

Luminaries and Legacies of Nenyingspa in Western Bhutan⁺

*Dorji Penjore**

Introduction

Nenyingspa (*gnas rnying pa*) was one of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism to spread in proto-Bhutan or Lhomon Khazhi (*lho mon kha bzhi*) as Bhutan was then known. Some of the other schools were Lhapa (*lha pa*) of Drigung Kagyu (*'bri gung bka' brgyud*), Kathogpa (*ka thog pa*) of Nyingma (*rnying ma*) school, Chakzampa (*lcag zam pa*) of Thangtong Gyalpo (*thang stong rgyal po*), Barawa (*'ba' ra ba*) school of Gyaltsan Palzang (*rgyal mtshan dpal bzang*), and Gaden Shingtapa (*dga' ldan shing ta pa?*). Several centuries later, the school, its lamas (*bla ma*) and their legacies are not known in Bhutan for various reasons. They were a member of the coalition of five lamas (*bla ma khag lnga*) who opposed Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal's (1594-1651) consolidation of political power under Drukpa Kagyu (*'brug pa bka' rgyud*) school in western Bhutan.¹ The coalition made troubles and allied themselves with the Tsangpa rulers

⁺ Primary information for this paper is a chapter from Pema Tshewang's (1994) *'brug gi rgyal rabs*, which itself is based on *gnas rnying pa'i gdung rabs skyes bu dam pa'i mam par thar pa rin po che'i gter mdzod*. I would like to thank Dasho Sonam Kinga (PhD) for reading and suggestions, and to Sangay Wangchuk for his information on and photographs of some of the ruins of Nenyingspa monasteries.

^{*} The Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies, Thimphu, Bhutan. Correspondence email: dorpen71@gmail.com.

¹ For convenience's sake, I have used 'Bhutan' to refer even to the regions of what is today western Bhutan, mainly Paro, Punakha (*Theḍ*) and Thimphu (*Wang*) although the unified national polity of Palden Drukpa was created in 1627 out of the western valleys, while the central and eastern regions of Lho Mon Khazhi (proto-Bhutan) were brought into the Drukpa fold only in the 1650s.

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of Tibet. They encouraged Tsangpa invasions of Bhutan and even joined forces, albeit unsuccessfully. They also allied with the Fifth Dalai Lama, who had displaced the Tsangpa rulers as Tibet's sovereign and continued the hostility against Bhutan. The Gaden Phodrang (*dga' ldan pho brang*) Government too tried to destroy Zhabdrung's Glorious State of Drukpa Kagyu (*dpal ldan 'brug pa*), partly fearing a problem that a strong independent state next to its southern border might potentially create for Tibet in future. Following the failure of the coalition of the lamas to stop Zhabdrung's consolidation of political power and also of the Tibetan invasions of the country, Nenying monasteries and their holdings were confiscated and their lamas and monks fled the country. More than three and a half centuries later, not much is known about this school.

This paper provides accounts of the founding of Nenying school and Nenying Gonpa in Lhatod in Tibet in the eighth century, its institutionalisation and conversions. It also looks at the school's advent into western valleys of Bhutan, its influence and monastic establishments, conflict with the new state of Palden Drukpa, the departure of its lamas to Tibet, its earlier monastic holdings, and of some of well-known monasteries such as Dzongdrakha (*rdzong drag kha*) and Chang Pelri Gonpa (*cang dpal ri dgon pa*).

The Gonpa

Nenying Gonpa is today a Gelug (*dge lugs*) monastery in upper Nyang in Tsang, central Tibet, established during the reign of Ralpachen (806-838). According to Gyurme Dorje (2009), the Gonpa was founded as Kadampa (*bka' gdams pa*) in 750, converted into Zhangpa Kagyu (*shangs pa bka' rgyud*) in 1050, and then became a Gelug school in 1650. Lodro Tenpa (1402–1476), the 7th Gaden Thripa (*dga' ldan khri pa*) of the Gelug monastery of Gaden founded by Je Tsongkhapa Lobzang Drakpa (1357-1419) came from the Nenying tradition. Drukpa Kunley (1455–1529) is said to have taken his novice monastic vow from a Nenying abbot. Nenying Gonpa, also known as the Bodh Gaya of Tibet, was destroyed during the Younghusband

mission 1904 and later during Mao's cultural revolution (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Ruins of Nenyong Monastery in Lhatod, Tibet. Photo credit: Fitzgerald, 2018.

Nenyong Gonpa was established by the Go (*'gos*) and Gya (*rgya*) clans during the early diffusion of Buddhism (*bstan pa snga dar*) in Tibet. Thrisong Detsen (r: 755-797/804) awarded to his minister, Go Thrizang Yablhag, lands in different areas. Later these lands came into Gya clan's possession when Ralpachen (r.806-838) awarded some territories to Gya Jampal Sangwa, his Tantric teacher from Samye. At the same time, one of Go Thrizang Yablhag's sons enthroned Gya Jampal Sangwa as Gonpa's abbot, and the Gya clan thereafter started to provide successive Gonpa abbots. The Go clan was in charge of secular matters while the religious activity was the Gya clan's responsibility (Vitali, 2003).

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Figure 2: Fresco of Nenying Gonpa. Photo credit: *The Treasury of Lives*, 2020.

When Jowo Atisha (b.982-d.1054) arrived at Ü and Tsang provinces in 1045, Nenying Gonpa's spiritual head was Gya Josay Phurpa Phel. The clan ownership of the Gonpa changed after the coming of three Yol brothers who were Jowo Atisha's disciples. Following the re-consecration of Nenying Gonpa by Jowo Atisha, Gya Josay Phurpa Phel offered the Gonpa, along with its estates, to one of the Yol brothers, Yol Chowang. This was how the Gya's control over the Gonpa came to an end. After that, Nenying Gonpa became an important centre of Kadampa school stemming from Jowo Atisha. But before transferring the Gonpa, the authority over other temples and territories was transferred to Lho Khazhi (*lho kha bzhi*). This territorial entity, presently a part of Bhutan and Tibet close to the Indian border, partially corresponds to the land of the Goyul Todsum. Thus, temples in Nyangtod were owned by branches of the Gya as far as the 11th century (Vitali, 2002).

The Founder

The chronicles of Nenyang Gonpa's 44 successive abbots begin with Koncho Khar (*dkon mchog mkhar*, 1036/1084-1171) of Nyangtod. He was an associate of Dri Sherab Bar (11th-12th century), Jowo Atisha's chief disciple. He was a student of Kunga Nyingpo (1092-1158), the founder of Sakya (*sa skya*) school, and one of the six main disciples of Chungpo Naljor who founded Zhangpa Kagyu (Gardner, 2020). Nenyang was Zhangpa Kagyu's earliest sub-school.



Figure 3: Koncho Khar. Photo credit: Himalayan Art Resources, 2020.

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Nenyingspa slowly became closely associated with the new Gelug school of Tsongkhapa. The Gelug presence in Bhutan began when Tsongkhapa's disciple Chimi Rabgay (*'chi med rab rgyas*) was its abbot in 1361 (Aris, 1979). The Nenyingspa-Gelug merger was completed after the third Gelug invasion of Bhutan in 1656-57. Following the failed invasion, Panchen Lama negotiated a treaty. One of the provisions was a prisoner exchange, and Nenyingspa Jetsun Drung, coincidentally Panchen Lama's disciple, was freed.

Nenyingspa in Bhutan

Although Nenyingspa lamas arrived in Bhutan later than the Lhasas or Drukpa Kagyupas, they were able to establish firmly in the western valleys by the first half of the 15th century (Aris, 1979). After that, a series of Nenyingspa lamas visited Bhutan, founded several monasteries and propagated the school (Royal Education Council, 2018, p. 31).

Nenyingspa is best known in Bhutan through Dzongdrakha, a well-known monastery in Paro. It was founded by Gonpo Dorji (*dgon po rdo rje*) who was sent to western Bhutan to reveal a hidden treasure (*gter*) by Rinchen Samten Palzang (1262-1311), a descendant of Koncho Khar who also served as a Nenyingspa abbot. The Nenyingspa's influence in Bhutan began after the arrival of Drupthob Gonpo Dorji to find and open the sacred space of Dzongdrakha. He arrived at Paro, revealed Dzongdrakha, and discovered a treasure of a crystal stupa which today remains enshrined in a larger stupa. He settled in Dzongdrakha and the local people became his patrons. He established a link between Dzongdrakha monastery and Nyangtod. A line from one of his incarnations is said to have started the Dzongdrakha nobility (*chos rje*) family in Paro (Aris, 1979, pp. 191-94).

After Gonpo Dorji, several Nenyingspa lamas visited western Bhutan, including Rinchen Samten Palzang whose religious activities in western Bhutan benefited the sentient beings. He

mediated in a bitter feud between Dzongdrakha and villages farther up the valley and gave substantial gifts to the feuding parties in return for taking an oath to renounce fighting for 12 years (Aris, 1979, p. 193). The local people offered monasteries to him to reciprocate his service. He enjoyed close relationship with Phajo Drugom Zhigpo's descendant Drungdrung Gyalzom at Dechenphu monastery (Phuntsho, 2013). Drungdrung Gyalzom, the fourth abbot of Dechenphu monastery, was a grandson of Jop Kunzang Dorji, who in turn was Phajo Drugom's grandson.

Rinchen Samten Palzang's son, Jamyang Rinchen Gyaltshan Palzang (b.1364-d.1422), who was Je Tsongkhapa's teacher, established monasteries such as Tarakha (*rta ra kha*), Samar Zingkha (*sa dmar rdzing kha*), Nazhing Rama (*Na zhing ra ma*), Phudug (*phu gdugs*), and Chabcha (*skyabs cha*). It was he who sent Drubchen Rinchen Darpo to Bhutan, with a Buddha statue done in gold, a golden cloak, a vajra and bell, a conch, a drinking cup and thirteen-pointed staff, with the instruction to build as many monasteries as possible in Punakha (*Theḍ*), Thimphu (*Wang*) and Paro. Drubchen Rinchen Darpo was also Je Tsongkhapa's teacher.

Jamyang Rinchen Gyaltshan Palzang had two sons both of whom served as Nenyang abbots. They both came to western Bhutan and had large followings due to their close connections with the regions. They travelled throughout valleys of western Bhutan and extended Nenyang's influence deeper into the valleys. Both of them received teachings from Je Tsongkhapa's disciples.

The older son, Jamyang Rinchen Druba (b.1403-d.1452) visited western Bhutan twice to look after Tsharkhang, Gonserkha and Dzongdrakha out of many monasteries offered to his grandfather. He gained patronage to support the monasteries and conducted innumerable religious discourses (Tshewang, 1994, p. 90).

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The younger son, Je Gyaltshan Rinchen (b.1405-d.68) visited western Bhutan on the invitation of Ama Seymo (sras mo) and Lama Pelchog (*dpal mchog*) of Tsharkhang (*mtshar khang*) monastery. When he was praying before the Buddha Maitriya at Kyichu temple, a rainbow parasol was known to have covered the temple and the Jowo Statue spoke to him. At Gonsakha (*dgon sa khar*), he gave away limitless blessed objects to the public of the three villages of Gepteng (*gad pa steng*). Unlike his grandfather, he avoided mediating in local disputes. People witnessed the stupa moving and shaking when he made offering before the white stupa in Dzongdrakha (Tshewang, 1994, p. 90).

Other Nenyng abbots and lamas who followed their masters or ancestors to western Bhutan were Drakpa Gyaltshan, Choki Gyaltshan, Rinchen Dorji, and Jetsun Drung. Their main monasteries of Gophog (*go phog*), Samargang (*sa dmar sgang*) and Parlingang (*spar gling sgang*) along with land and full authority was offered by Lama Genyen (*dge bsnyen*) and Lama Jampa (*byams pa*). Drung Drachom Ponlop (*drung dgra bcom dpon slob*) offered Zhagshul (*zhag shul*) Monastery while Ponpo Thogyam (*dpon po thos rgyam pa*) offered the monasteries of Sendeng (*seng ldeng*), Uma (*dbu ma*) and Shingdong (*shing sdong*) along with land and full authority to Rinchen Dorji after his arrival in western Bhutan (Tshewang, 1994, p. 90).

Over the generations Nenyng lamas established many centres and continued to expand even after the school began to follow the Gelug tradition in the 15th century. The reformed Nenyng school continued to spread in many parts of Bhutan until the 17th century. Later, various monasteries were maintained by keepers. When Zhabdrung arrived in the country, the Nenyngpa seat was held by Jetsun Drung.

The Conflicts

While sources differ on the composition of the coalition of five lamas who opposed Zhabdrung, all sources are unanimous in including Nenyngpa and Lhapa. The other members were

Kathogpa, Chakzampa, Barawa, and Gadan Shingtapa.² As pioneers to come to Bhutan, Lhapa, Nenyng and Drukpa Kagyu schools controlled the parts of western Bhutan since the 12th century. While Drukpa Kagyu was old in Bhutan, Zhabdrung was new, and the five lamas challenged his effort to consolidate political power. They were against Zhabdrung's construction of Sangna Zabdon Dzong, also known as Simtokha Dzong. Fearing his growing power, they launched their first attack in 1629 when the Dzong was being built. Lama Palden of Wang Langmalung was their leader. The attack was repelled and Lama Palden died in the battle in 1630.

Taking advantage of the conflict between Zhabdrung and Tsangpa ruler, the five lamas sought the help of Tsangpa ruler Karma Tenchong Wangpo (r:1620-1642), and encouraged him to invade the country. The second Tsangpa invasion in 1634 also centred around the newly built Simtokha Dzong. Lama Dechog Gonpo of Shingtapa temple and his patrons who opposed Zhabdrung consequently fled to Tibet; the Kathogpa Lama was killed in action in Wang Langmalung; the Chakzampa monastery was destroyed by fire during the battle at Tachogang; a Nenyng Lama was imprisoned; Lama Lhapa, left alone and helpless, fled to Phari, Tibet (Phuntsho, 2013).

The third Tsangpa invasion took place, again at the five lamas' encouragement. Their combined force made a prolonged siege of Punakha Dzong. Once again, the invasion was defeated. Following that, most followers of the five lamas left western Bhutan. The Lhapa and Nenyng leaders in Bhutan left for Tibet in 1641 when Zhabdrung took over Do Ngon Dzong, today known as Dechen Phodrang, and renamed it Tashichho Dzong, which became the second seat of the Drukpa government (Ardussi, 1977). In the third Gelug invasion (1656-57) of

² Gaden Shingtapa was a branch of Gelug (*dge lugs*) school, named after a monastery in Lingzhi (*gling gzhi*) in northern Bhutan founded by the followers of Palden Dorji of Phanyul who was a student of Je Tsongkhapa.

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Bhutan partly instigated by Nenyingpa and Lhapa lamas, a joint Tibetan-Mongol forces was defeated. As already mentioned, Nenying Lama Jetsun Drung, a scion of the Nenying household, was released as a part of the terms of the treaty negotiated by the First Panchen Lama. After defeating Nenyingpa, Zhabdrung also took over the Central Dung in today's Wangdi Phodrang previously controlled by Nenyingpa and appointed Lhawang Lodro as *lapon* (*bla ma dpon*) (Tshewang, 1994).

Nenying Monasteries in Bhutan

According to Karma Phuntsho (2013), the Nenyingpa almost matched Drukpa Kagyu in terms of the number of monasteries. Several monasteries in western Bhutan either built by successive abbots or offered by local patrons constituted Nenying's main holding in the country. Nenying monasteries were of two types: Magon (*ma dgon*) and Gonlag (*dgon lag*). The former, meaning Main or Mother Monasteries, was distinguished as dzong (*rdzong*) while the latter were Branch Monasteries.

The following are some of the Nenying monasteries in western Bhutan enumerated by Aris (1979, p. 322).

1. Namochen Dzong (*nags mo chen rdzong*) in Paro
2. Galteng Gangma nang (*gal stengs sgang ma nang*) in Paro
3. Chang Palri Gonpa (*cang dpal ri dgon pa*) in Paro
4. Chagzamtokha (*lcags zam tog kha*) in Paro
5. Kabe Jasek Dzong (*dkar sbe bya sreg rdzong*) in Thimphu
6. Samar Zingkha (*sa dmar rdzing kha*) in Thimphu
7. Tshali Gonpa (*tsha li dgon pa*) in Thimphu
8. Babe Lhakhang (*bar pa lha khang*) in Thimphu
9. Wang Langmalung (*wang glang ma lung*) in Thimphu
10. Bardrong Jemai Dzong (*bar grong bye ma'i rdzong*) in Punakha
11. Jang Marpo (*gyang dmar po*) in Punakha

12. Bardrong Dangsa (*bar grong dwangs sa*) in Punakha.

There are several monasteries associated with Nenyang which are missing from the list, such as Dakha Dzong in Paro (REC, 2018) and Wangdi Dra Dzong in Wanakha (Dorji, 2020). While a couple of Nenyang monasteries are functioning today, most of them are in ruins. It is possible to identify some of the ruins through oral sources.

The ruins of Namochen Dzong (Figure 4), also called Donagmo Dzong, is located near Bjishingang village. Today, only the ruins of the monastery remain. Galteng Gangma nang monastery (Figure 5), also called Langma Tashicholing, is above Gepteng [*gal stengs?*] village in Wangchang Gewog. It was originally built by Nenyangpa but later it was rebuilt and expanded by the patrons Serdrup Dargye and re-consecrated by the 25th Je Khenpo Sherab Gyaltshen.



Figure 4: Ruins of Namochen Dzong. Photo credit: Sangay Wangchuk, 2021.

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Figure 5: Galteng Gangmanang. Photo credit: Sangay Wangchuk, 2021.

Built atop the Serigang Hill in Paro, Chang Pelri Gonpa (Figure 6) was founded in the 14th century by a Nenying lama Chimi Rabgay. According to some local accounts, the Gonpa is also associated with Vanaratna (*sgrub thob nags kyi rin chen*, 1384-1468), a Bengali Pandita and Mahasiddha. The Gonpa still has Vanaratna's statue and a rock bearing his name in old Bengali script.

According to the Pelri Gonpa's caretaker (*dkon gnyer*), in a bitter struggle between Zhabdrung and Nenying lama over the control of Chang Pelri Gonpa, the former asked Nenying lama to make a drawing to decide the victor. The latter drew the picture of himself 'riding a horse' while Zhabdrung was shown 'sitting under a tree' (Figure 7). Zhabdrung responded, "Since you are 'riding', your destiny is to leave this place, while my destiny, as shown 'sitting', is to stay." But Nenying lama refused and the fighting continued. Story goes that the Pelri

Gonpa originally had seven storeys. During the fight, Zhabdrung demolished one floor after another with the power of his mantra (*mthu*). When the last floor was about to be demolished, the Gonpa's deity Yamantaka (*gshin rje 'jigs byed*) is said to have pleaded to spare the last floor for him. Today, the Gonpa still has a single storey. A stone slab seat under the cypress illustrates Zhabdrung sitting under a tree (Figure 5). Remains of broken statues were found while digging foundations for house construction below the Gonpa. Yamantaka, a five-ox headed deity with 16 hands, is still the main deity of the Gonpa.



Figure 6: Chang Pelri Gonpa. Photo by Dorji Penjore, 2017.

Chagzamtokha (Figure 8) could be the monastery near Bodhi tree opposite Shaba across the Pachu river. The Bhodi tree is believed to have grown from the staff of Thangtong Gyalpo, but some elders say, it grew from the walking staff of Nenying lama. Today the monastery is in ruins.

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Figure 7: The stone slab seat. Photo by Wang, 2020.



Figure 8: The Bodhi tree at Chagzamtokha. Photo credit: Sangay Wangchuk, 2021.

Built as Nenyings' *ma dgon* (mother monastery) for the Wang region (Thimphu), Karbe Jaseg Dzong (Figure 9) is located in a forest on the left side of the Kabisa village in upper Thimphu. Only the ruins of wall remain today. The royal palace was initially planned to be built there in 1955 but it was shifted to Dechencholing after discovering the ruins. One has to walk about half an hour after crossing Kabisa to arrive at the ruins.



Figure 9: Karbe Jaseg temple. Photo by Sangay Wangchuk, 2020.

Located below Tandin Ney and Thimphu-Lungtenphu motor road, Samar Zingkha (Figure 10) was a Nenyingspa temple. Its main *nangten* is the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni which is said to have spoken to the 9th Je Khenpo Shakya Rinchen when he was a monk. The statue made a prophecy of him becoming Je Khenpo and his teachings flourishing in the country. It is one of the few Nenyingspa monasteries that remains intact today.

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Figure 10: Samar Zingkha Lhakhang. Photo by Dorji Penjore, 2021.

Tshali Gonpa (Figure 11), also known as Tshalumaphay monastery, is located across the Wangchu, the river which flows through Thimphu valley. The monastery is opposite to Babesa. Until recent years it was the least known and thus the least visited temple. Its fortune changed after 2015 when renovation began under the patronage of Her Majesty Gyalyum Tshering Yangdoen Wangchuck. It was originally called Tsholing Gonpa (*mtsho gling dpon pa*), named after a lake at Tshalumaphey village at the bank of Wangchu. After it was abandoned by Nenyngpas, the people of Tshalumaphey took over it as a community temple.



Figure 11: Tshali Gonpa. Photo by Dorji Penjore, 2021.



Figure 12: Babe Lhakhang. Photo by Dorji Penjore, 2021.

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Babe Lhakhang (Figure 12) is located below the Babesa express way adjacent to the flyover bridge at Bebesa near the entrance to Thimphu. Today it serves as a community temple. Wang Langmalung (Figure 13) was built at the lower end of Paga Labtsa on a hilltop above Chuzom.



Figure 13: Ruins of Wang Langmalung. Photo courtesy: Sangay Wangchuk, 2020.

Located above Bardong village in Wangdue, Bajo Lhakhang was built on the same spot where once stood Nenyngpa's *ma dgon*, Bardrong Jemai Dzong (Figure 14). Jang Marpo (Figure 15) was built nearby Bardrong Jemai Dzong. A portion of red wall on the sand bank between the motor road and Punatsangchu river is all that remains of Jang Marpo. Later, the village also came to be known as Jangmarpo, meaning Red Wall.



Figure 14: Bardrong Jemai Dzong. Photo credit: *Kuensel*.

The mountain slopes above Debtsi Phakha and left of Kuensel Phodrang was once a flourishing Nenyong monastic community. It is said that a Nenyong Lama arrived at the present site of Tshali Gonpa. At night, a wild dog came and carried off/stole (*rku*) his shoe. Finding his shoe (*lham*) missing in the morning, he started to search for it everywhere and found it above on the mountain slope. He interpreted it as a sign that he had to settle there. He built a temple there and named in Lham-ku (*lham rku: shoe stolen*) Gonpa, which later became corrupted to Hamku. Ruins (Figure 16) along the slope are of that temple as well as monks' living quarters (Tshering, 2021).

According to the village elders of Tsendonang the ruins (Figure 17, 18, 19, 20) found about an hour walk from Sangchokor, above Rinpung Gonpa in Lamgong Gewog, are of Nenyong dzong (Tshering, 2021). It is also said that Nemjo in Lugnyi, Paro, got its name after it was settled by highlanders (*bjob*) of Nenyongpa (Nemjob, *gnas rnying bjob: Nenyongpa's job*).

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Figure 15: A portion of red walls of Jangmarpo temple. Photo courtesy: Sangay Wangchuk, 2019.



Figure 16: Ruins of Hamku Gonpa. Photo by Dorji Penjore, 2016.



Figure 17: Ruins of a Nenyng Dzong, Lamgong, Paro. Photo courtesy: Phub Tshering, 2021.



Figure 18: Ruins of a Nenyng Dzong, Lamgong, Paro. Photo courtesy: Phub Tshering, 2021.

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Figure 19: Ruins of a Nenyings Dzong, Lamgong, Paro. Photo courtesy: Phub Tshering, 2021.



Figure 20: Ruins of a Nenyings Dzong, Lamgong, Paro. Photo courtesy: Phub Tshering, 2021.

Dzongdrakha

Dzongdrakha (Figure 21) in Paro is a well-known Nenyng monastery in Bhutan, often referred to as second Taktshang. In his paper, “Narration of the sacred place of Dzong Drakha in Paro”, Phuntshok Tashi (2009) provides a rich account of the coming of Gonpo Dorji to Paro, the opening of the sacred Dzongdrakha, and the discovery of a hidden treasure (pp. 111-118).



Figure 21: Dzongdrakha; Photo courtesy: Herz et al., 2019.

It is said that Nenyng Abbot Rinchen Samten Palzang had a vision of Guru Rinpoche’s sacred place in Bhutan. So, he dispatched Gonpo Dorji to discover the place. Gonpo Dorji arrived at Paro to find and reveal the sacred place. He came to the right bank of a river flowing by a village and got lost after crossing the river. Suddenly, a fox appeared and walked before him as if to show the path. Both the river and the village took the name of Wuchu, a corruption of *’a chu*: fox’s stream. He followed the fox and came to a village where he was greeted by a dumb boy. To everybody’s surprise, the boy found his speech and began to talk. He informed his mother about Gonpo Dorji’s coming. The mother was so happy, and the place came to be

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known as Gadrang Nang (*dga' grags nang*). It is today called Gyeb Jag Nang. Led by the fox, Gonpo Dorji finally arrived at a place what is today Dzongdrakha. There he saw a baby goat by the pond walking towards him. As the animal sat on a flat stone, milk began to ooze out from her udder and fell on the stone. He interpreted it as an auspicious sign and inscribed *om mani pad me hum* mantra with his finger on the stone. Later, he built a reliquary stupa with that stone as its inner support of worship (*nang rten*), and named it Om Mani Stupa.

The oral account has it that when Guru Rinpoche came to Bhutan, he first came to Drakharpo and then Dzongdrakha before moving to Taktsang. His foot imprints can be seen today in Dzongdrakha. However, when Gonpo Dorji first arrived there the place was covered with thick forests. On arriving there, he was received by Damchen Dorji Legpa (Vajrasādhu), the main guardian deity of Dzongdrakha. He interpreted the reception as a good sign for his mission. While he was absorbed in deep meditation to bless the place, Guru Rinpoche appeared in his vision and gave him a glass dagger hard enough to cut the cliff. The dagger fell in front of him and a glass stupa of an arrow's length and three precious teeth (*ring bsrel*) of Kasyapa Buddha (*'od srung*) emerged out of the dagger. Two of the teeth disappeared while Gonpo Dorji could gather the third tooth and the glass stupa.

Carrying the stupa and the tooth, he descended to Bondey village. While resting in a house, people noticed something was moving inside his bag and they requested him to show it to them. On seeing the items, they claimed them (glass stupa and the third tooth) as theirs. Back at Dzongdrakha, Gonpo Dorji built a small stupa on a rocky cliff resembling claws of a lion and entrusted it to Damchen Dorji Legpa. Later, the local people named it Chorten Gulshey Karmo (*'gul shes dkar mo*), after seeing the stupa shake on its own such that a part of the cliff fell away. Without a roof or walls the people feared the stupa might one day fly away like the two other teeth; so, it

was saved with a roof and walls. Even today, the stupa can be seen shaking sometimes while making offerings.

Dzongdrakha is a complex of four temples built around the main temple built by Gonpo Dorji. The four shrines of the temple are devoted to Tara (*sgrol ma*), Tsheringma (Longevity Goddess), Guru Rinpoche and Maitreya (the Future Buddha).

Oral accounts claim that Gonpo Dorji lived in Dzongdrakha and attained enlightenment. There was a prophecy that he would not have any direct descendants, but that his reincarnation line would build several religious centres. His reincarnations were Neten Jangchub Zangpo, Lama Rabten, Lama Phento, Lama Bachu, Lama Pema, Lama Kado, and Lama Dargo. The nobility of Dzongdrakha or *choje*, founded by the reincarnation of Gonpo Dorji's is one of the five such families in Paro. Others are those of Tachog, Gongka, Sha Radrag Go, and Hungrel.

A six-day annual Dzongdrakha tshechu, perhaps the most popular festival in Paro district after Paro tshechu, is the legacy of Nenyng Gonpo Dorji. It predates Paro tshechu by several centuries. There is a tradition for Paro tshechu to customarily start from and end at Dzongdrakha. By tradition and practice, it must begin a day after Dzongdrakha tshechu (the 8th day of the 2nd Bhutanese month), and it ends on the 10th day of the 2nd Bhutanese month, a day after the end of Paro tshechu. During the tshechu, the stupa of the past Buddha is opened to bless the devotees. The local people still hold to a belief that attending the Paro tshechu alone would be less meritorious if one did not attend Dzongdrakha tshechu.

Conclusion

Historical narratives are fundamental elements of a country's cultural heritage and collective identity. But history making is mostly selective memorializing and convenient remembering. As one of several Tibetan schools of Buddhism which arrived quite early in the western valleys of Bhutan and persisted for

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centuries, Nenying school's influence in the country was inevitable. It was not alone to leave the country; other schools, Lhapa in particular, also met the same fate.

According to Aris (1979), Dzongdrakha Choje, claiming descent from the reincarnation of Gonpo Dorji and serving as a custodian of the main Dzongdrakha temple in 1970s, did not know that the temple was founded by a Nenying lama. Instead, he claimed Gonpo Dorji was a Drukpa Kagyu lama (p. 193). And he had the reason to forget. A popular story goes that Nenying Jetsun Drung who was imprisoned by Zhabdrung until 1657 is said to have made a fervent aspiration prayer, while dying, to take a rebirth to take revenge on Zhabdrung. The 8th Desi Druk Rabgay (r:1707-1719) was then considered to be Nenying Jetsun Drung's rebirth who poisoned Kunga Gyaltshen, the reincarnation of Zhabdrung's son Jampel Dorji. Kunga Gyaltshen is said to have interpreted this as a karmic retribution for the damages done to the Nenying school by Zhabdrung and the fulfilment of Nenying Jetsun Drung's malicious prayers (Phuntsho, 2013, p. 312).

When the Nenying lamas and monks fled to Tibet, they left behind their temples intact for the local people, their patrons, whose material supports had enabled the school and its teachings to spread and flourish in the land. The oral accounts have it that once they had left, the village-settlements where temples had been embedded and had sustained a reciprocal relation through a lama-patron (*chos yon sbyin bdag*) relation for centuries became responsible for their custodial care, including performing customary yearly rites and rituals. Few temples flourished while the most floundered and fell into ruins. Those temples which persist to this day were looked after by the communities. However, once their up-keeping became a challenge, the communities offered them to the central monastic body. Two of the three Nenying monasteries in Thimphu, or rather the monasteries with Nenying root or pedigree, are being expanded and renovated in 2021. The ruins of other Nenying monasteries do not clamour for repair or

renovation or for their revival as a religious tradition, but for recognizing its historical role and religious services to generations of Bhutanese forebears. Such acknowledgement will only make the country's history, heritage, tradition and identity heterogenous, diverse, richer and stronger.

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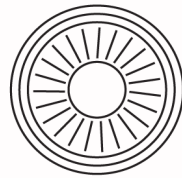
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