

The Role of English in Culture Preservation in Bhutan

*Dorji Thinley & T.W. Maxwell**

Abstract

This study explores issues surrounding the preservation and promotion of culture in the context of the secondary school English curriculum in Bhutan. The languages of Bhutan carry a rich and diverse tradition of oral literatures, but these genres and the cultural values they embody may disappear if they are not promoted. In Bhutan, schools are an active culture preservation site. For this reason, and also since English is the language of curricula for most subjects taught in school, we assumed that one of the ways in which Bhutan's diverse cultures can be honoured and enlivened is through the study of folk literature in the English curriculum. We asked two questions: (1) "How do secondary English teachers perceive the long-term role of Bhutanese folk literature as a source of cultural knowledge in the English curriculum?" and (2) "What knowledge and attitude do secondary students show following three months of learning about Bhutanese folk literature in the secondary English curriculum?" To address the first question, 38% of all secondary English teachers (n=181) responded to a purpose-built questionnaire followed by in-depth interviews undertaken with six (expert) teachers. The second research question was addressed using action research conducted with twenty-four Class 11 science students over three months in a higher secondary school in south Bhutan. Three important perspectives on the role of English in

* Dr Dorji Thinley is the Director of Research and External Relations, Royal University of Bhutan. Dr Tom Maxwell is an Adjunct Professor, School of Education, University of New England, NSW, Australia. Correspondence: dthinley6789@gmail.com

culture maintenance were identified. First, the latter can create opportunities for students to learn English in culturally familiar contexts. Second, using folk literatures that exist in different languages but translated into English as pedagogical catalysts will not only promote the values of cultural diversity in school but will also ensure the intergenerational continuity of Bhutanese culture through the education of children. Third, since English is a global language and a language of growing popularity in Bhutan, English translations of oral literature will promote cultural diversity and continuity in the face of globalization.

Context of the research

This study explores issues surrounding the preservation and promotion of culture in the context of the secondary English curriculum in Bhutan. Accompanying the positive impact of globalization are forces that especially impinge on small and vulnerable cultures and languages in different parts of the world, including Bhutan (GNHC, 2009b, pp. 161-162). Bhutan is a multicultural and multilingual society and has 19 different languages (van Driem, 2004, pp. 294-295; Gyatso, 2004, p. 265) of which 16 are exclusively oral. These languages carry a rich and diverse tradition of oral literature such as folktales, poetry, epics, myths, legends, ballads, proverbs, beliefs and superstitions, spiritual songs, heroic tales (RGOB, 1999, p. 65). The key point is that the oral folk literatures in these languages are rich repositories of cultural knowledge and values (RGOB, 1999, p. 35). Moreover, their loss will mean the loss of the depth and diversity of Bhutanese culture as a whole. Thiong'o (1986, p. 205) says, language "carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world."

While "culture" is a highly contested term, in this study it is relevant to consider it in the context of policy. Cultures may be said to manifest in 'tangible' and 'intangible' forms. Tangible culture manifests in customs, crafts, rituals, symbols, traditional games and sports, arts and architecture, astrology, folklore, myths,

legends, poetry, drama, to mention a few (RGOB, 1999, p. 65). The intangible forms include values, norms, attitudes, worldviews, moral and ethical choices, sense of right and wrong, among others (RGOB, 1999, p. 65) and the more abstract “values” that include notions of identity, dignity, non-alienation, and diversity (see Ura, 2009, p. 53).

The cultural values embodied in folk literatures that exist mainly in oral languages and dialects will depend for their survival on how the cultural and literary resources they embody are kept alive through publication in a language that is rich, versatile and has both local and international audience. The Bhutanese government recognizes the danger of losing the country’s “many cultural traditions, particularly oral traditions” and the challenge of conserving the heritage through research and documentation (GNCH, 2009a, p. 161; see also PDP, 2008, p. 23). There is a commitment to “allocate adequate resources to document and promote the use and survival of all other languages and dialects” (DPT, 2008, p. 44) besides Dzongkha. Government policy considers the role of teachers and students vital in keeping the diversity of Bhutanese cultures alive, making the oral traditions available to children through the schools’ formal and informal curricula. One way of saving the oral literatures from disappearing can be by writing them down in a language that has both local and international influence, thus making published materials available to the Bhutanese people and to the world.

For these reasons, English is a pragmatic tool for the preservation of the Bhutanese cultural heritage. In fact, several genres of Bhutanese folk literature have been translated into English in recent years, some of which have also been included in the secondary English curriculum for schools in Bhutan (Thinley, 2010, p. 5).

While Dzongkha is the language of “national identity and unity of the country” (DDC, 2002, p. xv), its ability to keep the culturally diverse oral literatures alive may be limited by a number of factors. First, it faces the same onslaught of

globalization as any other language in Bhutan and will thus continue to be promoted as the most important language in the country. Yet, Dzongkha has not spread as quickly as English (see Gyatso, 2004, pp. 271-272; Namgyel, 2009a, pp. 1-2; 2009b, pp. 1-2). Second, in the effort to promote Dzongkha and to build Dzongkha literature, it is possible in the future that the rich, unique and diverse oral literatures that exist in the smaller languages may be documented, absorbed into and called "Dzongkha literature," which will be a loss of diversity. Third, young people find Dzongkha harder to learn than English, especially to write.

Perspectives on the role of English

There is a significant body of literature on English as used in South Asian countries, where there is, as Kachru (1996, p. xi) puts it, an "ongoing love-hate relationship with English" (see also Lie, 2002, p. 59; Thiong'o, 2007, p. 149, 202). There are others who depict English more positively. For example, Joseph (2001, p. 237) says, these theories may need to be "brought seriously into question" because the facts behind the negative portrayals are often not checked. We assume that English can play a positive role in the sustainability of oral cultures in Bhutan. We argue our position from four closely interrelated perspectives.

The discursive possibilities of English

Language is a powerful carrier of culture. Thiong'o (1986: 205) says, it "carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world." Writers of the Third World like Chinua Achebe of Nigeria, Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Kenya, and R.K. Narayan of India used the English language as a powerful tool not only to explore the richness of the literary traditions of their lands, but also to present their own cultures to a global audience. The emergence of English translations of oral folk literatures in the 1990s in Bhutan illustrates the use of the rich resources of the English language and its global status to

expose the rich oral traditions to local and international audience. English translations are perhaps the most powerful means of articulating Bhutanese cultural values and identity to the outside world.

The discursive possibilities notwithstanding, it is important to consider the significant body of literature that portrays English as a cause of language and culture loss. Seen from this perspective, the English language promotes and perpetuates, particularly through the language curriculum, linguistic and cultural imperialism (Muhlhausler, 1994; Nandy, 1983; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). For example, Pennycook (1998, p. 14) says:

When English becomes the first choice as a second language in which so much is written and in which so much of the visual media occur, it is constantly pushing other languages out of the way, curtailing their usage in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

Crystal (1997, p. 114) goes a little further: “It is inevitable that, in a post-colonial era, there should be a strong reaction against continuing to use the language of the former colonial power, and in favour of promoting the indigenous languages.” So, two distinct views emerge from the debates - a pro-English view and an anti-English view.

We take a pro-English stance because of its ability to articulate diverse Bhutanese cultures within and outside the country and its ability within the country to facilitate intercultural communication, understanding and empathy. Rushdie (as cited in Crystal, 2000, pp. 135-136) takes a more moderate stance:

What seems to me to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it. Assisted by the English language’s enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves

within its front ... The children of independent India seem not to think of English as being irredeemably tainted by its colonial provenance. They use it as an Indian language, as one of the tools they have at hand.

We therefore discuss its role and status from the perspective of its advantages for Bhutanese culture. Owing to the different, positive, historical and political circumstances in which English was adopted by the Bhutanese, its choice by the first Bhutanese writers in the 1990s, we assume, was not a matter of shame or guilt, but a pragmatic choice and decision to carve out a distinct territory for Bhutanese writing in English. No doubt there was also an eye at sales. English is a language of conversation with the international community, not a 'Trojan horse' or a language of class stratification.

Growing popularity of English

Crystal (1997, p. 50) calls English the "prestige lingua franca," the "language of opportunity," the language of success. Although there are no empirical studies that show the status and popularity of English in Bhutan, as a language of modern secular education, employment, commerce, and global opportunities, its popularity is growing very rapidly (Gyatso, 2004, p. 8; van Driem, 2004, p. 29). According to Lo Bianco (2008, p. 1), there is "immense international investment in English, whose dispersion and status worldwide is probably unassailable ... close to [two] billion people could be learning or know English by 2010." Hohenthal's (2003, pp. 24-42) survey of university students across nine states of India helps to illustrate this trend. For example, in the domain of use, 67% of the informants said English served as a "link language," 93% said English was the most dominant language in government, and 100% said job interviews were invariably held in English. In the affective domain, 53% viewed English as a medium of aesthetic expression. In the pragmatic domain, 93% viewed "speaking English" as an advantage, 93% viewed it as useful for gaining access to employment opportunities, and 76% thought

that lack of knowledge of English was an obstacle to finding a job. The study's other findings include that "English carries higher status than Hindi in India." These figures reflect reasons for English's growing popularity in Bhutan. The Bhutanese perspective parallels the Singaporean perspective (Ayyub, 1994). Ayyub (1994, pp. 211-212) says, "The increase in literacy in English has made the English language the lingua franca, and since it is acquired through the medium of education, it has more prestige than Malay." English is clearly important in Bhutan for all the reasons indicated above.

In the Bhutanese context, while the status and popularity of English are growing rapidly, the implications of using English as a language of access to the oral literatures, and their cultural and aesthetic values in schools have not been studied. It was important to explore English teachers' and students' perceptions of the role of English in the context of their curricular and pedagogical experience with these materials, and in the light of government policy.

Intercultural communication

While there are defensive stances on English as impinging on cultures, the literature also reveals that English translations of indigenous literatures facilitate intercultural communication, understanding and empathy. Already the emerging body of English translations of Bhutanese folk literature highlights its diversity. For example, Kunzang Choden's *Folktales of Bhutan* (2002) and *Bhutanese Tales of the Yeti* (1997), and Sonam Kinga's *Speaking Statues, Flying Rocks* (2005) embody the cultural nuances of the central and eastern parts of Bhutan. Without English translations, much of the folk tradition that exists in the oral form would not have been known by many and perhaps even be lost by now.

Standard of English in the writings of non-native authors

Since some English translations of Bhutanese folk literature

have been included in the secondary English curriculum, it was necessary to understand perceptions about the kind of English used in these texts. According to Kachru (1983, pp. 50-51), since English is a universal language, native users of English must give up their attitudes of “reluctance, condescension, or indifference” towards non-native varieties of English as “deficient Englishes,” while the non-native users of English for their part must renounce their embarrassments with local varieties of English. Yet the linguistic cringe is still evidenced in South Asian countries. Thus, Rahman (1996, pp. 191-205) says, “Nineteenth-century literary English, however, is still held in high esteem by a large section of educated persons in Bangladesh” and that “People have negative attitudes toward non-native models.” So Lam (1999, as cited in Kramsch, 2000, p. 16) asserts:

Our responsibility as language teachers is to help students not only become acceptable and listened to users of English by adopting the culturally sanctioned genres, styles, and the rhetorical conventions of the English speaking world, but how to gain profit of distinction by using English in ways that are unique to their multilingual and multicultural sensibilities.

In relation to ‘standard’ of English, two perspectives are relevant. First, with the rapid globalization of English, an exonormative standard is not a realistic way of understanding the dynamic nature of the language. Instead, the focus should be on the principle of intercomprehensibility. Second, while English may assume different colours according to the unique cultural and literary contexts in which it is used, it cannot be indifferent to the long accepted conventions of language use. In the present study, we sought to explore teachers’ and students’ perceptions of what constitutes standard English and its role in the curriculum.

Cultural underpinnings of the English curriculum

Modern secular education began in Bhutan in the 1960s when the country opened itself up to the outside world,

introduced social, political and judicial reforms, and launched its first economic development plan. Public schools based on Indian models of Western education were established and, importantly for the purposes of this paper, English was introduced as a medium of instruction. With the exception of a few subjects such as environmental studies and social studies which are taught in Dzongkha at the primary levels, English is the predominant language of the curriculum for all the other subjects at all levels.

Up to 2005, the English curricula for secondary schools (Classes 7 to 12) in Bhutan were either influenced or administered directly by the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE) in Delhi, India. The new English curricula for Classes 7 to 10 emphasize the development of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (CAPSD, 2005c, p. v; CAPSD, 2005f, p. x), and the need for the students to cultivate values that reflect Bhutanese way of life, and to learn Bhutanese culture and “religious practices” (CAPSD, 2006a, p. xiv; CAPSD, 2006b, p. xiv; see also CAPSD, 2005f, p. xii). For example, the new Class 9 and 10 English curricula state that:

Through their reading, graduates have studied and reflected on the cultural values of Bhutan and other countries, particularly the different ways in which people discover meaning in their lives; different expressions of fundamental values of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty (CAPSD, 2005a, p. 3; CAPSD, 2005b, p. 3).

In the new curricula, the importance of learning English in a cultural context is emphasized in order to learn the “cultural values of Bhutan” as well as those of other countries. The real question of teaching and learning in multicultural settings is not attended to.

In centralized education systems, beliefs at the top have a direct bearing on beliefs, perceptions and practices on the ground. We need to understand the cultural underpinnings of the curriculum as stated in the language of policy. The review of

documents therefore focussed on the interaction of Bhutanese culture and the English curriculum. The documents generally attribute three roles to English in Bhutan. First, in the wider political context, English is the language of Bhutan's path to modernization and participation in the global community. For example, the Class 7 and 8 curricula stated:

When the veil of self-imposed isolation was lifted, Bhutan looked beyond its borders and began to prepare itself to modernize and join the community of nations. Which language to use to interact with the international community was one of the many decisions that had to be made (CAPSD, 2006a, p. ix; CAPSD, 2006b, p. ix).

According to the new Class 7 and 8 English curricula, English enabled Bhutan to articulate "its identity" and "profile" in the international community (CAPSD, 2006a, p. ix; CAPSD, 2006b, p. ix), expressed mainly through "its rich spiritual and cultural heritage," thus contributing to the "intellectual resources of the world" (CAPSD, 2006a, p. ix; CAPSD, 2006b, p. ix). Second, English is regarded as an official language alongside Dzongkha (CAPSD, 2005f, p. xi). Third, English is a tool for "thinking," "learning" and "expressing" (CAPSD, 2002, p. i).

Bhutanese government policy recognizes children and teachers as the custodians of culture and the catalysts of cultural transmission respectively (RGOB, 1999, pp. 20 & 36). They are therefore the key to addressing the cultural consequences of globalization and ensuring intergenerational continuity and influence of the Bhutanese cultural heritage. Policy envisages that the "country's rich traditions, values, ideals and beliefs must ideally live on in the minds of Bhutanese [youth]" to enable them to make "ethical and moral choices" in their lives (GNHC, 2009a, p. 20).

These policy choices influence the new English curriculum. For example, the curriculum states that materials selected for "reading and literature" (including short stories, essays and

poetry), listening and speaking, and writing should be based on “Bhutanese culture,” (CAPSD, 2005e, pp. 101-102; CAPSD, 2005f, pp. 33-34). Also, in the new curricula, some materials from Bhutanese folk literature have been included alongside traditional British texts. Thus, the new English curriculum for Classes 7 to 12 emphasized the tangible and intangible forms of culture in the education of children, including the values of identity, diversity (GNHC, 2009a, p. 161), and recognition of and respect for “cultural differences” (RGOB, 1999, p. 66).

Key questions and methodology

The stance taken in this study is that one of the many ways in which Bhutan’s diverse cultures, especially those that exist orally, can be honoured and enlivened is through experience in the English curriculum. Oral and written folk literatures may be used as cultural and pedagogical resources to support the learning of English. Thus, in this paper, we address two research questions:

1)	How do secondary English teachers perceive the long-term role of Bhutanese literature as a source of cultural knowledge in the English curriculum? and
2)	What knowledge and attitude do secondary students show following three months of learning about Bhutanese folk literature in the secondary English curriculum?

In this constructivist study, part of a wider study by Thinley (2010), to address question 1, mail questionnaires were sent to all secondary English teachers in Bhutan. Questionnaires were mailed to the English teachers and 181 completed questionnaires were returned (38% of total questionnaires mailed). This response rate would be quite conservative since there would have been some questionnaires that went to schools and were not used. The purpose-developed questionnaire was trialled. Then in-depth interviews were undertaken with six (expert) teachers who had a particular interest in the use of folk literatures in their lessons. While the questionnaires were analyzed using simple content analysis techniques, the interviews were analyzed thematically. Research question 2 was addressed using action research (AR,

Maxwell, 2003) conducted with a group of 24 Class 11 science students by Thinley in a secondary school in south Bhutan over three months. Data in this AR project were gathered through (1) two rounds of questionnaires, one each at the beginning and end of the intervention project, and (2) three rounds of interviews, one each at the beginning, middle and end of the project. (3) Thinley and the teacher colleague also kept a diary. As with the teacher data, the responses to the questionnaires and interviews/diaries were analysed using content and thematic analysis techniques respectively. The study was limited to the secular forms of Bhutanese folk literature that exist orally and in English translations.

Main findings: Secondary English teachers' perspectives

Three broad views emerged: promotion of the values of diversity; the tension between the curriculum's cultural priority and the need to teach students 'standard' English; and the discursive possibilities of English as an international language for Bhutanese culture.

Appreciation of cultural diversity

The notion of cultural diversity was included in the broad policy stance of the government and it was not part of the language of the extant English curriculum. Nor did the teachers acquire relevant knowledge and skills to deal with diversity in teacher training. We were not surprised by the teachers' silence in relation to cultural diversity in questionnaire responses. Consequently, the focus was on interview data where this issue could be explored.

Generally, three themes emerged. First, the informants recognized that cultural variations existed in the Bhutanese society which ought to be recognized and respected. Second, when cultural differences were recognized and respected, and people feel appreciated, mutual understanding grows among the people. Third, as one interviewee said, if students were given the opportunity to read English translations of Bhutanese folk

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literature, then they would be able to “understand the different ways or different life styles in different parts of the country.” The same interviewee also viewed translation of Bhutanese folk literature into English (e.g. Kurtoep to English, Sharchopkha to English or Nepali to English) as “fair” to those languages and the people who speak them. Another also argued that such translations would help to foster intercultural understanding among the people, “intimacy with ourselves, amongst ourselves,” and a sense of “belonging,” “integrity” and “respect.” While the teachers stated their understanding of cultural diversity in broad terms and in the context of student learning, they did not go into the complex interaction of culture, curriculum and teaching practice in the context of a multilingual and multicultural classroom.

Cultural learning and learning to use ‘standard English’

Although there has been no study to show classroom-based perspectives on it, an unspoken predicament in English education concerning what knowledge is of most worth for the students has always been there. The tension was visible in the teachers’ perceptions. The study of Bhutanese folk literature (BFL) in English translations personifies this tension. In Table 1, 98 (54%) of the 181 questionnaire respondents preferred inclusion of Bhutanese folk literature in the English curriculum, while 91 (50%) stated preference for the Dzongkha curriculum.

Table 1. The role of BFL in the curriculum (N, (%))

Bhutanese folk literature should be included in the English curriculum.	Bhutanese folk literature should be included in the Dzongkha curriculum.	Bhutanese folk literature is appropriate for class 7 to 12.	Because of its cultural relevance, Bhutanese texts motivate students better than non-Bhutanese texts.	Bhutanese folk literature should be included in the school curriculum as it will enable students to learn and appreciate Bhutanese culture.
98 (54%)	91 (50%)	144 (80%)	127 (70%)	63 (35%)

The evenly split difference in views was confirmed in the interviews. The informants stated dissatisfaction as well as satisfaction with the ‘standard of English’ used in Bhutanese folk literature. However, Bhutanese texts were well thought of. An interviewee remarked:

We teach [Bhutanese folk literature] just for its beauty and for students enjoy it. Also teachers feel very comfortable teaching it. But it is difficult to construct good test items from it based on Bloom’s taxonomy as the items drawn from it don’t fulfil the criteria for good questions. It is difficult to follow the table of specifications.

Some informants viewed Bhutanese folk literature in English as culturally useful and relevant material for the English curriculum. The “expression and vocabulary” as used in Bhutanese folk literature is “rich enough to make students appreciate how the situation is being expressed and how things are being discussed,” and that the “language used there is quite enough for our students” were two interviewees’ comments. Dyenka (1999, p. 5) saw this tension in the teaching of high school English in Bhutan and said that if the “cultural and curricular conflicts” in the English curriculum were recognized and addressed, then “we will be able to help students learn English better and enable teachers to teach English better.”

Discursive possibilities of Bhutanese folk literature in English

Since English was welcomed as a necessity and not forced upon the people by empire builders (see also Dyenka, 1999) or cultural missionaries, English is viewed positively in Bhutan and is perceived even as an effective agent of cultural assertion and identity in the global community. This positive stance was reflected in English teachers’ perceptions that English offered cultural possibilities. Teachers also generally viewed English as a popular language and so could “popularize” Bhutan. An

interviewee remarked that Bhutanese folk literature in English would provide people outside Bhutan a chance to “appreciate the unique beauty, the culture and tradition, and the imaginative and creative minds of our people.” Yet, another teacher said:

English ... has become a kind of language of the aristocracy, a language of people at the higher ends of society. It has become a language of big people. ... Its status is something like this in Bhutan because when somebody speaks English, he seems like an elite person.

This English teacher’s perspective helps us to understand the inherent tensions between culture, language and curriculum against the backdrop of globalization. Crystal (1997, p. 115) notes the dilemma and ambivalent attitude with which some writers of Britain’s former colonies view the English language: “(They) see themselves as facing a dilemma: if they write in English, their work will have the chance of reaching a worldwide audience; but to write in English may mean sacrificing their cultural identity.” However, Bhutanese English teachers generally perceived a dual advantage in promoting Bhutanese folk literature in English in particular, and the English language in general. First, it is perceived as a popular language and a high status language. Second, English can expose Bhutanese cultures to the outside world. So it provides discursive possibilities to the cultures which otherwise would stay in their oral forms and perhaps face the danger of disappearing.

The six English teachers, who were interviewed after the questionnaire data were analysed, thought that students’ interest and motivation to learn English were higher when they were exposed to culturally familiar material and prior experience. There they felt emotionally safe. These experts said students were able to express themselves better in English and engage in discussion and higher-order thinking, and thus engage in active learning. A minority (35%) thought the Bhutanese folk literature in the English curriculum would provide opportunities to appreciate

Bhutanese culture. However, there were some surveyed teachers who disapproved of English translations of Bhutanese folk literature as appropriate curriculum material for learning standard English. The six expert teachers also said that English translations of Bhutanese folk literature would promote understanding of and respect for cultural differences in contrast to the views of the secondary English teachers at large.

In summary, culturally familiar materials enhance the quality of student learning experience through increased interest and motivation to learn. Second, teachers generally viewed the role of English in terms of its ability to assert Bhutan's unique cultural identity in a globalized world. Despite the burden to teach good English, the cultural role of English translations of the oral literatures was acknowledged, but less so as a resource for standard English. Third, the six expert teachers believed that English translations of Bhutanese folk literature could help to preserve and promote culture, including the enrichment of the diverse cultural traditions that exist in Bhutan. What follows represent students' reactions to these and other issues in the action research.

Findings: Secondary students' perspectives

A comprehensive overview of the action research can be found in Thinley and Maxwell (2013a, 2013b). Here the focus is upon the students' reactions to the role of English in the curriculum. Two relevant themes were developed.

Status of English translations of Bhutanese folk literature

The Class 11 students over time generally made evaluative statements about English translations of Bhutanese folk literature in terms of the richness of vocabulary, complexity of structures, notions of 'good English,' depth and sophistication of ideas and themes, depth of feeling, and depth and sophistication of the aesthetic and cultural elements of the stories and poems they have read and discussed in the action research lessons. The

concept itself was quite sophisticated for Class 11 students. The statements in these first interviews mostly showed the informants' general awareness of the surface features of Bhutanese folk literature in English, while in the second interview, they were able to talk about its aesthetic and cultural values. For example, referring to a Bhutanese writer writing in English, one of the informants said that he could write "beautifully with his poetic imagination." And progressively in the third interview, the informants were able to compare Bhutanese folk literature with English literature from other countries.

In terms of the standard of English used in Bhutanese folk literature, opinions varied over time and across people. For example, student Khandro's first interview generalizations about standard (e.g. "things that we can see") moved to phrases in the second interview such as "plain narrative," and it was more "poetical and more interesting." By the third interview, Khandro was able to evaluate the stylistic quality of Bhutanese folk literature against external criteria for 'standard' English; a clear distinction was made between "deep feelings" in respect of literature from other countries and "plain narratives" in respect of Bhutanese folk literature. Student Wangyal held a different perspective and said that Bhutanese writers too had the ability to write beautifully about their culture and landscape. In the first interview, Wangyal used knowledge words that were part of familiar discourse (e.g. "environment"; "society"; "culture"; "tradition") and by the third interview, Wangyal was able to further elaborate his learning by referring to the spiritual (e.g. "compassion") and personal qualities of the Bhutanese people (e.g. "responsibility"). He said that his appreciation of these values increased his interest in Bhutanese folk literature. These are illustrative of the many possible examples of how most Class 11 students connected to Bhutanese cultural elements through English translations of Bhutanese folk literature.

Class 11 students attached high status to Bhutanese folk literature mostly because of its cultural and historical values.

Moreover, 18 (75%) respondents stated preference for Bhutanese folk literature in English over others. Only 3 (13%) respondents stated preference for folk literature in Dzongkha. In the second administration, the number of respondents increased to 22 (92%), that is, almost the whole class. There was also a shift from a generally naïve and banal attitudinal stance towards English translations of Bhutanese folk literature in comparison with English literature from other countries, in the beginning, to more explicit forms of evaluative and comparative understanding of the former's aesthetic, cultural and spiritual values in the end. To illustrate the pattern, in the first interview, most of the informants judged the standard of English translations of Bhutanese folk literature as simply "not high," "low," "OK," and needing "improvement." In the second interview, the informants generally recognized and appreciated the aesthetic qualities of Bhutanese folk literature in English. By the third interview, most of the informants said that English translations of Bhutanese folk literature lacked sophistication and depth as compared with English literature from other countries. The students generally found the standard of English used in Bhutanese folk literature lower than traditional English literature. Yet, generally the informants also considered Bhutanese folk literature interesting and beautiful.

Bhutanese folk literature and the role of English

In the Action Research, not much emphasis was placed on the role of English in relation to Bhutanese culture. But the learning was undertaken in English in the context of the secondary English curriculum. The 'role of English' generally includes the advantages of English translation of folk literature for Bhutanese culture, and the status of English as a global language and its implications for Bhutanese culture.

There exists an unspoken tension between Dzongkha, the national language and language of culture, and English, the language of globalization. But since the tension is not part of popular discourse, it was understandable that the students

considered it unorthodox to compare English with Dzongkha. Hence, a typical initial response was “English has become a universal language and many people even in Bhutan can read and write in English, and they can understand it.” By the third interview, some of the students showed explicit interpretive knowledge of the cultural advantages of English translations of Bhutanese folk literature. Their reason for this, included amongst others, was that English was a richer language than Dzongkha. Bhutanese folk literature in English dealt with Bhutanese culture and history, which were easy to understand. Apparently they felt more comfortable reading Bhutanese literature in English than in Dzongkha. They perceived the advantages of English translations for cross-cultural knowledge and understanding, and cultural identity. Dzongkha was more complex, they said, and lacked interest in it. Data segments from student Jigdrel’s three interviews represent a typical response pattern. In the first interview, Jigdrel did not explicitly talk about the role of English in relation to Bhutanese folk literature. In the second interview, on the other hand, he stated his preference for English more explicitly. Progressively, in the third interview Jigdrel expressed a heightened sense of awareness: “After I have been through this action research, I am also equally interested to read it in English” and “English is very important in the modern world.”

Discussion

A vast majority of the teachers believed that culturally relevant texts in English motivated the students to learn English better than those that were not. They agreed that their students learnt English better and they enjoyed learning more when the curriculum materials had familiar settings, characters, cultural concepts and themes in them. This can be set against the experiences of many of the teachers who had been at school prior to the Bhutanization of the curriculum (Maxwell, 2008) and the contextual demands of traditional texts in English. Thus, these culture-rich translations can be used in the English curricula as cultural and pedagogical resources in a language that interests

young people. These perceptions support the approach taken in policy that cultural values in children can be instilled and cultural alienation prevented (e.g. see Ura, 2009, p. 53).

Interestingly, most of the informants acknowledged the value of cultural diversity and its place in the curriculum. Moreover, the teachers generally believed that through exposure to English translations of diverse Bhutanese folk literatures, students would develop deeper understanding of diversity and its value for Bhutanese culture as a whole. These views are consonant with the government's stance on cultural diversity (eg GNHC, 2009a, p. 161).

Although the teachers acknowledged the pedagogical and cultural advantages of having Bhutanese folk literature in the English curriculum, in the interviews, some of them also admitted that the quality of English used in Bhutanese folk literature was not good enough for the students to learn 'standard English.' So, in their view, Bhutanese folk literature is not a good bridge to standard English, yet the action research study certainly showed the students' positive reactions to Bhutanese folk literature in English. Additionally, the teachers' general perception about English as a language of prestige is significant because it reflects the status of English in Bhutan, as is the case in other developing countries as shown in Hohenthal's (2003, pp. 24-42) study, and by Abdullah's (2001, p. 350) and Ayyub's (1994, pp. 211-212) claims for English in Singapore and Malaysia respectively. Moreover, English in Bhutan does not have the post-colonial overtones that it has in some other countries.

A significant contrast was seen in relation to the concept of cultural identity. In the interviews, while the students generally talked about how Bhutanese folk literature in English translations would popularize Bhutanese cultural identity outside Bhutan, the teachers were generally silent about it. On the other hand, the teachers implicitly linked the notion of identity to Dzongkha suggesting that Dzongkha was the main agent of cultural identity. This view is much closer to official policy. The students'

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perspectives represent an understanding of the emerging role of English in a globalized world. Both the perspectives are legitimate and have implications for theory and practice. While the teachers spoke with care and reverence for Dzongkha, the students spoke in terms of their aspirations about the English language in a globalized world.

The recurrent theme was that documenting the rich and diverse oral literatures from different languages in Bhutan in the form of English translations would not only help to preserve these oral traditions and their cultures, but would also enrich the existing diversity in Bhutanese culture as a whole. A generally accepted argument was that since English is a global language and its popularity in Bhutan is growing rapidly, documenting the diverse oral literatures in English not only can keep these cultures alive, but will also expose the Bhutanese culture to the outside world. However, both the teachers and students were generally silent about the more delicate issue of what would happen to the lesser known languages and cultures as a result of globalization, and the dominance of Dzongkha and English, and the cultures they represent.

Teachers and students also held complementary views regarding the status of English translations of Bhutanese folk literature. Translations were held in high esteem for their aesthetic and cultural values. However, they considered the standard of English in folk literature rather low and not appropriate as a good model of English for students to learn. These views raise a number of important issues regarding the quality of English translations, the process of selecting materials for the curriculum, and the need for more intensive study of the literary, aesthetic and cultural elements of Bhutanese folk literature so that teachers and students are able to make judgments about quality on the basis of close knowledge of the genres. There are pedagogical issues to be addressed also.

Policy documents generally attributed three commonly accepted roles to English in Bhutan - as a language of

modernization, as an official language alongside Dzongkha, and as a language of curriculum and instruction, hence as a tool for “thinking.” Teachers and students, on the other hand, showed alternative views. Although there are drawbacks in doing so, they said translating the oral literatures into English can help to popularize the oral traditions and cultural values in lesser known languages, promote intercultural empathy, and lastly, promote diversity. The deeper implications of English translations for the Bhutanese culture were not visible in the teachers’ and students’ perceptions especially in relation to minority languages themselves. Lo Bianco (2008, p. 1) says, “Languages are deeply intellectual and intensely practical. When you learn a language well, you engage in the deepest manifestations of a cultural system.”

In fact, there is likely to be cultural losses through English translations. The whole process could well hasten the decline of minority languages in Bhutan. On the other hand, translating the disparate forms of folk literature from the lesser known languages into English might help prevent these literatures from disappearing with the languages themselves. More particularly, transmission of the cultural essence of these folk literatures would be enabled. English translations would also make the diverse range of oral traditions available to the Bhutanese people as well as to the world. Of course, that is what English teachers would say. What about Dzongkha teachers? They would perhaps think differently. We suggest a similar piece of research with Dzongkha teachers. Clearly there is an academic debate to be had in this regard.

Conclusions

Three important perspectives on the role of English for oral and written forms of Bhutanese folk literature were identified. First, they can create opportunities for students to learn English in culturally familiar contexts. Second, using folk literatures that exist in different languages, but translated into English as pedagogical catalysts, will not only promote the values of cultural

diversity in school, but will also ensure the intergenerational continuity of Bhutanese culture through the education of children. Third, since English is a global language and a language of growing popularity in Bhutan, translating oral literatures into English will help to promote cultural diversity and continuity in the face of globalization.

The role of English translations of the oral traditions, and the role of English generally, and its implications for language and culture in Bhutan should be reviewed but not before empirical studies are undertaken on its spread, influence, status and impact on people's lives and their language and culture. In the age of globalization, this seems essential. While there is at present a paucity of studies on the role of English in Bhutan in relation to culture, the few statements made in English curriculum documents suggest the discursive possibilities of English, as beautifully sketched here:

The flexibility, versatility, and richness of English allow it to be used in a variety of circumstances and to be used by the Bhutanese people to meet their own goals ... The cultural and intellectual resources of the English-speaking world and the formulations of philosophy, jurisprudence and economics, to mention a few, have been opened to the Bhutanese people directly. In return, Bhutan has been able to share with the international community its rich cultural and spiritual heritage and, in the ensuing dialogues, enrich the intellectual resource of the world (CAPSD, 2006a, p. ix; CAPSD, 2006c, p. x; CAPSD, 2005d, p. xi; CAPSD, 2005f, p. vii).

While the English language presents possibilities for the survival of the oral traditions, the study has brought to light a number of issues that have not been attended to, including the quality and cultural authenticity of English translations of Bhutanese folk literature, and the role of English in Bhutan's multicultural and multilingual landscape. The present study helps

to understand that while the oral and written forms of Bhutanese folk literature can be used as pedagogical resources, success will depend on the epistemological approach of the English curriculum and the teachers' understanding of folk literature and its cultural value. Not so well known is how to teach about culture in a multicultural environment (see Thinley & Maxwell, 2013b). Finally, this study has shown possibilities and starting points for more sustained work in folk literature education, including educational policy, curricula, pedagogy, professional support in schools, teacher training, and folk literature studies in Bhutan.

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Diversity in Food Ways of Bhutanese Communities Brought About by Ethnicity and Environment

*Kunzang Dorji, Kesang Choden & Walter Roder**

Introduction

In mountainous Bhutan, geographical isolation has helped in conserving local cultures and traditions in isolated pockets. The small population of about 700,000 is said to speak 19 living languages (Van Driem, 2004). Many of these communities are small in numbers, economically and socially marginalized, and live in remote regions. With road access and penetration of global forces like the media and international markets, many of these communities are in transition and their distinctive cultural practices are in serious danger of being lost without having been documented. While substantial information has been generated by scholars, promoters for culture, the tourist industry and the international media on the culture, language and religious practices typical of western Bhutan, information available for most of the minority communities is limited. Recent research documenting the traditional knowledge and practices of particular ethnic groups vulnerable to assimilation were published by Giri (2003) for the Monpa communities in Trongsa and by Sharma (2005) for the *Lhops* in Samtse district.

* Walter Roder is the Country Director of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Bhutan; Kunzang Dorji is the Project Coordinator of the Leveraging Cultural Diversity Project of the HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Thimphu; and Kesang Choden is employed by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation. Correspondence: kunzang.dorji@helvetas.org

Diversity in Food Ways of Bhutanese Communities

The Bhutanese culture, food habits and the agriculture practices were no doubt influenced by those prevailing in the neighboring regions, especially Tibet, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal. Yet, most of the Bhutanese communities evolved with some degree of isolation resulting in specific food habits. With few exceptions, chili (*Capsicum annum*) is a very important ingredient for all Bhutanese, and no dishes, except perhaps medicinal food and baby food, are cooked without chili (Roder et al, 2008; Choden, 2007). Food culture of Bhutan has been discussed by Choden (Choden, 2007) who besides describing the food habits of mainstream Bhutanese society also provide information on food habits of shifting cultivators in Zhemgang and some groups of Nepalese origin.

Investigations were carried out with the objectives to document traditional food systems in five ethnically distinct communities in Bhutan, especially focusing on: 1) Ethnobotanic information, 2) Crop diversity, 3) Cultivation practices, and use of crops. All five communities are located in the lower mid hills of the country having subtropical climate (Table 1).

Table 1. General information of selected communities

Community	District	Respondents (nos) ¹	Altitude range	Language	Distance to road in 2010 ² (hrs)	Main staple
Lotokuchhu	Samtse	16	800-1800	Lhopu	2	Maize, millet
Lumbay	Samtse	15	600-1200	Rai	4	Maize, rice, cassava
Ngangla	Zhemgang	21	1225	Khengkha	12	Maize, rice
Kengkhar	Mongar	22		Tshanglakh	14	Maize, rice
Gongdu	Mongar	22		Gondupikha	16	Maize, rice

¹Respondents for household survey

²Distance in walking hours

Materials and methods

Selection of communities

The communities were selected for a larger project focusing on culture diversity, based on: 1) representing a distinct cultural identity, 2) danger of cultural erosion (plans of road access, modern education, impact of dominant culture), 3) potential for tourist activities, and 4) sufficient size of population (at least 100 households).

House hold survey

During 2010/11, surveys were carried out in all five communities visiting 14-26 households per community (Table 1). Information collected from each respondent included: crops cultivated, used or sold, number of varieties of individual crops, food eaten, food preferences.

Group discussions

Group discussion were conducted in all communities to get additional information on cultivation practices, food practices, production methods, and changes in food production and consumption practices.

Results

Cultivation practices

Traditionally three main land types of agriculture land are recognized in Bhutan: “wetland,” mostly used for rice cultivation, “dry land” used for all kind of rainfed agriculture and “*tseri*,” a fallow rotation system similar to those used in other parts of asia (Roder et al. 1992). Rice fields are terraced but the area for this land type is limited due to lack of irrigation sources and extreme slope gradients. Only the Nalatong and Lumbay communities have appreciable rice cultivation. Dry land is the main category of agricultural land

in all four communities. Most of the dry land fields are not terraced but many fields would have bunds built up over years by the effect of ploughing and by collecting of stones by the cultivators.

Over the last decade, the Government of Bhutan has strongly discouraged the use of the *tseri* system in the interest of safeguarding forest, forest products and wildlife, and to prevent environmental degradation. A reduction in *tseri* cultivation, resulting in an increase in dry land agriculture is thus the main change observed, especially for the Lotokutchu and Nganla communities where *tseri* was comparatively more important. Another important change observed is a decrease in the size of land holding per household as result from land fragmentations when families expand and establish new households.

Darft bullocks are used in all communities for land preparation while all the other cultivation work is done manually, following traditional methods. Hand tools used are similar across communities, with the most important being the hoe and the sickle. The most common method of planting maize in dry land, by dibbling maize seeds after the plough, is commonly used in all five locations. Similarly, the main constraints to crop production are the same across communities: wild life damage, guarding fields against wildlife, weeds and storage problems. The crops that are stored for long time include foxtail millet, common millet and finger millet.

Soil fertility for dry and wet lands is largely maintained through inputs of nutrients and organic matter produced through livestock production systems. Much of these nutrients originate from the forest (Roder et al 2003). While farmers in Kengkhar and Gongdu are largely using stall feeding, and apply bedding materials to produce manure carried to the field before cultivation, no such tradition exists in Nganla, Lotokuchu and Lumbay. In these communities,

cattle are kept overnight in the crop fields to retain the dung and graze freely during the fallow periods.

Crops and vegetables

Maize is by far the most important crop across all communities (Table 2, Figure 1). Other important crops cultivated by a large proportion of the households were banana, mandarin, ginger, taro and the different millet species. Cassava was important for Lotokuchu, Lumbay and Ngangla, while potato was important for Kengkhar and Ngangla only. Some of the crops would be planted on small areas only, and therefore the frequency of cultivation is not giving an indication of the area cultivated. However, it does provide a reasonably good indication of the importance of the particular crop. Often a mixture of crops is cultivated together. For example, in Kengkhar, one can find examples where five different tuber species are grown together, namely: potato, cassava, sweet potato, taro and *Canna edulis*.

Cash crops, especially mandarin are important sources of cash income in all communities. Cardamom is cultivated in Lumbay and Gongdu. Traditionally cardamom used to be planted under the canopy of natural forests, often encroaching upon government forest lands. Today there is an increasing trend to plant the cash crop in dry land, which is affecting cultivation areas for other traditional crops and cropping patterns.

Table 2. Frequency of crops cultivated

Species	Households cultivating species (%)				
	Lotokuchu	Lumbay	Ngangla	Kengkhar	Gongdu
Maize	100	100	100	100	100
Banana	94	47	76	91	32
Mandarin	38	47	91	77	86
Ginger	44	73	67	73	77
Taro	63	80	100	36	41

Diversity in Food Ways of Bhutanese Communities

Species	Households cultivating species (%)				
	Lotokuchu	Lumbay	Ngangla	Kengkhar	Gongdu
Foxtail millet ¹	75	80	81	32	18
Cassava	63	73	57	36	32
Finger millet ²	94	80	57	5	18
Sweet potato	38	53	71	59	14
Potato	6	7	43	91	27
Common millet ³	81	20	19	23	27
S. buckwheat ⁴	31	47	10	27	18
Mustard	75	33		5	14
B. buckwheat ⁵	38	13	38		
Sorghum	19			9	32
Rice	6	20	24	9	
Barley	6		5	5	23
Cardamom ⁶		27			5
Wheat				5	

¹*Setaria italica*; ²*Eleusine coracana*; ³*Panicum miliaceum*; ⁴*Fagopyrum esculentum*; ⁵*Fagopyrum tataricum*; ⁶*Amomum Subulatum*.

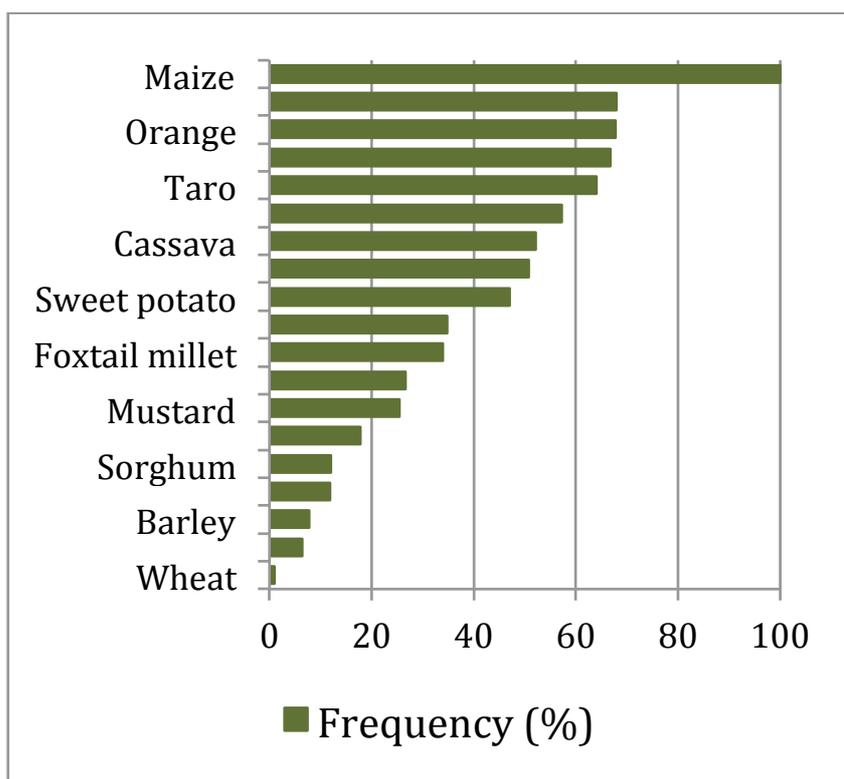


Figure 1. Average frequency of crops

Although the landholding with individual households are small, the variety of vegetables cultivated is high. Based on the house hold survey, mustard green, pumpkin, chilli and bean were the most important vegetables across all locations (Table 3, Figure 2). Radish was important for Ngangla, Gongdu and Kengkhar, while squash was important for Lotokuchu, Lumbay and Ngangla. Both, probably more a reflection of the climate rather than cultural preferences. These vegetables are generally grown on small pages near the individual houses.

Table 3. Frequency of vegetables cultivated

Species	Households cultivating species (%)				
	Lotokuchu	Lumbay	Ngangla	Kengkhar	Gongdu
Mustard green ¹	100	93	100	100	100
Pumpkin	94	80	100	100	86

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Chilli	100	100	71	100	82
Dolichos bean ²	94	47	95	86	91
Bean	38	80	100	100	64
Radish	31	60	91	77	91
Eggplant	63	73	81	36	55
Squash	94	87	81	32	5
Tomato	38	20	86	64	73
Cabbage	19	53	81	50	64
<i>Olachoto</i> ³	69	47	38	64	41
Lufa		7	62	32	36
Turnip	19	20	24	9	59
Carrot			24	9	18
Gourds	13	20			

¹*Brassica campestris ssp. pekinensis*; ²*Dolichos lablab*; ³*Cyclanthera pedata*

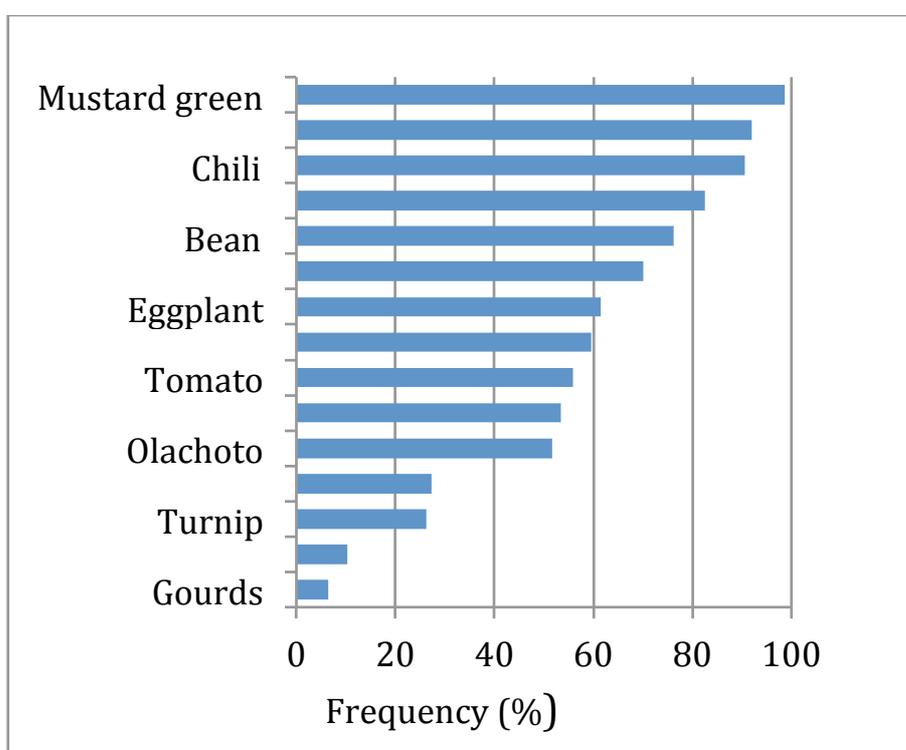


Figure 2. Frequency of vegetables cultivated

Diversity of crops and varieties

There is no clear difference in crop diversity, as all five communities cultivate a large number of different crops and vegetables. The communities in Lotokuchu and Ngangla have, however a comparatively higher number of varieties for individual species. The highest diversity within the same species was reported in Lotokuchu for foxtail millet, cassava, sweet potato, banana, chilli, tomato, lablab bean, squash, eggplant and ginger, while Ngangla had the highest number of varieties for maize, finger millet and pumpkin (Tables 4 and 5). Species were all communities mentioned an average of one variety only were common millet, radish, *olachoto* and mustard (not shown in tables 4 and 5).

Table 4. Varieties of crops

Community	Average number of varieties (nos)						
	Maize	Rice	Finger millet	Foxtail millet	Cassava	Sweet potato	Banana
Lotokuchu	1.4	2.0	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.2
Lumbay	1.7	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1
Ngangla	1.9	1.6	1.7	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Kengkhar	1.7	2.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Gongdu	1.6		1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

In Kengkhar, three local varieties of maize i.e *Beipu long*, *Betpa*, *Ashom*, *Teksumpa* and *Barkong tsanma* used to be cultivated in the past. *Teksumpa* and *Barpong* varieties are now replaced by dominant maize species introduced by the agriculture ministry. *Teksumpa* is a maize variety which can be harvested in three months after its cultivation. In Lotokuchu, two local varieties of maize, *Lhongrahm* and *Serahm* are still grown. *Serahm* is cultivated in the lower altitude along the banks of the Moti river (Toorsa) towards the end of January through the first half of February. *Lhongrahm* is cultivated a month later in the higher regions of Lotokuchu.

Teksumpa is also a dominant local variety of maize grown in Kaktong.

In Gongdu, a species of bean named *gamgali* (*Dolichos* bean) and four varieties of chili are grown. In Lotokuchu, a local variety of beans called *dukseiiy* and a bitter brinjal called *Beang* is still grown.

Table 5. Varieties of vegetables

Community	Average number of varieties (nos)							
	Chilli	Toma-to	Dolichos bean	Mustard green	Pump-kin	Squa-sh	Egg plant	Gin-ger
Lotokuc-hu	2.4	1.6	2.2	1.1	1.7	1.2	1.4	1.3
Lumbay	1.3	1.0	2.0	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.0
Ngangla	1.8	1.1	1.7	1.5	2.2	1.0	1.0	1.0
Kengkhar	1.6	1.1	1.3	1.6	2.2	1.0	1.0	1.0
Gongdu	1.5	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.4	-	1.0	1.0

Crops used for feed, alcohol and trade

Maize is the most important species used for animal feed (Table 6) and alcohol (Table 7). Other important species for animal feed were millets, cassava and mustard (Table 6). For alcohol production, millets and cassava are important in all communities.

The most important species traded were mandarin, ginger and cardamom. Ngangla and Lotokuchu reported a wide range of different species traded. In addition to the species listed in table 8, households from Ngangla also recorded sales of sweet buckwheat, bitter buckwheat, finger millet, common millet, foxtail millet, barley and lufa by 4.8, 9.5, 4.8, 14.3, 4.8, 4.8 and 19%, respectively. Kengkhar and Gongdu reported low frequency of trade beside mandarin with a small number of households in Kengkhar trading of banana (9%) and maize (14%), and a small number of households in Gongdu reported trading ginger (5%) and chilli (9%).

No barter or sale was reported for rice, wheat, sorghum, cassava, potato, tomato, radish, gourd, eggplant and carrot. From Ngangla, bartering was reported only for maize, buckwheat, millets and barley.

Table 6. Crops and vegetables used for animal feed

Species	Households reporting the use of species for animal feed (% house holds)														
	Lotokuchu			Lumbay			Ngangla			Kengkhar			Gongdu		
	cow	Pig	hen	cow	pig	hen	cow	Pig	hen	cow	pig	hen	cow	Pig	hen
Maize	69	50	56	73	67	47	76	86	90	100	18	68	32	36	55
Buck-wheat sweet	6		6			7	5	5	5	27		14	14	14	14
Buck-wheat bitter	13	6	13			7	10	19	14						
Finger millet		6	13			7	10	14	5	32			14	14	9
Common millet	6	6	6			7	14	14		27			5	9	9
Foxtail millet		6	13							18			9	14	5
Cassava	19	31	6	13	53			14							
Taro	13	31		20	53			14		14	9			14	
Radish	6						5	5		9			9	14	
Pumpkin	31	31		7			14	5		14			5	9	
Squash	13	25		7	7		5	5		9			5	5	5
Mustard	44	44	19	20	13					5			5		
Others <10% ¹	T, MG, BN	B, MG, BN	B		T, MG		MG	B	B	B, T			T, MG, S	T, MG, S	

¹B = barley, T = Turnip, MG = Mustard green, S = Sorghum, BN = Banana

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Table 7. Crops used for alcohol

Species ¹	Households using species for alcohol (%)				
	Lotokuchu	Lumbay	Ngangla	Kengkhar	Gongdu
Maize	81	67	100	100	100
Finger millet	44	53	62	32	18
Common millet	6	53	62	27	14
Foxtail millet	13		10	18	18
Cassava	56	33	10	18	9

¹Others reported were: buckwheat in Ngangla (24%), taro in Khengkhar (36%), wheat in Ngangla (5%), and barley in Ngangla (5%) and Gongdu (5%).

Table 8. Crops traded (barter or sale)

Species ¹	Households selling species (%)				
	Lotokuchu	Lumbay	Ngangla	Kengkhar	Gongdu
Orange	38	40	86	36	86
Ginger	31	40	10		5
Banana	6		14	9	
Cardamom		20	19		
Maize			33	14	
Sweet potato	13		71		
Chilli			14		9
Dolichos bean	6		14		
Mustard green	13		24		
Cabbage		7	19		
Mustard	19	7			

¹Others reported were: Bean in Ngangla (48%), squash in Lotokuchu (38%), turnip in Ngangla (19%), pumpkin in Lotokuchu (6%) and *olachoto* in Lotokuchu (6%).

Crops eaten, preferred crops and changes in preferences

Maize and rice are the most important staple foods for all communities (Table 9). A high frequency of millet is reported from Lotokuchu, where during the summer, millet is more frequently eaten than rice. Cassava is an important food for Lumbay and Lotokutchu only.

With some exceptions, the most widely cultivated crops and vegetables are also the most frequently eaten species. Preference for maize crop, due to its high adaptability even in dry soil conditions, rocky slopes and swallow soils, is widespread across the five communities. Crops like maize need less labour and tending. It can be grown and harvested two times a year in low warmer altitudes like Lumbay, Kengkhar, Gongdu and Kaktong. In Lotokuchu, the fertile alluvial soils along the banks of the river Amochu provide perfect land for maize growth. Among the crops grown in these communities, the yield for maize is considered much better than the yield of other local crops. As a result, maize has eased their dependence on other traditional crops like finger millets, foxtail millets, barley, wheat, buckwheat, rice and sorghum. This trend, however, may contribute to further loss of traditional species and varieties. As cash crop cultivation encroach aggressively on dry lands, the traditional crops are gradually pushed on to smaller peripheral lands leading to reduced grain productions. This trend has led to increasing dependence on imported rice from neighbouring India to supplement seasonal grain shortages.

Traditionally, food from the wild, either from the forest or from the fallow vegetation of *tseri* fields, were important food sources, especially for the Lotokuchu and Ngangla communities. These plants included wild yam species and a wide range of species used as vegetables. Based on the meals reported, wild vegetables are still widely used for the Lotokuchu, Lumbay and Ngangla communities, especially in the winter (Table 9).

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Table 9. Meals reported

Species	Lotokuchu		Lumbay		Ngangla		Kengkhar		Gongdu	
	s ¹	w ²	S	w	S	w	s	w	s	w
Staple food species (%)										
Maize	54	24	53	47	27	92	79	98	79	86
Millet	25	42	1	7					2	2
Rice	20	52	51	65	76	92	25	97	18	40
Cassava		12		30					1	
Vegetable species (%)										
Chili	100	97	89	100	97	100	98	100	99	100
Mustard green	6	48	12	16	22	16	20	17	18	14
Pumpkin	19	12	8	5	14	20	16	24	6	20
Bean	11	3	6		28	33	14	17	21	14
Potato		30	4	7	6	23	10	23	5	14
Radish			1		10	15	20	12	34	23
Cabbage	3	21	4	5	5	23	9	17	3	15
Taro		6	1	9	11	13	2		5	9
Squash	22	9	13	5	1					
Eggplant	12		11		10	8			4	2
Olachoto		12		2		5	2	15		9
Turnip					6	8	1		6	17
Wild vegetables	3	12	9	7	8	30				
Others ³	G, BW		BN	BN	C, B	B, CF	C		C, CF	C

¹During summer; ²During winter; ³G = gourd; BW = buckwheat, BN = bitter nut, C = carrot, B = broccoli, CF = cauliflower

Discussions

In spite of the diversity in climate, soil conditions and ethnicity, our research showed many similarities in terms of crops used, ways of eating, food preferences and especially production methods. The agriculture practices, species used and their relative importance are similar across the five communities. In all locations, the dry land agriculture system used has evolved from traditional slash-and-burn systems,

which are typical for the subtropical regions of Southeast Asia. The tools and implements are similar across all locations. The weed species are also similar. For example, the introduced species *Ageratum_conyzoides* is commonly found in all four communities.

Surprisingly, the most important staple; maize and four out of the five most important vegetables; chili, pumpkin, dolichos bean and bean are species originating from the American continents. The fact that they are widespread in all five communities is a strong indication of the intensive exchange and interactions taking place between these so called isolated communities.

The extent of trading reported is strongly influenced by the access to markets. The specific hill environment offered opportunities for marketing summer produced vegetables in the nearby markets of India. Because of the good market, products may occasionally be carried to the market as described by Roder et al (2008) for potato. Boarding schools close to the community may also have offered market opportunities for the communities.

The increasing preference for maize across all the communities, besides helping in grain self-sufficiency and providing some food security, may lead towards monocropping, thus affecting crop diversity. Furthermore, modernization of agriculture to boost food production has altered traditional agricultural practices in many countries. Improved quality of seeds and crops have replaced traditional local varieties. Trends towards such changes are becoming visible in the communities studied. The preference and introduction of selected crops and cropping patterns have brought about higher yields to feed the growing population. At the same time, this trend has resulted in the erosion of crop genetic diversity. For example, in the past, Lumbay cultivated a number of millet and buckwheat varieties on *tseri* lands. Such cropping practice is now discontinued.

In Lotokuchu, a number of traditional millet varieties are still cultivated. This is because millets have significant function in the life cycle of the Lhops. Millets survived due to their significance as ritual crop; millets constitute important ingredients of traditional ritual offering. It is considered as the food of the deities, gods and goddesses. Lhops consider death as an important cycle of life, and elaborate rituals for the dead include offering of meals for the dead soul. The meal must be prepared from no other crop than *Chacktoh*, a variety of foxtail millet. Lhops also say that millets are drought resistant and can be easily propagated and stored up to 10-15 years. Despite the significance of the millets in the lives of the Lhops, three varieties of millets are no more cultivated.

Thus, it is advisable to initiate in situ conservation within the communities through the establishment of low technology (combining local traditional knowledge) germplasm repository of local crops to conserve and revive local traditional varieties.

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Exploring Bhutan's 'Natural Democracy': In Search of an Alternative View of Democracy

*Katsu Masaki**

Abstract

This paper seeks to make an alternative translation/interpretation of Bhutan's democracy, in place of the mainstream view that the country has recently made a decisive transition toward democracy. It calls our attention to the country's time-honored 'natural democracy,' which rests on monarchical authority and cohesive rural communities. Both of them represent vernacular forms of freedom and equality, contrary to their widely held image as being averse to democracy. This research was made possible by funding from the Japanese Government's Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research.

Introduction

Bhutan is no exception to the global trend towards democracy. The process of political reforms has been accelerated in recent years, culminating in the promulgation of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan in 2008. Most existing studies consider this as heralding a new era of 'democracy,' given that the Constitution stipulates that the form of government shall be that of 'democratic constitutional monarchy.' Indeed, among the major changes effected is the introduction of the parliamentary system in which the members of the bicameral legislature, consisting of the National Council and the National Assembly, are elected by universal suffrage, and the Cabinet is formed by

* Dr Katsu Masaki is an Associate Professor, Hirao School of Management, Konan University, Japan. Correspondence: k_masaki425@nifty.com

the ruling party holding the majority of seats in the National Assembly.

Accordingly, the first elections of the National Council and the National Assembly were conducted in 2007 and 2008, while the second elections took place in 2013. The Cabinet was formed in 2008 and 2013 respectively to start a five-year tenure as the popularly elected government. For the first time in the country's history, the government is entrusted to politicians needing to respond to popular pressures owing to the fact that the voters can remove them through the ballot box. The multi-party system has also come into being to prompt politicians to heed electoral demands in order to have any chance of winning office.

Democracy is not entirely new to Bhutan. The country has been treading a steady path to democracy for decades. Bhutan's monarchy was established in 1907, ending incessant feuds over succession and civil wars. The third King, who ascended the throne in 1952, initiated the process of democratization, building on the first and the second Kings' achievements in consolidating the Dynasty's legitimacy and stability. In 1953, the National Assembly was created as a legislative body, with local representatives from all the administrative districts. In 1968, the cabinet system started in order for the King to share his executive powers with the ministers to be appointed by the King.

During the reign of the fourth King, who ruled the country from 1972 to 2006, district- and county-level assemblies were formed in 1981 and 1991 respectively. In 1998, the King relinquished his chair (equivalent to a prime minister) in the cabinet, created the post of the prime minister to be rotated among the cabinet ministers, and entrusted the ministers with full executive roles. The next step on the incremental path to full democratization was the

biggest, boldest and the most surprising,¹ namely, a royal decree that was issued in 2001 to enact Bhutan's first constitution, which would further transfer the King's leadership role to the people to usher in a new era of 'democratic constitutional monarchy.'

Bhutan's case is often hailed as the 'middle path to democracy' or the 'gradualist approach to democracy,' in that it does not comply with conventional democratic transition theories, which are based on modern European history. In several areas of Europe, the power of absolute monarchs and the landed aristocracy came to be increasingly challenged by the rising middle class from the seventeenth century onward. This resulted in the emergence of constitutional government, the power of which was to be restricted by constitutional rules defining the relations between rulers and the ruled. It eventually led to the rise of liberal democracy under which politicians acquire the right to rule through competitive elections, and government exercises its power in line with the aspirations of the public.

In Bhutan, unlike in Europe, democratization did not arise out of regime disunity, but was advanced on the initiative of the King. Monarchy has not receded but has taken on renewed importance, as will be delineated below, contrary to the European historical experience, according to which the 'divine right of kings' is a defunct doctrine. The advent of 'democratic constitutional monarchy' has not diminished the role of religion in Bhutan, while in Europe, it was restricted as the authority of the church was called into question.

We thus pay attention to the uniqueness or the 'specialness' of Bhutan, but with reference to European history leading to modern liberal democracy. The country's 'democracy' is discussed because of the move that has

¹ Mark Turner, Sonam Chuki, and Jit Tshering, "Democratization by Decree: the Case of Bhutan," *Democratization* 18:1 (2011), pp.184-210: 197.

historically been made towards the establishment of the current constitutional, representative government. Had the present form of government not been adopted, we might not even be deliberating about ‘democracy’ in Bhutan.

Does modern liberal democracy need to remain as our reference point? Is there any other standard by which democracy is discussed and analyzed so that we can free ourselves from the shackles of the orthodox story? If Bhutan’s democracy is to nurture the virtue of ‘government of the people, by the people, and for the people,’ to quote Abraham Lincoln, should we not seek a non-standard notion of democracy that occurs to them more naturally?

With these questions in mind, I hope to explore an alternative manner to inquire into Bhutan’s democracy, instead of drawing on the Eurocentric conception of modern liberal democracy as the foregone frame of reference. For this purpose, first, the paper will examine the pitfalls of equating the country’s democratization with the transition towards modern liberal democracy. Second, it will look into the democratic values embedded in the Bhutanese society, which constitute the country’s ‘home-grown natural democracy.’ Third, ‘natural democracy’ will be further analyzed, in view of its potential to address in an unorthodox manner the aporia of democracy, namely the irreconcilability between individual freedom and universal equality. The paper will conclude by pointing to the need to heed ‘natural democracy,’ to liberate ourselves from the orthodox explanations that center round the country’s adoption of liberal-democratic institutions.

Bhutan’s ‘Uniqueness’: With regard to modern liberal democracy

Setting the Context: Modern Liberal Democracy

Liberalism, a political creed committed to individual liberty, was the cornerstone of European history where the

rising middle class demanded that the political and economic privileges monopolized by the few should be revoked, in favor of a more equitable system, in which all are equally accorded the liberty to seek fulfillment. Liberalism thereafter continues to be 'the most powerful force shaping the western political tradition' up to the present.² Among a variety of possible forms or models of democracy, liberal democracy presently dominates the academic as well as popular thinking on the subject.

According to the advocates of liberal democracy, its strength is that citizens enjoy freedom and autonomy from the state, thus bringing about the expression of the widest possible range of views and beliefs. Liberal democracy is a system in which free citizens are given rights to grant or withdraw 'consent' to government, mandating it to exercise its power in line with their demands. In recent times, however, the focus of liberal democrats has come to be placed less on 'consent,' than on liberal democracy's capacity to forge 'consensus' or equilibrium in an increasingly complex society where there exists growing competition among rival interests.³

Accordingly, though democracy can be accounted for, either as institutional arrangements, ideals, or types of behavior toward others,⁴ an institutional analysis has in recent times tended to foreclose the other aspects; liberal democracy is generally considered to be attained when the following two conditions are met.⁵ First, various systems of checks and balances are instituted to constrain the government, which include a constitution, the separation of powers amongst public institutions, and regular, open

² Andrew Heywood, *Political Theory: Introduction, Third Edition* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.26.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.42-43.

⁴ Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), p.11.

⁵ Shin Chiba, *Democracy* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000), p.26.

elections. In the eyes of liberal democrats, government is a necessary evil in that it needs to exist to enforce law and order, and to safeguard individual liberty. Without devices to fragment governmental power, government is liable to be controlled by a small group that exercises dictatorial power over individual citizens.

Secondly, the state should serve as a neutral arbiter among competing interests in the society, and abstain from exercising social control from above. This is in line with liberalistic commitment to constructing a society where individuals can enjoy liberty in the vibrant sphere of the market, or in a healthy civil society. Because human beings are capable of making rational choices, by taking into account their surroundings, the state should focus on providing enabling conditions for individuals and groups to pursue their own happiness and fulfillment, though some form of social security is needed to protect those who find it difficult to help themselves. The state should refrain from prescribing what values are to be promoted in society.

'Uniqueness' of Bhutan's 'Democracy'

These two criteria of modern liberal democracy are implied in the above-mentioned assessment of Bhutan's democracy as the 'middle path' or the 'gradualist approach.' The country's case meets the first criterion. The process of separating governmental power culminated in the enactment of the Constitution in 2008, leading to the introduction of the parliamentary system under which free, competitive elections are held for the bicameral legislature. The National Council (NC) is to act as an alert and active house of review, and to question the constitutionality of decisions taken by the National Assembly (NA). The multi-party system⁶ is in

⁶ A multi-party system has not been introduced to the NC or local-level elections, but only to the NA election. This measure is intended to constrain the proliferation of divisive, partisan politics. In a similar vein, a political party is not allowed to be formed along the lines of region, religion, or other

place to compel different groups of politicians to compete with each other to frame politics that best respond to the preferences of the general public.

On the other hand, Bhutan's case can be judged to contravene the second criterion. The Constitution specifies that '[t]he State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness' (Article 9(2)). At the heart of GNH is the notion of fulfillment as emanating, not only from material prosperity, but also from spiritual and emotional well-being which is closely connected with social harmony and peace. Unrestrained individualism is seen as detrimental to the social fabric, in that it potentially divides people along economic, ethnic, religious, and other lines. With the forward march of modernization, care should be taken to preserve a cohesive society bound by mutual respect and obligation.

While GNH is not specifically referred to elsewhere in the Constitution, there are several clauses that uphold the underlying principles of GNH, which include a provision to promote a 'compassionate society rooted in the Buddhist ethos' (Article 9(20)), as well as provisions to protect the country's spiritual heritage (Article 3) and culture (Article 4). These provisions are to foster spiritual and emotional well-being, an integral element of GNH. Moreover, they are seen as indispensable to protect the independence and sovereignty of the last nation state based on Mahayana Buddhism, a point to be reiterated below. Bhutan is sandwiched between two giant, populous neighbors, China and India, which have merged Tibet and Sikkim into their respective territories.

sectional interests. Moreover, in order to deter post-election horse-trading, a two-tier system has been adopted for the NA election; a preliminary round is held to choose two parties that will participate in the final round.

According to Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, who served as the Chair of the Constitution Drafting Committee,⁷ '[t]here is no mention of religion and culture in any constitution of any other country except in the Constitution of Bhutan. Religion and culture play a vital role. Religion provides values and moral fibre whilst culture exhibits a separate identity and unity.'⁸ These would conventionally be interpreted as impediments to individual liberty. According to the wisdom of liberal democracy, these types of constitutional clauses risk leaving the definition of a 'good society' in the hands of the few who may articulate particularistic interests.

Why are these 'illiberal' provisions hailed as unique or special in existing studies on Bhutan's democracy? This is because liberal democracy, despite its promise to make possible a high degree of popular responsiveness, tends to cause political power to concentrate in the hands of small groups with money, power and position. This often creates a gulf between government and its subjects. In many of the world's 'advanced' liberal democracies, democracy has become synonymous with authoritarianism or totalitarianism.⁹ The ostensible virtue of individual freedom and autonomy is liable to mask the dominance by the privileged few, while the majority of citizens are reduced to passive roles and politics lapse into the concerns of closed elites.

Bhutan's polity is invaluable in today's global society, in that it seeks to promulgate an alternative notion of higher or inner freedom: freedom is considered to be attained when

⁷ The drafting committee was formed in November 2001 at the authorization of the King. It consisted of thirty-nine representatives from different sections of the society (the central monk body, the twenty districts, the judiciary, and government administration), with Chief Justice, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye as the chairperson.

⁸ Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, "The Making of the Constitution," *Kuensel* newspaper, November 3, 2012.

⁹ Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision, Expanded Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

people submit themselves to social morals, rather than indulging in egoistic freedom. In this way, unbridled individualism will be deterred, which destabilizes and puts social harmony at risk in other parts of the globe.

Bhutan's 'home-grown natural democracy': A model of its own

Not democratic transition, but translation/interpretation at issue

At the same time, it is imperative to probe critically into the above assessment, given its inclination to the Eurocentric notion of modern liberal democracy. The 'specialness' or 'uniqueness' of Bhutan's democracy is deliberated because the country has adopted a constitution which has introduced the parliamentary system, to meet the first criterion of liberal democracy. The enactment of the Constitution is regarded as a historical watershed in the cumulative *transition* to (modern liberal) 'democracy,' and is contrasted with the incremental process of democratization in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, touched upon at the beginning of this paper.

In this respect, the above assessment insidiously lapses into historicism, or a mode of thinking assuming any object under investigation as being internally unified and developing over time. A major drawback of historicism is its implicitly stagist view that distinguishes the pre-modern from the modern, or an idea 'first in the West, and then elsewhere' as pointed out by Dipesh Chakrabarty,¹⁰ who in his book *Provincializing Europe*, argues against regarding the 'global' agenda of modernization as taking over West Bengal's 'local' society alien to it. This pitfall manifests itself in

¹⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 2007 Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.6.

existing studies that dwell on Bhutan's democratic *transition*, as exemplified by the following excerpt.

With the Kingdom of Bhutan becoming a constitutional monarchy and consequently, one of the youngest democracies, the country took another decisive step along a path on which it embarked several years ago. ... For decades, modernization, development and preservation were the main goals of policy decisions rather than actively democratizing the country. But beginning in 1998, Bhutan experienced a rapid, peaceful, guided and unflinching *transition to democracy*.¹¹

Moreover, this and other similar studies draw on mainstream democratic *transition* theories, delineating political, social and economic factors that normally propel a move towards (modern liberal) democracy. They then conclude that Bhutan's democratization deviates from orthodox explanations, as follows.

It needs to be clearly stated that there was no evident popular demand for such a transformation, and that moreover, very little cultural, social, educational, or political preparation was made for the transformation. Even more to the point, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find evidence that suggests that the transformation of the relationships of the means of production had reached a level where changes in political structures were required.¹²

¹¹ Marian Gallenkamp, *Democracy in Bhutan: An Analysis of Constitutional Change in a Buddhist Monarchy* (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, IPCS Research Paper, no.24, 2010), p.2. Emphases added.

¹² Mark Mancall, "Monarchy and Democracy," in *Monarchy and Democracy in the 21st Century* (Thimphu: Bhutan Center for Media and Democracy, 2010), pp.1-18: 9.

This type of explanation is not irrelevant to Bhutan. On the contrary, it does elucidate the background to the 'incorporation of Bhutan into the ranks of the world's democratic nations,'¹³ in terms of the adoption of liberal-democratic institutions. As argued by Chakrabarty, no society is a *tabula rasa*, and '[t]he universal concepts of political modernity encounter pre-existing concepts, categories, institutions and practices through which they get translated and configured differently.'¹⁴

At the same time, in line with the above-mentioned recent trend to equate democracy with a narrow, institutional notion of politics, it fails to pay due regard to the democratic values that have historically been embedded in Bhutanese society, regardless of liberal-democratic institutional arrangements. This is crucial in that '[g]ood government should be democratic, in both an institutional and a social sense.'¹⁵ Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye correspondingly points out that '[o]urs was not a mandate to change the world but to assimilate [liberal-democratic institutional] change into an existing [social] system.'¹⁶

The issue at stake, therefore, to paraphrase Chakrabarty,¹⁷ is not so much about the 'uniqueness' or 'specialness' of the country's political *transition*, as about the *translation/interpretation* prevalent in existing studies, seeing Bhutan's social values as supplementary to the prime agenda of promoting liberal democratic institutional reforms. Bhutan used to be 'either romanticized as "Shangri-La," a hidden paradise on earth, or vilified as a tyrannical and medieval kingdom.'¹⁸ Contrary to this orthodox image, a

¹³ Turner et al., "Democratization by Decree," p.184.

¹⁴ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p.vii.

¹⁵ Crick, *Democracy*, p.92.

¹⁶ Tobgye, "The Making of the Constitution." Parentheses added.

¹⁷ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p.17.

¹⁸ Tashi Wangchhuck, "The Middle Path to Democracy in the Kingdom of Bhutan," *Asian Survey* 44:6 (2004), pp.836-855: 837.

'home-grown natural democracy' has long been thriving in Bhutan,¹⁹ which should be taken into account when studying the country's 'democracy.'

Bhutan's 'Natural Democracy': (1) Monarchical Democracy

Underlying the above assessment focusing on the country's democratic *transition* is Aristotle's classical classification that continues to be a mainstream taxonomy of forms of government, namely, rule by a single individual, rule by a small group and rule by the many. According to it, monarchy or rule by a single individual is distinct from democracy or rule by the many. This dichotomy also resonates with European history; it was when the Divine Right of Kings was called into question, that constitutional, representative government came to the fore.

Bhutan's polity, on the other hand, was and is a 'monarchical democracy,'²⁰ unorthodoxly amalgamating rule by a single individual (monarchy) and rule by the many (democracy). The Constitution not only positions the King as 'the Head of State and the symbol of unity' (Article 2(1)), but also stipulates that the King be 'the upholder of *Chhoe-sid*' (Article 2(2)), namely the religious (*chhoe*) and political (*sid*) values of peace and prosperity. The latter constitutional clause derives from the Buddhist conception of kingship, shared by the people of Bhutan who place their popular will in the King.

In Buddhism, monarchy is regarded as the proper mode of government,²¹ under which a good king rests his authority

¹⁹ Renata Dessallien, *Democracy, Good Governance and Happiness: Some views from the Kingdom of Bhutan* (Thimphu: Center for Bhutan Studies, CBS Monograph, no.29, 2005), p.71.

²⁰ Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Bhutan: Towards a Grass-root Participatory Polity* (New Delhi Konark Publishers, 1999), p.52.

²¹ Sonam Kinga, *Polity, Kingship and Democracy: A Biography of the Bhutanese State* (Thimphu; Ministry of Education, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2009), pp.17-19.

in his charitable, moral and humble actions. A king is thus expected to promulgate morality in society, as both a secular and a spiritual leader. In return, the people forego their parochial interests to seek the good of a common humanity. Although this notion of kingship is typically equated, from a liberalistic viewpoint, with paternalism preventing people from making moral choices, Buddhism regards it as enhancing the prospects of individuals making moral choices, in that it helps them to transcend the self, or the delusion that human beings are separate and independent agents, and to recognize the oneness of life.

This is how rule by the many (democracy) is to function in Bhutan. The King, as guardian of the nation state, seeks to preserve a cohesive society bound by mutual trust and obligation, and to avert divisive politics that would jeopardize social harmony by positioning himself at the helm of 'three foundations' (*tsawa sum*) comprising the nation, the people and the King. The view of 'three foundations' is in line with the Buddhist notion of the holy trinity (Buddha, *Dharma*, and *Sangha*), and is a vital condition for the nation state to flourish.²²

In line with this Buddhist notion of kingship, the constitution is widely viewed by the people as 'the gift from the King' who had thoughtfully conceived the need of political reforms to transfer his power to them and their representatives. The King followed the Buddhist notion of 'three foundations,' and ensured public involvement in the preparation of the constitution by getting a copy of the draft constitution distributed to each household. The King then conducted public consultations by visiting all the twenty district capitals to help people grasp the significance of the constitution and to receive comments on the draft constitution. In this way, efforts were made to level off the

²² Karma Ura, *Deities, Archers and Planners: In the Era of Decentralisation* (Thimphu, 2004), p.314.

aspirations of the general public and to attain as wide a consensus as possible concerning the need for liberal-democratic reforms.²³

This participative nature of the constitution-making built on, and corresponded to traditional practices; the King regularly travels to the countryside to explain the government's ongoing and future plans of action, and solicits the views of his audience on the priorities and needs of their local areas.²⁴ The King's frequent visits to various parts of the country made the King 'the most informed participant in the National Assembly.'²⁵ This also set an example which obliged the people's representatives in the National Assembly to endeavor to bring the problems and grievances of the public to the notice of other assembly members, government officials and the King.

In this way, direct interaction between, and among various levels of society was historically a mainstay of Bhutan's polity before the parliamentary system was introduced in 2008, which centers round the representation by professional politicians, most of whom are based in Thimphu. A session of the National Assembly was to be preceded by a series of local-level deliberations (Ura 2004: 133). Upon notification of the tentative date of the National Assembly, local leaders held meetings with the public in their own areas to discuss issues to be raised at the center. This was then followed by district-level meetings in which points to be submitted to the National Assembly were discussed and refined.

²³ The first draft was released in March 2005. In addition to the ensuing public consultations in the twenty districts, the draft was posted on a website, so that anyone (even from outside the country) could send comments to the drafting committee. Bhutan Broadcasting Services (the national television and radio stations) also conducted a series of forum discussions on the Constitution to sensitize the general public to the concept and purpose of the Constitution.

²⁴ Gupta, *Bhutan*, pp.148-149.

²⁵ Gupta, *Bhutan*, p.149.

This 'monarchical democracy' is also founded on the King's caliber as an agent of modernization, contrary to the mainstream image prevailing elsewhere which sees monarchical institutions as averse to modernity. It was the start of the hereditary monarchy in 1907 that put an end to incessant feuds over succession and the civil wars that had long afflicted the populace. The serf system was abolished, allowing the vast majority of the people to own agricultural land. Tax obligations have substantially been reduced, while alternative sources of revenues have been identified, including tourism and hydropower. A long list can be made of the modernizing reforms made under the monarchy, including the introduction of modern systems of education, health care, transport, and communications.

It is therefore natural that the constitution, intended to bring in modern institutions to the country's polity, has not diminished the role of King, the agent of modernization, even though executive powers have been entrusted to the elected government. On the contrary, the King has assumed greater importance as the 'safety net' against divisive forces that potentially arise with the advent of modern liberal democracy.²⁶ The King continues to visit the countryside regularly, and maintains his prerogative to issue directives regarding the government's conduct when necessary.²⁷ As the symbol of unity above and beyond politics, the King will ensure that the needs and wants of disadvantaged groups

²⁶ Kinley Dorji, "Self-censorship: A Means to an End," in *Monarchy and Democracy in the 21st Century* (Thimphu: Bhutan Center for Media and Democracy, 2010), pp.137-149: 148.

²⁷ For example, the King issued a directive in June 2012, when the National Assembly was deliberating a bill that would allow the government to retain larger leverage to distribute governmental land for resettlement purposes. Drawing on growing public concern about the prospects that it might accelerate land transfer to individual citizens, the King sent out a message to the effect that governmental land should be preserved in the interest of future generations. This prompted the government to pledge to defer the deliberation of the bill until after the next National Assembly election scheduled for 2013.

are addressed, and that crises are mediated when they arise from pluralistic politics.

In the constitution, accordingly, the term *gyal kham* (which literally means ‘the realm of the King’) is utilized as the equivalent of the nation state. This is to abide by, albeit in an unorthodox manner, a maxim which is widely accepted in political theory, namely that [g]overnment power can only be held in check when the government of the day is prevented from encroaching upon the absolute and unlimited authority of the state.²⁸ To counter this risk, from the viewpoint of liberal democracy, the state machinery needs to be kept unaligned with any particular leader. In Bhutan, on the other hand, the state is positioned as ‘the realm of the King’ who, as ‘the upholder of *Chhoe-sid*,’ embodies the permanent interests of society, and serves as the symbol of unity above ideological preferences and partisan interests.

Accordingly, an alternative *translation/interpretation* of Bhutan’s democracy can be made, which does not revolve round modern liberal democracy, but draws on ‘monarchical democracy’ as our reference point. The enactment of the Constitution is not necessarily a major watershed in the *transition* to democracy, but can be regarded as a reform that has been infused into the traditional ‘monarchical democracy.’ According to this alternative view, the liberal-democratic changes are supplementary to the existing ‘monarchical democracy,’ not vice versa.

Bhutan’s ‘Natural Democracy’: (2) Grassroots Self-Governance

As stated above, a cornerstone of Bhutan’s polity has historically been direct interaction between and among different levels of society, with the King at the helm of the nation state. From the modern liberal-democratic viewpoint,

²⁸ Heywood, *Political Theory*, p.78.

the country's 'monarchical democracy' is typically presumed to result in an undemocratic polity whereby the people defer to the directives of higher authorities. On the contrary, the people often negotiated with governmental institutions, and contested official policies when they entailed implications to their livelihoods.²⁹ In addition, the members representing different districts in the National Assembly often questioned the King's decisions.³⁰

This participative nature of Bhutan's polity was founded on the well-honed oratorical skills that the people acquire through popular self-governance.³¹ In villages where more than eighty per cent of the population live, decisions affecting local areas are mostly taken in village meetings, attended by at least one representative from every household. While this type of decision-making is seen elsewhere to risk playing into the hands of powerful actors who dominate the proceedings, this is not the case with rural Bhutan. On the contrary, all are given an equal say, debate various opinions, and work out mutual differences to arrive at a conclusion.

This egalitarian nature derives from Buddhist teachings that inculcate the people with an ethos of individual equality and freedom.³² According to the Dalai Lama,³³ '[t]he Buddhist world view recognizes the fundamental sameness of all

²⁹ For an account of how tax obligations and access to forest resources were continually debated by the people's representatives in the National Assembly, see Adam Pain and Deki Pema, "Continuing Customs of Negotiation and Contestation in Bhutan," *Journal of Bhutan Studies* 2:2 (2000), pp. 219-249. The rural populace also managed to renegotiate their access to forest resources with recourse to a direct appeal to the King.

³⁰ The National Assembly was a 'fascinating theatre of democracy,' as described in Gupta, *Bhutan*, pp. 103-112. For instance, the members representing different districts questioned the promises given during the King's visit to the countryside, which remained unfulfilled, the King's conciliatory stance towards the insurgency in southern districts (to be taken up later in the paper), or the King's decision to exempt a group of people from (now defunct) corvée obligations.

³¹ Wangchuck, *The Middle Path*, pp.841-845.

³² *Ibid.*, p.841.

³³ Quoted in *ibid.*

human beings. ... Not only do we desire happiness and seek to avoid suffering, but each of us also has an equal right to pursue these goals. Thus not only are Buddhism and democracy compatible, they are rooted in a common understanding of equality and potential of every individual.' Thriving on this vernacular form of equality and freedom, grassroots self-governance has customarily been in practice in rural Bhutan.

This type of self-governance, however, is typically excluded from the theorizing of modern liberal democracy, in that it is typically labeled 'private,' and thus seen to lie outside the boundaries of politics, narrowly associated with 'public' institutions. For example, the advocates of deliberative democracy, a (de facto) variant of liberal democracy, similarly value open and thorough discussions among those with a disposition to listen to others and treat others with respect. However, in the eyes of Jürgen Habermas, an eminent proponent of the deliberative model, the public-private divide is indispensable as 'the boundary between the demands of truly universal validity and goods which will differ from culture to culture.'³⁴ A 'public' arena with formal rules defining how equal, impartial interactions are to take place, is considered as vital to ensure that a deliberative process leads to a reasoned outcome. According to this liberal-democratic maxim, informal forms of democracy lack 'truly universal validity,' as does Bhutan's grassroots self-governance.

In tandem with the practice of village meetings is Bhutan's vibrant village-based civil society. In Bhutan, civil society historically takes the form of rural community organizations serving various purposes³⁵ to promote (a)

³⁴ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.88.

³⁵ Bhutan has also seen, in recent years, a mushrooming growth of urban-based civil society organizations (CSOs) which deliver services to disadvantaged segments of the population. To facilitate this, the CSO Act was

cooperation related to farming and harvest practices, (b) solidarity and dependence in times of hardship, (c) spiritual services and related activities, (d) common resource management, (e) hospitality of hosting people engaged in indigenous trade practices, and (f) recreational community activities.³⁶ In Bhutan, the term 'civil society' usually denotes leverage for maintaining and further developing a cohesive society, or congenial state-society relations. This notion is based on the Buddhist conception of 'three foundations' (*tsawa sum*), referred above in relation to the 'monarchical democracy.'

This is contrary to the notion of modern liberal democracy that postulates a public-private divide, and posits a civil society beyond the reach of government, in which individuals form 'civic' groups in their capacity as 'private' citizens. This mainstream view of civil society thus connotes defense against the state that is postulated as a necessary evil that enforces law and order to protect individual liberty; civil society is presumed to be a sphere for individuals to enjoy autonomy from the state, to pursue the good life as they define it, and to voluntarily engage in advocacy and vigilance against the state. A 'rights-based society' is thus visualized under the liberal-democratic view of civil society. It stands in stark contrast to the 'duty-based society' observed in Bhutan.³⁷

This contrast leads us to an alternative *translation* of Bhutan's polity that disposes of the liberalistic public-private distinction, and instead places the private sphere on a par

enacted in 2007 and the CSO Authority was established in 2008. In line with the Buddhist notion of 'three foundations,' the CSO Act/Authority does not envisage advocacy types of CSOs.

³⁶ Tashi Choden, "Civil society in Bhutan: Manifesting the Spirit Within," in *Understanding Civil Society in Bhutan* (The Center for Bhutan Studies: 2005), pp. 19-45.

³⁷ Lham Dorji, "Understanding the Concept of Civil Society in Bhutan," in *Understanding Civil Society in Bhutan* (The Center for Bhutan Studies: 2005), pp.9-10.

with the public sphere. A typical 'rights-based society' presupposes the existence of a perfect voluntarism in the private domain, which however, serves to mask the inequitable and hierarchical characteristics of civil society.³⁸ This results in '[t]he general rule of civil society that its stronger members get stronger.'³⁹ This general rule also spills over into the public domain, causing political power to concentrate in the hands of the stronger members of the society. The liberal-democratic discourse that privileges free, autonomous individuals with recourse to the public-private divide, not only masks the political dominance of small groups, it also marginalizes the caring and nurturing that people engage in within the private arena, as pointed out by the feminists, among others.

In Bhutan, on the other hand, caring and nurturing has been a mainstay of 'natural democracy'; Bhutan's polity is founded on the conception of inner freedom, or the idea that freedom is attained when individuals submit themselves to the morals of mutual trust and obligation. This constitutes the basis of Bhutan's wider practice of grassroots self-governance, which in turn, underlies the participative nature of the country's polity as stated at the beginning of this section. In Bhutan, therefore, the public domain is conditioned by the private domain. The country is a fascinating theatre of the feminists' dictum, 'the personal is political'; it attests to the need for a broader notion of politics as advocated by the feminists, among others.

Accordingly, the promulgation of the constitution is not so much a major leap in the country's *transition* to democracy as it is a move to infuse several liberal-democratic changes into the traditional 'home-grown natural democracy.' 'Natural democracy' had long been thriving in

³⁸ Michael Walzer, *Politics and Passion: Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism* (2004), pp.66-89.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.78.

rural Bhutan to propagate the democratic ethos of harmony and tolerance, while deterring the unbridled individualism that often puts social stability at risk elsewhere. An alternative *translation/interpretation* of Bhutan's democracy can thus be made, taking into account the country's 'natural democracy' to rectify the current academic and popular thinkings that tend to draw on modern liberal democracies as the main reference point.

An Alternative Way for Addressing the Governor-Governed Divide

Underlying the liberal-democratic assertion about the need to separate the public and private realms is a major constitutive dilemma concerning democracy; it is implausible to fully reconcile freedom and equality. Democracy calls for a group of people with a collective identity, which nevertheless cannot be formed without occluding the plurality and difference of its members. Because there exists no natural convergence of interests among them, democracy is bound to entail some form of exclusion from within. Under modern liberal democracy, an irreconcilable difference of viewpoints is to be withdrawn to the private domain, while in the public arena, a middle ground is to be arrived at, through open deliberative interactions and procedures.

This rationalistic view is problematized by the proponents of radical democracy, who point to the arbitrary nature of a 'middle' ground' that tends to mirror the interests dominant in society. They thus propose that the arbitrariness of political decisions be ceaselessly called into question by citizens, especially disadvantaged segments whose voices are liable to be filtered out in official decision-making processes. 'The ideas that power can be dissolved through a rational arrangement, and that legitimacy can be based on pure rationality are an illusion that can endanger

democratic institutions.⁴⁰ Radical democracy builds on the Derridean view that it is not feasible to reach a point where 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people' is completely achieved. Democracy will always be a promise, or a 'democracy to come.'⁴¹

Bhutan's 'home-grown natural democracy' offers an alternative way of addressing this constitutive dilemma of democracy, or of coming closer to the full realization of democracy. To illustrate this point, Miguel Abensour, an eminent proponent of radical democracy, puts forth the notion of 'insurgent democracy,'⁴² and proposes that the masses incessantly engage in direct action to remedy the irresolvable dilemma of democracy. In this way, political grievances can be voiced without being shackled by the formalistic process of government. 'Insurgent democracy' does not amount to a political regime, but is protest politics that 'continues through time, always ready to spring up due to the obstacles encountered.'⁴³

Since, in many of so-called 'advanced' liberal democracies, democracy has become synonymous with authoritarianism or totalitarianism,⁴⁴ it is imperative, as proposed by Abensour, to explore the 'possibility of annihilating the division between governors and governed.'⁴⁵ At the same time, it is another matter whether it is unavoidable to turn to popular political engagement in attenuating the tension between the two. Underlying the notion of radical democracy are simplistic binaries biased toward the Eurocentric view of liberal democracy. First, drawing on the Aristotelian classification, democracy is seen to be distinct from monarchy; in the latter,

⁴⁰ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 104.

⁴¹ See Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.43-45.

⁴² Miguel Abensour, *Democracy Against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p.xxiii.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*.

⁴⁵ Abensour, *Democracy Against the State*, p.96.

'the essence of politics is ... the domination of a single master.'⁴⁶ Second, democracy is regarded to spring from 'the emancipation of politics from the hold of religion.'⁴⁷ These dichotomies emanate from historical experiences in Europe, according to which constitutional, representative forms of government emerged when sovereign monarchs underpinned by divine authority withered away.

'The division between governors and governed' need not necessarily be tackled through protest politics. Alternatively, the case of Bhutan illustrates how the constitutive dilemma of democracy can be addressed when 'the hold of religion,' and that of 'the single master' bring home to both 'governors and governed' their inherent human nature of being gregarious, and propel them to concern themselves with the good of other beings and with each other. Individuals are thus encouraged to seek to gain inner freedom, to be freed from the internal constraints of egoism and greed. This then causes the democratic ethos of harmony and tolerance to spread to every realm of society. The government is also transformed into an entity subordinated to the society, while the public-private divide fades away. The King, at the helm of the nation state, promulgates the morality of cooperation in the society in accordance with the Buddhist view of kingship or its related notion of 'three foundations' (*tsawa sum*) that comprise the nation, the people and the King.

This is typically interpreted, from the viewpoint of modern liberal democracy, as an impediment to individual freedom, or is seen as running the risk of lapsing into a paternalistic society in which the definition of a 'good society' is left in the hands of elites with particularistic interests. At the same time, if 'the hold of religion' or that of 'the single master' is said to risk resulting in domination by an elite, popular political activism must equally be said to be fraught

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.52.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.17.

with chances of domination by an elite. As stated above, perfect voluntarism is illusory given '[t]he general rule of civil society that its stronger members get stronger.'⁴⁸ Radical democracy may add to this inequitable nature of civil society by instigating free individuals to engage in 'free competition,' namely the doctrine that currently breeds the political dominance of small groups in many parts of the globe.

When exploring the 'possibility of annihilating the division between the governors and governed,' therefore, it is imperative not to restrict ourselves to the radical-democratic approach. If individual freedom is to be valued foremost, as asserted by Abensour and other proponents of radical democracy, we must also respect people's freedom to view monarchy and religion as accumulated wisdom tested by time, both of which have served as the basis of Bhutan's 'natural democracy.'

Conclusion: In search of an alternative view of democracy

As mentioned at the outset, this paper is intended to explore an alternative manner to inquire into Bhutan's democracy instead of unwittingly drawing on the Eurocentric notion of modern liberal democracy as the foregone reference point. The analyses made thus far point to the importance of paying heed to 'heterogeneous temporality,'⁴⁹ or multiple flows of time surrounding the country's democracy. They include (a) the series of reforms to adopt liberal-democratic institutions, which has increased its pace in the twenty-first century; and (b) the country's 'home-grown natural democracy' that dates back to the start of the monarchical rule, or to even earlier days.

Furthermore, it is also vital to work to rectify such conventional stories which center around (a), and thus focus

⁴⁸ Walzer, *Politics and Passion*, p.78.

⁴⁹ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p.243.

on the democratic *transition* of Bhutan. We should instead problematize this orthodox *translation/interpretation* of Bhutan's democracy, while (b) recedes into the background. Otherwise, we would lapse into historicism, assuming 'first in the West, and then elsewhere.'

This is reminiscent of recent debates regarding culture and development in development studies, which seek to remedy the orthodox notion of culture as something development acts on (either as hindrance or resource in the quest of development). Current wisdom has it that the mainstream notion of development is itself a cultural artifact that places European societies at the pinnacle of progress. Instead of ranking various societies at different stages of development, efforts have recently been made to discern multiple forms of development.⁵⁰

Similarly, it is imperative to embrace the idea that the mainstream notion of modern liberal democracy is a cultural artifact. Moreover, as part of our efforts to acknowledge multiple forms of democracy, the intrinsic value of the country's 'natural democracy' is to be taken note of. Contrary to the widely held view of traditional Bhutan as 'Shangri-La' or a 'mythical kingdom,' modern political concepts (such as civil society, equality and freedom) have historically been embedded in the Bhutanese society.

This 'natural democracy' has not only been thriving in Bhutan, but has also been a fertile ground for the participative nature of the country's polity; it nurtures an ethos of harmony and tolerance, and thus helps to foster associative bonds among the people that shape their desires, values and purposes. Such a public culture, assigning individuals a sense of the common good, is indispensable to liberal democracy if it is to function as pointed out by

⁵⁰ Bhutan's Gross National Happiness is a prominent example of an alternative version of development, questioning the major modernist view as material progress.

Michael Walzer who portrays liberalism as a 'self-subverting doctrine' upholding a society composed of individuals separated from one another, and at the same time, requiring their associative ties.⁵¹ This maxim has been well practiced in Bhutan, where 'natural democracy' provides the basis of liberal-democratic reforms.

To answer the questions raised at the beginning, the Eurocentric notion of modern liberal democracy need not remain our major referent, but the country's 'home-grown natural democracy' can take its place, if we are to liberate ourselves from the shackles of the orthodox story about liberal-democratic *transition*, and also to broaden our thus far narrow views on democracy. In this way, we can put into practice a well-known maxim found in political theory textbooks; 'democracy' is not a single, unambiguous phenomenon, ... (it) inevitably brings forth a variety of models that offer different forms and mechanisms of 'popular rule.'⁵²

Liberal democracy not only takes precedence in existing literature on Bhutan's democracy, it also dominates wider academic and popular thinking on democracy, resulting in the general *mistranslation/misinterpretation* relegating democracy to institutional devices aimed at forging a reasonable 'consensus' among free, autonomous individuals. This minimalist conception of politics has caused political power to concentrate in the hands of the few, and to create a gulf between government and the people in many parts of today's globe. Bhutan's case can serve as a source of inspiration for those of us who are exploring ways to overcome the predicament of today's 'democracy.'

⁵¹ Walzer, *Politics and Passion*, pp.153-154.

⁵² Heywood, *Political Theory*, p.222.

Wangdü Chöling Dzong: The Masterpiece of Gongsar Jigme Namgyel

*Gengop Karchung**

Abstract

Due to political and spiritual significance, Dzongs hold a special place in the minds of the Bhutanese people. Unlike any other dzongs in Bhutan, Wangdü Chöling Dzong in Bumthang Shamkhar is quite unique due to factors like (1) the builder who was the father of Monarchy in Bhutan, (2) the accomplishment of victory over Jakar Dzongpön Tsöndrü Gyaltshen and (3) the place being used for Buddhist teachings by lama Je Jangchub Tsondrü. Constructed with elaborate Bhutanese architectural designs, it is said to have been built by Gongsar Jigme Namgyel himself in 1857, particularly the Utse. This paper attempts to figure out the significance and role of this well-known historical structure besides throwing some lights on establishment of the dzong and its renovation. It also tries to present other information related to this Dzong through available written and oral sources. Besides researching on written sources, interviews were conducted with Lam Jampel Dorje, Wangdü Chöling Lam, Agäy Rinzin Dorje, 84 (2010) and Agäy Sherub Wangdü, 76 (2010) who shared valuable information.

Introduction

Dzongs in Bhutan have special significance both politically and spiritually. In olden days, Dzongs were built mainly to signify a seat of certain religious institutions to

* Gengop Karchung is a Research Officer at the National Library and Archive of Bhutan. Correspondence: luckycarchu@gmail.com

flourish in that vicinity. Some were also built for security purposes, and others still were built in order to mark victories in warfare. Hence, *Dzongs* are revered as important historical monuments in the country. Likewise, Wangdü Chöling Dzong (*dBang dus chos gling rdzong*) in Bumthang has its own significance and history.

Wangdü Chöling Dzong is located on the broad floor of Chökor valley below the Jakar Yügyal Dzong (*Bya dkar gyul rgyal rdzong*) in Bumthang *Dzongkhag* in central Bhutan. Bumthang was known for five *khar* (mkhar; house) namely; Gyalkhar, Chamkhar, Gongkhar, Chagkhar, and Shamkhar. Before the establishment of Wangdü Chöling Dzong, the place was commonly known as Shamkhar. Though the Dzong served as a private residence of the Trongsa Pönlop *Gongsar* Jigme Namgyel (1825–1881) since its founding, it became a Royal Palace when *Gongsar* Ugyen Wangchuck (1862–1926) was proclaimed as the first Monarch of the Kingdom of Bhutan in 1907. Since then, it served as the Royal Court for the successive Kings until the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1928–1972) who shifted the Royal Court to Paro Ugän Pelri Palace and eventually to Thimphu Dechencholing, following the death of the second King Jigme Wangchuck (1905–1952). However, the descendants of *Ashi* Pem Dechen (1918–?) resided in the *Dzong* until they left for the capital city, Thimphu. Currently, Wangdü Chöling Dzong, the masterpiece of the *Gongsar* Jigme Namgyel, houses a monastic school (*sLob-drwa*) for novice monks that was established in 2004 as a branch of Trongsa *Rabdey*.

Establishment of the Dzong

Gongsar Jigme Namgyel became the Trongsa Pönlop when Tshoki Dorje of Ugän Chöling (Bumthang) retired in 1853. The succession was in reward for his bravery and loyalty in rescuing the latter from an assassination plot three years earlier in Punakha, the then seat of central administration. During the succession, there was an implicit understanding

that he would relinquish the post after three years in favour of the outgoing *Pönlop*'s son, Jakar *Dzongpön* Tsöndrö Gyaltshen. However, Jigme Namgyal showed no sign of retiring when the time finally came.

As a result, Tsöndrö Gyaltshen took up arms against the Trongsa *Pönlop* in 1857. The armies of both the parties clashed on the field of Shamkhar below Jakar *Dzong*. When the battle proved indecisive, the Jakar *Dzongpön* and the former *Pönlop* Tshoki Dorje sought help from Druk *Desi* Künga Pelden (rg. 1856–1860). The confrontation continued till the negotiating team of *Je Khenpo* Yönten Gyaltshen (rg. 1851–1858) and Zhabdrung's *Zimpon* Drachung came to negotiate a truce in 1858. The peace settlement ended at Kurjey (Bumthang) with a nominal promotion of the Jakar *Dzongpön* to the post of Jakar *Pönlop*, with Lhuntse and Mongar *Dzongkhags* under his authority, whereas Jigme Namgyel retained the post of Trongsa *Pönlop* with an additional supremacy over the *Dzongkhags* of Zhemgang and Trashigang. It was a sign of the emergence of Jigme Namgyel as an indisputable figure with power and authority.

Since the post of Trongsa *Pönlop* was then one of the most coveted, for its power, fame and authority, Jigme Namgyel proved his legitimacy on its possession with the moral victory over his contender. So, to mark the victory in the tussle, he constructed Wangdü Chöling Dzong in the battlefield of Shamkhar where he had built a military camp before. According to varied sources, Wangdü Chöling Dzong was believed to have been built to mark the victory in the battle with the Jakar *Dzongpön* and his allies. Although the negotiation ended in 1858 only, the construction of the *Dzong* most likely started in 1857 at the site of the military camp when the battle was entering into a stalemate.

Name of the Dzong

The Dzong then built was known as Wangdü Chöling Dzong. The term *Wangdü* means victory achieved after taking

over all groups of adversaries under his single power. The additional term *Chöling* probably stemmed from Lam Jangchub Tsöndrö (*byang-chub brtson-grub*; 1817–1856) who blessed the place by giving Buddhist teachings. In due time, the *Dzong* attained its full name; Wangdü Chöling Dzong, 'Fortress of the Land of Dharma and Victory.'

Founder of the Dzong

Gongsar Jigme Namgyel was born to Pila Gönpö Wangyal and Sonam Pelzom of Dungkar *Chöje* of Kurtö in 1825. The Dungkar *Chöje* originated from the descendants of *Khedrup* Künga Wangpo, the son of *Tertön* Pema Lingpa (1450–1521). At the age of fifteen, he moved towards Bumthang and Mangdelung (Trongsa) to seek his fortune, inspired as he was by his repeated dreams. On the way, he spent some months with the headman of Narut village in Tang valley of Bumthang, looking after herds of cows and sheeps. Yet again, driven by the divine prophesy, he set out towards Trongsa, where he met Buli Lama Shakya Namgyal in Chumê valley, a person who featured repeatedly in his dreams. The Lama gave him shelter and clothing, and in fact arranged his travel to Trongsa, dispatching his servant Urup Döndrup.

Trongsa *Pönlop* Ugän Phuntsho was at a archery game when they arrived. Urup Döndrup presented the young Jigme Namgyel to the Trongsa *Pönlop*. After enquiring about his home and family, he was accepted as a *Tozep*, the lowest level of retainers in the service of Trongsa Dzong, and was allowed to have access to food from the common kitchen.

In 1843, he was promoted as a *Zimgap* (attendant) by his new master Tshoki Dorje. Likewise, he rose through various posts such as *Zimnang* (junior chamberlain), *Darpön* (chief of attendants), Trongsa *Tshongpön* (trade master), and in 1848, he became the Trongsa *Zimpön* (chamberlain of Trongsa), a position that signified the extent of trust and confidence that was bestowed on him. Because of his loyalty and outstanding service and courage, he was promoted to the post of Trongsa

Drönyer (guest master of Trongsa) in 1850. During his tenure as Trongsa *Drönyer*, he crushed all revolts of central and eastern Bhutan, which paved his way to the post of Trongsa *Pönlop*. He eventually became the Trongsa *Pönlop* when Tshoki Dorje retired in 1853. This generous retirement and award of the post on Jigme Namgyel rather than to his own son was a sign of gratitude owed to Jigme Namgyel who saved the life of his master. However, the Trongsa governorship had rested on an understanding that Jigme Namgyel should vacate the post after three years for the son of his master, Jakar Dzongpön Tsöndrö Gyaltshe. Since Jigme Namgyel disregarded the agreement to vacate the post as agreed, the forces of Jakar Dzongpön and Trongsa *Pönlop* clashed which proved indecisive. However, the seat of Trongsa *Pönlop* undisputably fell on *Gongsar* Jigme Namgyal that encouraged him to construct the Dzong in celebration of his apparent victory.

However, he continued to be engaged in various internal strifes, apart from facing external threats from the British in India. He proved invincible in all these, and so in 1870, Jigme Namgyel ascended to the throne of the Druk *Desi*, the supreme ruler of Bhutan. He was fully supported by the Lhengä Zhung Tshok and the Central Monk Body. Finally, at the age of 56 in 1881, he passed away in Semtokha Dzong, few days after falling off from the yak he was riding at Hungtsho, near Dochula in Thimphu.

Significance of the Dzong

Wangdü Chöling Dzong, built in the mid 19th century by the father of the Wangchuck Dynasty, Trongsa *Pönlop* Gongsar Jigme Namgyel, is one of the finest examples of domestic architecture in the country, exclusively designed for secular affairs and for his family. It bears striking differences from the other *Dzongs* of the country that were built for the dual system of religious and temporal affairs by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (1594–1651). The *Utse* (central tower) was

personally built by *Gongsar* Jigme Namgyel during his tenure as the Chötse (Trongsa) *Pönlop*. The original structure and architecture can be seen even today without any modifications. The architectural features of Wangdü Chöling Dzong are quite unique from that of the other *Dzongs* and the manor houses that are ubiquitous in Bhutan. It portrays a masterful blend of innovative architectural features present in the *Dzongs* as well as in the manor houses, in sync with the lifestyle of the time. Karma Ura (1995) fortifies the concept of the rich architectural heritage of the *Dzong* along with that of the two other Royal Palaces of Kinga Rabten (Trongsa) and Domkhar (Bumthang), all of which were not only hubs of Royal activities then, but which were also showpieces of the architecture of that era. The *Dzong* now stands as the oldest of all the structures that were built by the Monarchs of the country. Hence, it is a masterpiece of *Gongsar* Jigme Namgyel.

The *Dzong*, originally used as a private residence of *Gongsar* Jigme Namgyel, became the first Palace of the Wangchuck Dynasty. It was the place where the First King *Gongsar* Ugyen Wangchuck and the Second King Jigme Wangchuck held their Royal Courts. Similarly, it was also the place where the Third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck grew up and absorbed the lessons of statecraft and court procedures alongside the common retainers at the court of the Second King. Therefore, Wangdü Chöling Dzong is a historic seat of the country's revered Wangchuck dynasty.

The Dzong and its purpose

Initially, Wangdü Chöling Dzong was built by *Gongsar* Jigme Namgyel to serve as his family residence. Later on, it became the Royal Court of the early Wangchuck Monarchs.

It was in this *Dzong* that *Gongsar* Jigme Namgyel took his wife *Ashi* Pema Chöki, the daughter of *ex-pönlop* Ugän Phuntsho of the Tamzhing *Chöje* family. All their children were born at Wangdü Chöling including the future King *Gongsar* Ugyen Wangchuck in 1862.

After Jigme Namgyel, *Gongsar* Ugyen Wangchuck began to pursue his father's strategy of strengthening his political position through family ties and alliances. He married his first cousin *Ashi* Rinchen Pem and appointed her elder brother Chime Dorje as *Jakar Dzongpön*, and gave in marriage his own sister, *Ashi* Yeshe Chödrön (1864–?), to Chime Dorje. After the death of his mother in 1884, Ugyen Wangchuck bequeathed the Wangdü Chöling Palace and its other valuable assets to his sister and her husband.

After that, *Gongsar* Ugyen Wangchuck spent his time at Lamai Gönba Dzong Phuntsho Pelri, Künzang Chöling Gönba above Lamai Gönba and Thrinle Rabten above Jamba Lhakang, devoting his time predominantly in prayers and religious functions, besides shaping the country simultaneously.

In 1890, the 8th Peling *Sungtrul* Künzang Dechen Dorje [Tenpai Nima] passed away. To commemorate his death and also to accelerate the rebirth of the succeeding Peling *Sungtrul* in Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck left for Lhalung and initiated feast-offering for six weeks. As a result, the 9th reincarnation of Peling *Sungtrul* was born to his own sister Yeshe Chödrön in Wangdü Chöling Dzong in 1894. The *Sungtrul* was named as Tenzin Chöki Gyaltshen (1894–1925).

Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck introduced modern education though there was the predominance of monastic learning in the country. As the first steps towards this development, he opened the first modern school of Wangchuck Lhodzong at Hâ in 1914, and in the following year, the Thrinle Rabten School, attached to Wangdü Chöling in Bumthang, was also opened. The Crown Prince Jigme Wangchuck was also given formal education in the latter school, along with several children of the attendants and nobilities. The students were taught Hindi and English languages apart from traditional Bhutanese subjects. These schools were improved and upgraded later by King Jigme Wangchuck.

On the death of the second queen *Ashi Tsöndrö Lhamo* in 1922, *Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck* promised to offer ten thousand butter lamps (*sTong-mchod*) at Kurjey and Jampa Lhakhang. But the pledge became ineffectual when *Ashi Peldron* of Lamai Gönba Dzong, the daughter of Ugyen Wangchuck's first consort *Ashi Rinchen Pem*, was not able to arrange the items required such as buckwheat, wheat, butter, rice and so on during the grave period. During that difficult time, *ex-drönyer* Dorje Rabden of Wangdü Chöling Dzong, the son of Ugyen Wangchuck's sister *Ashi Yeshe Chödrön*, had generously offered not only the essential items but also every help and services required to fulfil that pledge and other activities. Thereafter, although Dorje Rabden was a retired personnel, *Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck* had given him due recognition and trust that ultimately led to his increased influence in the Royal Court of the First King. However, due to some dubious acts by *zamsungpa* Namgyal, the relation between the *ex-dronyer* and Prince Jigme Wangchuck was strained.

However, later on, the *ex-drönyer's* mother *Ashi Yeshe Chödrön* solicited King Jigme Wangchuck to marry *Ashi Pem Dechen*, the younger sister of queen *Phüntsho Chödrön*, and also submitted the Wangdü Chöling Dzong of which *Ashi Pem Dechen* was the ultimate inheritor from *Ashi Yeshe Chödrön*. Consequently, in 1932, His Majesty accepted the proposal and married *Ashi Pem Dechen*, thereby, resolving the strained relation with the *ex-drönyer*. Simultaneously, His Majesty also took over Wangdü Chöling Dzong and established his Royal Court therein.

After the completion of the construction of *Künga Rabten Palace* in Trongsa in 1929, Wangdü Chöling Dzong became the Summer Palace. Hence, the Royal Entourage spent six months of spring and summer in Wangdü Chöling after which the Royal Court moved to *Künga Rabten Palace* to avoid the bitter chill of Bumthang's winter. The Royal Court routinely

moved to its winter residence in Künga Rabten in the ninth month of the Bhutanese calendar and returned to Wangdü Chöling by the third month every year.

Over the course of time, the Second King bequeathed Wangdü Chöling Palace to the younger queen *Ashi Pem Dechen* along with the Künga Rabten Palace that was located on the Mangdechu river valley and which became his favoured residence.

His Majesty passed away at Künga Rabten Palace in 1952. A month later, another tragic incident took place when Wangdü Chöling *Mayum Ashi Yeshe Chödrön* expired. So, their bodies were cremated together at Bumthang Kurjey. After the funeral rites, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck became preoccupied with moving his Royal Court from Wangdü Chöling to Paro Ugän Pelri. The retainers at the court expected a hectic time packing some of the moveable properties of the late King found in Wangdü Chöling Dzong, though the younger Queen Mother *Ashi Pem Dechen* had decided to stay back. To the relieve of the retainers and as a sign of generosity, His Majesty gave the keys of the Treasure House of Wangdü Chöling to the younger Queen Mother and did not want to own anything save four boxes of swords and some guns that was in the palace of Wangdü Chöling.

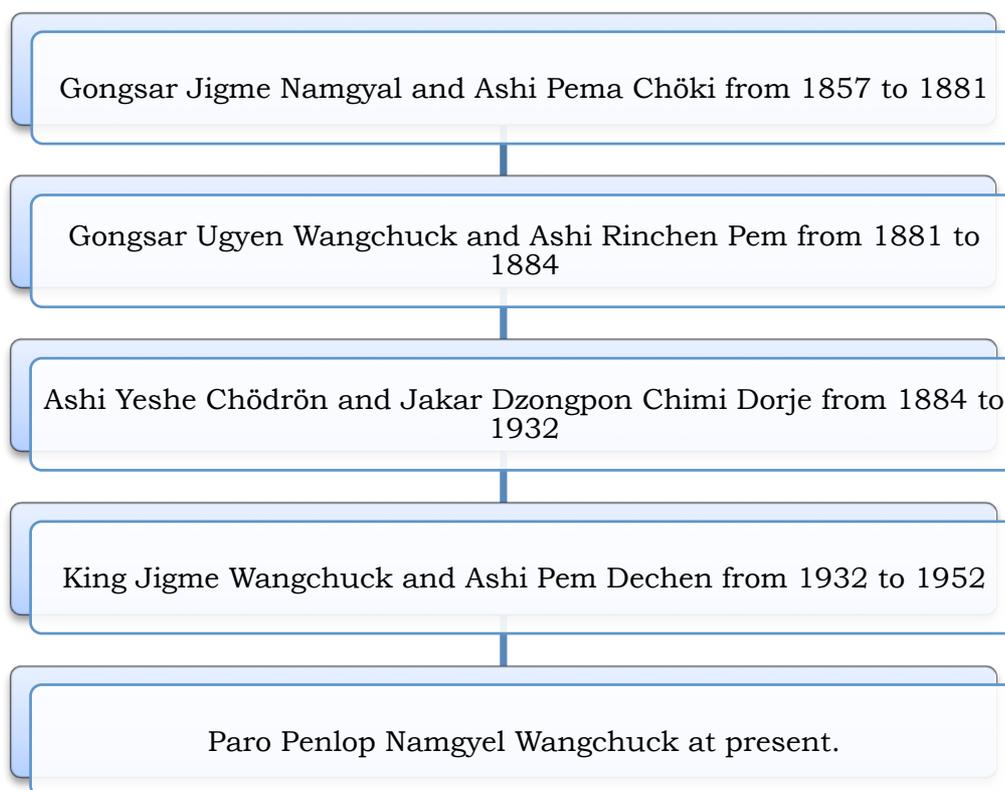
The departure of the Royal Family and the change of the location of the capital from central to western Bhutan not only made the Wangdü Chöling Dzong lonely and desolate, it also cast a mood of gloom over the public of Bumthang and Trongsa. The changes were made in the larger interest of the country, and therefore, the public was eventually reconciled to the changed reality. However, the Palace was never the same again.

Since then, *Ashi Pem Dechen* lived there with her son Prince Namgyal Wangchuck and three princesses who were the subsequent and ultimate dwellers and estate holders of the *Dzong*. As there were an increasing number of Tibetans

fleeing to Bhutan during the Chinese occupation of Tibet, with many people coming to Bumthang, the local people feared that they too might need to leave the place for safer havens. In addition, the increasing developmental activities in Thimphu convinced the estate holders to shift their base to Thimphu. Thereafter, the management and supervision of the massive estate of the *Dzong* fell partially on the government.

Under the charge of the government, nothing significant happened until the community was in dire need of monks for religious ritual ceremonies to be performed. So, in 2001, when Jampel Dorje was appointed as the *Kangjup* at the *Dzong* from Trongsa Rabdey, people living nearby expressed their interest in instituting a monastic school for the benefit of the community. Therefore, under the initiative of *Kangjup* Jampel Dorje, a monastic school with 15 novice monks was established on 13th April, 2004. Currently, headed by Lam Jampel Dorje, the monastic school is upgraded with 30 monks and has classes till 4th standard, after which the monks have to continue their higher education at Trongsa *Dratshang*. However, even before the establishment of the monastic school and the appointment of a *Lam*, there was a *Kunyer* for daily *sölkha* and *lhachö* performance in the *Dzong*.

Figure 1. Family estate holder of Wangdü Chöling Dzong



Treasures of the Dzong

Even though the *Dzong* in itself is one of the most invaluable treasures of the country for its unique architecture and the history it holds, it contains some precious relics belonging to the early Wangchuck Monarchs. Besides, the *Dzong* also houses the *Utse Gönkhang* and *Chakdzö Lhakhang*, displaying valuable *kuten*, *sungten*, *thukten* and other valuable objects.

Utse Gönkhang

The main tutelary deity of the *Utse Gönkhang* is *Dralha Chegu*. It also accommodates *kusung thuktens* such as *Düsum Sangye* (past, present and future Buddhas) as its main statue along with *Chenrezi* and *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel*. The *kuten* also includes a statue of *Guru Rinpoche*

which used to be carried along during the migration to Künga Rabten in Trongsa. It also has a Dröma statue and other relics.

Sungten consists of Bum ('Bum; Pranjaparamita sutra; Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in One Hundred Thousand Lines), Domang (*mDo mangs*; Anthology of sutras), *Kathang De 'nga*, Gätom (*brGyad stongpa*; Pranjaparamita sutra in eight hundred verses) in gold scripts and other *sungchö* texts. It also has Deshek Chöten Gä (*bDe-gshegs mchodrtten brgyad*; Sugata stupa; Eight types of stupa depicting eight events in the life of Buddha Shakyamuni), stupa of Tshelha 'Namsum (*Tshe lha nram gsum*; *Tshe dpag med*, *sGrol dkar* and *rNam rgyal ma*), Ashi Wangmo's Kudung Chöten (*sKu gdung mchod rten*; Stupa of body remains), and Sidok Chöten (*Sri bzlog mchod rten*; Stupa for repelling evil).

Chakdzö Lhakhang

Chakdzö Lhakhang or Treasure House temple houses Tsheringma and Namsê, the gods of wealth and prosperity.

With regard to other valuable objects in the two lhakhangs, Lam Jampel Dorje confirmed that there were no objects of great value like gold and silver. There was however a pair of small butter-lamp vase made of silver. As the *Dzong* was of great significance, the Royal Family members contributed religious objects and at present, the lhakhangs have nine silver vases for butter-lamp offering.

Kuchö Bumdé and festivals in the Dzong

Besides other religious ceremonies at Wangdü Chöling Dzong, there was a great public fair held in the seventh lunar month every year which rivalled Punakha Domchöe. The fair was instituted first in 1937 to celebrate the completion of Domkhar Palace in Bumthang, but it became so popular that it became an annual event of Wangdü Chöling Dzong.

However, at present, besides the daily ritual and *yarngo marngo tshechu*, three days of *Dralha Pangtö* is carried out

from the 14th to 16th, and *Göm Bangrim* on 17th of the fifth month. Additionally, two days of *Göm Bangrim* is held on the 30th day of the ninth month and the first day of the 10th month annually.

Renovation and extension of the Dzong

After the end of Duar War (1864–65), Jigme Namgyel retired in 1866, passing on the seat of the Trongsa *Pönlop* to Dungkar Gyaltshen, his elder brother. During his brief retirement, he spent his life at Wangdü Chöling with his family, embarking on renovation and extension of Wangdü Chöling Dzong, and several other religious activities including offering of *sertô* at Bumthang Jampa Lhakhang. However, this period was interrupted when he had to intervene between *Puna Dzongpön* Drang Tashi and ex-Wangdü *Dzongpön* Darlung Tobgay, and incumbent Dzongpön Künlek Dorje and Thimphu Dzongpön Kawang Makhel in 1869.

The central tower (*Utse*) is the work of Jigme Namgyel but other extensions were carried out by *Gongsar* Ugyen Wangchuck. Later on, during the time of the Second King Jigme Wangchuck, he planned to completely demolish and reconstruct Wangdü Chöling Dzong. To this effect, His Majesty dispatched a writ to the *garpas* of Mangde, Punakha, Hâ, Kurtö and Trongsa to come for reconstruction works. In response to the writ, about three hundred *garpas* came for the reconstruction work. However, Trongsa Neten Dranglapa Dargä, who was a trusted and favoured courtier, counselled and pleaded with the King not to modify the *Utse* of the Dzong, though rest of the complex was to be renovated, as it represented the original workmanship of Chötse *Pönlop* Jigme Namgyel.

The *garpas* were deployed under the charge of Zhemgang Dzongpön Thrinle Namgyal, half brother of the queens, to extract timber from the mountains of Chökor for an entire summer. Some of the *garpas* floated the timber down the Chamkharchu where it was trapped at Wangdü Chöling. By

the end of the summer, the meadows of Wangdü Chöling were blanketed with logs, beams and planks. However, the planned reconstruction was never launched as the events took a different turn.

Other historical monuments at the Dzong Site

Linga Lhakhang

Linga Lhakhang has *ku sung thuktens* (*sKu gsung thugs rten*) which comprise of khenlop chösum (*mKhan slob chos sum*); Khenchen Boddhisattva (*mKhan chen zhiba 'tsho*), Lopön Pema Jungne (Guru Rinpoche; *sLob-dpon pad-ma 'byung-gnas*) and Gäpo Thrisong Deutsän (*rGyal-po khri srong lde'u btsan*) of which the Guru Rinpoche statue at the centre was believed to have a right horn of the sheep that prevented falling rocks at Luggi Raw Lhakhang at Chökortö (Bumthang). The other statues include Tshe-lha Namsum. It also has Buddhist canon, kanjur (*bKa'-'gyur*) as its holy scripture (*gSung-rten*).

With regard to religious ceremonies, a week long Sidô Khorlo (*Sri bzlog 'khor lo 'bar ba*) is carried out starting on the 21st day of the ninth month every year. This was instituted by the successive Kings. This ritual was known to have been carried out for months on end in the olden days at the Linga Lhakhang according to the Lam Jampel Dorje.

Linga Thang archery range

Linga Thang was the place where the great fair of Wangdü Chöling used to be held during the time of the Second King. Although it served for multiple activities, it was initially created for archery that the successive Kings used to relish for weeks on end.

Chukhor Mani

There are five *Chukhor Mani* just below the Linga Lhakhang. Although the first one (next to the gate), was as old as the *Dzong*, the four others were built by *Ashi Chöki*, according to

Agay Rinzin Dorje who is 84 years old (in 2010) and from the Wangdü Chöling locality.

Kabra

Although Kabra is not attached to Wangdü Chöling Dzong, it is very much a part of the *Dzong* since the time of ex-*Drönyer* Dorje Rabden. It is the Tsänkhang (*bTsan khang*; deity house) of Tseu Marpo (*Tse'u dmar po*), a protective deity. Dorje Rabden was believed to have discovered treasures as he was known for Terdak (*gTer-bdag*; Treasure Guardian) of Tseu Marpo. So, the Kabra served as his personal Lhakhang where he even instituted 15 monks.

Conclusion

The historic Dzong of Wangdü Chöling has endured the vagaries of the weather and climate, standing majestically firm and high in the valley of Shamkhar in Bumthang Chökor. The *Dzong* which once bustled with activities of the Royal Court, with footfalls of hundreds of men, now wears a dreary look. Since its Royal inhabitants have left for the new Capital, the *Dzong* has become defunct and is now in a state of disrepair.

However, there is hope in the near future with planned renovation involving international conversation experts. The Palace today serves the curiosity of the international and regional tourists, as they take a glimpse of the glorious history of our Monarchy. The *Dzong* is a majestic masterpiece, bearing a unique architectural, and conceptual design and purpose. Preserving the *Dzong* today will help cement the legacy of our early Monarchs, thus ensuring its survival for the posterity which will be much richer for it.

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The Old Man ‘Mitshering’ at Nyima Lung Monastery

*Tenzin Jamtsho**

Special stage performers called *atsaras* wearing clownish masks are a common feature in religious festivals across the country. In their whimsical, and sometimes bawdy way, they serve various purposes like introducing dances, managing the performing arena, helping in crowd control and basically keeping the audience entertained through the long performances.¹ However, a similar but easily distinguishable performer is the *Mitshering* which is seen in some monastic festivals of central Bhutan like Nyima Lung. The performer wears an easily identifiable mask that is completely different from the *atsara*. The mask clearly depicts a very old man with long white beard and a wrinkled face. He is adorned with a unique costume: he wears the dress of a monk and a mixed red and white scarf with fringes like those worn by the local leaders called *Gup*. The old man carries a staff in his hand, which helps him to stand upright.

Enquiries were made with senior monks in the monastery about the rendering of his name, character and responsibilities in the dance of the Guru’s Eight Aspects. The monks knew him only by the name ‘Old man’ (*Mi tshe ring*), though they explained his responsibilities (see below). Religious specialists were also consulted for this paper in several other monasteries on whether a similar character with

* Tenzin Jamtsho is a Lecturer at the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, Taktse, RUB. Correspondence: tjamtsho.ilcs@rub.edu.bt

¹ Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1976: 82.

the same name was present in the dance of the Guru's Eight Aspects in their respective monasteries. However, they all rendered his name differently and provided different explanations. Some said that he is known as Gyalpo Hashang (*rGyal po Ha Shang*), whom they believe is a patron of Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche); however, this character is not prominent in other monasteries.

According to Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Hashang is sometimes presented as the chief deity, where he is respected by offering scarves, while at other times he is ridiculed by the *atsaras*.² He also explains that Hashang is identified as "a representative of a Chinese Buddhist sect who tried to spread teachings of his school in Tibet, but was defeated in a religious dispute by Kamalasila," and this is the reason why he is ridiculed by the *atsaras*. In a similar vein to Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Richard J. Kohn states that long life man known as Hashang in the *cham* originated from Chinese, as he asserts that "Hva Shang or *ho shang* in Chinese is a generic term for Buddhist monks."³ Hashang is also presented in the annual festivals at Kumbum, Tashilhunpo and Choni in Tibet.⁴

A figure with similar characteristics portrayed in Mongolia is known as Cagan Obo, 'White Old Man' (*rgan po dkar po* or *dkar rgan* in Tibetan). The 'White Old Man' is seen in all Mongolian temples and the figure takes part in the ritual dances at New Year (Tsagan Sar). It is said that "the thirteenth Dalai Lama initiated this figure and introduced it into the New Year dance of Potala, and from there, the figure has spread to other *cham* in Tibetan and Himalayan countries." Cagan Obo is also said to have been originally a divinity of pre-Buddhist Mongolian folk religion.⁵ Jam Fontain⁶ states:

² Ibid.

³ Kohn, 2001: 204.

⁴ Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1976: 83.

⁵ Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1976: 83.

In the Mongolian Tsam festival, the 'White Old Man' represents the ancient shamanistic gods of Mongolia who were absorbed into the Buddhist pantheon but who were assigned a role of only secondary importance. Tsaghan Ebügen is the Protector of Cattle, who can prevent various animal diseases. Though definitely of Tibetan origin, he has assumed both the appearance and the function of Shoulao, the Chinese God of Longevity. Armed with a staff with a handle or a finial in the shape of a dragon, the White Old Man performed the role of a buffoon. This may indicate that the Lamaist hierarchy tried to undermine the prestige of this representative of pre-Buddhist shamanist beliefs. In some monasteries, Tsaghan Ebügen was even humiliated and ridiculed as one of the hated and despised Chinese. Moving along the edge of the Tsam square, he performs his caricatures of the solemn dances. He also "kills" a "tiger" and performs numerous tricks with the four "lions." That he is associated, like his Chinese counterpart Shoulao, with longevity is evident from popular superstition. Those who were hit by the sticks of the Lords of the Charnel Grounds were believed to die within the year. Only by receiving another hit by the staff of Tsaghan Ebügen, could they again be ensured a longer life.

I assume that the figure of the old man originated according to the explanations above. There seem to be several similarities between the characters, though they are rendered by different names according to the local beliefs and traditions. The meaning of the name *Mitshering*, prominent in Nyima Lung monastery, is similar to that of the Mongolian name.

⁶ Fountain, 1999: 52. Hanna Havnevik informed me about this Mongolian tradition and the work of Fountain.

In the Nyima Lung monastery, *Mitshering* is believed to be the one who knows the detailed histories of Padmasambhava, as described in the following. *Mitshering* enters the courtyard after the eight aspects of the Guru are seated in a row. He bows down before Guru Rinpoche three times. According to Buddhist belief, to bow down is to show homage and respect to the higher ones, which Peter Harvey considers to be among the most common of the Buddhist devotional acts.⁷ When the old man enters the courtyard, the clown-like character known by the name Zhonu Loden, the holder of the parasol of Guru Rinpoche in the procession, starts criticizing and making fun of him, asking several funny questions; this corresponds to the explanation by Nebesky-Wojkowitz.⁸ Thereafter, a question and answer session between Zhonu Loden and *Mitshering* ensues. Before presenting that, however, I will discuss the meaning of *atsara* in general and of Zhonu Loden in particular in Nyima Lung monastery.

As in several religious theatrical performances, the buffons play an important role in the *cham*. Their movements in the dance are not governed by any rule. Sometimes they seem to go beyond the limit but try to stay within the boundary.⁹ On one hand, the role of the *atsara* is to entertain the audience with any kind of joke. Their spoken words usually have a sexual overtone, corresponding with their ornaments, which represent the male genital. On the other hand, the *atsaras* have the task of readjusting the masks and costumes, and correcting the steps of the other dancers in the course of the dance.¹⁰

Atsara is known in Sanskrit as *Acarya*, which signifies a Master in philosophy also known as Drubthob (*sgrub thog/thob pa*), A 'highly accomplished one,' and usually

⁷ Harvey, 1990: 172.

⁸ Ibid.: 83.

⁹ Pommaret, 2006 : 37.

¹⁰ Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976: 82. *cham*

denotes accomplished tantric yogins. The clowns are believed to be from the noble family according to the orally transmitted tradition. The character *atsara* is believed to represent an accomplished master coming into the human, worldly existence in the disguise of a clown in order to uplift the worldly beings to enlightenment through jokes according to the people's tradition and beliefs.¹¹ Nebesky-Wojkowitz mentions that the name *atsara* also represents the Hindus. He claims that *atsara* is a figure designed to "ridicule the priesthood of Hinduism."¹²

The name of one of the *atsaras* in Nyima Lung monastery is Zhonu Loden. He is believed to be young and intelligent by nature, at least in Nyima Lung monastery. He wears the Bhutanese men's dress *gho* (*bgo*) while the rest of the *atsaras* wear pants and jackets typically designed in accordance with their characters in the dance, showing their entities. Zhonu Loden is the one who holds a parasol for Padmasambhava in the course of the procession of the Guru's Eight Aspects in the courtyard.

Padmasambhava is a character well known to the entire Buddhist population in Bhutan, though most of the audience remains in the dark about what he is supposed to have accomplished. He is believed to be the main hero of the myth and the role model of yogis, and he is worshipped most by the Nyingma adherents. This assertion corresponds to Kohn's statements in his description of the Mani Rimdo festival in Tibet and Nepal.¹³ In the following, I will present the details of the question and answer session between the *atsara* and *Mitshering* in the *cham* performance of the Guru's Eight Aspects, according to the tradition of Nyima Lung monastery.

¹¹ Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1976: 82.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kohn, 2001: 197.

The dialogue between the Clown and Old man

gZhon nu blo lden

Zhonu Loden says

ha ha mgo la mtshar dkar ma gyon rung/ /

Ha! Ha! You do not need to wear aesthetic cloth on your
head,

dgun 'khyabs ba mo 'di na med/ /

There isn't any winter frost here

lcang dkar dbyugs pa ma bzung rung/ /

You needn't hold the white staff of a willow tree

sgo khyi btsen po 'di na med/ /

There isn't a powerful, harsh dog here

ldem ldem gom pa ma spo rung/ /

You need not walk in a graceful way,

bro gar 'chams sa 'di na men/ /

This isn't a place for dance

rgan po sa cha gang nas yin/ /

Old man, where are you from?

da nang 'ong ba gang nas 'ong/ /

Today, where are you coming from?

do nub 'gro ba gang du 'gro/ /

Tonight, where are you going?

don dag gang gi don la 'ong/ /

For what reason are you here?

mi rgan gyis

The old man says

ha ha go la yag po gyon lugs la/ /

Ha! Ha! One who wears a nice dress,

lo rugs cor 'go can zhig 'dra/ /

Looks like a disgusting man

kha rgyag rtse mo mkhas lugs la/ /

One who is articulate enough,

ma rabs blo rig can zhig 'dra/ /

Is like a contemptible low-class people

mgo nag rgas pa phya lugs la/ /

A black head with the behaviour of an old man

grog po ngan pa can zhig 'dra/ /

Is like an evil friend

bzang ngan pha gcig bu la yod/ /

There is good and bad even between sons of the same
father

gzhon nu sha rgyas khrag rgyas dus/ /

Youthful times of development

khyod las lhag cig nga yang yod/ /

I have some more aspects than you

kha mig dbang po gsal ba'i dus/ /

When the senses are clear/explicit

khyod las mkhas cig nga yang yod/ /

I have more good qualities than you

nga 'chi med ngo mtshar gnas nas yin/ /

I am from the land of deathless wonderers

da nang 'khor ba'i gnas nas 'ong/ /

Today, I am coming from the land of cyclic existence

do nub mthar pa'i gling du 'gro/ /

Tonight, I will proceed to the land of happiness

Pad ma byung gnas mjal du 'ong/ /

I am here to see Padma Jungne

The old man 'Mitshering' at Nyima Lung

gzhon nus.....

*sprul pa'i sku mchog pad ma byung gnas 'di ring 'dir byon
pa gang nas yin khyod rang gis shes song?*
Do you know where the miraculous Padma Jungne comes
from?

rgyas pos.....

*ha ha... gnam la 'ja' 'tshon snga lnga'i 'od kyis gur spubs
cing//*
Ha! Ha! The sky is pitched with the tent of the glow of a
five-coloured rainbow

bar snang la me tog sil ma'i char babs//
In the middle, the drizzling rain of flowers

*sa gzhi la au ldum wa ra'i me tog 'khrungs tshul dpag na,
sprul pa'i sku mchog pad ma byung gnas 'di ring 'dir byon pa
thag chod do//*

If I see the blooming flower of Udumvara, the miraculous
Padmasambhava has definitely come here today.

gzhon nus.....

mi rgan khyod rang la lo ngo gang tsam red?
Hey! Old man, how old are you?

rgyas pos.....

*he he mi rgan nga rang lo ngo nyi stong dgu brgya sum cu
so gnyis yin la//*
Ha! Ha!... I, the old man, am two thousand, nine hundred
and thirty-two years old.

**Zhonu Loden bows down and pays respect, and
receives the blessings from the old man**

yang gzhon nus...

kho sangs rgyas sha kya thub pa dang lo ...yin pa 'dra//
Oh! Then his age must be equivalent to a Buddha.

*he he.... mi rgan tshe ring po zhig re 'dug pas rgyas can
zhig yin gyi red pas/ nga tsho la sprul pa'i sku mchog pad ma
byung gnas kyi nam thar dang ngo sprod mdor bsdus zhig
bshad rogs gnang dang//*

Hey! You seem to be a long-lived person and more enlightened being, so could you please tell us the condensed biography and introduction of the miraculous Padmasambhava?

mi rgan nas...

*sprul pa'i sku mchog pad ma byung gnas dngos 'dir
bzhugs yod pas/ nges vajra gu ru'i lung drang mi dgos kyang/
da kha mi mangs thabs med rogs kyis dri nan//
wa mi rgyal ka med dr'i 'gram lcags//
khyi mi bzugs thabs med rkun mas nag bur//¹⁴
zer ba'i dpe ltar/ khyod kyis dri dus nged kyis bshad dgos
te/drin bshad dgos/ slab na slob dgos te zer ba ltar red/ da
kdo tsam zhig bshad na//*

As miraculous Padma June himself is present here, I do not feel that I have to explain about him. However, I have no way as I am asked to do it...

Then the old man narrates the detail story of Padmasambhava.

¹⁴ These citations/dialogues are actually found in the text called *Lugs kyi nam bshad* (Buddhist philosophical text). However, it seems that some of the informants do not seem to be aware of these verses. Some of the informants believe that these dialogues are orally transmitted from the past and became the culture and tradition in Nyima Lung monastery, and in the Eight Manifestation Dance of Padmasambhava.

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