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Early Happiness Policy as a Government Mission of Bhutan: A Survey of the Bhutanese Unwritten Constitution from 1619 to 1729*

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Abstract

Modern Gross National Happiness in Bhutan contains nine domains including: standard of living, good governance, time use and balance, community vitality, cultural diversity and resilience, ecosystem diversity and resilience, health of the population, education, and psychological wellbeing which address modern policy issues. The nine domains also balance material and spiritual concerns in a holistic manner. However, were the nine domains related to happiness policy before and after Bhutan became a nation? The unwritten constitution of early Bhutan, includes Nga Chudruma of 1619, the Tsa Yig Chenmo of 1629, the first Legal Code of 1652, and updated Legal Code of 1729. Happiness policy in early Bhutan promoted a view of a wise ruler providing governmental support so citizens may become enlightened due to Mahayana Buddhism. Happiness policy in Bhutan has evolved from an early Buddhist focus to a range of factors that maintain Mahayana Buddhist traditions balanced with modern societal requirements.

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Introduction

In 1987, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck stated in an interview in the Weekend Financial Times of London that placed Gross National Happiness (GNH) above Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a primary value:

We are convinced that we must aim for contentment and happiness. Whether we take five years or 10 to raise the per capita income and increase prosperity is not going to guarantee that happiness, which includes political stability, social harmony, and the Bhutanese culture and way of life (Elliot)¹.

This pronouncement and policy by the fourth King of Bhutan has continued to be advanced to balance the growing pressures of capitalism and modernization with Bhutan's ancient Mahayana Buddhist traditions and culture (Dorji 1997; Dorji 2008b; Dorji 2004; Mathou 1999, 2001; Ramakant and Misra 1996; Rose 1977; Sinha 2001; Voice of America News 2005; Wangchuk 2004; White 1909). In this paper, happiness is defined as current satisfaction with one's entire life or a satisfaction with a fulfilling life based on altruistic actions. Some prior references in scholarly works have drawn a tentative historical policy link and connection between modern GNH and early happiness policy shortly after the creation of Bhutan in 1651 (Ura et al. 2012). This paper furthers our understanding in a comprehensive manner of early happiness policy in Bhutan from 1619 to 1729. Furthermore, we provide a comprehensive analysis of the

¹ Some scholars and observers believe the 4th King flying back from Havana, Cuba from a Non-Aligned Nation conference mentioned GNH as more important than GDP in an interview with an Indian journalist at the Bombay, India airport in 1979. However, no authoritative citation or quotation confirming this interview has been produced as of this writing. Other scholars and observers have argued that the 4th King said GNH is more important than GDP in 1972. Again, there is no definitive or authoritative direct source citation of this as of this writing.

similarities and differences of early Bhutanese legal provisions on happiness with GNH.

In Bhutan, the current method for evaluating happiness under the GNH includes a balance of the four pillars: economic growth, cultural preservation, ecological protection, and good governance with no corruption (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011b, 2011a). For the purposes of further analysis of GNH on Bhutanese society, the four pillars have been expanded into nine domains (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011b, 2011a; Thinley 2009). The nine domains include: standard of living, good governance, time use and balance, community vitality, cultural diversity and resilience, ecosystem diversity and resilience, health of the population, education, and psychological wellbeing (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011b, 2011a; Thinley 2009). The Centre for Bhutan Studies - a Bhutan-based think tank - has also recently developed 33 measures based on national public opinion surveys to assess the progress toward national wellbeing as reflected in the nine domains (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011b, 2011a; Thinley 2009). Ultimately, at the center of all development efforts under GNH is a focus on the material and spiritual welfare and wellbeing of each individual in Bhutan (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011b, 2011a). But, what are the linkages of the nine domains of modern GNH with early Bhutan happiness policy?

Methodology

In order to ascertain what the linkages are between modern GNH policies and measures and early Bhutan happiness policies we provide a context analysis of all legal provisions that directly reference happiness policies from 1619 to 1729. From 1651 to 2007 Bhutan did not have a formal and written Constitution. The first formal constitution was written in 2008 (Royal Kingdom of Bhutan 2008) From 1619 to 1729 several key legal documents comprised Bhutan's unwritten constitution. Unwritten constitution is defined as:

The customs and values, some of which are expressed in statutes, that provide the organic and fundamental law of a state or functioning as a constitution....Many aspects of an unwritten constitution are based on custom and precedent (Black's Law Dictionary).

These key legal documents are the early unwritten Constitution of Bhutan and include: Nga Chudruma of 1619, Tsa Yig Chenmo of 1629, first Bhutanese Legal Code of 1652, and a second and updated Bhutanese Legal Code of 1729 (White 1909; Dorji 1997; Tshewang; Asis 1986; Givel 2014; Dorji 2008a). The Tsa Yig Chenmo and the Nga Chudruma are two such examples (Dorji 1997; Dorji 2008a; Tshewang). The Nga Chudruma is Shabdrung's seal of victory over his rival Tsang Desi Phuntsho Namgyel and is a testimony to his right as an embodiment of Avalokiteshvara (the Buddha of Compassion in Mahayana Buddhism) to rule Bhutan as a Mahayana Buddhist kingdom (Dorji 1997; Dorji 2008a; Tshewang). The Tsa Yig Chenmo was written at the Ralung and Cheri monasteries and finalized in 1629 as a primary religious code of required monastic behaviour (White 1909; Asis 1979). The First and Second Legal Codes contain Mahayana Buddhist civil and criminal provisions.

A translation from Tibetan Chokey to English of the Tsa Yig Chenmo is in Appendix I of John Claude White's 1909 book, *Sikkim and Bhutan: Twenty-one Years on the Northeast Frontier, 1887-1908* (White 1909). Chokey to English translation of the Nga Chudrama is available in Dasho Sangay Dorji's book, *The Biography of Shabdrung Namgyal* and Lam Pema Tshewang's book, *History of Bhutan* (Dorji 2008a; Tshewang). A Chokey to English translation of the Bhutanese Legal Code of 1652 was completed in 2014. Finally, a Chokey to English translation of the Bhutanese Legal Code of 1729 is contained in Michael Aris's book, *Sources for the History of Bhutan*.

In this paper, all direct references for the unwritten Constitution of Bhutan from 1619 to 1729 related to governmental promotion of happiness will be coded. The happiness policy references will then be provided in chronological order in the Results section. A description of the meaning and context of each reference along with a summary of the overall purpose and intent of early happiness policies in Bhutan from 1619 to 1729 will then be provided. This summary will then be compared with the nine realms of GNH to determine the nature of the linkages, if any, of happiness policy from early Bhutan to 2014.

Results

The establishment of the political institutions to facilitate and steer toward the primary collective policy goal of happiness and wellbeing in Bhutan commenced in 1616 AD with the arrival of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal from Tibet (Dorji 1997; Sinha 2001; Gulati 2003; Labh 1996; Rose 1977; Zangpo 2002). Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal's arrival into Bhutan was previously prophesized by Guru Rinpoche, or Guru Padmasambhava, who brought Mahayana Buddhism to pre-Bhutan in 747 AD (Dorji 1997; Zangpo 2002; Dubey 1996; Gross National Happiness Commission 2002-2007). Guru Rinpoche arrived to pre-Bhutan from the Swat Valley in modern day Pakistan (Aris 1994; Denman and Namgyel 2008). Many in Bhutan consider the Guru Rinpoche to be a second manifestation of the Buddha (Dubey 1996). The Shabdrung was born in 1594 in the Gya clan in Tibet (Dorji 1997). The Shabdrung, who was the 18th Prince-Abbot of the Brug-pa Monastery at Ru-Lung and ranked fifth in the entire Tibetan hierarchy, ruled until 1606 (Sinha 2001; Aris 1979). He was forced into exile from Tibet in 1616, at the age of 23, due to a power struggle with a rival ruler, Tsang-pa (Sinha 2001; Aris 1979). The Shabdrung subsequently fled south of Tibet to the Himalayan region that is now modern Bhutan.

Happiness Under Buddhist Theocracy

From 1616 to 1651, the Shabdrung unified Bhutan under one governmental authority, establishing a theocratic two-fold system of government known as Chhyosi Nyidhen (Dorji 1997; Gulati 2003; Rose 1977; Sinha 2001). During this period, Mahayana Buddhism was established as the state religion (Dubey 1996). The establishment of Chhyosi Nyidhen also represented the triumph of the Drukpa, or Thunder Dragon, school of Buddhism over all rivals (Dorji 1997; Dubey 1996; Gulati 2003; Labh 1996; Rose 1977; Sinha 2001; Zangpo 2002). The five local factions of local lamas, or Buddhist teachers, who opposed the Shabdrung were eventually defeated (Aris 1994; Gross National Happiness Commission 2002-2007). Dzongs, which are large fortresses that encompassed religious, military, and civil administrative activities also contained temporal and religious administrators who governed Bhutan. The establishment of Dzongs was a key political approach by the Shabdrung to consolidate civil and religious rule amongst various local Buddhist clans (Ardussi 2009; Aris 1994; Gross National Happiness Commission 2002-2007). Dzongs also served as a key military strategy as they were built in defensive locations to successfully repel most Tibetan, and in once case Tibetan and Mongol military attacks during this period (Ardussi 2009; Aris 1994; Gross National Happiness Commission 2002-2007).

The unified twofold system of governmental rule in conjunction with the establishment of modern Bhutan occurred in 1651. Under it, the secular matters of the nation were overseen by a Druk Desi (or Deb Raja), the first of which was Umzey Tenzin (Dubey 1996; Dorji 1997). The Shabdrung, who was also a Buddhist monk, assumed spiritual leadership of Bhutan as the Je Khenpo, or Dharma Raja, until his death later that year at the Punakha Dzong (Dubey 1996).

Nga Chudruma Happiness Policies

The first important document of Bhutan's early unwritten constitution is the Nga Chudruma or 16 Is (Figure 1) of the Shabdrung written in 1619. The Nga Chudruma was issued by the Shabdrung after his military victory over Tsang Desi Phuntsho Namgyal a rival of the Drukpa school of Buddhism. The verses of the Nga Chudruma state:

I, who turn the wheel of the dual system;
I grant refuge to all;
I am the holder of the precious teachings of Palden
Drukpa;
I am conqueror of all who pretend to be Drukpas;
I am the one accomplished in poetry;
I am the source of moral aphorisms;
I, the lord whose views are limitless;
I, refute those who hold wrong views;
I, the lord of the authority of debates;
I am him before who everyone trembles;
I am the hero who conquers the host of evils;
I am him whose powers cannot be obstructed by any
sorcerer;
I, the powerful lord with mastery over speech;
I am one who excels in all sciences;
I am the emanation prophesized by illustrious
beings;
I am the one, who subdues impostors (Dorji 2008a).

Explanatory verses state the following:

Lord of Tibet, one worthy of spiritual undertakings,
A divine emanation whose deeds are vast and great,
Kunkhyen Pema Karpo had stated his reasons.
Who is second to him in the world now?

It is Ngawang, who is always victorious in every direction!

That I am thus is clear in the centre (of Nga Chudruma seal)

The sixteen I's in different directions

Encircle it, suggesting harmony with the outside world.

Four circles inside, for squares outside,

And the four conches signify the flourishing of spiritual deeds,

And subjugation of the three realms with the sound of "I".

The swords of sorcery surrounded the Wheel.

An auspicious sign of victory from all of the four directions,

And accomplishment of four kinds of spiritual undertakings.

Composed by the lion known as Ngawang,

May it resound in every direction at all times (Dorji 2008a)!

Figure 1. Nga Chudruma Wall Painting at Tango Goemba Monastery, Bhutan



Picture taken by Author on July 2, 2014

The following is an overview of the context and meaning of the 16 Is. In the first I, Shabdrung states he turns the wheel of the dual or Mahayana Buddhist civil and religious theocracy of pre-Bhutan. This can also refer to The Golden Wheel, the last of the eight auspicious symbols, which represents the Buddhist canon of the eightfold path (Beer 1999).

I grant refuge to all is one of the fundamental rites of passage for Buddhists, by which they take refuge in the Three Jewels: Buddha, Sangha, and Dharma, and thus are undoubtedly defined as Buddhist (Gethin 1998). Shabdrung is thus clearly stating that from the founding of Bhutan all of its people will have the opportunity to take refuge in the Three Jewels of Buddhism through him. Shabdrung is effectively providing shelter (spiritual and socio-political) to a people who deeply cherish it. This sense of protection is a symbol for one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism, The Parasol (Beer 1999).

I am the holder of the precious teachings of Palden Drukpa, refers to the Shabdrung as a fundamental image of the

Palden Drukpa Buddhist tradition. He is hailed as the one and only “precious jewel” of the Drukpa lineage (Dorji 2008a). Because of his background in the Drukpa lineage he is an authentic vessel for the dissemination of its teachings. The Buddha’s teachings maintain their power independently of how many people come into contact with them. In this way, the teachings themselves are a source of infinite spiritual wealth. A symbol for the holder of the teachings could then be The Treasure Vase which is always full even after countless people have “taken” the contents (Beer 1999).

I am conqueror of all who pretend to be Drukpas is congruent with the Shabdrung’s victory over rival Buddhist religious groups including Tsang Desi Phuntsho Namgyal in Tibet (Phuntsho 2013). The consequent celebration of the Shabdrung triumph is representative of The Victory Banner, another of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism (Beer 1999).

I am the one accomplished in poetry, reflects that throughout his life, Shabdrung had extraordinary abilities in arts, particularly those relating to Buddhism. He excelled in Kalacakra and Catuhpitha astrological systems, “grammar, poetry and the interconnection of words and meaning (*mtshams byor*), instantly comprehending these sciences” (Dorji 2008a). Shabdrung was exceptional from a young age in his ability to acquire skills and learn of the world around him (Phuntsho 2013).

I am the source of moral aphorisms is related to the Shabdrung being seen as the Buddha of Compassion (Avalokiteśvara), Shabdrung was and is fundamentally seen as a beacon of wisdom and moral teachings in the eyes of the Bhutanese people. The “bases of merit” in Buddhism can be divided into three major categories: generosity (*dana*), ethical conduct (*sila*), and meditation (*bhavana*) (Gethin 1998). Shabdrung Rinpoche excelled in these elements at different periods of his life: protecting life of people, going on multiple meditation retreats for extended periods of time, and the

giving of gifts across the land (Phuntsho 2013). The source of moral aphorisms must be completely pure; in this way, Shabdrung is likely referencing the third auspicious symbol, The Lotus which is the ultimate representation of purity and Enlightenment (Beer 1999).

I, the lord whose views are limitless, is indicative of Buddhism as a limitless doctrine in both scale and time; owing to the endless cycle of rebirth (samsara) and suffering, the teachings provide limitless relief to suffering souls. Shabdrung states that he is limitless, in sync with The Endless Knot, one more auspicious symbol of Buddhism. This auspicious symbol of Buddhism represents both dependent origination (samsara) and the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha, both of which are necessarily limitless representing eternal harmony (Beer 1999) .

I refute those who hold wrong views is linked with the Shabdrung as the Buddha of Compassion (Avalokitesvara), a bodhisattva who has the life quest of helping people be free of danger and suffering (Watson 1993). Shabdrung is largely hailed as Avalokitesvara and thus sought to reduce the suffering of his people. In Buddhism the causes of suffering are greed, hatred, and ignorance (Gethin 1998). Shabdrung would effectively be refuting those with wrong views by promoting Buddhism in Bhutan.

I, the lord of the authority of debates, reflects that debate plays an important part in Buddhism. In the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha prescribed a healthy dosage of debate alongside faith for spiritual advancement (Gethin 1998). Shabdrung was seen to have progressed to impossibly elevated states of mental clarity and thus be able to see true reality for himself and his people.

I am him before whom everyone trembles. Shabdrung was said to be incredibly advanced in the arts of sorcery and tantric magic, achieving tremendous feats of strength: Through meditation, he transformed his mind to one

symbolizing great anger. His movements were very violent and his speech, aggressive. His gaze was unlike anything and when he glanced, ritual banners called *chenzing* would shake. The stench of burning flesh could be smelt and everyone present at the rituals including Shabdrung's attendants experienced deep fear and astonishment (Dorji 2008a).

I am the hero who conquers the host of evils. As the founder of Bhutan he conquered the impeding dangers of invasion by means of strategic military precision. As the Buddha of Compassion he overcomes the Buddhist evils of suffering due to ignorance, attachment, and desire.

I am him whose powers cannot be obstructed by any sorcerer. Even after numerous attacks from Tibetan sorcerers sent predominantly by Tsang Desi, Shabdrung was able to survive. One such attack is said to have occurred when Shabdrung was meditating in a cave near modern-day Tango Goemba, Bhutan and sorcerers attempted to collapse boulders onto him. While the cave experienced tumultuous trembles which would have left any other person dead, Shabdrung is said to have stopped the attack with his powers and survive unscathed (Dorji 2008a).

I, the powerful lord with mastery over speech refers to Shabdrung's commitment to maintaining truth of speech—one of the five Buddhist precepts. This specific stanza is symbolic of The White Conch, one of the eight auspicious symbols, which represents the sound and sovereignty of the Buddha's teachings (Beer 1999). In this manner, Shabdrung having mastered speech has reached the ability to truly express superior sounds—those of the Buddha.

I am one who excels in all sciences. Science in this non-western context refers to an understanding of the self through Buddhist eyes, the development of advanced sorcery and magic, and perfection of military strategies to protect the homeland, all of which Shabdrung successfully achieved in this lifetime.

I am the emanation prophesied by illustrious beings. Shabdrung was prophesied to be the precious lineage-holder of the Palden Drukpa by the *Tantra of the Great Compassionate One Who Liberates All From Samsara* scripture (Dorji 2008a). The Ralung establishment viewed Shabdrung as the incarnation of Pema Karpo “based on prophecies which the late master is said to have left behind” (Phuntsho 2013; Beer 1999).

I am the one who subdues impostors relates to his continued military victories. The Shabdrung was able to hold a firm ground in his newly established land and eliminate imposters with his greatness.

The Nga Chudruma represents a declaration by the Shabdrung that he is the sole and legitimate ruler of the new emerging Drukpa and Mahayana Buddhist state later to become Bhutan in 1651. His declaration indicates he was seen to be a modern manifestation of the Buddha of Compassion. His Drukpa lineage from Tibet is not in dispute. His mastery over wisdom, Buddhist practices, and the ability to rule are uncontested. However, none of the 16 I’s represent any direct references to happiness policy.

Tsa Yig Chenmo, and Happiness Policies

The Tsa Yig Chenmo provides regulation of Buddhist religious behavior including moral requirements (White 1909). The only provision directly referencing happiness policy in the Tsa Yig Chenmo states:

Buddha says in the Sutras, “A king, if he is fond of Dharma finds the path to happiness both in this and in the future lives. The subjects will act as the ruler acts, and therefore should the ruler strive to learn Righteousness” (White 1909).

This provision is clearly a guide for a ruler in pre-Bhutan to move the entire nation toward the Buddhist path of becoming enlightened particularly by ruling in a righteous manner as is

required by Buddhist Dharma. Happiness policy in this regard is good governance to promote the collective Enlightenment of all in pre-Bhutan.

First Bhutanese Legal Code of 1652 and Happiness Policies

The first and only known version of the first legal code of the Shabdrung is located outside of the Punakha Dzong in Punakha, Bhutan (Figure 2). The code is etched in black slates and was enacted in 1652 one year after Bhutan became a nation and the Shabdrung's death. The only reference of happiness policy in the First Legal Code is located in the preamble:

It is the nature of the Buddha and his heirs to engage in various skills in activities through which the benefit and happiness of the infinite world of sentient beings is obtained.

Again, like the provision in the Tsa Yig Chenmo, this provision provides a framework and mandate for rulers in Bhutan to move the entire nation toward becoming enlightened.

Figure 2. First Legal Code of Bhutan of 1652, Outside Punakha Dzong, Bhutan



Photo Taken by Author on July 19, 2014

Second Bhutanese Legal Code of 1729 and Happiness Policies

The original legal code was updated in 1729 (Aris 2009). The second legal code was much larger in terms of length and contained several provisions related to happiness policy in Bhutan. In the Introduction it states:

In accordance with these words, in general the happiness of all beings who are as limitless as the sky's extent depends on those very places where a Buddha's teachings have spread.

Later in the Introduction the Second Legal Code instructs:

The good religious observance of humans
Form the basis of the holy dharma
The practice of the dharma together with its basis
Will gain one happiness

Toward the end of the Introduction the means to obtain happiness is revealed:

If there is no law, happiness will not come to beings. If beings do not have happiness there is no point in the Hierachs of the Brug-pa upholding doctrine of the dual system. Therefore, holding the precious doctrine in one's heart, it is necessary to enact legal observances like those of the Dharmaraja (Je Khenpo or head Monk) Srong-btsans Gampo, which establish a justice devoid of bias or partiality.

Furthermore:

The happiness of beings depends on the doctrine
And the doctrine on being who uphold it.
Thus it happened, and so for beings who uphold the doctrine there is cause for desiring an establishment of happiness in doctrine and among beings by setting up whatever is fundamental to a dual system [of legal administration] under which all beings are looked upon as an only child.

In the second part recounting the requirement of rulers to lead:

Now, as the chief actions befitting as Desrid Phyagmdzod, who is the illuminator of the doctrine of the joint system (of religious and state law) and master of the practice of legal observances, the Bhaavat has said in the sutras:

If the king becomes enamored of religion
It is the path to happiness both in this and future lives
Subjects will also act as the king acts
Therefore he must learn how to live in accord with religion.

Continuing further:

In accordance with these words, since this southern range is itself the unequalled and glorious `Brugpa Rinpoche's field of conversation, there is a definite need for not inferior designs to further the happiness of beings and of the doctrine by honouring on high the lotus feet of Mighty Ngag-gi d-Bangpo, the Jina's ruler.

Additionally:

In general the reason for instituting laws is for the very sake of the happiness of subjects in various districts. In particular, it is for the purpose of upholding, guarding, and diffusing the sangha which [abides to] the Vinaya rules of the Buddha and [forms] the basis of the doctrine.

A final section of the second part of the Second Legal Code is this passage:

When the Vinaya rules decline the land is
filled with oath-breakers.
The causes of happiness of beings to diminish.

In the final section another passage related to the role of the religious states reads: "Which is the goal of temporal circumstances, the sure result of beneficial happiness." These sections related to government promotion of happiness policies in Bhutan are all oriented toward wise and just rulers promoting policies that facilitate citizens to become enlightened.

Summary

The early mission of Bhutan, as was true in the Tsa Yig Chenmo and the First Legal Code, is for the rulers of Bhutan to rule wisely so that all subjects may reach high levels of

spiritual advancement. This objective is stated in great detail in the Second Legal Code. However, the 16 I's, do not have explicit provisions for promoting happiness.

Discussion

The unwritten early constitution of Bhutan clearly contained several references to a judicious ruler promoting the collective happiness of a nation so that all citizens of Bhutan would become Enlightened. In modern times, happiness policy in Bhutan as embodied in the GNH Index, has expanded into a holistic measure of nine domains that balances various specific material and spiritual requirements of wellbeing and happiness. Included in the nine domains are: psychological wellbeing, health, education, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2009a, 2009b, 2011a). In early Bhutan, happiness policy was congruent with the dual system of government promoting happiness through a spiritual path by grace of wise rulers. In the modern context, happiness policy has evolved to encompass a variety of other concerns such as the promotion of traditional Mahayana Buddhist values while meeting social and material needs. This evolution of modern happiness policy is reflective of modern issues facing the nation. This is a significant evolution of Bhutanese happiness policy from the early days of pre and post Bhutan when the primary concern was collective action through government policies to promote the Mahayana Buddhist goal of Spiritual Enlightenment.

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Visions, Prophecies and Leadership: Oral Accounts of the Life and Death of Tertön Drukdra Dorji

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Background: The Treasure Tradition and its Controversy

This section of the paper is based mainly on a review of literature of the subjects under consideration particularly with regard to three existing source materials which present firstly the general theory of Treasure tradition and the visionary masters and then a corroborative account of Tertön Drukdra Dorji (*gter ston 'brug sgra rdo rje*, the main subject of this paper) and his entanglement with the Bhutanese powers in existing texts.

The first modern publication that we refer to is the *Tibetan Treasure Literature*¹ in which the author, Andreas Doctor firstly puts the 'Treasure tradition' (*gter lugs*) in the context of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism to which it belong. He writes, "This tradition propagates the reverence of religious material known as 'Treasure' (*gter ma*), blessed words and objects said to originate in the enlightened intent of the Buddhas and Boddhisattvas. Broadly, the Treasures belong to a tripartite system of scriptural and oral transmission defined by the Nyingma School as the 'three great transmissions' consisting of (a) the long lineage of

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¹ Doctor, A. (2005), *Tibetan Treasure Literature. Revelation, Tradition and Accomplishment in Visionary Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers (First Indian Edition 2009), Delhi. Hereafter abbreviated as TTL.

Transmitted Precepts, (b) the short lineage of Treasure, and (c) the profound Pure Vision Teachings.² He further mentions that “Central to this process is the figure of the Treasure revealer (*gter ston*) – the person who acts as a medium for the re-emergence of this inspired material into the human world. Accordingly, beginning in the eleventh century and continuing into the present, the Nyingma School identifies a large number of Treasure revealers and grants authoritative status to their discoveries” (p. 17). Generally, the Tertön(s) are categorized under the following even though sometimes such classifications can be untenable or superfluous; three regional master incarnations (*mchog gi sprul sku gsum*), the five Kingly Tertön-s (*gter bston gyi rgyal po lngal*), the thirteen Lingpa(s) (*gling pa 13*), and the thousand Terthren(s) (*gter phran stong*).

Despite its unconditional acceptance in most cases today, there were times when this tradition was treated critically by the more conventional and conservative elements in the Buddhist community. Doctor (2005, p.33) says through an analysis of many critical works says that “The main objection of the early polemics seems to have been a concern that the Treasures were false Tibetan compositions devoid of spiritual continuity with Buddhist India.”

The earliest know critique of Treasure revelation is by the scholar and polemicist Chak Lotsawa Choje Pal (*chag lo tsa ba chos rje dpal* 1197-1265), who advanced his criticism of the Treasures as part of a general complaint against practices and scriptures circulating in Tibet that he perceived to be spurious in nature. There were other thinkers of this period, such as Jigten Gonpo (*jig rten mgon po* 1143-1217), Sakya Pandita (*sa skya pandita* 1182-1251) and possibly even Buton (*bu ston* 1290-1364) who, like Chak Lotsawa, saw it fit to issue warnings against the Treasures. Some detractors

² *Babs so chen po gsum*: (a) *ring brgyud bka' ma*, (b) *nye brgyud gter ma* (c) *zab mo dag snang*.

took the criticisms to the extremes and doubted if these so-called Terton(s) were actually men possessed by evil spirits.³

In acknowledgement of the presence of negative elements within the tradition, and in an effort weed them out, Mipham (*ju mi pham*), an insider of the tradition in his work *Gem that Clears the Waters: An Investigation of the Treasure Revealers*⁴ says that the schemes of the false revealers are practices such as inserting the names of wealthy people into the preceding prophetic inventory (*byang bu*) of the Treasure, lobbying spiritual authorities for recognition, declaring beautiful women as religious emanations especially suited for partnership, and the common Tibetan (and perhaps universal?) practice of denouncing all adversaries as deceitful demons.⁵ In the end, as with all schools, some members are more keen on extracting material gains at the cost of spiritual righteousness. An aspiring Treasure revealer would often ascend to fame only through active endorsements by the established regional powers.⁶ Therefore, manipulation of Treasures to suit particular financial, social and political ends were not uncommon.

Now, one might discount the impact that an outlandish mystic can have on a society. But in a highly spiritual and conservative society like Bhutan, such characters and anything they say could not be taken lightly. According to John Ardussi (2004), “Biography, poetry and religious history were literary genres which [the greater Tibetan world] used to expound views on government, often linking important events and leaders of the present with archetypes, both good and evil, from canonical antiquity and the early monarchy. Prophecy (including recovered *gter-ma* works and dream encounters with deceased saints) was an especially potent Tibetan cultural medium in which political criticism of contemporary rulers could be articulated as an authoritative

³ TTL, p.31.

⁴ *gter ston btag pa chu dangs nor bu zhes bya ba bzugs so//*

⁵ TTL, p.47.

⁶ TTL, p.49.

voice from the past. In the extreme were certain itinerant prophets who, like their Biblical counterparts, sometimes described their visions in voices deemed too politically strident, becoming thereby the targets of imprisonment or assassination.”

He substantiates the claim with a “prominent example [that] is the Tibetan prophet-cum-‘treasure finder’ Rong-pa *gter-ston* U-rgyan bDud-‘dul Gling-pa, who was captured and imprisoned by the Tibetan authorities’ c. 1717 after a twelve-year exile in Bhutan, for his promulgation of prophecies from Padma Sambhava critical of the Tibetan Qosot overlord Lajan Khan.⁷”

The second case that Ardussi presents is the famous *gTer-ston* and political critic from Khams named ‘*Brug-sgra rDo-rje*, who is believed to have been assassinated in Bhutan c. 1728 following his revelations of Padma Sambhava critical of the 8th Bhutanese *sDe-srid* named ‘Brug Rab-rgyas (1707-1719).⁸ The first lay Desi (head of civil administration), he was universally infamous in the writings of the monk scholars whose works are today our sources of history. But even in popular mythology, he was blamed for the death of Lama Zhang, an eminent master from Kheng Gonphu and reincarnation of Shakya Ozer of Beyul (pp: 306).⁹ However, at least one personality was more favourably disposed towards him. The otherwise outspoken Dudul Lingpa predicted the rise of the Desi and the doom of his enemy, which unfortunately even the monk scholars had to concede to a large extent. In reward, the Druk Desi did his utmost for the

⁷ Ardussi, John (2004), Formation of the State of Bhutan (‘Brug gzhung) in the 17th Century and its Tibetan Antecedents, *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Volume 11.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Phuntsho, Karma (2013), *The History of Bhutan*, Random House India. Noida, UP. Hereafter abbreviated as THB.

exiled master, and even risked a war with the mighty Tibetan government which he was to win.¹⁰

Despite his valour and pious deeds, the Druk Desi irrecoverably fell from the esteem of important personalities of the time. His running feud with Kuenga Gyeltshen (1689-1713), the supreme head of the country which ended in the death of the latter is a fact which turned all popular opinion against him. In his own time, much to his displeasure, Terton Drukdra Dorji demonized him by identifying him with an anti-Buddhist minister during Padmasambhava's time. For this bold claim, Drukdra Dorji lost his life. Kuenga Gyaltshen, according to Drukdra Dorji, was Kawa Paltseg, an eminent translator of Buddhist texts during the Early Diffusion and Druk Rabgay was Lhazang Lüpal, an evil minister supporting Bon religion in Tri Songdetsen's court. He argued that Kuenga Gyaltshen's fate would have been different if the hierarch succeeded in building a strong connection with *tertön* Dorji Drolöd, a representative of Padmasambhava. Failing this, Kuenga Gyaltshen was left open to abuse by Druk Rabgay, the incarnation of anti-Buddhist minister. Thus, their antagonism was traced back to their former lives in eighth-century Tibet.¹¹

Drukdra Dorji predicted that Druk Rabgay will 'in the beginning honour Kuenga Gyaltshen like a hat, in middle use him like clothes and in the end take him off like shoes'. The similes appropriately described Druk Rabgay's changing relationship with Kuenga Gyaltshen. The ancient Karmic enmity between them revealed by Drukdra Dorji was further reinforced by the identification of Druk Rabgay with another enemy figure, namely Nenyng Jetsun, the Nenyngpa lama who opposed Zhabdrung and was imprisoned until 1657. Nenyng Jetsun is said to have died with a fervent prayer to

¹⁰ THB, p.312. Even though the biography of Terton Drukdra Dorji could not be traced, important references about some of his most controversial claims can be found in THB from where entire passages are reproduced here with due acknowledgement.

¹¹ THB, p.313.

take rebirth as someone who could take revenge on Zhabdrung. Druk Rabgay fitted this role and was considered to be the immediate rebirth of Nenyng Jetsun. Thus, Kuenga Gyaltsen, in his last word before he was poisoned to death, explained to one of his disciples that his ordeal was a karmic retribution for the damages done to the Nenyng school by Zhabdrung and the fulfillment of malicious prayers made by Nenyng Jetsun.¹²

With the advantage of this background study, we will now proceed to the oral accounts of the life and death of Terton Drukdra Dorji. It may be mentioned here that this is particularly useful because in the oral accounts recounted hereafter, critical information are often missing or they are deliberately kept in the dark by the faithful people of the places where the Terton was universally respected as a saint and hence the people did not wish to relive the supposed preposterousness that are unmentionable for them.

The Prophecy and Persecution: Version One of the Life and Death of Terton Drukdra Dorji

Even though Terton Drukdra Dorji has been associated with some critical visions concerning modern Bhutan¹³, his biography today remains hard to locate if it was there at all. However, in many places of Chukha District where the Terton spent many years conducting religious services, oral accounts of the Terton's life is recounted to these days. According to one of these versions, while the Terton was residing at Lungchu-tse, Tsalu-na and other sacred sites (*sbas gnas*) conducting beneficial activities for the sentient beings, a vicious rumour spread that he was destined to retrieve a Treasure from Paro Chumophug called *gnam lcags 'o ma'i ral gri*.

¹² THB, pp. 313-314.

¹³ Prophecy regarding the birth of Fourth King at Kazhi 'omai Drong, present day Dechencholing.

Getting wind of the persistent rumour, the reigning 8th Desi, Druk Rabgye (1707-1719)¹⁴ called the Terton and asked if it was true that such a Treasure was destined for him to which he answered that it was indeed the case. The Desi then consulted his omniscient in-house priest who said that should the Treasure be retrieved, then the days are numbered for the two of them¹⁵ to see the white clouds and drink the chilled water.¹⁶ He reasoned that in their previous lives, they were not on good terms with Zhabrung Rinpoche and so resorted to malignant dedication against him because of which when they were reborn, they were well placed to do harm to his state.

The Sungkhorb further submitted that since the Treasure had the potential to naturally eliminate malignant beings, they should contrive against the possible retrieval of the Treasure. He pointed to the fact that in the Nyingma tradition, for a being to fully realize his potential partner, he needs an appropriate consort. The most appropriate consort in this regard was a lady with beard called Khasa Bjeru Zhoem from Paro Nap Khasa. However, in place of this lady, the Desi by force made the Terton to establish relation with his own maid who had signs of all nine evils from Wang Khasa and the two of them to retrieve the Treasure. Upon arrival at Chumophug, the inauspicious union led to all the Treasures vanishing into thin air. But hidden from the perception of all people present, three relics (*'phel gdung*) of the Buddha presented themselves into the palms of the Terton.

¹⁴ According to *The History of Bhutan* by Dr. Karma Phuntsho, Terton Drukdra Dorji demonized Druk Rabgye by identifying him as Lhazang Lupal, an evil minister in Thri Songdetsen's court and also predicted that Druk Rabgye will 'in the beginning honour Kuenga Gyaltshen like hat, in middle use him like clothes and in the end take him off like shoes'. For this bold claim, Drukdra Dorji lost his life.

¹⁵ *blam dpon gyog gyis//*

¹⁶ *sprin dkar po blta ni dang chu 'kholm 'thung ni//*

On his return, the Tertön reached Paro Dhop Shari where he instructed the leading family¹⁷ there to mould the image of either a Buddha or Guru Rinpoche in which the relics should be enshrined in the offering bowl. At some future time, the relics will proliferate and emerge via the nose. Upon hearing that such a statue had been made, some evil minded people vandalized it in the hope of extracting the relics. They were unsuccessful in their design and claimed that this was false. Upon inspection later, it was found that the relics had in fact moved till the neck of the statue.

Thus, fearing the exposure of more critical facts which could threaten their position as Desi and priest, they made an arbitrary decision to exile the Tertön who subsequently was made to go to the southern borderlands where it was believed his impact would be negated by the sheer remoteness of the place. On route to his destination, he first reached the place that is nowadays called Damchu where the people from Chapcha and Lobneykha were raising their horses in a serene meadow. The people could not however reside in the place as there was no clean water source. To this predicament, the Tertön informed to the delight of the people that there was a Karmic relation between him and the people there from their past lives. So, he will create a sacred water source while they should arrange for ration. This arrangement was subsequently fulfilled by both parties thus heralding an auspicious relation which was to last to this day.

Following the traditional route, the Tertön next arrived at Tsimasham where he practiced Abidharma (*mngon pa*) for three months leaving behind his bodily imprints. Moreover, in a nearby place, he left his footprints as well as that of his mount and created sacred water source because of which the

¹⁷ From the group of five Lama-s (*blam kha lnga*) who revolted against Zhabdrung Rinpoche. The decedents of the leader of the Lhomon Kathogpa, Yeshey Bumpa (1254-1311) is called Paro Dhop Shari Choje (*spa ro rdop chos rje*) and Shala Drangkhu Khoche (*sha la sbrang khu kho che*).

place became auspicious and today the Dzong of Chukha is located in this place.

Subsequently, the Tertön arrived at the place where now the dam of the Chukha Hydro Power Project is located. Even though the people say that the stone-pile the height of a three-storied building is called Dho Jangchub (*Awakening Stone*), it is actually the Bumpai Ney (*Hundred Thousand Secret Site*) where it is prophesized that a hundred-thousand monks will assemble in the future. The Tertön then visited the waterfall resembling water offering that is just opposite the site of Bumpai Ney and retrieved Treasures thus turning the site into a sacred grove for the faithful. He also left imprints of his foot as well as that of his horse apart from creating sacred water source. Then just before he reached Gedu, he left the imprint of his mount in a place called Lachugang. To the pleasant surprise of the construction workers who tried fruitlessly to dislodge the boulder bearing the imprint during the laying of the national highway along that stretch, the boulder stood firm despite the use of rock explosives. Therefore, the road was made around the boulder and today travelers can see the unscathed imprints for themselves.

After performing these miraculous feats in various places along the highway, the Tertön reached a place called Labarma in Bongo Gewog where he meditated in a cave on the Troetroema cliff where he again founded a natural sacred spring source. Following the traditional path, he then reached the border area in a place called Passakha.

According to the accounts of the people, the reason why the Tertön had to go to this place was because this was an outlying area away from the purview of the government at the centre and thus it was a safe haven for those who escaped the heavy tax burden of the state or fugitive figures like the Tertön himself. It was the auspicious fruition of Karma which led the Tertön to the sacred site of Lhamo Ekajati called Aum

Kangchigmai Ney where he spent years on end practicing and propagating the Dharma.

Later the Terton made the determination to return to the Centre to which Aum Kangchim raised objection saying that obstacles to his life could result from this adventure. However, the Terton was adamant at which point, Aum Kangchim said that even she was a tenth bhumi Bodhisattva¹⁸ and her objections cannot be dismissed thus. She took many wrathful forms to get the Terton to consent, but instead the Terton miraculously created ritual object (*dmar gtor*) in negation of her powers. The sacred stone which we can still see is believed to be the remnant of this object.

In fulfillment of his destiny, the Terton made the fatal return journey during which Lhamo Ekajati accompanied him till the village of Agay Lakha in the guise of his riding horse. The footprints of the Terton and the Mount along with the marks made by his staff can be clearly seen on the sacred stone in this village. As predicted by Lhamo Ekajati, misfortunes accrued to the Terton's life force as he was confronted with two assassins from the village of Bjabchu at the cliff of Troetroema. However, all known weapons to mankind could not inflict harm on the Terton, and while the assassins were pondering, the Terton who through his visions knew that his time was now at its end, instructed the assailants to try the famous method of bloodless death in the Himalayas by way of choking. Saying thus, the Terton gave his belt to the two men who used it to stifle the Terton and then stuff silk scarves down his throat thus assassinating the saint in water pig year of 1713. Thus the cliff which was formerly called Troetroema was in grief called Trongtrongma (*bkrongs, an honorific word for assassination*).

After the regretful passing away of the Terton was conveyed to the Tsamdra Trulku Je Ngawang Drub, he sent his disciples to receive the earthly remains (*sku gdung*) of the Terton from

¹⁸ *sa bchu thob pa'i byang chub sems pa//*

the cliff. On the first day of the journey, the body was received at Tsimasham where the BOC station is located today. The spot is said to be strangely barren as if burnt but due to development activities, this cannot be attested any longer. On the second leg of the journey, the bodily remains were received at a stone slab near the Chabcha Dzong.

The next day, preparations were made to receive the remains in Tshamdrag. However, this could not be done as the body showed sign that its final resting point was at that particular place. Therefore, presided over by the Tsamdrag Trulku, it was decided that the Tertön was to be cremated near the Chabcha Dzong. It was then that the body lent itself easily to be laid for the final rites. After the cremation, a strong gust of wind took all the ashes (*spur thal*) upwards to the heaven at which point the Tsamdrag Trulku begged for some residue to be left for the benefit of the sentient beings and managed to secure a handful. With the relics thus secured and the Tertön's own saintly clothes (*bla chas*), a reliquary stupa was built at the location as an object of faith which is believed to fulfill all enlightened wishes. This account of the passing away of the Tertön to the realm of no bounds is the first of two versions of the life and death of Tertön Drukdra Dorji as narrated by the elders.

An Outlandish Master, Exile and Death: Version Two of the Life and Death of Tertön Drukdra Dorji

According to the second version of the oral account of Tertön Drukdra Dorji, in the medieval days, Bhutan was divided by the factional self-interests of the Desi and regional Penlop-s (*dpon slob*). Around that time, Tertön Drukdra Dorji was residing at Lungchutse above the Dochula mountain pass. As the pass roughly forms a geographical division between the west and east of the country, warlords residing on one side of the pass harboured suspicions that the Tertön was aiding the warlords of the other side and vice versa. This tense situation came to a head when in a heated altercation; the Tertön stabbed the Changangkha Lam on his ribs with his hand-held ceremonial dagger. For this assault, the Tertön was

incarcerated and sent to Chabcha Dzong where the Penlop who was from Dokhachu Goenpa was a deeply pious man.

Even though the Terton was technically a prisoner, the Penlop treated him with great reverence, offering him a place of honour in his personal altar and entertaining him with special foods and drinks at night even though during the day time, the Terton had to be lodged in a cell below the central tower (*dbu tse*) of the Dzong. This secret arrangement was soon leaked to some evil-minded people who reported the whole affair to the government which immediately transferred the Penlop to the remote borderland with a demotion as some sort of border minder (*sa srung pa*). The Terton was recalled to Paro where he was unceremoniously bundled in a leather rucksack and cast away in the river. Upon the exposure of the lapses on the part of the Penlop who served the Terton disregarding the higher order, the Terton assured the Penlop that he should feel secure even in his new posting as Aum Kangchim who was his secret consort would look after his welfare.

As the Terton was destined to live longer for the benefit of sentient beings, fortune favoured him. An elderly fisherman and his younger friend were at this time setting fish traps in a ravine river called Changchang Yarlokma when the rucksack got struck in the trap of the younger man to his utter dismay. He cursed his luck for landing a useless catch and was about to set it afloat again when the elder man offered to exchange his fishes for the sack. However, when they opened load, a corpse appeared inside because of which they were about to cast it away again. However, to their relief, the Terton introduced himself and instructed the two men not to do him harm. In appreciation of the instant change in the behaviour of the two men, the Terton said that all the negative merits they earned so far from their debased occupation will be absolved with his rescue in their hand. The two men thus returned home as changed men while the Terton roamed the jungle in search of food and shelter. The place was named Beyul Kinzang (*Auspicious Secret Place*). As summer

approached, the heat became overwhelming and the Terton moved upwards till he reached the confluence of Thimphu chu (river) which swirled from the right and the Tshechu Lum chu moved from the left and came upon a beautiful mini-island like the location of the Punakha which he named Gawaithang (*Happy Plain*). Then the Terton continued to move till he reached the Kekema village from Arugang where he asked the people what the name of the place was. The people answered that the village was called Kekema on which the Terton said that a more suitable name should be given to the place and thus named it Phatshuma.

After Phatshuma, the Terton headed towards Bongo in the guise of a lay priest, but on the way, he suffered extreme fatigue and hunger. However, a group of cow herders saw his plight and offered boiled milk and nourishment because of which the Terton rejuvenated and again asked for the name of the place to which the herders replied that it was Patalakhu. The Terton said that a more suitable name for the place would be Sonamthang (Meritorious Plain) as the people there accrued great merit by hosting him. Today it is believed that even the poorest household in this place has a few head of cattle because of the Terton's blessings. Just before the Terton reached the village of Bongo, he turned to have a last glance at Pasakha. The spot from where he did so is today called Semdang-gang as he experienced a feeling of clarity there. Then upon reaching the village that is today Bongo, the Terton said that the village is located on the head of the treasure trove of Namsey (*Vaishravana*) and thus named it Bongo (*bang mgo*). From Bongo, the Terton reached the place that is called Jungley today. The name is an onomatopoeic corruption of the name given by the Terton to the place which he called Joen-ley after the deities there welcomed him with greetings. While the Terton was in meditation at this place and contemplating building a bridge to connect the two deep valleys of Bongo and Miritsemo, some people who harboured ill-feelings for the Terton relayed reports of the Terton's escape and his sojourn in this place.

Upon getting this intelligence, the Desi issued edict that were relayed from one village to another by designated errands in these places.¹⁹ The message was that whichever person was successful in eliminating the Terton will not only see his tax obligations²⁰ to the government pardoned, but by virtue, his whole village will be written off as well. When this incentive-laden message reached Jabchu Mepisa, two misguided men thought that now their whole village can get rid of taxes owed to the government for generations to come and thus decided to take on the challenge. They departed from their village with this evil plot and upon reaching Miritsemo, another accomplice called Ap Takchung joined them who said that he knew where the Terton was and thus, the partners-in-crime reached Joenley. Upon reaching the village, they feared an encounter with the famed strongman of this village called Drodrew who might foil their plot. So, they deviously went to his mother in a bid to deceive her. They pretended to ask for her son, but the old woman who was roasting rice told Ap Takchung to give his hand which she then put inside her armpit and held it there. Ap Takchung was unable to free himself from this hold and so, the old woman told Ap Takchung to return for if he was no match to an old woman, he might well be grievously injured by her son should an encounter occur.

However, the three men would not concede and so they hatched a plan to secretly carry off the Terton together with his meditation hut. Ap Drodrew heard the commotion while they were attempting to do so, and with the strongman in their pursuit, they had to abort their plan and flee to safety which they did by crossing the river which acted as the village boundary from where trespassing was not allowed. So, Ap Drodrew had to give up his pursuit at this point but he took a boulder from there as a representative of the Terton which the elders of the village attest to but which is no longer there for us to see.

¹⁹ *'bka shog sa rim//*

²⁰ *rgya dos, spa tsar 'dam ru gi dos, spa thag dang nor thag gi dos//*

Upon reaching the cliff previously known as Troetroema, but which nowadays is called Trongtrongma, Ap Takchung returned home to Miritsemo, thus not becoming a part of the heinous act. The two men from Jabchu would not back down and they tried to execute the Terton in vain as all their weapons failed. Seeing their persistence and knowing that his time was now up, the Terton instructed two men to use his own scarf and stuff it down his throat. The two men accordingly wrapped the scarf around their sword and stuffed in down the throat of the Terton thus suffocating the Master to death.

The earthly remains of the Terton was then carried to where the Chukha Hydro Power Project is today located on the first day. The next day, the body of the Terton was received above where the present-day BOC station of Tsimasham is located at a spot called Lam Seou Drangsa where preparations were made to offer the customary meals to the ethereal remain of the Terton when it blurted that the person who will offer the meal is on his way referring to the Tsamdrag Trulku who was then actually coming to receive the Terton.

A preparation for the night was made at a place near the Chabcha Dzong. The next day, it proved humanly impossible to lift the body and a report was sent to the Desi to that effect. The Deb (*sdep*, an alternative word for Desi) then sent words that should that be the case, preparation for the ceremonial cremation should be made immediately at the same location. The cremation was conducted the same day. As with the first version, when a windstorm struck and blew away all the ashes, only a handful could be saved which the Tsamdra Trulku entreated the Terton to leave behind for the benefit of the sentient beings. A reliquary stupa was then built with this relic as the main content. And thus end the second version of the oral accounts of the life and death of Terton Drukdra Dorji.

Rebirth of the Master: Account of the Omniscient Master

After the untimely and ignominious passing away of Tertön Drukdra Dorji who constantly faced obstacles to his practice and life, his reincarnate Lam was born in the border areas of Tibet and China and was popularly called Lam Geyshey by the people of Chukha where he returned following his instinct from his previous life. As Tertön Drukdra Dorji was killed by strangulation, Lam Geshey's speech was stifled but when chanting mantra and performing rituals, his speech was clear.

The circumstances' surrounding the birth of the Lam is rather mysterious. His mother who was mute had a male relative who was a cantor (*dbu mzaḍ*) in a monastery. One night, he had an unusual premonition, and thus went to check on the mute woman who had delivered a child. By the time the monk got home, the people there had already discarded what they thought to be a misformed fetus. Unable to believe, the monk went to look for what was delivered by the woman when he saw two vultures incubating. The birds' heat had kept the new born baby boy alive to the great delight of the monk who took the boy to his monastery and fed him sheep's milk. As the boy grew, he was admitted as a monk and was educated in the various monastic disciplines.

The Lam then turned his stead to the south²¹ according to his destiny and after reaching Ralung, the origin of the Drukpa order, along with his shepherd follower named Chagma, he descended down to Bhutan from Paro and then finally reached Chabcha where he revived the old sacred spring sources created by Tertön Drukdra Dorji. He spent three years in meditation during which time, the people of Chabcha generated deep faith and reverence to his person.

²¹ *chibs kha lho lu 'gyur//* this is a popular expression after Zhabdrung Rinpoche's advent to Bhutan.

After his long sojourn in Chabcha, the Lam went to Bongo with nothing except his *khri khur*. As the Lam practiced a sacred chant ritual (*bcos tshogs*) with hand-held drums in the manner of village shamans, the people mistook him for one of them and thus had little regards for the Lam even though he spent a fortnight there. The Lama subsequently returned to his Chabcha. While he was in Bongo, he predicted that the newly conceived child of his host will be a boy. So, after a year, the child was born as predicted and he returned to Bongo amidst greater fanfare and gained considerable patrons. The Lam again made a return to Chabcha and when he came back to Bongo, the people entreated him to stay there as their village priest to which he agreed. The Lam then wanted to construct a meditation hut above the village but the people said that there are no water sources nearby. The Lam said this was not a concern and he will take care of it. As said, after five days, his follower Chagma and another assistant called Drub Tshering discovered that the spot where the Lam laid a stone slab was bubbling with a new spring. This sacred water source can still be seen today.

While residing in Bongo, the Lam not only administered religious service, but since he was also an adept artist with good grasp of all traditional art forms (*bzo rig bcu gsum*), he also produced many amazing artifacts of which his hand made altar and statues can still be seen today. Even though the Lam spent most of his time in Bongo, he was also concurrently the Lam of Gedu where he spent seven years in meditation on its mountain top. He also offered religious services to Miritsemo where of his many extraordinary feats; he revived the sacred water source at the Trong Trongma cliff where Terton Drukdra Dorji passed away. In Gedu, there was a prolonged drought and crop failure because of which the people requested the Lam for a solution. The Lama meditated at the mountain top retreat where he miraculously re-created a water body which dispelled all the afflictions.

Despite spending many years in these remote areas, the Lam did not give into the temptations of the worldly word and led a

pure and inscrutable life. However, as the destiny to propagate his lineage came, the Lama came into contact with the wife of the village headman (*rga po*) called Tandin and a daughter was born. After the lady passed away, he performed all the rites. After that, he took another secret consort at the place called Biri and a son was born.

After his prolonged stay in Bongo, he suffered a severe food poisoning and was subsequently shifted to Miritsemo. Upon reaching Miritsemo, the Lam expressed his wish to pass away there in the house of a wealthy man in the village called Nado. However, fearing impurity from the occurrence of the death in his house, he refused to let the Lam fulfill his wish because of which the Lam had to be stretchered to Biri where he took a wife. It is said that because of this lack of faith, Nado's family lost its wealth within no time.

Upon reaching Biri, his long-time attendant Chagma passed away for which he conducted the rites. It was at this time that the Lam said that he was Terton Drukdra Dorji and that after he passed away, there is no need for any other master to perform his funeral rites. After the Lam passed away, his funeral ceremony was performed during which his skull cap (*dbu thod*) dislodge itself as with other enlightened beings and fell in front of his son Rinzin Dorji after which he took it to his home. However, an ex-monk advised the son not to keep it without cremating as this might cause the next rebirth of the Lam to be born without some faculties of the body. Consequently, the skull was cremated too after which the ashes were encased in a reliquary stupa. It is said that as the son was still young, he could not keep the merit (*gnos grub*) granted by his father.

The reliquary stupa was built near the present day Gedu town in the village of Laptsa-kha by the former representative of the village, Chimi drep Tsendra. Apart from the stupa, a derelict temple founded by the Lam in Miritsemo which was built in an inconvenient location was later restored and built close to a big boulder on which the Lam frequently took rest

during his lifetime. All these deeds were done under the coordination of Tsendra by the people of Miritsemo in memory of Lam Geshey.

Even though no formal recognition was ever conferred on Lam Geshey as the reincarnation of Tertön Drukdra Dorji, the people say that based on his great services to the Buddhist teachings and his peculiar method in doing so, there is no doubt that he was indeed the rebirth of the great Tertön Drukdra Dorji. With these, the oral accounts of both the Tertön and his probable rebirth (*sku tshe gong 'og gnyis*) come to an end.

Tumdra Ney²²

Guru Padmasambhava hid spiritual treasures in the environs of unusual natural features, and often under supernatural circumstances. The Tumdra Ney is one such place. The Ney has 51 caves, which are all carved out of the steep cliff-face of the Tumdra Hill. The Tertons zhugthri (seat) is still in one of the caves. Other unusual features of the Ney are the lakes surrounding it. The Ami La Tsho is considered the most sacred, as it is believed to be the 'soul laje' of Lhamo Ekajati. The lake is located on the outskirts of an Indian village called Jainti. Today, Tumdra Ney is also known by Tumdra Ami Ney, Am Kangchimai Ney, Lhamo Ekajati Ney, Palden Lhamoi Ney, Sachaphu Ney and so forth.

Lhamo Ekajati/Am Kangchigma²³

Lhamo Ekajati is the chief resident of the Tumdra Ney. She is highly revered and feared by both Hindus and Buddhists. In the Nyingma tradition, there are three primary dharma protectors, and Ekajati is one of them in the trinity of Ma Dza Dam Sum-Mamo Ekajati, Dza Rahula and Damchen Dorji Lekpa. Further, the blue Tara is considered the emanation of Ekajati. It is believed that Guru Rinpoche had subjugated and made her one of the principal dharma protectors.

²² Tshering Tashi, Kuensel issue of 01.02.2014

²³ Tshering Tashi, Kuensel issue of 01.02.2014

Lhamo Ekajati is described to be short-tempered and, in her wrathful form, capable of striking misfortune on anyone who displeases her, but is also known for her power to fulfill wishes. Lhamo has a unique look and is depicted with a single breast, one leg and an eye. Some Bhutanese believe Lhamo to be the secret consort of Terton Drukdra Dorji.

Conclusion

In compiling this oral accounts of the life and death of Terton Drukdra Dorji, we feel that we are doing whatever little we can to document the life of this famous saint whose great services to the Buddhist teachings extend beyond the realm of the state and its sophisticated traditions to include the little known people and their lives in places so remote that few masters visited them, before or after him. We do not mean this document as a substitute for this visionary master's whole existence as his life is way too significant for us to be able to capture with any degree of sufficiency. Yet, in keeping these records, we are at least sure that we are placing before the general readers and the scholars a preliminary study of an itinerant master's journey to some very remote areas where the people's history and sense of being is intractably linked with the person of this master.

As it is, this paper is also no attempt to dig out old skeletons from the closet. The personal enmity between the master and the ruler is hardly a concern for anybody now. Certainly no one would think of making an issue out of a matter that is so long back in history that it is almost certainly of no immediate interest to anyone today. However, it would indeed be a pity, if such accounts are not preserved, for they carry both the contestations and the reconciliations which took place simultaneously at various level to build the foundation of a strong nation.

Informants

Ap Gongetse: Chabcha

Son of Lam Geshey, Rinzin Dorji: Darla

Ap Lhapa: Labarma

Former Chimi Tsendra: Miritsemo

Zeko: Agay Lakha

The incarnation of Yongzin, Lopen Nagphel

Lopen Kencho Tshering: Bongo

An Overview of Kurtöp Morphophonemics*

*Dr. Gwendolyn Hyslop***

1. Introduction

Kurtöp is an East Bodish (Tibeto-Burman) language of Bhutan that is still endangered as people shift from the village to centers of commerce outside of the Kurtöp-speaking region. While it has been described to some extent (e.g. Hyslop 2011) there has not been much attempt made to communicate findings of the language to outside fields. Specifically, this article presents an analysis of morphophonology, or sound changes conditioned by word formation, in Kurtöp.

In Linguistics, the term ‘phonology’ refers to the study of sound systems used in language while ‘morphology’ refers to the study of morphemes, or meaningful word units. Taken together, *morphophonology* is the study of how sounds change

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in words depending on how the words are composed. For example, in English, the plural suffix -s is pronounced as [s] when following words that end with sounds like [p], [t], and [k], as in *gaps*, *pits* and *yaks*. However, when plural -s follows words that end with sounds like [ʃ] the suffix is pronounced as [əz] as in *leashes*. It is important to keep in mind that in linguistics we study the way words are pronounced, rather than the way they are written.

Like all languages, Kurtöp also displays alternations in sounds dependent on word morphology. Before delving into these details, some background information is provided on the language in Section 2. Section 3 is devoted to the phonological alternation present in verbal stems. Section 4 illustrates the morphophonological alternations associated with the perfective morpheme *-pala*. Section 5 offers a brief summary of the article.

2. Background

Kurtöp is spoken in Dungkar, which lies within the political district of Lhüntse, approximately 50 kilometers west of the border with Arunachal Pradesh in India, and 15 kilometers south of the border with Tibet, as shown in Figure 1. We estimate approximately 15,000 speakers of Kurtöp in and outside of Lhüntshe.

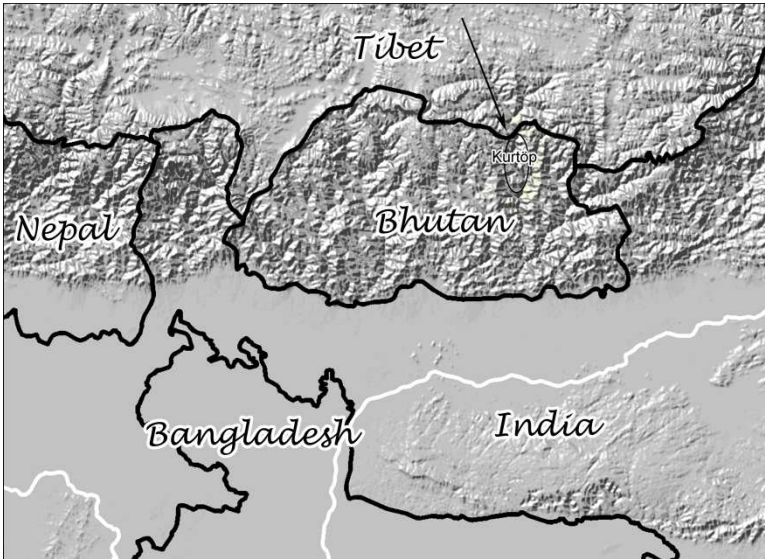


Figure 1. Approximate location of Kurtöp homeland in Bhutan

2.1 Genealogy

Kurtöp is considered an East Bodish language. Shafer (1954) appears to be the first to use the term ‘East Bodish’. For him the term represented the proto-language from which Dwags, a language spoken southeast of Lhasa, had come. Bradley (1997) proposes that East Bodish is most closely related to Central Bodish (i.e. the Tibetan dialects). Recent work on the East Bodish languages (e.g. Hyslop (2014; 2013) has confirmed that the East Bodish languages are not Tibetic languages but are probably distant cousins of Classical Tibetan.

van Driem (1995) provides an overview of the languages in Bhutan. His proposal situates 19 different Tibeto-Burman languages within six different Tibeto-Burman branches. Two of these, Central and East Bodish, are composed of a handful of languages. The other four are represented by one language each: Tshangla, Lhokpu, Gongduk and Black Mountain Mönpa. Tshangla is spoken by the largest population of

speakers (138,000) and is considered the *lingua franca* of eastern Bhutan. The latter three are spoken by just a few thousand, or less, speakers each. Central Bodish is the sub-branch which contains Tibetan, Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan) and five other languages spoken in Bhutan (Chocangacakha, Brokpa, Brokkat, Lakha and B'ökha). East Bodish consists of Bumthang, Kheng, Kurtöp, Nupbikha, 'Nyenkha, Chali, Dzala, and Dakpa.

Within East Bodish there is at least one fairly obvious sub-grouping; a handful of languages show enough similarity to be considered part of one large dialect chain consisting of Bumthang, Khen, and Kurtöp. Sometimes described as languages of the 'Bumthang' group, these languages also show considerable similarity with Central Bodish, perhaps more so than other East Bodish languages. The proposed relationship amongst the East Bodish languages is illustrated by figure 2 below.

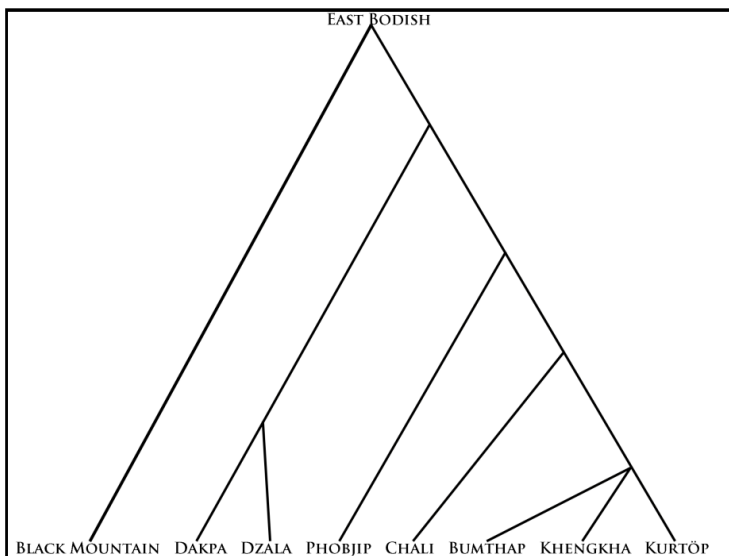


Figure 2. Relationship among East Bodish Languages (Hyslop 2013)

2.2 Phonology

Kurtöp exhibits a three-way contrast in voice (voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated, voiced) at five places of articulation (labial, dental, retroflex, palatal, velar). A set of voiceless unaspirated and voiceless aspirated dental affricates are found, as well as a voiceless and voiced dental fricative. Nasals contrast at four places of articulation (labial, dental, palatal, velar). One rhotic is found¹, two laterals (voiceless and voiced) and two glides (labiovelar and palatal) are also found. The glottal fricative /h/ is found in a few items and a glottal stop is often present word-initially preceding high toned vowels and sometimes as a realization of word-final /k/ though does not appear to possess any phonemic weight.

The phonemes found in Kurtöp are illustrated in figure 3 below.

	labial	dental	retroflex	palatal	velar	glottal
stops	p, ph, b	t, th, d	tr, thr, d	c, ch, j	k, kh, g	
affricates		ts, tsh				
fricatives		s, z		sh		h
nasals	m	n		ny	ng	
laterals		l, lh				
rhotics		r				
glides	w			y		

Figure 3. Kurtöp Phonemes

Figure 4 illustrates the possible onset clusters in Kurtöp and figure 5 shows which of the phonemes may be syllable codas.

¹ However, see Lowes (2006) for evidence that a contrast amongst multiple rhotics could have recently collapsed.

pr- pc- pc ^h - p ^{hr} - br- b _J - bl- kw- k ^{hw} - gw- mr- mj-

Figure 4. Kurtöp Onset Clusters

-p -t -k (-s) (-h) -m -n -ŋg -r (-l)

Figure 5. Kurtöp Coda Consonants²

Kurtöp contrasts seven vowels, which are shown in figure 6 below. Note the two front vowels are long and often vary with the corresponding diphthongs. The other two diphthongs are /iu/ and /au/.

i	y: ~ ui	u
e	ø: ~ oe	o
	a	

Figure 6. Kurtöp vowels

In open syllables only a contrast is found between short and long vowels. In this article, vowel length is indicated by a circumflex above the vowel (e.g. â). Tone is also found in Kurtöp. High and low tone contrast following the sonorant consonants and palatal fricative onsets in word-initial

² A set of parentheses indicates the marginal status of the segment as a possible coda consonant. Coda /s/ has not been found for all speakers; some have coda /t/ in its place. Coda /h/ has only been found in a handful of words to date. The coda lateral occurs in only a few words in normal pronunciation (e.g. the name *Chophe*) but may also occur in discourse as the result of deletion of final vowels.

position. Following all other consonants in word-initial position tone is high if the consonant is voiceless and low if the consonant is voiced. For more details on Kurtöp, please refer to Hyslop (2011).

3. Verb Stems

Verb stems adhere to the Kurtöp syllable structure, which is maximally CCVC (Hyslop 2008) with the following possible codas: *-k*, *-ng*, *-t*, *-n*, *-r*, *-p*, *-m*, open syllable. Open syllables can be divided into two sets: those which were historically closed with coda *-l* and those which were not.

Unlike other Bodish languages such as Tibetan (Beyer 1992) and Dakpa (personal field notes) which exhibit alternation in vowel quality of verbal stems, depending on aspectual and other factors, Kurtöp stems exhibit variation only in the realization of stem-final *-k* and voicing of stem-final consonants. The loss of coda *-k* will be first discussed in some contexts in section 3.1 followed by the description of the voicing of stem-final codas in the imperative construction in section 3.2.

3.1 Coda *-k*

Verb stems with final /k/ lose their coda consonant word-finally. Examples of this alternation are illustrated in (1) below. Note when the verb takes the suffixes *-ta* or *-shang* the stem-final consonant /k/ is present but while the suffixes *-male* or *-wala* (allomorph of *-pala*, as described below in 4.1) are used the stem-final /k/ is absent and vowel length is found in its place.

- (1)
- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| <i>drak-ta</i> | <i>drak-shang</i> |
| sound-IMPFCT | sound-PFCTV |
| <i>drâ-male</i> | <i>drâ-wala</i> |
| sound-FUR | sound-PFCTV |

<i>tshok-ta</i>	<i>tshok-shang</i>
cook- IMPFCT	cook- PFCTV
<i>tshô-male</i>	<i>tshô-wala</i>
cook- FUT	cook- PFCTV

3.2 Imperative Construction

In the Kurtöp imperative construction non-coronal stem-final stops are voiced. That is, /p/ becomes [b] and /k/ is realized as [g]. These alternations are demonstrated below in (2). Note in the first column to the left the verb is illustrated in the imperative, while in the columns to the right displays examples of the verb in other verbal paradigms and as a bare stem. The allomorphy of the imperative suffix is discussed below.

(2)

<i>phab-e</i> bring.down- IMP	<i>phap-shang</i> bring.down- PFCTV	<i>phap-ta</i> bring.down- IMPFCT	<i>phap</i> bring down
<i>bab-e</i> go.down-IMP	<i>bap-shang</i> go.down- PFCTV	<i>bap-ta</i> go.down- IMPFCT	<i>bap</i> go down
<i>kug-e</i> gather-IMP	<i>kuk-shang</i> gather- PFCTV	<i>kuk-ta</i> gather- IMPFCT	<i>kû</i> gather
<i>trug-e</i> stir-IMP	<i>truk-shang</i> stir-PFCTV	<i>truk-ta</i> stir- IMPFCT	<i>trû</i> stir

To date one verb stem has been found to have irregular morphophonemics when in the imperative construction. The verb *khor* 'take' loses its final *-r* in the imperative construction to give the form *khole*.

3.3 Discussion

This section has illustrated alternations in Kurtöp verbal stems. I have illustrated that Kurtöp stem-final *-k* is lost, with the preceding vowel lengthening, when suffixed with

-wala, and stem-final non-coronal stops (i.e. *-k*, *-p*) are voiced in the context of the imperative suffix. Note that the former sound change (loss of *k* leading to long vowel) is familiar within the Tibeto-Burman family. For example, loss of /*k*/ led to a long vowel with a falling tone in Lhasa Tibetan (DeLancey 2003). Loss of final *-k* in other contexts in Kurtöp has led to a long vowel but no falling tone (Lowes 2006). The voicing of *-k* and *-p* in the environment preceding the imperative suffix (*-e* in both instances) can be seen as the voicing of a stop intervocalically. Thus, Kurtöp stem alternations can perhaps be better envisioned as reflecting straight-forward phonological processes, unlike the instances in Classical Tibetan (Beyer 1992) and Dakpa (personal field notes), in which stem alternations are also associated with grammatical differences.

4. Verbal Morphology

Much of Kurtöp verbal morphology does not exhibit morphophonemic alternation, such as the perfective *-shang* and the future/intentional *-male*, for example, which do not change form. In this section, the allomorphy of two verbal suffixes will be described. Namely, we discuss the allomorphy of the perfective suffix *-pala* and the allomorphy of the imperative suffix *-le*.

4.1 Perfective *-pala*

The perfective form *-pala* marks perfective aspect when the speaker has direct evidence of the event; therefore, it tends to be used to refer to first person more than second or third. This suffix has the form *-wala* when following *-k*, *-ng*, *-r* and open syllables which were historically closed by a coda *-l*. The allomorph *-sala* is found when suffixed to an open syllable which was not historically closed by coda *-l*, and the form remains *-pala* in all other contexts. This allomorphy is illustrated by the data in Table 1 below.

Stem Type	Example Bare Stem	Gloss	Stem with -pala
-k	<i>kuk</i>	'gather'	<i>kū-wala</i>
-ng	<i>thong</i>	'drink'	<i>thong-wala</i>
-r	<i>chir</i>	'chop'	<i>chir-wala</i>
historical -l ³	<i>phre</i>	'separate'	<i>phre-wala</i>
-t	<i>dot</i>	'sleep'	<i>dot-pala</i>
-n	<i>gin</i>	'put on'	<i>gin-pala</i>
-p	<i>phap</i>	'bring down'	<i>phap-pala</i>
-m	<i>ngom</i>	'become drunk'	<i>ngom-pala</i>
open syllable	<i>se</i>	'die'	<i>se-sala</i>

Table 1. Allomorphy of Kurtöp -pala

4.2 Imperative -le

The imperative suffix *-le* also evidences some morphophonemic alternations. Following non-coronals the form *-e* is found and following open syllables which were not historically closed by *-l* the form *-ye* is used. In all other contexts *-le* remains unchanged. This allomorphy is displayed in Table 2 below.

Stem Type	Example Bare Stem	Gloss	Imperative
-k	<i>kuk</i>	'gather'	<i>kug-e</i>
-ng	<i>thong</i>	'drink'	<i>thong-e</i>
-p	<i>phap</i>	'bring down'	<i>phab-e</i>
-m	<i>ngom</i>	'cry'	<i>ngom-e</i>
-r	<i>chir</i>	'chop'	<i>chir-le</i>
historical -l	<i>phre</i>	'separate'	<i>phre-le</i>

³ Because synchronic open syllables in verbs may come from at least two different sources (i.e. open syllable remains open or coda -l is lost and fronts the vowel) a verbal stem in it of itself does not show whether or not a coda -l was present historically. Thus, comparative data is used to discern whether or not the stem had a -l coda historically. For example, with regard to the present data, comparison with Classical Tibetan sP+l.b. <spralba> supports the hypothesis that this form had a historically present -l final stem.

-t	<i>dot</i>	‘sleep’	<i>dot-le</i>
-n	<i>gin</i>	‘put on’	<i>gin-le</i>
open syllable	<i>se</i>	‘die’	<i>se-ye</i>

Table 2. Allomorphy of Kurtöp *-le*

4.3 Discussion

In this section, I have illustrated that the perfective suffix *-pala* has allomorph *-wala* when following stems with final velars, *-r* or a diachronically present *-l*, and allomorph *-sala* when following stems with synchronic open vowels that did not have a coda *-l* present at a previous stage in the language. The motivation for the allomorphy surrounding *-pala* is less clear than for that associated with the verbal stems. In case of the stem-final velars, it might be best to hypothesize that $/p/ > [w]$ is an assimilation to velar place of articulation, and that the change $/p/ > [w]$ following *r* and *l* is an assimilation in sonority. It is not yet clear what conditions the change $/p/ > [s]$.

The allomorphy of the imperative suffix *-le* is also interesting. If the verbal stem terminates (or terminated, in the case of stems which had an *-l* coda at a previous stage of the language) in a coronal consonant, then there is no change in the form of the imperative. However, following a non-coronal consonant, the *l* of the imperative will delete. Such restrictions on deletion seem intuitive if we assume two adjacent consonants must agree in coronality in this context. Of further interest is the sound change $/l/ > [y]$. While it may be considered another example of assimilation in terms of sonority (cf. $/p/ > [w]$ *_l, r* in the case of *-pala*, above), the sound change $l > y$ has happened elsewhere in the language. Consider, for example, the data in Table 3 below.

Kurtöp	Classical Tibetan	Gloss
<i>yâ</i>	lg.p. <lagpa>	'hand'
<i>yanga</i>	LV. <lnga>	'five'
<i>yam</i>	lm. <lam>	'road'
<i>yô</i>	lug. <lug>	'sheep'
<i>yang</i>	lvs. <langs>	'stand'

Table 3. Examples of Kurtöp *Y* corresponding to Classical Tibetan *L*

5. Summary and discussion

This article has addressed allomorphy in Kurtöp, a Tibeto-Burman language of Bhutan. The full extent of alternations in verbal stems has been described here. Namely, I have illustrated that Kurtöp stem-final *-k* is lost, with the preceding vowel lengthening, when suffixed with *-wala*, and stem-final non-coronal stops (i.e. *-k*, *-p*) are voiced in the context of the imperative suffix.

Morphophonemics of some verbal affixes have also been addressed. I examined morphophonemics of the perfective suffix *-pala* and the imperative suffix *-le*. The former had the allomorph *-wala* following *-k*, *-ng*, *-r*, and old *-l* final stems. If stem was vowel final but did not have a *-l* coda at a previous stage in the language, then the form *-sala* was employed. In all other contexts *-pala* has remained *-pala*.

Most instances of Kurtöp morphophonemics discussed in this article may attribute their alternations to simple phonological processes, such as assimilation and deletion. It was also noted that at least two instances morphophonological alternations are also reflected in historic sound change. That is, the alternation of *-k* with \emptyset and lengthened preceding vowel in verbal stems mirrors the sound change $k > \emptyset$, which has happened elsewhere in the language, triggering a long vowel (Lowes 2006). Also, the alternation of *l* with *y* in the imperative mirrors the sound change $l > y$, which was illustrated in Table 3.

This article has not considered morphophonemics of other affixes, such as the negative prefix, locative and genitive suffixes, and other verbal suffixes. These also display allomorphy but are not discussed here. Further investigation of these processes promises to yield interesting results, especially in light of the historic sound changes in other aspects of the language.

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Masked Dance of Sumthrang Mountain Deity

*Gengop Karchung**

Abstract

Masked Dance of Mountain Deity (*Tsän Cham*) of Sumthrang Samdrup Chödzhong in Ura, Bumthang is a unique performing art that has been inherited since the 15th century. When the 23rd 'Nyörab Jam'yang Drakpa Özer ('Jam-dbyang grags-pa 'od-zer; 1382–1442) planned to slip away to Tsari (Tibet) for meditation clandestinely, the *Drak Tsän* Dorje Dradül appeared and beseeched lama to stay at Sumthrang, simultaneously performing this masked dance along with four of his retinues. Consenting to the plea made by the deity, the lama then taught the dance to his disciples. The dance then became part of annual festival called Sumthrang Kangsöl held from 25th Day of 9th Month of the Bhutanese lunar calendar for 5 days. The dance is known by various names: Lha Cham (dance of god), *Tsän Cham* (dance of mountain deity), and *Ta Cham* (dance of horse) as the masked dancers ride horses. Today, some episodes of this dance is performed at Zhongmä lhakhang in Lhuntse Dzongkhag as this lhakhang was built by Jam'yang Drakpa Özer. This paper will try to give detailed information on this unique festival, especially the *Tsän Cham* as it is critically endangered. Further, it will also try to bring out the historical accounts of the lhakhang and other associated sites. This paper will be based on limited available manuscripts, historical publications and other written sources which will be further supplemented with the existing myths and legends that are available.

Introduction

Bhutan having embraced its culture as one of the core lifelines of every Bhutanese has ensured its sovereignty and independence since time immemorial. Due to this attributes

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and also because of the wind of change creeping into Bhutan lately, culture is given due importance in preservation and safeguarding of its values and forms, so as to pass on to the future generations. To safeguard and ensure protection and promotion, culture is identified as one of the four pillars of Bhutan's guiding developmental philosophy of Gross National Happiness, besides incorporating a separate Article in the Constitution of Kingdom of Bhutan.

Bhutanese culture is closely associated with religion that the people of Bhutan seek their solace from. As Buddhism is being widely practised by the inhabitants of Bhutan, the cultural forms, values, and beliefs are deeply embedded in the Buddhist principles. As a result, the places or elements of historical and religious importance have also a great significance in its culture as well. Thus, these three subjects are inseparably blended, particularly from the advent of Buddhism in the 8th century.

As culture was given utmost importance in any spheres of activities in the country, it primarily focuses on the tangible aspects of culture, such as movable and immovable cultural properties as it is generally susceptible to the natural and human-induced disasters. But with modernisation and globalisation gaining its heights in the Bhutanese society, it has posed a great threat to intangible cultural heritage (ICH) that has been transmitted through generations to generations orally or aurally. It has forced the ICH bearers and holders to be awake and devise necessary counteractions, which is why various mechanisms are in pipeline to uphold those invaluable heritages.

Amongst five domains of ICH categorised by UNESCO, ICH element on cultural expression of a local festival specifically on *Tsän Cham* or Masked Dance of Mountain Deity of Sumthrang in Ura, Bumthang under the Performing Arts will be singled out in this paper. The performance of this masked dance has been challenged by lack of human and financial resources to carry forth the age-old tradition of Sumthrang

lhakhang. So, it is hoped that this paper will help to preserve and promote the masked dance through dissemination of historical, cultural, religious and spiritual importance and significance of this masked dance.

Brief Account of Sumthrang in Ura, Bumthang

Bumthang is located in central Bhutan. It is the hub of religious and spiritual sites and festivals. It has 111 lhakhang (lHa khang; temples) and *gönba* (dGon pa; monasteries), 300 *chöten* (mChod rten; stupas), 36 *'menchu* (sMan chu; medicinal water), 46 *drubchu* (sGrub chu; sacred spring) and 12 *'ne* (gNas; pilgrimage sites).¹ Some great Buddhist masters even coined a term that “Bumthang is the hidden valley of gods.” Bumthang Dzongkhag² has four Gewogs³; Chokhor Gewog, Tang Gewog, Ura Gewog and Chumey Gewog. Ura Gewog alone has nine lhakhang in good condition, including Sumthrang lhakhang. Bumthang Dzongkhag is a high altitude Dzongkhag with an elevations ranging from 2400 to 6000 metres above sea level. Therefore, majority of people depended on subsistence livestock farming, but due to global phenomenon of rising temperatures, people are now inclining towards agriculture farming as their main source of income. In 2004, Bumthang even commenced cultivating paddy. The population of Bumthang was 16,116 in 2013.

Situated at an elevation of 3,100 metres above sea level, Ura village is 50 kilometres from Jakar Dzong in Bumthang on the east-west highway. Particularly in Ura, majority of people depends on livestock as it is the coldest Gewog amongst the four. Sumthrang⁴ village is located on a gentle slope above

¹ Bumthang Dzongkhag at a Glance, 2013

² Dzongkhag is district. Bhutan is divided into twenty Dzongkhags and further sub-divided into 205 Gewogs.

³ Gewog is sub-division under district or sub-district (Drungkhag).

⁴ There are two accounts in deriving this name: when the founder of the Sumthrang Samdrup Chödzhong threw mini-drum into the sky to look for the destined site, the drum landed at the current site with a sound “*So-’Brang*” (So-drang). Hence the name of the place became So-drang and later it became Sumthrang. In another account, the

Pangkhar village at about 5 kilometres away from Ura village. Sumthrang village has about 18 households.

Founding of Sumthrang Samdrup Chödzone

At about 47 years of age, Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje (1179–1265) approached his root master who prophesied that his destined place would be in Mon (Bhutan) and the lineage of Nyö Gäwa Lhanangpa (1164–1224) and the work of tutelary deity Dorje Phurpa would firmly flourish there. In one week's time in a trance, he envisioned his future seat: a village where the flowers bloomed even in winter; scree formed a swastika symbol in the east as a sign of firmness and stability; as a sign of purity and everlasting lineage, flowing of milk-like rivulet in the west; as a symbol of expanding Buddhism, presence of rocky mountain resembling religious texts in the north; as a symbol of spreading its fame, a conch-shaped land in the south; and finally, at the centre of these four directions stands a four-sided stone pillar which bears potion during special occasions.

He then set forth to Bhutan with his sacred religious objects of body (sku), voice (gsung), mind (thugs), qualities (yon tan) and activities (phrin las). When he reached on the Mönla Karchung pass, *Hor dü* (demon) tried to impede his journey, resulting in subjugation and claiming the life of the demon. So Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje carried the skull and chest skin of the demon, which can be seen in the Samdrup Chödzone even today.

He crossed the pass and reached Sumpa in Ngang village of Chökortö (Bumthang). He built a stupa (chöten; kChod rten) and meditated there to confirm the envisioned place but since there was no sign of that envisioned place, he left in search of the right place, leaving behind one set of sacred religious

name of the place was based on the three routes converging at the place; *gSum* (sum) denotes three and *Phrang* (Thrang) denotes path or route.

object even though the public of that place requested to extend his stay.

He came across a pass which then was named Zhangma La on account of being too tiresome to reach on its summit. Just below the pass towards Ura, remains of a stone seat (Zhugthri; bZhugs khri) and two hitching posts to tie his horses can still be seen under a *Abies densa* tree. The search of a right place was disrupted by negative forces, and he landed on the side of Shingkhar in the east rather than in Sumthrang. Since the environment resembled to his clairvoyance, he camped in close proximity to Shingkhar village below a cliff. But darkness enveloped the encampment and became night filled with stars in the sky although it was day time. So, he surmised that it was not the right place, and even the name of the place became Mumbrag from the word 'Mendra' meaning 'supposedly not'. So under such a confused state, he took out and hit the mini-drum called 'Ngachung sangwai drukdir'⁵ that gave a sound "som-drang" and flew away towards north. At this miracle, he followed behind and reached a pass from which he could clearly see the envisioned place with all its signs and symbols. So he exclaimed it is nice to see the right place and hence the name of the pass became Thonglek La (mThong legs la; mThong- see, Legs- good, La-pass). Today, it is called Tonglek La due to pronunciation variations over the years.

When 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje reached at the four-sided stone pillar, the mini-drum also landed with a sound "som-drang." He then meditated and had vision of his Activity God Dorje Phurpa and also subjugated the mountain deity of the locality, Dorje Dradül, who committed to carry out any activities of the Chöje⁶. At the site, there was a lake source from which a white lady emerged and offered the land and a stone with a conch on it. He then built the temple on that

⁵ Religious mini-drum which is a Thukten (thugs rten), sacred mind religious object of 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje

⁶ A noble family or a person who upholds and practices one or more Buddhist traditions.

land in 13th century and named as Sumthrang Samdrup Chödzung.

Route Followed from Tibet to Bhutan

Although it is not very clear where he really was when he commenced his journey, 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje set off to Lhasa to offer his prayers to Jowo, and then after visiting Tsari, he set off to Mön (Bhutan). He reached Mönla Karchung pass where *Hor dü* (demon) was subjugated when it tried to impede the progress of his journey to the envisioned destination.

After crossing the Mönla Karchung pass, he descended to Ngang in Chökortö in Bumthang. He tried to settle at Sumpa but devoid of any promising omens, he resumed his journey in search of the right place, even disregarding the plea made by the community for his presence there.

He felt refreshed when he saw an enormous pass in a distant east. He reached at the top of the pass, which is now called as Zhangma La. A stone seat and two hitching posts to tie horses are still seen on the pass under an *Abies densa* tree on the way towards Ura from that pass. On resuming the journey, Lama and the entourage were duped towards Shingkhar due to evil forces' ruse. At Sa-tsham Pokto, on the apex of the boundary mountain of Sumthrang and Shingkhar, a chunk of Tibetan grass, *bötsa*, is grown from faeces of horse which still grows there. He then camped in close proximity to Shingkhar village that resembled his envisioned place at Mumbrag – cliff in the north and water in the west. Since the signs did not favour him, he followed the mini-drum or '*Ngachung sangwai drukdir's* sound and direction. The entourage reached a pass from where he could clearly see the envisioned place with all its signs and symbols depicted in that land, and the name of the pass became Thonglek La. 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje and his entourage safely reached at the destined place at Sumthrang in Ura.

Founder of the Samdrup Chödzung

'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje alias Dechok, the founder of Sumthrang Samdrup Chödzung was the 18th 'Nyörab⁷ lineage holder. He was born to the 17th 'Nyörab, Gäwa Lhanangpa and Lhacik Dechokma on the 15th Day of the 4th Month of Earth Pig Year of the Lunar Calendar in 3rd Rabjung corresponding to 1179. At the age of 15, he started receiving teachings, empowerments and transmissions of 'Nyö tradition from his father and uncle. Besides, he received special education on secret tantric form of Vajrayana and teachings, empowerments, and pith instructions on Dorje Phurpa from 'Ngagchang 'Neljor Tsemo (sngags 'chang rnal 'byor rtse mo) of Chimphug Drak'mar Kewtshang (mChims phug brag dmar ke'u tshang). He then underwent intensive solitary meditation practice into the mountains and other secluded retreat places for nine years that triggered visualization of his deities, masters and dakinis.

At the age of 47, when he visited his master during the visit of Samyā and Yarlung in Tibet for merit-making on account of his mother's death, the lama instructed him to establish his dharma activities in Bhutan. Thus accordingly, he followed the route to Bhutan and founded Samdrup Chödzung in Sumthrang, Ura.

As per the vision that he had experienced in a state of trance, he followed to Shing'nyer and built a lhakhang. Upon completion, he meditated there and experienced the same

⁷ Lineage of 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje from 'Nyö Je Jathul Karpo who was the first 'Nyörab lineage holder. Literally, *sMyos* ('Nyo) refers to 'psychosis,' and *Rabs* (Rab) refer to 'series or successive.' Hence, when these two words are combined, it becomes *sMyos rabs* ('Nyörab), and it literally means 'successive 'Nyö lineage.' This lineage is said to have started from a single parent who lost all his/her (some texts mentioned that it is a king, while in some text, a queen is mentioned) three sons in a tragic incident. Due to this unbearable loss, he/she became mentally unstable. However, an intercourse with a god progenerated a child, and the lineage extended from this became widely known as 'Nyö(rab).

miraculous omen of blooming flowers in winter. Even today, although the *Sew shing* shrub is grown in the village, it does not bloom in winter except at the two lhakhangs.

After leaving a lineage holder at the request of public, he passed away on the day of Lord Buddha's Descent from Tushita Heaven in 1265, leaving a son named Zhikpo Trashi Singge (zhig-po bkra-shis; 1237–1322).

Lineage of 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje

'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje is the son of Gäwa Lhanangpa, whose root spiritual master was Drigung Kyobpa Jigten Gönpo (1143-1217), the founder of the Drigung Kagyü⁸, and his father was 'Nyö Drakpa Pel (1106–1183). Gäwa Lhanangpa propagated Lhapa Kagyü, sub-sect of Drigung Kagyü in western Bhutan. However, Gäwa Lhanangpa's lineage traces back as far as the 'Nyö Je Jathul Karpo. The following is the successive lineage from first 'Nyö Jathul Karpo until the present lineage holder 'Wangdra Jamtsho, the 45th 'Nyö Chöje, where Gäwa Lhanangpa is the 17th 'Nyö and his son 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje is the 18th 'Nyö as given below:

1. 'Nyö Je Jathul Karpo (gNyos [myos;smyos] rje bya-thul dkar-po),
2. 'Nyö Je Tsänpo (gNyos rje btsan-po),
3. Sengge Shok (Seng-ge shog),
4. Takhar (rTa mkhar),
5. Je Zhang De (rJe Zhang sde),
6. Dring De ('Bring sde),
7. Dringchung ('Bring chung),
8. Palyön (dPal yon),
9. Tshulyön (Tshul yon),
10. Guru,
11. Lhaphen (lHa 'phen),
12. Thugä alias Pangla Meshor (mThu-rgyal alias sPang-la me-shor),

⁸ Sub-sect of Kagyü tradition

13. Yöntän Drakpa (Yon-tan grags-pa; 967–1072),
14. Tsangtsha Dorje Lama (gTsang-tsha rdo-rje blama; 1008–1086),
15. Pelgi Sengge (dPal-gi Seng-ge; 1054–1120),
16. 'Nyö Drakpa Pel (gnyos grags pa dpal; 1106–1183),
17. Gäwa Lhanangpa Sangge Rechen (gnyos rgyal-ba lhanang-pa sangs-rgyas ras-chen) alias Ziji Pel (gZi-brjid dpal; 1164–1224),
18. Dechok (bDe mchog) alias 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje (gNyos-ston 'khrul-zhig chos-rje; 1179–1265),
19. Zhikpo Trashi Singge (zhig-po bkra-shis; 1237–1322),
20. Vajra Dūpa alias Phurpa Tshering (ba-zra 'dus-pa; 1262–1296),
21. Dewai Penjo (bDe-ba'i dpal-'byor; 1291–1359),
22. Pelden Singge (dPal-ldan seng-ge; 1332–1384),
23. Jam'yang Drakpa Özer ('Jam-dbyang grags-pa 'od-zer; 1382–1442),
24. Namkha Samdrup (Nam-mkha bsam-grub; 1398–1459),
25. Jangsem Zhonü (Tshenchen) (Byang-sems gzhon-nu'i mtsan-can; 1422–1494),
26. Pelden Zangpo alias Trashi Gäpo alias Shri Bhadra (dPal-ldan bzang-po; 1458–1518),
27. Tshungmä Drakpai Tshenchen (mTshungs med grags-pa'i mtsan-can; 1474–1523),
28. Zhonu Tempa (gZhon-nu bstan-pa; 1489–1537),
29. Sang'ngag Tandri/ Sangdak Tshenchen (gSang-sngags rTa-mgrin/ gSang-bdag mtsan-can; 1506–1569),
30. Pema Tandri/ Pema Tshenchen (Padma rTa-mgrin/ Pad-ma'i mtsan-can; 1539–1609),
31. Dungdzin Karma (gDung-'dzin karma; 1567–1631),
32. Ngödru Gätshä/ 'Ngödru Jamtsho (dNgos-grub rgyal-mtshan/ dNgos-grub rgya-mtsho; 1610–1666),
33. Pema Chörab (Pad-ma chos-rabs; 1627–1687),
34. Gelek Tendzi (dGe-legs bstan-'dzin; 1667–1746),
35. 'Wangchen Norbu (dBang-chen nor-bu; 1701–1775),
36. 'Wangdra Jamtsho (dBang-drag rgya-mtsho; 1730–1748),
37. Lha'wang Chöjin Zangpo (Lha-dbang chos-sbyin

- bzang-po; 1748–1808),
38. Thrinlā Jamtsho (Phrin-las rgya-mtsho; 1777–1825),
39. Damchö Singge (Dam-chos seng-ge; 1792–1816),
40. Tshultrim Dorje (Tshul-khrims rdo-rje; 1809–1872),
41. Norbu Wangä (Nor-bu dbang-rgyal; 1841–1891),
42. Namgäl Khandro (rNam-rgyal mkha'-gro; 1869–1888),
43. Künzang Ngödru (Chos-rje kun-bzang dngos-grub;
1887–1953),
44. Tshewang Tandri (Tshe-dbang rta-mgrin; 1910–1973),
and
45. Wangdra Jamtsho (dBang-grags rgya-mtsho; b.1949)
– Present lineage holder.

Origin of Tsän Cham

The *Tsän Cham* was conceived by 23rd Nyörab Jam'yang Drakpa Özer, the younger of the twin brothers. When he planned to leave Sumthrang clandestinely to Tsari (Tibet) for meditation, *Drak Tsän* Dorje Dradül appeared and performed a masked dance along with four of his retinues, requesting the lama to stay at Sumthrang.

Lama then taught the same dance to his pupils and was instituted at Sumthrang Samdrup Chödzung. Thus, this festive celebration became annual event and the masked dance was known as *Lha Cham*, 'dance of god.' However, some call it as *Tsän Cham*, 'dance of mountain deity,' as the dance was presented by *Drak Tsan* Dorje Dradül of the Sumthrang cliff. Some even call it as *Ta Cham*, 'dance of horse,' as the masked dancers ride horses. However, these entire different names refer to a single entity of dance performed at Sumthrang lhakhang. In any case, since this masked dance was originated from the mountain deity of that community, it is considered as extremely sacrosanct. This *Tsän Cham* is performed during the annual festival held from 25th Day of 9th Month of the Bhutanese lunar calendar for five days.

Today, some episodes of this same dance are performed at Zhongmä lhakhang in Lhuntse, while the internal sacred dance of *Drak Tsän* is not performed there.

Composer of the Cham

Jam'yang Drakpa Özer and Tenpai Nima were born as twins to the 22nd 'Nyö Pelden Singge and mother Jangchu Dräma. The twin brothers were born on the 15th Day of the 1st Month of the Water Dog Year of the 6th *Rabjung* corresponding to 1382. They were the 23rd 'Nyö. Jam'yang Drakpa Özer was the younger twin. From his elder brother, Tenpai Nima, the royal families of Bhutan are descended.

At the age of 3, his father passed away and had to learn reading, writing and other teachings particularly empowerments, oral transmission, and admonitions on *Künzop* (samvriti [satyam]; totally obscured truth) and *Döndam* (Paramartha [satyam]; absolute truth) from his father's disciple. From the age of 6 until his brother's departure to Tibet at the age of 29, the twin brothers presided over their father's throne on rotational basis. At the age of 15, his mother and brother knotted him with Bum Kima ('Bum sKyid ma) of Ngangpai Dung (Ngang pa'i gdung; aristocratic of Ngang in Chökortö) lineage and gave birth to a son Namkha Samdru.

At the age of 18, he left for Tibet and received teaching on Kagyü (bKa' brgyud) from Karmapa Dezhin Shekpa (Kar ma pa bDe bzhin gShegs pa; 1384–1415) and Bodong Künkhen Jigdrel (Bo dong Kun mkhyan 'Jigs bral; 1376–1451). At Druk Ralung, he obtained ordination from Jamtrul Yeshe Rinpoche ('Jam sprul Ye shes Rin po che) and received teachings on *Chakchen Chödru* (Phyag chen chos drug; the six practices of Maha Mudra) and went into retreat for three years in the mountains of Ralung. However, at the age of 23, his brother Tenpai Nima had dispatched a message regarding their mother's poor health. Instantly, he returned to Sumthrang. Residing there for few months, then he left to Sikkim, India. At Drakar Trashiding (Brag kar bKra shis lding), he met with

Rigdzin Gödemchen (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can; 1337–1408) and subsequently received teaching on great secrets of Buddhism. He then entered into meditation for three years, mastering the accomplishment of his mind from complexities and fabrications. At the age of 28, he returned to Sumthrang via Paro. In the following year, when his brother left for Tibet, he took charge of the throne and gave teachings to over 200 pupils around the country. He also built monastery in the middle of the Sumthrang cliff from the gifts accumulated from his devotees. The monastery is known as Nubling *Gönba*. Today, it is under renovation. Besides, he also tamed the demonic naga of Kazhi cliff in Kurtö and built a *chöten* and a lhakhang. He also renovated Khibur [Khyi-nyal] and constructed Zhongmä lhakhang in Lhuntse Dzongkhag. He pioneered in opening the place of pilgrimage at Shingkhari Cliff in Kheng Zhemgang and constructed a temple along with its inner relics and objects. Moreover, he also built lhakhangs and appointed a *'la-tshap* (acting lama) each at Wamling, Khomshar, Radi, Kalamti, Drokar, and Goshing in Kheng Zhemgang, and established a great deal of activities of vajrayana Buddhism.

At that time of the period, Sumthrang has gained popularity in terms of disciples and devout patrons as far as Lhodra in Tibet, Pethang in India, and Sikkim. Thus, some of these places even today have to invoke the same deity of Sumthrang and perform *Ta cham* of Sumthrang, where the Sumthrang Chöje had the custom of visiting those places for religious purposes. As a result of spreading popularity in and outside Bhutan, he realised that all such name and fame are subject to hindrance in establishing collective merits. So he preferred going to Tsari in Tibet for meditation. Concocting this idea, he tried to slip off from Sumthrang clandestinely. But *Drak Tsän* (Mountain deity) Dorje Dradül appeared before him and requested him to stay, to which he acquiesced.

He then submitted all his time for the prayers, having attended to the calls of other's welfare and finally at the age of

61 in the Water Dog Year of the 7th *Rabjung* corresponding to 1442, he passed away leaving behind miraculous relics.

Tsän or Mountain Deity Worship in Bhutan

Bhutanese worship *lha* (lHa; deity of heaven, god), *'lu* (Klu; Skt. Naga; netherworld being with human body joined to reptilian lower body), *tsan* (bTsan; mountain deity), *sabda* (Sa bdag; deity of land), *'näda* (Nas bdag; lord of the soil or earth), *zhida* (gZhi bdag; lord of the settlement), *kä lha* (sKye lha; natal deity), *dra lha* (dGra lha; protector deity), *sok lha* (Srog lha; life deity), *pho lha* (male god), *mo lha* (female god), *'ü lha* (Yul lha; deity of the village), and other deities and spirits. These practices came into force during Bon practices and pre-Buddhist beliefs, which is continued till today as Buddhism assimilated Bon in some aspects.

Broadly, there are two levels of numinous beings: enlightened beings (nang and gsang ba'i chos skyong) and haughty and wrathful deities residing within the six spheres of existence. The deities identified above will fit into this category of beings. They are the protector of the people ('jig rten pa'i srung ma/phyi'i chos skyong). These latter numinous beings reside in the landscape that is broadly stratified into three vertical layers: heavenly level (extra-terrestrial), the intermediate level (terrestrial) and underworld level (subterranean). *Lha* occupies extra-terrestrial level, human beings or *tsän* in the terrestrial level, and *'lu* in the sub-terrestrial level. Except for the heavenly gods, the abodes and citadels of these deities and spirits are sacred groves, rocks and cliffs, trees, hills, mountains, confluence of rivers, lakes, waterfalls and other unexploited areas on earth. Since these beings are worshipped as some sort of god, the sites are characterized by minimal human interference. Any interference and pollution to their abodes and citadels might result in unleashing storms of epidemics and diseases to the people concerned or to the community as a whole. During such cases, two types of invocation rites are performed: typical ritual for deities by monks based on invocation-text, and shamanic recitations or oral utterance through the medium of shamans like *pawo*,

pamo and *'neljom*. Even if such curses are not inflicted to the community and its people, invocation rites are performed once or twice depending upon their traditional practices. The deity-invocation involves yearly sacrifice of oxen, yaks, sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry birds in early days. But now, Buddhist masters have substituted the sacrifice of live animals toward symbolic sacrifice with offerings of model or effigy of the animals, although a small piece of meats are required for the *tshō* (banquet offering).

These deities and spirits were subjugated by Guru Padmasambhava and other great masters in the service of dharma and to protect people and their habitats.

The *Tsāns* are fierce warriors, spirit residues of historical kings and heroes. Hence, *Tsān* is a fierce, red, helmeted warrior dressed in a kingly and knightly robe. *Tsāns* are usually found located atop crags, cliffs, waterfalls, or mountain passes. Similarly, the rocky cliff above Sumthrang lhakhang is considered the abode of *Drak Tsān Dorje Dradül*. The deity was subjugated by 18th *'nyö* *'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje*, the founder of the site and converted him to protect dharma and people. Today, not only by the Sumthrang Chöje and its locality but the followers and monasteries that are closely affiliated to Sumthrang lamas worship the *Drak Tsān Dorje Dradül* for his protection and blessings.

Drak Tsān Dorje Dradül of Sumthrang

Drak Tsān Dorje Dradül of Sumthrang is regarded amongst the 'twenty-one laymen' (dGe bsnyen nyer gcig), which affirms that *Drak Tsān Dorje Dradül* of Sumthrang is also one of the deities, who was subjugated by Padmasambhava. However, it is not known which one is the *Drak Tsān Dorje Dradül* from the following twenty-one laymen. Yet it could be Tsari Dorje Dūdül or one of its retainues as *'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje* left for Bhutan after visiting Tsari.

'Nyenchen Thanglha, the powerful mountain spirit and the twenty-one non-humans in his retinue were not only bound

under oath but were caused to take the Buddhist layman's vows. The twenty one consists of four king (rGyal po) spirits; four section leaders (sDe dpon); four generals (dMag dpon); four demons (bDud po); and five workers (Las mkhan). The 'twenty-one laymen' (dGe bsnyen nyer gcig) are:

1. 'Nyenchen Thanglha Dorje Chokrab (gNyan chen thang lha rdo rje mchog rab),
2. Tisi Dorje Gangkar (Ti si rdo rje gangs dkar),
3. 'Magä Pomra (rMa rgyal spom ra),
4. Mangkhar Gang (Mang mkhar gangs),
5. Bulê Gang (Bu le gangs),
6. Jang Targoi Gang (Byang star go'i gangs),
7. Phoma Gangjo (Pho ma gangs jo),
8. Kulha Khari Gang (sKu lha kha ri gangs),
9. Tsang gi Jomo Kharag Gang (gTsang gi jo mo kha rag gangs),
10. Dorje Gangwa Zangpo (rDo rje gang ba bzang po),
11. Gätse Dumpang (rGyal rtse dum gangs),
12. Lachi Gang (La phyi gangs),
13. Tshering Gang (Tshe ring gangs),
14. 'Nanam Gang (sNa nam gangs),
15. Tidro Gang (Ti sgro gangs),
16. Odê Gungä ('o de gung rgyal),
17. Yarlha shampo (Yar lha sham po),
18. Sälje Gang (gSal rje gangs),
19. Howa Gangzang (Ho ba gang bzang),
20. Tsari Dorje Dödül (Tsa ri rdo rje bdud 'dul), and
21. Kongpo lai Gang (Kong po la'i gangs).

Distinctness of the *Tsän Cham*

Every community in Bumthang has its own time of festivity that is associated with the masked dances as an annual event like any other communities in the kingdom. Unlike masked dances of Pe'ling tradition and *Bö cham*⁹, Sumthrang has a

⁹ Generally, tantric [mask] dance is categorized into two: gods and humans. The mask dances performed by humans were termed as *Bö cham* ('Bod 'cham). Moreover, in olden days, the mask dances were

unique masked dance for its own community, composed by descendants of Gäwa Lhanangpa, 23rd 'Nyö Jam'yang Drakpa Özer. As the masked dance was performed by the *Tsän*, mountain [or cliff] deity, it is considered as a sacred *Tercham* (dGongs gter gyi 'cham; Mind Treasure Dance) that should be performed sacrosanct with special religious and spiritual significance rather than for mere public entertainment. This is the mind treasure of Jam'yang Drakpa Özer. It is performed by five masked dancers riding on a horse including the *Drak Tsän* Dorje Dradül himself with the Four Great Kings (who guard the four cardinal directions) – east, west, north, and south of their community.

Essence and benefit of the *Tsän Cham* Performance

The *Tsän Cham* is performed at Sumthrang Samdrup Chödzhong since the time of 23rd 'Nyö Jam'yang Drakpa Özer in 15th century. The core rationale behind this performance is to propitiate and reaffirm the relationship of the member of the community and the *Drak Tsän* Dorje Dradül, and to thank the successive lamas for their great contributions to the welfare of the community and the nation. Apart from these fundamental themes, there are few derived significances from this annual function.

It is a time for the local community to thank *Drak Tsän* Dorje Dradül and other deities for the prosperous year that they relished and welcoming their blessings and protections in the upcoming year. The festive is observed and celebrated to rejoice after perspiring efforts in their domestic livelihoods, such as farming and herding of animals. The time of the occasion assures them with bountiful stock as it coincides with the autumn season which is a harvesting hour of the people. Hence, it is fairly right to note that the moment is celebrated lavishly with grand feasts on the account of their bountiful harvest of the year, and engage themselves in social gathering, a moment where one's loved and dear ones can

mostly performed by Bō Garpa ('Bod sgar pa). Hence, it is popularly known as Bō Cham.

wine and dine from one pot under the same roof after a long separation, promoting social cohesion and community vitality.

The festive event also bears paramount spiritual values. People, not only from the locality but from around the country, try to make their presence during the festival to not only witness the unique masked dance of the *Drak Tsän* but also to get blessings from the masked dance and other sacred religious objects and relics that exist in the lhakhang since 13th century. It is an opportune occasion to access oneself to the living heritage such as relics and antiques of the past 27 successive lamas of the Samdrup Chödzung.

After attending the festive events with unwavering spiritual beliefs and commitments, it benefits the public with abundant yields, favourable weather, and excellent health, besides promoting harmonious living. In short, it results in a very prosperous year and harmonious living with the neighbours. These opulent consequences are no doubt attributed to the blessings of the deities of the vicinity.

Costume of *Tsän Cham*

Tsän Cham is performed by five masked dancers riding on a horse including the *Drak Tsän Dorje Dradül*. Each pony has a porter or syce each. Hence, the exact performer involved in this dance in the ground is ten. But it requires many more personnel behind the curtain. It requires monks to perform the religious activities inside the temple and few playing the religious instruments to make it more ritualistic and spiritual in nature. Out of five masked dancers, the leader is *Drak Tsän* and other four are the retainues of the *Drak Tsän*. The four retainues represent the Four Great Kings, who guard the four cardinal directions – east, west, north, and south of Sumthrang but the sceptres of the four retainues differ from

the Four Great Kings of the universe (rGyal chen sde bzhi; Catur Mahārāja)¹⁰.

Drak Tsän is exhibited in a dark red (or brownish) mask with red robe riding on a white-heeled black horse (rTa nag rting dkar). He holds a spear-headed small flagpole and a snake in his right hand while clamping a black bird (bTsan Bya) in his left hand. He has got wrathful appearance. Four of his retainers have plain expression wearing identical costume to that of their face colour. They wear white, yellow, red, and green costumes. The white masked dancer who guards east has got a lasso in his hands, while yellow masked dancer who protects south firmly holds bow in his left hand and arrow in his right hand. The red coloured masked dancer who defends west has a sword in his right hand and the green coloured masked dancer who shields north holds spear in his right hand, while their left hands are apparently empty. These four masked dancers have got same colour of horse (mask) as to their own costume colour.

During the masked dances, like in any other religious masked dances performed in Bhutan, it also involves similar religious musical items such as *Jali* (clarinet), *Dungchen* (large trumpet), *'Nga* (big drum), *Dribu* (bell), *Draru* (double-headed hourglass drum), and religious texts to invoke deities.

Proceedings of the *Tsän Cham* and the Annual Festival

The annual festival of Sumthrang village was held from 25th to 29th of the 10th month in olden days as the month was considered as 'month for hurling of ritual-cake for tantric practitioners' (Ngagpa zor phang gi dawa). But now it is

¹⁰ In Buddhist faith, they are the Guardians of Four Cardinal Directions of the Universe. The Four Great Kings are:

1. Defender of the Area in the east (Yul khor Sung; Dhritarashtra);
2. Noble Birth in the south (Phak Kyepo; Virudhaka);
3. Ugly Eyes in the west (Chän Mi Zang; Virupaksha); and
4. Son of He who has Heard Many Things in the north ('Namthöse; Vaishravana).

rescheduled in the 9th month on the same date because of some management inconveniences. The most unique and sacred part of this festival is the masked dance of its *Drak Tsän*, hurling of ritual cake and exhibiting the sacred religious objects of Sumthrang Chöje, Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje. The annual festival is widely known as Sumthrang Kangsöl (bsKang gsol). This is to appease tutelary deities with religious offerings.

First Day Kangsöl – Tagön

This foremost day of the five-day religious festival is known as *Tagön* (sTa gon), preliminary ritual. The programme begins towards the evening of the 25th day of the 9th month of Bhutanese lunar calendar. The religious performance is commenced with the *Gekträ* (bGegs bskrad) performance, exorcism ritual for evil spirits, to clear obstacles for dharma activities. In accordance with the exorcism ritual, male and female masked dance of *Ging* is performed by two dancers inside the temple. Thereafter, the entire procession of lamas, the *Ging* masked dancers and the people move to all the houses in Sumthrang village, performing the ritual and dance. The masked dancers hold a bunch of fire each with tinder composed of sawdust mixed with kerosene. While lama swing religious bell reciting prayers and toss gravels and grains, the crowd following them will shout and whistle to expel the evil forces and bad lucks. Once all the houses have been visited and expelled the obstructing forces, they gather at the *Hom khung* spot to burn the negative forces in the triangular shaped *Hom khung* made from firewood piles.

Second Day Kangsöl – Tsän Cham

The second day of the festival is dedicated to the Mountain Deity of Sumthrang. Vajra Kila ritual performance commences as early as 2am and the masked dance program begins at sunrise in following sequence.

1. *Sipa Phomo* – Sumthrang *Gadpo Ganmo*
2. *Shinje Sacha Phomo Cham*
3. *Tsän Cham* (dance of Drag Tsän Dorje Dradul) is

- performed in the lhakhang
4. *Ta Cham* (Dance of the Tsän's four retinues) is performed in the courtyard of the lhakhang

Third Day Kangsöl – Drak lä

The ritual performances inside the lhakhang remains same but in the courtyard following masked dances and programmes are carried out for the public exhibition:

1. *Sacha Chung dzam*
2. *Zhana*
3. *Chaging* (Throwo Chui Cham)
4. *Tshoging* (Thromo Chui Cham)

Besides these dances at the show, there is a *Phüchang Gutsi* ceremony, Wine Libation Ceremony. The wine is specially brewed with utmost care from nine different cereals for this annual occasion. During this event, the *Phüchang* (the first sacred offering of wine) is contained in the priceless cauldron discovered by Tertön Pema Lingpa (1450–1521) from Membar Tsho (Burning Lake) in Tang, Bumthang, which is exhibited only for this occasion. After the wine libation ceremony, all the priceless thangka (scroll-paintings) of the Dharmapalas of 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje will be displayed when the incumbent Chöje offers his apologies for any kinds of misconducts and shortcomings during the year and the *Phüchang* will then be offered to the lama, (lay) monks and the people.

This day is marked with another important function called Drag lay (Drag las; fierce operation) or Drawo Drel (dGra bo bsgral; crushing enemies) ritual. It is a profound ritual of the Vajrakila. During this performance all the evil forces and elements are summoned and crushed with the Phurpa (three sided ritual dragger) and their spirits are liberated. This ritual along with the yogic dance which is part of the ritual is a special tradition of the Sumthrang Chöje lineage and it demonstrates of their tantric heritage.

Fourth Day Kangsöl – 'Nga cham

The day four of the Kangsöl is dedicated to the most sacred Mini-drum called 'Ngachung sangwai drudir, a valued possession of Sumthrang lhakhang. The following masked dances are performed for the public:

1. *Sha dzam*
2. *Durda Cham*
3. 'Ngachung Cham
4. *Chung zhi*
5. *Pholä Molä*

Fifth Day Kangsöl – Tojap

The *Tojap* (gTor rgyag) or hurling of large ritual cake event is held on 29th day of the 9th month. During this event a large crowd of people including lama and monks will move to the *Hom khung* spot along with two Garuda and four *Goma zhi* (divine guards) of Vajra Kila. They will perform ritual and dance, and crush all the negative forces and liberate their spirits. After the event, whole procession will return to the temple courtyard and perform dance of divine rejoicing. Then gathering inside the temple, lama and monks will perform conclusion ceremony with *Trashi 'Mölam* (Auspicious Prayers). With this, the five day *Kangsöl* festival will come to an end until the following year. However, on the 1st day of the following month, *Tang ra* (gTang rag), thanksgiving ceremony is performed for the deities.

Other Masked Dances Performed at the Festival

Besides the *Tsän Cham*, there are other masked dances performed at the festival to make it more elaborate and enjoyable one. The masked dances have their own significances as follows:

1. *Caging cham* – it is a dance of ten wrathful form of Vajra Kila (throwo chui cham) which represents a male deity, Dorje Zhonu (Phurpa; Vajra Kila). It is performed by 10 performers. The dance of *Pawai Ging*

(dPa' bo'i ging) was seen in the Pure Land (Dag pa'i zhing) in a trance by 24th 'Nyö Namkha Samdru, and hence he instituted the same dance which came to be known as *Caging*.

2. *Tsho Ging cham* – the female form of Phurpa is known as '*Neljom* (rNal 'byor ma), and hence the dance is known as *Thromo Chui Cham*. It is performed by 10 performers. The dance of male and female Phurpa was performed to invoke [Dorje] Phurpa, Activity Deity of 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje.
3. '*Ngachung cham* – invented and performed in tribute of '*Ngachung sangwai drudir*.
4. *Zhana cham* – the Black Hat Dance is performed to sanctify the ground. It is also known as '*Ngak cham* (sNgags 'cham), the dance of tantra. Since the lamas of Sumthrang were tantric practitioners, the dance is performed in this connection.
5. *Chung zhi & Yulima cham* – the dance of four Garuda emanated from Vajrapani. These dances are performed to suppress the deity of land and the nagas.
6. *Dre cham* or *Ke cham* – Dance of Phurba Goma zhi
7. *Durda cham* – the dance of the Lords of the Crematoriums.
8. *Sha dzam cham* – it is a dance of stags. The stag dance portrays the subjugation of the Wind God by Padmasambhava.
9. *Pholä Molä cham* – the dance of the Noble Man and Lady which concludes the five day Tshechu.
10. *Gadpo Ganmo cham* – it is a dance of old man and woman. It represents clown (Atsara) as well.

Other Religious Ceremonies at the Lhakhang

Besides this main festival, there are other religious ceremonies performed for the wellbeing of the community and country at large in Sumthrang lhakhang. These are:

1. On the 15th Day of the 1st Month – a ritual ceremony in honour of *chösong* and *yidam* Phurpa is performed. However, in olden days *Phurbi Drupchen* (Religious

- Ceremony on Great Accomplishment of Vajrakilaya) was performed.
2. On the 10th Day of the 4th Month – Tshechu on *Gongdü* and *Treu chö* (birth anniversary of Padmasambhava) is observed.
 3. On the 15th Day of the 5th Month – A ritual rite called *Sersung Chodpa* is performed to prevent hailstones from damaging crops.
 4. On the 10th Day of the 8th Month – A *Tshepakme Throwo* is performed for long life.
 5. On the 22nd Day of the 9th Month – the day is marked as Lord Buddha’s Descend from Tushita heaven, *Lhabab Düchen*. Since Gyäwa Lhanangpa also died on that same day, *Kuchö Bumde* in honour of Gyäwa Lhanangpa is performed.
 6. From 25th to 29th of the 9th Month – Annual Sumthrang Tshechu is held as presented above. In olden days it was held in 10th Month as it was considered as ‘month for hurling of ritual-cake for tantric practitioners’ (’Ngagpa zor phang gi dawa).
 7. On the 1st Day of the 10th Month – a day-long *Tangra*, thanksgiving ceremony is performed in honour of the deities.
 8. On the 26th Day of the 10th Month – Invocation of deities called *Lhachö* is held.
 9. Finally, on the 1st Day of the 11th Month – Lay monks, *Gomchens* used to go for alms in olden days for their subsistence but now they spent their days on various activities ranging from business to religious wanderings.

Relics and Sacred Objects

Besides other sacred religious objects of *Ku* (body), *Sung* (speech), *Thu* (mind), *Yöntän* (qualities) and *Thrinlä* (activities), the most valuable mini-drum, *’Ngachung sangwai drudir* and bamboos from Tsari in Tibet, *Tsari ’Nyukma* (Kila wang) are still in the temple. It was brought by ’Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje when he left for Bhutan. Although the *Kila wang* is exhibited to the public on the 10th Day of 8th Month every year

coinciding with *Tshepakme Throwo* ritual, however, the priceless mini-drum is prohibited for public exhibitions.

In addition, the temple also houses 'mardung (dead bodies) of Döndrup Zangpo, Pema Lingpa's father and 'Ani Drupthop Zangmo, sister of *yab* Döndrup Zangpo.

Other Religious Sites Associated with the Dzong and the Successive Lamas

Gön 'Langdrang

'Langdrang monastery was located near Sumthrang lhakhang. Today the place is called as Kibthra Bung and it is covered under forest but the ruin of the monastery is still seen. Although the monastery was said to have constructed during the time of Sumthrang Samdrup Chödzung, during the time of Tenpai Nima (1382-?) the monastery was destroyed by fire. Tenpai Nima is the father of Döndrup Zangpo and grandfather of Tertön Pema Lingpa.

Sumthrang Durthrö

During the time when Pelden Zangpo alias Trashi Gyalpo alias Shri Bhadra (dPal-ldan bzang-po; 1458-1518) was 61 years of age, he told his disciples to cremate his body on the tortoise-like stone near the Samdrup Chödzung towards Gön 'Langdrang. He informed that if they find footprint of Goddess of Crematorium on the stone after his body is cremated, it would be tantamount to the Cool Grove of Cremation Ground (Dur khrod sil ba'i tshal) and whoever is cremated on that stone will not have to bear samsaric sufferings but would be directly liberated to higher realms.

After the death he was cremated there at the present spot but when the disciples came to collect the ashes after three days, it had already been taken by dakinis. But to their surprise, they have seen a footprint left on the stone. Since then the Crematorium (Durthrö) of Sumthrang became so popular.

Shing'nyer

Shing'nyer or Shinjar is located 15 kilometres away from Sumthrang towards Jakar, Bumthang. As envisioned, 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje built the Zhongar or Shing'nyer lhakhang. *Sew shing* (*Rosa sericea*???) shrub grows just below the lhakhang which blooms white flower even in winter season although it is very cold.

A lady from that village offered a venomous drink to 'Nyötön Thrulzhik Chöje. Knowingly 'Nyötön drank and poured the remaining on the stone table laid before him on which the cup was placed. Instantly, the stone table broke down due to the power of the venom. Lama then pointed his *phurpa* (vajra) on the other side of the valley and the forest caught fire, which exhibited his miraculous power shown against the venomous lady. Even today the *zhukthri* (stone seat) and the broken stone table can be seen in Shing'nyer.

Conclusion

In this paper, as the country is witnessing lots of robbery and pilfering cases of the sacred religious and other priceless items, the details of relics and other sacred religious items are not reflected. So, anyone spiritually motivated to know more about the relics and sacred objects may kindly visit Sumthrang Samdrup Chödzung in Ura.

The Intangible Cultural Heritage element on cultural expression of a local festival, particularly on *Tsän Cham* or Masked Dance of Mountain Deity of Sumthrang in Ura, under the performing arts not only bears cultural heritage but also spiritual significance that involves lots of beliefs, faith, respect and commitments from the performers as well as from the spectators. This specific ICH element which was on the verge of disappearance due to constraints in human and financial resources to carry forth is hoped to be safeguarded and promoted by writing this piece of information. However, the ICH element bearer is coordinating with the community members in finding masked dancers and other possible

resources to safeguard and promote in the interest of its long history of tradition and for the future generations.

By researching and writing this paper, it is hoped that not only will it preserve and promote this particular masked dance but also disseminate the historical, cultural, religious and spiritual importance and significances of this particular masked dance to the national and international folks.

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Oral Source

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Masked Dance of Sumthrang Mountain Deity

Pe'ling and 'Nyörab Lineage

