Punakha Dzong's most radical processes of demolition and re-erection seems to have reached to a temporal climax.

From a western 'conservationist' point of view and 'monumentalist' attitude towards issues of cultural and architectural preservation, the complete demolition and reconstruction of the old Machen Lhakhang and Kunre, seems nothing but the erasure of a whole historical chapter. For the Bhutanese, however, the re-erection of the new Machen Lhakhang, Kunre and *Dzongchung*, seems to confirm the 'impermanent' status of architecture on the one hand; on the other it may be viewed as a 'built' sign of protection marking a new phase in furthering the country's quest for national identity and cultural explication, expressed in material culture.

*The Reconstruction of Punakha Dzong: a Paradox?*

Since most of Bhutan's monumental monastery-fortresses (*dzongs*) represent the administrative centre of a certain district (*dzongkhag*) it might be interesting to put into perspective the obvious link between the political importance of an administrative *dzong* and the territory that is referred to by the same term. Until 1992, Punakha Dzong represented one of Bhutan's largest and northernmost administrative entities. It shared a strategic alpine borderline with Tibet which, before its closure following the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1952, was a major transit area for trade and international communication. Coinciding with these internationally souring relationship, Punakha Dzong lost its status as winter capital *dzong* in favour of the more southern situated Tashichho dzong at Thimphu, which was ultimately transformed into Bhutan's permanent seat of government. In the last quarter of the 20th century, Punakha Dzong all of a sudden resurged from an alleged state of politico-cultural and architectural dormancy, the latter being demonstrated by the morpho-typological history of the monument.

The paradox concerns the following: just as Punakha Dzong is being restored to full political and architectural glory, the territory it was

governing until 1992 shrank to almost a single valley. Indeed, furthering Bhutan's gradual but firm engagement to decentralize institutional responsibilities, Bhutan's administrative map was retraced. One of the major implications was the upgrading of former sub-districts into districts: Gasa in Northwest Bhutan and Tashiyangtse in Northeast Bhutan. For Punakha Dzong it implied a territorial shrinking from the largest to the smallest district; from an internationally important borderzone to an internally landlocked enclave. However, by reducing Punakha Dzong's territorial concerns to a strict minimum, the *dzong* itself is provided with an unprecedented opportunity: to become Bhutan's politico-religious and cultural (heart) centre. There are indications that, in the light of Bhutan's present stage of political transition and search for national identity and cultural integration, the major reconstruction of Punakha Dzong may well be regarded as an act of spatial and ritual protection and consolidation. To unravel other more culture-specific and inarticulate considerations that may have prompted Punakha Dzong to resurge is more difficult to evaluate. From the viewpoint of material culture as a built medium of intercommunication, however, there is evidence that Punakha Dzong is provided with a particular challenge to serve as locus and vehicle of cultural transfer in which architectural trendsetting plays an important role.

### **The *Dzong* as 'Propelling' Monument: Architecture as Vehicle of Cultural Renewal and Change**

So far, we have looked at some factors that may justify the *dzong*'s title of 'living' monument. The fact that *dzongs* still fulfil more or less unchanged historical tasks was one argument to support this idea. The *dzong* in use is evocative of a stage of development and as such provides it its title of 'living' museum. The *dzong* in Bhutan commemorates the construction of a spatio-cultural identity, expressed in material culture. However, the factor that may provide the *dzong* with its ultimate status of 'living' monument concerns the Buddhist cultural idea of the impermanent state of being of all form-expressions of material culture. Historically important monuments too, as exemplified by the case of Punakha Dzong, do not escape from this peculiar cultural practice of architectural demolition and re-

erection. Two questions arise here: 1. If Bhutanese *dzongs* are still in use, what kind of role do they in shaping and actualizing Bhutan's spatio-cultural identity; and 2. what are the potential factors and agents of change that may provide Bhutan's state-religious architecture with the predicate of 'propelling' monument?

### **Propelling Versus Pathetic Monuments: Terms and Categories**

If the *dzong* may be approached as medium or agent of change (ranging from adjustment to transformation), it has to integrate more 'dynamic' characteristics than those needed to renew itself. The terms 'propelling' versus 'pathetic' elements, borrowed from the work of the Italian architectural theoretician Aldo Rossi may provide a useful concept. In his work *The Architecture of the City*, Aldo Rossi approaches monuments as physical signs of the past that: 1. persist virtually unchanged, endowed with a continuous vitality; or 2. on the contrary exhaust themselves, and as Rossi argues, then only the permanence of their form, their physical sign and *locus* remains'. As permanence's, monuments may represent one of these two aspects which can be viewed as a pair of opposites: 'propelling' versus 'pathological' elements. According to Rossi<sup>16</sup> propelling elements 'continue to function; condition the urban area in which they stand and continue to constitute an important urban focus'; pathological elements, on the contrary, stand virtually isolated in the city; nothing can be added; and they constitute an experience so essential that they cannot be modified'.

If this line of thinking is applied to Bhutan's monumental state-religious architecture, as exemplified by the *dzong*, we encounter a problem that relates to Bhutan's culture-specific context and its traditional definition of space. Bhutan is a predominantly rural dwelling culture in a discontinued alpine landscape. From a geo-topographical perspective, Bhutanese *dzongs* tend more towards seclusion than integration. As Bhutan's traditional settlement tissue adheres more to a system of radiation versus enclosure, we have to look for other clues to understand what influence the *dzong* may exercise upon the entirety of Bhutan's contemporary dwelling culture.

### **From Dzong to Farmhouse: What Makes the Dzong a ‘Propelling’ Monument?**

Architectural uniformity and coherence between *dzongs* and traditional village settlements have been a constant throughout Bhutan's built history. The built configuration in general, and the architectural expression of its elaborate timber architecture in particular is, however, very different from the configuration, observed by Davis in 1783. By comparing both water colours, one may observe that as far back as 1783, the timber oriels (*rabsal*) were nothing more than a grouping of individual (larger) windows or small individual *loggia*'s. Considering the reconstructions of the built history of several monuments, one may recognize a three-fold evolution: 1. from more Tibetan-like form-expressions to more explicit Bhutanized space-definitions; 2. from relatively simple to more differentiated built configurations; and 3. from introvert to more assertive manifestations of architecture.

Considering the extreme character of Bhutan's Himalayan landscape and the mosaic of peoples that inhabit it, how can we explain the fact that the architectural configuration of *dzongs* and villages have continuously changed hand in hand throughout the country? If the geo-topographical condition of Bhutan and the multi-cultural constellation of its society may be considered diverging factors, how is it possible that architectural innovations are so rapidly disseminated and adopted throughout all of Bhutan. The underlying hypothesis here is that the *dzong*, embodying the highest Buddhist ideas and values, functions as a *locus* and vehicle of cultural transfer and change. By studying aspects of cultural transfer from a praxiological point, we have identified three potential factors that may unveil the role of the *dzong* as key to the understanding of what may well be understood by the ‘dynamics’ of Bhutan's ‘living’ architecture: 1. The cultural role and authority of the master-builder; 2. Bhutan's application of ‘naillless’ architecture; and 3. The *dzong* as cultural centre.

#### **The Cultural Role and Authority of the Master-Builder**

The responsibility for the conceptualization of and materialization of Buddhist stock of ideas in the form of a distinct architectural practice can be traced to a trinity of key actors, referred to as the patron, the ritual master and the master-builder. The higher the political and religious rank of the trinity, the more advanced the level is at which this peculiar play of architectural 'do-thinking' takes place; and more importantly the more impact it may have on the architectural actualization in all of Bhutan. To ensure the continuity of Bhutan's architectural tradition in keeping with ideological values, the structuring of the spatial environment is not left over to one's individual architectural creativity. From an spatio-cultural perspective, the master-builder, referred to by varied terms according to rank, grade, craftsmanship and field of specialization, not only acts as the architect and contractor, but equally as an authority in 'material culture'. The specific terms that differentiate between the various traditional crafts are equally reflected in the title and rank by which master-builders are addressed to. The country's most senior master-builder entrusted with the honourable task to architecturally interpret whatever changes might be proposed by the highest level of patronship, i.e. the king and the head abbot, is traditionally referred to as the '*zorig-lapon*' or exceptionally the '*zorig-chichop*'.<sup>17</sup>

Dating back to the period of the first *Zhabdrung* and the founding of Punakha Dzong in 1637, there is a revealing story about the status and authority associated with the cultural role of *Trulbi Zow Balingpa* (Balip), the *Zhabdrung*'s most senior master-builder. The Tibetologist Yoshiro Imaeda in his catalogue on portable shrines (*tashigomang*), not only unveils how the dream was conceptualized and materialized in the form of a scale model, but also provides us with an idea about the 'divine' faculty that is traditionally associated with craftsmanship. He writes:

"It is believed that the great architect *Trulbi-zow* Baleb, incarnation of the divine craftsman Vishwakarma, invented the *tashigomang* under the guidance of the *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel. The legends tells that once with the benediction of the supernatural power of the *Zhabdrung*, *Trulbi-zow* Baleb visited in a dream the heavenly Palace of Guru Rinpoche. The next morning, *Zhabdrung* inquired of *Trulbi-zow* about his

dream and asked whether he could give form to what he had seen in the dream. *Trulbi-zow* agreed and made out of a radish the prototype of the Tashigomang. As *Zhabdrung* was satisfied with his skill he told him to carve it of wood.”<sup>18</sup>

The character of Vishwakarma with whom all Bhutanese master-builders and craftsmen feel associated through lineage, is no other than the prime and heavenly architect, venerated in both Hinduism and Buddhism. The idea of belonging to the important lineage associated with the mythical figure of Vishwakarma provides ritual meaning to the praxiology of cultural transfer from the most senior master-builder of the King to the local village carpenter. According to the Tibetologist Michael Aris, the legend and the reference to the ritual hierarchy associated with traditional craftsmanship appears in a local source<sup>19</sup>. His translation of the passage goes as this:

“The craft of building construction: As for woodworking and the construction of buildings, in addition to what existed in previous times (the story can be told of how) an expert in carpentry called “The Emanational Craftsman Balingpa” came forth at the time when *Zhabdrung* Rinpoche was building the *dzong* of Punakha. He constructed fortresses, houses and the other buildings by adding as appropriate a multiplicity of beautifying elements to the ancient Designs still being used in building constructions. And so there (later) arose the expert woodworkers of Bhutan who are renowned to belong to the lineage of the master craftsman Balingpa.”<sup>20</sup>

In the ‘History of Bhutan Handbook for teachers’,<sup>21</sup> however, the picture of the exceptional status that is seemingly associated with the rank of *zorig lapon* or *zorig chichop* today, is nuanced. Despite his status as incarnation of Vishwakarma, the master-builder of the *Zhabdrung* seemed not capable of conceptualizing the new Punakha Dzong by his own mind and craftsmanship:

“He (the *Zhabdrung*) sent somebody to call him (Balip) to build the *dzong*. Although this man was intelligent, his mind could not grasp what the *Zhabdrung* exactly wanted. He could

not conceive this great project so the *Zhabdrung* guided him magically to the paradise of Guru Rinpoche, the *Zangdopelri* and showed him this place.”<sup>22</sup>

Interesting about this passage is the suggestion of a more ‘challenging’ relationship between patron and master-builder (in the sense of who is guiding whom in the process of architectural design and construction).<sup>23</sup> The master-builder’s primary role is to merge his profound knowledge of Buddhist iconography (couched in the canon of his own anthropometric measurements), with the practical and spiritual objectives of the patron in the form of an architectural synthesis. What may well facilitate the cultural transfer of stock of ideas from the nation’s most senior master-builder to the carpenter apprentice in a remote village is an ingenious architectural concept and artisanal building technology.

### **Bhutan’s Application of Nailless Architecture**

Considered as one of the most ingenious aspects of traditional building construction in general and carpentry in particular, the method of ‘nailless’ timber jointing is not authentic to Bhutan. However, by studying the Bhutanese approach to the concept and practice of ‘nailless’ architecture in relation to socio-economic and cultural parameters, three characteristics were identified that may shed some light on the contribution of this peculiar building system to a dynamics of a nation-wide process of cultural transfer and actualization, expressed in material culture: 1. a proportional Design and construction system by which graphics and building plans play a secondary role as didactic tool and means of instruction; 2. the rationality and high standard of the building method of artisanal prefabrication making use of elementary hand tools only; and 3. the minimum requirement of skilled labour for the maximum usability of unskilled labour for all aspects and phases of building construction.

Firstly, by tradition, the preparation and reference to drawn building plans is secondary if not redundant. To ensure a truthful materialization of such iconographic programmes, reference is made to ‘proportional’ schemes. In the case of state-religious (and domestic) architecture, no such schemes could hitherto be traced. As far as



carpentry works are concerned, one may come across very few drawn memo's (mostly carved onto a wooden plank) and wooden stencils that provide some elementary information about the compository principles of some of the more complex timber jointing and profiling. Craftsmanship in 'nailless' forms of architecture (and furniture making), however, is a kind of ready knowledge that is traditionally transferred from mentor to disciple by means of oral instruction and through extensive on-the-job training. As far as intercommunication between the most senior master-builder and his many assistants is concerned, the use of elementary sketches and wooden stencils may well be considered an effective instrument to overcome problems of language, cultural background and level of craftsmanship that may find its origin in Bhutan's geo- and multi-ethnic situation. In practice, the master-builder provides the artisans with small sticks (e.g. bamboo) on which the elementary units of measurement of his own canon are marked as a measure of standardization. In addition to this aspect of scaling, full-scale samples of the most important, innovative and complex timber components to be reproduced are being prepared by himself or under his immediate guidance. The master-builder not only provides his guidance to the carpenters (*shingzow*) and woodcarvers but even so to all other skilled craftsmen and to the unskilled labour force. It is this peculiar practice of 'scaling', i.e. making usage of the anthropometric scale of the master-builder and not the patron or owner, that ritually interrelates all craftsmen from Bhutan's most senior master-builder (*zorig lapon* or *zorig chichop*) to the historical Banglingpa and mythical Vishwakarma in one direction and from the master-builder to the lowest apprentice to the other. It is this ritualized relationship that may explain why in each village, the head-carpenter is treated with such dignity and respect.

Secondly, if we acknowledge the advantage of 'proportional' building which involves a minimum of scaling for a maximum of applications, the high standard of Bhutan's artisanal building technology by itself may lay at the basis of a smooth cultural transfer of innovative architectural ideas on the one hand, and of a building industry that facilitates or encourages processes of cultural transfer through the practice of demolition and renewal on the other. Not belittling the craftsmanship of Bhutan's stone dressers and *pisé*-builders, it is the

high standard of Bhutan's prefabricated timber architecture that plays an important role to express in material culture Bhutan's sense of national identity and quest for cultural uniqueness. As illustrated in the diachronic reconstruction of the built history of Punakha Dzong, the elaboration of the projecting timber oriels (*rabsal*) to the proportion of entire facades forms a key factor in this process of politico-cultural differentiation and explicitation.

Thirdly, this ingenious system of nailless timber architecture not only allows the carpenters to process, prefabricate and test virtually every building component at ground level but provides room for the construction of very high quality buildings, with the help of only a few skilled experts and a maximum deployment of unskilled labour. The fact that each building component can be dis-assembled into numbered timber profiles, virtually everyone, from women to children, can be involved to transport various sets to their final position.<sup>24</sup> Until recently, the unskilled labour for the reconstruction's of *dzong*'s was recruited under the *gungda ula* system (*gung* means family), a form of taxation that requires the participation of one person per family per year for a period of two weeks in works of national importance. In the specific case of *dzong*'s, this labour service is called *dzongsey ula*. It is a labour contribution, with pay, by each household for the seasonal maintenance of *dzong*'s and the periodic maintenance of important temples (*lhakhangs*). In order to reduce dependency of imported labour, the general system of *gungda ula* was introduced in 1988 to meet the increasing demand for labour to implement development projects.<sup>25</sup> At present, this labour system of taxation is discontinued from 1996 onwards.<sup>26</sup> Since such forms of labour service may well contribute to a sense of national identity and cultural belonging, it is an open question whether such considerations have been taken into account when it was decided to discontinue this system.

### **The Dzong as Cultural Centre**

Considering the extreme physical conditions of Bhutan, we can ask ourselves how it is possible that remarkable architectural innovations are so rapidly disseminated and adopted throughout the country. So

far, we have dealt with the *dzong* as permanent construction site and vocational training centre for village artisans. After the completion of the reconstruction works on *dzong*'s or other important historical buildings and monuments, the professionally enriched and spiritually enlightened village artisans stand for the introduction and dissemination of these challenging new concepts and expressions at village and house level. If we know that the wood work of a traditional farmhouse is renewed approximately every twenty years or at least once per generation, it is acceptable to believe that new architectural trends, pre-set by the *dzongs*, are relatively quickly adopted by the villagers, even for those dwelling at remote places.

By bringing the aspect of unskilled labour service onto the foreground, it is suggested that the villagers themselves are relatively update with the new architectural trends. This is demonstrated by the fact that until recently, they literally participated in this process on a voluntary or rotative basis (*dzongsey ula*). However, the underlying hypothesis here is that the architectural synthesis of the concept of the *dzong*, embodying the highest Buddhist ideas and values, functions as a cultural magnet and a didactic source for spatio-cultural inspiration and architectural fine-tuning. As a governmental institution, the *dzong* can be considered as the socio-political and cultural heart of a district (*dzongkhag*). Indeed, everyone depends for his/her personal and public matters on the *dzong* of his/her district, and is therefore familiar with its actualized architectural configuration. At the annual festivals of *tshechu* and *dromchoe*, the *dzong* provides the perfect scenery to evoke a strong sense of cultural belonging. Virtually everybody gathers at the *dzong* to commemorate the 'Great Deeds' of Guru Rinpoche and to honour the main protective deities.<sup>27</sup> It is at such collectively staged rituals that the *dzong* unveils its role as cultural centre in the true sense of the word: a locus and vehicle of cultural exchange, renewal and change. By incorporating the innovations to the private house, each individual hereby endorses the cultural change, promoted by the authorities and materialised by the renovated *dzong*.

### **From Dzong to Urban Villa: the Dzong as Spatial Mediator Between Tradition and Modernization**

So far, we have geared all attention to the role of the *dzong* as setter of trends in a relatively untainted traditional spatio-cultural constellation. With Bhutan's increasing exposure to external and modernized concepts of ordered space and built form, it might be of relevance to investigate whether in modernizing Bhutan, there is still a role left for the *dzong* as propelling monument. For this purpose, a close look will be taken at the re-erected capital *dzong* at Thimphu. Coinciding with 1. the opening of the first section of Bhutan's arterial motor road (Phuntsholing - Thimphu) in the mid 1960s; 2. the import of new building materials; and 3. the introduction hitherto unpractised definitions of space and built form, the reconstruction of Tashichho dzong can be designated as one of the first substantial built signs to mark Bhutan's move towards planned development, modernization and urbanization.

Although many of the *dzong*'s morpho-typological innovations and elaboration's can be ascribed to innumerable smaller interventions covering several generations of patronship, the major reconstruction of Tashichho dzong in the 1960s, represents a more radical act of demolition and re-erection. Rather than operating at a more structural level of the urban settlement tissue, the interrelation between the innovated *dzong* and the city should be situated at a more morpho-typological level. As potential propelling monument, the valley-based Tashichho dzong does not physically take part in the structuring of the urban tissue. Although the main linear shopping line of the city centre (Norzin Lam) may function as an occasional ceremonial axis towards the *dzong*, the monument manifests itself as a solitary landmark and self-contained architectural concept. From this perspective, there may well be some ground to believe that the *dzong* may be viewed as pathological monument rather than one that challenges, mediates or operates as a mediating and generating force from within the capital's urban settlement tissue.<sup>28</sup>

However, despite its physical exclusion from the city, the Tashichho dzong seems to exercise substantial influence upon the morpho-

typological development of the urban settlement tissue. Considering Bhutan's patterns of clustered settlement on the one hand, and the absence of an urban tradition until the 1960s on the other, the new Tashichho dzong, for the Bhutanese, undoubtedly not only represented the best what this dwelling culture could achieve at this particular time juncture (1960s), the term Tashichho dzong literally stood for 'national identity' and 'tradition' itself. In this regard there is every reason to believe that for the Bhutanese the most effective way to cope with the rapid and conflicting import of westernized urban concepts of ordered space and built form was to impose an emphasized facade control, in the form of a design and building code, upon the city's settlement tissue. Although some typical characteristics of Bhutan's traditional architecture such as the rammed earth technology and the abundant use of timber were increasingly discouraged within the boundaries of the township for various reasons<sup>29</sup>, the new capital *dzong* of Thimphu played its role as 'the' setter of trends, more than ever before.

Within the context of the small urban centres that are emerging in all of the nation's 20 administrative districts, distinct features of the *dzong*'s 'introvert' courtyard architecture, exemplified by the elaborate timber galleries, were reversed and rethought of as a local version of 'arcade' shopping lines, particularly to give shape to the newly introduced concept of the public square or 'plaza'. Another attempt to Bhutanize all sorts of imported concepts of built form concerns the urban villa, bungalow, duplex and apartment estates and all other public building types.

Making extensive use of new building materials and technologies to 'copy' typical features and fragments of Tashichho dzong's elaborate timber architecture, a building industry emerged that, however, no longer organized the cultural transfer following the traditional channels of authority and expertise, exemplified by the trinity of patron, ritual master and master-builder. Following the massive deployment of an imported skilled and unskilled labour force to build the city, the traditional cultural transfer from *dzong* to farmhouse, and from master-builder to carpenter was literally being excluded from Bhutan's urban context. Just like in India, 'the rise and dominance of

the Bhutanese version of India's Public Works Department (PWD) as premier agency undertaking public works (and in Bhutan the private urban sector as well), the marginalization of the indigenous building practices was inevitable' to paraphrase the Indian heritage conservation expert A.G. Krishna Menon<sup>30</sup>. He explains:

“This process of marginalization was primarily because the PWD construction specification and schedule of construction costs became the building ‘bible’ for all works in the formal sector of society. The ‘bible’ ignored traditional building practices altogether, and they were relegated to the informal or unofficial sector of society.”

It should be mentioned here that Bhutan's Public Works Department is entirely structured in accordance with its Indian counterpart which not only provided the know-how but equally the staff to draw and set out the first lines for Bhutan's first urban planning and urban architecture. Merely acquainted with the identity and dynamics of Bhutan's uncharted dwelling culture, it is not surprising that the cultural transfer from *dzong* to city was starting to take place at a more superficial and aesthetic level. However, notwithstanding the fragmented and superficial way the cultural transfer from *dzong* to city was taking place, it does not belittle the role of the new Tashichho dzong as frame of reference to mediate conflicting forces that came along with the nation's accelerating process of modernization and urbanization.

It is important to note here that the process of cultural transfer is never a one-way communication. By exercising some influence on the urban tissue, the *dzong* by itself became object of adjustment and modernization. From modern building materials such as corrugated iron roofing to modern infrastructures, the *dzong* is gradually adopting some of the imported architectural and technological know-how. This is not only applicable to Tashichho dzong alone but to all of Bhutan's monumental *dzong*'s and historically important religious buildings. Thus, how traditional and untainted the cultural transfer between the *dzong* and the rural hinterland might have been in the recent past, the *dzong*'s role as setter of trends is of a different order than it used to be

before Bhutan's exposure to new ideas of modernized space and built form.

## **Conclusion**

The cultural matrix investigated in this essay is Bhutan, one of the world's most secluded, hitherto well-preserved and uncharted 'living' architectural traditions. Bhutan is a small independent Himalayan Buddhist kingdom where one can still observe a blend of centuries-old (rural) architectural traditions, and the first attempts to introduce and structure urban space as the materialization of a 'modern' (urban) condition. Bhutan is at present confronted with the consequences of a modernization process that is, slowly but rather effectively, affecting its built environment. This modernization is a recent phenomenon, resulting from the opening up of the country that started in the sixties and seventies. Up till now its effects are most of all visible in the urban area of the capital Thimphu. This urban valley is urbanizing at a rather fast pace, giving rise to all kinds of interactions between modernity and tradition. Throughout these interactions, however, Bhutanese people are very concerned about preserving their cultural identity. Tradition for them is a living entity, which they do not wish to give up in favour of imported values or goods. They thus seek for a negotiation between tradition and modernity that would allow them to preserve their identity while at the same time taking advantage of some selected aspects of modernization. This process of negotiation is facilitated by the fact that Bhutanese tradition is not a fossilized body of habits and conventions, but is rather based on an outlook that permits and even stimulates change. This dynamic feature of Bhutanese tradition is particularly obvious in its building and dwelling culture in general and the way its monumental state-religious architecture is dealt with in particular. It, presents us with remarkable evidence of the intimate relation between culture and architecture.



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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Mansell 1990:93.

<sup>2</sup> I owe this line of thinking to Edward Shills (1981:63-71) when he deals with the 'endurance of past objects' in the light of his exploration of the concept of tradition.

<sup>3</sup> Shills 1981:69.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'theriomorphic' means: Thought of as having the form of a beast. Used of a deity, (Greek: *thêrion*, diminutive of *thêr*, wild beast). Source: *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term means: "having an animal form".

<sup>5</sup> As foretold by Guru Rinpoche, the prediction is formulated as follows: "On the top of a mountain which looks like the nose of a lying elephant, a boy named Namgyel will come. His meditation will be stable and as firm as a thunderbolt. His supernatural powers will appear all the time. He will always be talking with me and whoever meets him will be reborn in the paradise of *Dewachen*" (RGOB 1988:116).

<sup>6</sup> The story says that in the 14th century an Indian saint called Ngagi Rinchen came to Bhutan to search for the spirit of his deceased mother. It was believed that her spirit was reborn in the hell which was symbolised as a rock at a place called Jamling valley. In short, through visions he found the very place and used his supranational power to free his mother's spirit. He had a dream in

which he heard the prophecy of Guru Rinpoche. He then went down the valley to look for the prophesied tip of a mountain which looks like the 'trunk of a lying elephant'. He blessed and pacified the land and in 1328 or 1374, - depending on the sources-, he built a small temple which is referred to as *Dzongchung*.

<sup>7</sup> The Rangjung Karsapani is the self-created image of Avalokiteshvara (*Cehnrezig*) from the first vertebra of Tsangpa Gyare, the founder of the Drukpa School in Tibet at the time of his cremation. See Pommaret (1990:176); *Dasho* Rigzin Dorji in Kuensel, dtd.26.02.94; and Aris (1994c:27). This bone relic (*rus*) was the issue of multiple Tibetan threats and military attacks.

<sup>8</sup> At present, the *Je Khenpo* or the Head Abbot of Bhutan and his state clergy still hold to this tradition of seasonal migration.

<sup>9</sup> In 1981, a Tibetan style *chörten* was built, patronized by the Queen mother, H.R.H. Ashi Kesang.

<sup>10</sup> According to Pommaret (1990:176) the central tower (*utse*) was rebuilt at the time of Minjur Tenpa (r.1667-80).

<sup>11</sup> Pommaret 1990:178.

<sup>12</sup> In its 600-year history, the *Dzongchung* withstood its own series of calamities. In 1994, however, the Punakha *Jhou*, a sacred statue of Lord Buddha, -installed by the *Dzongchung*'s founder Ngagi Rinchen to protect the *dzong* that would be constructed following Guru Rinpoche's prophecy-, miraculously survived the fatal destruction of the temple structure in which it was accommodated. Source: Kuensel, dtd. 31.12.94; dtd.28.09.96 and 2.11.96.

<sup>13</sup> The following facts illustrate this: 1. the *dzong*, and more precisely the Machen *Lhakhang*, a temple located in the third courtyard, contains the three most sacred relics of the nation, namely the *Rangjung Kharsapani*; the *machen* (preserved body) of the *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel (1594-1651); and the *kudung* (catafalque) of the great treasure discoverer Tertön Pema Lingpa; 2. The *dzong* is 'the place' where on 17 December 1907, the former Tongsa *Penlop* Ugyen Wangchuck was enthroned as the first hereditary king

of Bhutan. It is here that the Royal Wedding of the present King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck and Their Majesties the Queens was celebrated on October 31, 1988, a historical event that brought the lineage of the ruling monarch closer to the lineage of the *Zhabdrung*; 3. Punakha Dzong is also the ritual place where the retirement ceremony and investiture ritual of Bhutan's succeeding head-abbots (*Je Khenpo*) are performed; and 4. Since the 2nd of March, 1993, the *dzong* of Punakha moreover accommodates the largest religious banner (*Thongdroel*) of the nation, depicting the *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel (25mx28m).

<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to assess in how many works of reconstruction the King and members of the royal family were or are involved. Advised by high *lama*-s such as the Late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and the highest skilled master-builders (*Zorig Lapon*) such as *Dasho* Khandu, members of the royal family sponsor multiple renovation and reconstruction works at *dzong*-s, *lhakhang*-s,...These acts of merit are not restricted to the geographical borders of Bhutan (Bodhgaya in India, Gangtok in Sikkim-India,...) and transcend the devotion to one religion. (e.g. commissioning of Hindu statues, taking part in 'Tikka' ceremonies,...)

<sup>15</sup> The *Kudung chörten* of enlightenment is a five metre high structure made of 'sandal' wood accommodating Bhutan's three most sacred relics, i.e. the *Rangjung Karsapani*, the mortal remains of the *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyal and those of the great treasure discoverer *Terton* Pema Lingpa.

<sup>16</sup> Rossi 1985:59-60.

<sup>17</sup> The term *zorig* literally means art/artist; *lapon* means master. The title *chichop* means 'the one who directs, masters'. The *Zorig Lapon* (by now retired) of the present king who has initiated me in the skill of traditional architecture, is *Dasho* Kandro, who was involved in the reconstruction works at Tashichoedzong (as an apprentice of the *zorig-chichop*), Kurje, Punakha Dzong and at a later stage in the modernized construction of the SAARC Conference Centre, opposite the Tashichoedzong. The title of *zorig chichop drep* (*Drep* means retired) is the highest rank ever given to a certain character, Parpa Oeser, who is commended for the reconstruction of the Tashichoedzong in the mid 1960s.

<sup>18</sup> Imaeda 1982:12.

<sup>19</sup> Lacking the reference in Das (1974), Michael Aris was kind to copy it for me and complement it with a local source, available to him, which for the occasion of this dissertation was transliterated and translated: ‘Slob-dpon Nagmdog, ‘*Brug dkar-po/’bruggyal-khab-kyi chos-srid ngas-stangs* (Tharpaling, 1986:239-40). Source: Personal communication with Aris by fax, dtd. 12.10.98.

<sup>20</sup> As for the concepts of “emanational beings”, in this case an “emanational craftsman” pronounced *trülpe zowo*, Aris recommends further fieldwork. The application of this epithet to Balingpa (pronounced in *Dzongkha* “Balip”, literally “The Man of Baling”), Aris argues that it is to taken more as high eulogy rather than as an assertion that he was really an ‘emanation’ of the Buddha.

<sup>21</sup> RGOB 1988:117-8.

<sup>22</sup> From then onwards the story matches with the one, accounted by Imaeda, except that here it is specifically mentioned that the model of the portable shrine equally served as model for the construction of Punakha Dzong.

<sup>23</sup> This may provide us with some indication of this presumably advanced play of ‘do-thinking’ that might explain some of the ‘last-minute’ alterations that were made in the course of rebuilding the Machen Lhakhang and *Kunre* at Punakha Dzong. That this interactive play of ‘do-thinking’ did not always take place at such peaceful level demonstrates the heavy price the master-builder of the Palace at Leh in Ladakh had to pay for his unequalled mastership.

<sup>24</sup> Organized as a system of mutual exchange of labour in village communities, this construction method substantially brings down the cost factor since a minimum of cash flow is required.

<sup>25</sup> Kuensel dtd. 23.12.95.

<sup>26</sup> According to an article in Bhutan’s National weekly (23.12.95), the system was first organized in 1962 called *Druk Dom*. each *Druk Dom* was a grouping of six ‘able-bodied’ persons who contributed a month of labour each on rotation basis. This worked out to two months of labour contribution a year by one person. Therefore, in a family of six persons, one member would be

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working throughout the year according to the same article. To double the labour force for increasing development works in 1963, the system was replaced by *Sum Dom* (*sum* means three). Other similar systems concerned the *Chuni Dom* (12 member grouping) in 1968, the *Zhabto Lemi* which aimed at promoting voluntary labour at village level and finally the *gungda ula* in 1988.

<sup>27</sup> For an introduction to Bhutanese festivals, refer to Pommaret (1990:102-3).

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Rossi's examples of 'propelling' monuments concern amphitheatres that form an integral part of the historical urban centres of Arles and Nîmes in France. In the course of their built history, their specific layout, form generated peculiar definitions of space by which functions were reversed and 'a theater became a city' to say it with Rossi (1985:88).

<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that, within the town centre, the abundant use of timber is mainly discouraged in order to minimize the danger of fire hazard and the economizing out of ecological concerns. For reasons of space use (wall thickness of approx. 70cm) and the reluctance of insurance agencies (e.g. Royal Insurance corporation of Bhutan -RICB) to grant mortgage loans to builders of rammed earth constructions within the township, the 'pisé' building practice became a practice associated with Bhutan's rural dwelling culture only.

<sup>30</sup> Menon 1994:40.

## Signs of the Degenerate Age: the Desecration of *Chorten* and *Lhakhang* in Bhutan<sup>1</sup>

Richard W. Whitecross\*

“They destroy the *ku sung thukten*, they destroy human life. Truly, we live in a degenerate age!”.<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

According to the official figures issued in July 1999, 136 *lhakhang* and 1,132 *chorten* had been subject to theft, arson, desecration and their caretakers attacked and murdered.<sup>3</sup> The thefts and the desecrations were a recurrent topic which fuelled discussion, and at times, disagreement. Arguably, they serve as a metaphor for the changes and the problems facing contemporary Bhutan.

The events discussed focus on a major issue, which has caused widespread concern amongst both the government and the ordinary people. As if to reinforce the significance of the *chorten* and *lhakhang* in Bhutan, there have been several recent examples which highlight their importance. One photograph in Kuensel showed a new “Enlightenment Stupa” erected by high school children at Daga High School to mark the Silver Jubilee in 1999.<sup>4</sup> More recently, in late December 1999, the Khamsum Yuelly Namgyel *chorten* was formally consecrated in Punakha valley. Its purpose to “help remove negative forces and promote peace, stability and harmony in a changing world”.<sup>5</sup>

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### **Forgetting the Alphabet: Reactions to the Desecrations of *Lhakhang* and *Chorten***

When discussing the attacks on *chorten* and *lhakhang*, three main themes emerge. First, is the reaction to the violence which is now associated with the robberies. The second, a belief that those engaging in these actions are being encouraged by individuals or groups of individuals residing outside the country. The stolen items are then transported out of Bhutan and clandestinely sold to collectors. The third theme is concerned with the spiritual harm caused to the local area and to the country as a whole arising from the desecrations. In this section, these three aspects are outlined in order to demonstrate how ordinary Bhutanese perceive the increase in *chorten* and *lhakhang* robberies. This serves as a valuable background for the following section which focuses on debate in the National Assembly and the role of the judiciary.

### **Broken Statues and Shattered Security: Tales of Desecration**

“As a small child, maybe five or six, I recall hearing my mother and father talking with my uncle, who had just arrived at our house. At that point, we were living in Lhuntse. He had come with news that the local *lhakhang* had just been robbed. The *lhakhang* had been founded by Tenzin Rabgye (*Gyelse Tulku*)”.

As Tshering described the events surrounding the robbery and damage to his village *lhakhang*, he commented on the effect it had on him. Even as a small child he was distressed by the damage caused to the statues inside the *lhakhang*. The village was stunned by the event, and uncertain how to repair the damage. Fortunately, a highly respected *Lama*, *Lama Sonam Zangpo* undertook the repairs of the *nangten*. This story was by no means rare, virtually every Bhutanese interviewed, including in casual conversation has direct knowledge of a *chorten* or *lhakhang*, which has been robbed, in or near their own villages.



The frequency of attacks on sacred sites is such that Kuensel recently commented in a report of the arrest of two young men from Geykhar that *chorten* vandalism is now the main crime committed in Mongar *dzongkhags*.<sup>6</sup> A central element in many of the incidents recounted highlight the increasing use of violence by those engaging in the robberies.

Tshering provided a detailed account of a robbery and murder, which took place at Pangsho Goemba in May 1999. He had met the survivor from the attack in which the caretaker was brutally murdered and was able to provide the survivor's description of the attack. The murder of caretakers and attending monks has deeply shocked people. One incident which shocked many Bhutanese in 1993 was the murder of a *Lama* and his two novices at 'Chi med Lhakhang by a gang of five young men. After arriving at the *lhakhang* they had been offered food and drink by the elderly *Lama* and his novices. When they attacked, they slit the throat of the *Lama* and used axes to smash the skulls of his two novices. However, they were disturbed from screams below the *lhakhang* and fled. The violence of this attack and the ruthlessness of the young men who carried it out is significant. Not only had they accepted the hospitality of the *Lama* and his novices, but also they were willing to take human life in order to steal the few relics owned by the *Lama*. The lack of respect for both the *Lama*, his life and those of his novices was a feature of the discussions of the problem of *chorten* and *lhakhang* robberies among those interviewed.

The lack of respect, or *thamdasthi*, was central to the criticism of those who undertake such crimes. For many Bhutanese, there is a strong sense of respect and proper behaviour, which shapes their daily lives. Tshering commented that those who engage in these crimes "are not remembering the *dge bcu*.... Instead, they kill and they steal. Why? Because they are greedy and hold wrong views. They have forgotten the alphabet of being Bhutanese".<sup>7</sup> For Tshering, as with many of the people I spoke with, the underlying basis of their daily lives is governed by Buddhist teachings. As "enemies of the dharma", those engaged in the desecration and theft of the *ku sung thukten* are perceived as forgetting the heaviest of the ten non-virtuous actions,

the denial of karma. The representative for the Central Monk Body described them during the 77<sup>th</sup> National Assembly as “people who have neither faith, nor the ability to discriminate between good and evil”.

Yet, the lack of respect was not described as restricted to those who committed the crimes being discussed. It was an underlying theme to which people returned when discussing changes in Bhutanese society. The *chorten* and *lhakhang* robberies highlight what for many represents a more general decline in traditional values which many people fear will undermine their society. Many spoke of the need for more religious education for young people, and for them to understand how important the traditional values of respect are to the social well being of all Bhutanese. These views were not restricted to older people. Many of the young Bhutanese interviewed commented on the social changes and the need for a balance between an openness to new opportunities and the importance of traditional values which have held Bhutanese society, and especially, families together.

Many of these themes were incorporated in a Bhutanese film entitled “Karma’s Chair”. The film is set in rural Bhutan and follows a young man who after seeing a “chair” wants to become a chair maker. Despite his father’s desire for him to lead a religious life he is, eventually, permitted to leave for Thimphu. In Thimphu, Karma experiences the impact of the “modern” and returns to the village to present his father with a chair. However, his father prefers his cushion and the chair is subsequently rejected by other villagers in turn. In the end, the only person with a sewing machine uses it. “Karma’s Chair” highlights the tensions between rural and urban life and the problem of rural-urban migration. More significantly for the purpose of this paper, is the sense of the erosion of religious values, partly demonstrated by a *chorten* robbery, and partly by the desire of the main character to follow a secular life away from the village.<sup>8</sup>

Although, there are those who argue that the robberies are mainly the work of anti-nationals (*ngolop*), most Bhutanese I spoke with felt this was not necessarily always the case.<sup>9</sup> It was generally accepted that *ngolop*<sup>10</sup> were responsible for the theft and desecration of Geleg

Lhakhang in 1999 and other robberies<sup>11</sup>. However, many people described the robbers as “poor, ignorant farmers”, “young, bored and greedy men” and “those who do not respect the dharma or the gods”. There is no consistency or agreement as to whether they believe those engaging in such actions are primarily from the rural villages or the poorer elements of the developing towns of Thimphu, Phuntsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar. Nor even as to their ages – it is not simply a question of juvenile delinquency. However, there is consistency, as we shall see, in perceiving these people as “enemies of the dharma”.

Directly linked to these comments were concerns over the appointment and suitability of individuals to be caretakers. Caretakers are usually drawn, as I understand, from the local community and serve for a period of time as caretaker. There have been a number of robberies from *lhakhang* where jewels and precious *gzi* and other items have found to be missing, usually replaced with counterfeit pieces. In a recent case two men from Isu *geog* in Haa were both charged with the theft of six *gzi* from the *goenkhang* of Paro Rinpung Dzong. One of the men, Wangdi aged 33, was the caretaker of the *goenkhang* at the time that a complaint was made to the police by the Paro Rinpung *dratshang* about the loss of one *gzi*. On investigation a further five *gzi* were found to be missing. A further twelve former caretakers covering a period stretching as far back as 1979 were also being questioned.<sup>12</sup> One informant commented that “the government needs to check these people. Many are good people. But there are always those who are willing to break the trust given to them”.<sup>13</sup>

These individuals are believed to be for the most part dupes in a wider network of thieves, often linked to anti-national elements, who have links beyond the country in India, Nepal and further afield. It appears, at least to my informants, that the incidence of attacks on the *lhakhang* and *chorten* started in the late 1970s as more “westerners” visited the country. The numbers of thefts escalated and I was told by various people about “tourists” taking photographs of objects and arranging for them to be stolen for them. Certainly, many religious buildings have been closed to tourists since January 1988, and access to sacred sites tightly controlled<sup>14</sup>. The official reason given is that tourists disturb the monks living in the *lhakhang* and *monasteries*.

In recent newspaper reports, the Royal Government has commented on the problem of the burgeoning trade in Himalayan art and the demand for pieces from western and Far Eastern collectors. One newspaper article stated, perhaps unwisely, that a rare nine-eye *gzi* was worth up to Nu. 1.5 million.<sup>15</sup> There is undoubtedly a great degree of truth in the belief that the thefts, and by implication the violence, have been encouraged by an illegal market in cultural artifacts.<sup>16</sup> However, people in connection with issues of developing expectations also discuss the link between western demands for antiquities and the thefts and the social problems associated with development and exposure to “new” ideas and material desires.<sup>17</sup>

Bhutanese frequently commented on the spiritual significance and role of *chorten* and *lhakhang*. Emphasis was often given to the pacification and honouring of local deities through the construction and location of these sacred sites. Tshering commented on the displeasure, which is caused to the local deities when these sites are vandalized and the relics removed from them. Whilst, Tshering expressed a fear that these deities, if angered, may chose to leave typically, they are believed to display their displeasure by causing disease or the death of livestock. The importance of the local deities cannot be underestimated. The role of these deities in daily life is a prominent feature. The local deities are “geared towards solving the daily problems of a person or community” (Pommaret 1996:53, see also Schicklegruber 1997). To anger them, even through the actions of a criminal, is taken seriously. As one *chimi* commented, the desecrations “will affect the good fortune of the communities in the concerned areas”.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it was stated by a number of informants that the thieves would never take from their own village *lhakhang* or *chorten* but would travel to other villages, though typically not that far from their own, to carry out their thefts. This may be true in most cases. However, the Mongar incident recounted above provides evidence that thieves are prepared to rob from sacred sites within the area of their own community.

Perhaps, the belief that thieves are unwilling to incur the wrath of the local deity by traveling beyond their own community reflects an unspoken hope that these individuals are not so devoid of social

consciousness that they are willing to avoid bringing unnecessary hardship to their community. The more prosaic answer may simply be that thieves are trying to avoid recognition, rather than any social concern for their own community. Nor, can it be overlooked that “some of these criminals are local inhabitants who are knowledgeable about the  *nangtens*  in the  *lhakhang*  and  *goendeys* ”.<sup>19</sup>

**The Khrimsgzhung Chen mo and the National Assembly: to Kill or Not to Kill**

Under Section *Tha* 1 which deals with the construction and maintenance of *lhakhang* and other religious buildings in Bhutan it states:

*Tha* 1 – 9 Any person/persons committing an act of theft/robbery of *ku sung thukten* from a private or a government owned *lhakhang* or *goenkhang* shall be sentenced to life imprisonment.

*Tha* 1 – 11 Any person/persons breaking open a *chorten* or an image and removing the *Zung* shall be sentenced to life imprisonment.

*Tha* 1 – 12 A person who has already been convicted once for committing theft of a *lhakhang* or a *chorten* and repeats the crime again shall be punished with capital punishment.

These provisions in the Khrimsgzhung Chen mo, the Supreme Law Code of Bhutan, set out the position of the formal laws to guide judges when passing sentence on those convicted of robbing sacred sites in Bhutan.

And yet, whilst it would appear that the law code is unambiguous about the punishments which are to be imposed on those found guilty of such acts, the practice differs from the formal statement. The seriousness of these crimes was subtly, though indirectly, reflected in

the recent amnesty granted by the King in December 1999. Political figures were granted amnesty, but those convicted of *lhakhang* or *chorten* robberies and murder were excluded. Typically, those convicted are subject to life imprisonment. In recent years, there have been fierce debates during the National Assembly over the application of section *Tha* 1 – 12, the clause setting down the death penalty for those who have robbed more than once from a *lhakhang* or *chorten*.

In the case of the recent attempt to rob the sPyan ldan sbis *chorten*, the three men accused of the attempted robbery were sentenced by Trongsa *Dzongkhag* Court to life imprisonment. It is not reported whether those convicted, Som Bahadur Tamang, Dawa Tamang and Chime had previously committed a similar offence. In the absence of prior convictions, the life sentences passed by the court are in keeping with the provisions of *Tha* 1 – 9. However, in the case of Gonpo, a 40-year-old man from near Paro, the court did not follow the provisions of *Tha* 1 – 12. Although, he had several prior convictions involving the desecration and theft of at least three *lhakhangs* and several *chortens*, on passing judgment on him in October 1998 Gonpo was sentenced to life imprisonment. This judgment was issued jointly by the courts in Paro and Thimphu shortly after the 76<sup>th</sup> National Assembly during which there were calls “for capital punishment to be awarded for criminals who repeated the offence”.<sup>20</sup>

During the 77<sup>th</sup> National Assembly held in the summer of 1999, the issue of capital punishment was once more raised for discussion. In one of the longest debates of the National Assembly, the representatives (*chimi*) expressed a wide range of views. The representative from the capital, Thimphu, argued that Bhutan’s sacred sites and temples were being “regularly desecrated and robbed by anti-dharma elements within the country and ngolops from outside”.<sup>21</sup> He argued that “the anti-dharma elements are exploiting a society firmly entrenched in Buddhist values...to deter these criminals and for the overall security of the country those who are caught must be imprisoned for life, and for the more serious cases, capital punishment must be imposed”<sup>22</sup>.

Other representatives supported the call for the implementation of *Tha* 1 – 12. In words reminiscent to those found in the eighteenth century law code, the bKa khri<sup>23</sup>, and the representative for Chhukha argued that the increase in the number of robberies was a direct result of the leniency in enforcing the law. Developing this idea the *chimi* stated “Life imprisonment involves a long legal wrangle by the end of which the criminal might even escape. Capital punishment will send the right message and put an end to the desecration of monasteries and *chorten*”.<sup>24</sup> The representative for Haa took up the problems of imprisonment arguing that those convicted do not “undergo rigorous imprisonment. They enjoy many facilities and have an easy life in prison”<sup>25</sup>.

The 'Brug rgyal sgang representative who stressed the spiritual damage caused to the country recognized the difficulty facing the National Assembly. “As Buddhists, it hurts us to propose the death penalty. But the alternative is the loss of the very essence of our spiritual well being”<sup>26</sup>. The Punakha representative took up this idea when he stated “if evil is not suppressed, good will not prosper”.<sup>27</sup> And yet, for all the strength of feeling displayed in these statements there were many who argued against the enforcement of *Tha* 1- 12.

Several representatives stressed that as a Buddhist nation it would be more appropriate to take steps to prevent further robberies and acts of sacrilege than to take the lives of those convicted. Emphasizing the wider dimensions of the debate on capital punishment, various representatives pointed out that Bhutan was a member of the United Nations and was seeking to uphold human rights. To impose capital punishment would therefore be a counterproductive measure.<sup>28</sup> The representative from Wangdue Phodrang argued that often the most vulnerable sites were remote, privately owned rather than those under government care with caretakers. Therefore, as suggested by the Trongsa representative, more monk caretakers should be appointed to safeguard the *lhakhang*.

The representatives from Trashi Yangtse and Toebesa both argued that capital punishment was unthinkable in a Buddhist nation. Rather, it was up to the people to “help protect the country’s heritage. In this

era of deteriorating values, every citizen must come forward to help guard the country's priceless possessions".<sup>29</sup> This stress on the collective responsibility for the safety and maintenance of the *lhakhang* and *chorten* was raised by several of my informants who felt that it was an issue, which required to be tackled by local communities. Many felt that local communities had failed to respond fully to a *Kasho* issued by the king in 1993, which entrusted the care of *lhakhangs*, *chortens* and so forth in their respective areas to the local communities.

At the end of the debate the Speaker of the National Assembly, *Lyonpo* Kinzang Dorji, noted that the "members were satisfied with the existing laws of the land although some felt it was not adequately implemented". In addition, he noted that although no change was being suggested to the existing laws that "representatives of the government, *dratshang* and the people suggested that it should be enforced more strictly". The Assembly resolved that the judiciary should "strictly enforce *Tha 1- 9*" of the *Khrimsgzhung* Chenmo and "not show any leniency to those found guilty of desecrating *lhakhangs* and *chortens* and robbery of *ku sung thukten*".<sup>30</sup> More significantly, "the Royal Bhutan Police must not keep such criminals in the same prison with other convicts". Instead those convicted under *Tha 1 – 9* "must be kept in strict confinement".<sup>31</sup>

The judiciary faced with the task of maintaining and applying the laws has come under heavy criticism. One informant when asked about the possible use of capital punishment in case of *lhakhang* and *chorten* robberies declared:

"They should be executed. What use is it if these people are allowed to live? Where is the message to others that may plan to do the same? They are put in prison but manage to escape. No. The judges should sentence these people to death. It may be harsh. But, if we don't act now when will these despicable acts stop?"



Informants often remarked upon the apparent failure or impotence of the law to curb the increase in the occurrence of these thefts and the violence associated with them. Yet, it was also illustrative of the difference of opinion to be found among ordinary people. Whilst the informant mentioned above had no doubts about the necessity of the death penalty, others were less certain that it was either justifiable or beneficial. Those opposing the implementation of capital punishment in these cases commented on the ignorance of those involved in these crimes and the problems caused by developing material expectations and unemployment. As mentioned above, many felt that the thieves were “dupes” in a game in which they were the losers. Nor was it lost on my informants that the level of *chorten* and *lhakhang* robberies has risen since the late 1970s. Although not articulated, there was a strong sense from at least three-quarters of the informants that the increase mirrors the difficulties facing Bhutan in its attempt to accommodate tradition and change.

In explaining the life sentence passed on Gonpo by the courts in Thimphu and Paro, a judiciary official stressed that the “law [does] not exist merely to impart penalties. The judiciary aim[s] to correct and rehabilitate wayward individuals as [a] means to human and social development”.<sup>32</sup> By asserting its independence from the executive, the judiciary has sought to take a less rigid view of the need to strictly apply the provisions of Section *Tha* 1 – 12. This is not perhaps the place for a discussion of the role of “imprisonment” and the significance of removing an individual’s personal liberty, but the role of the judiciary as an active, social institution which draws on everyday ideas and sensitivities is significant. It contradicts the image of a rigid, formal institution and reflects the fluidity to be encountered in everyday life as it negotiates its position within the complex interrelationship between formal institutions and the social, mundane world of the individual subject.

### **Towards a Conclusion: the Significance of the Robberies and Popular Reaction to Them**

What can we learn from the issues arising out of the discussion of the *chorten* and *lhakhang* robberies? Do the stories and accounts cast a

different light upon these events? By the same token, do these acts of violence serve to cast light on the values, which are the foundation for both the informal and formal aspects of the legal system of Bhutan?

In “The Division of Labour” Durkheim presents a theory of punishment, which treats punishment as a matter of morality and social solidarity. Beginning his discussion of “crimes” he points out, rightly, that crimes are neither “given” nor “natural” categories. Rather, they represent in his opinion those acts, which seriously violate a society’s common conscience (conscience collective). As Durkheim develops this idea he links the violation of the sacred norms of the common conscience with a punitive reaction. The function of the “state” as guardian of the common conscience is “to create respect for the beliefs, traditions and collective practices: that is, to defend the common conscience against all enemies within and without” (Durkheim 1984:73). The sanctions set out in the *Khrimsgzhung* Chen mo therefore represent not simple conventions or regulations, but sacred prohibitions which command wide social assent. Or as Durkheim wrote “what gives penal law its peculiar character is the ...extraordinary authority of the rules which it sanctions” (1984:141). As reflected in the reactions of those I spoke with and of the representatives to the National Assembly, there is a strong sense of a shared perception of the social and moral order, even among those not directly involved, which informs their discussion of the *chorten* and *lhakhang* robberies. These reactions “caused by the criminal’s desecration of sacred things” are the basis for the authority and importance of Section *Tha*. This sense of outrage, Durkheim argues, creates a passionate desire for the criminal to be punished. “Passion... is the soul of punishment” (1984:86).

The strength of outrage conveyed by those I spoke with, and which can be seen in the National Assembly debates certainly appears to follow Durkheim’s analysis of “punishment”. Yet, if we accept that the state, or in this case the judiciary, is to act as the guardian of tradition and social values, how then do we interpret the decision not to implement Section *Tha* 1 – 12, and the reaction to this decision? The judiciary has sought, arguably, to highlight and indeed respond to changing perceptions of “punishment” in Bhutan. The National

Assembly has endorsed the judiciary to apply strictly Section *Tha* 1 – 9, rather than capital punishment for repeat or multiple offences. In effect, the judiciary has responded to the most important aspect underlying punishment “to maintain social cohesion intact, while maintaining all its vitality in the common conscience” (Durkheim 1984:108). This in turn is linked with statements emphasizing Bhutan as a “Buddhist nation”.<sup>33</sup>

Implicit through out the debates and discussions on the desecration of *chorten* and *lhakhang* is the concept of karma (*las*).<sup>34</sup> The immense negativity associated with these crimes was treated, as so awful, that many felt that it was not necessary to execute these criminals. Rather, it would be better for them and for society, to try to rehabilitate them.<sup>35</sup> Of course, rehabilitation for repeat offenders was also recognized as perhaps too late, so strict confinement was all that could be done for those individuals. Several commented on the importance of allowing these individuals time to regret their actions, and indeed felt it was important for society, as represented by the courts, to show compassion to these people.

In a Kuensel editorial on “deeper values”, notably the difficulty of balancing traditional values with the ongoing changes in Bhutanese society, one can sense the balancing act which faces the courts in contemporary Bhutan. When acts are carried out which directly confront and break with deeply held values, the courts have to been seen to uphold societal values yet must temper “extreme views” which “discolour the view of tradition itself”.<sup>36</sup> To date, it is clear that the judiciary has acted in a sensitive manner, which has successfully balanced upholding traditional values and sensibilities, whilst being attuned to wider sensibilities over the use of capital punishment.

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### **Table of Equivalencies Transcription - Transliteration**

The names and terms appear in the order they appear in the article.

Chorten: mChod rten  
Ku sung thukten: sku gsung thugs rten  
Daga: Dar dkar  
Khamsum Yuelly Namgyel: khams gsum yul las rman rgyal  
Punakha: sPu na kha  
Ngawang Thinley: Nga dbang 'Phrin las  
Lopen Degun Rinchen: slob dpon bGe 'bdun rin chen  
Lhuntse: lHun rtse  
Tenzin Rabgye: bsTan 'dzin rab gyas  
Gyelse Tulku: rGyal sras sprul ku  
Sonam Zangpo: bSod nams bzang po  
Mongar: Mon sgar  
Pangsho Goemba: sPang sho dgon pa  
Chime lhakhang: 'Chimed lha khang  
Tshering Wangdi: Tshe ring dbang 'dus  
Thadamtshi: mtha' dam tshig  
Geley: dGe legs  
Phuentsholing: Phun tshogs gling  
Samdrup Jongkhar: bSam grub ljong mkhar  
Paro Rinpung Dzong: sParo rin spungs rdzong  
Goenkhang: mgon khang  
Wangdi: dBang 'dus  
Goemba: dgon pa  
Chimi: spyi mi  
Wangdue Phodrang: dBang 'dus pho drang  
Nangten: nang rten  
Goendey: dGon sde  
Chendebji: sPyan ldan sbis  
Trongsa: Krong gsar  
Gonpo: mGon po  
Chhukha : Chu kha  
Trashig Yangtse: bKra shis g-yang stse  
Dujeygang: 'Brug rgyal sgang  
Toebesa: gTod sbe sa

Kasho: bka' shog  
Lyonpo: blon po  
Kinzang Dorji: Kun bzang rdo rje

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on fieldwork carried out between June 1999 and June 2000 among the Bhutanese community visiting, or living in and around Zhe chen bstan gnyis dar rgyas gling *Nying ma* monastery, Boudhanath, Nepal and in Thimphu, Bhutan. The research was funded by ESRC Award ROO429824743. This paper represents work in progress examining law in everyday life in contemporary Bhutan and its development since the 1950s. An earlier, and longer version was presented in January 2000 at the University of Edinburgh, Postgraduate Seminar in Social Anthropology. I would like to thank Professor J. Spencer, Dr. F. Pommaret, Dr. R. Baker, Lopen dGe ldan rin chen, Dr. M. Dujardin for their comments and assistance with the paper.

<sup>2</sup> Nga dbang 'Phrin las, oral communication, October 3, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> *Kuensel*, vol XIV, No 27 July 10th 1999, p.18

<sup>4</sup> *Kuensel*, vol XIV, No 25 June 26<sup>th</sup> 1999, p. 6

<sup>5</sup> *Kuensel*, vol. XV, No 1 January 2nd 2000, p.1

<sup>6</sup> *Kuensel*, vol. XIV no 27 July 10 1999, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> Tshering Wangdi, oral communication, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1999.

<sup>8</sup> “Karma’s Chair” 1998. “Phorpa” 1999 (The Cup) by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche in a gentle way also touches on the pressures facing even monasteries as external, secular events impact on the monks and the life and discipline of the monastery.

<sup>9</sup> It should also be noted that several informants stated that the incidence of attacks on sacred sites started in the late 1970s before the current “*ngolop*” problem. However, they did argue that by the attack on *kusunghukten* a person was undermining the wellbeing of the nation so could be called a “*ngolop*”.

<sup>10</sup> The term “*ngolop*” refers to a traitor or anti-national. See Chapter 17 of the *Khrimsgzhung Chen mo*.

<sup>11</sup> *Kuensel*, vol.XIV, No 27, July 10<sup>th</sup> 1999, p.4 “*Ngolops* responsible for robbery of monasteries”.

<sup>12</sup> *Kuensel* July 3 1999, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Nga dbang ‘Phrin las, Oral communication, August 30, 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Pomparet advised that the monasteries were closed to foreigners from 01/01/1988.

<sup>15</sup> *Kuensel* vol. XIV, No 2 July 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Throughout South and South East Asia, there are increasing incidences of thefts of sacred art and stolen items appearing in auction houses around the world.

<sup>17</sup> These issues have been raised in the letters and editorials appearing in *Kuensel*. Although I do not deal with them in any depth in this paper I intend to examine these issues in future papers.

<sup>18</sup> *Kuensel*, vol XIV, No 37, 77<sup>th</sup> National Assembly Supplement, September 17<sup>th</sup> 1999, p.14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* - remarks made by the Home Minister.

<sup>20</sup> *Kuensel*, Editorial, October 10<sup>th</sup> 1998

<sup>21</sup> *Kuensel*, vol. XIV, No. 27 July 10<sup>th</sup> 1999, p.18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> See Aris, M (1986) *Sources for the History of Bhutan*.

<sup>24</sup> *Kuensel*, vol. XIV, No. 27 July 10<sup>th</sup> 1999, p.18.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Kuensel*, 77<sup>th</sup> National Assembly Supplement, September 17<sup>th</sup> 1999:15.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Kuensel*, 77<sup>th</sup> National Assembly Supplement, September 18<sup>th</sup> 1999:15.

<sup>32</sup> *Kuensel*, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1998 p.1.

<sup>33</sup> It is important of course, to be cautious when dealing with what people understand or believe (for example, M. Spiro, 1970, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes*). I do not want to suggest that all Bhutanese share the same understandings, or depth of knowledge. However, there is a level at which those I spoke to among the lay community view themselves as Buddhist and present a “Buddhist” perspective.

<sup>34</sup> One aspect I have had to leave out of the discussion in this paper is the inclusion of *chorten* robbery and desecration as one of the five nearly boundless actions (*mtshams med pa dang nye ba lnga*).

<sup>35</sup> The importance of rehabilitation of offenders can be seen with the opening of a Juvenile Offenders Rehabilitation Centre in 1997. Although, the young offenders are there due to petty crimes, it reflects a desire to provide help to reintegrate offenders into society. One story told to me emphasized that people can change once they see the damage they have caused and develop regret.

<sup>36</sup> *Kuensel*, vol XIV, No. 27, July 10<sup>th</sup> 1999, p.2.



## Continuing Customs of Negotiation and Contestation in Bhutan

Adam Pain and Deki Pema\*

### Introduction

A concern for the maintenance of traditional values and customs in the processes of modernisation within Bhutan is evident in much of Bhutan's official documentation. The fundamental importance given to the maintenance and fostering of Buddhism, its beliefs and associated institutions reflected in Bhutan's rich culture, is constantly returned to and emphasized in commentary. Thus the establishment of the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs in 1985 "is seen as a reflection of the great importance placed upon the preservation of the country's unique and distinct religious and cultural traditions and values, expressed in the customs, manners, language, dress, arts and crafts which collectively define Bhutan's national identity" (Ministry of Planning, 1996, p.193). Equally the publication of a manual on Bhutanese Etiquette (*Driglam Namzhag*) by the National Library of Bhutan was hopeful that it "would serve as a significant foundation in the process of cultural preservation and cultural synthesis" (Publishers Forward, National Library, 1999).

One strand of analysis that could be pursued concerns the very construct of "traditional" and what is constituted as "within" or "without" that tradition. As Hobsbawm (1983) reminds us with respect to the British Monarchy, much of the ceremonial associated with it is of recent origin. Equally national flags, national anthems and even the nation state, are, as Hobsbawm would have it, "invented traditions" designed largely to "inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with

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the past” (*op. cit* p1). While it is clear that certain emblems of tradition within Bhutan are of relatively recent origin (e.g. the flag, the national anthem), there is also a strong core of traditional practices and cultural norms that stretch back into history although the use to which they have been put may have varied over time.

Much of the recent writing on Bhutan has focussed on the more formal and materially evident aspects of tradition and culture – the religious institutions and their ceremonies, the monarchy, architecture and textiles (see Aris, 1994; Myers & Bean, 1994; Schicklgruber & Pommaret). Aris’s paper of 1994 (Aris, 1994) on patterns of conflict, mediation and conciliation within Bhutan is possibly the only writing on Bhutan, which looks at patterns of social interaction, although primarily at the level of political (and military) conflict. His fascinating paper on negotiation and mediation as customary Bhutanese practices, and their embeddedness in Buddhist doctrine, theocratic, legal<sup>1</sup> and political institutions is the starting point of this paper.

### **Historical Evidence**

While most of Aris’s examples relate to political and military disputes both between Tibet and Bhutan and within Bhutan, he cites one example (*op.cit.* p14) of dispute between two rural communities of Ura in Bumthang and Ngangla Kharchung in Mongar<sup>2</sup> over traditional grazing rights within Mongar. In this long running dispute, the litigants have been in and out of court and through various processes of conciliation, all of which had failed to provide judgements that stuck. While Aris used this case to illustrate the process of mediation, what is also revealing about the dispute has been the enduring capability of the people of Ngangla Kharchung to continue to protest and dispute a court judgement that found against them, a fact indicating ‘the relative impotency of the state in settling (the) conflict’ (*op.cit* p15). Other historical evidence supports an interpretation of the limits of state power (and historically fractionated nature of the state) and the ability of rural communities to protest and to find means of doing so in a political system that has often held by outside commentators to be rigidly feudal.

Karma Ura's book *The Hero With a Thousand Eyes* (Ura, 1995) while subtitled a historical novel is in reality a thinly disguised biography of *Dasho* Shingkar Lam. Shingkar Lam was conscripted as a court servant of the second King of Bhutan in 1944, rose to the rank of Deputy Minister and Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan under the third King and finally retired in 1985 during the reign of the fourth King. His involvement in the various stages of tax reform during both the reign of the second and third Kings provide the basis of details on taxation regimes in Chapter 8 of Ura's book. This chapter, so far the only recently published source<sup>3</sup> to begin to look at Bhutan's rural economy prior to the 1950s provides evidence of aspects of social economic relations between rulers and the ruled for at least for the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The detailing of the specifics (given by nature of the tax and by household type) of the taxes (primarily in kind and in labour) overlies two broader features. The first is the multiplicity of taxation regimes that could be imposed according to the relative strength or will of the local ruler or tax collector. Indeed part of the purpose of the tax reform exercise under the 3<sup>rd</sup> King was precisely to impose a uniform taxation regime across the country (*op.cit* p139) and reduce where possible the taxes paid. As we will see later in the discussion on the records of the early meetings of the National Assembly this did not serve to remove various anomalies in the taxes paid. The second feature concerns the tax status of individual households within a given taxation regime and whether they were regarded as full paying tax households (the *threlpa* or *khep* households whose tax (and social) status could be traced back to their ancestors role as patrons<sup>4</sup> of the *Zhabdrung*), the *zurpa* households that were relatively young households that paid partial taxes and the *suma* households who had protection under one of the aristocratic families and paid lower taxes than the other two groups. In addition there were both *drab* households under the protection of religious establishments who paid no taxes and serfs who belonged to richer households.

What is revealing is the ability of households at times to contest and change their tax status by playing off one taxation centre against

another. For example Upper Kheng broke away from the *Dzongpon* of Zhemgang in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and sought protection under Wangdicholing Palace in Bumthang because of the labour burdens for *dzong* construction that were being imposed by the *Dzongpon* (Tenzin Rigden and Ugyen Pelgen, 1999 p47). Households might appeal over the head of their local lord in order to reduce tax demands, not always successfully. A number of *kashos* (written order) held by the descendants of the Chumi *Zhelngo*<sup>5</sup> illustrate these various points (see Table 1).

The first three documents illustrate some of the circumstances under which taxation might be relieved either by the immediate point of taxation or by a higher authority. Documents (a) and (c) identify religious responsibilities or donations as grounds for tax relief. Document (b) is an agreement on gaining protection from the Chumi *Zhelngo*.

**Table 1: *Kashos* held by Chumi *Zhelngo*<sup>2</sup>**

<p><b>Tax Exemptions</b></p> <p>(a) <i>Kasho</i> issued by Uygen Wangchuk (1<sup>st</sup> King) exempting Dundung households as <i>suma</i> households under the Chumi <i>Zhelngo</i>, from taxation on the wetland as the Chumi <i>Zhelngo</i> had contributed relics to Punakha Dzong after it had been burnt down. Undated</p> <p>(b) Informal agreement between households of Koshila and Dundung for the acquisition of <i>suma</i> status; each gave two <i>langdos</i> of wetland to the Chumi <i>Zhelngo</i> in exchange for protection and because of the fame of Pema Lingpa's son and the many <i>kashos</i> from the <i>Zhabdrung</i>. Undated, possibly about 300 years ago during the time of Pema Lingpa's son</p> <p>(c) An exemption for Chumi <i>Zhelngo</i> and his <i>drabs</i> from paying butter tax on account of the three <i>lhakhangs</i> that he had to maintain. Male Wood Tiger Year (1914?). Authority unknown.</p> <p><b>Maintenance / Confirmation of Taxation</b></p> <p>(a) Year of the Fire Monkey 20<sup>th</sup> Day of the 1<sup>st</sup> Month, issued by <i>Desi</i> Jigme Singay (1896?)</p> <p>Each <i>khep</i> household in Dundung must pay 20 <i>dreys</i> of paddy to the Chumi <i>Zhelngo</i>.</p> <p>(b) Iron Mouse Year (1840/1900?) (apparently to the <i>drabs</i> of Chumi <i>Zhelngo</i> who had complained of the services that they had to provide) - issued by a <i>Desi</i>?</p> <p>Chumi <i>Zhelngo</i> has been a very important seat of <i>Terton</i> Pema Lingpa's son Dawa. Therefore the people should continue to pay fodder and firewood taxes and also transport these loads to Tibet both in summer and winter. Similarly all other types of services that were offered to the <i>Zhelngo</i> are to be continued without raising any</p>
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complaints.

- (c) Iron Pig Year, (1851?) issued by Jigme Wangchuk, *Desi* and also sent to 16 households in Tsampa in Tibet

Chumi Naktsang is allowed to carry out its salt trade in Tsampa and Langtad as this was the practice over the last many decades. Therefore the people of Tsampa should not create any sort of disturbances that could affect the salt trade of the *Zhelngo*. Moreover henceforth the *Zhelngo* should be allowed to trade with the people of Lhalung, Dojong and Nyidey.

- (d) Earth Bird Year (1909) issued by the first king

People of Chumi are responsible for transporting sixteen yak loads of Chumi *Zhelngo* to Tibet twice a year. They are also obliged to carry back whatever loads the *Zhelngo* wants to transport from Tibet. This responsibility was imposed by *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyal himself and it to be continued without raising any objections.

- (e) Iron Monkey Year, (1920) issued from *Lame Gompa* and issued to the people of Upper Choekoer with regard to the transportation of Chumi *Zhelngo*'s loads to Tibet.

You have raised complaints and requested exemption. While you are exempted from the transportation of other types of loads you can never be exempted from the transportation of Chumi *Zhelngo*'s loads as there is a *kasho* from His Majesty commanding the continuation of this service to the *Zhelngo*.

The five documents listed under the Maintenance or Confirmation of Taxes indicates two aspects. First households could and did frequently raise requests (or "request exemption", a phrase that has continued in use) to be relieved of taxes and second, such requests or complaints could often be rejected. The grounds for rejection are revealing. Obligations on grounds of support for religious institutions or customary support to religious institutions were without question to be

maintained, although contributions to religious institutions could provide grounds for subsequent relief. In addition, practices that could claim tradition or custom (see (c) on the salt trade) or authority (a *kasho* from the King) could not be relieved.

If requests for the relief of taxation burdens were rejected, and the taxes were found to be intolerable, in extremis households or even whole villages could migrate. There are examples of households from central Bhutan migrated eastwards to Trashigang in order to escape taxation burdens from central and eastern Bhutan and gained *suma* status where they settled (Interview with *Dasho* Tenzin Dorji, Trashigang, September 21<sup>st</sup>. 1999). Van Driem (1992, p24) accounts for the settlement of *Monpas* in the village of Reti on the eastern slopes of the Black Mountains as an escape from Rukha on the western side of the Black mountains and corvee labour impositions of carrying tea from the south of Wangdi Phodrang during the time of the first King. The settlement of households from Kheng (Zhemgang) in Dagana during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century can also be partly accounted for by this (Adam Pain and Deki Pema, Field Notes, February 2000).

### **Evidence from the National Assembly Records**

Debate and contestation over taxation continued into a more public forum once the National Assembly was established in 1952 and Annex 1 contains a selection of resolutions related to tax adopted by the National Assembly between 1952 and 1968. While the resolutions shed little direct light on the mode of bringing such items to the agenda, the conduct of the discussion and debate and the methods and protocol of resolution, the range and specificity of the topics and the fact that these issues were brought up for discussion at all is indicative of the fact that such matters were seen to be legitimate matters for debate.

The various resolutions shed light on the range of taxes that had been historically imposed and the variability of those taxes between locations. In addition to grain taxes (see Session (S) 19, resolution (R) 35) taxes were paid in the form of salt (S17, R35; S17, R11), grass (S1,R1c), labour (S1,R1d & e), butter (S16,R13), bamboo (S19,R10),

butter containers (S19,R9), incense (S19,R18), leather bags (S1,R6), paper (S14,R8), cloth (S14,R7), wool (S20,R13), baskets and buckets (S19,R24), shingles for roofing (S22, R2) and timber (S20,R21).

A number of the debates were concerned with the resolution of what were seen to be inequities in terms of tax payment. Thus in Session 1 (R1d) efforts were made to ensure that the labour for driving the Kings cattle during transhumance was distributed equally between communities. Butter taxes (S16, R13) were reformed so that taxes were not imposed on those who had no cattle and to ensure that cash payment in lieu of butter payment was standardised (S20, R23) between Thimphu and other *dzongkhags* (districts). Double taxation on grazing land (S26, R6) was raised (although it is not stated how this was resolved).

Many of the agenda items raised were concerned with gaining a reduction in the amount of taxes to be paid. Thus the amount of grass to be paid as tax was reduced for the people of Tongsa (S1, R1c), the amount of salt tax paid by the Layaps to Punakha and Gasa was reduced (S17, R11), the people of Phobji supplied a permanent box for butter storage instead of paying annually 120 butter containers (S19, R9), the supply of bamboo mats from two communities in Wangdi was reduced from 25 to 5 (S19, R10) and taxes on *Tseri* land were halved (S28, R17).

In other cases the payment of certain taxes was exempted altogether. Thus the people of Dagana were exempted from supplying the raw material for incense (S19, R18), the paddy tax paid on land belonging to the Central Monk Body in Gasa was abolished on the grounds that the land itself had been washed away more than 50 years ago (a revealing fact which does not explain why the tax continued to be paid) and farmers had still been paying the tax (S19, R35) and the obligation to supply planks by the people of Goen Shari to Punakha *Dzong* was abolished.

Request for relief of taxation burdens were not always met. The request to substitute a lower quality cloth as tax payment by the people of Tashigang was not agreed to (S14, R7); the attempt by the



people of Gasa to be excused the supply of shingles on the basis of *kashos* held from both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> King, was not agreed to on account of objections by the people of Shar and Punakha who argued that the shingle labour tax was being raised under a different taxation system (S22, R2). The initial refusal by the Assembly to accept a request for the exemption of a potato tax by the people of Chapcha, Kheng and Samdrup Jongkhar (S25, R6) was subsequently overturned when the matter was brought back to a later assembly (S26, R5) and the request brought by a wider constituency.

This latter debate on potato tax raises a number of broader issues. Prior to the National Assembly establishment negotiation on taxation had been very much a local debate carried on between the taxpayer and the local tax authority and the visibility of excess or exempted tax was limited. Once the debate was brought to a new and larger forum the knowledge base on which taxes could be compared was of course widened but equally the chances for individual negotiation reduced because there were others to ensure that equity was maintained.

Indeed with the introduction of a monetary form of taxation from the 1960s onwards the debates on taxes reduced substantially as other State interventions, most notably the Forest Act of 1969 and the Land Act of 1978 were introduced.<sup>6</sup>

#### **The 1969 Forest Act and Debates in the National Assembly**

The Bhutan Forest Act of 1969 was the first major act to be introduced after the creation of the Thrimzhung Chhenmo (Supreme Laws) of 1957. It in effect nationalised all forestland and restricted access to or regulated use of forest products such as timber, pasture and other forest produce.<sup>7</sup> Further it reserved the right to the absolute ownership of trees, timber and other forest produce on private land (The Bhutan Forest Act 1969, Chapter III, Section 10).

From 1969 onwards it is evident from the National Assembly resolutions that the scope and restrictions of this Act were under constant debate. Thus in Session 31 (1969) resolution 2 established the rights of villagers to use lands within a radius of 2 miles of the

village for grazing (and re-debated in S32, R21). Rights of use on *sokshing* (land from which leaf litter is collected) that had been registered in individual *thrams* (land register) have been constantly contested in the National Assembly. The demands for the above article to be amended (to allow for the rights to fell timber without taxation on land registered in one's own *thram*) have been continually resisted (see S32, R18; S45, R3). Ultimately however (R48, S1) rights to the free use of timber from trees growing on registered land by the owner were gained and established through clauses 6 and 7 in Chapter III of the Land Act although the Forest Act continued to govern the access to trees on privately registered *tsamdo* (grazing land) and *sokshing*. This compromise did not stop further unsuccessful attempts to regain timber rights at a subsequent Assembly meeting (S49, R5).

Rights to other forest produce were reclaimed. Thus exemption from taxation from the use of bamboo growing on pasture land or *tseri* (land cultivated under fallowing systems) registered in the *sathram*, for feeding livestock was gained (S32, R20) although the right to levy tax on bamboo used for roofing was maintained at that time. However later the right to use bamboo for house construction and domestic purposes without taxation was also regained (S38, R6). Similarly the rights to extract tree juice for polishing and domestic purposes without taxation was regained, subject to the permit from the *Dzongda* (S32, R26).

More general dissatisfaction with the regulation of the use of pasture land on which owners paid taxes and costs by the Forest Department emerged later (S45, R4) where it was argued that the Forest Department had failed to recognize the rights of pasture owners on their own lands. The decision for an investigation to report back at the next session led to the establishment of a set of draft Rules and Regulations on pasture land which were then incorporated into the Land Act.

It is not the purpose of this paper to follow through the tangled history of debate and contention on the scope and remit of the Forest Act and access to and use of land covered both by this Act and the Land Act. The important point to be made is that even within a formal

institutional setting of the National Assembly rights to access and use of resources were continually being debated, renegotiated and contested.

The minutes of the National Assembly of course give no flavour of the debate or detail as to the positions adopted by contending interests in the discussion. Nor of course do formal agreements at this level necessarily reflect outcomes in the practice of resource use at the village level. But the National Assembly has not been the only recourse that the rural population has to renegotiate rights of use and access to resources and traditional avenues of recourse have also been maintained.

A reading of the Manual of Forest Orders (Department of Forestry, 1987) shows that direct appeal to the King could also establish (or re-establish) rights of use. Examples include the following:

- A Royal Command of 1975 to reduce by 50% the royalty on timber used for the construction of Wooden Bridges and Wooden Channels for Irrigation (Administrative Orders p.2)
- An Office Order of 1978 based on a Royal Command allowing villagers to collect bamboo and cane free of royalty for the purposes of handicraft production (Administrative Order p.16)
- A Sanction Order of 1979 allowing inhabitants of Laya, Lingshi and Lunana to collect incense free of royalty (Administrative Order p.26)
- A Sanction Order of 1980 waiving the forest royalty and sales tax on the collection and sale of lac (Administrative Order p.29)
- An Office Order of 1985 based on Royal approval for exemption of royalty on timber for house construction for the inhabitants of Lingshi Dungkhag (Administrative Order p.103)

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the 1978 land act and the negotiation that has arisen with respect to various categories of land use, inclusion of land within and outside land ceilings, taxation rates according to altitude and so forth. Suffice it to say that the National Assembly resolutions read in conjunction with the guidelines of the Ministry of Home Affairs (Procedures on the Land Registration

and Transaction System, 1998; Guidelines on the New *Sathram* Compilation, 1998) provide a similar picture of debate and negotiation over the meaning, interpretation and application of the Land Act.

### **Competing Authorities and Rights of Recourse**

Reference back to Annex 1 (and discussed above) supplies a case where different views on the scope and jurisdiction of *kashos* were debated. In Session 22 under resolution 2, the jurisdiction of *kashos* issued by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Kings and held by the public of Gasa was debated. While the *Gasaps* (people of Gasa) held that these *kashos* exempted them from the supply of shingles to Punakha Dzong, this interpretation was challenged by others on the grounds that new ground rules now governed the supply of shingles and that these superseded the application of the earlier *kashos*. The National Assembly upheld this challenge.

Elsewhere (1970) in the National Assembly the issue of different sources of authority in relation to *kashos* also emerged and was addressed:

‘It was observed that the practice of some rich people in certain *Dzongkhags* of producing *Kashos* from various dignitaries and thereby excusing themselves from *Dzong* renovation works was causing great problems to the people. As such it was decided that henceforth only those producing the *Kasho* of His Majesty the King would be exempted from such works. In this connection, His Majesty the King was pleased to issue a *Kasho* invalidating the other *Kashos* issued by various dignitaries. The Assembly endorsed the move’ (S23, R37).

Similarly it is evident from the Royal Command issued in 1984 (Manual of Forest Orders, 1987 p11) stating “that no land could be allocated by anybody except His Majesty” that prior to this date there had been various sources of authority for gaining access to land. Indeed (Interview, *Dasho* Tshewang Penjor, Paro, January 2000 - Adam Pain and Deki Pema) it appears that during the 1960 and

possibly into the 1970 during the whole process of land registration and taxation reform, district level officials primarily *gups* (elected representatives at the *geog* (block) level and *dzongdas* (district administrators) as well as central level officials had asserted rights (and thus authority) in the process of land allocation. Evidence therefore at least into the 1980s of multiple authorities with differing jurisdictions, all of which might provide room for manoeuvre for individual households.

The issuing of *kashos* is linked to a traditional right<sup>8</sup> to seek protection, assistance and relief (*kidu*) whereby individual households could seek help from both government officials and the King. Indeed the Home Minister was until 1998 known as the *Kidu Lyonpo*. The seeking of *kidu* from the King is an established and commonly exercised right and in the matter of land allocation alone, substantial areas of land was given to individual households by the present king between during his reign (Land Records Office, Ministry of Home Affairs,) a tradition and exercise of right that can be traced back to the civil rulers (*Desi*) that predate the establishment of the monarchy. *Kidu* is also sought for assistance in matters of debt, particularly with formal institutions, and domestic disaster.

### **Summary Discussion**

The emphasis of this paper in its description has been on the interactions between individual households or communities, and formal institutions in Bhutan, largely because that is where the written evidence lies. Fieldwork during the last year (Adam Pain and Deki Pema, Unpublished Field Notes) indicate that patterns of social interaction between rural households, within and between different villages as well as between community and local authority are unsurprisingly, deep in processes of negotiation and dispute. Evidence has been found of processes of renegotiation over access to common property resources of leaf litter, grazing and forest produce both between and within villages. Social networks that facilitate such interaction are dense and lengthy. Some are sufficiently formalised to have gained a recognised status, such as the *nep* system<sup>9</sup>, which is essentially a form of fictive kinship, which allows households to lay

claim or access to shelter, resources and other networks in different locations. Others, often mediated by kinship or community identity, allow households to lay claim to assistance or resources outside their immediate physical environment.

What does all this evidence of negotiation about resources amount to? The thread or patterns of negotiation that are evident from historical times to the present are a consistent representation of a distinctive pattern or custom of interaction. They are statements about rights and also about obligations. They are about cultural practices and power relations which as Berry (1993) puts it are neither separate, imitative or distortions of (as respectively structural and neo-classical economic theories would argue) economic activities but are a triad of closely interrelated dimensions of social processes.

The contract drawn between *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyal and between those who provided offerings in the 17 century (Aris, 1986) and on which the taxation system was subsequently built was of a relationship between the patrons (the term used to describe those who supported the monastic institutions) whose material support to the religious and ultimately state institutions, was reciprocated with spiritual (and in times of individual need, material as well) guidance and support. While the contract was not one from which individuals could easily withdraw, and hence the instances of migration described earlier in the paper, details could clearly be discussed or contested if local authorities at times were seen to exert or place unreasonable demands. Land however as an asset related more to social and cultural position and was rarely an asset for accumulation. Indicative of this fact is that land ownership in Bhutan remains relatively egalitarian<sup>10</sup> in terms of distribution of land ownership in contrast with other Asian countries (Ura, 1993).

But institutional settings within which negotiation has taken place have changed and influenced the substance of discussion, just as the debate has changed the institution itself. One cannot assume that negotiation about, for example, access to land and payment of taxes addresses the same substantive issues now as it did in the past. The institutional position and authority of the 3<sup>rd</sup> King was very different

from that of the 2<sup>nd</sup> King and new formal institutions such as the National Assembly came into existence in the 1950s. The National Assembly was used as a forum to negotiate and contest taxes in kind and its existence allowed a different scope to that debate than had existed previously. In turn the Forest Act of 1969 which emerged out of a modern government institution, and which probably owes much in objectives, style and content to Indian Forestry Acts was a step by government to redefine access to resources. That it was contested both within formal institutional settings and in practice is hardly surprising and is well documented and this has led to some extent to modifications. Indeed it remains one of the more contentious pieces of legislation and the mid-term review of the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan by the Planning Commission was critical of the way in which it had impinged on the livelihoods of individuals.

Equally the land act of 1979, coupled with the monetization of taxes and the gradual opening out of the economy to market forces, redefined both the social and economic nature of land as an asset. It has remained highly disputed although the nature of the disputes to do with land use and land area are different than from before, and in all probability will be subject to change in the near future.

Social networks then are a feature of Bhutanese society and unsurprisingly so, in such a small country. They permeate and fuse both the formal and informal institutions. They allow for constant transactions and manoeuvre, which are often open-ended; they are a key part of Bhutan's culture, of internal power relations and ultimately of economic activity as well.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the recent papers by Lungten Dubgyur and Tshering Wangchuk (2000) on alternative dispute resolution on legal traditions with respect to mediation

<sup>2</sup> Aris (1994) states that Ngangla Karchung is in Mongar. In fact the village is located in Jarey *Geog* in Lhuentse on the border with Mongar. It is unclear whether the disputed grazing lands are next to the village or are separate in Mongar.

<sup>3</sup> There is in fact historical material on taxation to be found in various sources including the narratives of the early British visitors to Bhutan in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century (see for example Captain Pemberton's (1939) report on Bhutan) and in the Bhutan legal code of 1729 (Aris, 1986). In addition, taxation records compiled in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century have been found (Adam Pain & Deki Pema) during the course of fieldwork and are currently being analysed.

<sup>4</sup> Interpretation of the precise meaning of *threp*, *khep*, *zurpa*, *suma* and *drabs* is complex and contextual. Originally a patron was a 'sbyin bdag' (master of offerings) a term, which carries religious meaning and implies a special relationship to that religious person (Pommaret, personal communication). It would appear that the origins of the later taxation system under the kings lies in the earlier patron relationship to the religious institutions, and although the term is still used in relation to describing the recent past (Pain & Pema, Field notes, Khangkhu, Paro) it defines a somewhat different economic relationship and at times appears to be synonymous with *trep*. Equally the term *drab* originally meant 'monks' (*grva pa*) in the Tibetan context but its meaning is different in Bhutan (Pommaret, personal communication). Fieldwork (Pain & Pema, Field notes) indicates that the economic status of *drabs* and how they saw themselves (and in relation to *threps*) varied considerably throughout the country.

<sup>5</sup> The *Chumi Zhelngo* or *Dung* (the hereditary lord/ nobleman of Chumi) lives at Prakhar in the Chumi valley in Bumthang. Prakhar was the seat of 'thugsey' Dawa Gyeltshen who was Pema Lingpa's son and his *chorten* is there. The first of this religious lineage to have the title of Prakhar *Zhelngo/Dung* was Dawa Gyeltsen's son Tenpe Nyima. The Chumi *Zhelngo*' family have been guardians of the temple and local lords since that time. We are grateful to the descendant of the Chumi *Zhelngo*, *Dasho* Kinzang Dorji who gave us access

to the *kashos* held by his family and who provided the explanations and translations of the original documents described in Table 1. (Interview, Tashi Dinkha, Trongsa, December 1999). The advice of Françoise Pommaret with respect to explanation of the *Zhelgno* lineage is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>6</sup> One might speculate that the National Assembly debates during the 1950 and 1960's reflected negotiation between rural households and the monarchy with the newly established bureaucracy playing a very minor role. In fact very few interventions by civil servants are recorded in the minutes of these meetings, although this may be accounted for as much by style of reporting as well as by the participation in debate. Subsequently as the bureaucracy established itself and began to set its own agenda, the number of parties and therefore interests to the negotiation began to increase.

<sup>7</sup> It is probable that this Act owes much to similar Indian legislation, the presence of Indian Civil Servants in the Bhutanese bureaucracy at that time and the training of Bhutanese in the Indian Forest College at Dhera Dun in Uttar Pradesh. The act clearly reflects the historical lineage of the parable between the State and Scientific Forestry (see Scott, 1998) in both its scope and intent and it is scarcely surprising that it has been so disputed.

<sup>8</sup> 'Right' not as a legal claim but an entitlement claimed on moral grounds of a shared relationship, which can be vertical (as between sovereign and subject, authority and subordinate) or horizontal (kith and kin, same village etc.).

<sup>9</sup> 'Nep' literally means 'host' and is a well-known system which existed through the Tibetan area (Françoise Pommaret, personal communication)

<sup>10</sup> Land is no doubt an asset. However it was not acquired and claimed in the accumulative sense evidenced by the fact that except for few families of high social and cultural positions (in positions to command the labour required to cultivate) who owned large tracts of land, the size of land holdings are generally equal, modest and in keeping with domestic labour availability. Indeed after the abolishment of serfdom in the 1950's richer households in Paro who lost essential farm labour, gave up land which they could not cultivate (*Dasho* Tshewang Penjor, January 2000, Interview Notes)

**Annex 1.** Selected Resolutions adopted by the National Assembly of Bhutan between 1951 and 1968 relating to taxation.

**1<sup>st</sup> Session of the National Assembly, Water Dragon Year (1952)**

1.
  - (a) Earlier the people of Haa district were required to supply 16 he-caves to the Government livestock farm at Sambekha. During the current session it was decided that the cowherds be permitted to pay an amount of Nu.45 per calf in lieu of animals.
  - (b) Although the public of Tschochen (Thimphu) possessed large areas of land, they could not bring all of them under cultivation owing to the shortage of farm hands. Because of this, it has not always been possible for the people to pay taxes in kind for all the lands possessed by them. In view of this problem, it was decided to realize tax only for the actually cultivated lands. This would also apply in equal measure to the districts of Paro and Wangdiphodrang.
  - (c) It was reported that His Majesty the King was not residing at Mangdey (Tongsa) and as such, the number of horses stationed there for use of His Majesty was reduced considerably. In view of this, it was decided that the taxes being paid in the form of grass was also to be reduced as follows:-

The Assembly resolved that the blocks of Nupa, Tangbipa and Dragtempa under Tongsa district would henceforth have to supply only half of the earlier quantities, and in case of Wangthel block, the supply is to be limited to one load of grass from each household.
  - d) While shifting the cattle belonging to His Majesty, Wangdicholing and *Lama* Gompa at Mangdey (Tongsa) and Bumthang to and from low lying areas, the number of labourers required for carrying loads and driving the cattle would be provided equally by all the concerned communities of Threlpa, Sumar and Dazur.

e) In the previous years, it was obligatory for the people to carry 280 loads for Tshongpon (Trade agent of Tongsa district). It was decided to reduce the same to 200 loads only.

6. Previously, the people of Sha (Wangdiphodrang) had to supply 59 leather bags to the store officer of Wangdi Dzong for packing of rice. Since His Majesty was pleased to exempt the collection of rice, the people of Sha requested that they be exempted from supplying leather bags unless and until it is required by the King.

#### **14<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Assembly, Iron Mouse Year (1960)**

##### *7. Matter Relating to Acceptance of Tax in the Form of Cloth (Zong) From Tashigang*

The representatives of Tashigang district proposed that tax in the form of cloth (*Chazong*) should be accepted by the government. However, it was decided to accept only *Marzong* and not *Chazong*.

##### *8. Matter Relating to the Taxation of Dagana*

The people of Dagana carried paper and rice to Punakha and Thimphu for religious offerings by way of tax. This practice should remain in force instead of introducing a cash payment system. However, since the people of Dagana had now been exempted from supplying salt and from paying entitlements to the mask dancers, taxes would be levied in cash in Dagana from this year onwards.

#### **16<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Assembly Iron Ox Year (1961)**

##### *13. Matter Relating to Taxation in Kind*

It was found that the collection of various taxes in the form of butter i.e. *Yarmar*, *Ginmar*, *Temar*, *Tshongjur*, *Bandakho-dup*, *Togmar*, *Selbom*, *Marphu*, *Tshamar* etc., irrespective of whether the concerned people owned cattle or not, had created disparities among the tax payers, and as such it was decided to discontinue the practice. In this context, the following resolutions were passed.

- No tax would be imposed on those people who did not own cattle and on cattle belonging to the government.
- The rest of the cattle, even those belonging to His Majesty, would be enlisted for taxation after conducting the necessary cattle census.
- Cows above three years of age would be taxed at 3 'sangs' per *Jatsham*, while other categories of cows and demo would be taxed at 2 sangs per *Jatsham*.
- As the previous system of collecting tax in the form of meat was abolished, it was decided to levy a sum of Nu.3 per *Jatsha* and Yak and of Nu. 2 per other category of Bulls.

**17<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Assembly, Water Tiger Year (1962)**

*11. Matter Relating to Reduction in Supply of Salt to Punakha and Gasa Dzong*

The public of Gyen, Laya, Shung Jasup supplied 130 bags of salt to Punakha Dzong and 51 bags to Gasa Dzong. This caused them great problems. Therefore, it was decided that they would be allowed to supply only half of the existing quantities.

*12. Matter Relating to Tashigang Rabdey*

The existing strength of monks at Tashigang Rabdey being only 38, numerous problems were encountered in conducting the Tshechhu and other festivals. As such, the Assembly decided that the strength of monks in Tashigang Rabdey be increased to 50 hereafter.

*13. Matter Relating to Transmigration of Cattle*

The people of Buso and Sephu who are responsible for the transmigration of His Majesty's cattle from Tongsa to Longtay in summer and for housing them in fresh cowsheds etc. had not yet been exempted from the other labour works (apart from Dudom) under Wangdiphodrang *Dzongkhag*. Therefore, it was decided that the labour provided by the people of Buso and Sephu should be adjusted against the labour to be provided for other government works under the *Dzongkhags*, as in the case of other *Dzongkhags*.

*14. Matter Relating to Wood Tax (Shingthrel) for Punakha and Wangdi Dzongs*

The public residing in the lower altitude of Wangdi were to provide rice in lieu of *Shingthrel* for the Punakha and Wangdi Dzongs, and the people residing in the high altitudes were to provide *Dey* and bamboo products in lieu of *Shingthrel*. The previous system whereby the people of both the higher and lower altitudes supplied rice and other products stood abolished, and was to be henceforth replaced by the supply of timber, dey and bamboo products under *Dudom*. This amendment would also apply to the people of Punakha district.

*22. Matter Relating to the Thimphu Dzong Shingthrel*

Some *Chimis* of Thimphu requested that *shingthrel* for the Thimphu Dzong be fixed at par with that of Wangdi. As the chimis of Gyen, Lingshi were not present, the Assembly directed them to report the matter in the next session of the National Assembly.

**19<sup>th</sup> National Assembly Meeting, Water Rabbit Year (1963)**

*9. Matter Relating to Butter Container (Sipang)*

The people of Phobji were required to supply 120 butter containers to the store officer of Wangdiphodrang Dzong annually. It was resolved that instead of the above practice, the people of La-Wogma would make a permanent box for keeping butter at Wangdiphodrang Dzong.

*10. Matter Relating to Bamboo Mats (Rithey)*

The people of Lagongsum used to supply 13 bamboo mats annually, and the people residing above Zamdong 12 bamboo mats biannually to the Store Officer, Wangdiphodrang. It was decided that henceforth only 5 bamboo mats would be jointly supplied by the above people every year.

*18. Matter Relating to the Incense Sticks of Dagana*

The people of Daga would be exempted from supplying raw materials for incense sticks as the incense sticks were being made available from the *Rabdey* of Dagana.

*20. Matter Relating to the Paddy Loads for Chari*

The Chari *Dzongpon* was entitled to 40 des of paddy from the people of Toep block. In case the people failed to reach the same to his residence, he himself came down to the village and collected an additional 20 (des) on the pretext of transportation charges. Further, he made the people of Toep/Tshochen carry his luggage to Chari without payment. Therefore, it was decided that if the people paid the additional 20 *deys*, they would not have to carry the loads; and that if they carried the loads, they would not have to pay the additional 20 *deys*.

*21. Matter Relating to the Carriage of Luggages by the People of Chapcha*

It was observed that the people of Chapcha were made responsible for the carriage of 120 luggages belonging to the officers residing in Thimphu including *Je Khenpo*. Since the motorable road had opened and government lorries were plying regularly, it was decided to exempt the people of Chapcha from the above. However, they would be required to repair the road whenever it was blocked.

*23. Matter Relating to the Supply of Foodstuff to Cowherds*

The public of Khen Gongdey used to supply foodstuff free of charge to the cowherds deputed for looking after the government livestock. It was decided that henceforth the cowherds would be required to pay for the government rate. Further, the cowherds were also required to pay transportation charges for luggages as per the tradition of the village concerned if they required labourers from the villagers.

*24. Matter Relating to the Supply of Materials to Punakha Dzong*



The public of Goen block under Punakha district used to supply 100 baskets (Tochung), 30 wooden buckets and 16 tea churners annually to Punakha Dzong. Since these items were not being properly made by the people, it was decided that the public of Goen would henceforth supply 12 wooden buckets and 6 tea churners to the lower *Dzong*, and one tea container made of good quality wood to the upper *Dzong* every four years. As it was observed that 100 baskets were not required, it was decided that only 20 would need to be supplied to the upper and lower *Dzong* annually.

*35. Matter Relating to the Land of Central Monk Body at Gasa*

The paddy field at Choishi Michen under Gasa Dzong belonging to the Monk Society was washed away by floods more than 50 years ago. However, the people tilling this land had since continued paying their share of 800 des of paddy annually. The authenticity of the fact was reported by the *Thrimpon* of Gasa Dzong. In view of this, it was decided to exempt the people from paying the above amount of paddy to the monk body.

**20<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Assembly, Wood Dragon Year (1964)**

*13. Matter Relating to Wool*

The people of Bumthang were required to supply wool to the store officer of Bumthang in excess of his legitimate needs. As such, the store officer greatly benefited from the wool. Therefore, the people of Bumthang requested the Assembly to exempt them from supplying wool to the store officer. The house resolved that the Ministry of Finance would investigate the matter.

*21. Matter Relating to the Supply of Planks*

The people of Goen Shari were required to supply 20 planks to the store officer of Punakha Dzong yearly. As the planks supplied were found to have remained unutilized for the *Dzong*, His Majesty was pleased to free the people of Goen Shari from the obligation of supplying the above planks.

*23. Matter Relating to the Cost of Butter*

It was observed that the people of Tshochens under Thimphu Dzong had been paying Nu. 3 in lieu of one sang of butter tax, whereas the people of Mongar, Punakha and Wangdiphodrang were understood to have been paying only Nu. 2 per *sang*. To introduce uniformity of taxation per sang of butter, it was decided that the price per *sang* would be Nu. 2.

*28. Matter Relating to the Exemption of Tshochay*

Because of cracked, uncultivable patches, the government land under Zomling block of Punakha Chesithang was causing a loss of 2,180 *days* of grains to the public. As such the 'Tshoche' for 2,180 *pathis* was being exempted.

**22<sup>nd</sup> Session of the National Assembly, Wood Dragon Year (1965)**

*2. Matter Relating to the Shingles for Punakha Dzong*

The public of Gasa requested that in view of the fact that they were holding *Kashos* issued by the late King Ugen Wangchuck and His Majesty the King in the Iron Horse and Earth Pig years respectively, they be exempted from the supply of shingles to Punakha Dzong. The people of Shah and Punakha pointed out that such *Kashos* had been traditionally considered valid. However, they felt that since the present works were being carried out under chunidom, the people of Gasa should supply the shingles. The Assembly agreed, noting that the above mentioned *Kashos* did not specifically exempt the people of Gasa from the obligation of supplying shingles. However, it was also clarified that they would be exempted from the supply of labour for other works connected with the Punakha Dzong on the basis of the *Kashos*.

*4. Matter Relating to Roof Drain*

It was learnt that the public of Toep, who carried wooden roof drains for Punakha Dzong, were also required to carry shingles in the interests of uniformity. However, the Assembly decided to exempt

them from the supply of shingles in view of their involvement in the supply of wooden roof drains.

**25<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Assembly, (1966)**

*6. Matter Relating to Exemption of Sales Tax on Potatoes*

The public of Chapcha, Khen and Samdrupjongkhar requested that they be exempted from sales tax on potatoes. In view of the fact the sale tax levied on potatoes sold in the domestic market was only nominal, the Assembly resolved not to accord the said exemption.

**26<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Assembly, Fire Sheep Year (1967)**

*5. Matter Relating to Exemption of Potato Taxes*

Resolution No. 6 of the 25th session turned down the public request for exemption of tax on potatoes. However, the public of Mongar, Shemgang and Chapcha again requested for a reduction in the potato tax. The house therefore, decided that the existing tax rate of Nu.5 be reduced to Nu.2 per maund.

*6. Matter Relating to the Double Taxation on Grazing Land*

Some members informed the house that the pastures of Wangling and Pelri were lying vacant. At the same time, the people of Bumthang, Mongar and Tashigang were paying taxes for the use of pastures at Wangling and Pelri, thus, as per the survey report, subjecting them to double taxation, as they were paying to the Government also. Meanwhile, the controversy over the pastures in Dung Meta and Gaylegphug was also brought to the notice of the house. In this context, the house resolved that both the matter of double taxation and the above controversy should be investigated by the Royal Advisory Council as per *sathram*.

**28<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Assembly, Earth Monkey Year (1968)**

*17. Matter Relating to the Payment of Taxes on Tseri Land*

As the shifting (*tseri*) and dry lands could not be cultivated every year, it was decided to reduce the tax on such lands from 0.75 ch to 36 ch per *langdo*.

**Annex 2: Transcription-Transliteration Table**

Chumi zhelngo Chu smad zhal ngo

Desi	sde srid
drap	grva pa
drey	bre
dzongda	rdzong bdag
dzongkhag	rdzong khag
dzongpon	dzong dpon
gup	rged po
kasho	bkha shog
kidu	skyid sdug
lhakhang	lha khang
lyonpo	blon po
monpa	mon pa
naktsang	sNgags tshang
nep	gnas po
sathram	sa khram
Zhabdrung	zhabs drung
sokshing	srog shing
suma	bsu ma
terton	gter ston
thram	khram
threlpa/khep    khral pa	
thrimzhung chenmo	khriims gzhung chen mo
thuksey	thugs sras
tsamdo	rtsam 'brog
tseri	tse ri
zurpa	zurpa

## The Politics of Bhutan: Change in Continuity

*Thierry Mathou\**

### Introduction

Although there is a certain degree of incompatibility between the Western-derived rhetoric relating to politicisation and Bhutanese practice, since the former may be irrelevant to the latter, challenges resulting from the politicisation process in Bhutan can be compared to what happened in all developing societies. As all traditional states, Bhutan has gone through two different stages in the modernisation of its polity. From the establishment of the monarchy in 1907 to the 1960's, the first challenge had been to "concentrate power necessary to produce changes in a weakly articulated and organised traditional society and economy". The second stage that consists in expanding "the power in the system to assimilate the newly mobilised and politically participant groups, in order to create a modern system"<sup>1</sup>, is still underway. Huntington's conclusion that such a process was necessarily fatal to any monarchical system lacking the western European political-cultural background has not yet been verified in Bhutan. On the contrary, the Bhutanese monarchy has been the main agent of modernisation. Since it opened to the outside world, in the early 1960s, the kingdom has adopted a unique path toward development. Promoting a distinctive approach to institutions building (polity) and governance orientations (policies), which is consistent both with tradition and modernity, has been essential to its survival.

The present paper is a tentative presentation of the normative architecture of the current Bhutanese polity. It identifies a hierarchy of principles and patterns, which have guided simultaneously the preservation of the traditional system and its adaptation to modern

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constraints. The main challenges are also described in order to assess the viability of the monarchy as the principal agent of change.

### **The Basic Principles of Bhutan's Polity**

The Bhutanese polity has been influenced by specific historical, cultural and religious factors. Its general profile can be drawn from five parameters: cultural identification, national independence, and tradition of consensus, synthesis capacity, and the role of hereditary monarchy.

### **Cultural Identification**

Building unity out of diversity has been one of the main threads of Bhutan's political history. Since its emergence as a single political entity, during the 17th century, the country had to face various periods of external aggression and internal strife. The creation of a nation-state has been dependant upon the definition of a Bhutanese identity which is closely related with the dominant *Drukpa*<sup>1</sup> culture. The credit for unifying Bhutan and introducing its first codified laws, known as *Chathrim*, goes to *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyal (1616-1651) who was instrumental in founding a new country and asserting its religious and political independence from Tibet. Among other achievements, he secured the dominant position of the *Drukpa Kagyu* school that gave the country its local name - *Drukyul*: the land of the *Drukpa* sect - and forged its religious and cultural history. Common traditions, including a dress code and distinctive rituals with Bhutanese characteristics, date back from that period. *Dzongkha*, the only language with a native tradition in Bhutan, which became the national language in 1961, was also decisive in building a sense of solidarity among the people. Eventually, the unification of Bhutan was completed when the theocratic rule was replaced by an hereditary monarchy. An oath of allegiance -*Genja*- was sworn in 1907 by the most important civil and monastic officials, along with the people's representatives, who jointly pledged their support to and appointed Ugyen Wangchuck as first

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<sup>1</sup> All italic words can be found in the *Dzongkha* Transcription-Transliteration Table and Glossary, at the end of the paper.

king of Bhutan.<sup>2</sup> Although there is "no evidence in available sources, that anything resembling an election was actually used in 1907 in the events that preceded the recognition of Ugyen Wangchuck as *Druk Gyalpo*",<sup>3</sup> "the decision to establish monarchy appeared to have been genuinely popular not only among those responsible for taking it but also with the public at large".<sup>4</sup> This episode was decisive in the nation building process. It was also a major factor of cultural identification.

As the last Mahayana kingdom, Bhutan has inherited a philosophy of life which is deep rooted in its religious traditions and institutions. Basic values like compassion, respect for life and nature, social harmony, compromise, and prevalence of individual development over material achievements have had direct impact on policy making. Achieving a "balance between spiritual and material aspects of life, between *Peljor Gongphel* (economic development) and *Gakid* (happiness and peace)"<sup>5</sup> is both a cultural imperative and a political objective. Because Bhutan is located between two giant neighbours that could threaten its independence at any moment, the concept of survival has become the geopolitical prolongation of its sense of insecurity. For that reason, cultural identification and the need to preserve what can be described as the "Bhutanese exception", both in cultural and political terms, is perceived by the regime as essential to the viability of the current system, and to the independence of the kingdom. That explains why the *Drukpa* culture is still inspiring current institutions.

### **National Independence**

Despite its strategic location, Bhutan has never been colonised, nor by the Tibetans who tried to invade it after it became a distinct entity, neither by the British who imposed their rule over the Indian subcontinent. Contrary to most developing countries, it entered the 20th century without a complex of inferiority and subservience vis-à-vis foreigners. From its point of view, national independence has had three major correlations: the autonomy of the local polity, a strong sense of national pride, and a culture of isolationism.

None of the large ideological movements that spread through the third world after the Second World War affected the kingdom. Bhutan escaped the concepts of nationalist political movements that led to India's independence and spread to Nepal and Sikkim. Socialism or liberalism is irrelevant to the Bhutanese polity, at least in its present form. Political consciousness has always been very low among the general populace. The politicisation process that had significant impact on large sections of the population in all other parts of South Asia has not mobilised Bhutanese crowds, except for Nepali Bhutanese in the southern districts. That the average Bhutanese is only poorly educated and clearly has priorities that lay outside of the political sphere has been decisive in that respect.

Bhutan has not imported foreign institutions nor political parties, even during the 1960's when the kingdom was placed under the pressure of India that played a decisive role in the modernisation process. Concerns have arisen at that time about the influence of India in the decision-making process in Bhutan. In the mid-1960's, the role of Indian officers in the kingdom caused great controversy. Many Indian officers were in charge of day-to-day operations because the Bhutanese administration lacked human resources. In 1963 the king accepted the appointment of an "Indian adviser" to assist him. However Indian influence on the administrative level never had direct impact on the polity itself.<sup>6</sup> The prominent position assumed by Dorji family members until the assassination, in 1964, of the *Lonchen*, who was the closest to a prime minister, did not alter the nature of the system as the king assumed both the role of head of state and head of the government.

As a result, the Bhutanese people have inherited a strong sense of national pride. The kingdom has been dependant on external assistance to finance its modernisation. Yet, foreign donors have respected its approach to development, so that Bhutanese have the feeling of being the masters of their own future. Bhutan has always maintained a low profile on the international scene. Preserving its sovereignty has been one of the main objectives of its foreign policy. It has never considered the guidance clause included in the treaty it signed with India in 1949, as a limitation to its independence. On the



contrary, it used its special relation with India to gain entry to the United Nations as a country, which intended to exercise its full, and sovereignty rights.

Although Bhutan was not a secluded state, as often described, isolationism has generated a tradition of self-reliance and self-organisation among local communities that developed their own regulations, unwritten laws, practices and customs. The sharing of irrigation water and grazing land, and the use of common labour for infrastructures and monasteries maintenance are part of that heritage. Because local communities were confronted with difficult geographical and climatic conditions, they had to count on their own capabilities to organise their life. Trade had an important role in traditional Bhutan. Yet, the country was not organised as a commercial hub. Its social and political structures were mostly inward looking. Once settled in their valleys, farmers had few contacts with the outside world. Therefore "maintaining the sovereignty of the kingdom through economic self-reliance" has become a national objective.<sup>7</sup>

### **Tradition of Consensus**

As noted by Michael Aris, most Bhutanese consider that "violence at best provides only an interim solution, and at worst merely provokes a cycle of further conflict".<sup>8</sup> In the political tradition of Bhutan, peace and violence<sup>9</sup> represent the two wings of government that are supposed to be held in a kind of balance in the same way the sacred and secular spheres (*Chhösi*) or the samsara and nirvana (*Sizhi khordey*) form "unitary dualisms". Because the use of violence has been channelled by religious practice through tantric rituals, peace has become a system of government used by the civil administration known as the "Peaceful" (*Zhiwey Zhung yog*).<sup>10</sup> For that reason the "tradition of mediation" that emerged under the theocracy, is still prevalent under the current polity. Confrontation is refused as a solution to conflicts both at the local and national levels. What can be described as a "customs of negotiation and contestation"<sup>11</sup> has resulted in the building of a system where consensus is a mode of government.

The way major institutions operate is consistent with that concept. The monarchy itself was created on an act of consensus: the consensus was then to pacify the country and to centralise the power. Later on, the monarchy was cautious in making modernisation acceptable by all circles of the society, including local elite families<sup>12</sup> and the monk body. The people were also associated to the modernisation process through the promotion of a land reform and the use of the *Kidu* - welfare- system. The capacity of the monarchy to become the first agent of conciliation was essential in asserting its legitimacy. The same reason that makes the king the representative of the whole people, without distinction of ethnical, religious or political origins, explains why political parties are not allowed: they are not consistent with the tradition of consensus. Simultaneously, processes of negotiation have been invented to allow contestation to be channelled through concertation procedures. The National Assembly and local development committees (*GYTs* and *DYTs*<sup>13</sup>) fulfil that role. Discussions in these bodies are often vigorous as shown by the last sessions of the National Assembly. However, major decisions are always taken on the base of consensus after long debates.<sup>14</sup> The contest in the national elections -both in the Royal Advisory Council and in the National Assembly- is more and more vigorous, and therefore controversial. However, consensus still inspires election procedures. Even the newly created Council of Ministers (*Lhengye Zhungtshog*) is complying with that tradition: "as the ministers are all new, in order to discuss among themselves and decide by consensus, a Co-ordination Committee of the Council of Ministers (*Lhengye Nyamdrel Tshogchung*) has been established".

Consensus is also transpiring from Bhutanese legal codes. "Formal litigation is costly and there is a certain stigma attached to it. A dispute can instead be put to a respected and independent figure for adjudication, either lay or clerical. Sometimes intermediaries (*Jabmi*) will liaise between that person and the parties to the conflict. More formally, a case can be put to a village headman to negotiate a compromise settlement outside the court system. Usually a contract is drawn up and formally signed by the disputants and countersigned by those who have taken part at the settlement. Therefore the process of formal litigation in a court of law represents the total failure of the

community itself to effect a settlement. Even in a court the tendency is always to reach a settlement by amicable compromise rather than by decree. District courts have inherited the powers that was formally vested in the royal secretaries and courtiers who were assigned the task of resolving dispute by delegation of the king's power".<sup>15</sup> As the final court of appeal with authority to commute sentences and grant pardon, the king is the keeper of the tradition of consensus.<sup>16</sup>

### **Synthesis Capacity**

Independence does not mean ostracism towards foreign influence. On the contrary, Bhutan has shown a capacity to assimilate innovations, which are not harmful to its traditions, and to transform them into something consistent with the local system of values, which eventually become distinctively Bhutanese. This "Bhutanisation" process, which can be described as a synthesis capacity can be observed in the strategy of development itself. Coming late to the development scene, Bhutan was eager to avoid mistakes committed elsewhere. While strongly dependant on foreign aid and expertise, it was determined to follow its own set of priorities. As a result, development has been remarkably free from seeing economic, political, social, or cultural disruption. Building a well trained but lean bureaucracy and a modern system of education, both with western input but according to Bhutanese criteria, was essential in that process.

The same type of adaptation has taken place in the legal sector. The reorganisation of the judicial system back in the late 1960's, the development of the jurisprudence later on, the enactment of decisive acts, and the recent improvement of the judicial process through the development of a standardised civil and criminal court procedure participate to the modernisation of the overall system which has been enriched by principles of western origin. At the same time, the laws of Bhutan are locally-grown. It is still the 17th century *Zhabdrung's Chathrim* and its Buddhist values that inspire the judiciary. As noted by the Chief Justice who is very keen in theorising this combination: "We must draw inspiration from the wisdom of the past. At the same time, we must face the challenges of changing times".<sup>17</sup> For that reason the creation of an independent Office of Legal Affairs has been

proposed in 1999, in order to facilitate the evolution of the justice system to meet challenges ahead.

### **Hereditary Monarchy**

Bhutan has a very atypical monarchy. Compared to other countries, the institution is rather recent, at least in its present form. Yet, there is a cultural continuity with previous systems. Kingdoms were established in Bhutan long before the country was unified in the 18th century. Some of the local rulers, especially in the East, made a decisive contribution to the emergence of the founding myths of Bhutan.<sup>18</sup> The *Druk Desis* - leaders who, from 1751 to 1907, held secular powers, at least in theory, in the semi-theocracy system known as *Chhösi* - can be compared to kings although their status in the society was slightly different. In that respect, there is a monarchical tradition in Bhutan that goes far beyond the institution itself. It explains why the hereditary monarchy has become the main source of cohesion and consistency of the current polity.

The Bhutanese monarchy identifies closely with the religious legacy, on a rather distinctive mode. Contrary to the king of Nepal, who is a manifestation of Vishnu, the king of Bhutan is a secular monarch who did not inherit the religious authority of the *Zhabdrung*. Neither is he a *Chogyäl* in the Himalayan tradition. As the ruler of the *Drukpa* society, the *Druk Gyalpo* only inherited the secular powers of the *Druk Desi*.<sup>19</sup> He does not get his primary legitimacy from his divine ascendance, although the Wangchuck dynasty has a line of ancestors that goes back to the Dungkar *Chöje* of Kurtöe and to the famous saint Pemalingpa.<sup>20</sup> For that reason, he cannot be considered as an absolute monarch "in either theoretical or legal terms",<sup>21</sup> but as a "ruler by convention" as mentioned in the Buddhist tradition.<sup>22</sup> The mode of enthronement of the dynasty reminds the model of the first king of Buddhism legend, Mahasammata - Mangpö Kurwai Gyalpo, literally the King Elevated by Many- whose legitimacy was based on popular consent.

Although secular, the Bhutanese monarchy uses various religious symbols.<sup>23</sup> The *Druk Gyalpo* is "The Precious Master of Power and

King of *Drukgyul*".<sup>24</sup> He is addressed formally by the honorific word for foot "*Zhab*" - literally "In Front of the Feet"- a religious term which was also found in *Zhabdrung*. He occupies the "golden throne" and is the only one, apart from the *Je Khenpo*, to wear the yellow scarf. Both attributes are usually associated with high *Lamas*. His crown carries the head of a raven which is a reference to the religious history of the country.<sup>25</sup> The *Driglam Namzha* or code of etiquette that includes all formal behaviours observed not only in the presence of the king but in all ceremonial occasions, has been influenced by Buddhist values.<sup>26</sup> When enthroned, the king is vested with his formal powers during a ceremony held in the *dzong* of Punakha where he "presents a ceremonial white scarf, symbolising the purity of his intentions, to a scroll-painting of the protective deity of the realm, in the presence of the embalmed remains of the founding *Zhabdrung*. In return he receives a scarf of office as if from the very hands of the country's first unifier".<sup>27</sup> The *Druk Gyalpo* is supportive of the dharma and the sangha. The Mahayana figure of the bodhisattva who refuses nirvana to alleviate the sufferings of the world is seen by Bhutanese as applying to their king.<sup>28</sup>

The king is highly revered by the people. Yet he is very close to it. His standing is rather simple and palace ceremony is minimal, although recent trends have introduced more formality.<sup>29</sup> He often tours the country to meet with local communities and organise public debates. Any one can present grievance to him. His *kidu*, or welfare, can always be requested. The "elected" basis of the monarchy and the re-introduction in 1999 of a mechanism through which the National Assembly can register a vote of confidence in the king<sup>30</sup> enhance that dimension.

The hereditary monarchy has become the key factor of the "unitary dualism" which can be described as the main characteristic of the Bhutanese polity. His legitimacy mainly relies on his capacity to preserve the balance between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism on which depends "change in continuity".

### **The Impact of these Principles on the Governance System**

Institution-building and policy orientations have been deeply influenced by the above features, as shown by the national ideology and the decision-making process.

### **Bhutan's Distinctive Institutions: the Religious Factor**

With a few changes and some significant additions, most of the structures created by the founding *Zhabdrung* have been surviving under the present system. The principle of tripartite participation involving representatives of the people, the administration, and the community of monks, which is part of consensus politics, is prevalent among most political bodies in Bhutan. The National Assembly (*Tshogdu*) which was created in 1951, consists of three categories of members: 105 are elected by the people; 35 are nominated as ex-officio representatives of the government, and 10 are elected by the clergy. The Royal Advisory Council (*Lodoi Tshogde*) has the same type of structure. It consists of nine members: six elected representatives of the people, two elected representatives of the clergy and one nominee of the government who also serves as the chairman of the council. It was created in 1965 as part of the "modernisation" of institutions. Yet, it can be seen as the revival of the old state council (*Lhungye Tsok*) that was established during the 17th century by the *Zhabdrung*, and lost its relevance after endorsing the setting up of the monarchy. The cabinet itself (*Lhengye Zhungtshog*) as per the reform of 1998 is made up of ministers elected by the National Assembly, and the members of the Royal Advisory Council. While a small body inclusive only of elected members would have resembled closely the cabinet seen in Western parliamentary governments, a larger body is typical of Bhutanese governance.

Also typical is the role of monks in the polity. "The monastic order lacked strong leadership during the transitional period" to be capable of any effective action.<sup>31</sup> The termination of the theocracy might have generated frustration within the *Drukpa* monastic establishment, which has been progressively excluded from a critical role in the country polity.<sup>32</sup> The modus vivendi achieved between the hereditary

monarchy and the *Drukpa* monastic establishment proved mutually satisfactory and non confrontational. The institution of the *Je Khenpo* has never been endangered by the hereditary monarchy. While the *Druk Gyalpo* still exercises some sort of "indirect authority over the monastic establishment",<sup>33</sup> the *Je Khenpo* is the undisputed head of the *Dratshang*.<sup>34</sup> Religion has a "modern" role in contemporary Bhutan in the sense that monks have lost their political status and autonomy. They are heavily dependent upon the government for their financial support. The representatives of the monk body, in the National Assembly,<sup>35</sup> the Royal Advisory Council, and the local committees are mainly concerned with religious matters. The monastic establishment made no obstructions to reforms, although most of them eroded their influence.<sup>36</sup> Reportedly, they have even "supported most of the economic and social reform programs".<sup>37</sup>

Yet, their political influence should not be undermined, especially under the present context. Changes affecting the Bhutanese society are a major preoccupation for the monastic establishment, whose primary concern is the preservation of cultural identity and religious values. Conservatism has gained ground during the last decade. The introduction in 1989 of a code of etiquette echoed an old demand of the monastic establishment that requested in the early 1970's "civil officials wear traditional Bhutanese dress while on duty".<sup>38</sup> The role and place of religion are emphasised by public policy as part of preservation of the cultural heritage. A Council of Ecclesiastic Affairs (*Dratshang Lhentshog*), headed by the *Je Khenpo*, has been created in 1984. Existing religious institutions are being expanded and new ones established "in fulfilment of the command of the king and the wishes of the people in order to ensure that the Dharma teachings will continue to flourish".<sup>39</sup> Monks are encouraged to play a greater civic role. Many efforts have been done to improve their understanding of development issues, in order to use their influence in the Bhutanese society to promote health or environment consciousness. The election in 1996<sup>40</sup> of a younger *Je Khenpo* helped the monastic establishment to become more dynamic. Religious ceremonies of collective blessing and prayer (*Wang-lung-thri*) which are conducted all around the country by the *Je Khenpo*, in front of thousands of devotees, are the occasion to exhort the monks to become raw models for the society.

In order to stop the decline of religious values among the young generation and to address the current shortage of monks, instruction have been given to increase their number.<sup>41</sup> Ceremonies with a high degree of symbolism are often the occasion to celebrate the founding fathers of Bhutan and to proclaim the importance of religious values.<sup>42</sup> Eventually, the *Dratshang* brings its contribution to the modernisation process by adapting some of its traditional rules as shown by the recent reform of offerings.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Path Toward Modernisation**

Although major reforms were introduced soon after the third *Druk Gyalpo's* accession to the throne in 1952, it was only during the 1960's that the modernisation process became comprehensive. During that period, external factors<sup>44</sup>, to both the south and north signalled the end of Bhutan's insulation from disruptive forces and made policy innovations necessary. The personality of the third *Druk Gyalpo* was also decisive. Jigme Dorje Wangchuck was familiar with the mechanisms of reform in India, and somewhat sympathetic to the concept of modernisation itself. He was convinced that changes had to be brought to the kingdom through a guided program of development that would encompass political, administrative, economic and social reforms. Those reforms were better adopted under non-crisis conditions so that the monarchy could keep the lead, control the whole process, and avoid disruptive effects on traditional system and national unity that could have resulted from radical changes.

The present king has followed the same path. Contrary to what happens in most monarchical polities, he has always anticipated the needs for reform, which are usually claimed by the people. The absence of a modernising elite other than his immediate entourage and the low level of political consciousness of the people are largely responsible for that situation. His decision to devolve full executive powers to an elected cabinet, and to submit himself to a vote of confidence give indications about his personal vision: "The time has now come to promote greater people's participation in the decision making process. Our country must be ensured to always have a system of government which enjoys the mandate of the people, provides clean



and efficient governance, and also has an inbuilt mechanism of checks and balances to safeguard our national interest and security".<sup>45</sup>

The timing of the reform might have been influenced by external pressure regarding the need of a "democratic" evolution in Bhutan. Yet the king has followed his own pace of modernisation. He has "observed the political systems of other countries" and does not exclude further institutional changes. The mention of "checks and balances" could be a reference to a parliamentary regime with a constitutional monarchy that could eventually be adopted in Bhutan. The implementation of such a system would require further reforms, including the introduction of party based elections. Because the current polity "cannot afford to have the divisive forces of communalism come into play in the election of the Council of Ministers", this type of reform is not on the official agenda, at least for the moment. Nevertheless the king has decided to put his own destiny in the balance through the introduction of a "mechanism for a vote of confidence in the *Druk Gyalpo*", as a testimony of his democratic ambitions.

### **The National Ideology**

Theocratic tradition prevailing before the establishment of the monarchy provided little ideological support to the new regime other than religious principles. The ruling elite has never complied with any dogmatic approach. Pragmatism and a predilection for gradualism has been its guiding principles. Political rhetoric has been little stultifying. As already noted, Bhutan does not classify itself in terms of socialist or liberal policies, although egalitarianism has occasionally appeared in public statements, including recently at the occasion of the debate on the introduction of an income tax.<sup>46</sup>

Yet, ideological considerations can be used to analyse new political behaviours. After Bhutan opened to the outside world, the official rhetoric tended to be modernist in content, due to the influence of foreign patterns, essentially coming from India, and to the requirements of development. While modernisation is still essential, the importance of conservatory policies and preservation of national heritage has been underlined. The two rhetorics have been merged

under the catchphrase of "Gross National Happiness" (GNH). "Apart from the obvious objectives of development: to increase GDP on a national level and incomes at the household level, development in Bhutan includes the achievement of less quantifiable objectives. These include ensuring the emotional well-being of the population, the preservation of Bhutan's cultural heritage and its rich and varied natural resources.<sup>47</sup>" The concept of GNH was first introduced by the king in the late 1980's but the term is "a popularisation of the distinct Bhutanese perception of the fundamental purpose of development, which can be traced throughout the period of development".<sup>48</sup> It is a "translation of a cultural and social consciousness into development priorities", in a country which perceives itself "as a kind of Mandala, a place where Man can transform their infrastructure, polity and social organisations to create Gross National Happiness".<sup>49</sup>

The tendency to describe the concept with reference to the Buddhist cosmology, is a clear evidence of its ideological content. "We are facing a genuinely non-western development approach, which considers non economic goals more important than economic ones".<sup>50</sup> Among the main features of that ideology, the importance of environmental preservation is inherited from Buddhist rhetoric. The role of welfare state, through a paternalist approach of political organisation is a prolongation of the feudal organisation that was prevailing in traditional self-sufficient local communities. This ideology works as a legitimisation factor of the monarchy. According to Leo Rose, the main reason explaining why Bhutan does not follow Huntington's model which provides evidences that "the struggle between a pro-status quo traditional elite and a pro-change modernising elite is likely to be fatal to any monarchical system lacking the western European political-cultural background",<sup>51</sup> is the absence of a "strong traditional elite bitterly opposed to programs of change". We propose to add a second factor: the promotion of Gross National Happiness as a cohesive national ideology, which works as a strong support for the regime.

### **Political Patterns**

Political patterns refer to the question of the decision-making process: Who takes the decisions in the Bhutanese political system? What has

been done to enlarge the process in order to imply greater participation of the people? To what extent does this process give indications regarding the general attitude towards modernisation?

The first question deals with the structure, the role and the status of the ruling elite. Traditional elite families, who had a long history of influence in local politics prior to 1907, contributed to the assertion of the monarchy. Family ties, economic possessions, and ancestry lineage have been decisive in drawing the main circles of power around the king. Merit has been equally important in shaping the modern elite. In the absence of political parties, and because the political status of monks has been eroded and the influence of *Chimis* mainly operates in their constituency, only the royal family and the bureaucracy qualify as active members of the ruling elite. Although the king is the centre of the polity, his immediate entourage is less present in everyday politics than it used to be thirty years ago. Some ministers have family links with the monarch, through marriage alliances, but members of the royal family are not given ministerial status "either directly or in slightly disguised forms"<sup>52</sup> as it was the case during the 70's. They have been confined in protocolar, humanitarian or cultural functions.<sup>53</sup> More significantly, the administrative power has been transferred from the Palace Secretariat to the bureaucracy.

The bureaucracy has become both the instrument of the monarchy in the development process and the incubator of the modern elite. It has been opened to a wide range of people from various social and ethnic backgrounds. The promotion through education of common people who can access to ministerial positions, had a double impact: first it provided Bhutan with a high qualified and experienced bureaucracy - while the old elite was mainly socialised in the traditional culture, a growing number of young Bhutanese has been exposed to foreign education<sup>54</sup> - second, it allowed the monarchy to keep control on the elite reproduction system, in order to stay the primary agent of modernisation, and to enlarge its support base. A great attention has been given to the modernisation of the bureaucracy itself<sup>55</sup>: foreign administrators and technicians have been progressively replaced by well trained Bhutanese personnel, new structures have been created,

co-ordination between departments has been improved, lines of responsibility have been defined, ministerial authority has been asserted. The devolution of full executive powers of governance to an elected cabinet, was a logical step in that process. While it is uncommon in most South Asian states, for bureaucrats to be appointed to ministerial positions, what has become a general practice in Bhutan since the 1960's, has been somehow institutionalised in 1998. As stated by the king<sup>56</sup>, candidates for ministerial positions "should be selected from among persons who have held senior government posts at the rank of Secretary to the Royal Government or above". Such a mechanism excludes, at least for the moment, non bureaucrat candidates. Although the merit-based selection theoretically<sup>57</sup> allows a very wide accession to the elite status, the system narrows while in function. Recently, the Royal Government has confirmed its commitment to review, rationalise and strengthen the bureaucracy. Promoting efficiency, transparency, and accountability within the administration, has become a key element for enhancing good governance.<sup>58</sup>

Assuming that consensus politics in a traditional society like Bhutan are largely elite-dominated, the scope of genuine popular participation in the decision-making process was relatively narrow until the 1960's. Because the modern elite system itself was highly centralised, the question of power sharing and participation in the decision-making process had to be addressed. Significant efforts have been made to create institutional mechanisms capable, at least in theory, to enlarge the system of power allocation, and to promote a grass-root participatory polity.

At the national level, although the *Tshogdu* is still far from a western parliament, its powers have been regularly increased, since its creation in 1953. It has gained authority in the legislative sphere that progressively superseded its function as a consultative body<sup>59</sup>. The recent decision to reintroduce the vote of confidence in the king, although symbolical, enhances the authority of the National Assembly as a representative of the people. During the last decade, matters of national importance have been regularly raised by *Chimis* who have specific concerns regarding security matters, and preservation of the Bhutanese heritage. On various occasions, they have expressed views

that differ significantly from those defended by the king and the Royal Government. Debates are open to critics and propositions. Discussions on the annual budget are becoming more and more incisive. While the king still appoints ministers, the National Assembly has been assigned the role not only to approve appointments or removals as it was the case until 1998, but also to elect ministers. The system is yet too recent to know if the National Assembly will gain a real control over the selection, Designation and revocation of top executive officers. However, this parliamentary-like evolution could result in significant changes in Bhutanese politics where personal destinies have been exclusively promoted by the Palace. In the absence of factional alignments or political associations, the emergence of a stable support base within the Assembly for long term programs and policies, is not clear. Moreover, "under the Tshogdu's haphazard electoral system, there is limited continuity of membership, and only a small proportion of the people's representatives in the Assembly have had a lengthy experience in government".<sup>60</sup> For these reasons, representatives of the people are not ready to challenge the bureaucracy's elite position. The *Tshogdu* has not yet become a channel for advancement of the people who dominate the decision-making process.

At the local level, the creation of block (*GYT*) and district (*DYT*) development committees has been a significant institutional innovation.<sup>61</sup> Basically, these elected bodies,<sup>62</sup> that are scattered all around the country, have been created to co-ordinate development activities. Used by their members as forums to articulate local needs and grievance, they fully participate to the legislative process. Points submitted to the National Assembly have first to be ratified by *GYT* and *DYT*, and genuine decentralisation is progressively taking roots. Although considerable efforts have been made to involve local communities in the decision making process, differences existing in Bhutan like in all developing countries, between rural and urban populations, educated and uneducated people, is still one of the major lines dividing the society and polity. The political consciousness of the *Chimis* and the members of the local committees is progressively increasing. Yet, they are essentially interested in local issues. For that reason, conservatism is still dominant among their circles.<sup>63</sup>

## **The Challenges Ahead**

As many changes have already occurred during the past three decades, the Bhutanese polity will be confronted to various challenges relating to the nation, the economy and the people.

### **The Nation**

As noted in a Vision Statement prepared by the Royal Government: "The main challenge facing the nation as a whole is the maintenance of our identity, sovereignty and security as a nation-state".<sup>64</sup> In that context, the Bhutanese nation is facing two major threats, internal, and external. In both cases communalism tensions are playing a major role.

Although the Northern Bhutanese culture associated with the *Drukpa* tradition prevails, the kingdom is multi-ethnic, multi-religion, and multi-lingual. In such a country, modernisation, which is inseparable from the nation-building process, needs national integration. In order to achieve that goal, which has been described by the *Druk Gyalpo* under the concept of "one people, one nation", unification of political decision is needed in order to create conditions for "modernising the minds of the people" and to lead them "into a post-ethnic consciousness".<sup>65</sup> The major risk comes from ethnic tensions which can contradict the overall process. National integration was generally considered a success in Bhutan where all minorities could enjoy their own culture within the mainstream of the Bhutanese society. During the 1980's, sections of the *Lhotshampa* (Nepali) minority started to consider that integration was detrimental to their identity and that homogenisation resulting from modernisation was leading to the exclusive domination of the *Drukpa* culture. The declaration of *Dzongkha* as the only national language, the termination of the teaching of Nepali in schools, the promulgation of a code of etiquette (*Driglam Namzha*), and the identification of illegal immigrants through census operations were assimilated to a "Bhutanisation" process whose only purpose was to favour the culturally and politically dominant group. This perception has been amplified by the difference existing between *Lhotshampa* and other ethnic communities in term of political consciousness. While politicisation

of the *Drukpa* society has always been very low, people of Nepali origin have been exposed to politics at least from the beginning of the 1950's, when the roots of ethnic dissent in Bhutan can be traced. The creation in 1952 of the Bhutan State Congress (BSC), was the first attempt of the people of Nepali origin to organise themselves. It failed because it was unable to expand its socio-political base to include people from ethnic groups other than Nepalis, and to engender a broad-based support among the Nepali Bhutanese community itself.<sup>66</sup> Yet political developments in Sikkim during the early 1970's, the permanence of Gorkha militancy in the Darjeeling Hills during the early 1980's and political upheavals in Nepal in 1989-90, contributed to a greater politicisation of the people of Nepali origin and to the exacerbation of the crisis that led to the departure of thousands of people from the southern districts of Bhutan to refugees camp in eastern Nepal. Although the problem in Southern Bhutan had been largely mitigated, the presence of a large minority which is the most recognisably disenfranchised under the hereditary monarchy <sup>67</sup> is still a challenge to the political order. Should the Royal Government accept the return of some of the people who currently live in Nepal, there is no guarantee that this population which has been influenced by Nepalese politics during the last decade, will easily reintegrate the Bhutanese "melting-pot". Solution will have to be found to prevent any ethnic confrontation that could be fatal to consensus politics.

Such a threat should be taken seriously as the kingdom is located in a region submitted to potentially disruptive changes. ULFA and Bodos militants who are rebelling against the Indian Government have established their presence in the border areas in the eastern districts. Their presence is a direct threat to Bhutan's sovereignty and security. It has already created serious problems for the commercial activities of the business sector and has been affecting the implementation of development programmes. The concern of the local population led *Chimis* to claim for rapid and concrete solution, during the last session of the National. The king has taken full responsibility for resolving the problem. A dialogue has been initiated with the ULFA, and measures have been taken in order to cut off all supplies to the camps of the militants. Should a peaceful solution not be found, the implications of a military option are uncertain. Some Bhutanese have been reported to

support the unrest. Although limited to fractional elements, such behaviours are disruptive factors in Bhutanese politics.

### **The People**

Because solidarity has always been strong in local communities, social categorisation as applied in the West, was not relevant to describe the traditional rural Bhutanese society. The situation is changing with modernisation. The fault lines found in all developing countries - between rural and urban societies, have and have not, the younger and older generations, men and women - are likely to develop in Bhutan too. Population growth, urbanisation and tertiarization of the economy have brought many changes. Individual behaviours have already been affected. New trends have emerged with either good or negative impact on the overall society. After completing their education abroad, young Bhutanese have seeded a life style steeped in consumerism and western values. Bars and video-shops have been mushrooming in urban areas. Although not yet alarming, the cases of drug abuse and thefts and the crime rate are on the rise. New criminal activities, like the desecration of *Chörten* with the intention of smuggling religious antiques enshrined in them, is a direct challenge to traditional values. The influence of religion has been eroded, especially among the younger generations. Intra-family solidarity is declining between urban and rural communities. In some cases traditional values have adapted quite well to foreign trends, in some other cases they have suffered from modernisation.<sup>68</sup> As noted by a *Chimi* during the 77th session of the National Assembly: "in a town like Thimphu where there is a congregation of all kinds of people, it is difficult to ensure that the *Driglam Namzha* and dress code are observed properly". Although considerable efforts have been done to increase understanding and knowledge of the people on the dress code, it will become more and more difficult in the long run for the younger generation to resist the attraction of western fashion, and for the government to enforce its policy. Due to the inconvenience at work of the traditional dressing, accommodations have already been accepted for certain professions and others are under consideration.<sup>69</sup>

As far as collective behaviours are concerned, the most significant evolution during the past three decades, has been the emergence of a



middle-class, whose growth will have a decisive impact on the traditional society and polity. New social needs have emerged. Although most of them have not yet been translated into political requirements, the time will come when further reforms are needed. In some cases traditional institutions have already started to adapt. The emergence of feminism is a good example. While women have traditionally been vested with the responsibilities of running the households, their political role has always been minor. Things are progressively changing as women are claiming equality with men. Now "in the *zomdus* in the villages and in *geog* meetings, women are the main participants".<sup>70</sup> They have been elected as people's representatives to the National Assembly<sup>71</sup> but there are no women in ministerial positions although boys and girls have equal access to higher education. Among the decisions taken to commemorate the Silver Jubilee anniversary of the king's coronation in June 1999, the introduction of the internet and television has been the most significant in term of adaptation of the traditional society to the modern world. However, a society with a strong oral tradition like Bhutan is very vulnerable to the negative influences of the media, as shown by the debate which has appeared in the country about the risks of external influences diluting the kingdom's cultural heritage and religious values.

Political consciousness is increasing among the average Bhutanese. As observed in other developing countries, the development of concepts like consumer rights which are progressively gaining ground in Bhutan,<sup>72</sup> could lead to further changes through lobbying and political mobilisation. As already noted: "the government has not formally banned political parties, but it is well understood by the Bhutanese elite that the formation of such organisations at this time is still discouraged. The day will probably come when political parties will not only be permitted but will indeed be an essential ingredient in a liberalised, participatory political system".<sup>73</sup> Under the current context the main risk would be to let divisive forces of communalism interfere with that process. The legalisation of ethnic based political movement alone would probably be fatal to the culture of consensus.<sup>74</sup> For that reason, the local polity will have to find fault lines adapted to its nature. The opposition between progressives and conservatives,

which is already existing though it has not generated definitive political tensions, could draw these lines.<sup>75</sup> The major challenge for the regime will be to allow this confrontation to happen in other occasions than the annual session of the National Assembly or the meetings of the local committees in a form that does not contradict consensus politics.

### **The Economy**

Despite the progress already recorded, the Bhutanese economy is still in its infancy. As noted in a government report, "it is not yet fully monetized and the nation's economic structure is still shallow and narrow",<sup>76</sup> with the main impulse coming from the state whose paternalistic approach has been the driving force behind the country's economic development. In that context private sector development is both an economic necessity and a political challenge.

Since the implementation of the Sixth five-year Plan, the Royal Government has declared that "the private sector should play an increasingly important role in fostering economic growth and as a source of employment". Privatisation is already underway and redefining the role of the state is under consideration. As Bhutan moves forward to adapt its economic structure to international competition<sup>77</sup> and promote economic growth and stability through liberalisation of its structures, new actors are joining the scene. Although the private sector is still at an early stage of development and is not yet well organised, entrepreneurs are forming a new category in the society whose role will be decisive in the coming years. The Government has already called for the private sector to take a greater share in the development process. The implementation of that policy will need careful monitoring. While the State will progressively move from a role of "provider" to the status of "enabler" of development, the question of power sharing between government, private sector, and NGOs will become more and more accurate.

As listed by Stefan Priesner,<sup>78</sup> they are obvious contradictions between market economy and Gross National Happiness. First "the current role of the state contradicts a flourishing private sector. Rather than a paternalistic state, which directly interferes in all parts of

development, private sector development calls for retreat of the state to the position of a monitoring agent backed by a transparent legal framework. Second, to promote private business effectively, the government is compelled to restructure its development priorities towards an increased centrality of economic concerns. Third, private sector development requires a reorientation of people's attitudes towards saving, consumption, work, time, and profit from traditional values to the rules of the market. Notwithstanding the state's capacity to correct market failures, these structural pressures will possibly jeopardise the non-economic objectives of Bhutanese development such as cultural and environmental preservation". Fourth, as the rapidly growing educated work force will be derived from the public sector to the private sector, the monopoly of the bureaucracy as the ruling elite will have to be reconsidered.

### **Conclusion**

The Bhutanese polity evolved from a unique historical background of the pre-1907 period. First, it was demonstrated that it was the product of a deeply imprinted sense of cultural identity which had generated the dominating paradigm of "survival and preservation". The tradition of consensus has been described as the mere prolongation of the concept of "unitary dualisms" inherited from Buddhist values, and incarnated by the hereditary monarchy. Second, it was argued that the hereditary monarchy was the major link between Bhutan's past and present. Its capacity to incarnate both tradition and modernity has given it a leading role in the defining of a national ideology, known as "Gross National Happiness" which is both a unique approach to socio-economic development and a legitimisation factor of the current polity. The cultural influence of religion on politics and the leading role of the bureaucracy have been described as decisive and sometimes contradictory factors of the general attitude towards political modernisation. Finally, it was suggested that Bhutan was facing major challenges that needed further adaptation of its polity in order to maintain the pace of "change in continuity".

Bhutan is under a growing pressure both in terms of cultural preservation and socio-economic development. Because containing

negative outside influences is more and more difficult, conciliating tradition and modernity will become even harder. There is a strong feeling in the kingdom that national values will eventually mitigate negative external factors. Even in that case, adjustments will be needed in order to preserve consensus politics. Viewed from a western perspective of political development, Bhutan is at a cross-roads. The king's objective to "promote even greater people's participation in the decision making process" is indeed essential to the viability of the "Bhutanese exception".<sup>79</sup> Apart from decisive institutional reforms which have already been engaged, the implication of the whole society is needed. Because promoting is better than preserving, Bhutan will probably have to reassess the way "national culture" is perceived by young generation and non-Buddhist communities. Enhancing the emphasis on traditional values in the education system and fostering the ancient dialogue between Buddhism and Hinduism will certainly contribute to the dynamisation of "cultural identity" which otherwise might be perceived as a purely rhetoric and restrictive concept. Inventing new consultation mechanisms which are both compatible with consensus politics and the promotion of a grass-root participatory polity will also be useful. The introduction in the Bhutanese polity of non plebiscitary referenda based on people initiative, comparable to the systems existing in Switzerland or Italy could be an interesting perspective for the monarchy to consider.<sup>80</sup> Eventually, assimilating in the ruling elite newly mobilised and potentially politically participant groups coming from the private sector and other non governmental circles, will help Bhutan enlarge the support base of its unique approach to development.

#### ***Dzongkha* Transcription - Transliteration Table and Glossary**

Bhutanese terms are followed by brackets containing their transliterated spelling according to the Wylie System

Chathrim (bca' khrim): Rules and regulations  
Chimi (sPyi mi): Member of the National Assembly (People's representative)  
Chögyal (chos rgyal): the head of the civil structure who is also the protector and the promoter of the dharma, in the Himalayan tradition  
Chöje (Chos-rje): "Lord of Religion". Ancient title used by the heads of noble families.  
Chhösi (chos srid): Dual System of Government (temporal and religious) that prevailed in Bhutan from 1650 to 1907.  
Chörten (mchod rten): Stupa, Buddhist monument  
Dorje Lupon (rDo rje slob dpon): The Second in command in the Drukpa religious hierarchy  
Dragpo tewa (drag-po'i lte-ba): Literally "the centre of violence"  
Dratshang (Grva tshang): State monastic community  
Dratshang Lhentshog (Grva tshang lHen Tshogs): Council of ecclesiastic affairs  
Driglam Namzha (sGrigs lam rnam gzha): Code of etiquette  
Druk Desi ('Brug sde srid): The "Regent of Drukyl". The head administrative officer under the Zhabdrung system (1650-1907). Called Deb Raja in most Western-language sources.  
Druk Gyalpo ('Brug rgyal po): The King of Bhutan. Title given to the Wangchuk monarchs since 1907.  
Druk Gyalpo Nadag Rinpoche (Bru rgyal-po mnga'-bdag rin-po-che): The "Precious Master of Power and King of Drukyl". Ceremonial term referring to the King of Bhutan  
Drukpa ('Brug pa): Followers of the religious school of the Drukpa Kagyu  
Drukpa Kagyu ('Brug pa bka' bgyud): A branch of Tantric Lamaism originated from Naropanchen. The official religion of Bhutan  
Drukyl ('Brug yul): Literally "Land of the Dragon", name of Bhutan in Bhutanese  
Dzong (rDzong): Fort-monastery  
Dzongkha (rDzong kha): Language of western Bhutan, now the national language  
Dzongkhag (rDzong khag): District (20 districts in Bhutan)  
Dzongkhag Yargay Tschochung (DYT) (rDzong khag yar rgyas tshogs chung): District Development Committee  
Gakid (dga' skyid): Literally "happiness and peace"

Genja (Gan rgya): Contractual document  
Geog (rGed'og): Administrative unit under a district. Block  
Geog Yargay Tschochung (GYT) (rGed'og yar rgyas tshogs chung):  
Block Development Committee  
Gup (rGed po): Elected leader of a block  
Jabmi (rGyab mi): Legal representative  
Je Khenpo (rJe mkhan po): Spiritual head of the Drukpa Kagyu  
religious school  
Kidu (sKyid sdug): Welfare System  
Kudungs (sKu gdung): Sacred relics (mummified remains of a high  
Lama).  
Kuensel: The National Paper of Bhutan: a weekly publication in  
English, Dzongkha and Nepali.  
Lhachhoe Gewa Chu (lHa chos dge ba bcu): Literally "the ten virtues"  
Lhengye Nyamdrel Tshogchung (lHen rgyas nyams grel tshogs  
chung): Co-ordination Committee of the Council of Ministers  
Lhengye Zhungtshog (lHen rgyas gzhung tshogs): Council of  
Ministers  
Lhotshampa (lHo tshams pa): Bhutanese of Nepali origin  
Lhungye Tsok (lHun rgyas tshogs): Old State Council established  
during the 17th century by the Zhabdrung  
Lodoi Tshogde (Blo gro'i tshog sde): Royal Advisory Council  
Lonchen (Blon chen): Prime Minister.  
Lyonpo: Minister  
Machen (Ma chen): The sacred relics of the Zhabdrung Ngawang  
Namgyel  
Michhoe Tsangma Chudug (Mi chos gtsang ma bcu drug): Sixteen  
Act of Social Piety  
Phampa Zhi (Pham pa bzhi): Literally "the Four Renouncements"  
Peljor gongphel (dPal 'byor gong 'phel): Economic development  
Shab (Zhabs): Literally "In Front of the Feet"  
Zhabdrung (Zhabs drung): The spiritual and temporal sovereign of  
Bhutan (1650-1907). The first Zhabdrung, Ngawang Namgyel (1594-  
1651), was a great Lama of the Drukpa Kagyu school who unified  
Bhutan in the mid-17th century under the hegemony of his school and  
gave the country its administrative system. Toward the end of his  
reign, he appointed two of his followers as his chief assistants in the  
religious and civil administration. The first was made Je Khenpo, and

the second was given the title of Druk Desi. This dual system of government was known as chhösi.

Sizhi khordey (Srid-zhil'khor-'das): The samsara and nirvana

Terton (gter ston): Treasure discoverer

Tshogdu (Tshogs 'du): National Assembly of Bhutan

Wang-lung-thri (dBang lung khrid): Ceremonies of empowerment and textual transmission

Zhiwey Zhung yog (Zhi-ba'i gzhung-g.yog): literally "government servants of peace"

Zomdu ('Dzoms 'du): Public meeting. Assembly.

Zhi-drag (Zhi drag): Peace and Violence

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington (1968). *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, , p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> The allegiance to the *Genja* of 1907 has been solemnly reaffirmed by the National Assembly during its 77th session in 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Leo E. Rose (1977). *The Politics of Bhutan*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Aris (1997). *The Raven Crown: Origins of Buddhist Monarchy in Bhutan*, London: Serindia, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> Planning Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan (1999). *Bhutan 2020, A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> After the assassination of the *Lonchen* Jigme Dorji, some members of the National Assembly expressed their concern about the risks of Indian interference in domestic affairs. When the Indian adviser, Nari Rustomji, was transferred by his government to another position in 1966, Bhutan and India mutually agreed that no successor would be appointed.

<sup>7</sup> As mentioned by *Lyonpo* Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, first Chairman of the Council of Ministers, during the 77th session of the National Assembly, the three national objectives are: "strengthening the security and sovereignty of the nation, promoting economic self-reliance through regionally balanced development, and achieving GNH". *Kuensel*, September 18, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Aris (1994). "Conflict and Conciliation in Traditional Bhutan" in *Bhutan: Perspectives on Conflict and Dissent*, Kiscadale: Asia Research Series, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> As noted by M. Aris: "the antonyms of peace and violence are joined in the stock compound term *zhi-drag* ("peace-violence"), which is used in bureaucratic language to refer to the civil and military authorities of Bhutan." (M. Aris, p. 22)

<sup>10</sup> *Zhiwey Zhung yog* "government servants of peace", by opposition to "The Violent", the army which is referred to as *Dragpo tewa*, literally "the center of violence".

<sup>11</sup> Adam Pain and Deki Pema, *Continuing Customs of Negotiation and Contestation in Bhutan*, 16th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh, September 2000.

<sup>12</sup> As noted by Leo E. Rose, *ibid.*, p. 184: " There was a de facto division of responsibilities and powers between the King and his small coterie of officials, who exercised the "national" powers - e.g. foreign relations, arbitration between the local elite in case of dispute - and the dominant local families who were broadly autonomous. There was a national tax system and judicial structure, but the local civil and religious elite collected the revenue, little of which ever got to the royal court, and served as the judiciary in the courts. This "live and let live" approach to governance worked quite effectively in maintaining internal peace with the country, in contrast to the incessant strife that had been typical of the *Zhabdrung* system. It was a highly decentralised but reasonably efficient system of governance that began to change with the ascent of the third *Druk Gyalpo* to the throne in 1952".

<sup>13</sup> *GYT* and *DYT* are *Dzongkha* acronyms for *Gewog Yargay Tshochung* and *Dzongkhag Yargay Tshochung*. *DYTs* have been established between 1976 and 1981. *GYTs* were first introduced in 1991, in order to promote further decentralisation.

<sup>14</sup> Although secret ballot has been introduced in the legislative procedure at the National Assembly in 1968, a vote is usually organised only after a general consensus has been reached through a long debate.



<sup>15</sup> Michael Ari, *Conflict and Conciliation in Traditional Bhutan*, *ibid.*, pp. 36-37

<sup>16</sup> Recently, royal pardons have been major acts of consensus politics. The decision of the King to grant pardon to 200 "anti-national" prisoners including Tek Nath Rizal, former Royal Advisory Councillor and prominent figure of the political dissent, on the occasion of the National Day in 1999, can be interpreted as an effort to restore the traditional peace and tranquillity in the southern districts.

<sup>17</sup> Bhabani Sen Gupta (1999). *Bhutan: Towards a Grass-root Participatory Polity*, Delhi: Konark Pub., p.75.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, it is the Sindhu Raja who invited the divine guru Padmashanbhava to Bumthang. What was initially an initiative meant to allow the Raja to get a cure to a fatal illness, gave the way to the first symbolic act of mediation and to the cult of Padmashanbhava who "tends to supplant even the Buddha Shakyamuni as the primary object of reverence" in Bhutan.

<sup>19</sup> The *Zhabdrung*'s religious powers have been vested in the *Je Khenpo* who has been presiding over the *dratshang* since the 18th century.

<sup>20</sup> *Tertön* Pemalingpa (a famous discoverer of sacred texts and treasures), Guru Padmasambhava, *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel, and Drukpa Kunley (the "holy madman") are the four main heroes of Bhutan.

<sup>21</sup> Leo E. Rose (1994). "The Role of the Monarchy in the Current Ethnic Conflicts in Bhutan", in *Bhutan: Perspectives on Conflict and Dissent*, Kiscadale: Asia Research Series n°.

<sup>22</sup> Hartmunt Scharfe (1989). *The State in Indian Tradition*, New York: E.J. Brill.

<sup>23</sup> These symbols are commonly used in the Tibetan tradition, both by masters of religion and secular monarchs.

<sup>24</sup> *Druk Gyalpo Ngadag Rinpoche*, see Michael Aris, *The Raven Crown*, *ibid.* , p. 146.

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<sup>25</sup> Yeshe Gönpö (Sk. Mahakala), the protector-deity of the *Drukpa* tradition appeared as a raven to the *Zhabdrung* Ngawang Namgyel, and guided him to Bhutan.

<sup>26</sup> *Driglam Namzha* has been influenced by the Dharma teachings. The Vinaya outlines 253 rules for the monks that may be summarised into *Phampa Zhi* (the Four Renouncements). For the laity, it has been condensed in the Ten Virtues (*Lhachhoe Gewa Chu*) and the Sixteen Acts of social Piety (*Michhoe Tsangma Chudug*).

<sup>27</sup> During the 77th session of the National Assembly, the king has been described as the "true manifestation of a Bodhisattava". Kuensel, September 18, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> The *Druk Gyalpo* is a secular monarch. Yet, there is a clear tendency to sacralise him. He is highly revered by the people who consider him as a true bodhisattva. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the enthronement, the National Assembly, on behalf of the people, offered him the Golden Wheel "which is the symbol of the teachings on the Four Noble Truths by the Buddha in Varanasi, that was used as an object of worship long before the images of the Buddha came to existence" (Kuensel, September 18, 1999). Although confusing for some, this symbolic offering does not mean that the teachings are proceeding from the King.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Aris, *The Raven Crown*, *ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>30</sup> About this mechanism, which was first introduced in 1969, see Thierry Mathou, *Political Reform in Bhutan: Change in a Buddhist Monarchy*, *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIX, N°. 4, July/August 1999, p. 625.

<sup>31</sup> Leo E. Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, *ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>32</sup> "In 1969, for instance, the government abolished the system under which most monastic institutions had collected rent-in-kind from cultivators of certain prescribed lands, substituting in its place a new system under which monasteries and shrines are directly subsidised by the government". Leo E. Rose, *ibid.*, p. 149. Another symbolic separation between temporal and religious spheres was the decision in the 1950's to transfer the capital to Thimphu, which is the seat of the dratshang only during the winter.

<sup>33</sup> Leo E. Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, *ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>34</sup> On his succession to the throne in 1972, the *Druk Gyalpo* Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced publicly that he recognised the authority of the Je Khenpo in the sphere of religion and had no intention of making any competing claims.

<sup>35</sup> The *Dorje Lupon*, who is considered as the Number Two man in the *Drukpa* establishment, is one of the nine representatives of the monk body in the National Assembly.

<sup>36</sup> The land reform deprived the monastic order from part of its possessions. The promotion of a modern school system ended its monopoly over education.

<sup>37</sup> Leo E. Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, *ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>38</sup> Leo E. Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, *ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> *Kuensel*, September 18, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Like his predecessor Geshe Guduen Rinchen, (1990-1996), Jigme Choedra is a reformer. He took his office in 1996, at the age of 41. Before, he was *Dorje Lupon*.

<sup>41</sup> *Kuensel*, June 12-18, 1999.

<sup>42</sup> In 1996, the sacred relics (*Kudungs*) of the *Zhabdrung* known as *Macchen*, and those of Pemalingpa have been installed in a renovated place in the utse of Punakha dzong, where the relics of Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje, the founder of the *Drukpa* school, are also kept.

<sup>43</sup> Recently, the *dratshang* took a significant decision in limiting the offerings which were made to the clergy during cremation ceremonies, in order to alleviate the pressure on the average family because the cremation was becoming the most expensive filial obligations, sometimes leaving the family in debt.

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<sup>44</sup> Among these factors the most decisive have been the decolonisation process in South Asia, the creation of the PRC, and the occupation of Tibet by Chinese troops.

<sup>45</sup> *Kuensel*, August 29, 1998.

<sup>46</sup> After intense debate throughout the country, it has been decided in 1999, to postpone the introduction of an income tax. Although it corresponded to a necessity both in fiscal and social terms, that reform was not understood by a majority of the people. Its postponement is a typical example of consensus politics.

<sup>47</sup> Royal Government of Bhutan, *Seventh Five Year Plan, Main Plan Document*, 1991, p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Stefan Priesner, 'Bhutan's Vision of Development and Its Challenges, in *Gross National Happiness: Discussions Papers*, The Center for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu, July 1999, p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> *Values and Development*, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, in *Gross National Happiness*, *ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>50</sup> Stefan Priesner, *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup> Leo E. Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, *ibid.*, p. 223

<sup>52</sup> Leo E. Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, *ibid.*, p. 218

<sup>53</sup> The queens are very involved in raising funds, promoting social development, preserving the cultural heritage, and enhancing the nation's image.

<sup>54</sup> First exclusively in India by the 1950's and the 1960's, then more and more in OECD countries like the UK, the USA, Australia or New Zealand.

<sup>55</sup> The Bhutanese civil service comprise of 13, 845 well-trained civil servants, whose status is regularly improved. Salaries have been significantly increased in 1999 under the command of the king and a pension scheme has been introduced. *Kuensel*, September 1999.

<sup>56</sup> Kuensel, August 29, 1998.

<sup>57</sup> A growing number of students sent abroad for higher education - thus qualifying for the top positions in the bureaucracy- come from the new elite families who were first exposed to foreign socialisation. In that respect the emergence of an urban bourgeoisie, will narrow the recruitment basis, so that fewer students coming from non elite families will be allowed in the system, compared to the 1960's and 1970's.

<sup>58</sup> *Enhancing Good Governance*, Royal Government of Bhutan, November 11, 1999. The major recommendations of that report concern the bifurcation of some ministries, the creation of two new agencies - an Employment Agency and an Office of Legal Affairs-, the introduction of a clear hierarchy, the establishment of a career line for civil servants, and the pervasion of corruption.

<sup>59</sup> During the 77th session of the National Assembly, the chairman of the cabinet pointed out that the "main responsibilities of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* are to implement the national Assembly resolutions, the five-year plans that are updated and revised each year, and uphold general law and order in the country".

<sup>60</sup> Leo E. Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, *ibid.*, p. 165. Introduced by eight *Dzongkhag* during the 76th session of the National Assembly, the proposal to extend the tenure of *Gup* and *Chimi* from 3 to 5 years has been rejected by a majority. Among the arguments used by opponents of that reform, it has been argued that capable persons would be re-elected so it was not necessary to increase the tenure. *Kuensel*, September 18, 1999.

<sup>61</sup> Karma Ura, 'Development and Decentralisation' in *Bhutan: Aspects of Culture and Development*, pp. 25-51.

<sup>62</sup> Today there are 572 *DYT*s members in 20 *Dzongkhag* and 2,614 *GYT*s members from 202 *geogs* in the country, elected directly by the people. *Kuensel*, September 18, 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Recently, the most intense debates at the National Assembly focused on the question of *Driglam Namzha*, the national language, and the desecration of *lhakhangs* and *chhortens*. Traditionalists have expressed their concern over the dilution of culture.

<sup>64</sup> *Bhutan 2020, A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness*. Planning Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1999, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph C. Mathew, *Ethnic Conflict in Bhutan*, New Delhi: Nirala Pub., 1999, p.22.

<sup>66</sup> The party ceased to exist in the 1960's. See Leo E. Rose, p. 112

<sup>67</sup> D.N.S. Dhakal & Christopher Straw, *Bhutan: A Movement in Exile*, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 133-4

<sup>68</sup> Françoise Pommaret, *Traditional Values, New Trends*, March 17 1998, Wien.

<sup>69</sup> *Kuensel*, September 18, 1999.

<sup>70</sup> *Kuensel*, September 18, 1999.

<sup>71</sup> Currently, there are nine women among the *Chimi*. See *Kuensel*, July 3, 1999.

<sup>72</sup> *Kuensel*, June 19, 1999.

<sup>73</sup> Leo E. Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, *ibid.*, p. 115

<sup>74</sup> Since 1989 various political organisations have been created by Nepali Bhutanese in Nepal or in India: People's Forum for Human Rights, Bhutan (PFHRB) in 1989; Bhutan People's Party (BPP) in 1990; Bhutan National Democratic Party (BNDP) in 1992; Druk National Congress (DNC) in 1992.

<sup>75</sup> The assassination of *Lonchen Jigme Palden Dorji* in 1964 was interpreted by some as a historical manifestation of that confrontation. See Mathew Joseph C, *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>76</sup> *Bhutan 2020*, *ibid.* p. 34.

<sup>77</sup> Bhutan's application to WTO has been introduced in 1999.

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<sup>78</sup> *Gross National Happiness: Bhutan's Vision of Development and Its Challenges*, *ibid.*, pp.43-44.

<sup>79</sup> This expression is referring to the highly original, and truly non-western Bhutanese model which can be described as a genuine exception in the mainstream of development approaches.

<sup>80</sup> The idea of introducing new mechanism to promote even greater participation of the people is already under consideration. In May 1999, the Council of Ministers took an interesting initiative. They sat on a panel to be questioned, with no hold barriers, by the public.