

BHUTAN:  
ASPECTS OF CULTURE  
AND DEVELOPMENT

*edited by*

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Frontispiece: Traditional enemies - the garuda and lion, conch and makara, otter and fish - crossed into three allegorical hybrids representing 'The Conquest of Discord' (*mi-mthun g.yul-rgyal*).  
Drawing by Robert Beer.

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## Introduction

Michael Aris

(St Antony's College, Oxford)

The papers assembled here were among those presented to a conference on "Bhutan: A Traditional Order and the Forces of Change" held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, in March 1993.<sup>1</sup> The convenor, Dr. Michael Hutt, brought together a wide range of scholars from many countries for what was certainly the first international conference on Bhutan held in an academic setting. Particularly welcomed by all participants was the strong representation from this small, landlocked kingdom of the eastern Himalayas. The meeting was credited principally to the energy and enthusiasm of Michael Hutt, but it also reflected a need and willingness in Bhutan to communicate its policies and traditions to the outside world at a time of political crisis. This was felt to be significant, seen in the context of the continuous soul-searching that takes place within the kingdom. How much does it stand to gain or lose by departing from what looks superficially like the age of Marco Polo and entering the twentieth century with its complex problems and benefits?

It is fair to say here that very few, if any, of the papers presented to the conference were the product of wholly independent research. Unless I am mistaken, all but one of us who participated have been, in one capacity or other, the employees or guests of the Royal Government of Bhutan, and this is bound to have been reflected in our writings in various ways. To balance the fundamental need for objectivity with the duty to reciprocate the friendship and hospitality of our patrons or hosts is not always easy! However, the neutral ground of London certainly provided the right context for the sober appraisal of a difficult issue. So far as one could judge, the conference was deemed a great success by all who attended.

Although the ambitious scope and title of the gathering focused on how Bhutan's traditional order deals with the forces of change, no one was unaware that what provided the immediate impetus to look at this

issue came from the urgent and related problem that has arisen in the south of the country since 1989. The departure, whether by voluntary exodus or involuntary flight, of some 85,000 or more Nepali-speaking people from that area to refugee camps in Nepal is the only international issue affecting Bhutan to have brought the attention of the world's media to bear on the kingdom. To see the problem in true perspective it was thought necessary to place it firmly in the wider context of contemporary Bhutan, seen against the backcloth of its cultural heritage, reacting to modern change. Those papers which directly addressed the problem and immediate context of the Nepalese exodus from Bhutan have already been published under Michael Hut's editorship in a volume in this series entitled *Bhutan: Perspectives on Conflict and Dissent*.<sup>2</sup> Presented here are the papers which considered some of the dimensions of the broader issue of culture and development in Bhutan. Despite the pioneering nature of the papers, readers may be disappointed by the omission of many aspects of the issue. For instance, an account is lacking of the changes affecting the all-important institution of state monasticism, of music, the arts and literature. The course of modern development itself is considered in only two, albeit wide-ranging, contributions. For these reasons the collection should be seen as no more than the first installment of a complete survey that must gradually be made.

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The fundamental challenge facing Bhutan is expressed in a cluster of closely related questions. Even if they are not articulated in the same way, they are present in the minds of a great many Bhutanese and their foreign guests. How can Bhutan's modern development be harmonized with its traditional culture? Are the concepts of "development" and "culture" as presently conceived so intrinsically opposed and so mutually exclusive that dualism and alienation cannot be avoided? Is this really an issue whose outcome a government body or international agency can determine by formulating policies, issuing decrees and trying to implement them? Will the conundrum be settled by the people themselves gradually according to their own will, naturally and spontaneously? Or will the dual effort to preserve ancient legacies and

to improve the quality of present life be hijacked by forces beyond human control?

The pressing need to achieve a balance and synthesis between the heritage of the past and a programme of modernization and reform has been recognized as a priority of government since Bhutan began to emerge from isolation and enter the modern world in the 1960s. Indeed nobody inside or outside the kingdom has argued against the wisdom of an ideal which looks to the steady and controlled integration of the best aspects of the past with what is so urgently needed from the present. However, the policy rests on the assumption, which can always be challenged, that those responsible for its implementation not only have the necessary discrimination to identify what is valuable and worthy of being preserved or introduced but also the practical ability to do so. Moreover, as development gathers pace and foreign contacts multiply in all directions, it is clear to everyone that the key issue of integration becomes increasingly complex, raising more and more questions and yielding fewer and fewer answers. Perhaps the time is right, therefore, to reflect on some aspects of the question which are likely to endure even as change accelerates. No solutions are offered here, merely a few pointers that may or may not be useful to future discussion.

It helps to realise that Bhutan is not alone in addressing the issue or making it a priority. Much of the developmental effort brought to bear on the poorer countries of the South in recent decades is now recognized to have failed spectacularly because little or no account was taken of cultural traditions and values or indeed of genuinely popular aspirations.<sup>3</sup> The term "endogenous development" is today the new catch phrase. Instead of looking to the imposition of external models and squeezing these, usually without success, to fit local conditions, this new strategy or "style" of development seeks rather to uncover those factors, particularly cultural factors, internal to any society which promote a human, sustainable and shared development. The World Commission on Culture and Development currently in session under the auspices of UNESCO has declared in its mandate that "this new development can only be built on the basis of new ideas, policies and practices, which will develop only if the links between culture and development are explored and strengthened. In the future, development models should be focused on people and should foster

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cultural values instead of being prejudicial to them... Culture, indeed, is the source and the ultimate goal of development ...".<sup>4</sup> The deliberations and guidelines of the Commission are intended to be adopted and distributed through the UN General Assembly in 1995 after yielding a document similar to the Brundtland Commission report on the environment.

According to one of the working papers of the Commission, "In the South, the primary aim will be to avoid the dangers of slavish imitation, by fostering a development at once endogenous and open to the outside. The enormous cultural and biological diversity of the South creates favourable conditions for inventing futures that do not fall into the Northern trap of overconsumption. These countries will thus also be confronted with the twin challenge of, on the one hand, a creative interpretation of their culture and, on the other hand, the evolution of a new culture which takes a selective vision of modernity into account".<sup>5</sup> Although not articulated in quite the same words, this sounds very much like the stance adopted by the Government of Bhutan over the last three and a half decades. Few would disagree, however, that it is much easier to make pronouncements of this sort than to bring them to reality. The intangible, even spiritual, goal of development as thus conceived cannot be quantified and reduced to a statistical table.

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The present collection begins with a clear and optimistic account of how the country has sought to develop in tune with its heritage, written by a Bhutanese civil servant directly involved in the planning process. Karma Ura considers the impetus for change in the light of the transition from theocracy to monarchy that was achieved in 1907. The constitutional change which brought in monarchy entailed no radical break with the Buddhist ideology of the past. However, the direct purpose of government was gradually transformed and enlarged from its primary duty of maintaining the institutions of religion. It is worth emphasizing here that even under the theocracy, the "welfare of the public" was seen as a principal task of government.<sup>6</sup> Indeed behind the local conception of "welfare" lies the primary Buddhist injunction to remove human suffering. Ultimately this takes place in the mind of

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each person as the bonds of desire are severed. Directed to that end are the primary ethical values taught by Buddhism, along with a huge array of philosophical, ritual and meditative techniques. At the same time there has long been clear recognition, at least since the country's first unification in the seventeenth century, that a government must take practical measures to eliminate the immediate, material causes of suffering and to actively encourage the conditions necessary for prosperity. The reforms introduced by the third king<sup>7</sup> and the modern development of Bhutan which he and his son, the present king, have pursued with such vigour can therefore always be presented in this light, that is to say in very traditional terms which in no way conflict with the heritage of the past. It is partly for this reason that the Buddhist clergy, whom some might expect to act as a reactionary force opposing change, have never done so.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand the modern concept of "engaged Buddhism", which lays special emphasis on the religion's active potential for relieving social and political inequities, has yet to take root.<sup>9</sup> What is sure is that the ethical basis of Buddhism and its teachings on compassion and harmony will continue to provide the theoretical basis for much of the state's endeavours. It can also be expected that the tensions which naturally arise between the ideal and the reality will be expressed in new and troublesome ways. These tensions will be seen especially in the interaction of the state's theoretical basis in the primary teachings of Buddhism with those militant aspects of the institutionalized Drukpa school which lay much emphasis on the defence of the realm against external threats.<sup>10</sup>

The movement described by Karma Ura towards decentralization and popular participation which has received such emphasis in government policy since the present king came to the throne can also be shown to have arisen from traditional roots waiting to emerge. There are few hints in the indigenous historical literature about how corporate decisions were taken on matters which lay outside the immediate purview of the state, or about the way in which negotiations between the state and society were conducted. However, the concept of the *mang* (spelt *dmangs*, which can be translated variously as the "public", "community" or "commonalty")<sup>11</sup> served as a balance to the absolutist, and often exploitative, nature of government in the past. The term occurs most frequently in reference to monastic communities, conceived as the sum total of their members, but it is

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also heard in speaking of village communities and their corporate rights and responsibilities. Nothing has so far been recorded of how the *mang* operates on the ground, either in the past or the present, but the whole notion has been deliberately brought to the fore in the operation of the local development committees which now fill the country.<sup>12</sup> Popular empowerment of this kind at a grass-roots level is restricted so far to making choices and decisions on relatively minor issues of local development. When these issues are contentious or involve policy considerations they are forwarded to the National Assembly by elected "people's representatives" who make up roughly two-thirds of its membership. However, it is the non-elected government representatives in the National Assembly, the appointees of the king, who are the main initiators of major legislation, and the king himself retains the right to veto any resolution. If the experience of recent decades is anything to go by, the further progress of reform and democratization will depend more on the king himself continuing to take the lead rather than on popular pressure exerted from below. The king has set himself the task of finding a durable solution to the "southern problem" of the ethnic Nepalese. Any lasting settlement would presumably entail political changes affecting the system of government.

The search for internal prosperity has been matched by the external search for the means to achieve it. Bhutanese diplomacy has been aimed both at locating the funds to underwrite the cost of development and at gaining international recognition for the country's independence. Thierry Mathou provides a most useful account of this process in the years 1961-91. The growth of modern diplomacy is presented as a radical break with the past, for it has caused what he describes as "this most isolated country in the world" to develop formal relations with eighteen nations and it has joined one hundred and fifty international organizations. No one will dispute the importance of this movement, but it has to be seen in the context of some far-flung Asian contacts which Bhutan developed in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Trade and pilgrimage provided links with lands to the north and south, and missions of a diplomatic nature were deputed to successive rulers of Assam, Bengal, Kuch Bihar, Nepal, Sikkim and Ladakh. The Sakya principality, a quasi-autonomous unit within Tibet, maintained particularly cordial relations with Bhutan over a long period. After two sides in a conflict appealed to Beijing by

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sending delegations there in 1734 a permanent Bhutanese mission was established in Tibet's capital and continued there until 1959. The grant to Bhutan of large monastic estates in Nepal, western Tibet and Ladakh brought frequent contacts with the other major Himalayan powers. In the later eighteenth century Indian secretaries were maintained at the Bhutanese court for correspondence with the British authorities in India.<sup>13</sup> The nature of some of these relationships has sometimes been interpreted to support claims that Bhutan formed part, successively, of the Chinese and British empires.

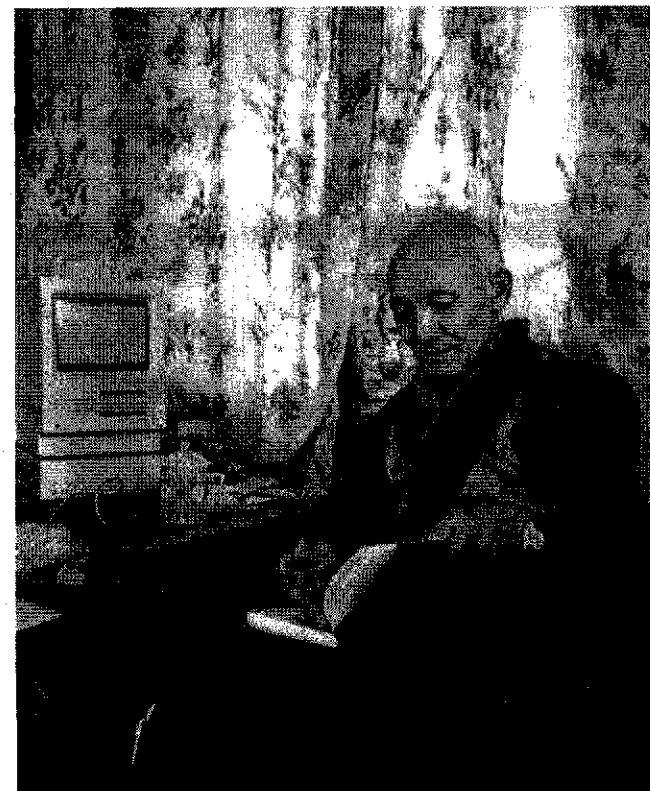
None of this fits the standard picture of long and deep isolation that is normally drawn for the country. What is sure, however, is that the chaos of civil strife in the nineteenth century gradually caused the Bhutanese state to turn away from the confident external relations it had earlier developed. By the time the monarchy was established in 1907, apart from British India the only foreign power with which Bhutan continued to have relations was Tibet, and there the contact was limited mainly to issues of trade and ceremony. It took more than a decade after India had won independence in 1947 before the treaty provision which had placed Bhutan's external relations first in British and then in Indian hands gradually came to be ignored, culminating finally in Bhutan's admission to the United Nations in 1971. The expansion of its diplomatic relations thereafter can in one sense be seen as a turning of the clock right back to much earlier times when the country had strong regional ties in Asia, now augmented on a global scale. Mathou gives a detailed account of the skill with which this was achieved, and he points to some of the future challenges that may arise from the rapid expansion that has taken place.

Turning back to the internal situation, George van Driem looks to the important issue of language policy, basing his information partly on the first linguistic survey of the country which he recently helped to conduct and partly on statements of government educational policy. (The broader issue of education in general is among the topics missing from this volume, along with those of agriculture, health, trade, industry and several other critical aspects of development.) The linguistic survey has given valuable detail to a picture that was already known in outline.<sup>14</sup> It reveals that the speakers of those closely related Central Bodish dialects of the western Bhutanese who are known as the Ngalong, upon whose tongue the national language of Dzongkha<sup>15</sup> is

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based, only slightly outnumber the ethnic Nepalese of the south. (There are 160,000 Ngalong and 156,000 Nepalese according to his figures. However, it is not clear to me at all how the figure he provides for the Nepalese relates to that of the refugees now in Nepal, whether it includes or excludes them.) Each of these groups outnumbers the other two major language groups, namely those who speak dialects of the Bumthang language that falls under East Bodish (108,000) and the so-called "Easterners" (Shachop) who speak Tshangla (138,000). Three other languages — Lhokpu, Gongduk and Lepcha — are, like Tshangla, as yet unclassified within the Tibeto-Burman family. They are spoken by only 6,500 people.

The linguistic diversity of the kingdom is said to be accommodated and preserved by the government. Multilingualism is both the reality and the aim, and it is worth remembering here that Nepali is widely understood and used in the north alongside the indigenous languages and English. However, it is noted that the teaching of Nepali has now been totally abolished in reaction to the southern problem. The key issues remain to what extent the government's plans to develop the national language of Dzongkha will affect the classical Buddhist heritage preserved in literary Tibetan, also whether Nepali will be allowed to make an official comeback, and how Dzongkha will be used in its spoken and written forms alongside both the local languages and English. Apart from the single newspaper, *Kuensel*, and educational textbooks, the only major publication in Dzongkha I am aware of has been the multi-volume collection of short stories compiled from vernacular oral tradition by Sherab Thayé.<sup>16</sup> Long poems in Dzongkha of the *lozé* genre have certainly been composed and circulated in recent years.<sup>17</sup> However, despite the considerable effort to expand the use of Dzongkha as a unifying instrument of national identity, literary Tibetan remains the standard for practically all new compositions and most government transactions. Indeed a certain revival of classical literary standards has been apparent since Bhutan turned towards modern development, the result surely of a perceived need to preserve and reassert the heritage of the past in the face of so much change.<sup>18</sup> Clearly the fear that Dzongkha would displace literary Tibetan, as expressed by some inside the country and also by David Snellgrove,<sup>19</sup> seems far from being realized. Yet the movement for classical revival, though not coming to an end, appears to be slowing down, at least in



The eminent scholar Lobsön Pemala (Lama Pema Tsewang), retired Director of the National Library of Bhutan, with the computer used for writing his works of history and religion, Thimphu 1982. (Photo: Anthony Aris)

terms of literary output. The present head abbot of the state monks, Gendun Rinchen, is a prolific author of traditional writings, but he is unmatched by any except the retired director of the National Library, Lama Pema Tsewang (Lobsön Pemala), the author of a major and long-awaited history of Bhutan that has just appeared.<sup>20</sup> The work breaks new ground in its traditional methodology by adopting a rigorous attitude to sources, but the viewpoint remains wholly conservative. That the author now uses a computer to facilitate his writings is typical of a cultural climate which, although traditional, is beginning to exploit the advantages of modern technology.

The efforts of these and other authors and the fact that the National Library has its own valuable holdings and over two hundred Bhutanese

and Tibetan classics currently available for purchase means that the literary and historical heritage of the country will definitely survive for reappraisal by future generations.<sup>21</sup> Any new vision of the present and future is bound to entail a new vision of the past. But the prospects for literary development, as distinct from preservation, will be closely affected by the increasing use of English. Far more than written Dzongkha, it is English which is serving to displace the classical idioms. Nor do any of the insights, perspectives and literary genres open to users of English appear yet to be filtering back either into written Dzongkha or into literary Tibetan as used in Bhutan. For instance, a novel has yet to appear in either of these forms, and no English work has so far been translated into any Bhutanese language. Until some cross-fertilization begins to take hold in this and similar ways it is difficult to see how the use of English will not lead to a sense of cultural alienation.<sup>22</sup>

Literary forms, indeed practically all types of cultural expression in Bhutan, are closely bound up with religious attitudes. It is fortunate we have two contributions by the husband-and-wife team of Sonam Chhoki and Michael Kowalewski. They explore the Buddhist religion in its popular aspects that are so easily missed or ignored by scholars concerned only with textual traditions. Sensitive to the loose boundaries separating the "high" religion of monks in their monasteries from the "low" religion of peasants in their villages, they are conscious of the way these oppositions have merged at many points and drawn inspiration from each other to form a total world view of great depth and complexity. Sonam Chhoki's account of a hitherto unrecorded village ritual helps to throw light on the way local aspirations are expressed very differently from the concerns of the dominant, all-powerful establishment. The latter appears to deal with these potentially threatening forms of expression either by ignoring them or by gradually incorporating them into the purview of the state. Many of Bhutan's most interesting traditions are, like the one studied by Sonam Chhoki, those which are least accessible, hidden in the customs and seasonal festivals of remote communities or in texts whose secrets have to be teased into the light of day.<sup>23</sup> The quest to reveal and understand this legacy is potentially the most exciting and rewarding of all the joint ventures that bring insiders and outsiders together. Kowalewski attempts a holistic approach to the total picture by providing an

impressionistic account of the main themes which imbue popular historical consciousness and ritual activity.

"Culture" tends to be conceived by the state largely in terms of those elements deliberately selected by it for the purpose of constructing a single national "identity". Indeed the two terms "culture" and "identity" are practically synonymous in official statements in English.<sup>24</sup> Most of the more traditional Western notions of culture fall in Bhutan under the heading of "religion", *cho* (chos). However, one term which comes closer to the more contemporary and inclusive conception of culture is "tradition", *lusö* (lugs-srol). The term alludes to all those customs, whether of the state or of the local community, lay or religious, that are sanctioned by historical precedent. It can potentially accommodate "the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group ... not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs".<sup>25</sup> The category of *lusö* can thus subsume not only *riñé* (rig-gnas, Sanskrit vidhyāsthāna), which refers to culture in its more limited aspect of "arts and letters",<sup>26</sup> but also, as Sonam Chhoki has shown in her paper, those cultural features of village life that the state might look on as aberrant.

When the term *lusö* is qualified in the common phrase *Drukpa'i lusö*, "the cultural traditions of the Bhutanese", the speaker is usually invoking a set of norms governing ritual behaviour and appearance prescribed by the state and enforceable by law. Formal acts of deference and national styles of building and dress all come under this heading. In this way the distinctive and specific forms which evolved in Bhutan as a result of the country's political unification are deliberately promoted to counter the effects of modernization and to foster loyalty to the state. Just as the rights and aspirations of the common man are given prominence by the state in its development programmes, so at the same time does the state seek to bring compliance to its ordinances by asserting what is lawfully and acceptably Bhutanese. Nowhere is the culturally prescriptive role of the state more evident than in the official "code of discipline" (*dritrim*, grigs-khrims) now laid down by the government and imposed on the population at large. Known as "The Fundamentals of Disciplined Behaviour" (*Driglam Namzha*, sGriglam gNam-bzhag), it consists of an elaborate choreography of



deference developed out of monastic tradition. Observed not only on formal occasions but, increasingly, in areas that some might consider private, the code constitutes "culture" in official eyes. But how will this state-conceived culture deal with those aspects at the core of the traditional heritage which depend on the individual's own quest for enlightenment or with all those external influences that encourage free thought and expression? When so much effort is aimed at identifying and "freezing" ancient forms it cannot be easy at the same time to maintain a flexible and rational approach to the fundamental changes that are taking place. The success and integrity of Bhutanese culture, conceived in its widest sense, will depend on keeping the poles in balance, and much thought will be needed to achieve this by developing new rationales of what culture is all about.

Meanwhile the state's strict ordinances on architecture and dress provide a testing ground for its cultural policies. These areas of material culture account for almost everything that is visibly and distinctly Bhutanese, and the effort to preserve them as a statement of national identity runs parallel to the government's environmental policies aimed at keeping the country's natural heritage intact. Writing from the perspective of architectural anthropology, Marc Dujardin takes pains to relate the values expressed in buildings and in their methods of construction to the wider context of Bhutanese culture. He provides a sensitively critical analysis of the government's attempts to marry distinctive features of the local architecture with imported building techniques. Here tradition is reduced to mere wallpaper decoration, and its truly dynamic quality, never static, is lost in the "urban tissue" of the developing townships. However, as he points out with optimism, the great majority of the population outside the townships still preserves a vibrant and integrated dwelling culture that carries the potential to meet the challenges of development and modernization.

The same is unambiguously true for the culture of cloth, which has accommodated new materials and styles without losing anything by way of meaning and purpose. From slightly different perspectives Françoise Pommaret and Diana Myers explore the fundamental importance of textiles to many critical aspects of Bhutanese life.<sup>27</sup> The tradition as we see it today can be viewed as the gradual triumph of elements that are usually marginal and excluded from the central fabric

of the state. Originating in the peripheral east of the country that was made subject to the dominant west, the textile arts lie in the hands of women whose voice is rarely heard in a society, government and culture dominated by men. In textile production, largely free from government stricture, we see an efflorescence of creative expression quite unique in the trans-Himalayan world. That this evolving tradition as a whole was absorbed wholesale from the fringe and made so central to national culture provides eloquent testimony to the long-term capacity of Bhutanese society to adapt to new and vibrant forms. Nevertheless, difficult political issues remain. Will the measures to enforce the national dress code on those who now prefer to wear imported garments really work? Is it necessary or desirable to preserve "culture" by coercion? Will the Nepalese population in the south continue to be made to wear the national dress? Is this really practicable or desirable? Only time will tell.

The greatest challenge will come, surely, from the rapid expansion of a monetary economy rather than from external influences affecting established norms of cultural expression. If these norms have the value claimed for them, then they will endure naturally by adaptation, aided by the undoubted strength and resilience of the Bhutanese character. However, the need to improve the quality of day-to-day life through controlled development programmes has brought with it unprecedented opportunities to make a great deal of money very quickly. A shared, even prosperity is the worthy goal of a Buddhist state, but a growing climate of competitive greed and ostentation threatens the ultimate purpose of Buddhist institutions and traditions. While the Bhutanese are just as preoccupied with material acquisition as the people of most other countries, a strong sense of the ideal of sufficiency is inherent in their value system. The "awareness of sufficiency" (*chokshé*, chog-shes), which renders Sanskrit *samtuṣṭi*, "contentment" or "satisfaction", is fundamental to Buddhist teachings. Along with the primary value placed on compassion, which can only promote pluralism and a tolerance of diversity, it is surely these elements in the national culture which will, in the end, achieve the balanced integration that is so much desired, both with the modern world and with the country's largest ethnic minority.

Notes

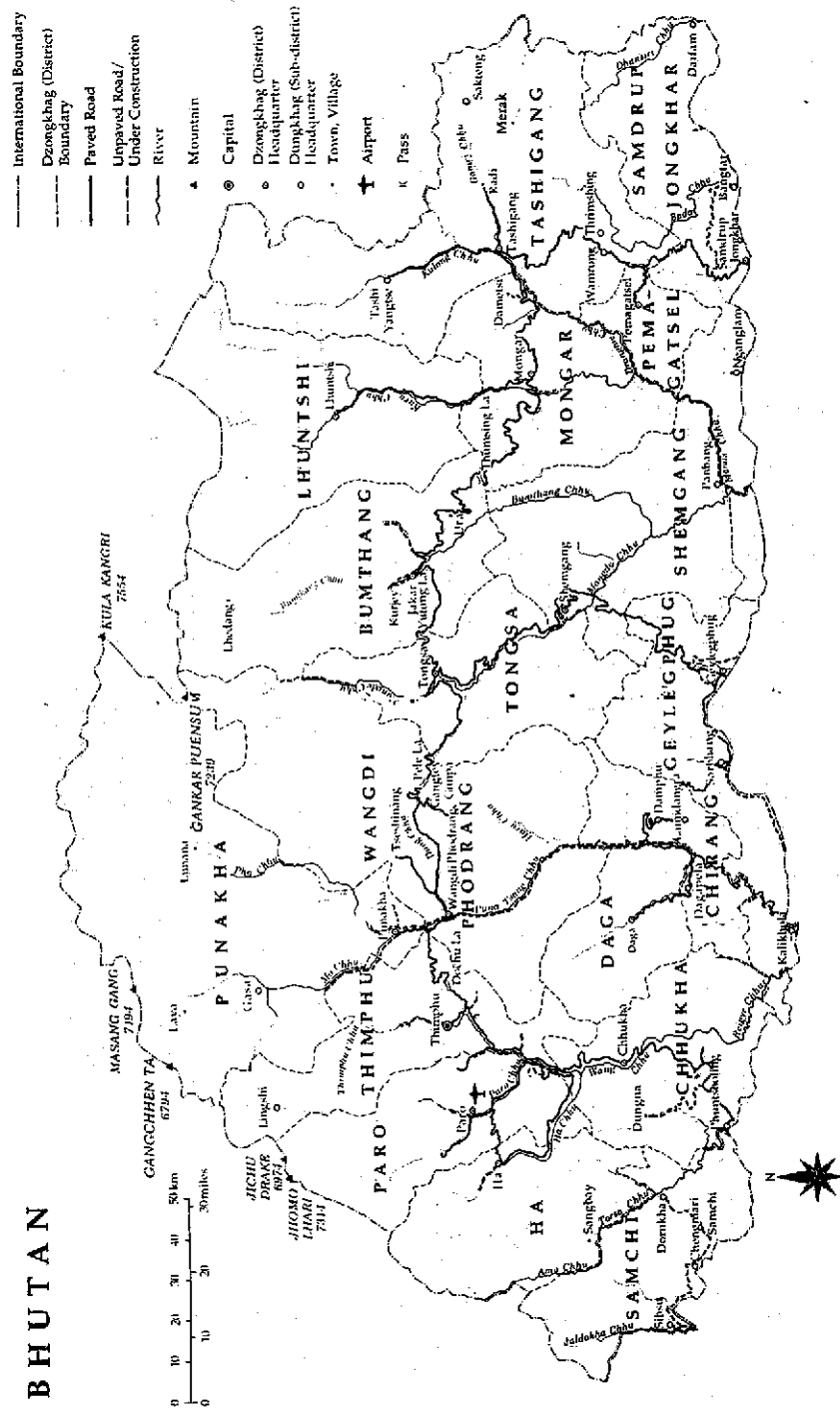
- <sup>1</sup> It is assumed readers will have had access to basic information on Bhutan. Those who still require this are referred to Michael Hutt's introduction to this volume's companion (see next note). See also Ramesh C. Dogra, *Bhutan* (World Bibliographic Series cxvi, Oxford and Santa Barbara, 1990); John Bray, "Bhutan: The Dilemmas of a Small State", *The World Today*, xxxix no. 11 (1993), pp. 213-16.
- <sup>2</sup> Michael Hutt (ed.), *Bhutan: Perspectives on Conflict and Dissent* (Gartmore, Kiscadale Asia Research Series no. 4, 1994). It may be useful to provide here the contents of this companion volume: Michael Hutt, "Introduction", pp. 5-20; Michael Aris, "Conflict and Conciliation in Traditional Bhutan", pp. 21-44; Jigmi Y. Thinley, "Bhutan: A Kingdom Beseiged", pp. 45-76; Kinley Dorji, "Bhutan's Current Crisis: A View from Thimphu", pp. 77-96; Christopher Strawn, "The Dissidents", pp. 97-128; Rachael Reilly, "Life and Work in the Refugee Camps of Southeast Nepal", pp. 129-140; Brian C. Shaw, "Aspects of the 'Southern Problem' and Nation-Building in Bhutan", pp. 141-164; Kanak Mani Dixit, "Looking for Greater Nepal", pp. 165-182; Leo Rose, "The Role of the Monarchy in the Current Ethnic Conflicts in Bhutan", pp. 183-94; Nicholas Nugent, "Reporting Bhutan", pp. 195-202; Awadhesh Coomar Sinha, "Bhutan: Political Culture and National Dilemma", pp. 203-16.
- <sup>3</sup> This is well understood in Bhutan. "Simply imposing development models from outside which do not take religion and tradition into account will not only serve to diminish existing culture, but will also meet with limited success. The process can lead to the creation of dualism, whereby the majority of the population continue to make use of traditional services and practices, while a minority, usually the more educated population, will benefit from government funded development programmes": Planning Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan, *Seventh Five Year Plan, 1992/93 - 1996/97*, 2 vols. (Thimphu, 1991), i, p. 66.
- <sup>4</sup> "Mandate of the World Commission on Culture and Development" (UNESCO, Paris, 1993), paras. 2-3.
- <sup>5</sup> Ignacy Sachs, "Cultures, Environments and Developmental Styles" (UNESCO, CCD-II/93/DOC.5, Paris, 22 June 1993), p. 7. See also Celso Furtado, "Development as an Endogenous Process" (UNESCO, CCD-II/93/DOC.3, Paris, 22 June 1993); Robert Klitgaard, "Taking Culture into Account: From 'Let's' to 'How'" (UNESCO, CCD-II/93/DOC.8, Paris, 22 June 1993).
- <sup>6</sup> See the Bhutan law code of 1729 edited and translated in my *Sources for the History of Bhutan* (Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 14, Vienna, 1986), text 3, pp. 122-68. It is very clear from the provisions of the code that the rapacity of government officials was a major cause of human suffering under the theocracy. The "welfare of the public" (*misergi kyiduk*, *misser-gyi skyid-sdug*) consisted both in controlling official corruption and in taking positive measures to promote human harmony and prosperity.
- <sup>7</sup> For a brief account of how the first tentative steps towards reform and development began during the reigns of the first two kings, see my *The Raven*

- Crown: The Origins of Buddhist Monarchy in Bhutan* (London, 1994), pp. 104-5, 135-8.
- <sup>8</sup> By contrast the clergy in Tibet during its period of *de facto* independence earlier this century actively opposed measures for reform and development. This seems to have happened because the measures were thought to threaten their influence and vested interests. This has not been the case in Bhutan.
- <sup>9</sup> The delegation of state monks who travelled in 1994 from Bhutan to Sri Lanka to learn from the activities of Buddhist clergy engaged in social welfare projects there was one of the first, officially-sponsored steps in this direction.
- <sup>10</sup> I address this issue in my "Conflict and Conciliation in Traditional Bhutan", in Hutt (ed.), *Bhutan: Perspectives on Conflict and Dissent*.
- <sup>11</sup> Bhutanese terms as pronounced in Dzongkha are rendered in italics, their proper orthography in roman. The Glossary at the end contains simple definitions of all Bhutanese terms found in this collection.
- <sup>12</sup> Christopher Strawn has suggested in his "The Dissidents", in Hutt (ed.), *Bhutan: Perspectives on Conflict and Dissent*, that in the south of the country the policy of decentralization through the establishment of local development committees and other measures has served to remove intermediate levels of accountability and to reinforce the power of the centre.
- <sup>13</sup> On Bhutan's foreign contacts under the theocracy, see the relevant sections of Yoshiro Imaeda, "La constitution de la théocratie 'Brug pa au dix-septième siècle et les problèmes de la succession du premier *Zhabs drung*" (Doctorat d'Etat es lettres et sciences humaines, Université Paris 7, 2 vols.); Michael Aris, *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom* (Warminster and New Delhi, 1979), esp. pp. 266-9; Aris, *Raven Crown*, pp. 40-2.
- <sup>14</sup> See my *Bhutan*, pp. xiv-xviii.
- <sup>15</sup> It should be understood that the system of "Roman Dzongkha" used in his contribution by Van Driem is a technical method of transcription developed for the linguistic projects of the Government of Bhutan, not a system intended for public usage. The system has undergone further development since the paper was written, and the superscript cirlet is no longer used.
- <sup>16</sup> Entitled *rDzong-kha'i gram-rgyud sna-tshogs* ["Dzongkha Short Stories"], these have appeared in ten volumes at irregular intervals. An English collection of similar legends has been assembled by Kunzang Choden in her *Folktales of Bhutan* (Bangkok, 1993).
- <sup>17</sup> Two of these have reached me in Oxford. One composed in 292 lines by Dasho Lam Sangak in 1989 is entitled *bDud-rtsi'i thigs-pa* ["A Drop of Nectar"]. It tells the tragic story of his love for a girl of Dagana. Another, undated *lozel* in 320 lines by Dasho Karma Gelek has no title but begins *lHo mi-gyur chos-khi rgyal-khab-di / bstan dar-zhing rgyas-pa los-rang-dga'* ["In this unchanging kingdom of religion in the south / There is certainly joy for the Teachings prosper"]. The poem is a eulogy of the Bhutanese monarchy and a prayer for victory over the Nepalese of the south.
- <sup>18</sup> See my "The Revival of Traditional Scholarship in Bhutan", in Tadeusz Skorupski (ed.), *Indo-Tibetan Studies: Papers in Honour of Professor David L. Snellgrove's Contribution to Indo-Tibetan Studies* (Buddhica Britannica, Series

- Continua ii, Tring, 1990), pp. 23-7. The survey takes account only of works published up to 1986. I am indebted to Chris Butters for information on works that have appeared in more recent years.
- <sup>19</sup> See David Snellgrove's remark in the preface to the second edition of his *Himalayan Pilgrimage: A Study of Tibetan Religion by a Traveller through Western Nepal* (Boulder, 1981), pp. xix-xx: "So far only the Bhutanese have attempted to differentiate their written language from literary Tibetan by devising new spellings which accord more with Bhutanese pronunciation, calling this newly created literary form Dzongkha. But if its use is successful, it will have the great disadvantage of cutting those so educated off from all their previous literature, which is in normal Tibetan".
- <sup>20</sup> Gendun Rinchen's Collected Works are still appearing in a multi-volume *poti* format; the index (*dkar-chags*) so far occupies nine folios. Pema Tsewang's work is entitled '*Brug gsal-ba'i sgron-me* ["The Lamp which Illuminates Bhutan"]' (Thimphu, 1994). Another of his important works is '*Khor-'das lam-gsum ston-byed srid-'khor rnam-bshad* ["An Explanation of the Wheel of Existence which Reveals Samsara, Nirvana and the Path (to Enlightenment)"]' (Thimphu, n.d. 1992?).
- <sup>21</sup> See Yoshiro Imaeda, "National Library of Bhutan: Role and Function", in Ihara Shôren and Yamaguchi Zuihō (eds.), *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Narita 1989*, 2 vols. (Narita, 1992), ii, pp. 497-500.
- <sup>22</sup> By contrast some Bhutanese works have appeared in English translation: *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley*, trans. Keith Dowman and Sonam Paljor (London, 1980); Aris, *Sources for the History of Bhutan*; Kunzang Choden, *Folktales of Bhutan*. Michael Kowalewski is presently translating the life of Phajo Drukgom Shikpo (1208-76), and four translations by Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi and Chris Butters are currently in press in Thimphu. See also '*Brug pa kun legs: Das wundersame Leben eines verrückten Heiligen*', ed. and trans. Andreas Kretschmar (Beiträge zur Zentralasienforschung v, St Augustin, 1981); Michael Aris, *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: A Study of Pemalingpa (1450-1521) and the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706)* (London and New York, 1989).
- <sup>23</sup> See for instance Michael Aris, "The Admonition of the Thunderbolt Cannonball and its Place in the Bhutanese New Year Festival", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, xxxix (1976), pp. 601-35; Chime Wangmo, "Rituals of Bhutanese House Construction", in Barbara Nimri Aziz and Matthew Kapstein (eds.), *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization* (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 107-14; Michael Aris, "The Boneless Tongue: Alternative Voices from Bhutan in the Context of Lamaist Societies", *Past and Present*, no. 115 (May 1987), pp. 131-64; Françoise Pommaret, *Les revenants de l'au-delà dans le monde tibétain: Sources littéraires et tradition vivante* (Paris, 1989); Sonam Wangmo, "The Brokpas: A Semi-Nomadic People of Eastern Bhutan", in N.K. Rustomji and Charles Ramble (eds.), *Himalayan Environment and Culture* (Shimla and New Delhi, 1990), pp. 141-158; Marceline de Montmollin, "*bKra shis sgo mang* of Bhutan: On a Specific Tradition of Shrines and its Prolongation in the

- Museum of Ethnography in Neuchâtel", in Ihara and Yamaguchi (eds.), *Tibetan Studies*, ii, pp. 605-14; Françoise Pommaret, "Les fêtes aux divinités-montagnes *Phyva* au Bhoutan de l'est", in Per Kvaerne (ed.), *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes 1992*, 2 vols. (Oslo, 1994), ii, pp. 660-9.
- <sup>24</sup> The Planning Minister, Lyonpo C. Dorji, clarified the objectives of development in the completed Sixth Plan in an interview with *The Hindu*, 11 Nov. 1992, p. iv. The first objective was said to have been aimed at tightening the administrative machinery and the second objective at "preserving and promoting the national identity which is vital for strengthening the security and status of a small country like Bhutan". This was achieved "by promoting the Bhutanese heritage in literature, architecture and art; promoting and adapting Bhutanese institutions and values; promoting research on Bhutan's history and geography; promoting the national dress and language; and providing access and orientation to courses in tradition and culture. There is now a greater appreciation and desire among Bhutanese people to strengthen their unique national identity".
- <sup>25</sup> This definition of culture was put forward by the World Conference on Cultural Policies in the Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies (1982).
- <sup>26</sup> *Rigné* (literally, "field of knowledge") is divided into ten subjects commonly enumerated as grammar, medicine, painting and crafts, logic, philosophy, poetry, semantics, lexicography, astrology and dance-drama. The Chinese communists use the term *igné* for "culture", as in *igné sarjé* ("cultural revolution").
- <sup>27</sup> For a fuller treatment of the subject, see the illustrated catalogue to the international exhibition of Bhutanese textiles held at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, and other sites in the United States: Diana K. Myers and Susan S. Bean (eds.), *From the Land of the Thunder Dragon: Textile Arts of Bhutan* (London and Salem, Mass., 1994), with contributions also by Michael Aris and Françoise Pommaret.

# BHUTAN



## Development and Decentralisation in Medieval and Modern Bhutan

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I start by looking back briefly at medieval Bhutan.<sup>1</sup> The period that seems medieval in character extends right up to the end of the 1950s. Some may wonder why this is so recent but there were strong features of the medieval period and of feudalism until the late 1950s. To be historically accurate, it may not be appropriate to treat Bhutan in only two distinct periods: a succession of different periods shade into each other. But for this short and impressionistic account, it is as well to periodise the study of Bhutan into two: medieval and modern,<sup>2</sup> to bring out the major differences between the present and the past.

The principal features of the medieval period were non-market organisations and a government based on the Buddhist ideology<sup>3</sup> of "religion and religiously-inspired secular powers".<sup>4</sup> An understanding of medieval Bhutan is important even in the present, ever more dynamic modern Bhutan, because we can still find the momentous heritage and deep traces of medieval Bhutan around us. The modern can be understood to some extent by learning about the medieval. But it is only to be expected that our vision of the medieval is itself coloured by our present socio-political perspectives. The traditional order and the forces of change can be explored today as I examine the evolution of Bhutan from a non-market to market organisation, from a customary self-subsistence economy to a planned trading economy, from theocratic and absolutist regimes to a modern form of government, and from a state whose ideology was the support of religious orders to one with a commitment to the socio-economic development of the country. I will summarise the major reforms taken between the late 1940s and 1950s, and also describe the important reforms made to restructure the government, based on a separation of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Finally, I should like to examine in some detail the effect of sub-national elected bodies like the DYT (Dzongkha acronym for

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Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchung, district development committee) and GYT (Dzongkha acronym for Gewog Yargay Tshogchung, block development committee). I wish to highlight significant institutional innovations made by the present king to take the decision-making process to the grass-roots level.

#### **State, Society and the Individual in Medieval Bhutan**

The process of unification, expansion and consolidation of the state of Bhutan was religiously-inspired and carried out in the name of a religious order in the 17th century. The establishment of the state was itself a fulfillment of a higher prophecy revealed to the founder of Bhutan, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (1594-1651). The purpose of pointing out that Bhutan was founded on a Mahayana Buddhist ideology is to trace its effect on the nature of the state, society and the individual in medieval Bhutan.

The state was the main organ of the principal religious preceptors: the Shabdrung, his reincarnations, the head abbots of Bhutan and many other high lamas. In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, such preceptors are divine Bodhisattvas in human form, and are, in principle, accorded higher status than temporal rulers who are simultaneously their students and patrons.<sup>5</sup> The secular and the religious often became indistinguishable.<sup>6</sup> It was so in more than one sense: secular and religious powers were sometimes combined in one hand. The state's main function was to support the religious order. Within the religious order, pursuits included dance, drama, secular philosophy, meditation, pharmacology, astronomy, astrology, poetry, metallurgy and printing. The religious institutions promoted a humanitarian morality among the laity. The church-state's function was to "enforce temporal laws by punishing sinful and impious acts in perfect accord with moral and religious laws..."<sup>7</sup> For promotion, there were "sixteen acts of social piety" and there were "ten impious acts" to be prevented.<sup>8</sup> The state directed most of its resources to support religious institutions. Material support for the religious order was necessary because the monks and yogins were supposed to be beyond society and disassociated from material wants and possessions.<sup>9</sup> However, over time, religious institutions began to have communal possessions including land<sup>10</sup> and herds of cattle and yaks, and to develop administrative committees. The hierarchy was based on

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seniority, knowledge and age. These factors, along with merit, are also given due consideration even in the civil service today. With the evolution of such organisations in the monasteries, the kernel of a civil administration began to form.

Now I shall explore the place of the individual in the economy and ideology of such a state. Buddhist ideology colours the way in which an individual looks at himself and the world around him. Rebirth in the human realm is considered to be the best opportunity to gain rebirth in an upper realm; and within the political, social and economic context that an individual was born into, he or she had to bear this central goal in mind. While the highest aim in life, according to philosophers, theologians and mystics, is to seek salvation, the bulk of the peasants in their mundane existence could not hope to attain it within a single lifetime. So their aim was merely incremental: to amass virtue through holy, generous and compassionate deeds.<sup>11</sup> The individual in medieval Bhutan, as seen through a Buddhist ideological construction, was a virtue maximiser so as to work out the karmic chain.

Although society's ideals of Buddhist virtues might have moulded the character of individuals in medieval Bhutan, they cannot give us a broader view of the individual's character, for these ideals were not the only source of impulses for the individual. We have to view the Bhutanese individual not simply as a follower of Buddhism, which provided a common denominator for the Bhutanese, but simultaneously as a member of his or her linguistic, sectarian, and ethnic group. These facets of an individual's character tended to give him/her various identities within a growing national identity.

#### **The Medieval Economy**

Within the constraints of poor internal communications and isolation from the external world, the traditional economy was very successful. It afforded a degree of affluence at the subsistence level, but health and education standards were very poor.

Trans-Himalayan and Indo-Bhutanese trade did take place by caravan, but it was only for high value goods or absolute necessities, e.g. salt, which were not produced in Bhutan. The economy's potential was limited in the absence of greater specialisation and external trade. However, among the valley communities, there was a vigorous exchange of goods and merchandise, facilitated by the migration of

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livestock and people from temperate settlements in summer to subtropical settlements in winter. In fact, a substantial section of the Bhutanese population have dual residences and land — one in warm and the other in cold places.

Over the centuries, the Bhutanese people developed farming systems which met their subsistence needs, and used the available resources in a sustainable way. Under the overpowering influence of the micro-climatic conditions of Bhutan, valley communities diversified their agro-pastoral activities to adapt to what the natural resources could offer without damaging the environment. In many remote mountain communities, such practices have not changed. A household keeps not only a number of different kinds of livestock like birds, horses, pigs, cattle, yaks etc., but several species of an animal, e.g. different species of cattle. Far from being mono-culturist, a household grows many crops and vegetables and owns patches of cultivable and grazing land in both temperate and subtropical areas. Such diversification is dictated not simply by subsistence needs. It is a sophisticated ecological response to a risk-prone micro-climatic environment.

As the country remained uncolonised, there has been considerable stability in the political and social environment in which indigenous institutions (rules and organisations) and a traditional system of knowledge could evolve. Furthermore, there was very little systematic effort on the part of the state, until modernisation began in the 1960s, to intervene in the fragmented economies of agro-pastoral communities.<sup>12</sup> Both of these factors favoured the emergence of localised institutions and a strong knowledge base in the form of local innovations.

I would like to cite one particular area of local institutions which has been accommodated within national laws. In the broad framework of the modern Land Law and Forest Act of Bhutan, there are vibrant customary rules and norms, especially regulating the use of community grazing land, shrines, bridges and footpaths. These customary rules and norms are indeed more real and living to communities than legislative acts because they provide community-specific guides to collective resource usage.<sup>13</sup>

The valley communities did not face much intervention from outside, i.e. from the state. If for no other reason, poor communications restricted the frequency of contact. Nor were they

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disturbed from their inaccessible locations or from the subsistence activities that were regulated by a body of norms and customs. Perhaps the only times when they were shaken out of their ordinary equilibrium were wars, localised famines and epidemics. In addition to the demographic influence of celibate monks and nuns, wars and epidemics seem to have kept the population pressure down.

In organisational terms, there was some stratification. At the top of the pyramid there was a handful of aristocratic families who often had religious eminence as well. Then there were eminent but tax-paying families distinguished by claims to common clan ancestry. Below them were a mass of tax-paying ordinary households. The aristocratic families and other eminent families (e.g. *dung*, *chöjé* and *lam*) employed serfs and servants.

The existence of a militia (*pazap*) system, of a religious order, and of officials and an aristocracy required material support from others in terms of offerings, contributions and tax collection. The taxes raised were largely channelled to religious institutions, administrative officials and the militia. Religious institutions spawned Bhutan's culture and traditions, and the militia system was necessary for defence. Indeed, between the 17th and the 19th century, Bhutan had to defend itself many times against the Tibetans in the north and the British in the south. Resources raised through taxation made it possible for the state to maintain a system which enabled medieval Bhutan to consolidate its sovereignty, unity and national identity.

There were commodity taxes of every conceivable kind: bundles of hay and fodder for official stables; raw materials such as ash and bark for the production of bark papers; clothes and textiles; baskets and crafts; butter, cereals and so forth. Taxes in kind were not the same for everybody; they were based on production in the area. So if a place wove woollen textiles, the tax was collected in woollen textiles. A place such as Geynyin in Thimphu paid nothing in taxes except for the pig iron which it produced.

In order to collect, manage and redistribute offerings, contributions and taxes, there must be a nascent administrative organisation. Medieval Bhutanese administration consisted of the *gup* at the lowest level. The hierarchy was built up with the appointment of *drungpas* at the subdistrict level and *dzongpöns* (fort-governors) at the district level. A *dzongpön* was assisted further by the *nyerchen* (store-master) and the

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*zimpön* (chamberlain).<sup>14</sup> A legal code on "the rights and responsibilities of all government servants"<sup>15</sup> was drawn up as early as 1729. Each local authority took what was due to him from the taxes paid in kind and transferred the residue to *dzongs* (forts) in whose basements were stocked vast quantities of food for prudential and security reasons. As new stocks were added, the old ones were issued to the monastic bodies, to officials, to the militia, and to people who wished to exchange old for new cereals, butter, oil or meat. Reserve foods were also channelled into areas of localised famine.

Some of the goods paid as taxes were deposited in the dzongs quite close to the sources of production. But a large proportion had to be transported by humans and pack animals for more than a week to other far-off dzongs. The need to move commodities raised as taxes in kind, as well as the produce of aristocratic farmlands or estates, led to a system of labour contribution<sup>16</sup> from each household. Labour contribution also became institutionalised for the maintenance and construction of dzongs and state monasteries. In the art and architecture of dzongs and monasteries, we see the full flowering of Bhutanese manual arts. While some might today disdain the employment of labour for such buildings, there is no doubt that it has resulted in cultural and artistic production of the first order. Labour was also mobilised in a systematic way for such undertakings as the construction of mule tracks and bridges, the arteries of the medieval Bhutanese economy.

Apart from the contribution of labour and taxes in kind to the state and the need to raise militia to repel external threats, the interaction between state and society was far less than it is now. Each community seems to have been forced to look within itself for resources and innovations.

#### **Major Reforms**

Having described briefly the features of medieval Bhutan, I shall now do the same for post-1950 Bhutan. These reforms, brought about between the late 1940s and early 1960s, were of a fundamental and far-reaching nature. It is not my intention to give disproportionate attention to such reforms, though they were very remarkable. But "history is, by and large, a record of what people did, not of what people failed to do: to this extent it is inevitably a success story."<sup>17</sup> I

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would, in particular, like to emphasise that several important reforms had taken place before aid started flowing into Bhutan or before development plans were launched in 1961. These reforms were introduced in rapid succession by an enlightened and progressive monarchy. There was no domestic political compulsion or pressure for reforms. The impulse for reform originated in the monarchy itself. Indeed, all institutional changes and innovations in Bhutan have been initiated from the throne by the third king and the present king.

Until the end of the reign of the second king of Bhutan in 1952, there was no pronounced separation of powers. There was of course a State Council with much longer antecedents, where major national decisions were passed. However, the lines between adjudication, legislation and executive powers were fuzzy. Soon after the third king came to the throne, he started a series of reforms. For the first time in 1953, a full-fledged parliament was convened. In one of its first sessions, a draft form of the *Thrimshung Chenmo* (Supreme Laws) was discussed. Every provision of it was scrutinised by the members for over five years before it was completely codified and passed by the National Assembly in 1959. In 1965, the *Lodrä Tshogdey* (Royal Advisory Council) was established to advise the king on all matters of national concern. The Royal Advisory Council consisted of six elected representatives of the people, two representatives of the clergy and two government representatives appointed by the king. The present king reduced the number of representatives of the government from two to one and further strengthened the Royal Advisory Council in 1984 when he insisted on including a special clause in the revised rules and regulations of the Royal Advisory Council, despite the objections of the National Assembly, which empowered the council to report against the king to the National Assembly.<sup>18</sup> The third king also separated the judiciary from the executive, began codification of the laws and instituted district courts. By 1968, the High Court was also set up in Thimphu.

I mentioned earlier the existence of servitude in medieval Bhutan. Now I want to point to the astonishingly bold civil rights reform of the third king in freeing serfs and distributing land to them in the late 1950s. 1956 saw a major social reform. The third king declared the freedom of the serfs (*kehey, jou, zaden* etc). In his royal decree, the third king promised gifts of land for the settlement of serfs. There was a

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considerable exodus of serfs from several districts, mostly in western Bhutan, and they were successfully and promptly settled as independent households in districts other than their original domiciles. This was a clear demonstration of the third king's liberal and humanistic views, visible not only in his social reforms but in his own personal life. He elevated several able persons of serf origin to high positions, which effectively symbolised the end of servitude.

The second king undertook fiscal reform for many years. His main aim, in accordance with one of the strongest wishes of the first king, was to make taxes in kind more equitable and less burdensome across the country. This began with a more accurate assessment of the type and amount of taxes in kind (*löntrel*) paid by each *gewog* to various officials. One major means of reducing the burden of tax in kind was to abolish most of the offices of *drungpas* and minor *pönlops*.<sup>19</sup> The second major tax reform took place in 1954 when the third king commuted taxes in kind to cash taxes (*kamtrel*). It started first in Tashigang, the most populous district of Bhutan. Along with the abolition of in-kind taxes,<sup>20</sup> labour service to transport goods collected as taxes was abolished.

### **Institutions and Processes of Law-Making in Modern Bhutan<sup>21</sup>**

Bhutan has two fundamental sources of law: the king and the National Assembly (*Tshogdu*). All laws should stem from either one of these paramount sources. The authority of the king and the National Assembly very often overlap. Dual sources may converge so that there appears to be a single focal point of law-giver. Both sources act in a mutually reinforcing way. The king attends the National Assembly sessions and through his participation in the deliberations contributes directly to the laws it issues. But the king cannot veto the decision of the National Assembly as this right was relinquished by the third king.

The National Assembly is made up of 154 members. The membership is divided into three categories: 105 elected representatives of the people including one representative of the business community, 12 representatives of the clergy, and 37 senior civil servants appointed by the king. Representatives of the monks and the people are elected for a period of three years. Of the 37 senior civil servants, 20 are *dzongdas* (heads of district administrations) and the rest are ministers and a handful of high-ranking officials.

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The National Assembly normally sits twice a year. Its agenda is drawn up according to the points for discussion submitted by the members. As I will discuss below, much happens in the villages and district headquarters before it is actually convened. A session of the National Assembly is only the culminating point of a much longer preparation. A call for points to be submitted to the Assembly goes out well in advance, along with the announcement of a tentative date for the National Assembly session. In response, representatives of the people hold meetings with the villagers and call for points to be raised in the National Assembly. This is followed by DYT (district development committee) meetings throughout the country. It is in these meetings of the district development committees that the representatives of the people discuss once again the points to be submitted for presentation in the forthcoming National Assembly. Points (motions) are refined, selected and submitted to the National Assembly so that it can prepare the agenda. Thus, Bhutan follows a two-tier ratification system for submission of points to the National Assembly. It should be first ratified by the GYT and then by the DYT before finally going to the National Assembly. Each point submitted by a representative of the National Assembly usually consists of a few pages, unlike a government legislative proposal which can be longer.

The relevant agencies prepare government legislative proposals for consideration by the National Assembly. The Cabinet must endorse a proposal before it goes to the National Assembly. The proceedings and resolutions of the National Assembly are printed in English and Dzongkha and circulated to all National Assembly members and high officials. One of the duties of a representative of the people, at the end of the session, is to verbally disseminate the resolutions of the National Assembly in his constituency. This is done by calling a meeting of the heads of every household in his constituency.

### **Courts and the Legal System<sup>22</sup>**

In the organisational hierarchy of the judiciary in Bhutan, there are two levels: twenty district courts and the High Court in Thimphu. A district court is run by a judge and one deputy judge with other staff. The High Court has eight judges of whom two are representatives of the people. There is no institute where judges get degrees; would-be judges are trained on the job by apprenticing to a senior judge for over



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eight years. Such a long period of apprenticeship means that they are thoroughly versed in the legal system. The apprenticeship probably takes longer than it would take in the West to reach a comparable position.

All the courts in Bhutan are of general jurisdiction and deal with both criminal and civil cases. Litigants present their civil cases in the court for themselves, but they also can be represented by a *jabmi* (legal representative well versed in law). Legal counsel from the staff of courts can be sought, but this type of help is not institutionalised. Judgements are given in accordance with various books of law as well as resolutions and acts of the National Assembly, and those who are not satisfied with the verdicts of district courts can appeal to the High Court. Litigants who are dissatisfied with the judgements of the High Court can in turn appeal to the king, the ultimate appellate authority. A case brought for appeal to the king is directed for review to the Royal Advisory Council, the highest elected body. If the result of the RAC's review of a case conflicts with the prior judgement of the High Court, it is settled by joint sittings of the High Court and the Royal Advisory Council, in the presence of the king.

Civil and criminal laws are set out in Dzongkha in several books of law, for example in the *Thrimshung Chenmo* (Khrims-gzhung chen-mo, "Supreme Laws"), 1959, which is the basic law book that has been elaborated in the following subsidiary books of law; Inheritance Law, 1980; Land Law, 1979; Livestock Law, 1981; Debt Law, 1981; Marriage Law, 1980; Police Act, 1980; Prisoners' Law; Citizenship Act, 1985; National Security Act, 1992; Companies Act, 1989 etc. Laws in Bhutan have enormous implications for individual actions, which demonstrates that society in Bhutan is based largely on law. To take an example, the *Thrimshung Chenmo* of 1959, the Forest Act of 1969 and the Land Law of 1979 have exerted profound influences on the pattern of property rights, a regime of resource utilisation, and the formulation of subsequent laws.

The impact of laws on the people depends on their compliance, which in turn depends on internalisation by the people. The people's comprehension and compliance with all the important laws like the Land Law and the Inheritance Law is due to the fact that they are widely distributed by the government. Every *gup* (elected head of the block) in a *gewog* has a set of law books for his reference.<sup>23</sup> The same

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books are also used by the courts. To some extent, law in Bhutan thus tends to be the common man's guide and not an obscure code understood only by judges and lawyers. This has resulted in a distinct legal situation where law books are read and disputes arbitrated by village functionaries, thus reducing the burden on the courts which have over the years increased their efforts to resolve the cases swiftly. Indeed, the High Court in Thimphu recently announced that all the courts in the kingdom had been arbitrated and the backlog of litigation cases had been settled by the end of 1992. To maintain judicial efficiency in the processing of cases, the new policy of the judiciary is to clear every pending case by the end of each year.

Since the formal system of justice was instituted in the late 1960s, Bhutan has met with considerable success in building a society and state based on the rule of law. Every citizen is treated equally before the law and the actions of the state are also bound by law. The concept of the rule of law is firmly rooted in the *Thrimshung Chenmo* of 1959 and a host of other books of law. For example, the first part of the *Thrimshung Chenmo* stresses equality, and no one is deemed superior before the law. In recent years, members of the Royal Family and many high officials, including ministers of the government, have been taken to court by the ordinary people. Everyone can, further, appeal to the king and this right to appeal protects the individual against bureaucratic transgressions and personal misfortunes.

### *Economic Development Since 1961<sup>24</sup>*

Economic development and modernisation started in 1961, when Bhutan emerged from its self-imposed isolation. The first three Development Plans (1961-1976) were financed almost entirely by India. India is not only a major source of aid for Bhutan but her main trading partner. In the current Seventh Plan, it is estimated that internal revenue will finance 30 per cent of the plan outlay, India will contribute 40 per cent and the remaining 30 per cent will come from other donor countries. Foreign aid<sup>25</sup> is still crucial for financing capital investment or development activities. Among her development partners Bhutan has a record of efficient, effective and transparent utilisation of foreign aid which has been used to lay the foundation of a sustainable economy and a modern welfare state. Although foreign

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aid is required for development activities or capital investment, Bhutan's domestic revenue is able to meet the entire recurrent budget of the plan. The Royal Government has placed great emphasis on the increase of domestic revenue to achieve the vital goal of self-sufficiency in the recurrent budget.

The emphasis of the first three Development Plans was on the establishment of a basic infrastructure to reduce Bhutan's physical isolation and improve internal communications. Better communications made trade more feasible, and this in turn prompted increased monetisation and opened the way for more specialisation in production.

At the same time, plans were devoted to building up the institutions of a modern economy and state, especially through education and training and health services. It was with justified satisfaction that the Royal Government and its aid partners were able to declare the achievement (a clinical feat given the rugged and the widely dispersed population) of Universal Child Immunisation in 1991. More than 67 per cent of Bhutan's children of school-going age are attending schools and the literacy rate has reached about 54 per cent. There were also several other notable achievements relating to human development, as shown in the Table below. 40 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water and 90 per cent of the population has access to primary health care. All these and other achievements have come about in about thirty years of development.

The backbone of the economy is still agriculture, forestry and livestock. In 1990, these three sectors together accounted for about 44 per cent of total production. The dominance of agricultural activities is even greater in terms of the number of people occupied in the sector, where an estimated 80 per cent of the workforce is engaged. There are measures to increase the productivity of agricultural land through subsidised inputs, extension services and the organisation of markets for agricultural produce. There are also substantial programmes to improve the quality and productivity of breeds using artificial insemination techniques, and to provide animal health services and develop pastures and fodder. In the course of economic development, experience shows that technical progress in the agricultural sector reduces the percentage of the workforce engaged in agriculture and increases the landholding of the farmers (as small-scale farmers quit

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farming for other employment).<sup>26</sup> For several reasons, change in this direction has been rather slow. It can also only take place up to a certain point, because the Land Law of 1979 will stand in the way. For example, a provision of the Land Act 1979 says that a household can own a maximum total agricultural land holding of twenty-five acres.<sup>27</sup> Bhutanese law does not recognise the sale of any land if by this transaction the seller's holding goes below five acres. For this reason, and also because of the mountainous terrain, the emergence of large mechanised farms is unlikely. But the ceiling and floor for land holdings do not apply to orchard plantations. One of the most striking agricultural transformations in Bhutan is the expansion of plantations of apples, oranges, ginger and cardamom - cash crops produced for export. It is only in this aspect of Bhutanese agriculture that we notice any commercialisation.

Growth and technical progress in the agricultural and livestock sectors are fundamental to greater prosperity for the Bhutanese people.

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#### *Selected Indicators of Sixth Plan Achievements*

Per capital income (at current prices)	Nu. 6,328 in 1987 Nu. 9,281 in 1991
Child immunisation	84% universal child immunisation achieved in 1990
Infant mortality rate	142 per 1000 live births in 1984 134 per 1000 live births in 1989
Primary school enrolment	58,116 in 1987 70,354 in 1990/91 (67% in 1991)
Literacy rate	54% in 1991
Access to safe drinking water	31% in 1987 40% in 1991
Primary health care coverage	65% in 1987 90% in 1991
Revenue	Nu. 842 m in 1987/88 Nu. 1064 m in 1991/92
Exports	Nu. 427 m in 1986/87 Nu. 1388 m in 1990/91

Source: Planning Commission, *Achievements in Planned Development, Review of the Sixth Plan, 1987-1992*, September 1992, p. 6.

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But these sectors are not ordinarily regarded as the most dynamic. The sectors which are expected to revolutionise the economy in the medium term are actually hydro power, manufacturing and construction. The medium term outlook is bright, mainly because of industrial and hydropower projects that are in the pipeline, and the continuing expansion of the construction sector. The hydro and industrial projects themselves will come on stream only towards the end of the century, but their construction and service-related activities will boost economic growth. Rapid growth rates of 6 per cent on average achieved between 1980 and 1990 should be sustained in the 1990s.

The exploitation of another of Bhutan's major natural resources, its forests, is not at all encouraged. Although there are agricultural and commercial interests which compete with environmental considerations in the decision making process, on the whole the Bhutanese leadership has taken the long-range view of the ecologist, a view also inherent in Buddhist ethics.<sup>28</sup> The environmental laws of Bhutan have declared that 60 per cent of the country should forever remain under forest and, within that, 20 per cent of the country should be managed as wildlife sanctuaries and forest reserves for biodiversity conservation.

Over the last twenty years Bhutan has become an open trading economy. The evolution from medieval to modern Bhutan is underscored by its integration with global economies. To show the extent of the globalisation and integration of the Bhutanese economy with others, in 1989 exports amounted to about 27 per cent of GDP, while imports were 38 per cent of GDP. India is the dominant trading partner for Bhutan: it has been the destination for more than 90 per cent of Bhutan's exports and the source of 68 per cent of Bhutan's imports. Bhutan's main exports are now electricity, processed wood products, agricultural products and cement. Exports have risen from Nu. 427 m in 1986/87 to Nu. 1388 m in 1990/91.

The long term prospects for Bhutan's economy are bright. Hydroelectric power potential, in particular, is enormous. The economy is so small that a few large projects can make a big difference to its outlook and growth, and several manufacturing and hydro-power projects are going to be undertaken soon. The continued development of the physical infrastructure will enhance opportunities for

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development, as will the considerable investment in human resources that is taking place in terms of health, education and training.

#### **Decentralisation and People's Participation**

##### *DYTs*

On the subject of decentralisation and people's participation, I shall first sketch a picture of the administrative levels in Bhutan. The country is governed through three tiers of administration — the central government agencies, district administrations, and *gewog* "administrations". The country is divided into districts, and districts are further divided into *gewogs* or blocks. There are 20 districts and 196 *gewogs*. A *gewog* is further broken down into villages, and villages into households (*gung*).

The household, the smallest unit, occupies a central place in legal and administrative concepts in Bhutan. In demographic terms, the notion of a household is coterminous with an extended family and consists of about seven to eight people on average. However, any person not part of the extended family can also be considered legally a part of the household, if that person has been living as part of the household for over ten years and has shared the "loss and gain" of the household equally.<sup>29</sup> The critical test, whether a group of persons living under one roof is a household or not, noted as such by the official land register (*sathram*), since one household ought to have only one land register certificate.<sup>30</sup> Whether a group of persons living together is a household or not is crucially important for this determines the liability for taxes and the possibility for various subsidies and compensations.

A group of households — say about twenty — makes a village. A group of villages in turn makes a *gewog*. Each village elects a *mang-ap*<sup>31</sup> (literally, "father of the community") and several *chupöns* ("leader of ten households"): this term shows that originally there might have been one *chupön* for every ten households.<sup>32</sup> A *chupön* is a liaison agent between the section of the village which he represents and the *gup*. As it is both impractical and inefficient for every household to work directly with the *gup* on a day-to-day basis, the *mang-ap* and *chupöns* represent the villages and act on their behalf. *Gewog dzomdus* (gatherings) are, however, called from time to time by the *gup* and these are attended by a representative of every household in the *gewog*. *Dzomdus* of the household heads of a *gewog* are very frequent: about thirty-six *gewog*

level meetings were held in one *gewog*<sup>33</sup> in 1991. On all routine matters, the *mang-aps* and *chupöns* conduct village *dzomdus* in their villages to obtain the views of the people and to communicate the briefings they have received from the *gup*.

The *gups* and *mang-aps* have been a central feature of Bhutanese village life since the 17th century.<sup>34</sup> The *gup* was an intermediary between the community and the state in the medieval period which lasted until the late 1950s. Until 1963, the position of the *gup* was confined to distinguished and well-to-do families of the community despite the representative nature of the post. In 1963, the National Assembly passed a resolution that all *gups* should be elected on the basis of public preference instead of hereditary responsibility.<sup>35</sup>

After the advent of planned development in 1961, the responsibilities of the *gup* have increased steadily, in parallel with the expanding role of the district administration. The duties and responsibilities of the *gup* soon expanded to include the following:<sup>36</sup> collection of rural taxes; endorsing applications by the people to the district administration for subsidies and compensation; screening of applications for bank loans; collection of food and money from households for public rituals, ceremonies and hospitality; maintenance of land registers and census records; identification of landless people in the *gewog* for land grants; articulation of development needs such as irrigation channels, motor roads, schools, electricity supply, extension centres etc; submission of points to the National Assembly in consultation with the people and the *chimi*; arbitration of disputes and litigations in the *gewog*; mobilisation of labour contribution; supervision and coordination of construction activities and maintenance of such collective facilities as irrigation channels, clinics, extension centres and schools; maintenance of community property and assets not supported by the government, such as community temples, knolls, common lands, footpaths and bridges. The range of responsibilities the *gup* has is very wide and a huge repertoire of skills is needed to fulfil them. To discharge this long list of duties, a *gup* is assisted by *mang-aps* and *chupöns*.

Soon after his formal accession to the throne in 1974, the present king began a process of political and administrative decentralisation. Administratively, it was aimed at the delegation of authority as well as the transfer of manpower from the central agencies to the district

administration. Politically, the decentralisation process was aimed at encouraging people to participate in the planning and implementation of development activities in their areas. So that the elected representatives of the people and district civil servants might enter into dialogues about development plans, district level fora — DYT — were set up. Between 1976 and 1981, a DYT was established in every district. Today, across the nation there are a total of 20 DYT and 560 elected members (excluding the officials of the district administration, who are also members of DYT).

The membership of the DYT includes the *dzongda* (civil administrator of a district), heads of various sectors in the district administration, *chimis* (representatives of the people of the district in the National Assembly), and the *gups* and *mang-aps* of the district. The size of the DYT membership ranges from twenty to sixty depending on the size of the district. The *dzongda* is the chairman of the DYT. The DYT meet quarterly in addition to emergency meetings and special meetings before each session of the National Assembly. There is a wealth of information on the working of the DYT in the form of the minutes of all the DYT. A study of these bulky files reveals the intricate functions of the DYT. A look at the minutes of the DYT meetings of some districts like Samchi and Wangdi Phodrang from 1976 to 1989 shows that DYT have served two major intended functions.

First, the DYT proceedings show that its primary function was the coordination of development activities in the district. Coordination is dependent on information and crucial for efficiency. Activities in one sector were made known to the officials and public of another sector in the DYT. This function took by far the biggest proportion of meeting time, as each sector official of the district administration presented the progress of an activity as well as the programmes for the coming months.

Second, elected members of the DYT have used the forum to articulate local needs for goods and public services (electricity, post, health, education etc.) based on the specific socio-economic realities of the locality and the community's choice. These are further transmitted to central departments in Thimphu, if the district administration cannot respond to them.

With the DYT established in all the districts by 1981, the king was

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able to successfully involve the people in the decision-making process, particularly in the formulation of development programmes in their own districts. Until 1981, a broad national plan was formulated. Starting with the Fifth Five Year Plan in 1981, individual plans were drawn up for every district, with the DYT's articulating the needs of the people in the respective districts, and forwarding their proposals to central agencies in Thimphu. With an active role in development planning, the DYT's have collectively become a source of grass-roots legitimation of social and economic change. The DYT's have become an important instrument for active participation by the people in the development process and have emerged as key organisations in the decision making process on all significant national issues.

#### *GYT's*

In 1991, the present king instituted GYT's in every *gewog* in the country. The objective of establishing GYT's was to promote further decentralisation by taking the decision-making process to the village level and to develop greater political consciousness among the people. The GYT is the executive body of the *gewog zomdu*, thus providing the people with an instrument to carry out the decisions they arrive at during such meetings.

The GYT's were also established to regenerate a sense of control, ownership and responsibility for the maintenance of collective local resources which had declined with a concomitant rise in bureaucratic power. Although administrative appendages are created at lower and lower levels reaching closer to the villages and households, the Royal Government is fully aware that this in itself does not further decentralisation unless the administrative units are accountable to local communities through elected bodies such as DYT's and GYT's. Equally, the Royal Government is aware that unless there is real delegation of power and authority to such bodies, decentralisation can be fraught with contradictions.<sup>37</sup> Power and authority are being progressively delegated towards district administrations and elected bodies — DYT's and GYT's. The process of decentralisation is thus aimed at reversing the shift in decision-making from the communities to the state.

Corresponding to the 196 *gewogs*, there are 196 GYT's with 2589 elected members. The members of each GYT consist of *chupöns* and *mang-aps* with the *gup* as their chairman. Government field staff

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working in the *gewog* are given observer status only. According to the constitution, a two-thirds quorum is needed for any decision. Decisions are adopted by simple majority where there is no consensus. Thus, the basic instrumental modality of democracy, i.e. majority voting, has been adopted by the GYT's and DYT's.

Before coming to the functions of the GYT as laid down in the GYT *Chatrim* (constitution), 1992, I would like to briefly highlight the electoral process for the GYT and DYT members. The *gup* and his staff, organised as a GYT, are elected once every three years, by the representatives of each household. A series of *zomdus* provides the fora in which candidates are nominated by a village or group of villages in the *gewog*. The method of voting in the election of a *gup* and his *mang-ap* may differ from *gewog* to *gewog* and from one election to another. In a small community, it is possible to know the candidate who would make a dedicated and able *gup* and the candidate may be chosen by wide consensus, but another method is also employed in the election: voting by casting lots in situations where there is a tie between the candidates. What I have said about various aspects of the electoral process of the *gup* applies with equal force to the election of all the people's representatives of the DYT and GYT and the National Assembly.

The GYT constitution of 1992<sup>38</sup> extends broad decision making powers to the GYT in addition to the existing functions of the *gup*. The decisions are validated either by consensus or by majority votes, subject to a quorum. Some of the important functions of the GYT according to its constitution of 1992 are: to foster harmony among the people in the *gewog* and enhance political consciousness; to identify and prioritise areas of development activities to ensure the participation of the *gewog* people in planning and decision making and in the implementation of planned programmes; to review achievement of the plans; to serve as a conduit between the sub-district and district administrations and the *gewog* people.<sup>39</sup>

It is clear from the constitution of the GYT that the decision-making powers of the *gup* with the new responsibility as the chairman of GYT have been significantly enhanced. This legislation had rapidly formalised democratic practices at the village level. The broad legal framework for the GYT is radical enough in delegating extensive powers to the people through this elected body and making it highly

susceptible to popular participation. The 196 GYT's are thus a fundamental base for a democratic order.

The GYT's and DYT's participated extensively in the formulation of the Seventh Five Year Plan (1992/93-1996/97). A brief digression on the active role of the GYT's and DYT's in the planning process of the Seventh Five Year Plan should demonstrate the decentralisation of the decision-making process in Bhutan. At the start of the formulation of the Seventh Plan in early 1991, the king, the heads of the agencies and other planning officials attended public meetings in every district, in all of which DYT and GYT members were also present. In these large meetings, the people voiced their views on what should be planned in their districts. This consultative process is crucial to ensure the relevance of the plan to people's needs. Their views and suggestions are heeded by the government and become the basis of a district plan. A year later, after the draft district plans were prepared, public meetings were held again in every district. The king and sector officials went back to every district to attend meetings in which the draft plans were discussed and endorsed. Each district plan was eventually finalised in public meetings chaired by the king. Once the district plans were finalised, it was possible for the national plan in aggregate to emerge and the broad outline of the national plan was submitted to the National Assembly for approval.

Through institutional innovations like GYT's and DYT's, decisions at the sub-national levels between the civil servants and the public are taken on a wide consensus. These participatory fora also create an awareness of the macro resource constraints of the country and new policy orientations. Most importantly, these institutions enable the people's own needs and expectations to influence the course of social and economic change and thus to do things, to a significant degree, according to their choice. In essence, GYT's and DYT's are mechanisms for the self-determination of individuals at the grass-roots level. Herein lies the true importance of this innovation introduced by the present king.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

The relationship between society and the state has undergone substantial changes in Bhutan. In the medieval period, civil society extended its resources to the church-state. Today the state is no more

the collector of contributions, offerings, taxes in kind and labour services from the rural population. It is not dependent solely on resources drawn from farming households. In fact, although 80 per cent of the population lives in the rural sector, rural taxes form a minuscule portion — 1.8 per cent in 1989 — of the total tax revenue. In the economic realm, the direction of the net flow of resources between the state and the civil society has actually reversed. Because of various socio-political necessities, the state absorbed a surplus from society in medieval Bhutan. Now it channels a considerable amount into society.

Bhutan is no longer a church-state of medieval times involved primarily in supporting religious institutions. This is clearly indicated by the modest allocation for monastic affairs: 1.2 per cent of the current plan outlay. The role of the state has become very different to what it was in the medieval period. Today, the government with the king at the helm is the prime mover behind social, legal, political and economic progress attained through a series of five year plans. A synergistic partnership between the Royal Government and its development donors has clearly improved the general standard of living in Bhutan. This would be borne out by whatever measuring rod of progress one uses — longevity, income,<sup>40</sup> literacy and also human choice.

It should come as no surprise that the individual in Bhutan has acquired increasingly greater choice over the years. Apart from the progressive and liberal outlook and policies of the throne, Bhutanese society has always had a propensity for the toleration and acceptance of individual freedom. This is so because of the Buddhist values which are deeply cherished by the Bhutanese. There is, in Buddhism, a clear stress on the responsibility of the individual for finding a path most suitable for perfecting and developing himself or herself.<sup>41</sup> This tolerance of the individual developing his or her own path is, in some ways, synonymous with individual liberty in a secular sense.

At many levels, development has been extremely rapid — so rapid that nobody in the 1960s would have envisaged the positive changes that have come about in the last three decades. A few examples illustrate the quantum leap Bhutan has taken from the medieval age to the modern era. Before 1961, there were virtually no proper schools, hospitals, post offices, telephones, motorable roads, electricity and so

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forth. All of these facilities are not only available to the people today, but they are subsidised substantially by the government. Airline services and satellite communication systems linking Bhutan with the outside world have been around for some years and advanced technologies are being introduced in many areas. A network of microwave transmission is being installed around the country and all the districts in Bhutan will be connected by the latest telecommunication system.

Bhutan has achieved tremendous progress in just three decades, without losing its rich cultural heritage and unique national identity. These achievements are attributable to an enlightened leadership which has inspired a pragmatic, result-oriented and corruption-free government and administration. The Bhutanese people anticipate the future with considerable optimism generated by the achievements of the past three decades.

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### **Notes**

- 1 I am deeply indebted to Dasho Shingkar Lam, former Secretary to His Majesty the King and once a Speaker of the National Assembly, for most of the information on medieval Bhutan.
- 2 "The division of history into periods is not a fact, but a necessary hypothesis or tool of thought, valid in so far as it is illuminating, and dependent for its validity on interpretation": Carr 1961: 60.
- 3 By ideology is meant "merely the form of political thinking in which the emphasis falls ... on moral reflection — on elaborating and advocating conceptions of good life, and of describing the forms of social action and organisation necessary for their achievement": Partridge 1967: 34.
- 4 Klieger 1989.
- 5 For a thorough discussion of this relationship, see *ibid.*
- 6 See Aris 1987.
- 7 White 1909: 302.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 See Gombrich 1988: 95.
- 10 For example, the monks of Gasa Dzong owned a paddy field in Goen Shari in Punakha. The land was cultivated by the people of Goen Shari who had to pay a fixed amount (821 dey) of paddy. This was discontinued in 1964 after the paddy field disappeared in a land slide.
- 11 See Chapela 1992.
- 12 "Just as Caccia had noted in 1627 that every person was 'an absolute lord in his own house', so in the 19th century it has been said that every baron was a king in his own province": Aris 1979: 264.
- 13 For a discussion of the distribution of community grazing land, see Ura 1992b.
- 14 For a diagrammatic illustration of the medieval administrative structure, see Department of Education 1991: 44-6.
- 15 See Aris 1979: 263.
- 16 For a discussion of labour contribution, see Ura, 1988. In this paper I discuss the various categories of labour contribution and their sociological and

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- economic implications such as size of household, household formation, urban migration, wage rates etc.
- 17 Carr 1961: 126.
- 18 The clause states that "if any person, including His Majesty the King, does anything harmful to the interest of the Kingdom and the people, the Royal Advisory Council without suppressing such matters and free of fear from any quarter shall bring it to the attention of His Majesty the King and, if necessary even report it to the Cabinet and the National Assembly".
- 19 An abolition and merger of drungkhags also took place in 1953. See Resolution Part 4, No. 1 of 1st session of the National Assembly in 1953.
- 20 However, in many parts of the country, taxes in kind continued to be collected. Resolutions of the sessions of the National Assembly held in 1961, 1962 and 1963 have frequent references to the collection of taxes in kind. It appears that cash taxes replaced taxes in kind throughout the country only by 1964. Resolution 2 of the 20th session of the National Assembly held in 1964 notes that "in support of the proposal submitted by the Ministry of Finance and the Thrimpon, Thimphu, the members from Chapcha, Shemgang, Mongar and Dungsam requested the Assembly to introduce payment of taxes by cash. It was accordingly decided to introduce the same, which was reported to His Majesty also".
- 21 For this section I have drawn heavily from my 1993 article (see bibliography), p. 48.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 There are about six standard law books given to the two highest village functionaries — chimi (representative of the people) and gup (gewog chief). This came about through Resolution 2 of the 45th Session of the National Assembly which states that "In the past the National Law Book was kept only by the courts of law for reference". The Assembly decided to supply copies of the same to the gups so as to enable them to explain its contents to the public for the latter's convenience.
- 24 For this section of my discussion I have drawn from Planning Commission 1991, to which I contributed.
- 25 Foreign aid ranged from Nu. 989 m in 1984/85 to Nu. 1086.3 m 1988/89. Aid from India always exceeded aid from other sources, underscoring the importance of India as the major donor. On average, the amount of aid received from India between 1983/84 and 1988/89 was about Nu. 787 m year.
- 26 See Hicks 1969: 120-1.
- 27 The first reference to the twenty-five acre land ceiling occurs in Resolution No. 9 of the 11th session of the National Assembly in 1959. The Resolution says that "A household possessing twenty-five acres of land or land yielding 400 x 40 dre or more annually or registered in the land records would neither be permitted to purchase more land nor to receive additional land as a gift. In the case of households with a single son or daughter possessing more than twenty-five acres, all land in excess of twenty-five acres would be confiscated by the government after the crease of the parents".
- 28 Ura and Gupta, 1992: 539-67.

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- 29 See Inheritance Law (Ga: sKal-ba bgo-bsha'i khirms-yig), Thimphu, 1980, pp. 33-8.
- 30 See Land Law (Ka: Sa-yi khirms-yik), Thimphu, 1979, p. 69.
- 31 Mang-aps are also known as thlmi in some places and gaau bura in Southern Bhutan.
- 32 Chupön can also be called public messengers, since they summon people to meetings. Across the country there is a range of terms in local dialects by which they are known. They are known generally as chupön in Western Bhutan; pirpön in Central Bhutan; tsholops in Eastern Bhutan; and karbarrey in Southern Bhutan. Chupöns are further assisted by households (called letshen in Bumthang) appointed on a yearly rotation basis.
- 33 This was ascertained in a field survey and pertains to Sershong gewog in Gayleggphug, southern Bhutan.
- 34 According to oral history, prominent families and the courtiers of the Shabdrung were obliged to be gups.
- 35 Resolution 37 of the 19th session of the National Assembly held in 1963.
- 36 I have assembled this information from four gewogs: Ura in Bumthang, Sershong in Gayleggphug, Jena in Punakha and Phangyul in Wangdi Phodrang.
- 37 A contradictory process — a decentralisation effort leading towards greater centralisation — is evident in Nepal. The Nepalese experiment with decentralisation is instructive. In Nepal, "more recent experiments with decentralisation at the village and district level have merely facilitated the reach of the central governmental authorities by creating administrative appendages in rural communities". "In essence, the decentralisation process in Nepal has consisted of the central government agencies creating administrative arms at lower and local levels whose power to operate independently is limited by the higher authorities": His Majesty's Government of Nepal/IUCN 1991: 30-1.
- 38 See Chathrim (constitution) for Gewog Yargay Tshogchung, 1992.
- 39 Ibid., 5-6.
- 40 The rate of economic growth has generally exceeded the rate of growth of population, suggesting a rapid rise in per capital income, estimated at US \$425 in 1991.
- 41 I am grateful to Chris Butters, National Library, Thimphu, for the discussion on individual freedom in Buddhism.



# The Growth of Diplomacy in Bhutan 1961-1991: Opportunities and Challenges

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Once the most isolated country in the world, Bhutan has unwillingly become headline news. Forty years ago, foreign policy posed no complex problem for this landlocked, sheltered kingdom. When Prime Minister Nehru made his historic visit to Bhutan<sup>1</sup> in late 1958, he was the first head of a foreign government ever to penetrate the kingdom. At that time, Bhutan had no diplomatic relations.<sup>2</sup> Today, the kingdom maintains diplomatic relations with 18 countries<sup>3</sup> and has 5 missions abroad.<sup>4</sup> It has joined more than 150 international organisations, including the United Nations.<sup>5</sup> Only India and Bangladesh have embassies in Thimphu, but 54 international agencies are involved in development projects in Bhutan.<sup>6</sup> Yet the kingdom's international steps are modest. It has no diplomatic relations with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, including China with whom it shares a border of 470 kilometers. Until recently<sup>7</sup> Bhutan had never been elected to a major body of the UN. It is the only country of SAARC (the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) which has never hosted the annual summit of the organisation.<sup>8</sup>

Even if some of these limitations are due to a lack of infrastructure, Bhutan's low profile on the international scene is the result of skillful and surprisingly developed diplomacy. It has made cautious and calculated moves to enlarge its approach to the world. Among the three Himalayan kingdoms,<sup>9</sup> Bhutan probably succeeded best in conciliating four mutually exclusive objectives: sovereignty, preservation of its cultural heritage, a "special relationship" with India, and broadening of its foreign relations. Today, in the midst of political unrest, Bhutan is experiencing one of the most critical moments of its history. Indeed,

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the balance between tradition and modernity achieved through thirty years of careful planning and prudent diplomacy is in danger.

The growth of diplomacy has affected Bhutan's social and political life. When the kingdom decided to end its isolation in the early 1960s, following Chinese military incursions and Indian political pressure, it started an inexorable process. Every step meant a new opportunity and challenge to Bhutan. In 1961, the year of the launching of the first Five Year Plan, the opportunity of an "opening policy" was the beginning of a new and productive partnership with India which has been playing a major role in the emergence of modern Bhutan. The challenge, however, was a growing political and economic dependence that Bhutan had to overcome by opening new channels of communication to the world. This was done in 1971 when the kingdom joined the UN. This major step gave Bhutan an international status. But it also challenged its ability to adapt to the international rules of diplomacy and to the set of cultural values imposed by Western countries through international institutions. To compensate for the dilution of its identity and to avoid these influences, the kingdom entered into new commitments that corresponded more to its interests.

In 1973, it joined the Non Aligned Movement (NAM)<sup>10</sup> by subscribing fully to the principles of the Panch Shila. Regional initiatives were also essential for Bhutan in order to balance India's hegemony in South Asia and to develop new cooperation with neighbouring countries with similar problems. The creation of SAARC in 1983 furthered the kingdom's interests, but also became a challenge, as South Asia is a troubled region confronted with ethnic problems and political rivalries.

The growth of diplomacy has allowed Bhutan to assert its independence and sovereignty. But it has also increased its exposure to the world and has dragged it into shifting world politics. The study of this process through an analysis of the objectives and principles of its foreign policy may help to explain Bhutan's current domestic problems which partly result from the kingdom's growing international involvement.

#### **Foreign policy restructuring: independent factors**

As a small, poor, landlocked nation, Bhutan has been dependent upon many changing factors that complicate its foreign policy. These factors

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can be divided into four broad categories: external factors, domestic factors, traditional-cultural factors and decision-making factors.<sup>11</sup>

#### **The geopolitical setting and security perspectives:**

##### **The China-India factor**

Bhutan is typical of a country whose geography is a major determinant of its foreign policy. In area, Bhutan is small, about the size of Switzerland,<sup>12</sup> but its location between the crowded Assam-Bengal plains of India and the Communist-occupied Tibetan plateau gives the kingdom great geopolitical significance. Because it is sandwiched between the two giants of Asia, and because it traditionally lacked military, economic, and human resources<sup>13</sup> that could allow it to take care of its own destiny, Bhutan's neighbours have practically determined all its foreign policy considerations. In response, the kingdom had to develop a strategy of survival to protect itself, since any event in the region could threaten its existence. For this reason, external factors have always been major constraints on its diplomacy.

##### *The Chinese threat*

China's occupation of Tibet in 1950-51 revealed the Chinese military threat to Bhutan. Because the kingdom had very strong cultural and historic ties with Tibet, it worried a lot about the conquest of its neighbour. Furthermore, in 1939 Mao Zedong had included Bhutan in the list of the "lost territories" of China. Thereafter, Chinese cartographers included parts of Bhutan in Chinese territory. In 1959, after the suppression of the Khampas' revolt, Bhutan closed its border with Tibet and a dispute arose with China over the fate of Bhutanese enclaves in Western Tibet. This episode was highly significant for Bhutan's future course. After 1959, what had been an external matter became internal as an influx of Tibetan refugees flowed into Bhutan. The Tibetans have since become a factor in domestic politics and have regularly been suspected to have helped foment some of Bhutan's internal upheavals, notably during the mid 1970s.<sup>14</sup>

The closure of the border and the banning of trade harmed Bhutan's northern areas, where resources are scarce. The only alternative for the local economy was to reorient its commercial routes towards India. Yet, at that point Bhutan was still reluctant to draw too close to India. In 1961 the king had refused to be "either the friend or the enemy of

China".<sup>15</sup> This was the typical reaction of a buffer state that did not want to antagonise either of its neighbours. As the Sino-Indian dispute deepened in 1961 and resulted in a military clash in 1962, Bhutan became aware that as long as it lacked an international presence, it would be vulnerable. The kingdom had no choice but alignment with India to reach this position.

*Indian pressure*

Even though India has had a very positive attitude towards Bhutan since 1961, its political priorities in South Asia make its involvement in the Himalayan kingdom all but disinterested. One of India's main concerns has been its northern security. New Delhi treats Bhutan as a regional unit within its own defence perimeter.<sup>16</sup> Yet India is not a military threat to the kingdom and has no motive to threaten Bhutan. New Delhi prefers a friendly buffer state with China to 470 kilometers of an unstable new border which would be the result of an annexation of the kingdom.

India's economic pressure is much more significant. A major difficulty in the Bhutan-India relationship has been the extreme dependence of the Himalayan kingdom upon India for its economic development. Bhutan has been forced to adjust its priorities to India's security interests. New Delhi was initially hostile to a diversification of Bhutan's foreign relations, even for economic purposes. During the first two Five Year Plans, all of Bhutan's foreign aid came from India. Fearful of global power-politics, India discouraged direct economic aid pacts between Bhutan and foreign countries which might draw the small kingdom into entangling relations with third powers.<sup>17</sup> The same pattern was applied to the Bhutan-China relationship. In the late 1960s, despite its abhorrence of Chinese behaviour in Tibet, Bhutan might have been interested in resuming talks with China to settle the boundary dispute.<sup>18</sup> In the long term the resumption of trade with Tibet and a possible normalisation of its relations with its neighbour could also have been a worthwhile goal for Bhutan. Yet bilateral negotiations between Thimphu and Beijing were so dependent on Delhi-Beijing relations that they began only in 1984 after the normalisation of Sino-Indian relations. India's economic and political leverage was so great that Bhutan could not have a "Chinese realpolitik" of its own.

*Domestic factors: uncertain variables*

"Coming late to the development scene, Bhutan was eager to avoid mistakes committed elsewhere. While strongly dependent on foreign aid, it was determined to follow its own set of priorities, keep public finance on an even keel, build up a well trained but lean bureaucracy, and prevent environmental damage from over-exploitation of the forests or uncontrolled growth of tourism. As a result, development in Bhutan has been remarkably free from seeing economic, social, or cultural disruption". These remarks, in the World Bank's 1989 appraisal of Bhutan, could easily be applied to the kingdom's diplomacy. Although the growth of the economy has been amazing, it has not interfered with the internal political process. This result is unique, because the aftermath of economic development is usually political instability and cultural revolution. Instead, Bhutan's diplomacy has been remarkably stable, largely because social and political groups have had no direct role in making foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> This situation could change dramatically in the future. Domestic factors could have a decisive impact on foreign policy through the combined effect of the development of western-style education and the emergence of domestic tensions.

*The education factor*

Western-style education developed during the 1960s while Bhutan was experiencing the first steps of its economic modernisation. Today, Bhutan has established a primary and secondary educational system, with the help of foreign countries and international organisations including UNDP and UNESCO. In higher education, the lack of local institutions has obliged the best students to go abroad. Although most have attended Indian institutions and received technical training in the 1960s, since the 1970s more students have studied in Australia, Britain, Germany, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. Vocational education is no longer their only interest, as some are now majoring in management or general administration. Unlike students from many other developing countries, a large majority returns home. Because the private sector is still limited, most of these students have joined the civil service and have experienced rapid advancement. The emergence of a group of young Bhutanese with managerial and

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technical skills could be a source of internal conflict between modernising and conservative forces. No fundamental change in Bhutan's foreign policy has occurred yet because of resentment among some of the educated youth.<sup>20</sup> This situation, however, could change as economic development and domestic problems have more and more international implications. Some members of the young elite might wish to strengthen and establish diplomatic relationships outside the SAARC region, keeping in view Bhutan's long-term interest in business and economic cooperation rather than the preservation of its cultural identity.<sup>21</sup>

### *The ethnic challenge*

Among the domestic problems, the so-called "democratic" movement, so described by its organisers through an extensive disinformation campaign, could have a significant impact on foreign policy. This problem is rooted in Bhutan's modern history and is a direct consequence of economic development. As the kingdom undertook its modernisation programs with a limited local work-force, a flood of Nepalese workers began to enter the kingdom in the 1960s.<sup>22</sup> Many favourable circumstances — the fertile and lightly populated lowlands of Bhutan, free education and medicine, the porosity of the borders in the whole region — but also social and economic pressure in Nepal, encouraged this immigration. What was a manageable ethnic minority during the first half of the century has turned into a large community<sup>23</sup> which considers itself a part of the Nepalese diaspora with a different cultural background and little allegiance to the Thimphu regime. This community became a major source of instability when ethnic political parties began to be active.<sup>24</sup> In 1990, the Nepalese revolution, which forced the king of Nepal to accept constitutional rule, had a great impact on the Nepali-Bhutanese community. What was temporarily a domestic issue focusing on the Driglam Namzha cultural policy, and on the 1988 Census, which identified a substantial number of illegal immigrants, rapidly became a regional concern, with thousands of people leaving Bhutan and moving to Nepal.<sup>25</sup>

This is a typical example of the conjunction of foreign problems that became a domestic concern through immigration and later burst onto the international scene through foreign media and political activism. Its impact on foreign policy, which has already been

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perceptible, could be dramatic in the future. It could become a major bilateral dispute between Bhutan and Nepal; even if the relationship between the two kingdoms remains cordial. On the regional scene, even if India has refused for the moment to get involved in the problem, it will be more and more difficult for New Delhi to stay neutral in the long term as the pressure will grow not only within SAARC but also from outside the region. Finally, the internationalisation of the issue through NGOs has attracted unusual attention to Bhutan. The kingdom will probably be forced to change its approach to the international scene and to invent new methods of communication in order to cope with foreign public opinion and with potential pressure from foreign governments and international agencies.

### *Decision-making variables: necessary adaptations*

Two men played a decisive role in the structuring of Bhutan's foreign policy. The third Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1952-72), was aware of the constraints faced by his kingdom. His approach to foreign policy was based on the assumption that India would permit Bhutan a cautious and progressive diversification of its foreign relations, if this would not harm India's interests. His strategy, based on adaptation and flexibility, has been a success. Bhutan has acquired an international status without undermining its special relationship with India. Prime Minister Jigme Dorji also played a major role in establishing Bhutan's diplomacy principles. He shared with the king a vision of a modernised Bhutan and was in charge of foreign affairs as the Druk Gyalpo focused his energy on domestic reform.<sup>26</sup>

Concerns have arisen about the influence of India in the decision-making process in Bhutan and about the degree of flexibility Thimphu had to concede to New Delhi in the conducting of its foreign policy, at least on a functional basis. In the mid-1960s, the role of Indian officers in Bhutan caused great controversy. In fact, many Indians were in charge of day-to-day operations because the Bhutanese administration lacked local officers. In 1963 the king even accepted the appointment of an "Indian adviser" to assist the Prime Minister. This position gained influence when the Prime Minister assumed a more prominent role while the king was in Switzerland for medical care. But the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was created long after Indians could

dominate this department. Since 1966,<sup>27</sup> the administration has gone through a "Bhutanisation" process. Because of the national labour shortage, about 20 percent of the civil servants are still reportedly "non national". However, they occupy secondary or consulting positions and are involved only in domestic affairs. Today India is not directly involved in the decision-making process of Bhutan's foreign policy. Consultations between the two governments are frequent, but this is only common diplomacy.

#### **Traditional-cultural factors: cultural uniqueness**

The impact of the cultural factor on foreign policy is probably the most difficult to analyse as it requires a description of the country's national character and the way in which this influences its diplomatic choices. The growth of diplomacy since 1961 has been in apparent contradiction with the tradition of isolationism that is often seen as Bhutan's main cultural characteristic. This assumption is inaccurate. Bhutan's traditional isolation has been exaggerated and its diplomacy has been consistent with its sense of identity. As Leo Rose has remarked: "Isolationism had been the fundamental principle upon which Bhutan based its foreign policy for so much of the modern period that it came to be viewed as an immutable, unchanging factor by Bhutanese and foreigners alike. Yet it is apparent from our limited knowledge of Bhutan's history that isolationism was, in fact, a relatively recent phenomenon, dating back only to the late eighteenth century."<sup>28</sup> The term 'isolationism' has become a mystical rhetoric, as Bhutan is still unknown and mysterious to many people, even in South Asia. Yet this term does not apply wholly to modern Bhutan's mentality as it carries some kind of negative, medieval image. "Cultural uniqueness" is a better way to describe Bhutan's character. This uniqueness has been forged not only by history, but also by geography. The kingdom has enjoyed a political insulation that protects it from external cultural influences.

Contrary to some beliefs, the growth of diplomacy has been very consistent with the traditional-cultural variable. As already mentioned, alignment with India was the only solution for Bhutan to protect its sovereignty. This strategy of survival has been designed as a culture-protection mechanism. For example, cultural protection has led to the refusal of mass-tourism as a form of "cultural pollution",<sup>29</sup> to a

pragmatic restructuring of foreign policy, and to a cautious approach to economic development.

#### **Foreign policy objectives**

Bhutan's diplomacy has pursued three objectives. As the king himself stated, the kingdom is first "politically committed to a strong and loyal sense of nationhood to ensuring the peace and security of its citizens and the sovereign territorial integrity of its land". Second, it aims "to achieve economic self-reliance". Third, it wishes "to preserve the ancient religions and cultural heritage that have for so many centuries strengthened and enriched Bhutan's life".<sup>30</sup>

#### *The quest for sovereignty*

Many questions have been raised about the kingdom's sovereignty. The Treaty it signed with India in 1949 provides in Article 2: "Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations". The expression "agrees to be guided" has often been interpreted to mean that Bhutan has given India the right to formulate and conduct its foreign policy. This interpretation is inconsistent with Bhutan's intention and has been largely denied by practical experience. In 1949, Bhutan's objective was simple and straightforward: recognition of its independence. India had been very receptive on this issue as the treaty also provides "the Government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan". Thus, Bhutan accepted a "guidance clause" similar to the clause in the treaty of Punakha signed in 1910 with the British. During the 1960s, Chinese feelers to Bhutan on direct negotiations in the wake of the India-China border clash gave new importance to the issue of guidance.

At that time, it appeared to Bhutan that it was not "one hundred percent independent because of the 1949 treaty".<sup>31</sup> It had no desire, however, to deal directly with China. When it accepted that New Delhi should take up the issue with Beijing as part of its own border negotiations, the kingdom did not make a major concession. For Thimphu, the advice of India is "entirely optional and it is up to Bhutan itself to follow it or not".<sup>32</sup> India has accepted this statement as it did not prevent Bhutan from expanding its foreign relations.<sup>33</sup>

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When the kingdom joined the UN, it was tacitly welcomed in the comity of nations as an independent political entity, not as a semi-sovereign state.<sup>34</sup> In 1971, the Indian ambassador to the UN made an unequivocal statement when he welcomed Bhutan as a country which exercises "its full and sovereign rights". Even the Chinese delegate referred to Bhutan as a country "with a long history of independent existence". Only Pakistan expressed its hope that Bhutan would broaden its foreign contacts, while France thanked the "Indian guide" for having "led its companion to the United Nations".<sup>35</sup> Of course, it was no accident that India allowed Bhutan to be admitted to the UN the same year the PRC took its seat. The aim was to establish Bhutan as an independent state and to prevent any Chinese claim of sovereignty over the Himalayan kingdom. India has a real influence on Bhutan's perception of the outside world, but the kingdom has proved that India's strategy has not fettered its own foreign policy.

### *Economic independence: a political challenge*

Two handicaps have made economic independence difficult to secure. As a landlocked country, Bhutan is dependent on India for its trade. As a developing nation, the kingdom has to rely heavily on foreign aid. During the first half of the century the economy was not a major concern for Bhutan. Food grain was plentiful and trade with Tibet helped to meet other needs. The decision to modernise the economy was motivated primarily by political considerations and was a strategy to preserve independence. But this decision also disrupted the kingdom's internal balance and eroded its autonomy.

### *The trading handicaps of a landlocked nation*

Bhutan relies heavily on India for its trade. More than 90 per cent of its exports go to India and 70 per cent of its imports still come from its southern neighbour. To cope with the absence of trade diversification, Bhutan has signed transit agreements with India not only to preserve free trade but also to simplify procedures, and to facilitate its trade with third countries.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Nepal, Bhutan has a good and stable trade relationship with India.<sup>37</sup>

With India's approval, the kingdom has been able to diversify its relations with new trading partners like Bangladesh, Nepal, Hong Kong and Singapore.<sup>38</sup> Because the kingdom belongs to a small but

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underprivileged club of countries which are not only least-developed but also landlocked, trade diversification has become a very practical issue and a fundamental principle that refers to its very independence as a sovereign state. For this reason, Bhutan has strongly supported all initiatives, notably at the UN, that aim to promote the freedom and rights of landlocked countries. For instance, it has been very sensitive to all questions relating to the freedom of transit and trade, the law of the sea and programmes that compensate for geographical handicaps. Yet, despite its efforts, Bhutan will always be dependent on India's economy. When India sneezes, Bhutan catches a cold. There is little the kingdom can do about this.<sup>39</sup>

### *Modernisation: dependence on foreign aid and the cultural challenge*

To reduce its dependence on foreign aid donors, notably India, Bhutan has developed a threefold strategy: diversification of donors, increase of domestic revenue, and strict control of the pace of modernisation. Although India financed the first two plans, other donors began to provide aid to Bhutan for the third and later plans. The proportion of aid from third countries rose from 17 percent in 1981 to over 30 percent in 1991. This increase was achieved thanks to the contribution of UN agencies, (which currently provide 37 percent of non-Indian aid), bilateral donors,<sup>40</sup> and non-UN multilateral organisations like the Asian Development Bank.

The Royal Government has always welcomed financial and technical aid from the international community. Yet it considers that national development objectives cannot be achieved without increasing self-reliance. Bhutan has been quite successful in its self-reliance pledge. Internal resources covered 34.7 percent of the Sixth Five Year Plan expenses while Indian Government aid and other foreign assistance (including UN agencies) had an equal share of 27.5 percent.<sup>41</sup>

Yet the most remarkable achievement of Bhutan in its quest for economic autonomy has been the development process itself. The kingdom has insisted on following its own set of priorities to avoid the mistakes committed by other developing countries. Indeed, foreign concerns have influenced the modernisation process. During the early 1960s, the building of a road network was highly motivated by India's security interests. However Bhutan has since been adept in writing its

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own agenda and setting the pace of its development. The king himself has been trying to maintain the internal balance of his country by promoting his own vision of modernisation. He has even coined a new term, "Gross National Happiness", to define the kingdom's main objective. This idealistic project aims to preserve Bhutan's cultural heritage and has influenced all its policies through the years. The Driglam Namzha policy has the same kind of purpose. According to the king: "the Bhutanese felt that unless some initiatives were taken, Bhutan's identity as a sovereign, independent country would be completely eroded in the next 20 years".<sup>42</sup> Until recently, the government succeeded in achieving balanced development. This modernisation did bring economic relief to the kingdom, but hastened the emergence of social divisions and political conflicts. In this respect, the growth of diplomacy has already altered the traditional balance of the kingdom and is partly responsible for its current problems.

#### **Foreign policy: the main features**

To attain its objectives, the Government of Bhutan has been conducting a focused foreign policy which can be described as pragmatic, utilitarian, neutral, and traditional.

#### *Pragmatism*

Bhutan has always been very suspicious of ideologies. None of the large ideological movements that spread through the third world after the second world war affected the kingdom. Political parties have always been peripheral and ethnic phenomena. They have never been part of the decision-making process. Bhutan escaped the new concepts of nationalist political movements that led to India's independence and created problems in the two other Himalayan kingdoms, Nepal and Sikkim. Socialism was not a threat and never appealed to Bhutan's elite. The Soviet Union, despite its cordial relations with New Delhi, never developed ties with Bhutan.<sup>43</sup>

The absence of ideology does not necessarily imply that the kingdom denies all theoretical principles. Bhutan strongly believes in the Panch Shila and subscribes to the United Nations Charter. It has however chosen not to let any foreign ideology guide its destiny. Consequently, its foreign policy has been pragmatic, notably vis-à-vis India.

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Unlike Nepal, Bhutan has never sought confrontation on the regional scene.<sup>44</sup> Pragmatism is also one of the reasons why the kingdom joined SAARC, a non-political forum created to promote economic cooperation among its members. SAARC operates mainly through technical committees and is not allowed by its charter to raise bilateral and contentious issues. These limitations suit Bhutan's cautiousness.

#### *Utilitarianism*

Small nations have become so obsessed with sovereignty that their foreign policy has turned into a pathetic hunt for diplomatic recognition.<sup>45</sup> Bhutan has steered clear of this quest, even after India accepted its diversification on the international scene. According to the king: "Diplomatic relations alone are not of great importance for the kingdom's sovereignty. One or a hundred missions abroad make no difference."<sup>46</sup> This explains why Bhutan has only five embassies on foreign soil and has formal diplomatic relations with less than twenty states.<sup>47</sup> The kingdom has not made a single diplomatic move that does not strictly correspond to a practical need. This attitude could seem cynical if Bhutan was not a small and weak country which must rely on its judgement to find its way on the international scene. For this reason, each of the kingdom's partners has been assigned a specific function, either political or economical, in its diplomatic spectrum.

#### *Neutrality*

Bhutan might be the member of the NAM with the strictest definition of non-alignment. The kingdom has had formal relations neither with the United States nor with the former Soviet Union. It has refused to become engaged in world politics and to become a pawn in a Big Power's hand. Its strategic position as a buffer state between India and China could have made Bhutan of interest to the Soviet Union, or to the United States as a means of disturbing the Soviet-Indian relationship. None of this happened. Bhutan rejected all opportunities to establish diplomatic relations with any of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council because it feared being dragged into great power politics.<sup>48</sup>

The decision to join NAM in 1973 was in accord with Bhutan's traditions and philosophy. The Bhutanese elite has showed a

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pronounced pro-Western bias. This step, however, was the consequence of friendships forged through travel and scholarships and not a political trend that influenced its foreign policy. At the UN, Bhutan has voted according to its own perception of the world and has never followed any particular point of view or group of countries. Based on its non-alignment policy, some observers have seen Bhutan becoming a sort of "Asian Geneva".<sup>49</sup> This trend seemed likely in the mid-1980s when Thimphu hosted the SAARC foreign secretaries' meeting and two rounds of Sri Lankan peace talks. It is indeed an attractive idea. It is however totally inconsistent with the kingdom's objectives and orientations. According to the king: "Thimphu, unlike Geneva, never had any deliberate policy of acting as a forum".<sup>50</sup>

### *Traditionalism*

Bhutan is a small country with limited financial resources. As such, its foreign policy has always operated on a minimal basis. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not created until 1972 and remains small.<sup>51</sup> As of late 1991, it had a staff of 124. Diplomatic officers represent barely 40 percent of the total. The lack of personnel is largely responsible for some of the major gaps in Bhutan's diplomacy. For instance, in the mid 1970s the Royal Mission to the UN in New York had no delegate because none of the few people who could have filled this position was available at that time. For the same reason, Bhutan waited until 1989 to appoint a director to SAARC in Kathmandu.<sup>52</sup> Yet the benefit of a small staff is the broad experience and knowledge of those in charge, notably of the Minister of Foreign Affairs who is currently the senior in office among all the foreign ministers in the world.<sup>53</sup> The lack of a well-trained bureaucracy also emphasised through the years the role of personal diplomacy. Members of the royal family have often joined more conventional delegates to represent the kingdom in international meetings. The king himself insists on granting audiences to most of the foreign missions visiting the country and also meets on a regular basis with the Prime Minister of India.<sup>54</sup> Personal diplomacy, and diplomacy through friends, will probably play a major role in the future development of Bhutan's foreign policy, not only towards India but also on the international scene.<sup>55</sup>

Effective though this kind of spontaneous diplomacy has been, it seems that traditionalism and pragmatism will not be sufficient in the

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future to face the new challenge of the so-called "democratic movement" and its international ramifications. For the first time in history, the kingdom is confronted with a "humanitarian problem". The Bhutanese Government was not prepared to respond to international critics and media questioning. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have a Communication Division and has never been particularly inclined to "cocktail diplomacy" or organised lobbying in foreign chanceries. To present its message through the media and to find a peaceful solution to the problem of the Nepali-Bhutanese community, Bhutan will probably have to change its approach to the international community. The time might come when the kingdom will need to count its friends.<sup>56</sup>

### *The growth of diplomacy: the three circles*

Bhutan's diplomatic history since 1961 can be divided into three periods that correspond to successive levels of internationalisation and define the three "circles" of its foreign policy: the Indian circle, the regional circle and the multilateral circle. Each circle took approximately a decade to mature and originated from a major diplomatic initiative which had a large symbolic meaning.<sup>57</sup> The Sino-Indian war of 1962, the detente between Delhi and Beijing in the 1970s and the political crisis in India during the 1980s are the motivating forces behind these initiatives. Today, the three circles are perfectly concentric.<sup>58</sup> The kingdom's diplomacy has been remarkably stable. Its growth has been cautious and steady. Yet in a rapidly changing environment, disruptions could force Bhutan to reassess the harmony of its diplomatic sphere.

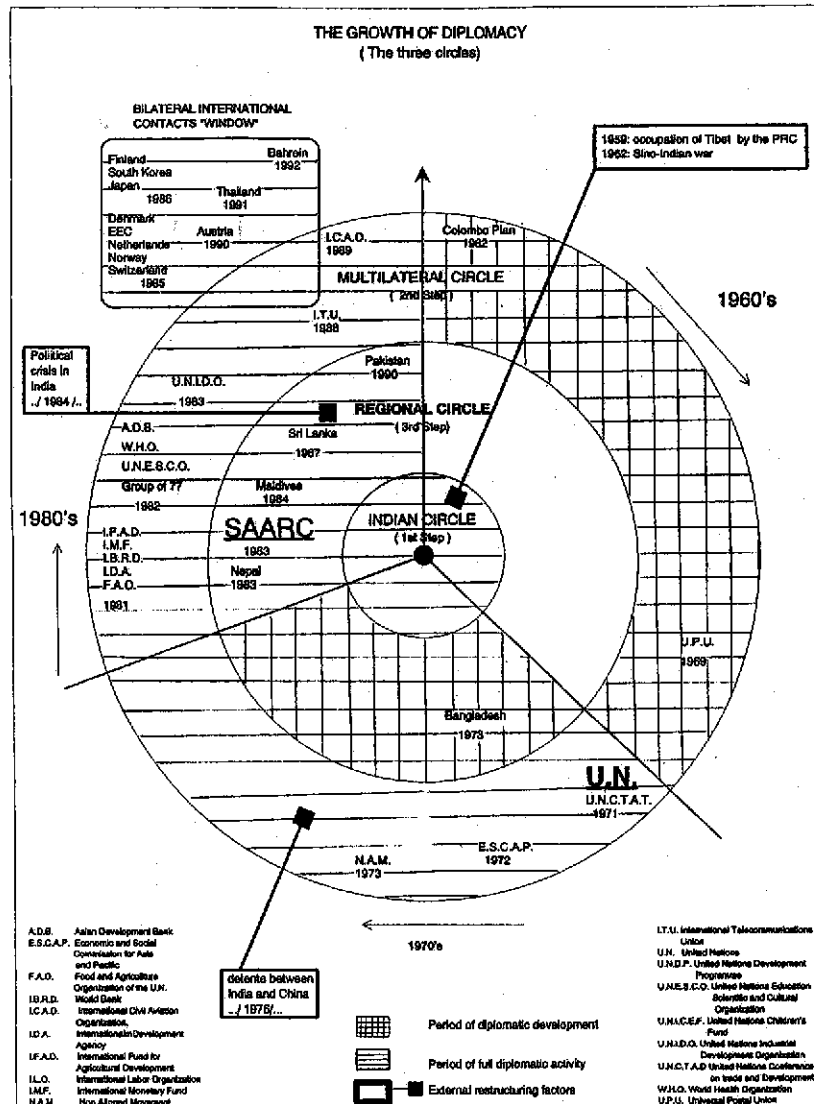


1) The Indian circle

The Indian circle which prevailed during the 1960s is still the core of Bhutan's diplomacy. The relationship between the two countries can be described as intimate. However, it has evolved through the years from an exclusive and restrictive connection to a much more balanced partnership. Paradoxically, all the evolution has been on the Indian side which has become more inclined to consider Bhutan as a true partner and not as a protectorate.

The political relationship between the Himalayan kingdom and its southern neighbour goes back to colonial times. It was set by events linked with the Younghusband expedition into Tibet (1903-1905) and by the treaty signed in 1910 in Punakha with the British Government.<sup>59</sup> Bhutan was never a part of the British Empire. In 1947, it emerged from the colonial era as a "semi-sovereign state". The independence of India was a major challenge for Bhutan, which could have been forced to join the Indian Union.<sup>60</sup> However, Jawaharlal Nehru insisted that the Himalayan kingdom should maintain its independent identity. When it signed a treaty with India in 1949,<sup>61</sup> Bhutan was not only allowed to preserve the status quo it had maintained with the British, but it also became a fully sovereign state, at least theoretically. But its relations with India took more than a decade to clarify. In 1952 Nehru declared that Bhutan was "technically not a part of India". Nor was it a "foreign state". The Indian Prime Minister preferred to describe the kingdom as an "autonomous state" or as the "little brother of India".<sup>62</sup> During the 1960s, New Delhi adopted a paternalistic attitude towards Bhutan and took various symbolic initiatives. In 1963 it was decided that all Bhutanese would be eligible for government posts in India with the exception of the Indian Foreign Service. The same year, the appointment of a special adviser to the Government of Bhutan was an important sign of India's intentions. During this period, Indian journalists and scholars referred to the king of Bhutan as the "Maharaja" and not as the "Druk Gyalpo", which was a way of undermining the kingdom's identity by confusing it with a princely state.

The evolution of diplomatic relations between the two countries reveals the difficulties Bhutan had to overcome to reach a more balanced partnership with India. Although they signed a treaty in 1949, Bhutan and India only exchanged fully accredited ambassadors



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in 1978. In the meantime the channels of communication between the two governments were very confusing. In 1964, after the Bhutanese Prime Minister's assassination, the post of "Bhutan Agent in India" was abolished. This was also the case of the special adviser in 1966 who was not really a diplomatic envoy. Only the Indian political officer in Sikkim was officially accredited to Bhutan, although he rarely acted in this capacity. In 1969, after intensive negotiations and political resentment in the Bhutanese National Assembly, a mission was opened in each capital. The heads of the missions were designated as "special officers", not as ambassadors.<sup>63</sup> India waited nine years before it recognised Bhutan as a foreign state by granting the title of "embassy" to its delegation.

During the 1970s, bilateral relations entered a new phase. India's perception of its own security had evolved. New Delhi adopted a more pragmatic and realistic approach to its northern frontier, but also a more tolerant attitude towards the other states in the region. Although the 1960s had been overshadowed by the humiliation of the war with China, the new detente that dominated the mid-1970s brought relief and confidence in New Delhi. In 1971, India signed a treaty of peace and friendship with the Soviet Union which enhanced its status as a regional power. New Delhi achieved a greater self-confidence about its role in the sub-continent after its war with Pakistan in 1971 and the creation of Bangladesh. The failure of China to intervene in support of Islamabad in 1965 and the 1971 Indo-Pakistan wars reduced New Delhi's apprehension over the PRC's role in South Asia and paved the way to a normalisation of its relations with Beijing.<sup>64</sup> In this context, Bhutan became much more valuable as a partner than as a protectorate, notably on the regional scene and at the UN. While sponsoring the admission of the Himalayan kingdom into the world body and later on into the NAM, India was trying to reinforce its stature as a mature and responsible nation which was able to behave with unselfishness and political generosity, unlike the big powers and regional contenders. India's changing attitude was particularly visible during the Janata rule (1977-1980). Although sometimes described as an attempt by Thimphu to break away from New Delhi, the change which occurred during this period was in fact the result of India's own policy. It expressed the resentment of some leaders of the Congress Party who feared that Bhutan might take advantage of India's

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temporary low profile on the regional scene.<sup>65</sup> The kingdom did indeed make the most of the "beneficial bilateralism" advocated by Morarji Desai and Charan Singh, and took initiatives to promote its sovereignty. In 1974, on the occasion of the coronation of the new king,<sup>66</sup> the government invited Australia, Bangladesh, Burma, Canada, China, France, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand, Singapore, the Soviet Union, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

India was also invited, but New Delhi might have been offended by this symbolic gesture, especially after a private meeting between the king and the Chinese delegate.<sup>67</sup> In 1979, during the Havana non-aligned summit, Bhutan took its own stand on the issue of Kampuchea.<sup>68</sup> The same year, a major controversy erupted in Indian papers. During a press conference in Bombay, the king of Bhutan appeared to question the treaty of 1949 and to ask for an "updating" of the "guidance clause". But King Jigme Singye Wangchuk was misquoted. In February 1980 he disavowed any intention to seek a revision of the treaty, but also pointed out that Bhutan intended to take the final decision on all questions affecting its interests. "If the treaty does not create a problem, there is no need to discuss it with India". The kingdom matured diplomatically during the 1970s and has become capable of playing its own role in international affairs. However, its assertion of independence must not be considered as a strategy for pulling away from India. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated: "India, by virtue of its size and technological achievements, has a pre-eminent role in the region. The smaller South Asian countries have to live with this reality."<sup>69</sup>

Unlike Nepal, Bhutan has never tried to twist this reality. The kingdom has preferred not to follow the Nepalese model of a "balanced friendship" with India and China. Thimphu has always been very skeptical about Kathmandu's foreign policy which it considers too ambitious, risky, and unrealistic.<sup>70</sup> Until recently, Bhutan had not considered including China in its diplomatic sphere. The spirit of detente between New Delhi and Beijing has to some extent influenced Thimphu's approach to relations with China. The resumption of talks between the two countries has been a relief for Bhutan. Its policy towards China however still has limited objectives, primarily the

resolution of the border dispute and the resumption of trade with Tibet.<sup>71</sup>

Bhutan's present government will never try to emulate the Nepalese policy. Yet a Chinese entry into Bhutanese politics must not be ruled out, at least in the long term.<sup>72</sup> While India is facing growing instability and political unrest within its own borders, it will become more and more tempting for Beijing to offer Thimphu its "moral support", should the ethnic problem in Bhutan deepen into a regional conflict. In any case, Bhutan will probably decide to avoid undermining the security interests of its traditional partner.

## *2) The multilateral circle*

On the international scene, Bhutan has always preferred multilateralism to bilateralism. From the kingdom's point of view, multilateralism can be described as politically neutral while bilateralism always presents risks and uncertainty. In 1962, the Colombo Plan was the first international organisation the kingdom ever joined. The Foreign Minister has described this initiative as a major step which began a new dynamic in the kingdom's foreign policy: "The impact of the Colombo Plan on Bhutan has been more political than economic. There is no doubt that membership has resulted in the flow of much needed financial and technical resources for our development efforts. By far the greatest benefit of membership, however, has been the exposure of Bhutan to the international community. It has fulfilled an aspiration dear to every Bhutanese heart, namely, the recognition of the sovereignty and independence of our kingdom by the outside world".<sup>73</sup> Bhutan's admission to the Universal Postal Union in 1969 had the same impact.<sup>74</sup> Yet only the United Nations gave Bhutan the international status it sought. Joining the UN had at least four consequences. First, it gave Bhutan a new window on the world.<sup>75</sup> Second, it allowed the kingdom access to new programmes of aid and development. Third, it boosted its diplomacy. Fourth, it clarified the relationship between India and Bhutan and made official the Bhutanese interpretation of the treaty of 1949.

The multilateral circle has been a counterbalance to the Indian circle, but it is not a credible substitute. Multilateralism is not a politically-oriented instrument that Bhutan would use against India.<sup>76</sup> The kingdom was able to join international organisations only because

India had been willing to sponsor its candidacy.<sup>77</sup> For this reason the growth of the multilateral circle was dependent on the Indian circle, at least during the early 1970s. Since this period Bhutan has been responsible for its decisions at the United Nations and has "cut the umbilical cord" with India.<sup>78</sup> Yet the kingdom has continued to expect a privileged relationship with New Delhi.

Since its entry to the United Nations, Bhutan has shown solidarity with India on almost all issues, but this near-unanimity is not a sign of subservience. The Minister of Foreign Affairs once remarked: "being in the same part of the world, India and Bhutan have obviously complete identity of views on all important world issues".<sup>79</sup> In a few cases some differences have appeared.<sup>80</sup> They mostly correspond to the kingdom's regional concerns, such as security and economic development. Only a few deal with world politics. For example, as a small, landlocked developing country, Bhutan has supported all initiatives to establish a new and equitable world economic order, though India has shown doubts on specific issues, such as the charter of economic rights and duties of landlocked states regarding free access to the sea, or the implementation of actions related to the particular needs of landlocked developing countries.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, as a non-military state, Bhutan has approved all resolutions concerning the control of international weaponry, while India has not, to allow for its own military interests as a regional power. Consequently, the two countries have had a different approach to all issues dealing with the cessation of nuclear tests, disarmament, annual reports by member-states on their military expenses, and the prohibition of chemical and bacteriological weapons. The nuclear issue, which became a regional concern after the explosion of the first Indian nuclear bomb in May 1974, reveals the cautiousness of Bhutan's policy at the UN. The kingdom condemns nuclear proliferation, but it expressed confidence that India would use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Based on India's acknowledgment, Bhutan refused to support Pakistan's proposal for a nuclear-free zone in South Asia, even though it favours the principle of nuclear-free zones.<sup>82</sup> In this specific case, Bhutan adapted its diplomacy to India's strategy.

As a non-aligned nation, the kingdom has also remained neutral on some issues that India strongly supported. In many cases, its decisions have been guided more by caution than by non-alignment. For

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instance, the kingdom differs from India's Middle East policy. India was pro-Arab during the 1970s and the 1980s. According to Bhutan's Foreign Minister: "Bhutan doesn't feel any need to be pro-Arab or pro-Israel, since it is not directly involved in the issue".<sup>83</sup> Because it lacked information, Bhutan also abstained from votes regarding human rights in South America, the Falklands Islands, the question of Guam and the question of Timor.<sup>84</sup> Unlike India, Bhutan did not have an opinion on any of these issues.

Even though the kingdom fully supports the universality of the UN Charter and advocates the respect of broad principles of world-wide application,<sup>85</sup> its policy in the UN is primarily oriented towards South Asia.<sup>86</sup> In 1982 Bhutan joined the Group of 77, but it has expressed no interest in embracing the cause of other small countries facing similar problems. Neither the UN nor the NAM has been an ideological forum for Bhutan. For this reason, multilateralism has always been a very positive asset in Bhutan's foreign policy.<sup>87</sup>

Bilateralism is not totally absent from Bhutan's international diplomatic sphere. Yet it does not form a circle on its own, merely a "window to the world". Bhutan currently maintains diplomatic relations with eleven countries outside South Asia. Most of them are members of the OECD and belong to the industrialised world. They are only aid providers and economic partners for Bhutan. None of these relations is politically significant. Apart from Japan, they are small countries, mostly located in Northern Europe, which can be described as "non-politically-compromising" partners. Historically, the relationship with Japan is the only one which could have had some political implications, at least from an Indian perspective. In the early 1960s, India allegedly prevented some Japanese private companies from participating in development projects in Bhutan. At that time, New Delhi considered itself the only aid provider to the kingdom and eventually denied Japan any role in South Asia. The situation has changed during the last ten years. Even if Japan is still politically absent from the region, its financial and economic power gives it the ability to be a major actor in Bhutan's modernisation.<sup>88</sup>

### *3) The regional circle*

The regional circle is the most recent and could be the most politically significant. During the 1980s Bhutan's foreign policy was characterised

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by a wide range of initiatives towards its neighbours in South Asia. In 1980, it opened an embassy in Bangladesh. In 1984 the two countries signed a protocol on the expansion and regulation of trade, and an agreement on economic and cultural cooperation during a state visit of the king to Dhaka. The kingdom also established "non resident" diplomatic relations with Nepal in 1983, with the Maldives in 1984, with Sri Lanka in 1987 and finally with Pakistan in 1990. Bhutan also joined the South Asia Cooperative Environment Program (SACEP) in 1982 and SAARC in 1983.

Bhutan's bilateral diplomacy in the region has always been cautious. The kingdom has been India's most loyal partner in South Asia. In 1971, it supported India's policy in Eastern Pakistan and was the second country to recognise the new Republic of Bangladesh. Pakistan was the last member of SAARC to have diplomatic relations with Bhutan. The kingdom has never supported an initiative of Islamabad, notably at the UN, that could undermine New Delhi's interests. It also denied the idea of regional pacts or political alliances intended to counterbalance India's dominance in South Asia, such as the so-called "Himalayan Federation" proposed by some Nepalese in the early 1960s.<sup>89</sup>

Bhutan supported the concept of SAARC because it favours the development of a new type of cooperation among the nations of South Asia, which could be more balanced and less India-oriented. It is no coincidence that Bhutan's South Asian initiatives took place during a period of growing political and religious strife in India, which culminated in the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. From this time on, Bhutan realised that India was a shaky power that could fall apart. In that case the kingdom would need to develop new alliances in order to fill the vacuum left by the political absence of India. None of the states of the region can replace India, but some of them can still become closer partners.

Among these partners, Nepal is certainly not the closest. It is paradoxical that these two kingdoms have so many cultural and geographical similarities, but are not better friends. Long-standing religious and historical relations have existed between the two countries, but their political relationship has always been more troublesome. The Nepalese minority in Bhutan has been a major obstacle to an harmonious and unbiased partnership. The current so-

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called "democratic movement" in Bhutan has received support from Kathmandu.<sup>90</sup>

Yet Bhutan's approach to Nepal has changed through the years. The fear of an India-backed Nepali agitation in Bhutan might have been an important factor in establishing diplomatic relations with Nepal in 1983. Bhutan assumed at that time that gradually increasing cultural and political contacts with Nepal and its monarchy would reinforce respect for the Druk Gyalpo and traditional institutions among the Bhutanese of Nepalese origin. But the Nepalese revolution changed the political parameters of the region. The king of Nepal is no longer able to influence his kingdom's policy towards Bhutan. Today, the Nepalese minority poses a threat to Bhutan's survival. This minority can secure external support, notably from Nepal. In this context, Nepal is more of a problem than a partner for Bhutan. Unlike Nepal, Bangladesh is eager to become a major economic and political ally of the kingdom. Today, Bangladesh is the only state apart from India to have an embassy in Thimphu. When Bhutan decided to open a mission in Dhaka in 1972, it did not consult India. Though accepted in New Delhi, the decision did show that Bhutan had decided to conduct its foreign policy independently of India. The relationship with Bangladesh has been very important for landlocked Bhutan, and could become more significant, while the kingdom seeks to reduce its dependence on India.

### **Conclusion**

Bhutan has come a long way ever since the ending of isolation in 1961. The growth of diplomacy has been an integral part of the development process. Despite an adverse geopolitical setting, the kingdom has succeeded in asserting its identity and in building a new but strong national character. Yet Bhutan faces the same dilemma that most small countries striving for modernisation and political recognition have faced. On the one hand, the kingdom cannot do without foreign inputs, either as imported labour or development funds. On the other hand, it must limit its exposure to the outside world to prevent a dilution of its culture. Unfortunately, history and geography are not the best allies of the kingdom in what could be a pathetic fight for survival. Soon, Bhutan will face at least three diplomatic challenges. Its ability to adapt to new regional parameters will determine its success.

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In the short term, bilateral negotiation with Nepal would seem the best solution to solve the current problem that has already become a major threat to the kingdom's survival. Yet neither country is eager to welcome the thousands of people<sup>91</sup> who have fled from southern Bhutan to eastern Nepal. The crisis might become a major international handicap for Bhutan should the kingdom be forced to justify its policies in response to increasing political activism and media scrutiny.

The second challenge will be India's attitude if the Bhutanese problem becomes a major regional issue, and also the effect on Bhutan of the political and ethnic turmoil in India. India has no reason to solve the problem the way it did with Sikkim in the 1970s, by annexing the kingdom. The political and social conditions are different. Bhutan is a sovereign state and a member of the United Nations, and has always been a faithful partner of New Delhi. India is more likely to try to support the kingdom than to destroy it. Yet India might not be able to take care of the problem, because Bhutan's turmoil is part of the instability of the whole region. From Kashmir to Assam, the Himalayas have become a place of great disorder. One root of this disorder, notably in the Eastern Himalayas, is a large population of unsettled villagers who move back and forth between the crowded Brahmaputra plains and the lower hills of the Himalayas. The only resort of these people, stricken by poverty and social fatality, is to political activism and religious bitterness. Even if it solves its current problem, Bhutan, with the lowest population density in the region, will never be sheltered from new migrations challenging its culture, political system and even its identity.

In the short term, only a dialogue between Bhutan, Nepal and India can solve Bhutan's problem. Yet the current crisis should not be treated only as a domestic issue. All the states of the region, including Bangladesh and Pakistan, have a part to play. In the long term, only a forum that can address the economic problems and propose political solutions will be able to bring peace to the Himalayan foothills. SAARC could provide such a forum. Yet this implies a revision of its charter and a moral and political commitment of all nations to address the real issues without ulterior motives.<sup>92</sup> In this respect, the regional circle could truly become the best asset in Bhutan's foreign policy.

Finally, the third challenge will be Bhutan's ability, and to some

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extent its need, to expand its diplomatic relations further. China will be a major actor to watch even if Bhutan does not consider any specific move towards Beijing at the moment. Yet bilateralism could become more significant for the kingdom on the international scene. Bhutan will have to adapt to the new international order. In this respect, the development of a relationship with the US will probably be one of the main items on the Bhutanese agenda. At the same time, Bhutan will be keen to reinforce its position in international forums. Its recent election to the UN Economic and Social Council has been a remarkable achievement. It proves Bhutan's commitment to modernisation through diplomatic innovation and will have a major role in enhancing the kingdom's international status.<sup>93</sup>

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### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> The meeting between the Indian Prime Minister and the King of Bhutan, at Paro on 23 September 1958, led to the formulation of the first development plan for the kingdom.
- <sup>2</sup> After the independence of India, Bhutan successfully maintained the status quo it had established in 1910 with the British, by signing in 1949 a treaty which enabled India to "guide" it in its external relations.
- <sup>3</sup> Bhutan has formally established diplomatic relations with India (1971), Bangladesh (1973), Nepal (1983), Maldives (1984), Switzerland (1985), Denmark (1985), Sweden (1985), EEC (1985), Netherlands (1985), Norway (1985), Kuwait (1986), Japan (1986), Finland (1986), South Korea (1987), Sri Lanka (1987), Austria (1989), Pakistan (1990), Thailand (1991), and Bahrain (1992). It also has consular relations with Hong Kong (1982), Singapore (1982) and Macau (1985).
- <sup>4</sup> Bhutanese embassies are located in Dhaka, New Delhi, Kuwait City, Geneva (UN) and New York (UN).
- <sup>5</sup> This includes all international organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental: *Yearbook of International Organizations 1991/1992*, Union of International Organizations (New York).
- <sup>6</sup> Organisations such as Helvetas, FAO, UNDP, WFP and WHO maintain a resident representative in Thimphu.
- <sup>7</sup> In 1992 Bhutan was elected to the UN ECOSOC.

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- <sup>8</sup> In May 1985 Bhutan hosted a meeting of the South Asian foreign ministers which paved the way for the establishment of the association in December of the same year. But the kingdom declined to host the 1986 SAARC summit, despite being second after Bangladesh in the SAARC alphabetical pecking order. (The first summit was held in Dhaka in 1985.) The lack of adequate facilities available in the kingdom explained this decision. According to recent reports, Bhutan has also expressed its inability to host the 1993-4 summit: *The Independent*, Kathmandu, 30 Dec. 1992.
- <sup>9</sup> Sikkim was not truly an independent country. After being a protectorate of the British Crown until 1947, it was rapidly transformed into a protectorate of the newly independent Government of India and was then integrated into the Indian Union in 1975.
- <sup>10</sup> Bhutan was admitted to the NAM at the summit meeting in Algiers in September 1973.
- <sup>11</sup> This classical typology in diplomatic studies has already been applied to Bhutan for the 1959-1962 period in Holsti 1982.
- <sup>12</sup> At its longest east-west dimension, Bhutan stretches around 300 kilometers, and it measures 170 kilometers at its maximum north-south dimension, forming a total of 46,500 square kilometers (about 18,000 square miles), an area one third the size of Nepal.
- <sup>13</sup> According to the most recent sources, Bhutan's population is 600,000. Today, the country's population growth is estimated at 2 percent per year: Planning Commission 1991.
- <sup>14</sup> The family of Yangki, the once-influential Tibetan mistress of the late king, was allegedly associated with the assassination of the prime minister in 1964. In 1974, a Tibetan connection (that could have included the Dalai Lama's own brother) was also suspected to be part of a plot to murder the king. None of these allegations have been proved so far.
- <sup>15</sup> "Borders of Bhutan: Peking's bid for direct talks": *The Hindu*, 31 Jan. 1961.
- <sup>16</sup> The 1949 Indo-Bhutan treaty makes no reference to India's defence of Bhutan, except what might be inferred from Article 2. Prime Minister Nehru, however, declared in 1959 that acts of aggression against Bhutan would be taken as acts of aggression against India itself: *Lok Sabha Records*, November 1959. For this reason, the defence of Bhutan has been the joint responsibility of the Government of Bhutan and the Indian Military Establishment. The IMTRAT (Indian Military Training Team), for instance, has been playing a major role in the training of the local army, estimated to have 5,000 men.
- <sup>17</sup> Bhutan joined the UN in 1971 under Indian patronage, but the UNDP did not open an office in Thimphu until 1979. Up until then, India would have objected to foreigners becoming too much and too directly involved in Bhutan.
- <sup>18</sup> This is purely conjectural. During the 1960s Bhutan did not make any official move to negotiate directly with China.
- <sup>19</sup> The only organised political forces have been limited to the Nepali Bhutanese community. In 1952 a few leaders of this community formed the Bhutan

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- National Congress, a shadow political party that existed only outside Bhutan. One of its demands was a closer association with India. See Rose 1977.
- <sup>20</sup> During the mid-1970s relations between Bhutan and India experienced some wavering. Although Bhutan was not responsible for the situation, the ambiguity of bilateral relations during this period, which was later on rapidly dissipated, was reinforced by the claims of some young Bhutanese who wanted a more rapid diversification of foreign relations and who resented their country's dependence upon India.
  - <sup>21</sup> Today advancement in the civil service is less rapid than it was in the 1970s. This situation could create tensions in the administration.
  - <sup>22</sup> This was the second influx of Nepalese into Bhutan. The first immigrants — who have been relatively well integrated — arrived at the beginning of the century.
  - <sup>23</sup> "Officially, the government stated that 28 percent of the national population was Nepalese in the late 1980s, but unofficial estimates ran as high as 30 to 40 percent, and Nepalese were estimated to constitute a majority in Southern Bhutan. The number of legal permanent Nepalese residents in the late 1980s may have been as few as 15 percent of the total population however": Robert L. Worden, "Nepal and Bhutan, Country Area Study" (to be published).
  - <sup>24</sup> Leaders of the Nepali Bhutanese community created several political groups in Nepal and India which organised demonstrations in southern Bhutan. The Gurkha Movement have supported some of these groups.
  - <sup>25</sup> According to UNHCR estimates, 70,000 people have moved to Nepal since 1989. Yet a large number seem to be Nepali Indians and not Nepali Bhutanese.
  - <sup>26</sup> The fourth Druk Gyalpo has shown the same pragmatism as his father. He rarely travels, but he has always kept an eye on foreign policy issues.
  - <sup>27</sup> After the assassination of the prime minister in 1964, some members of the National Assembly expressed their concern about the risks of Indian interference in domestic affairs. When the Indian adviser, Nari Rustomji, was transferred by his government to another position in 1966, Bhutan and India mutually agreed that no successor would be appointed.
  - <sup>28</sup> Rose 1977: 55.
  - <sup>29</sup> Tourism has been an important industry and the country's largest foreign exchange earner since 1974, but the government has decided to limit the number of tourists and has restricted access seasonally and to certain sites.
  - <sup>30</sup> Siraj Chowdhury, "Bhutan Maintains Separate Identity", *Holiday Dhaka*, 14 May 1983.
  - <sup>31</sup> *The Hindu*, 3 June 1960.
  - <sup>32</sup> Foreign Minister of Bhutan, News Conference, Thimphu, June 1974: *Indian Express*, 7 June 1974.
  - <sup>33</sup> The Indian prime minister Narasimha Rao recently declared: "India undertakes to give guidance when it is asked for", *Himal*, Nov/Dec 1993, p. 33.
  - <sup>34</sup> In the past, some countries have been denied this privilege. In 1920 the League of Nations refused membership to Liechtenstein because it had allegedly

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surrendered some of its sovereignty to Switzerland. Mongolia was only admitted to the UN in 1962 after it had diversified its foreign relations; in 1945 it had been denied membership because the USSR was underwriting its budget for foreign affairs. During the 1950s Nepal's admission to the UN was delayed because of its treaties with India and the British.

- 35 These remarks acknowledge or (in the case of Pakistan) regret the special relationship between Bhutan and India.
- 36 Three transit agreements have been signed with India in 1972, 1983 and 1990.
- 37 Bhutan has not experienced the pressure that India has exercised on Nepal, and has enjoyed a privileged status as the confidence between the two countries has been absolute. In 1990 New Delhi extended the last transit treaty by six months in order to facilitate the transition to a new treaty during the negotiation of some additional provisions.
- 38 The case of Bangladesh is highly significant. Apart from its strong sympathy for the Bengali liberation movement, one of the main reasons that led Bhutan to establish formal relations with the newly-created state of Bangladesh was the prospect of a new trading partner. Bangladesh has provided the kingdom with an alternative, easily accessible market and source of supplies and has also created another outlet to the rest of the world that Bhutan highly appreciates.
- 39 Because of the increasing coordination of the two countries' economies, Bhutan is very vulnerable to fluctuations and crises in the Indian economy. For instance, high inflation rates in India have immediate and exaggerated repercussions in Bhutan.
- 40 The bilateral donors are Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.
- 41 Self-reliance has depended on Bhutan's ability to create inflows of foreign currency. The kingdom's first assertion of its international personality was its decision to issue postage stamps. This was not only an act of sovereignty but also provided the kingdom with its largest source of foreign exchange. Hydro power has also proved to be a very lucrative source of revenue. The Chukha power plant, built with Indian finance and technology, has become one of Bhutan's most decisive assets. Only 3 per cent of the plant output is used domestically, the rest being exported to India. One of the main features of the 7th Five Year Plan (1992-7) is to "reduce reliance on external sources of funding and to encourage the production of goods and services that can compete in export markets".
- 42 "Trouble in the Kingdom", *Newsweek*, 29 Oct. 1990.
- 43 Such a move could have been tried by Moscow as it was with Tibetan refugees through Mongolia, by stressing a common cultural and religious heritage. Because India would not have accepted it, Moscow did not take any specific initiative towards Bhutan.
- 44 This does not mean that Thimphu shares all the views of New Delhi. It merely has a realistic approach to its own capabilities and limits. The relationship between the two countries has always been very practical. When the king meets

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with the prime minister of India he does not usually have broad discussions on regional and international problems. The conversations are always focused on bilateral issues, even technical matters. They exclude any linkage with extraneous concerns.

- 45 Some of the newly-born European Republics are rather typical in this regard. One of their main concerns has been to open missions abroad and to attract foreign embassies onto their soil, whatever the future consequences may be in terms of financial credibility and policy orientation.
- 46 Interview with the king in *Asiaweek*, 27 Sept. 1985.
- 47 Another factor inhibiting Bhutan's establishment of additional diplomatic missions abroad is the cost.
- 48 According to Ravi Verma 1988: 213, the US tried to establish early contacts with Bhutan, notably through Japanese "tourist expeditions". This assertion has not been proved yet. The only tangible early contact was the first visit to Bhutan by a US ambassador. In April 1962, John Kenneth Galbraith, the US ambassador to India, made a two-day visit to the kingdom (*Baltimore Sun*, 1 May 1962). The US, however, did not have any specific interest in Bhutan at that time.
- 49 Mamood-i-Elahi 1986: 514 ff.; *Asia 1990 Yearbook* 84; Kohli 1986.
- 50 *Asiaweek*, 27 Sept. 1985, p. 44.
- 51 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is organised into 7 divisions: the multilateral and bilateral economic division, the SAARC division and protocol division, the administration division and accounts division, the policy planning division and the territorial division.
- 52 Before this date the kingdom was the only member of SAARC not to have a delegate on the board of directors. There is hardly a single Bhutanese citizen working in the staff of an international organisation.
- 53 A Foreign Affairs Department had been established within the Ministry of Development in 1970 and was headed by the Development Secretary Dawa Tsering, who became Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1972.
- 54 King Jigme Singye Wangchuk was a close friend of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The relationship between Bhutan and Kuwait and the friendship between the Himalayan kingdom and Switzerland are also good examples of personal diplomacy. Emir Jaber is a personal friend of the King. Swiss technical cooperation with Bhutan started twenty years ago, initially on the basis of a private initiative.
- 55 The appointment of honorary consuls and the creation of Friendship Associations in foreign countries (such an association has been recently created in the US), are often the first steps before formal diplomatic contacts.
- 56 Bhutan has already started to develop a more aggressive diplomacy. In 1989 an officer of the Royal Embassy in Delhi was asked to take care of communications. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has also been involved in intensive consultations in order to explain the position of his government to the international community and to prevent potential conflicts or public



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accusations in international forums like the UN. Negotiations have been opened with Nepal on the refugee issue. The Foreign Minister also met with human rights organisations and with some officials of the US State Department during a visit to Washington in September 1992.

<sup>57</sup> The three chronological circles, which seek to explain a complex development over three decades, are of necessity in part artificial. Yet they do help to highlight the main trends of Bhutan's diplomacy which are highly "time-related".

**1960s: the "Indian years".** Ten years after the PRC occupied Tibet and in the context of the Sino-Indian war, Bhutan decided to restructure its foreign policy. It abandoned isolation for alignment with India on security and on political and economic issues. In the late 1960s India became the major and even the only aid contributor to Bhutan's development program. Since that time cooperation between the two countries has become closer. Yet this cooperation was never as exclusive as during the 1960s.

**1970s: the "international years".** Bhutan sought to move towards a broader range of international relations as early as the mid-1960s. At that time, however, India still had many reservations about an expansion of Bhutan's involvement in international forums. It was only when India began to feel more secure of its own position in the sub-continent and contemplated a normalisation of relations with China that Bhutan could get international status. The expansion of the multilateral circle really began in the 1970s with Bhutan's admission to the UN, and expanded through the 1980s.

**1980s: the "regional years".** After joining SAARC in 1983 Bhutan took various regional initiatives that corresponded with the political crisis in India. It should be noted that Bhutan's first initiative in South Asia was the establishment of diplomatic relations with Bangladesh in 1973.

<sup>58</sup> We can easily design a diagram that goes from a degree of zero, which corresponds to the situation prior to 1961, to the maximum degree of international exposure, which was potentially reached in 1971. The three circles are concentric, meaning that they are all interdependent and were generated from one to another. Chronologically, the outer circle was only the second step in the growth of diplomacy. Internationalisation in itself was not a goal for Bhutan, but an instrument intended to reinforce its sovereignty. The regional circle, which was only designed during the 1980s, more than ten years after the emergence of the multilateral circle, is much more consistent with Bhutan's priorities and concerns, which are mainly regional. Bhutan was only able to acquire a regional status after it had asserted its international position. In this respect, the outer circle can be considered as the gate to the regional sphere.

<sup>59</sup> By this treaty, which was a revision of an earlier treaty signed in 1865, Bhutan accepted for the first time to be guided by the advice of the British Government in regard to its external relations, and the British, in return, undertook to abstain from interfering in the internal affairs of Bhutan.

<sup>60</sup> The States Ministry under Patel and V.P. Menon was not "hostile" to the idea of incorporating the Himalayan states into the Union.

<sup>61</sup> The treaty was signed in Darjeeling on 8 August 1949.

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<sup>62</sup> *The Hindu* (Madras), 14 July 1952.

<sup>63</sup> In spite of India's attitude, Bhutan has always referred to its mission in New Delhi as an embassy.

<sup>64</sup> In early 1976 ambassadors were exchanged and regular meetings came to be held every year alternatively in Beijing and in New Delhi.

<sup>65</sup> One of the charges made by Indira Gandhi during the campaign for the Lok Sabha elections in 1980 was that "the Janata government had conducted its foreign policy in so spineless a manner that even Bhutan had begun to create a problem to India".

<sup>66</sup> Jigme Singye Wangchuk became king in 1972 after the death of his father, but the coronation ceremony was held in 1974.

<sup>67</sup> After the ceremony, the Chinese representative, Ma Mu-ming, held private meetings with the king and Bhutanese officials: *Xinhua*, 1 June 1974.

<sup>68</sup> India wanted to keep the Kampuchea seat vacant, while Bhutan voted to allow it to be occupied by a representative of the ousted Pol Pot government. Bhutan has condemned the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnamese troops.

<sup>69</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 Oct. 1982.

<sup>70</sup> The independence of Nepal has proved to be an illusion. Nepal has developed a strong national personality and has acquired a broader international status than its Himalayan neighbour. However, the gains of its policy have been very narrow and have often resulted in useless crises, such as the trade embargo imposed by India on Nepal in 1989, as a retaliatory response to Nepal's purchase of weapons from China.

<sup>71</sup> Since 1984, the Chinese and Bhutanese Governments have met every year. The last round of talks was held during the autumn of 1992 in Beijing. On this occasion, the Bhutanese Foreign Minister made an unprecedented visit to Tibet.

<sup>72</sup> For the time being China's priority in South Asia seems to be the normalisation of its relations with India. In 1989, China chose not to interfere in the Indo-Nepalese crisis. The same attitude is guiding its current policy towards Bhutan.

<sup>73</sup> *Far Eastern Economic Review, Asia Yearbook*, 1977, p. 23

<sup>74</sup> The second paragraph of the constitution of the UPU provides that "any sovereign country which is not a member of the United Nations may apply for admission as a Member Country of the Union".

<sup>75</sup> The Bhutanese permanent mission to the United Nations in New York was opened in 1972.

<sup>76</sup> In the wake of the China-India war Bhutan considered membership of the UN to be the only way to avoid the fate of Tibet, should China impose its rule on the whole Himalayan region.

<sup>77</sup> India delayed this because it feared that Bhutan could emulate Nepal, which combined admission to the UN with foreign policy innovations intended to revise its special relationship with its sponsor.

<sup>78</sup> Contrary to some allegations, the Bhutanese delegate in New York does not take

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the advice of his Indian colleague. This might have been the case at the very beginning when the kingdom needed some guidance and technical support to function properly within the UN machinery. In some other cases, India might have tried to exercise pressure on the Bhutanese mission on specific issues, but this is common practice at the UN.

<sup>79</sup> *The Indian Express*, 7 June 1974.

<sup>80</sup> From 1972 (27th session) to 1990 (45th session), 302 differences have been recorded during votes at the General Assembly. (Any divergent vote is called a difference: Yes/No, Yes/Abstention, No/Abstention, Yes/non participation, No/non participation). However only 10 of these differences are "totally divergent votes" (Yes/No). The others are technicalities or are still difficult to interpret.

<sup>81</sup> In 1975 Bhutan and four other landlocked Asian countries (Afghanistan, Laos, Mongolia and Nepal) were granted a special status as "least developed landlocked countries" by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in coordination with UNCTAD and UNDP.

<sup>82</sup> The kingdom voted in favour of resolutions establishing such a zone in the Middle East and in South America. It also approved a resolution related to the review of and supplement to the comprehensive study of nuclear-weapon-free zones. India abstained on all these issues.

<sup>83</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, 7 June 1974.

<sup>84</sup> A complete study of Bhutan's voting record at the UN is included in the author's thesis (to be published).

<sup>85</sup> Bhutan has always participated in votes condemning apartheid in South Africa.

<sup>86</sup> On two different occasions related to world politics, Bhutan has adopted a position totally divergent from India's approach. In 1979 the kingdom condemned the invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnamese troops. In 1980, it abstained from voting in favour of a resolution calling for the immediate and total withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. However, its position later proved to favour this resolution. On both issues India abstained, considering in the first case its strategy in Asia vis-à-vis China, and in the second case its special relations with the Soviet Union.

<sup>87</sup> Bhutan is a member of all the major international organisations (see diagram).

<sup>88</sup> Japan ranks first among the (non-Indian) aid donors to Bhutan. In 1990 it provided 23 per cent of non-Indian aid, before UNDP (18 per cent), UNICEF (8 per cent), the Asian Development Bank (7.5 per cent), WFP (7 per cent), Helvetas (6 per cent), Denmark (5 per cent) and Germany (3.5 per cent).

<sup>89</sup> According to Indian sources (*Times of India* and *Hindustan Standard*, 22 July 1959), China had prepared a secret plan to establish a Himalayan Federation consisting of Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and NEFA under her suzerainty. During the late 1950s and the early 1960s, Nepal had its own proposal. According to George Patterson, ("A Himalayan Confederation", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6 May 1965), in 1956 the Prime Minister of Nepal, Tanka Prasad Acharya, proposed to the Prime Minister of Bhutan, among others, that

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Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan should form a federation. Jigme Dorji turned the proposal down. During the early 1970s Bhutan also chose not to endorse Nepal's proposal to create a zone of peace in the Himalayas.

<sup>90</sup> Some newspapers in Nepal have been very supportive of the insurgents in Bhutan. Most of the parties and political groups which coordinate agitation in southern Bhutan have offices in Nepal.

<sup>91</sup> Nepal refers to these people as "refugees". The majority however seem to be economic migrants.

<sup>92</sup> During the 71st Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan, some members of the assembly suggested that the King may wish to consider raising the problem of southern Bhutan during the SAARC Summit, as a possible means of finding a solution. The king however informed the Assembly that the SAARC charter did not allow bilateral and contentious issues to be raised (*Kuensel, Assembly Supplement*, 14 Nov. 1992). This situation is not likely to change in the near future as SAARC experiences some difficulties of its own.

<sup>93</sup> Modernisation through the opening of flight connections and the development of telecommunications has already provided Bhutan with many foreign policy opportunities.

# Language Policy in Bhutan

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The linguistic situation in Bhutan is complex. Nineteen different languages are spoken in this Himalayan kingdom, which is only slightly larger than the Netherlands but comprises considerably less habitable surface area. The population numbers approximately 650,000 and there is no majority language. The Royal Government of Bhutan has adopted an official language policy aimed at establishing a single national language and also accommodating and preserving the country's linguistic diversity. The government's language policy is a balanced approach characterised by two complementary policy lines. The first line of policy is the promotion of Dzongkha as the national language. The second line of policy is the preservation and, indeed, study of the country's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. Here I shall provide a sketch of the ethnolinguistic make-up of the country, explain the rationale behind both of the Royal Government's language policy guidelines, and elucidate how both guidelines are being implemented in practice.<sup>1</sup>

## The linguistic situation in Bhutan

This section is a concise sketch of the ethnolinguistic situation in Bhutan, of which I provide a more detailed and historical account elsewhere (van Driem 1993b). Reliable language statistics are provided in the table below. These statistics are based on unreleased Bhutanese census data, estimates by knowledgeable foreign specialists working in Bhutan, local village authorities and my own roof counts during the linguistic survey work which has taken me throughout Bhutan. In order to properly assess these statistics, however, certain background information is required.

First of all, Dzongkha is the only language with a native literary tradition in Bhutan. Both Lepcha and Nepali are also literary

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languages, but neither has ever played any role as a literary language in Bhutan. Dzongkha derives from the local vulgate of Old Tibetan through many centuries of independent linguistic evolution on Bhutanese soil. Linguistically, Dzongkha can be qualified as the natural modern descendant in Bhutan of the language of which Classical Tibetan or Chöke, literally "language of the dharma", is the literary exponent. Chöke is the language in which sacred Buddhist texts, medical and scientific treatises and, indeed, all learned works have been written throughout the course of Bhutan's history. Dzongkha is the native language of Western Bhutan, comprising eight of the twenty districts of the kingdom, viz. Thimphu, Punakha, Gasa, Wangdi Phodr'a, Paro, Hä, D'agana and Chukha.

Literally, Dzongkha means the kha "language" spoken in the *dzong* "fortress". These *dzongs* dominate the mountainous landscape of Bhutan from east to west and have traditionally been both centres of military and political power as well as centres of learning. Dzongkha is thus the cultivated form of the native language of Western Bhutan, the inhabitants of which as well as their language have traditionally been known as 'Ngalong. A popular but false folk etymology for the term is that it means "the first to rise" to the teachings of Buddhism in the land. An early form of Lamaist Buddhism had already taken root in Bhutan before the *Einwanderung* of the 'Ngalong. The term 'Ngalong probably derives from 'Ngenlung "ancient region", a term first recorded for the people of Shä and Paro by the Tibetan sage Künkhen 'Longchen Ramjam (1308-1363) during his travels through central Bhutan. The 'Ngalong, or 'Ngalop, colonized Western Bhutan from central Tibet during the religious persecutions under the reign of the Tibetan king 'Langdarma (r. 836-842) in the 9th century, just four centuries after the Anglo-Saxons first came to Great Britain and brought with them the language that was to become English.

It should be kept in mind that the term "Dzongkha" is used in various, linguistically distinct senses in Bhutan to mean (1) formal, written Dzongkha as used in official documents, which is in some cases essentially Chöke, although more vernacular registers are also used in writing, (2) the cultivated form of the vernacular as spoken in formal situations, (3) the colloquial spoken language of the 'Ngalop of Western Bhutan. This explains why a native 'Ngalop of Western Bhutan might say that he has a poor command of Dzongkha, by which

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he could mean either the cultivated formal style registers of spoken Dzongkha or the written language. It also explains in which sense Dzongkha is said to have an ancient literary tradition because Chöke is to Dzongkha as Latin is to Portuguese, and the process of vernacularisation currently in progress in Bhutan has numerous parallels with the linguistic situation in the mediaeval Romance world. Just as Latin used to exercise and continues to exercise great influence on the vocabulary of the Romance languages and even English (e.g., video, multilateral, disinfecant, international, credit), so too Chöke, the language of learning and liturgy, continues to strongly influence modern spoken and written Dzongkha. This influence is manifest in the vocabulary, where Dzongkha has acquired many words directly from Chöke, and in the liturgical Chöke pronunciation of some literary words.

Sanggä Doji (forthcoming) provides an interesting list of traditional Bhutanese poems and songs extant in Dzongkha vernacular. During the tenure of the ninth jëkhembo Gäwa Shaca Rinche (1744-55), a "tax" known as the *tsünthrä* specified that one male offspring from each household was to enter monastic life. Sumd'a Trashi of Shänyishokha village who, although already a married father, was compelled to enter monastic life because he was an only son. His melancholic verse narrative of the genre known as *loze* was sung in the vernacular and is still a popular Dzongkha poem today. During the reign of the 37th Desi or "Deva Rājā"<sup>2</sup> Trashi Doji (1847-51), a servant to the Gasa 'Lam by the name of Singge, betrothed a young maiden named Galem, but their parents denied them the right to marry. The grief-stricken Galem took her own life, and her moving song of lament of the genre known as *co'lu* is sung in Dzongkha to this day. Similarly, the Dzongkha *loze* of the *zimbö* of Wangdi Phodr'a, Pëmi Tshë'wang Trashi of Shäkazhi, commemorates the tragic war between Trongsa and Bumthang during the reign of 43rd Desi 'Nädzi Päsa (1861-64). The vernacular *loze* of Jami Tshë'wang Pädrö of Shäphang Ü village commemorates the skill and distinction of Bhutan's first hereditary monarch 'Ugä 'Wangchu during his performance as arbiter in the Tibetan-British negotiations of 1904. In addition to these famous airs, old formal songs of the *zhungdra* genre have traditionally been sung in Dzongkha vernacular throughout the various different language communities of Bhutan.

Legal documents and contracts are generally still written in Chöke, although short stories, for example, have been written in Dzongkha, but legal contracts and short stories represent opposite ends of a stylistic spectrum. In writing, the more formal the subject and style, the more the use of Chöke prevails above that of the vernacular. Radio programmes and news broadcasts are in Dzongkha, as well as the national weekly newspaper *Kuensel*. Traditional folksongs and dances are in Dzongkha, and some western drama, such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, has been quite successfully translated and performed in modern Dzongkha.

Secondly, today Dzongkha is not the only *lingua franca* in Bhutan. Tshangla, or Sháchop, has long served as a *lingua franca* between various population groups in Eastern Bhutan, and in recent historical times both Nepali and English have come to serve as *lingue franche* in various domains, Nepali predominantly in the south, and English throughout the kingdom. In Thimphu, the capital, every language of Bhutan can be heard.

Thirdly, two languages, Tibetan and Nepali, are not originally native to Bhutan, and the antiquity of the residence in Bhutan of the Lepcha-speaking population is moot. Tibetan is spoken by the relatively modest number of Tibetan refugees in Bhutan and by their offspring. Second-generation Tibetans, however, are linguistically assimilated and speak Dzongkha, sometimes in addition to another indigenous local language. Nepali, on the other hand, is the native language of a considerable minority which has in recent history come to inhabit the country's southern belt. Nepalis began arriving in Bhutan in the first half of the twentieth century, and this migration is well documented in the historical sources (cf. van Driem 1993b). Most Nepalis in Bhutan, however, are of more recent immigration. Nepali-speakers are not losing their language in the same way as second-generation Tibetans, nor are they under any pressure to do so. In point of fact, no pressure is, or ever has been, deliberately exerted on any group in Bhutan to assimilate linguistically in this sense, although socio-economic and demographic pressures on one small ethnolinguistic group, the native "Monpas" of the Black Mountains, is unmistakably leading to the extinction of their language. It is unclear whether the Lepcha-speaking minority of Samchi district represents an ancient native population, as the Lepcha do in neighbouring Sikkim. It is certain, however, that the

Lepcha have inhabited portions of southwestern Bhutan for no less than several centuries. Native language retention amongst the Bhutanese Lepcha is perhaps even higher than amongst their brethren in Sikkim.

Fourthly, it is a linguistically defensible position to consider Khengkha, Bumthangkha and Kurtöpka to be dialects of a single "Greater Bumthang" language. However, these dialects or dialect groups are listed separately in the table below in recognition both of linguistic differences and of the strong ethnic or regional identity felt by the speakers.

Finally, the genetic groupings in the table show linguistic affinity and do not reflect ethnic divisions. For example, no special ethnic bond exists between speakers of "the Eastern Bodish languages" which sets them apart from other Bhutanese. There are ethnic groups in Bhutan, to be sure, which can be defined along cultural lines. The Lhokpu are animists who bury their dead in cylindrical sepulchres above ground and, like the Lepcha, have a distinct native costume. The Brokpa live in yakherd communities and wear a peculiar native dress, although speakers of other languages as well, particularly Dzongkha speakers in Laya, Lunana and 'Lingzhi, lead a similar lifestyle and, in Laya, also have a distinct native costume similar to that of the Brokpas of Mera and Sakteng in Eastern Bhutan. A large proportion of the allochthonous Nepali-speaking population in the south practise the Hindu religion. Some Nepali-speakers are Buddhist, however, e.g. the Tamang, and many practise an indigenous eastern Nepalese form of shamanism with only a historically recent veneer of Hinduism, e.g. the Limbu and Rai. The Nepali-speaking population, who had already abandoned Nepali costume in favour of European attire, have recently taken to wearing Bhutanese dress in keeping with the government's policy on national dress.

These cultural differences are not the topic of the present discussion and have been discussed in their historical context elsewhere (van Driem 1991a, 1993b). It is, however, germane to the issue of language policy to note that, despite the large number of languages spoken in the country, Bhutan is a surprisingly culturally homogeneous country. The native Bhutanese dress is the same throughout most of the kingdom. The vast majority of the population was converted to Lamaist Buddhism a millennium ago. The now prevailing orders are the

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popular, unreformed 'Nyingmapa order and the Drup ("Drukpa" in Chöke) or "Dragon" sub-order of the Kájüp or "Oral Transmission" order, which is the state religion. Yet no attempt has been made to convert the Lhokpu to Buddhism, and the Royal Government of Bhutan has even constructed Hindu temples and subsidized Hindu religious education in the south.

Central Bodish languages	Dzongkha transliteration	number of speakers
Dzongkha	(rDzong-kha)	160,000
Chocangacakha	(Khyod-ca-nga-ca-kha)	20,000
Brokpa	('Brog-pa)	5,000
Brokkat	('Brog-skad)	300
Lakha	(La-kha)	8,000
B'ökha (Tibetan)	(Bod-kha)	1,000
East Bodish languages		
Bumthangkha	(Bum-thang-kha)	30,000
Khengkha	(Khengs-kha)	40,000
Kurtöpka	(Kur-stodp-kha, Kur-stod-pa'i kha)	10,000
'Nyenkha	(sNyan-kha, Hen-kha, Mang-sde-pa'i kha)	10,000
Chalikha	(Phya'-li-kha)	1,000
Dzalakha	(Dza-la-kha, Dza-la-pa'i kha)	15,000
Monpa, 'Olekha	(Mon-pa-kha, Mon-pa'i kha, O-le-kha)	1,000
D'akpakha	(Dwags-pa'i kha)	1,000
Other Bodic languages of Bhutan		
Tshangla (Shächop)	(Shar-phyogsp)	138,000
Lhokpu	(no Dzongkha spelling)	2,500
Gongduk	(spurious Dzongkha spelling: dGongs-'dus)	2,000
Lepcha	(no Dzongkha spelling)	2,000
Indo-Aryan		
Nepali	(Lho-mtshams-kha)	156,000

The predominant language in Western Bhutan is Dzongkha. The Dzongkha language area covers well over a third of the country's surface area. The predominant language in Eastern Bhutan is Tshangla, known in Dzongkha as Shächobi kha "The language of the easterners, or Shächop", and the modern Shächop appear to represent an ancient population of Eastern Bhutan. The predominant language in central Bhutan is Bumthang with the closely related Khengkha and Kurtöpka. The predominant language in the southern belt is Nepali, known in Dzongkha as Lhotshamkha "southern border language".

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Other important regional languages include Dzalakha in northeastern Bhutan and 'Nyenkha, also known as Henkha or Mangdebikha, in the Black Mountains, and Chocangacakha, a sister language of Dzongkha, spoken along the most populous portion of the Kurichu Valley.

Lakha, Brokkat and Brokpa are languages of what were originally pastoral yakherd communities. Lakha is spoken in the north of the Black Mountains. Brokkat is spoken in the village of D'ur in northern Bumthang. Brokpa is spoken in the alpine yakherd communities of Mera and Sakteng in Eastern Bhutan. A Khampa dialect of Tibetan is spoken by yakherds who tend the herds of affluent Dzala speakers in the north of Trashi'yangtse district.

The Lhokpu represent the ethnolinguistic remnant of the primordial population of Western Bhutan, and Lhokpu or a closely related language appears to have been the substrate language for Dzongkha, which provides an explanation for the various ways in which Dzongkha differs from Tibetan. 'Olekha is the linguistic remnant of the primordial population of the Black Mountains, and Gongduk is the modern ethnolinguistic representative of an ancient population of central Bhutan before the southward expansion of the ancient East Bodish tribes.

**The national language**

In 1961 His Late Majesty King Jimi Doji 'Wangchu decreed Dzongkha the national language of the Kingdom of Bhutan, thereby conferring official status to the role which Dzongkha had acquired in the course of Bhutanese history. Dzongkha has traditionally served as the spoken vernacular of the royal courts, the military élite, educated nobility, government and administration at least as far back as the twelfth century. Because of the role of Dzongkha in the emergence of Bhutan as a modern state and because of the common Chöke literary tradition of the country, modern Dzongkha was a natural and obvious choice for the national language. This choice is generally felt to be appropriate throughout Bhutan, and Dzongkha constitutes a component of the national identity. For example, even in the extreme northeast of the kingdom, speakers of the Dzala language call Dzongkha *garkê*, which means "the language of the *garpas*". *Garpa* in Dzala means "official" or "chief" (*pön* in Dzongkha). The Dzala term therefore reflects the ancient status of Dzongkha as the language of government and

administration in the far northeast of the kingdom. In 1909, the first Western description of modern Dzongkha by St. Quintin Byrne of the India Police appeared under the title of *A Colloquial Grammar of the Bhutanese Language*, in which the Dzongkha material is presented in an improvised romanisation and the main grammatical features are described "of the language spoken by the people whose habitat is Bhutan".

Dzongkha is closely related to Dränjoke or, as it is called in Dzongkha, Dränjobikha, the national language of the erstwhile Kingdom of Sikkim. Dränjoke is the *kê* "language" of Dränjo "the rice district", i.e. Sikkim. There are several different dialects of Dzongkha, particularly in the far north and far west. The Dzongkha spoken in Hâ has a character of its own and is the Dzongkha dialect most resembling Dränjoke. The dialects of the alpine yakherd communities of Laya, Lunana and 'Lingzhi in northwestern Bhutan have a pronounced *couleur locale* resulting mainly from structural and lexical similarities with Tibetan. The standard dialect of Dzongkha is spoken in Wang, the traditional name for the Thimphu Valley, and Thê, as the Punakha Valley traditionally used to be known. There are also several highly divergent dialects of Dzongkha spoken in the south, e.g. in Päsakha east of Phüntsho'ling.

Dzongkha has many avid supporters amongst speakers of other languages of the kingdom, and native Dzongkha speakers in fact constitute a minority of the staff of the Dzongkha Development Commission, the organ of the Royal Government of Bhutan dedicated to the advancement of the national language. Dzongkha is spoken as a *lingua franca* throughout Bhutan, although in the east and in the south it shares this function with Tshangla and Nepali respectively, and Dzongkha is simultaneously the official language of the kingdom. Together Dzongkha and English are the administrative languages and media of formal education in Bhutan.

Education and learning have always been accorded a place of high esteem in Bhutanese culture, and the lamaseries have served as centres of education and scholarship. Traditional scholarship focused on Buddhist philosophical teaching, classical scriptures and Buddhist mental and spiritual discipline. Subjects such as history, philology, medicine, ethics and a variety of other subjects could also form part of an individual's curriculum in a Bhutanese lamasery. The vehicle for

instruction was the liturgical language Chöke, and in the course of centuries a vast quantity of learned treatises and scholarly work had been written in Chöke.

Alongside the traditional network of lamaseries, formal secular education was introduced into the country during the reign of king 'Ugä 'Wangchu (1907-26) with the opening of two schools. This number was expanded to five schools during the reign of king Jimi 'Wangchu (1926-52). In the mid 1950s during the reign of His Late Majesty Jimi Doji 'Wangchu (1952-72), it was decided to set up a nationwide network of formal secular education: sixty-one schools were built and opened throughout the country, and the school system has been expanding ever since.

Naturally, Chöke, the traditional language of learning in Bhutan, was taught at Bhutanese schools from the start. However, because of the lack of modern learning materials in Chöke, a second language had to be chosen as an ancillary medium of formal secular instruction. Until 1964, this second language was, rather surprisingly, Hindi. Modern, affordable learning materials in Hindi were readily available from neighbouring India, and the choice of a Hindi medium enabled the new system of formal secular education to get off to a quick start. Yet Hindi is neither a native language of Bhutan nor an international language, and along with Hindi medium instructional materials Bhutan also ended up importing the old-fashioned didactic methods characteristic of Indian-style formal secular education. These considerations soon led the Royal Government to abandon the Hindi medium for English in 1964. Not only were special instructional materials developed in English specifically for use in Bhutanese schools, but the Royal Government had already launched a programme for the modernisation of the national language. The liturgical and archaic Chöke was felt not to be ideally suited for modern formal secular education, and so the modern form of the language, Dzongkha, was to be the medium of instruction. In 1961 the first systematic efforts were undertaken to "modernise" and codify the national language. However, the depth of tradition was so great that the Dzongkha which was taught in the schools until 1971 was actually Chöke.

In 1971, the Dzongkha Division of the Department of Education was set up whose task it was to develop instructional materials in Dzongkha medium. The newly developed learning materials and

textbooks in Dzongkha produced by the Dzongkha Division for use in the schools have increasingly enabled the use of Dzongkha as a medium for instruction in the schools, and the work of the Dzongkha Division led to the development of entire curricula in Dzongkha for primary and secondary instruction. In 1971 the *New Method Dzongkha Hand Book* was written at the behest of His Majesty by 'Löbö 'Nádo, 'Löbö Pemala and 'Löbö Sanggä Tendzi. This book, written in Dzongkha, is a careful study of the differences between the liturgical language Chöke and modern, written Dzongkha. Also at this time, upon the instigation of Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering, Lieutenant Rinchen Tshering of the Royal Bhutanese Army and Major A. Daityar of the Indian Army produced a pamphlet entitled *A Guide to Dzongkha in Roman Alphabet* for the use of Indian army training personnel serving in the Kingdom of Bhutan. In 1977, 'Löbö 'Nádo, assisted by Dr'ásho Rindzi Doji, Boyd Michailovsky and Martine Mazaudon produced the useful *Introduction to Dzongkha* in Delhi, and in 1986 Doji Chödrö wrote the highly useful *Dzongkha Handbook*. Both booklets contain a brief introduction to Dzongkha pronunciation and script in English, some vocabulary and sample sentences.

In 1986, a special Dzongkha Advisory Committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Minister of Social Services 'Lönpo Sanggä Pänjo in order to formulate policy guidelines connected with the advancement of Dzongkha and to solve issues of standardisation, orthography and problems arising during the implementation of Dzongkha as the national medium of instruction. The beautiful *Dzongkha Dictionary*, which appeared in that same year, had been written by Künzang Thrinlä and Chöki D'öndr'u under the direction of the late 'Löbö 'Nádo, and stands out amongst the other valuable works produced by the Royal Department of Education as a work of great scholarship. Also in 1986, with the appearance of his *Miri Pinsum Integrated Dzongkha Language Book* Háp Tsentsen was the first to respond to the need for Dzongkha learning materials specifically designed for Nepali-speaking Bhutanese in the south of the kingdom. In that same year, Boyd Michailovsky wrote a "Report on Dzongkha Development" for the Department of Education of the Royal Government of Bhutan, which included a useful first study of Dzongkha phonology. This ultimately led to the study entitled "Lost syllables and tone contour in Dzongkha" by Boyd Michailovsky and Martine

Mazaudon, which appeared in 1989 and recapitulates the authors' research on Dzongkha phonology and provides diachronic explanation for the Dzongkha contour tone.

In 1989, both the Dzongkha Advisory Committee and Dzongkha Division of the Royal Department of Education were replaced by a new, independent government organ called the Dzongkha Development Commission under the chairmanship of the Minister of Finance Doji Tshering. The Dzongkha Development Commission develops curricula in Dzongkha for the Bhutanese school system, coordinates and conducts linguistic research on Dzongkha in order to produce linguistic studies for scholarly as well as didactic purposes, develops Dzongkha dictionaries, is currently developing a bilingual Dzongkha-English and English-Dzongkha dictionary, and sets standards for orthography, spelling and usage. The Dzongkha Development Commission does not only deal with all matters pertaining to the advancement of the national language, but is also responsible for all matters linguistic in Bhutan, and coordinates and conducts linguistic research on other languages of Bhutan in order to produce scholarly studies and preserve the rich linguistic heritage of Bhutan.

In addition to the increasing package of instructional materials in Dzongkha for school curricula, the Dzongkha Development Commission put out the *Dzongkha Rabsel Lamzang* in 1990, which is an expanded version of *An Introduction to Dzongkha* (1977), a phrase book written in English for foreign learners of Dzongkha. In the same year Dr'ásho Sanggä Doji of the Commission published the excellent *New Dzongkha Grammar*, written in Dzongkha for advanced native speaker education, and explaining many points of Dzongkha grammar and orthography. In the same year, Yoshiro Imaeda wrote a booklet entitled *Manual of Spoken Dzongkha* for the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers.

The Dzongkha Development Commission introduced a standard Roman orthography for Dzongkha with its *Guide to Official Dzongkha Romanization* by Geshê Jam'yang Öz'er. This orthography called "Roman Dzongkha" is based on a phonological analysis of Dzongkha, and on the 26th of September 1991 Roman Dzongkha was adopted by the Royal Government of Bhutan as the official standard, currently for use in scholarly works and the bilingual dictionary and ultimately intended for general use, although it is not meant to replace the



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traditional orthography in Bhutanese script. The romanisation is suitable both for the representation of modern Dzongkha and Bhutanese Chöke. In 1992, the Dzongkha Development Commission published *The Grammar of Dzongkha* and a *Dzongkha Language Workbook*, written in English by Geshê Jam'yang Öz'er. The former is intended for use as a linguistic reference grammar and as a Dzongkha language textbook to be used in conjunction with the workbook. A soundtrack is also currently being produced for the workbook.

The educational facilities and learning materials for the acquisition of Dzongkha in the schools are provided free-of-charge by the government. A first codification of Dzongkha grammar has been completed, and a modern Dzongkha-English and English-Dzongkha dictionary, replete with all the necessary neologisms for modern life, is currently being composed. The linguistic and historical arguments for the choice of Dzongkha as the national language are stronger than for any other language spoken in Bhutan. Because Dzongkha is the direct natural descendant of Chöke on Bhutanese soil, the language is moreover felt to be the common property of all indigenous Bhutanese, who share and pride themselves on the same literary and liturgical heritage. The language is continuously being standardized and modernized, and Dzongkha is also the best linguistically studied language in Bhutan. Because of the coordinated efforts of the Dzongkha Development Commission and the Royal Department of Education the upcoming generation now being educated in the Bhutanese schools will share Dzongkha as their common national *lingua franca*.

### **Unity through diversity**

The Royal Government of Bhutan maintains an equilibrium between her policy of the promotion of Dzongkha as the national language and her policy of the preservation and study of the country's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. This healthy balance is upheld both by the sensitive way in which these policies are actually implemented in practice in Bhutan and by the active interest of the Royal Government of Bhutan in other indigenous languages of the kingdom.

Bhutan's Minister of Foreign Affairs 'Lönpo Dawa Tsering points out that "It is a misconception to think that the promotion of Dzongkha means the suppression of other languages". Yet, it is easy to

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understand how such a misconception could arise in view of the widespread familiarity of many people with the dogmatic approach adopted by other, particularly Western, governments in the past. The linguistic policies of France have traditionally been characterised by adamant intolerance towards the use of native languages other than French, viz. Basque, Breton, Provençal, Flemish and German, in all domains of public life. In the past, governmental policy in Great Britain and Ireland was designed to encourage the demise of Cornish, Gaelic, Manx, Irish and Welsh in favour of English. In Belgium, Flemish people who understood no French were forced to defend themselves in courts of law in which only French was allowed to be spoken. Dutch colonists in South Africa who spoke only Cape Dutch, or Afrikaans, were likewise forced to defend themselves in British colonial courts in which only English was permitted. In the Netherlands, speakers of Frisian and Papiamentu have had to struggle for the recognition of certain language rights. Even Nepal, under the Rāṇā regime, pursued a policy of actively suppressing the literary traditions of the Newar and Limbu. Such ways of thinking are in sharp contrast with policy and practice in Bhutan. Whilst the Royal Government of Bhutan has designated Dzongkha as the only language of official intercourse, in practice Dzongkha is promoted in a gentle and pragmatic way, designed not to give rise to antagonism. The approach is polyglot, characteristically Bhutanese and in keeping with a benevolent Buddhist view of life.

The language of diplomacy is quite naturally English. Dzongkha and Nepali are the two languages used in the Tshödu, or National Assembly, in the same way as Dutch and French are currently both used in the Belgian parliament. In governmental committees, the language spoken is generally Dzongkha, whereas both English and Dzongkha are used in correspondence. In the southern belt of Bhutan, Dzongkha, English and Nepali are all three used as the language of administration, both as spoken languages in committee and in official correspondence. The fact that Nepali, an allochthonous language by origin, enjoys the status of language of administration in the predominantly Nepali-speaking southern belt and even of spoken language in the National Assembly is indicative of the accommodating and hospitable attitude of the Royal Government vis-à-vis the Indo-Aryan immigrant population. No such special provisions are made for

the speakers of any other indigenous language in Bhutan, even the numerous Tshangla-speaking Shâchop, but in practice language barriers are overcome in Bhutan in a friendly way. Bhutanese happily take pride in showing whatever command they have of another language of Bhutan. The haughty attitude of expecting the person addressed to conform to one's own language which is both the caricature and sad reality of the francophone-flemish conflict in Belgium and the anglophone-francophone conflict in Canada is alien to Bhutanese norms of behaviour.

On the contrary, an active interest in the many indigenous languages of the kingdom is seen as being in accordance with the governmental policy of preserving Bhutan's cultural heritage and natural habitat. It is viewed as a matter of national prestige that scholarly research on the country's indigenous languages is conducted under the auspices of the Royal Government. A "First Linguistic Survey of Bhutan" was carried out by the Dzongkha Development Commission from 1990 to 1991. This survey comprised the research results of previous fieldwork which had individually been carried out by Dr'âsho Sanggâ Doji, Hâp Tsentsen and Geshê Jam'yang Ôz'er, as well as the results of field research jointly conducted by this triumvirate in 1991. The preliminary results were published by the Commission in the *Report on the First Linguistic Survey of Bhutan* by Geshê Jam'yang Ôz'er, and in 1993 the Dzongkha Development Commission put out a more comprehensive ethnolinguistic study entitled *The Languages and Linguistic History of Bhutan* by Geshê Jam'yang Ôz'er, which also incorporated the results of additional fieldwork conducted in 1992.

The Permanent Linguistic Survey of Bhutan, initiated by the Dzongkha Development Commission in 1992, aims at producing in-depth descriptions of individual Bhutanese languages. The Permanent Linguistic Survey is a programme of ongoing linguistic research under the auspices of the Royal Government of Bhutan, which includes both the lexical and grammatical study of all of Bhutan's indigenous languages and toponymical studies, whereby the Dzongkha and Romanised spellings of place names throughout the kingdom are standardised and their local etymologies investigated. The Survey will record for posterity and make accessible to the international scholarly community the results of linguistic research on the languages of Bhutan.

Because of the current situation in southern Bhutan, it is germane to the present discussion to explain how what has been called the "southern problem" relates to the official language policy of the Royal Government. Bhutan closed its frontiers to Nepali immigrants in 1958, but no practical measures could be taken at that time to curb the flow of illegal migrants. In fact, the promise of free government-sponsored education and health facilities and arable land made Bhutan attractive to migrants. Education was not only free-of-charge, but in southern Bhutan education was even offered in Nepali medium, so that Nepali speakers in southern Bhutan enjoyed greater language rights than most of their Nepalese brethren in Assam or West Bengal. In addition to secular formal education in Nepali, the Royal Government of Bhutan funded and operated five regional Sanskrit *pāṭhshālās* in southern Bhutan to provide Bhutanese citizens of Nepali extraction with Hindu religious instruction and education in Sanskrit and literary Nepali. To encourage assimilation of the southern migrants, the Royal Government for some time even awarded subventions to couples of "mixed marriage" between native Bhutanese and Indo-Aryan immigrants.

In the early 1990s, the Royal Government of Bhutan implemented strategic administrative barriers to effectively impede the vertical social mobility of those who could not prove legal residence in the kingdom. These measures encouraged the emigration of illegal immigrants, but did not constitute a *Zwangsaussiedlung*. Whether or not the efflux of ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan can be attributed to these measures alone, the government's language policy was hardly a causative factor. Nepali medium was removed from Bhutanese schools in southern Bhutan in 1990. Yet this measure was not directly connected with the southern problem, but had a more complex background, although it did fuel the fire of the militant response. As early as the late 1980s, it had already been decided to discontinue the use of Nepali as a medium for formal education in Bhutan. The reasons for this decision were threefold. First of all, the use of Nepali medium in the south was found to be directly counter-productive to the advancement of the national language, since the accommodating stance of the Bhutanese people and authorities had effectively hampered the learning of Dzongkha by the immigrant population. Secondly, the use of Nepali medium in schools accorded special status to an originally allochthonous language which no native

language of Bhutan enjoyed, other than Dzongkha. Nepali medium was felt to have been a mistake in the same way as Hindi medium had been previously. Moreover, the use of Nepali in free educational facilities had only encouraged illegal immigration into Bhutan. Thirdly, in the 1984 National Education Plan, the Royal Department of Education had decided to adopt the controversial Fröbelian pedagogic philosophy known as the "New Approach to Primary Education" which necessitated the development of new curricula and learning materials. Western proponents of the approach advocated a more Bhutanised, "learner-centred" and "environmental" curriculum in which little stress is placed on forms of knowledge acquired by rote learning. These new materials had to be developed in both Dzongkha and English, and the Department thought it unwise to utilise its scarce financial resources for developing new curricula in Nepali as well, particularly after it had been determined that the use of Nepali medium in southern Bhutanese schools was impeding the assimilation of the immigrant population and counteracting the government policy of advancing the national language.

The closing of the five regional Sanskrit *pāṭhśālās* in southern Bhutan was not a policy decision but the direct result of terrorist activity in southern Bhutan. The Royal Government of Bhutan will not reintroduce Nepali into the school system in southern Bhutan, but the Director General of Education Dr'āsho Thrinlā Jamtsho and the Minister of Foreign Affairs 'Lönpo Dawa Tsering have both expressed the hope that the Sanskrit *pāṭhśālās* will be re-opened once the situation in southern Bhutan has normalised and the security of personnel and pupils can be guaranteed. The Royal Government has on many occasions provided subventions for the construction of Hindu shrines in southern Bhutan and continues to respect the freedom of religion of the predominantly Hindu southern Bhutanese. Alongside Dzongkha, Tshangla and English, Nepali still remains one of the four languages used by the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, and one of the three languages in which the national weekly *Kuensel* is published. As pointed out above, Dzongkha and Nepali are both used in the National Assembly, and Nepali is used in addition to Dzongkha and English both as a spoken and a written language of administration in southern Bhutan. It could be argued that the use of Nepali, even as an ancillary language of administration in southern Bhutan, is counter-productive

to the governmental policy of the advancement of Dzongkha. However, it is not part of the government's language policy to make life difficult. It may be possible to dispense with Nepali as an ancillary language of administration in the south once the upcoming generation of southern Bhutanese has received a proper education in Dzongkha. Meanwhile, language use in administrative practice in southern Bhutan remains reasonably polyglot, versatile and humane. Despite the vast differences in phonological and grammatical structure between Dzongkha and Nepali, southern Bhutanese are fervent and diligent learners of both spoken and written Dzongkha.

Elsewhere in Bhutan, local languages such as Dzalakha, Tshangla (Sháchop), Bumthang and so forth may also be heard in the regional *dzongs*. In fact, all these languages may be heard from time to time in Trashichö Dzong in Thimphu itself. Multilingualism is the normal situation, and the need for a unifying language in such a context is self-evident. This unifying language in Bhutan has always been Chöke, and now the modern daughter language, Dzongkha, has taken over this role. It is the official policy of the Royal Government of Bhutan that every Bhutanese citizen should be educated in and acquire a working command of Dzongkha. It is expressly not government policy that people give up speaking their native languages and assimilate linguistically to the 'Ngalop population of western Bhutan. Just as Chöke has been a unifying factor throughout Bhutanese history, now the modern national language Dzongkha will continue to act as a unifying force. On the other hand, the linguistic diversity of Bhutan's people represents a rich native cultural heritage, and the study and preservation of this highly treasured linguistic heritage is in harmony with the governmental policy to promote the national language Dzongkha.

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Notes

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The system of romanisation employed in this article is known as Roman Dzongkha. This newly devised system was adopted as the official romanisation for Dzongkha by the Dzongkha Development Commission of the Royal Government of Bhutan on 26 September 1991. Roman Dzongkha is a phonological transcription of the standard form of modern spoken Dzongkha, not a transliteration of the traditional orthography. Roman Dzongkha can also be used to render Bhutanese pronunciations of Chöke. Roman Dzongkha makes use of 22 of the letters of the Roman alphabet (F, Q, V and X are not used) and of three diacritics. The initial consonant symbols are: k, kh, g, g', c, ch, j, j', t, th, d, d', p, ph, b, b', pc, pch, bj, bj', tr, thr, dr, dr', ts, tsh, dz, zh, z, zh', z', sh, s, y, 'y, w, 'w, r, hr, l, 'l, lh, ng, ny, n, m, 'ng, 'ny, 'n, 'm, h. The vowel sounds are a, ä, ä, e, ê, i, i, o, ô, u, ü. The apostrophe at the beginning of a syllable marks high tone in syllables beginning with a nasal, liquid or vowel. The apostrophe following an initial plosive or sibilant symbol indicates a devoiced consonant followed by a low tone murmured vowel. The circumflex accent indicates vowel length. The diaeresis indicates a long, apophonic vowel. The system is explained fully in the *Guide to Roman Dzongkha* (1994).

<sup>2</sup> A pseudo-Indo-Aryan term used by some Indian and Anglo-Saxon scholars, derived from a folk etymological interpretation of sDe-pa, a variant of sDe-srid.

# Religion in Bhutan I: The Sacred and the Obscene in Bhutanese Religion

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Waddell, one of the earliest scholars of Tibetan Buddhism, saw Buddhism in Tibet (or "Lamaism", as he called it), as characterised by "the sinister growth of poly-demonist superstition" with a thin and "imperfect" veneer of "Buddhist symbolism".<sup>1</sup> Snellgrove, writing more than a half a century later, called Buddhism "a most luxurious growth" which had the tremendous capacity of "meaning all things to all men".<sup>2</sup> Both statements capture the accommodation, assimilation and blurring of boundaries that marked the historical development of Buddhism, not only as a religious doctrine but as a way of life in the societies where it spread.

This study is based on one area of the Buddhist world: on Töbesa, which lies between Thimphu and Wangdi Phodrang in western Bhutan. For the Töbs, the inhabitants of the area, the term *cho* implies not only *dharma* or "Religious Law" but also "learning" and "culture". It is closely linked to their notion of *lusö*, "custom". It is against this background of Buddhism as a vibrant and encompassing cultural phenomenon that the significance of the sacred and the obscene in the Töbs' religion can be appreciated. Conjunctions and disparities between these two aspects of their religion give the Töbs the articulating principles of their history and identity.

I have characterised certain apparent polarities and tensions within religious practices in Bhutan with the terms "sacred" and "obscene". The connotations of these terms correspond to Bakhtin's concept of European "medieval high culture" and popular "folk carnival humour". For instance, the "official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical culture"<sup>3</sup> is quite similar to the "sacred" aspect of the Bhutanese

religion, as denoted by the monastic tradition. The former has a "classic aesthetics" of man as a "finished and completed" being "cleansed, as it were, of all the scoriae of birth and development";<sup>4</sup> the latter similarly has a "high" ideal of the ultimate extrication of man from the ties and concerns of the material world.

There are certain parallels between the "obscene" in the Bhutanese context, represented here by the indigenous *nenjorm-pawo* ritual complex, and medieval "folk carnival humour". To appreciate this it is essential to outline the main features of Bakhtin's medieval "folk carnival humour". A carnival for him is not merely a religious or secular calendar event but the very embodiment of the ambivalent yet vibrantly renewing humour of medieval European folk culture which found its "greatest literary expression" in the works of Rabelais. This Rabelaisian "folk carnival humour" is characterised by a lack of "all religious and ecclesiastic dogmatism".<sup>5</sup> It is premised on a "universal spirit" of the interdependence and harmony between man and nature, and celebrates the continual "fertility, growth and a brimming-over abundance" not of an "isolated individual" or a specific society but of mankind as a whole.<sup>6</sup> This "boundless world" of Rabelaisian folk carnival humour parodied the prevailing "privileges, norms and prohibitions" of the medieval ecclesiastical establishment with a highly ambivalent and playful use of the human body. The Rabelaisian folk carnival humour "uncrowned" the "classic aesthetics" of the medieval high culture by depicting the human body in all its "acts of bodily drama — eating, drinking, defecation, copulation, pregnancy and dismemberment".<sup>7</sup>

These characteristics of the medieval European scene correspond closely with some vital aspects of the "obscene" as manifest in the *nenjorm-pawo* ritual tradition discussed below. The equivalent to Rabelais in Tibetan Buddhist culture is Drukpa Kunley with whom the Töbs identify closely.<sup>8</sup>

Mumford has also used Bakhtin's argument in a juxtaposition of what he has called a "Himalayan dialogue" between Tibetan lamas and Gurung Shamans in Gyasumdo, Nepal.<sup>9</sup> In a cultural parallel to the data from Töbesa presented here, Mumford shows how the Tibetan lamas with their written texts seek to transmute the "this-world" ancient matrix of the Gurung shamans to a higher level of

"individuating religious destiny" and ultimate extrication from "this-world" concerns towards liberation (*tharpa*).

### The Sacred

In the context of Bhutanese religion, the sacred as considered here is characterised by the following:

1. After-life concerns reflected in the concept of individual *karma* and rebirth, the transitory nature of this life and the ultimate renunciation of the ties of the samsaric world.
2. The ideals of asceticism, celibacy and a disengagement with "this-world concerns".
3. What Aris<sup>10</sup> calls "plotting out impeccable lineages" which give "present institutions" a divine origin and mandate.
4. The use of sexual imagery and language according to the Tantras, in which they are used to signify spiritual realities. For instance, the female element represents Wisdom and the male Compassion; their union is the transmutation of human passions such as hatred, ignorance and desire into Enlightenment.
5. The transmutation of phenomenal reality. Indeed, the fundamental characteristic of the sacred is *transmutation* and this marks a significant difference from the obscene.

Because the strands of religious and secular history are intertwined in Tibet (the birthplace of Bhutanese Buddhism) and Bhutan, the sacred is represented both by the monastic establishment and the political order. Indeed, the theocracies of the Gelukpa tradition in Tibet and the Drukpa Kagyüpa in Bhutan once formed the religious-political cores in both countries. Although the theocracy was replaced by a hereditary monarchy in Bhutan in 1907, the latter still identifies closely with the religious legacy and uses the symbols of Drukpa theocracy. For instance, the Bhutanese monarch's crown carries the head of a raven, which is said to have been the form assumed by Pel Yeshé Gönpö (Sk: Sri Mahakala) the protector-deity of the Drukpa tradition, when he appeared to Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (1594-1651), the founder of the state of Bhutan, and offered him the land to the south of Tibet. In this sense, the sacred for the Töbs represents the

wider realm of Drukyl (the 'Land of the Drukpa Doctrine') and their identity as Drukpas (inhabitants of Drukyl).

### The Obscene

The obscene is marked by:

1. The lack of a religious or political dogma, evident in the absence of a post-death perspective.
2. A concern with the expectations and values of ordinary lay people.
3. The celebration of life-affirming themes such as human fecundity, land and cattle fertility, growth and abundance.
4. The absence of any method of extrication from the ties and concerns of this world.
5. An irreverent and ambivalent use of conventional sacred symbols and practices.

This orientation of the obscene in the tradition of the indigenous ritual specialists called *nenjorm* (female) and *pawo* (male) is similar to that of the ambivalent "folk carnival humour" which Bakhtin analysed in his study of Rabelais. To examine this, it is vital to describe some of the main features of the tradition. The terms *nenjorm* and *pawo* are possibly locally derived from the words *naljorma* (Sk. *yogini*) and *pawo* (Sk. *vira*). These ritual specialists are possessed by local deities and perform a variety of fertility and sickness rituals, which involve the propitiation of the local divinities. A conspicuous feature of the *nenjorm-pawo* complex is its status on the periphery of the mainstream monastic establishment. Thus, while the monastic community is state-supported, the *nenjorm-pawo* tradition thrives on the patronage of local households in the villages. Unlike the Tibetan state oracles<sup>11</sup> the *nenjorm-pawo* in Bhutan do not prophesy or perform rituals for the state. The marginal status of the *nenjorm-pawo* tradition has also been observed in Sikkim by Gorer<sup>12</sup> and Nebesky-Wojkowitz. The latter suggests that this phenomenon is localized in the Sikkim-Chumbi-Bhutan area. Other scholars who have made observations about this tradition also remark on its "folk" character.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, it is precisely this folk orientation of the *nenjorm-pawo* tradition which is perceived by the Töbs to account for its peripheral

status. The *nenjorm-pawo* themselves describe their complex as having native origins, in contrast to the monastic tradition which came to Bhutan from Tibet. Its local focus is illustrated by the importance of the *yul-lha*, ("deities of the locality") in its rituals. In monastic rituals, these local deities figure as lesser attendants of the principal deities of the Drukpa pantheon.

It should be noted that while local deities such as the *tshomen* ("lake-goddess"), *rigamen* ("goddess of the mountain wilderness"), and *sabdak* ("owners of the land") belong to a generic category of deities, these divinities are venerated as the primal owners of individual localities. Of special significance is the *nep*, who is specific to a particular valley. The term *nep* means "host", and Ap Yasab is the "host" or custodian deity of Töbesa valley. The Töbs believe that they owe their land and its fertility to the bounty and protection of Ap Yasab. Their identity as Töbs or inhabitants of Töbesa is linked to Ap Yasab. Similarly, the people of the neighbouring Wangdi Phodrang valley identify with their *nep* Radab, and the people of Ha valley in the north-west of the country with Chungdü, the *nep* of Ha.

This consciousness of primal links with a specific valley is rooted in the earlier existence of isolated and fairly autonomous regions ruled by influential families or ecclesiastical authorities before unification under the Drukpa theocracy in the 17th century. Töbesa was one of the eight Wang villages which formed the local militia force called the *Wang tsochen gye*, the "Eight Great Hosts of Wang". The Töbs hold that this local support helped to establish the Drukpa theocracy in the country. The *nenjorm-pawo* tradition juxtaposes the Töbs' regional, centrifugal historical sensibility against the wider realm of the centripetal religious-political Drukpa order. However, the identification of this tradition with the Töbs' regional history and identity is overshadowed by its portrayal as an archaic, demonic Bon practice. This problem is examined briefly in the concluding part of the paper.

There follow some examples of the obscene as represented in the *nenjorm-pawo* tradition which share certain features with Rabelaisian "folk carnival humour". For instance, the fact that the *nenjorm-pawo* rituals do not deal with death and after-life issues is seen by the Töbs to be a major drawback, betokening the rituals' narrow, local outlook. When asked why she thought that this tradition was inferior to that of the monks, Am (Mrs.) Dorjim, a shopkeeper said: "When we die, the

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deities (*lha*) of the *nenjorm-pawo* will not help us in *lamthobni* ('path-finding'). We need *lam-chop* ("learned religious specialists") for that." Similarly, *Lopön Pema*, a defrocked monk, observed: "Their *dre* ("demons") are useful in preventing such calamities as famine and drought and in ensuring the fertility of the land and cattle. But they are of no use for *lam-thobni* and for breaking off the ties and obstructions of the *jikten* ("this world"), when we die." An example of this tradition's concern with the aspirations and interests of ordinary lay people is the invocation to the *rigamen* (goddess of the mountain wilderness). This reiterates the Töbs' primal links with this deity, whose help and protection is crucial for their land and cattle:

...Of the woods  
From the days of yore  
Of medicine and cattle  
... You are the queen-goddess...  
...Untouched by the different winds  
You reside.  
Unreached by the Summer's waters (floods?)  
You reside...  
Unreached by the Winter's fires  
You reside...  
...Since the last year  
[We] have not spoken.  
Since that year [we] have not met...  
...[ Please remember we] have been offering  
The autumn harvest offering,  
Please come and accept our offerings now...

This motif of renewal and growth recurs in the *tsbik* ("verses") of the Doley Shüni rite of the annual village Bongko ceremony. The help of the local deities and Padmasambhava (Ugyen Rinpoche) is sought against evil forces which threaten the harmony and prosperity of the people. The verses describe the preparations for the offerings to the deities:

...When invoking the deities in the kingdom  
We must invoke Ugyen...  
We must drive the demons away  
We must dance with our feet...  
When invoking the deities in the kingdom  
We must prepare chang for the Doley first offering  
When we prepare chang for the Doley first offering  
We must gather long pieces of wood



1. During the ritual of the Doley Shüni the *nenjorm* leads the village youths in chanting the bawdy banter between Tongdê Phajo and his consort Sonam Peiden. On a pile of stones at her feet lies the shell of a tortoise which carries the ills and misfortunes of the old year.





2. The *nenjorm* and her chorus performing the exorcism of demons at the five cardinal directions  
— centre, north, south, east, west. The boy in the centre holds the wooden phallus (*po hi*).



3. The *nenjorm* in her ritual outfit wearing the five-paneled crown (*ringa*) and the female ceremonial scarf (*rachu*) draped over her left shoulder and tied in a fan-like pleat on her right. She holds the pellet-drum (*damaru*) and bell (*drilbu*).

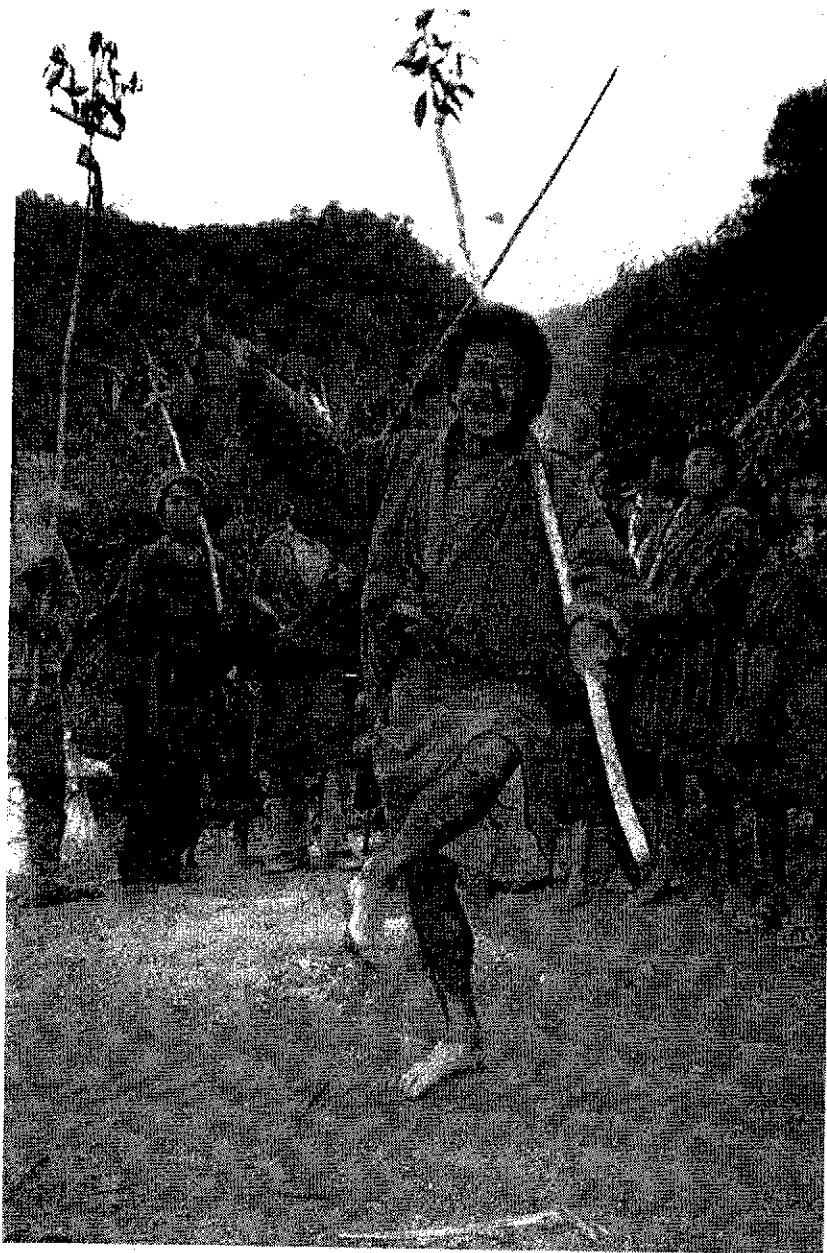
We must fetch water  
We must light a big fire  
We must bring the large ladle used for stirring cattle-feed...  
When preparing chang for the Doley first offering  
We must stir it up, stir it down, stir it well  
We must stir it there, stir it here, stir it well...

#### The Sacred and the Obscene Contrasted

Finally, as noted earlier, the sacred is premised on transmutation. Thus, while it does not entirely ignore the mundane interests and expectations of lay people and while it uses sexual imageries and language, it seeks ultimately the transmutation of all such experiences. In a significant contrast with the sacred as represented by the monastic order, such this-world concerns as human fecundity, prosperity and abundance, are often portrayed in the *nenjorm-pawo* repertoire by a bawdy inversion of conventional religious forms and personalities. The saucy "degrading" of religious norms can be seen in the depiction of the *torma*, the dough-image that is an essential item of religious rituals throughout Himalayan Buddhist societies, as an erect penis in the exorcism ritual called *mikha kayni*. The *tshik* (verses) of the *mikha kayni* rite compares the bawdy glory of the phallic *torma* called Sonam Buti to that of the copper-coloured mountain paradise of Padmasambhava:

Have you seen anything like my Sonam Buti?  
From the top, its red head looks like Zangdo Peri ("The Copper-Coloured Mountain").  
Down from its very root, it is covered with buttery whiteness.  
This Sonam Buti, which loves young (virgin?) girls..."

This use of a phallic *torma* as an aggressive symbol of human fecundity against the demons of *mikha* ("malicious gossip") is closely linked to the use of a wooden replica of the male organ called *po'u* (spo-chen, "Big Phallus") as protection against the forces of the evil eye and malicious gossip. The *po'u* are strung from the four corners of the roofs. Another version involves large drawings of the erect male organ on either side of the main entrance of houses. In all these instances, we find an inversion of the sacred goal of transmuting human passions and concerns through the use of sexual imagery and language. Here, it is those very parts of the human body that embody the passions that the *sacred seeks to transmute*, which the *obscene imbues with sacred significance*. The



4. A villager who acts the part of a warrior (*pazap*) performing the war-dance known as *bay-chapni* which takes place at the end of the Doley Shüni exorcism.

Töbs liken such uses of the male organ to the *chala* ("tool") that Drukpa Kunley used not only to subdue demons but also to ridicule corruption in the ecclesiastical establishment.

Another example of such irreverent "uncrowning" of the sacred is found in the verses of the Doley Śhüni rite of the Bongko ceremony during the Agricultural New Year.<sup>14</sup> This portrays Phajo Drukgom Shigpo (1208-76), who introduced the Drukpa Kagyüpa tradition to Bhutan from Tibet in the 13th century, and his consort Sonam Pelden. *Tondé* ("The Yogin") Phajo, as he is called here, engages in ribald banter with Sonam Pedé (a local variant of his consort's name, Sonam Pelden) about male and female sexual prowess and its effects on the suppression of demons and the perpetuation of religion:

Tondé Phajo said to Sonam Pelden:

Sonam Pelden's vagina is large

Sonam Pelden is full of wetness

Sonam Pelden's vagina is large

The mouth of its entrance is red.

Today, (look!) how inexhaustibly it widens...

Sonam Pelden retorts:

Why shouldn't my vagina be so large?

It is from this that I give birth to Lam Sangye (the Lord Buddha).

Why shouldn't my wetness be so much?

It is with this that I have to understand the people's illnesses.

Why shouldn't my wetness be so much?

It is with this that the offering-bowls have to be filled...

Then Sonam Pelden taunted Tondé Phajo:

Tondé Phajo's penis is large.

Tondé Phajo is full of wetness.

Tondé Phajo's piss is lengthy...

Tondé Phajo replied:

Why shouldn't my penis be so large?

It is with this that I crush the demons.

Why shouldn't my wetness be so much?

It is with this that I have to understand the people's illnesses.

Why shouldn't my piss be so lengthy?

It is with this that I have to lengthen the stream of the human lineage.

This casting of Phajo and his consort as symbols of human sexuality and fecundity inverts orthodox accounts of Phajo. In the latter, Phajo is said to have received a divine vision of the tantric deity Tamdrin ("Horse-Necked", Sk. Hayagriva) who instructed him to perpetuate his lineage in Bhutan and to spread the Drukpa doctrine with the help of a

consort, Sonam Pelden, from the Wang region (to which Töbesa belongs).

The obscene's debasing of sacred norms and canons is ultimately highly ambivalent. It is not a bare negation of the ecclesiastical and political edifice, as it does not seek to demolish or subvert the latter. Nonetheless, it articulates lay misgivings about the constraints and demands of the religious-political orthodoxy. For instance, as noted earlier, the Töbs have a strong sense of regional identity, represented by Ap Yasab, the *nep* of their valley. Their local identity and aspirations as Töbs have to accommodate and interact with the duties and obligations of their national identity as Drukpas. The *nenjorm-pawo* tradition's ambivalent travesty of the practices and proponents of the religious-political orthodoxy highlights the complex conjunction and disparity that exists between the two different spheres of the Töbs' history and identity.

#### Popular Literature and the Obscene in the Nenjorm-Pawo Tradition

There are some important parallels between the obscene as represented by the *nenjorm-pawo* tradition and the genre of popular Bhutanese literature studied by Aris. According to Aris, this literature emerged after the collapse of the Drukpa theocracy and the deterioration of monastic writing in the 19th century. The literature is also premised on the "common aspirations and attitudes" and values of the "individual, family and wider lay community". As such, it is evidence of a distancing from the formalism and strictures of the canons of the theocracy. This is clearly shown in the "dharma of copulation" of a teacher called *Pokchen* ("Big Glans") Gyalwa Lodrö.<sup>15</sup> Rather like the *nenjorm-pawo's* use of the *torma* to parody conventional religious practice, the author of the "dharma of copulation" who identifies himself as a "former monk" uses the "basic structure of a sutra" to turn the monastic liturgical style "inside out". Here, the Buddha is substituted by the phallic-shaped teacher Gyalwa Lodrö. Purporting to give "simple entertainment", the author voices his frustration at having to memorise lengthy ritual texts, the "secret" meanings of which elude most ordinary monks.

The other two pieces of popular literature discussed by Aris belong to the *lozé* genre peculiar to Western Bhutan. The first *lozé* recounts the tragic consequences of the prevalence of the state in the life of a

peasant, Sumdar Tashi, in the mid-18th century. The other *lozé* traces the doomed mission of a lay official, Tsewang Tashi, chamberlain to the governor of Wangdi Phodrang, who travels to his certain death "out of a sense of personal loyalty to his lord".<sup>16</sup> The presence of a popular literature with which the *nenjorm-pawo* tradition shares many features shows that, while there is a religious-political orthodoxy in Bhutan, there is also a lively and vigorous popular counterpoint, or what Aris calls an "alternative voice". What has to be considered is that it is perhaps the presence of this lay ethos, as a dynamic "internal development", that underlines Bhutan's survival as a sovereign, independent state. The existence of this indigenous popular voice, which articulates historical sensibilities and aspirations other than those identified with the religious-political establishment, is overlooked in observations about Bhutan. The denial of its presence either relegates such lay voices as the *nenjorm-pawo* complex to the prehistoric stages of the people's culture with little or no significance for their history and with no relevance other than its "this-world concerns", or it assumes that the presence of a "traditional order" in Bhutan necessarily means the absence of popular articulation or participation in the political processes of the country. For the Töbs, the reality is a complex, ongoing negotiation between regional aspirations and concerns and national duties and loyalty.

### Conclusion

In conclusion it must be said that the depiction of indigenous local traditions such as the *nenjorm-pawo* complex in Töbesa as a primitive, pre-Buddhist Bon practice must be treated as problematic rather than as a given historical reality. The Buddhist representation of Bon as an uncivilized, demonic practice points to similarities with orthodox Christianity's denunciation of the Gnostic Gospels as "heretical", a topic explored by Pagels.<sup>17</sup> In the case of Bhutan, there is little historical evidence to suggest that Bon flourished in the country or indeed that the local *nenjorm-pawo* tradition predates Buddhism. Given that this indigenous tradition's aspirations and concerns show similarities with the popular Bhutanese literature of the 19th century, it could well be that it grew from an interaction with and response to the overwhelming pressures and constraints of the religious-political orthodoxy.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> LA Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, London, 1895, p. xi.
- <sup>2</sup> DL Snellgrove, *Buddhist Himalaya*, Oxford, 1957, p. 121.
- <sup>3</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington, 1968, p. 4.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.
- <sup>8</sup> Keith Dowman, *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley*, London, 1980. This is an English translation of the "secret" biography of Drukpa Kunley, which is based on popular Bhutanese traditions of the unorthodox, shocking tactics employed by this *smyon-pa* ("divine madman"). The biography was edited by the Bhutanese scholar Geshe Gendun Rinchen (the present Je Khenpo) and was published by the late Lam (*bla-ma*) Nado, another distinguished Bhutanese scholar. See also Michael Aris, "The Boneless Tongue: Alternative Voices from Bhutan in the Context of Himalayan Societies", *Past and Present*, no. 115 (May 1987), p. 145 n. 23. One of the places where Drukpa Kunley is believed to have sojourned during his mission in Bhutan is Töbesa: *ibid.*, p. 128.
- <sup>9</sup> Stan Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, Wisconsin, 1989.
- <sup>10</sup> Michael Aris, "The Boneless Tongue: Alternative Voices from Bhutan in the Context of Himalayan Societies", *Past and Present*, no. 115 (May 1987); Prince Peter, "Tibetan Oracles", in James Fisher (ed.): *Himalayan Anthropology*, The Hague, 1978.
- <sup>11</sup> R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, The Hague, 1956. See also Prince Peter, *op. cit.*
- <sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Gorer, *Himalayan Village*, London, 1938.
- <sup>13</sup> Michael Aris, *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, Warminster, 1979, p. 315 n. 3.
- <sup>14</sup> The original significations of the terms Bongko and Doley appear now to be lost: none of my informants could supply me with either their spellings or their meanings.
- <sup>15</sup> Cited in Aris, *op. cit.*, 1987, p. 150. I am grateful to Michael Aris for letting me see a copy of the undated Thimphu edition of *sPo-chen rGyal-ba'i bLo-gros-kyi chos-spyod* edited by D. Lhendup.
- <sup>16</sup> Aris, *op. cit.*, 1987, p. 157.
- <sup>17</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, London, 1980.

## Religion in Bhutan II: The Formation of a World-View

Michael Kowalewski

Bhutan is, as is well-known, an outpost of Tantric Buddhism, of the kind practised in Tibet although ultimately derived from India, and in particular of one of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Drukpa Kagyü, whose dominance has given the country its name — Drukpa, the land of the Drukpa sect. Although one may find all the threads of Bhutanese religion present also within the Tibetan cultural area of the Himalayas, the particular weave of those threads is unique to Bhutan, in the sense of being distinct in some details from religion in Tibet, Ladakh, Sikkim and Nepal; in the sense of being the sole survivor of the state-church Tantric politics of the area; in the sense that it also possesses its own indigenous tradition — the *nenjorm-pawo* complex which is special to it, though elements are shared with other indigenous traditions in the Buddhist Himalaya; in the sense that Bhutan's concept of the religious-secular divide is drawn differently than that of Tibet; but also, and above all, because the people construct their distinct notions of history and identity in a deliberate and conscious fashion. The heroic figures of Bhutan, though shared with Tibet, are also distinctively valued. Guru Padmasambhava (the Lotus-born teacher, also called Precious Teacher, Guru Rimpoche), Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (the founder of the Bhutanese state in the 17th century) Drukpa Kunley (Bhutan's most popular saint, the "holy madman") and Tertön Pemalingpa (a discoverer of sacred texts and treasurers, a native of central Bhutan and ancestor of the royal family) are the chief heroes of Bhutan, and play a much larger role than they do in Tibet. Bhutan belongs to "Tibetan" Buddhism as Ireland or Poland belong to "Roman" Catholic Christianity, and its own version of Buddhism has been significant in forging its national identity, even in a secular sense. This paper approaches the religion of Bhutan from a number of entry

points — anthropological, historical, textual and personal — none of which can be privileged over the others.

Just looking at the Bhutanese landscape, it might seem the very embodiment of the Buddhist concept of Emptiness (*sunyata*) as described by the great Buddhist saint, Longchenpa who spent ten years in Bhutan: "All things have emerged from the power of emptiness... There is no distinction between appearance and emptiness." Just as easily, however, one may find in it more of the idea of the Buddhist heaven described as "the realm of the densely-packed" (sTug-po bkod-pa'i khams), a realm full of various life-forms, gods, demons, spirits, historical personages and figures of myth and legend.

For instance, in the fifty kilometres between the capital, Thimphu, and the next major settlement, Wangdi Phodrang, on the main road going east, one comes across several sacred sites. Hongtso, just before one crosses the main pass, is the residence of the local guardian deity, Ap Yasab. The main Dochu-la pass itself was the abode of a cannibal demoness, conquered by the great "divine madman" Drukpa Kunley. The place where he finally subdued her is on the other side of the pass, marked by the famous temple of Chimi Lhakhang. A little way back up the valley is a small temple, Chandana, where Drukpa Kunley's arrow, which he fired from Tibet, landed, as a sign of where the saint should travel. In that same village, the local female medium (*nenjorm*) has her house. In her care are the deities of the fields, forests and cattle, vital for the people if not for the monastic establishment. Her gods include Chungdü, a protective deity usually associated with the valley of Haa; the epic hero Gesar of Ling; a *khandro* (Sk. *dakini*) who shares many features with recognised Buddhist divinities but differs in function; Yasab, as mentioned before, the protective deity of the locality; one of the *rigamen*, mountain goddesses; and a *tsomen*, a female lake divinity. Directly above Chandana, on the other side of the river, is Talo Gompa, associated with the 17th-century founder of the Bhutanese state, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. The road turning to the left from Chimi Lhakhang takes one to Punakha where the huge fortress (*dzong*) houses the preserved body of the Shabdrung. Thus even this small patch of Bhutan contains a whole plethora of historical, religious, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, divine, demonic and human (*lha dre mi sum*) beings and forces that inhabit the landscape and are intertwined in a sort of gridlock of spheres of power that interact in space and time

and come to shape and give meaning to what might seem silent and inanimate.

### Life, Power and Blessing

However, these powers are not a chaos. They are arranged in hierarchies and sequences according to a deep structure, in which ritual power acts as a universal medium, like the shuttle weaving the threads into a recognisable world. It was not always so: the first principle of the Bhutanese way of ordering the world is that the first powers were indeed a chaos of demons (*diu*), serpent divinities (*lu*), flesh-eating *raksha* (*sim*), evil spirits (*dre*) and so forth until the taming of the land by the great figures of Buddhism, such as Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, Drukpa Kunley (already mentioned) and the greatest of them all, Guru Rimpoche, Padmasambhava; the Lotus-Born Guru. The temples and other sacred sites are not simply places within a landscape; they act as a focus of sacred energies and commemorate the very rising of order out of chaos.

In Bhutan, the most important of the Buddhist tamers of the land is Guru Rimpoche. His main shrines at Taksang in the Paro valley and Kurje Lhakhang in the central valley of Bumthang virtually define the scope of Bhutan as a land of the Buddhist religion. The guru is believed to have landed, after flying from Tibet on a tiger, at a place on a high rock called Taksang ("Tiger's Nest") in Paro. The central act of Guru's taming of Bhutan as a land of religion — the conversion of the king of Bumthang, Sindhu Raja — was enacted at Kurje. Padmasambhava's figure is frequently the central one in temples and shrines. When the people of the large village of Ura in central Bhutan recently reconstructed their temple, it was a huge statue of the guru that formed its centre-piece. The major festivals of the monastery-fort dzongs are called *tsechu*, literally "the tenth day of the month", which is the day on which the guru was born and on which he subsequently carried out his most famous deeds in his eight manifestations. The highpoint of these festivals is often the display of a *shondrol*, a huge picture of the guru, at dawn. The name of the Kurje temple in Bumthang, central Bhutan, which is central to the cult of the guru, means "body-traces" (*sku-rjes*), for it is believed that Padmasambhava left marks of his body on the rock itself. In fact, the power of Guru Rimpoche to leave traces on the earth is one of the most prominent features of his cult. There

are numerous sites throughout Bhutan where depressions in the rock are believed to have been caused by the guru. These are frequently associated with his subduing local female demons. Many other examples of Guru's importance could be given.

One may ask then, what is the function of Guru Rimpoche in Bhutanese religious experience? He is, first of all, a manifestation of the Primordial Buddha Kuntuzangpo (Sk. Samantabhadra), the All-Good, who is depicted as a dark blue Buddha embracing a consort above depictions of Padmasambhava. However, within Tantric Buddhism, Buddha Kuntuzangpo takes on another form, that of the ferocious, blood-drinking Buddha Heruka who subdues the opponents of the religion, in particular the gods of Hinduism, especially Shiva. Taking on the form of a demon as ferocious as those he is subduing, the Heruka subjugates the deities and incorporates them as his retinue in the form of a *mandala* with himself at the centre. While the male demon-deities are subjugated by being absorbed into and then excreted from the body of the Heruka, the females are attracted to the Heruka, like iron to a magnet, and are penetrated by him. Both male and female deities then become oath-bound (*damchen*) protectors (*gönpo*) of the religion, turning their ferocity against the enemies of the Buddhist Dharma.<sup>1</sup>

This subjugation of the older deities (*lha*) by the Buddhist lama sets the pattern and forms the basic mode by which one can understand the activities of Guru Padmasambhava, as well as other figures such as the founder of the Bhutanese state, the Shabdrung, and the holy madman, Drukpa Kunley. In the biography of Padmasambhava, the *Padma thang-yig*, the guru takes on the Heruka role to subdue Rudra (Siva). This act of subjugation is then repeated as the guru travels the Himalayas, subduing local demons and gods — and especially female ones — valley by valley, mountain by mountain, as he did those of Hinduism. Guru Rimpoche is the Heruka of the Himalayas, and of Bhutan in particular.

It is easy to note that an overwhelming part is played by ritual in Bhutanese religion. The vital significance of ritual is that it is a re-enactment of the power of the lama over the forces and powers of life and death. The householder, enmeshed in the play of these forces, invites the ritual specialist to take on the role of guru and to subjugate the forces by reminding them of their vow to serve the religion and the

commands of the guru. The word for power, *wang*, also means blessing. The power of the gods is overcome by the blessing of the guru which springs from the realm of the unconditioned to which he belongs. The arrival of an important lama will see the whole locality rushing to receive that blessing, whose ultimate sanction is the guru's charismatic presence.

### The Symbolism of Ritual

Most Bhutanese houses have a separate prayer-room where rituals are hosted. Even a one-room dwelling will at least have a small portable shrine in a corner. Typically, the altar will have statues of the three great lamas: the Lord Buddha, Guru Rimpoche and the Shabdrung. For a particular ritual offering, cakes called *torma*, which are also abodes of the deities honoured, are made of rice and coloured butter, sculpted according to the importance of the ritual and the wealth of the patron. These ritual occasions include funerals, spring fertility rituals and autumn harvest offerings to ancestral deities.

Three *tormas*, associated with the triad figures of the lama, the tutelary deity (*yidam*) tamed by the lama, and the female tantric deity or divine consort (*khandro*) of the lama who assisted in the taming, will be placed under the three main statues of the altar. In a typical case, the *tormas* were of Guru Padmasambhava, of the horse-headed divinity Tamdrin and of his principal consort Yeshé Tshogyel. Placed below these again are the *tormas* of the religion-protecting deities (*chösung*) who have been bound by guru in this role. In the centre are the gods of the *dzong*, who are those protective deities which are particular to the Drukpa Kagyü tradition, brought over to Bhutan by the Shabdrung who founded the Bhutanese state with their help. These are Yeshé Gönpo (Sk. *Mahakala*) and Penden Lhamo (Sk. *Sri Devi*). Yeshé Gönpo appeared as a raven to the Shabdrung and guided him to Bhutan. The raven thus appears on the Bhutanese crown. Other deities' *tormas* are also displayed. These *tormas* are flanked at the edges by the *tormas* of the local deities, *theyul-lha* which are particular to the family or ritual. For instance, in Thrinleygang the *tormas* are used of the local protector Yasab and of a water god or *chudré* who resides in a waterfall which tumbles over a dramatic cliff which never sees the sun.

The monks invited for the ritual sit facing the altar and *tormas* in the prayer room in a corresponding horizontal order. The chief officiant

sits at the centre with a small ritual table to support the all-important text of the ritual in front of him. He should be a senior celibate monk from the dzong. His main ritual elements are the bell (*drilbu*, Sk. *ghanta*) and *dorje* (Sk. *vajra*). These are also the main attributes of Dorjesempa (Sk. Vajrasattva) who is a further manifestation of Kuntuzangpo, the primordial Buddha, and therefore of Guru Rimpoche. He is supported by two other monks, or former monks, one for the drums and one for the cymbals. Other, junior, monks who might be present blow flutes, horns or thigh-bone trumpets. They may also act as altar servers, taking away and bringing offerings.

In the ritual, the Lama is invoked first, followed by the *lha*, from the centre towards the periphery. The seven essential offerings — water for drinking, water for the feet, flowers, incense, butter lamps, water for anointing, and holy food — are offered to the lama. All the gods are offered a libation of beer and food. As each god is invoked, the corresponding *torma* is carried away and placed under the roof where the dogs cannot get it.

During the ritual, the sense of separation between the host and the monks is emphasised by the monks' occupation of the prayer-room while the family and its guests busy themselves in the kitchen with eating and cooking, in an apparently strong affirmation of the sacred/profane distinction. A further point is that the gods and demons are of this world, but the power fails after death, when the life-force (*sok*) passes away, but the mind (*sem*) or consciousness (*namshé*) is left to wander in the intermediate state, called *bardo*, between incarnations. It is here that the guru's help in finding one's way after death is vital. For instance, on the first to seventh day after death, the Kansha ceremony is held to ask forgiveness from the guru for any transgression through violence to sentient beings on behalf of the dead person. The famous "Book of the Dead" (*Bar-do thos-grol*) which is read out to the dead person, is itself a *terma* or "rediscovered treasure-text", written by Guru Rimpoche, and its instructions constantly emphasise the importance of remembering the instructions one has received from one's own teacher as the apparitions of the *bardo* are encountered. Also important in this respect is the *raksha marcham*, or dance of the Judgement of the Dead at the *tsechu* festival, in which the terrors of the judgement are performed as a mask dance by the monks. Indeed it would not be an exaggeration to say that the concept of finding one's

way after death is the core expression of people's sense of the transcendent aspect of their religion. The hosting of ceremonies, the patronage of monks and lamas, the recitation of prayers and going on pilgrimage all find their justification in helping the mind (*sem*) to go on its way after death.

However, in practice and in theory, the boundaries of this world and transcendence are quite fluid. The monks are fed and chat with the host, people wander in and out and at crucial points the host will join in the ritual by offering beer or removing an offering. One of the monks may well be a relative of the family hosting the ritual. If the host is an ex-monk (a fairly common occurrence) he may well participate in the ritual itself, chanting or playing the drum, or even making the *tormas*. As if to confirm this, the texts say, ultimately the phenomenal and *nirvana* are one, ultimate reality is non-dual, beyond *samsara* and *nirvana*.

The rituals thus re-enact the Heruka activity of the guru who overcomes the worldly powers and acts as a culture hero using his sexual and aggressive powers to transform the world into a realm of Dharma. The guru is a symbol of the triumph of culture itself over the mass of inchoate powers that are the primitive state. This culture hero who tames, however, has a wildness that is undisciplined. As Longchenpa, the great Buddhist philosopher, put it in his commentary on the Tantra of the Secret Nucleus (*gSang-ba'i snying-po*)<sup>2</sup>: "Rudra attained Buddhahood as Kuntuzangpo in original time and then to subdue the Mara (devil) ...he became manifest in and of himself". The extraordinary semantic density of this passage defies analysis, but suggests something of the deity sacrificed by itself to itself and the transvaluation of values common to many kinds of religious symbolism.

The guru, then, represents the plenitude of a founding origin that transcends the opposites of good and evil, violence and peace, eros and sanctity. The ambivalence in his nature is drawn out in two further heroes of Bhutanese history — Drukpa Kunley, the holy madman, and Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the great tantric warrior and founder of the unified theocracy that turned Mönkyul (the barbarian land) into Drukkyul (the land of the Drukpa school).

The Shabdrung is in a sense analogous to Padmasambhava. I cannot here go into his full story, of how he came from Tibet according to a



prophecy after a dispute with the ruler of the Tibetan principality of Tsang and set up his theocracy.<sup>3</sup> I wish merely to note a certain distinction which may be illustrated by a passage from the story of the Sindhu Raja, king of Bumthang, mentioned previously. The key point is that the guru heals the Sindhu Raja who thereby becomes a religion-protecting king, analogously to the deities overcome by Heruka. At the crucial moment, the Sindhu Raja offers the guru political power: "Of the three kingdoms, India, Tibet and Mön (Bhutan) ...take and enjoy everything; I offer it to you". But Padmasambhava rejects the offer, saying he is the guru of all countries. The whole visible world is his palace. Gods, demons and men are his donors. He has no need of earthly kingdoms. So the Sindhu Raja swears obedience and becomes a 'king of religion' (*chöki gyalpo*) by practising virtue (*tshulthrim*).<sup>4</sup> The Shabdrung, however, announces himself, in his famous seal of the 16 I's (*Nga chudrugma*), as the one who turns the wheel of both secular and spiritual laws. It was as if the guru had accepted Sindhu Raja's offer and taken up political power, an actual disciplining of the country, with momentous results for the future development of Bhutan.

Another aspect of the Shabdrung's power is illustrated by the story of the drunkenness and humiliation of Ap Chungdü, the patron god of Ha valley in the northwest. The Shabdrung, taking control of the local gods, ordered Chungdü to fetch a flame from the land of the lower demons. As Chungdü was returning with the flame, he came across a feast, where he got drunk and fell asleep. The flame was taken by another god, Genyen of Thimphu, who presented it to the Shabdrung. As punishment the Shabdrung threw the *torma* of Chungdü out of the *dzong*, which explains why Chungdü has no *torma* in the monastic rituals. However, the Shabdrung relented sufficiently to make him the master of the flags that are placed on roofs during the annual ritual of the 'circle of offerings' (*tshongkhor*). Yet Chungdü cannot be dismissed simply as some folk godling; he is talked about with real fear, and people prefer not to meddle with Haps (inhabitants of the Ha valley) lest they are cursed by Chungdü, the Haps' protector.

In contrast to the Shabdrung, the politician and warrior, Drukpa Kunley is famous as the embodiment of unrestrained sexual power and as a trenchant critic of all establishments and hierarchies.<sup>5</sup> The original Drukpa Kunley was a wandering mendicant whose travels took him all over the Tantric cultural area. But it is in Bhutan that he has acquired

the aura of a magician, a tamer of demons and above all a priapic role as an antinomian seducer, even a Don Juan figure, albeit within a carefully-defined Tantric context. He too takes on the Heruka persona and subdues female demons with his magnetic sexuality. For instance, at Chimi Lhakhang Kunley subdued a particularly terrifying cannibal demoness who used to eat travellers on the Dochu-la pass (between modern-day Thimphu and Wangdi Phodrang) with his "magic thunderbolt of wisdom". A wooden effigy of Kunley's thunderbolt is preserved in the temple and childless women will go to the temple to receive the saint's *wang* (blessing) which will enable them to conceive. In this way, a Buddhist saint has been turned into an icon of liberation and fertility, but still within the overall schema of the Tantric world view which promises liberation in a single lifetime.

The stories of the Shabdrung and Drukpa Kunley allow the Bhutanese to express in finely nuanced ways their sense of belonging both to the wide Buddhist context and to their own very local roots and their own, earthly, sensual — one might even say Rabelaisian — character.

#### Exile and the Kingdom

The arrival of the Shabdrung in Bhutan and the setting up of the theocracy both fulfilled and brought to an end a particular phase of Bhutan's self-conception, which might be termed the theme of "exile and kingdom". In this theme an exiled figure, usually from India or Tibet, finds a place for himself in Bhutan where he sets up a new kingdom that is "happier by far". This theme is linked with the identification of Bhutan, and in particular the beautiful valley of Bumthang, as the "hidden land" (*beyul*). The Sindhu Raja, whose conversion to Buddhism by Guru Rimpoche has been touched on above, was himself an exile from India. A Tibetan exile, according to some chronicles, was Prince Tsangma who was a brother of the 9th-century heretic king of Tibet, Langdarma, and who fled to eastern Bhutan where he set up a local lineage of important families<sup>6</sup> that continued until it was superseded by the theocracy of the Drukpas in the 17th century. One can see how Guru Rimpoche, Drukpa Kunley and the Shabdrung himself all fit into this schema.

The figure of the great philosopher Longchenpa (1308-1363) whose words were quoted at the beginning of this paper, also fits into this

tradition. Exiled from Tibet by the then ruler, Longchenpa came to Bumthang where he set up the monastery of Tharpaling, which even today functions as a centre of Buddhist learning. We are fortunate in possessing Longchenpa's own feelings about Bumthang in a short outline of Bumthang which he wrote during his exile and which deals with several themes of great interest.<sup>7</sup>

Longchenpa calls Bumthang a "hidden land of the gods" (*lha'i beyul*), an arcadia wherein one might seek the solace of religion. It is a place visited by many religious kings and ministers and where there are many temples, thus emphasising that interaction of human, royal, historical, religious and aesthetic features, expressed through religious foundations and buildings, which invests the landscape with significance. Longchenpa writes of the joy engendered by the sight of mountains with their green slopes and white peaks which form the petals of a lotus, of which the valley forms the centre. In this way the link with the "lotus-born" guru, Padmasambhava or Pema Jungne, is explicitly made. Continuing with the image of a divine land, he praises the medicinal trees and shrubs. He praises the cool and lustrous waters, which flow "like a song from the mountains' throat" to the sacred Ganges. He is reminded of the central Tibetan province of Ü — surely an indication even before the founding of the Bhutanese state of Bhutan's difference from, yet equivalence with Tibet. Longchenpa praises the virtue of the inhabitants and says he has done well to come there according to the prophesy (*lungten* and grace (*jinlab*) of Guru Padmasambhava. It was time to seek the hidden land. "This excellent place of virtue, Mönyul Bumthang, although it is called barbaric (Mön) it is the equal of Ü and Tsang (the central Tibetan provinces). Even if it is not the hidden land, it is the echo of such a place."

Longchenpa's description is also in its own way a taming, an assimilation of the given and the local to the transcendental thematics of Buddhism, through the magic of the pen. The images of light pervading Longchenpa's description are derived from the Dzokchen ("Great Perfection") meditational system, in which the light of one's own mind is symbolised as Kuntuzangpo, the deity who, as noted above, is the source of the power of the greatest of all tamers, Guru Padmasambhava.

#### A Native Saint

Could the Bumthang description have suggested the religious name of Bhutan's greatest native saint, Pemalingpa, which means "man of the lotus-place"? Ugyen Pemalingpa who lived from 1450 to 1521, belonged to the tradition of *tertöns*, discoverers of treasures (*terma*) which were usually books believed to have been hidden by early Buddhist saints, and principally by Guru Padmasambhava, during the early diffusion of the Buddhist doctrines. The *tertön* tradition is associated with the Nyingma ("Ancient") sect, which claims spiritual descent from Guru Padmasambhava. Followers of this sect have lived in amity with the later tradition of the Kagyü who form the dominant monastic establishment in Bhutan through the Drukpa subsect of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, and to which Drukpa Kunley belonged. Michael Aris<sup>8</sup> has dealt at some length with the career and person of Pemalingpa. Here, I would simply like to point out how many of the threads of Bhutanese religion are woven into this controversial figure.

Pemalingpa links himself to Longchenpa by claiming to be a reincarnation of the great philosopher as well as by belonging to his tradition of the "Great Fulfilment" or "Perfection" (Dzokchen). The text of the story of the Sindhu Raja is one of the *terma* or hidden treasures "rediscovered" by Pemalingpa — and thus, perhaps, composed by him out of the oral traditions prevalent in Bumthang. The classical Tibetan title of this work is "The Clear Mirror of the Great Perfection" (*rDzogs-chen gsal-ba'i me-long*), thus linking the story to the mystical doctrine which forms the heart of the Nyingma tradition's teaching. The story of the Sindhu Raja draws strands from Indian and Tibetan lore, but clearly makes native the diffused traditions of Buddhism, giving them "a local habitation and a name" and thus providing a vehicle for the religious sense of Pemalingpa, a native of Bumthang. In origin these traditions were Indian, and were transmitted via Tibet, but they took root and flourished in Bhutanese soil, just as the staff of Padmasambhava was set in the ground at Kurje Lhakhang and grew into a tree, still standing today and identified as such. These threads were also pregnant for the future; the present royal family claims descent from a line of Pemalingpa's. Furthermore, Pemalingpa's texts of dances and rituals still form part of the repertoire of Bhutanese ritual life. I witnessed such a ritual in the house of Dasho

Jigme Thinley in Mendegang, just above Chandana and the temple of Drukpa Kunley. In the prayer room was a main statue of Guru Padmasambhava as well as a side statue of Longchenpa. The ritual texts chosen for this particular occasion in spring, an invocatory ritual known as *sökha rimdro*, came from Pemalingpa's cycle of "The Ocean of Jewels" (*Nor-bu rgya-mtsho*), a feature of which is the linking of ritual activity with a symbolism derived from the Dzokchen tradition of mystical realisation. At the same time, the village lies within the area of Töbesa, which prides itself on being one of the first supporters of the Shabdrung, and one of the Eight Hosts of the Wang area. The area is entitled to send representatives as *pazaps*, representing the original warriors who supported the Shabdrung in his setting up of the theocracy, to the great annual *dromchö* festival in Punakha which celebrates the triumph of the Drukpa sect and the Shabdrung over the Gelukpa forces of Tibet and the Mongols. The density of historical, local, religious, legendary and metaphysical affiliations gives Bhutan its particular colouring within the broader patterns of Himalayan Buddhist culture.

#### The Character of Bhutanese Religion

There is a relatively harmonious coexistence of the Nyingma and Kagyü traditions in Bhutan as is seen in the above example. Not only within Buddhism, but in Buddhism's relation to the indigenous traditions of the *nenjorm* and *pawo*, peaceful coexistence — though not identity — prevails. While the Drukpa Kagyü tradition is clearly the religious "establishment", it seems to me that the antinomian style of Dzokchen which derives from the omnipresent Guru Padmasambhava is personally closer to the people. It is with the imagery of that tradition, derived from Indian poetics, yet subtly localised, that Longchenpa lauds the divine hidden land of Bumthang. The key notions of Dzokchen are "spontaneity" (*lhundrub*), "naturalness" (*rangshin*) and "non-striving" (*madrub matsöl*). Perhaps these notions are more actualised among the Bhutanese than among the more hierarchically-minded Tibetans, though I would not like to make too much of such character analyses of nations. That there is a sense of rivalry between the two traditions might be indicated by the apparently more conscious swing towards the Shabdrung side of the Bhutanese religious picture, perhaps related to the descent of the present king's

wives from a reincarnation of the Shabdrung, or to a stronger sense of the ecclesiastical roots of the Bhutanese state linked to the cultural policy of Driglam Namzha. The largest *thongdröl* (large religious picture) in Bhutan is no longer the one of Guru Rimpoche for the Paro *tsechu* festival, but that of the Shabdrung for Talo. Again, too much should not be made of this — the recent rebuilding of Kurje Lhakhang and the deep reverence paid to the body of the departed Nyingma saint and Dzokchen master, Dünjom Rimpoche, which was specially brought over at royal and government expense from Nepal where he died, testify to a continuing reverence for the Nyingma tradition. Another great Nyingma teacher, Khyentse Rimpoche, had numerous supporters in the kingdom, and his magnificent edition of the Nyingma scriptures (*rNying-ma'i rgyud-'bum*) was subsidised by the Bhutanese royal family. What is also abundantly clear is that the religio-political system of the Gelukpa, the dominant tradition in Tibet, has not only had little influence in Bhutan but has been actively resisted. Indeed, that resistance virtually defines Bhutan as a distinct religious-political entity within the world of Himalayan Buddhism. Or, as one Bhutanese language-teacher told me with some vehemence, "Sir, I do not like Geluk; they do not honour Guru Rimpoche."

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Gyurme Dorje's unpublished translation of the *gSang-ba'i snying-po* (*Guhayagarbhatantra*), University of London Ph.D thesis, 1986.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>3</sup> See Michael Aris, *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, Warminster and New Delhi, 1979, p. 3.
- <sup>4</sup> For the Tibetan text of the Sindhu Raja story, see Blanche C. Olschak, *Ancient Bhutan*, Basle 1979.
- <sup>5</sup> For an English-language version of the life of Kunley, see Keith Dowman and Sonam Paljor, *The Divine Madman: The Divine Life and Songs of Drupka Kunley*, London 1980.
- <sup>6</sup> Aris, op.cit., pt.1 ch.4.
- <sup>7</sup> Published in Longchen Ramjam, *gSung-thor*, Delhi 1979.
- <sup>8</sup> Michael Aris, *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: A Study of Pemalingpa (1450-1521) and the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706)*, London 1989.

# Bhutan's Human Settlements Sector: Dynamics of Tradition and Modernity

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Invited to make a didactic presentation on architecture, I feel I should define my personal view.<sup>1</sup> There is a great temptation to discuss concepts of "tradition" and "modernity", based on an architectural-anthropological approach.<sup>2</sup> The organisation of this unprecedented conference is undoubtedly prompted by humanitarian considerations, following socio-ethnic unrest in southern Bhutan as a result of the implementation of the country's programme for cultural protection and identity. In my opinion, however, the issue at stake is the cultural survival of one of the world's most intriguing traditional societies. What makes Bhutan's cultural heritage so unique is not only the fact that this tradition is still commonly observed today, but that it holds within it the potential to generate new ideas in order to address the challenges of development and modernisation in a more integrated and culture-specific manner. It is paradoxical that, while Westerners have become convinced that an integrated society such as Bhutan can provide them with a comprehensive frame of reference to rethink their own decreasing cultural values, the Bhutanese no longer seem to be aware of the unique potential and dynamic character of their tradition.

Bhutan's firm commitment to preserving its rich cultural heritage can only be encouraged and supported. Yet it can be observed that only the exteriorised cultural patterns and achievements of a specific period are being promoted as true traditional ingredients and values. The forces and systems that should enable an integrated society like Bhutan to consider each and every innovation in the light of its fundamental ideological concepts are promoted less directly.

In this way, the interaction between all aspects of culture is

disconnected, leading to a loss of cultural unity. By reading the material culture of this particular society in transition, one can already perceive a degree of fragmentation of essential traditional concepts. The way the spatial environment is organised can help us to understand whether tradition still prevails in its active role and form, or whether it has been reduced to superficiality. Material culture can only help to clarify concepts of tradition and modernity if its characteristic properties are understood. The fairly young research field of architectural anthropology aims to identify the cultural backbone of a particular dwelling culture by rediscovering the underlying principles and mechanisms that structure space, thereby revealing an essential part of the country's cultural identity.

Before I discuss some of what I believe to be the essential characteristics of Bhutanese dwelling culture, it seems appropriate to outline Bhutan's spatial environment.<sup>3</sup>

**The General Context**

Bhutan is a landlocked Himalayan Buddhist kingdom of about 46,500 sq.km, enclosed by China (Tibet) and India. Its rugged terrain rises from altitudes ranging from less than 160m above sea level in the south (bordering Bengal and Assam), to more than 7,000m in the north (on the Tibetan plateau), which explains Bhutan's unique and extreme variety in climate, fauna and flora.<sup>4</sup>

The population of Bhutan consists of various ethnic groups of Tibetan, Mongoloid and Nepalese origin, and is estimated at 600,000 according to recent sources.<sup>5</sup> The country is divided naturally into three major lateral relief zones, each of which corresponds to a distinct climate and ecology:

North	-	High Himalayas	-	Alpine
Central	-	Inner Himalayas	-	Temperate monsoon
South	-	Foothill	-	Sub-tropical

The inhospitable valleys of the northern zone are thinly populated by pastoralists of Mongoloid type, mainly herding yaks. The numerous fertile valleys of the central zone are well protected by forested mountain ranges. These are the homeland of the Ngalong (*sNga-slong*), the major ethnic group from Tibetan stock. The central zone is

considered the economic and cultural heartland of the country. The tropical foothills of southern Bhutan are made up of fertile pockets of land surrounded by dense and often impenetrable tropical jungle. This zone is inhabited mainly by Bhutanese of Indo-Nepalese origin.

These three major relief zones are also associated with distinct ethnic groups and their inherent habitats. The high Himalayan valleys are the haunt of yak-herdsmen who live a semi-nomadic and independent life. The better-known groups are the people of Laya (*La-yag*) in the west and the Dakpas (*Dag-pa*) and Brokpas (*Brog-pa*) in the east. Most of these pastoralists shelter under black tents woven from yak hair. The tent is often stretched over an open stone basement. More permanent drystone-walled structures are built that will survive the severe winter months; these are used as storehouses.

The inner Himalayan region is subdivided longitudinally into three parts by north-south oriented mountain ranges, each of them containing numerous fertile valleys. The western and central valleys are predominantly inhabited by the Ngalongs, more commonly known as "Drukpas", whereas the Eastern region is the home of the Shachop (*Shar-phyogs-pa*, "easterners"). Throughout the valleys of the inner Himalayan zone, the traditional settlements clearly reflect the Buddhist background of the occupiers. The main valleys are dominated by strategically-located *dzongs* ("fortress") and *lhakhangs* ("temple"). Traditional settlements, principally dispersed clusters of farmhouses, often developed in the vicinity of such fortresses.

The foothills of southern Bhutan are inhabited mainly by Nepalese settlers who immigrated from the end of the 19th century until about 1950 and acquired full Bhutanese citizenship.<sup>6</sup> In southern Bhutan, one can therefore observe a settlement pattern which is very different from the Tibetan-inspired architecture of the central region. Indeed, the southern Bhutanese settlement type, apart from proving its suitability to withstand the sub-tropical climate, articulates primarily the social and hierarchical living habits of the predominantly Hindu population.

**The human settlements sector: a brief outline**

*The traditional housing sector.*

Bhutan is a predominantly rural society without an urban tradition. Traditional settlements, mainly in the rural areas, not only emphasise

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the variety of Bhutanese lifestyles, but also clearly reflect regional variations in climate and topography, and in historical and ethnic backgrounds.

The building tradition, which developed over centuries and is based on a system of mutual help and the maximum use of local available building materials, is still commonly practised today. This does not imply that the architectural configurations observed today have remained unchanged for decades: on the contrary, the morphology of traditional village settings has always been subject to renewal. Over centuries, the Bhutanese have developed the talent and the technology to actualise their dwelling environment with regard to functional, economic and socio-cultural considerations. Even today, despite their historical value, *dzongs* and monasteries are regularly renovated to fulfill present and future needs. They play an active role as setters of trends for domestic architectural developments. Another example of present-day architectural transformation is the way in which some regional aspects of traditional house construction are now being introduced in other regions; this will lead to new traditional architectural configurations in the near future.

Protected by its often inhospitable environmental conditions, Bhutan was never colonised. At the beginning of the 20th century, only a few Westerners had visited Bhutan, mostly as members of British political or trade missions. Following the annexation of Tibet by China in 1951, the high alpine trade routes were closed. Little known to the outside world, Bhutan did not undergo a period of post-industrialism or rapid post-independence urbanisation.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it was only during the reign of the third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1952-1972), that Bhutan emerged from its feudal era. In the early 1950s, the late king decided to make Thimphu the permanent capital.<sup>8</sup> Until then, the valley in which the capital is located contained only a *Dzong* surrounded by a number of traditional village clusters and barracks, inhabited by palace staff and Tibetan migrants, mostly traders. With the introduction of the first five year development plan in 1961, the country gradually changed from a barter economy to a monetary economy.

#### *The formal housing sector*

While traditional building practices and living conditions continued to

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develop at their own pace in rural areas, the first attempts to structure urban space were undertaken in Thimphu in 1964 with the preparation of a Master Plan for the capital.<sup>9</sup> India not only provided the bulk of the development aid for Bhutan in terms of finance, technology and work force, but also served as a frame of reference for setting up a civic and administrative system that conformed to Anglo-Indian codes and standards, adapted to the local context. This implied that, apart from attracting a large foreign workforce that ranged from senior delegates from Indian Ministries and Departments to unskilled labourers employed for construction work, Bhutan was now exposed to Indian know-how, technology, building materials and new products.

To accommodate the seat of the king, the head of the monastic body and the entire central administration, the Tashichho Dzong was partially demolished and then reconstructed as the headquarters of the Central Government. To staff its central administration, the Royal Government selected youngsters from all over the country to join the government service. In the absence of proper education facilities, some professional training was imparted in India and overseas. Following the Indian Civic Standards adopted by the Royal Government, the various Ministries and Departments were responsible for accommodating their staff. Large pockets of privately-owned agricultural land were expropriated and redistributed to various Government agencies, resulting in colony and pool housing.

In accordance with the various grades of government employees and their respective entitlements, various types of accommodation were constructed by the end of the sixties: single and double bungalows for senior staff; twin cottages for junior staff, and semi-permanent barracks and temporary shacks for support staff and labourers respectively. In a later phase, pool housing projects were designed and built as grouped apartment estates, with a variety of flat-type designs, complying with the same social ladder. It is worth noting that in 1988, in Thimphu (population approx. 25,000), 72 per cent of the housing units were occupied by Government officials and owned or rented by the Royal Government.<sup>10</sup>

#### *The semi-informal housing sector*

A new construction sector also flourished in parallel with the official housing market. This concerned the construction of residential

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quarters by public servants, and was associated with increasing international development aid from sources other than India. High-ranking officials took the opportunity to construct high-standard rental bungalows and apartments to cater to the needs of the steadily-growing international community. Following an acute shortage of such accommodation, this became a very profitable business which made up for low government salaries.

The designs for these private undertakings were undertaken by the technical staff of the National Urban Development Corporation and the Public Works Department, which in fact acted both as the planning body (for urban and architectural design work), and the controlling body (granting formal approval). This has resulted in the production of Indo-Westernised plan layouts with "Bhutanised" facades

#### *The informal housing sector*

Thimphu did not only attract people seeking jobs in government service. Farmers from other valleys gave up their agricultural activities to start small businesses in the capital. Prior to its final location the commercial area, then consisting of a number of substandard barracks, was relocated a number of times for various reasons.<sup>11</sup> Once the commercial area had been plotted, several private parties invited their village head carpenter to construct traditional farmhouses. From the various traditional house constructions, which are in fact elaborated versions of the traditional archetype (the farmhouse), one can more or less identify the house owner/builder's valley of origin.

However, these private houses, though built according to traditional designs and construction practices, were not used as rural farmhouses. Most were quite quickly re-arranged as rental units, accommodating up to ten families of different ethnic origins, and reducing the actual living space of the house owner to a strict minimum. Often, additional buildings were erected on the same plot, resulting in a dense private cluster where once a single farmhouse stood in the middle of an orchard. For protection from fire, and because they lacked proper plumbing facilities, these clusters were complemented by separate kitchen and toilet blocks, creating new forms of semi-private outdoor space. These private business parties, being allotted adjoining building plots, developed a semi-traditional urban neighbourhood over a period

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of one decade which had one of the highest population densities in the township. This area, located between the Sunday vegetable market and a colony of institutional buildings, is regarded by some high Government officials as an unhealthy and filthy dwelling environment, which should be demolished if possible, and parcelled out following Western planning standards.

It is worth comparing the urban fabric created by the informal sector with the urban and architectural achievements of the technical government staff, who were trained in India and are now responsible for the preparation of various types of designs and standards, based on technologies developed for environmental conditions other than those of Bhutan.

#### *Government involvement in the rural areas*

In 1987 the Royal Government launched a programme for the improvement of rural housing and living conditions. By introducing a series of simple improvements to the traditional house while maintaining the best of indigenous architecture, it was agreed that health and living conditions should both improve. A variety of settlement types, located in different climatic and geographical conditions, was morphologically and sociologically surveyed in order to increase the practical, economic and cultural feasibility of the project. The project provided on-the-job training for 388 selected village artisans, and resulted in the construction of 18 improved traditional prototype houses (one per *dzongkhag* or district).<sup>12</sup> It should be noted, however, that the Royal Government issued directives to introduce the Buddhist-inspired architectural tradition of central Bhutan into the southern zones, mainly populated by Hindu communities.

#### *Summary*

We focus on a quite unique context, in which more than 90 per cent of the population still lives and organises its habitat as a part of a very rich cultural tradition. Until the sixties, traditional building practices prevailed throughout the country, with remarkable harmony between impressive building structures such as *dzongs* and *lhakhangs*, and the traditional village clusters, based on a commonly accepted archetype, namely the farmhouse. By opening the country up to the outside world in the early sixties, an urbanisation process was initiated in Thimphu

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and in Phuntsholing, the most important commercial town on the border with India. In Bhutan, India not only found an allied partner who would shield her from the Chinese threat, and a new export outlet, but also actively assisted the Bhutanese authorities in the materialisation of a "modern" Bhutan.

The township was shaped in compliance with Indian codes and standards. This has resulted in an urban tissue that consists predominantly of government-constructed and privately-built "westernised" buildings, constructed with Indian technology and finished with a superficial Bhutanese facade treatment. Apart from a number of sparsely-located traditional clusters, one particular neighbourhood clearly stands in contrast to the "modern" realisations of the formal and semi-formal construction sector, namely the community of the business people, above the vegetable market.

It is paradoxical that, on the one hand, this semi-traditional organised urban community illustrates the existence of a potential to structure urban space in a more "Bhutanese" way, while on the other hand this area is looked upon as a substandard dwelling environment. However, since the Royal Government of Bhutan consolidated housing and salary payments in 1988, resulting in the stagnation of the formal housing market, civil servants have tended to move to lower standards of housing<sup>13</sup> such as that provided by the informal housing market described above. Government staff who opt to stay in government quarters tend to partly rent out a few rooms to relatives, colleagues or friends, in order to compensate for the mandatory rental deduction, fixed at 30 per cent of monthly pay.

In early 1987, when it launched a programme to promote and improve traditional living and housing conditions in the rural areas, the Royal Government became actively involved on a countrywide basis in the most important informal building sector, interfering with the living and housing habits of traditional farm households at all levels of decision making.

#### **Bhutan's Material Culture: Selected Issues**

The above outline provides us with a realistic picture of Bhutan's human settlements sector. Indeed, most of the publications on Bhutan that contribute a limited passage to its architectural tradition merely evoke an idyllic picture of the country's architectural uniqueness,

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ascribed to its era of self-imposed isolation. We have instead opted to highlight Bhutan's spatio-cultural diversity and its increasingly problematic and ambiguous character, ever since the modernisation process of the country was initiated in the early sixties.

The preliminary outline of the human settlement sector focuses mainly on the dwelling culture of the Ngalong or "Drukpa", because it is associated with the country's national identity. There is no doubt that in Bhutan the cultural presence of the Drukpa is the most assertive. It is recognisable in all its facets, ranging from body language and private house rituals to the most public and formal exteriorisations of a unique collective ideology. Yet it is my personal opinion that an acknowledgement of multi-cultural co-existence as one of the characteristics of Bhutan will be essential to ensure the peaceful and qualitative development of the kingdom. Each of the other ethnic groups has also developed a distinct cultural profile and identity as an essential element of the Bhutanese cultural landscape.

With the implementation of its recent programme for cultural preservation, the Royal Government has expressed its deep concern that the co-existence of a wide range of distinct sub-cultures within a small country such as Bhutan might not contribute to a national sense of cultural belonging and identity. If we overlook the frightening rise of ethnic unrest throughout the whole world, which has accelerated since the end of the cold war, it is as if Bhutan has created a problem from which it could have been spared. Indeed, the peaceful co-existence of a multi-cultural society that characterised Bhutan until the late eighties could have served as a model of institutionalised socio-ethnic tolerance and conciliation.

History shows us that the path to ethnic and cultural integration is always paved over many generations, and is never the result of mid-term policies. Referring once again to material culture, there was every reason to believe that efforts were made in this respect. Indeed, even on the basis of a limited number of architectural surveys in southern Bhutan, we learned that, in comparison with the dwelling culture of Nepal, the Hindu-inspired settings of the Lhotshampas in southern Bhutan are far more Bhutanese than one could possibly imagine. It is our firm belief that the dwelling culture of the Drukpa and the Lhotshampa have more structural and cultural elements of reciprocity in common than insurmountable incompatibilities.



So as not to extend the scope of this paper, we would now like to restrict ourselves to further explore the dwelling culture of the Buddhist Drukpas. In the introduction, we suggested that an insight into the characteristic properties of a material culture can facilitate a more appropriate and decisive attitude towards the actual problems of socio-cultural and political origin. Indeed, so-called present-day developments and problems, inherent in any form of society, are very often rooted in a country's cultural history and crystallised in its material culture, of which the organisation of the spatial environment forms an integral part. We have introduced the research field of architectural anthropology as a more relevant approach to identify the essence of a particular dwelling culture, in particular its concepts and dynamics, which enable the spatial environment to play its culture-supportive role.

#### **The Approach of Architectural Anthropology to Material Culture**

Architectural anthropology emerged in the sixties, following new insights and changes in attitude within the fields of architecture and cultural anthropology. On the one hand, the awareness of our Western cultural impoverishment and disintegrated image of society has created a climate of introspection and self-criticism. This encouraged young architects to rediscover the fundamentals of architecture, particularly by studying traditional societies in Asia.

On the other hand, inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss's<sup>14</sup> structural anthropology, the spatio-temporal dimension of culture became essential to the work of the cultural anthropologist. Indeed, issues that were earlier identified and dealt with as primarily matters of a sociological or anthropological nature more often found their answers in the material culture of the society concerned.

In his outline of architectural anthropology Pieper, one of the pioneers of this new thinking, emphasises that "Architectural Anthropology starts with the idea that every human society builds their habitat in a way which on the one hand reflects the ecosystem, technology, mode of production and ideas about life and after-life of that particular society, while on the other hand it articulates in its particular forms what is a universal phenomenon inherent in any human society."<sup>15</sup> And, if we support André Loeckx's statement that "transformations of tissue characteristics act as vehicles of cultural

change",<sup>16</sup> we subscribe to the view that the study of architectural transformations within a specific cultural context can draw our attention to disquieting changes in attitude towards essential ideas and concepts.

In our personal research, we aim to identify the innovative and dynamic character of tradition. In other words, tradition is not a "canon" that lasts for centuries, and it should not necessarily strive for cultural immobility. Tradition holds the potential to absorb the changes that are vital to the survival of mankind. Moreover, it acts as the source of inspiration by which the challenges of modernity can be met with more confidence and cultural self-respect.

#### *The approach applied to Bhutan*

In the context of Bhutan, "tradition" and "modernity" were identified as the most relevant concepts for a discussion of the rapid cultural changes that can be observed today in relation to the organisation of the spatial environment. Indeed, tradition and modernity are issues that are currently under discussion and are thus extremely real.

In Bhutan, tradition is not at all a static notion. The association of tradition with the past and of modernity with today is not relevant. What we have earlier defined as pseudo-traditional architecture (westernised buildings with superficial Bhutanese decorations) is very often recognised by the local authorities as "the traditional style of the day". To associate tradition with local housing and building practices, and modernity with imported architectural concepts and technologies, is also not relevant. The cultural patterns that prevail in southern Bhutan are not considered Bhutanese or indigenous, despite the full citizenship of their users. To associate tradition with a cultural equilibrium and modernity with time-bounded trends is no longer true for Bhutan. When Bhutan opened up to the outside world, it was confident that it would be strong enough to resist any foreign temptations that would undermine traditional values and patterns. However, the facts tell us that graduates, back from their overseas training, often find it difficult to identify with the policy of cultural uniqueness and preservation. The above leads to the following question: "How can we, in the middle of this Bhutanese cultural crisis, contribute to a more pragmatic way of discussing concepts of tradition and modernity in relation to the accelerated architectural developments

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of the past twenty-five years?" We believe that through the detailed study of architectural transformations in representative dwelling environments, we will be able to provide Bhutan with an additional frame of reference, with the help of which concepts of tradition and modernity could possibly be reviewed.

By means of multiple reconnaissance studies, we located and identified a number of dwelling environments, each of them representing a distinct way of organising its spatial environment, in both rural and urban contexts. Having established a relationship of trust<sup>17</sup> with some of the inhabitants in each of the representative dwelling environments, we started our investigations in the dwelling environments listed below. They more or less correspond with the outline of the human settlements sector described earlier.

Traditional (rural) context: the village of Rukubji, Sephu Gewog, Wandri Phodrang.

Semi-traditional (rural) context: the house of Sangay Dorji at Begana, Thimphu.

Traditional (urban) context: the shophouse of Zangmo along upper Norzim Lam at Thimphu.

Semi-traditional (urban) context: The clusters of Chencho Tsering, Zangmo, Dorji Gyeltsen, and Ande Kam at Thimphu.

Semi-traditional (urban) context: The rental apartment block cum shop of Danyi / Enchu along lower Norzim Lam at Thimphu.

Modern (urban) context: The apartment estate of Sonam Wangdi, below the UNDP at Thimphu.

Modern (urban) context: The overall morpho-anthropological development of Thimphu.

We learned that the unique Dzong architecture stands as a trend-setter for the conceptualisation, design, architectural expression and elaboration of the traditional farmhouse, Bhutan's archetype. The traditional farmhouse, commonly referred to by Bhutanese as "my village house" is not only a private family house. It is identified as the true "social habitat" of Bhutan. In rural areas, each and every village house is the cultural achievement of the entire village community. House construction is essentially an act of cultural belonging in the service of a collective ideological goal. Each house is the materialisation of the cultural identity of its users, endorsed by the entire community. The house is the place for social interaction and ritual. At certain ceremonies and rituals, performed for the wellbeing of all the village inhabitants, the selected farmhouse literally accommodates the entire

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village community, expressing a unique and strong sense of cultural belonging at that particular moment.

We have therefore opted to rediscover the characteristic properties of this unique dwelling type, by tracing the elaborations and transformations that the archetype has undergone, until this spatial concept ceases to exist. With reference to the above selected spatial environments, we have summarised our preliminary findings as follows:

The traditional (rural) context of Rukubji, a village settlement in Central Bhutan presents the Bhutanese archetype (i.e., the traditional farmhouse) with its compatibility and its ability to absorb changes of two main kinds: transformations in function of new spatial and functional requirements, and/or transformations accentuating a change in the status of the owner.

The semi-traditional (rural) context of Begana, near Thimphu, illustrates the fluency with which regional aspects of design and construction are nowadays interchanged, leading to new indigenous architectural configurations.

The semi-traditional (urban) context of the private informal sector, i.e. the down-market neighbourhood, represents the exploration and elaboration of the archetype. It is the re-confirmation of its ability to accommodate even more extreme changes. The formation of clusters accommodating groups of unrelated families of different ethnic backgrounds illustrates the flexibility of this unique concept very well.

The traditional shophousing (urban) context, initially designed and constructed by the Royal Government, did not lay the foundation for a new tradition. However, once the shops were privatised, and prior to the architectural development control implemented by the National Urban Development Corporation (now known as the Department of Works and Housing and Roads), private initiatives illustrate the creativity by which new traditional forms of built and open space are created. Yet shophousing in Thimphu paved the way for a pseudo-tradition.

The modern (urban) context of Thimphu clearly illustrates the failure of modern attempts to develop and structure urban space, by depriving architecture of its cultural role as spatial regulator, mediator and conciliator. Contrary to the rural areas, current patterns of urban landuse and architecture have already been pulled down to the level of a soulless object and speculative consumer commodity, which typifies our Western world.

### **The characteristic properties of Bhutan's spatial environment.**

Once familiar with this uniquely rich cultural context, one easily comes to the conclusion that two different dwelling cultures can be observed

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within it. Indeed, it is hard to believe that the Bhutanese urban fabric is the creation of the same people who developed one of the world's most unique and integral traditional dwelling cultures.

"Tradition" can easily be associated with the part of the dwelling culture that has developed following centuries-old traditions, and which is still commonly practised in the rural areas and in the vicinity of urban centres. "Modernity" is usually associated with the 28-year-old urban development of the country, and considered as one of the main physical achievements since Bhutan was opened to the outside world in the early sixties. With reference to the programme for cultural preservation, it may be interesting and timely to find out whether the current patterns of urban land use and settlement tissue still contribute to the fundamental spatial and ideological concepts.

To justify this thought, we will illustrate some of what we have identified as the characteristic properties of the Drukpa dwelling culture. Following our specific methods for reading and documenting aspects of material culture, we have opted to present a selection of key issues in a graphical way. The synoptic sketches (I-VIII, pp.164-71) depicting essential characteristics of Bhutan's dwelling culture are preliminary drafts of segments belonging to a "cultural matrix"<sup>18</sup> that will enable us to further our research in Bhutan in a more systematic and comprehensive way.

Sketch I on "spatial hierarchy and thresholds" essentially reveals a dual system of "spatial order and ritual protection": the vertical system articulates a spatial hierarchy that simultaneously unites, orders and provides each and every architectural concept with its role of spatial regulator, mediator, and conciliator. The important cultural role associated with each architectural concept is thereby not only articulated by scale, size or form, but equally through its interrelations with other spatial concepts and natural elements with spatial qualities, such as mountains, rivers, and so on. The horizontal system can be associated with the spatial concept of ritual protection. At all levels of spatial complexity, one can identify individually and collectively-staged forms of spatio-temporal ritualism, evoking a strong sense of cultural belonging and identity.

Sketch II covering "spatial and ritual entities" depicts Bhutan's architectural unity and harmony. Bhutanese architecture is harmonious because it radiates or expresses "diversity in its unity". In other words,

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throughout Bhutan we come across distinct variations and elaborations of one and the same basic architectural concept: the traditional archetype, expressed in its informal (private), formal (public) and religious forms.

Sketch III, mapping issues of "spatial and ritual trespassing", illustrates how in the village of Rukubji concepts of ritual protection are embodied by space ordering concepts, such as *lhakhangs*, *chötens*, *lukhangs*, prayer flags, and so on, and brought alive by means of specialised and collectively-staged rituals.

Sketch IV illustrates the densification process of a hybrid urban settlement tissue, along with the development of a multi-ethnic dwelling environment, where elements of spatial and ritual protection more often occur in disintegrated and purely ornamental forms.

Sketch V, the graphical synthesis of "structural and cultural patterns",<sup>19</sup> illustrates a selection of compository and structuring principles applicable to house construction. It articulates the hierarchical relationships between architectural concepts of various origins and cultural importance.

Sketch VI, the schematic representation of the "Bhutan archetype", not only depicts a spatial hierarchy at the house level, but equally articulates how concepts of spatial order and ritual protection are embodied in this unique architectural concept.

Sketch VII, the graphical synthesis of the major "rituals of traditional house construction"<sup>20</sup>, reveals how ritual forms an inseparable aspect of traditional building construction. It is believed that the creation of a living environment, complying with selective principles of composition and structure rooted in Buddhist tradition, not only enables its inhabitants to gain happiness and longevity in their present life, but equally ensures a happy state of existence following death.<sup>21</sup>

Sketch VIII articulates the importance of "anthropometric scaling" for house construction. Measure, rhythm, figure and proportion are commonly derived from the anthropometric measurements of the head carpenter.<sup>22</sup> To our knowledge the same principles of proportion, scaling and units of measurement apply to all artisanal creations such as *thangkhas* and mural paintings, sculpture, weaving, traditional *desho* (paper) making, etc. This compository uniformity<sup>23</sup> explains the "harmony" between all aspects of material culture which, if maintained,

will stand for the continuity and uniqueness of this unequalled cultural tradition.

**The Dynamics of Tradition: a selection of key issues**

What characterises Bhutan's material culture most is the merger of object and subject. Ranging from artisanal weaving through to the construction of breathtaking *dzongs*, the expression of a religious<sup>24</sup> dimension is omnipresent at all levels and in all components of material culture. In Bhutan, religious expression is the mediating factor *par excellence* that unites and integrates all aspects of culture into a distinct whole, crystallised in material culture. Recognisable in its bold forms of artisanal and artistic expression, or present by means of underlying compository or structuring principles, it is relevant to comprehend the dynamics and driving forces that made this factor of cultural integration and identity livable and relevant for many generations.

Discussing the role of Tibetan *thangka* painting, the Jacksons state that "painting along with sculpture was crucial to the religious life of Tibet because it was a medium through which the highest ideals of Buddhism were evoked and brought alive"<sup>25</sup> and that "following Tibetan Buddhist thinking, most Buddhist art functioned as *ten* (*rten*, literally, "supports"), that is, as physical representations and embodiments of enlightened body, speech or mind".<sup>26</sup> An object can therefore play its "culture-supportive" role only if it is "imbued with the spirit of enlightenment by means of a ritual consecration ceremony".<sup>27</sup> Referring to a classification of temples recorded by a 15th-century *thangka* authority named Bodong Panchen, they point out that important architectural concepts such as temples and monasteries can equally be referred to as *kuten* (*sku-rten*, "body supports"), and stupas (*chöten*, *mchod-rten*) may be recognised as the "support" of enlightened minds.<sup>28</sup> This valuable research into the essence and cultural role of the Tibetan *thangka* as "support" has inspired us to reformulate some of our own findings in connection with the exploration of Bhutan's material culture in general, and the organisation of the spatial environment in particular. Applied to Bhutan, the principle of a "support" presents itself as the key issue to rediscover the driving forces underlying Bhutan's culture-specific concepts of space. With reference to our research into the characteristic

properties of material culture in Bhutan, our assessment is that the concept of "support" not only applies to specific and esoteric forms of cultural expression, but to the whole system of spatial regulation. Indeed, with reference to Drukpa dwelling culture, it is our hypothesis that traditional architecture in Bhutan is, like other non-built components of material culture (e.g. painting, body language, dance, etc.) at the same time bodily and didactic. Most of the built and non-built assets of Bhutan's material culture are embodiments of ideological concepts, didactically exteriorised by acts and forms of spatial expression and articulated by consecratory and commemorative rituals. Like the purposeful commissioning of *thangka* paintings, we believe that in Bhutan, one's active contribution to the materialisation of an "auspicious and self-preserving living environment", complying with Buddhist ideas about life and the after-life, and ordered following "synthesis-oriented compository and structuring principles", can equally be considered a virtuous deed in itself.<sup>29</sup> The latter strongly suggests that the conception and materialisation of a culture-supportive living environment as the embodiment of ideological values cannot be achieved without creating a general climate of cultural belonging and identity. Implementation therefore calls for vision, cultural leadership and an "exemplary attitude", in order to ensure the introduction, dissemination and continuous actualisation of the Buddhist stock of ideas in order to face the challenges of the future with confidence.

This thought has probably predominated ever since Bhutan's unification process began in the 17th century. Under the Shabdrung, Ngawang Namgyel (1594-1651),<sup>30</sup> all aspects of culture were explicitly interrelated and institutionalised, in order to ensure the continuity of a united sense of cultural belonging and self-preservation rooted in Buddhist tradition. Today, the promotion of a national costume, guidelines for a national Code of Conduct (*Driglam Namzha*)<sup>31</sup> and the concept of a more uniform and integrated dwelling pattern are but a few elements which illustrate that nothing was left to chance in the process of cultural integration and unification. Bhutan's main cultural manifesto, commonly referred to as the *Tsawa Sum*,<sup>32</sup> calls for the preservation and promotion of a distinct and united cultural uniqueness, thereby urging every "Bhutanese individual" (irrespective of his background, status, rank or talent) to actively contribute to this common goal of national and ideological importance. Even today,

social factors such as status and rank are still essentially linked to a citizen's personal dedication to the concept of the Tsawa Sum. Body language and architectural refinement are means to proclaim and display the meritoriousness of a person's act and attitude.

With reference to uniform costume (body language) and uniform conceptions of architectural design, both the *kabné* (ceremonial scarf), and the type and degree of architectural refinement are considered as important cultural patterns from which to read and appraise someone's exemplary attitude and cultural animation. Indeed the *kabné*, in its variety of patterns and colours, not only reveals in what degree a person has been rewarded for his exemplary attitude and acts, but at the same time reveals the Cultural Code (Driglam Namzha) and the protocol that comes along with that particular type of scarf. In the same way, we have discerned a relationship between certain architectural features, adapted to the traditional farmhouse, and the rank and/or state of merit of its dwellers. For instance, the crowning of the farmhouse with yet another gabled roof (*byamdo*) uplifts the rewarded person's farmhouse from its direct spatial environment, but without disturbing the harmony of the overall prevailing settlement tissue characteristics. Another example of the didactic character of architecture is embodied by the four-sided pitch roof with lantern, commonly known as *jabzhi*, which is a distinct architectural feature traditionally associated with royalty, or is reserved to articulate the formal and religious character of important formal and public buildings, such as *dzongs*, *lhakhangs*, etc..

This all demonstrates that the promotion of a uniform settlement tissue does not necessarily prohibit each individual architectural concept from expressing its own identity and playing its specific role. Despite the uniform character of Bhutan's architectural landscape, we have never come across two identical *dzongs*, *lhakhangs* or farmhouses, although they have all been conceived with the help of the same compository principles. Uniformity and harmony are evoked by the religious dimension embodied in all distinct and coherent architectural forms of expression. Diversity is evoked by both the regional and physical aspects of building, such as climate, topography and ecology, and by the hierarchic relationships and interactions between all of these coherent architectural concepts. In other words, the spatial hierarchy that typifies Bhutan's architectural configuration is a sublimation of a

commonly accepted, repeatedly practised, and lived architectural concept, which on the one hand reflects in its uniformity and harmony a sense of cultural belonging and self-preservation, while on the other it articulates in its diversity and refinement the personified identity of each and every Buddhist individual.

Of all architectural concepts, the interrelationship between the *dzong* and the farmhouse is the most striking and representative one, articulating the dynamic and innovative character of Bhutan's architectural tradition. Indeed, there are astonishing similarities between the architectural concepts of the *dzong* and the farmhouse in terms of architectural expression, technology and texture.

The architectural conception and expression of the *rabsé*<sup>33</sup>, one of Bhutan's most distinctive tissue characteristics, applied similarly to both *dzongs* and farmhouses, presents itself as the most relevant issue here. Architectural uniformity and harmony between *dzongs* and traditional village settlements has been constant throughout Bhutan's history. The configuration in general, and the architectural expression of the *rabsé* in particular, currently referred to as the traditional style *par excellence*, is however very different from the configuration observed by the British as early as 1783, and documented with the help of very accurate paintings and sketches by Samuel Davis).<sup>34</sup> How can we explain the fact that the architectural configuration of *dzongs* and village houses has continuously changed hand in hand throughout the country? We have identified four dynamic factors which we consider essential for the enhancement and survival of Bhutan's cultural uniqueness:

1. Bhutan's "nailless" architecture.
2. The cultural role of the *zopön* (master-builder, head carpenter).
3. The *dzong* as a cultural and architectural trendsetter.
4. The *gungda ula* labour service as a catalyst for cultural sensitisation.

Taking the practical side of building construction into account, we strongly believe that Bhutan's ingenious traditional construction technology, commonly referred to as "nailless architecture", is one of the cornerstones of this culture. First of all, this meccano type of construction allows for the construction of very high quality buildings with the help of only a few experts and the maximum deployment of unskilled labour. Apart from its practical and economical

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characteristics, building construction in general and traditional house construction in particular can undoubtedly be considered the most dynamic and innovative factor of Bhutan's material culture. House construction is a cultural act that evokes a strong sense of belonging and self-preservation. Indeed, building construction is not at all an individual or family matter: each and every traditional farmhouse is the accomplishment of the entire village community. It is not only the act of construction and the rituals associated with house construction that evoke this sense of cultural belonging. The completed house in itself will always evoke these essential emotions.

However, to ensure the continuity of this architectural tradition in keeping with ideological values, the structuring of the spatial environment is not left to individual creativity and architectural expression. The head-carpenter (*zopön*) not only acts as the architect and contractor, but equally as an expert in material culture. The *zopön's* degree of cultural animation, and his sense of spiritual and practical synthesis, not only enhance the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the houseowner's family, but equally that of the entire community that participated in the construction and consecration rituals. The *zopön's* challenge is to merge his profound knowledge of Buddhist iconography (couched in the canon of his own anthropometric measurements) with the practical and spiritual objectives of the patron in an architectural synthesis. To personalise the conception, and to embody the newly-constructed structure with enlightenment, astrologers and lamas are involved to consult with the *zopön* and the patron.

Considering the extreme physical conditions of Bhutan, we can ask ourselves how it is possible that remarkable architectural innovations are so rapidly disseminated and adopted throughout the country. It is our hypothesis that the architectural synthesis of the concept of the *dzong*, embodying the highest Buddhist ideas and values, functions as a cultural magnet and a didactic source for spatio-cultural inspiration. As a governmental institution, the *dzong* can be considered as the socio-political and cultural heart of a *dzongkhag* or spatial and ritual entity. Everyone depends for his/her personal and public matters on the *dzong* of his/her spatial entity, and is therefore familiar with its impressive architectural configuration. At the annual festivals of Tsechu and Dromchö, the *dzong* provides the perfect scenery to evoke a strong sense of cultural belonging. Virtually everybody gathers at the *dzong* to

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commemorate the Great Deeds of Guru Rimpoche and to honour the main protective deities.<sup>35</sup> Most of the more significant and impressive elaborations of the *dzongs* can be described as the religious expressions of meritorious deeds, performed by historical figures and high authorities (both secular and spiritual), as an exemplary act of high spiritual devotion. The most highly qualified *zopön* of the country, entrusted with the honourable task of expressing these renewed values in the form of a new architectural configuration, is referred to as the Zorik Lapön or, exceptionally, the Zorik Chichap.<sup>36</sup>

Through our personal involvement in the "improved traditional housing project", we observed how the best master-carpenters were recruited throughout Bhutan to work under the guidance of the Zorik Lapön on prestigious renovations of *dzongs* (e.g. Punakha Dzong in the late 1980s) and *lhakhangs* (e.g. the Kujé Sarpa Lhakhang in Bumthang in the mid-1980s). Many of these village carpenters were recruited under the *gungda ula* system, a form of taxation that requires the participation of one person per family per year for a period of two weeks in works of national importance.

The above explains how new ideas for architectural elaboration and refinement were introduced by the Zorik Lapön to the *zopöns* (selected from all over Bhutan), in the form of intensive on-the-job training periods. In their turn, the professionally enriched and spiritually enlightened *zopöns* stand for the introduction and dissemination of these challenging new concepts and expressions at village and household level. If we know that the woodwork of a traditional farmhouse is renewed approximately every twenty years, it is acceptable to believe that new architectural trends, preset by the *dzongs*, are quickly adopted by the villagers, despite their topographical isolation. Of more relevance to us is the fact that by incorporating innovations to the private house each individual endorses a cultural change promoted by the authorities and materialised by the renovated *dzong* or *lhakhang*, thus reconfirming his belief and trust in the actualised concept of the Tsawa Sum.

### *Epilogue*

Without pretending to be complete or systematic in our arguments, we have tried to raise a number of issues that invite further exploration and discussion, in order to place some of the characteristic properties in

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their true context, and in the correct order of importance and relevance. We would therefore like to conclude with a few personal reflections and open questions.

If we now relate some of these key issues to the urban context of Thimphu, we can ask whether we are dealing here with a cultural rupture, triggered by Bhutan's accelerated and uncritical exposure to the Western world. Why is tradition brought down to the level of wallpaper decoration, out of context, reducing the dynamics of tradition to a superficiality of the highest degree? Can we actually associate the urban fabric with modernity, or do we have to speak of the decay of a tradition? What we have experienced as perhaps the most important characteristic property of Bhutan's traditional material culture is the fact that everything is dynamic and alive. All aspects of life and the after life are personified and play their culture-integrating role. Every architectural concept ("object") is imbued with the spirit of enlightenment and becomes a culture-integrating, mediating and conciliating factor ("subject") within this society. Can we describe the urban tissue as culture-supportive? Can a Buddhist happily reside in these hybrid and, in Bhutan's context, unsuitable structures? What is so meritorious about the urban settlement pattern?

We have every reason to believe that Bhutan's true cultural uniqueness survives in its dynamic form only in the rural areas. The question is for how long this unique tradition will be able to survive the increasing number of cultural transgressions. Almost twenty years ago, Niels Gutschow, one of the pioneers in the field of architectural anthropology, wrote the following statement with regard to physical planning at Bhaktapur in Nepal:

Some degree of modernisation is inevitable and indeed vital. We would hope that planning for development will not lose view of the fact that within a system, change in one place will trigger other changes; we would wish that planners will at least attempt to gauge the probable effects of an initial alteration...Deficient planning is all too common. Western experts usually have but a perfunctory acquaintance with the cultural presuppositions of the countries they are working in. Their counterparts from developing countries, often western-trained, sometimes do not wish to appear traditionalist; equating tradition with backwardness, they too readily yield to suggestions which set their own cultural heritage at naught.<sup>37</sup>

We can illustrate this with the following example. From the moment international guidelines (e.g. UNESCO's) for the preservation of an

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architectural heritage are applied to the *dzongs* without considering the *dzongs'* dynamic character; and if renovation and preservation works become the sole duty only of highly qualified professionals, there is every reason to believe that Bhutan's tradition will only survive in its fragmented and folkloristic forms. If the role of the *zopön* is brought down to the level of carpenter-technician, apprenticed in Western-structured vocational training institutes, or if he, and along with him his ingenious building technology, is excluded from the urban settlement sector, his culture-integrating role will end.

We would like to end on a positive note. Between the lines of our paper we actually suggest that Bhutan's material culture still holds in itself the potential to meet the challenges of development and modernisation with a confidence that is characteristic of Bhutan's pre-urban era. The fundamental characteristics of this unique culture still prevail in their integrated form, and are still relevant to 90 per cent of Bhutan's population. The challenge is, however, to rediscover the dynamic factors and properties and to apply them to work out the profile of a modern Bhutan, rooted in Buddhist tradition.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> From May 1986 to December 1990, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS/HABITAT) assigned me as an architect/planner to Bhutan. I would like to state that the views expressed in this paper are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the formal views of the Royal Government of Bhutan or the United Nations.
- <sup>2</sup> The idea emerged to undertake doctoral research, focusing on architectural transformations in this unique context, where one can still observe a blend of centuries-old architectural traditions, and the first attempts to introduce and structure urban space as the materialisation of a "modern" Bhutan. Having thoroughly explained my arguments and intentions, the Royal Government of Bhutan and the United Nations have formally approved this personal research undertaking. The challenging assignment provided us with an appropriate frame of reference for studying the present architectural context as a process of change. From May 1986 to December 1987, we were attached to the National Urban Development Corporation (NUDC), responsible for the preparation and implementation of Urban Development Plans for the capital Thimphu, the commercial border town Phuntsholing and major district centres. This enabled us to study the 25-year-old urbanisation experience of the country. From

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- November 1986 to December 1990, following a royal command to improve traditional housing and living conditions in rural areas (90 per cent of the housing stock), we were responsible for the formulation, planning and implementation of the Rural Housing Demonstration Project. This programme was first undertaken by the Public Works Department and completed within the framework of the Department of Works and Housing.
- <sup>3</sup> "Spatial environment" is a more plausible term than "built environment" or our Western interpretation of the term "architecture", because it integrates all aspects of life that structure and form space, including elements of landscape, topography and texture.
  - <sup>4</sup> See the map of Bhutan on page 24 of this volume.
  - <sup>5</sup> According to the Central Statistical Office in its *Planning Commissions Statistical Year Book of Bhutan 1988*, the population is 1,165,000. The Royal Government of Bhutan has recently acknowledged that these figures were over-estimated and based on a population figure of 1,000,000, preset on the occasion of Bhutan's UN membership in 1972.
  - <sup>6</sup> Van Strydonck et al. 1984: 11.
  - <sup>7</sup> Standley and Tull 1990: 1.
  - <sup>8</sup> Until then, Thimphu served as the summer capital, whereas Punakha was the winter capital, located in a valley at a lower altitude than Thimphu. The head of the monk body, the Je Khenpo, still observes this tradition.
  - <sup>9</sup> The physical planning assignment was undertaken by the Department of Architecture and Regional Planning, I.I.T. Kharagpur, India.
  - <sup>10</sup> Standley and Tull 1990: part B, 42.
  - <sup>11</sup> As the building site for the dzong reconstruction work required more and more space, the shop line was moved along the Thimphu river, where it was flooded in 1968. After being moved two more times, a commercial centre was planned, more or less following the proposed landuse plan of the Thimphu Master Plan, drafted in 1964.
  - <sup>12</sup> In 1992, with the implementation of the Seventh Five-Year Plan, two new *dzongkhags* were included: Gasa (in the northwest) and Tashiyangtse (in the northeast).
  - <sup>13</sup> Standley and Tull 1990: part E, 11.
  - <sup>14</sup> A relevant introduction to structural anthropology is Lévi Strauss 1962.
  - <sup>15</sup> Pieper 1980: 5.
  - <sup>16</sup> Loeckx 1982: 15-16.
  - <sup>17</sup> Bhutan is not a country that allows someone to unconditionally undertake personal work. One requires the formal approval of the Royal Government after having thoroughly explained one's arguments and further intentions. The Bhutanese do not like to become a subject of study as such, but they have developed a talent for telling outsiders only what they really want to reveal, or even for misleading persons whom they do not fully trust. It was therefore of importance to establish a mutual and confidential relationship with the



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Bhutanese, without regard to their rank or occupation. Our openminded attitude towards this society, so different from ours, and the broad character of our official duties, have undoubtedly contributed to the acceptance of our regular presence in their dwelling environments.

- <sup>18</sup> Inspired by the "3-field-model" of Devisch, and the expanded version, developed by Loeckx as a tool for reading culture-specific tissue characteristics, we have developed a "cultural matrix" relevant to the Indian context. The matrix relates fundamental Hindu concepts to coherent fields of meaning such as physical and social bodiliness, specialised rituals, secular and religious art, and the structuring principles of space at various levels of spatial complexity. The matrix was first developed in connection with a Masters programme in architectural science at the University of Louvain in Belgium.
- <sup>19</sup> This preliminary chart is extracted from my Bhutan case study documentation entitled "The Traditional House of Sangay Dorji at Begana". See bibliography.
- <sup>20</sup> Apart from our own observations at construction sites, our information on rituals of traditional house construction is mainly based on an interesting interview with Mrs. Chime Wongmo, Curator of the National Museum in Paro in February 1988, in connection with her article of 1985 on this subject (see bibliography). The illustrations are from my construction handbook on improved traditional housing.
- <sup>21</sup> Applied to thangka painting, see Jackson 1984: 10.
- <sup>22</sup> At all construction sites, I observed that the anthropometric measurements of the head carpenter (*sapön*) were used for scaling. Measurements for various timber components were passed on to the carpenter-helpers (*lagshep*) in the form of sized bamboo sticks to ensure uniform scaling. This does not exclude the use of the "canon" of the house owner or patrons on certain occasions. In that case the measurements for the layout of the plinth are derived from the owner's *dom* (full armspan) and the scaling of carpentry components is possibly derived from the "face measure" known as *tho*, which is equal to the span between stretched thumb and middle finger. More research is recommended on this subject. For anthropometric scaling, see also Aris 1988: 33-5; Jackson 1984: 50; and Pema Namdol Thaye 1987: 38-44.
- <sup>23</sup> Based on his extensive architectural research on the Nile cultures and ancient Egypt, Verschuren's thesis is that universal architectural forms of expression, through rhythm, measure, figure and proportion, find their original fundamentals in metaphysics.
- <sup>24</sup> The term "religious" is often misused and associated literally with the cultic aspects of a religion, which is a decreased (Western?) interpretation. Buddhism interferes with all aspects of life, and by doing so, brings structure and subsequently peace into a Buddhist's life.
- <sup>25</sup> Jackson 1984: 9.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*: 25.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

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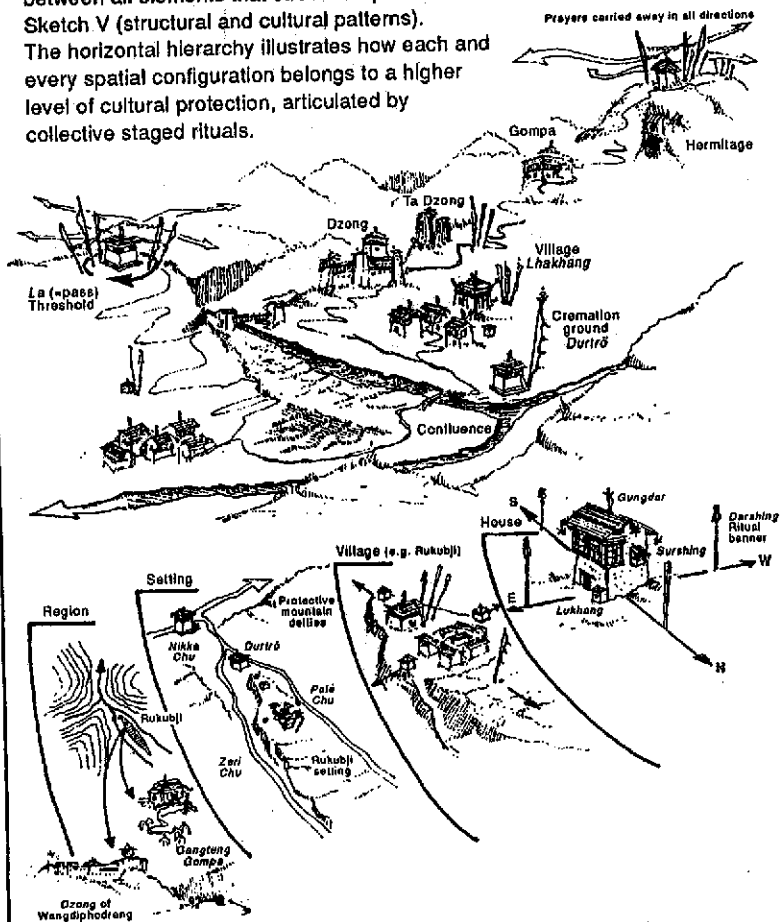
- <sup>29</sup> In relation to Tibetan thanka painting, *ibid.*: 10.
- <sup>30</sup> See introductory entry on "Bhutan's Unification and the Shabdrung's Legacy", in Pommaret 1990: 60-1.
- <sup>31</sup> The "way" to the traditional etiquette is referred to as Driglam Namzha. It includes a very detailed set of guidelines in connection with social and public conduct. For instance, traditional exchange of greetings with or without ceremonial scarf, prostration rules in *dzongs* and monasteries, the formalities governing inaugural ceremonies, and the like.
- <sup>32</sup> The promotion of the cultural identity is referred to as the Tsawa Sum, or love, loyalty and dedication to His Majesty the King, the country and the people.
- <sup>33</sup> *Rabsé* is the Tibetan word for "light" or "clarity", and therefore refers to the room with the largest number of windows. In Bhutan, where timber is in abundance, the concept of the *rabsé* has become the most distinct characteristic of traditional architecture.
- <sup>34</sup> Aris 1982.
- <sup>35</sup> For an introduction to Bhutanese festivals, see Pommaret 1990: 102-3.
- <sup>36</sup> The term *zorik* literally means art, craft or science; *lapön* means overseer of works; *chichap* means general supervisor. The title of *Zorik Chichap* is the highest ever given to a head carpenter, namely to Parpa Oeser who was responsible for the reconstruction of the Tashichho Dzong in the mid-1960s.
- <sup>37</sup> Gutschow 1975: 6

## I: SPATIAL HIERARCHY AND THRESHOLDS

### Issue of Spatial and Ritual Protection

Synoptic sketch depicting the interrelation between the various levels of spatial complexity. The vertical hierarchy illustrates the cultural role of each architectural concept as a spatial mediator. The interaction between all elements that structure space is dealt with in Sketch V (structural and cultural patterns).

The horizontal hierarchy illustrates how each and every spatial configuration belongs to a higher level of cultural protection, articulated by collective staged rituals.

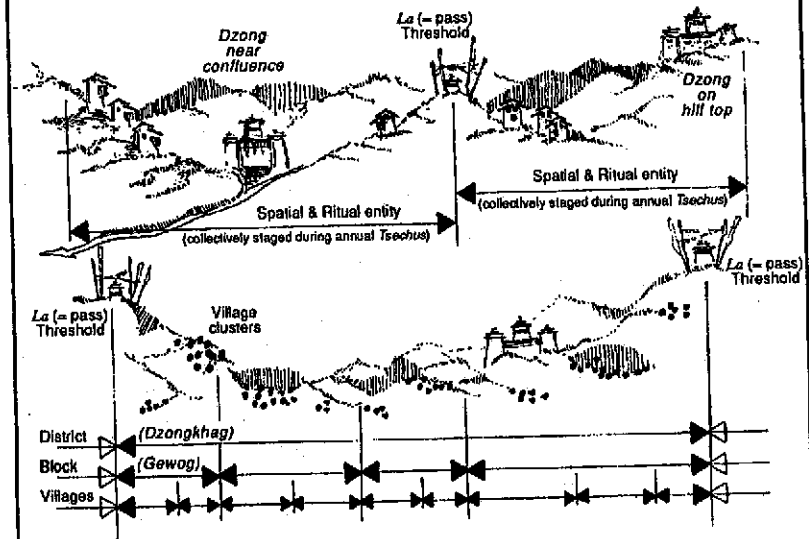
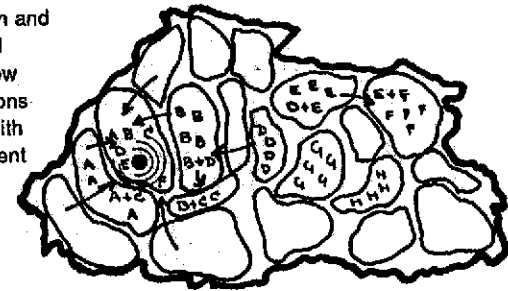


## II: SPATIAL AND RITUAL ENTITIES

### Issue of Bhutan's "diversity in unity"

Notwithstanding Bhutan's typological variety, each and every type characterises itself as a stylistic elaboration of one and the same concept, i.e. the traditional farmhouse, with the dzong architecture as predominant trend-setter.

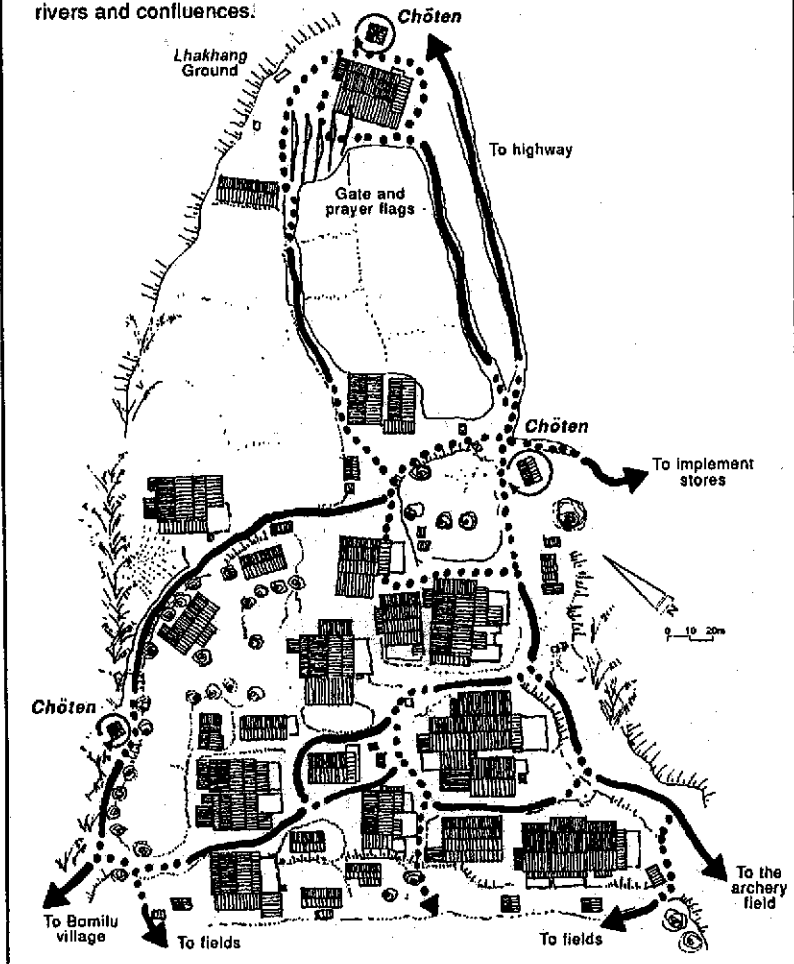
The schematic representation below illustrates Bhutan's indigenous modernisation process in and around newly developed urban centres, where new architectural configurations develop hand-in-hand with the housing of government employees originating from different valleys.



### III: THE TRADITIONAL SETTLEMENT OF RUKUBJI

#### The approach and thresholds

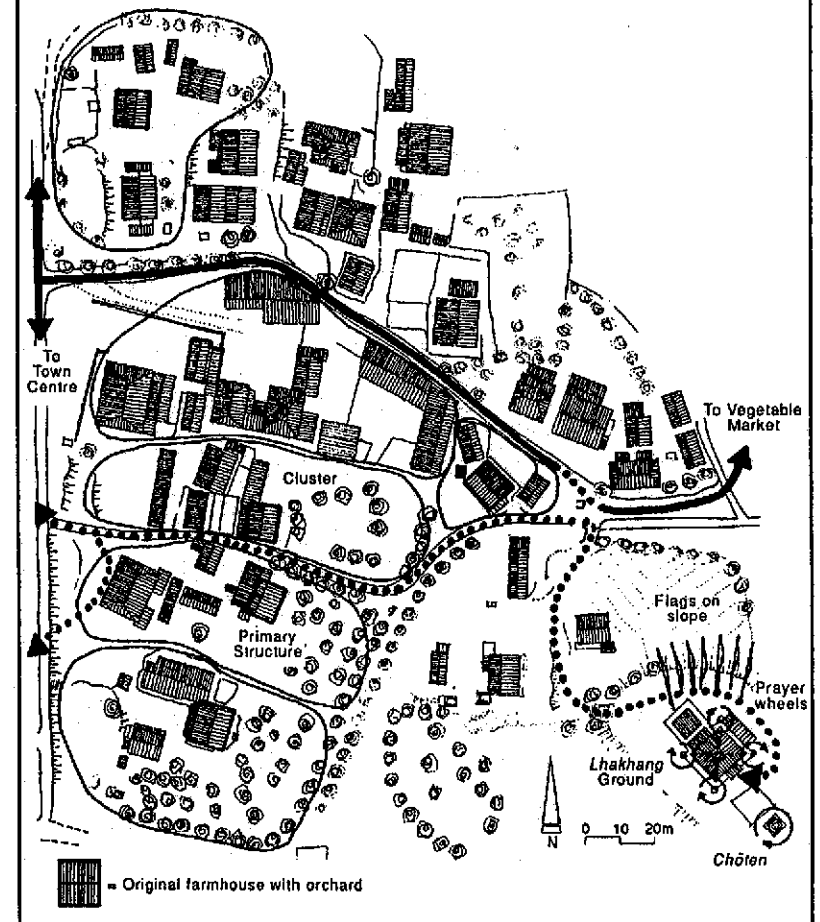
Preliminary layout plan of the village, depicting the most important thresholds and spatial mediators, such as *chôtens*, *lukhangs* (spirit houses), *darshing* (prayer flags), and natural elements such as hill slopes, rivers and confluences.



### IV: SEMI-TRADITIONAL NEIGHBOURHOOD, THIMPHU

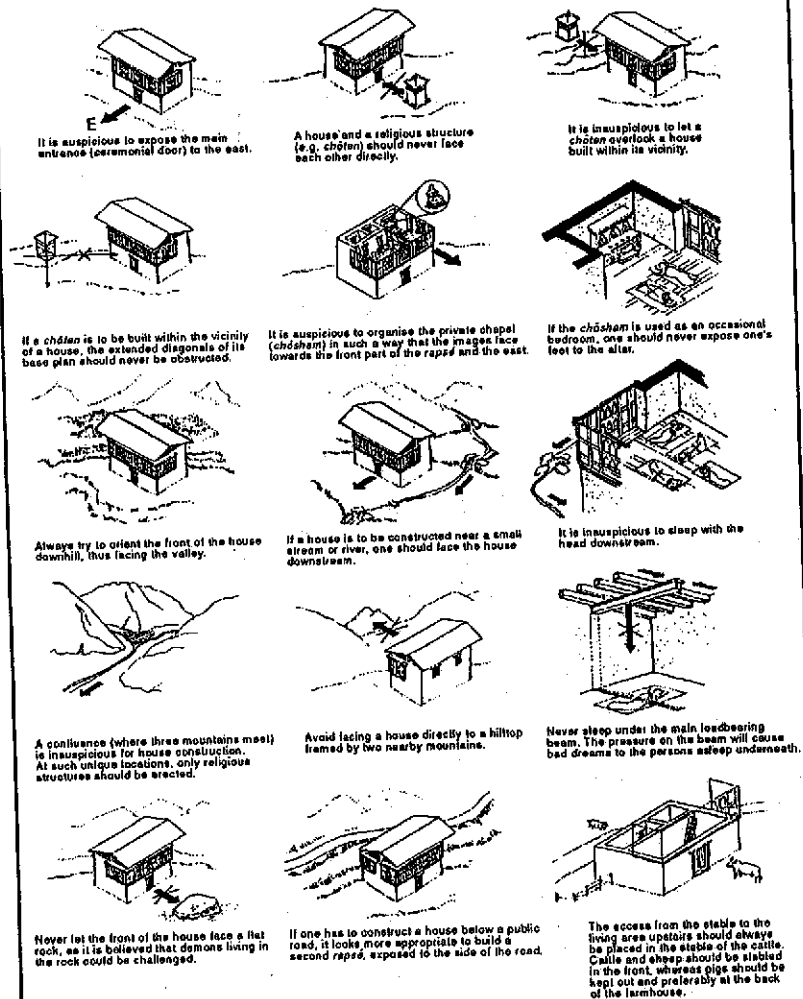
#### The approach and thresholds

Preliminary layout plan of the urban tissue developed by the private sector. An example of the densification of privately-owned land into multi-ethnic clusters, illustrating the ability of the traditional farmhouse (the archetype) to absorb even more extreme changes of diverse origin.



## V: STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL PATTERNS

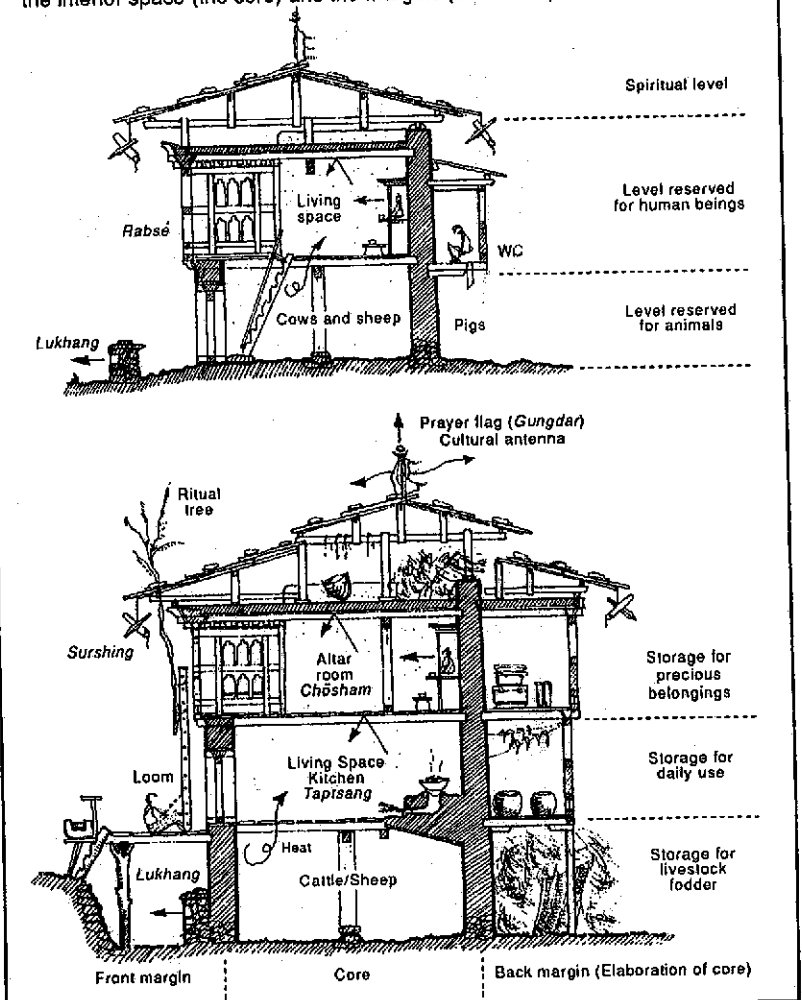
### Compository and structuring principles



## VI: EXPLORATION OF THE BHUTANESE ARCHETYPE

### Identity of the traditional farmhouse

Synoptic sketch illustrating the commonly-adopted principles for organising the interior space (the core) and the margins (front/back).



## VII: RITUALS OF LOCAL HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

### 1. Selection of the site and digging of the earth (*sachok*)

Identification of the Earth Goddess (*sabdak*)

### 2. Installation of the main door frame (*go*)

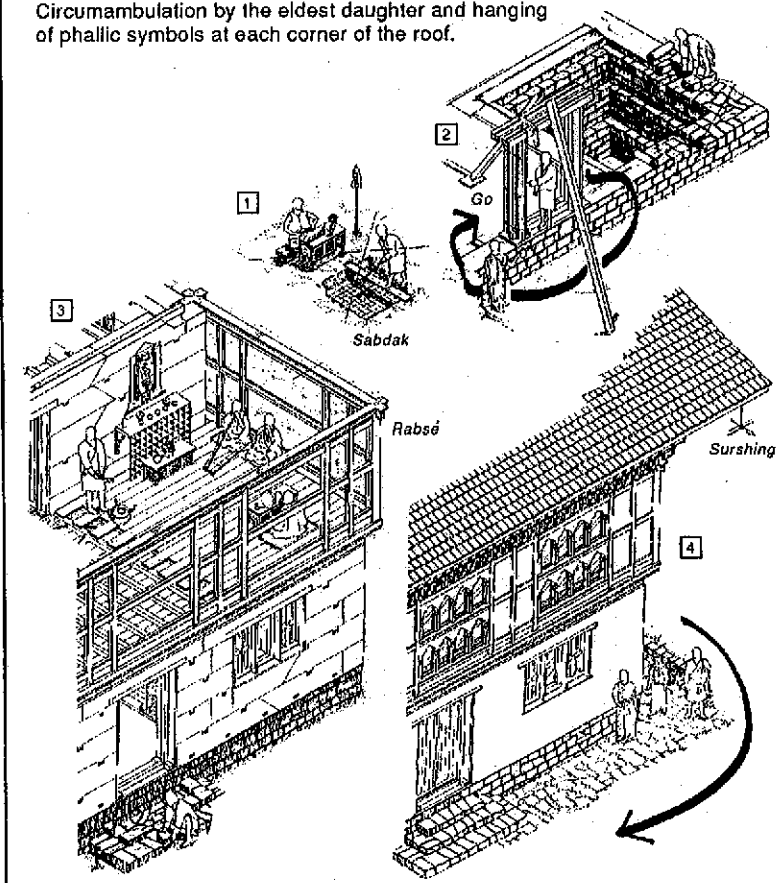
Hanging of ritual scarfs and door circumambulation

### 3. Installation of the main timber frame (*rabsé*)

Erection of the *rabsé* and major ceremony (*puja*)

### 4. Consecration of the house (*surshing*)

Circumambulation by the eldest daughter and hanging of phallic symbols at each corner of the roof.

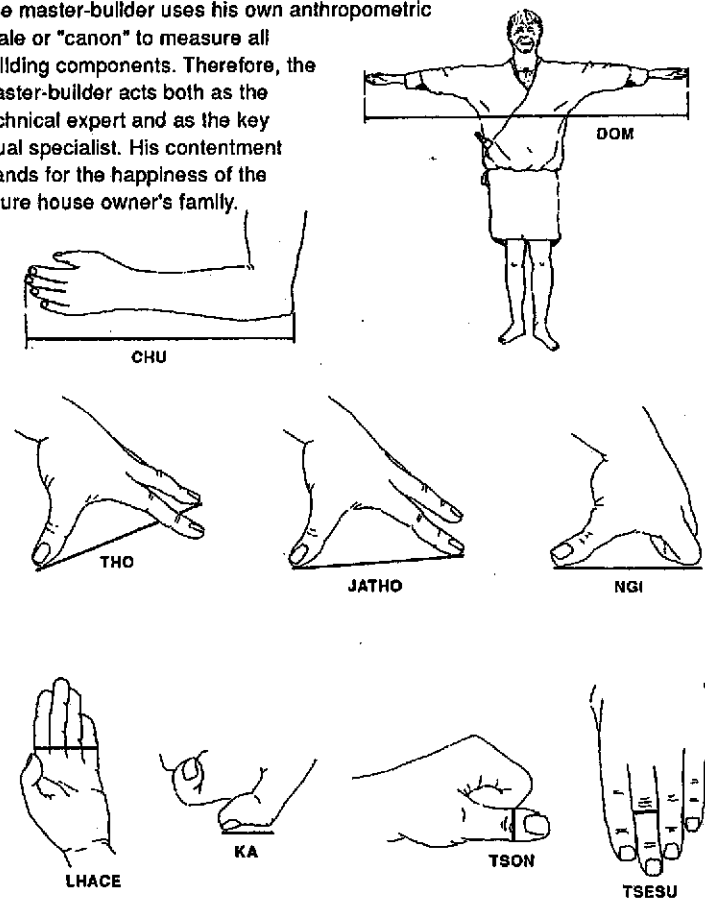


## VIII: ANTHROPOMETRIC SCALE FOR CONSTRUCTION

### The key to the stylistic aspects of material culture

All construction work is directed by the *zopón* or master-builder who acts as the architect and contractor at the same time. The carpenter is called the *shingzou* (*shing*=limber); the mason is the *dozou* (*do*=stone); and the builder with rammed earth (*pisé*) is called the *pazou* (*pa*=earth).

The master-builder uses his own anthropometric scale or "canon" to measure all building components. Therefore, the master-builder acts both as the technical expert and as the key ritual specialist. His contentment stands for the happiness of the future house owner's family.



## Textiles in Bhutan I: Way of Life and Identity Symbol

Françoise Pommaret

(CNRS, Aix-en-Provence)

The visitor to Bhutan is always surprised by the fact that everybody still wears the traditional costume: *go* for the men and *kira* for the women. In many Asian countries, traditional costume is nowadays worn mostly by women and often tends to disappear in favour of Western attire. In sharp contrast with the Emperor Meiji (1868-1912) who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, ordered the Japanese to discard traditional costume and don Western suits, the king of Bhutan issued an edict in 1989 whereby "the national dress should be worn by all citizens in dzongs, monasteries, government offices, schools and institutions, and at official functions and public congregations. Pandits and pujaris are free to wear their own dress. The national dress regulations do not apply to foreigners." Although taken after consultation with the people, this edict has become a controversial issue when it comes to Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese origin. I will not deal here with the problems posed by the implementation of the edict and the feelings of resentment which appeared subsequently, as there are other aspects not relevant to textiles which have to be considered when tackling this issue.

For the northern Bhutanese, also called Drukpas, however, whatever the political motivation of this edict, it is backed by the desire to preserve their traditions and village-based economy in an increasingly industrialised world. Moreover, never colonised, and sheltered from the outside world in their mountains, the Bhutanese Drukpas have developed a strong sense of identity. It is in this context that I shall consider here the cultural and socio-economic importance of textiles in Bhutanese life.

The eastern and central regions of Bhutan have a strong tradition of weaving which has no equal in the Himalayan world. The fibres used

were cotton and silk in the east while in central Bhutan wool was prevalent. Traditionally, fabrics were woven on a backstrap loom similar to the loom found in northeast India, Burma, Laos and Indonesia. This loom is now more or less reserved for cotton and silk fabrics while woollen fabrics are woven on a treadle loom which was imported from Tibet around 1925. Bhutanese fabrics are known for the intricate patterns woven into the cloth with either supplementary-warp or supplementary-weft techniques — the latter being also called brocade patterning — and sometimes both. In Bhutan, even before the king's edict, all Drukpas (and particularly villagers) wore traditional costumes, and a large majority of them used to weave them at home.

It is interesting to note that the embroidery technique existed only for religious objects, but that carpet weaving never existed in Bhutan. Carpets were imported from Tibet to be used as floor coverings in wealthy people's houses and as saddle carpets, but in most houses textiles were utilised for the purposes carpets had in Tibet: they were used as covers for sofas and pillars and as foot mats and covers for monks' and high officials' seats.

Bhutan used to send gifts of fabrics to the states with which it maintained friendly relations. In 1986 in the audience hall of the Dalai Lamas in the Potala, I remember noticing that the pillars were covered with Bhutanese ceremonial cloths called *chasi pangkheb*. These fabrics were most probably brought to Tibet by the goodwill missions (*lochak*) which were sent from Bhutan to Lhasa annually from 1730 onward.

In Bhutan, a country where money played virtually no role until the 1960s, fabrics were also woven to be given as taxes to the dzong, the seat of the district administration, which set the number of fabrics that each family had to provide each year. Fabrics were also offered to officials in return for favours, or to head monks when a son was admitted into a monastery. When the first eastern Bhutanese children were selected to go to school in the mid-1960s, parents, worried to see precious labour going away, pleaded their case with the recruiting officials by offering them textiles.

Fabrics were also presented on auspicious occasions such as promotions and marriages. They were given in a set of prescribed odd numbers, according to the rank of the recipient (3, 5, 7 or 9). The large number of fabric items presented on these occasions by wellwishers was

then stored by the recipient's family, who could use them to make clothes or present them in turn to their friends. Nowadays this custom is still observed, but in urban areas people who do not have weavers at home buy ready-made sets of fabrics which are often not matched and have little or no obvious usage. Therefore the fabrics are often offered on one occasion or another, or sold back to the merchant to be reinjected into the market. From a social custom which had a real economic justification, the offering of fabrics is for the urbanised Bhutanese slowly becoming just a social custom, a symbol, very similar to the Japanese custom of presenting gifts, in which the wrapping and the shop name are more important than the actual gift.

In Thimphu, it is amazing to see that as soon as a promotion or marriage is announced, the most famous Bhutanese cloth merchant busies himself preparing sets of fabrics of different patterns for his prospective customers. The quality of the fabrics bought depends on the means of the buyer, but the specific odd number of fabrics depends on the rank of the recipient. It would be a serious breach of etiquette to offer a set of three fabrics to somebody who is entitled to five. It is always possible to replace the fabrics with a monetary offering, but this "easy way out" is not really well regarded.

Another custom which is still practised today is to give a parting present to a friend or relative. This present is often a piece of fabric of greater or lesser value, according to the rank of the donor and the personal relationship he has with the person who is going away. As in the past, this could be a dress, a belt, or a piece of cloth to make a bag, but with the increasing use of traditional textiles to make objects which did not exist before, one may now receive jackets, table runners, little pouches with zippers, table mats, western-style bags, book-marks or slippers. These examples show well enough how a centuries-old social custom can find itself adapted to a changing world where economic priorities are different and new ideas are adopted.

If textiles have a tremendous social importance in Bhutan, their economic impact should not be overlooked. There is only one cloth factory in Bhutan and weavers still play a crucial role in the domestic economy. A large number of women in Bhutan, especially in central and eastern Bhutan, weave at home. They do not belong to any particular social group or to a weavers' professional corporation, but are simply village women who use whatever spare time they have to weave

### *Bhutan: aspects of culture and development*

clothes for their family. Most low-income peasants do not have the money to buy imported clothing and they are very keen on continuing to wear traditional outfits which they can make at home with a minimum of cash input. Moreover, if a woman is a good weaver, she can devote most of her time to weaving and sell the surplus fabrics to people who have no weavers among their relatives. This sale brings a welcome cash income, albeit often modest, to the family. Because the fabrics are still so widely used, and not only (as we have seen earlier) for clothing, young girls from poor rural backgrounds are now trained in a government weaving centre in the south-eastern district of Pemagatshel so that they can bring some income to their families. Although very localised, this recent official initiative is a kind of mini-revolution, as young girls traditionally learned how to weave at home from their mothers or sisters.

Therefore from purely domestic and ceremonial uses, textiles have also become an income-generating craft. A market for traditional fabrics was created by a combination of different factors: the development of the tourist industry and the gradual opening of Bhutan to foreign aid workers; the emergence since the early 1980s of an urbanised wealthy bourgeoisie linked to the development of the civil administration and private business; and a government policy promoting Bhutanese cultural identity. Women, whether they have been brought up in a weaving family or not, started working in offices but still needed fabrics for their personal use. This has created a great demand for handwoven cloth and given a boost to the work of the weavers. A good weaver is highly regarded in society and often spared the household chores by other relatives so that she can devote the maximum time to her craft. It is known that, at the beginning of the century in the central region, members of the royal family knew how to weave and kept weavers in their service. This tradition is still practised today.

Nowadays in Thimphu, a number of women from the upper class, who are originally from the central and eastern regions, know how to weave and also employ weavers who produce what one might call custom-made fabrics. The best weavers, although they can reproduce all the traditional patterns and designs, also have a great creativity which makes the weaving tradition very dynamic. If one of the weavers designs a particularly nice pattern, the wearer of the fabric is certain to

### *Textiles in Bhutan I*

receive many requests from other weavers to borrow it so that, in turn, they can copy it. Among the best weavers competition is fierce, not so much for commercial gratification as for recognition from society as a good weaver.

This recognition, the prestige attached to being a good weaver, goes beyond the social and economic rationale of weaving in Bhutan. Because weavers belong to all walks of society, weaving is one of the favourite topics of conversation among the Bhutanese Drukpas, women and men alike. It is sometimes surprising for a stranger to see how much interest men take in weaving and how proud they are if their wives or relatives are considered good weavers. Bhutanese men tend to be stylish and fashion-conscious, whenever they can afford it. Except while doing hard work or for certain socio-religious classes who are not expected to be fashion-conscious, men adhere to an etiquette which requires the pleats of their garment to be neatly tucked in the back, the hem to be straight and at the right length, and the cuffs as white as possible. And even if men occasionally grumble about their cumbersome garment, they are very proud of it as it is the unmistakable mark of their being Bhutanese, and it allows them to display the quality of the weaving. While travelling abroad, Bhutanese men usually wear a Western suit because it is more practical and they do not like to stand out in a crowd, but whenever they have to attend an official function, they wear their costume as a symbol of their country.

In villages, women who cannot afford to have many dresses protect their garment by wearing a large piece of cotton over it. And for festivals or any other important occasion, they wear their best dress which is, the rest of the time, carefully stored in a trunk. One of the women's favourite pastimes is to compare and judge the respective qualities of the weaving involved. The tightness of the ground weave, the delicacy of the supplementary weft or warp patterns, the creativity of the motifs, the colour combinations: each of these features is discussed and commented on at length.

Well-to-do women start collecting dresses for their daughters as soon as the girls become teenagers. These dresses will be given to them when they marry. If the mother is not a weaver herself, this collecting involves a large amount of money but, even if she is a weaver and finds a dress she judges attractive, she will buy it for her daughter. It is also



common to resell a dress because the owner does not like it any more or because she needs to raise cash for unforeseen expenditures. Dresses are thus considered to be an investment which can be used when needed. They are assets which can be disposed of, in the same way as gold or land. As the value of fabrics has increased constantly in the last twenty years, buying a dress as an investment is a little like playing the stock market in the West. The value the dress would have after so many years on the fabric market is carefully pondered, and more than ever, the quality of the weaving is assessed. However, as on the stock exchange, there are unforeseen parameters which can make a dress difficult to resell at a given time, even if it is well woven. The most important of these parameters is fashion.

Most outsiders do not realise the role that fashion plays in cloth. A pattern goes out of fashion for years and then makes a comeback. Another pattern will be all the rage for four or five years and then fall into oblivion. The very traditional patterns which were totally out of fashion in the early eighties when flashy, acrylic and gold threads and big geometric patterns were "in", have made a remarkable comeback in the late eighties and early nineties, and old patterns are being copied again. This trend could be associated with two factors: the international recognition of the beauty of old fabrics which has led locally to renewed interest in traditional patterns, and a more nationalist official line. The traditional cultural heritage has to be promoted and weaving is a part of it. In a culture where the shape of the dress is fixed, the quality of the weaving and of the details become all the more important and the focus of attention.

Though fashion has much more importance among the well-to-do who can afford to change dresses often, fashion does exist at the village level too. A woman will weave or try to save money to be the first to wear what is considered fashionable in town. This might be a trend which did not exist in the past. But fashion also has to do with age. The older a woman becomes, the less bothered she is with fashion and, instead of weaving or spending for herself, she will start weaving or spending for her daughter.

Pattern fashions are also associated with an unwritten but well-established code of dressing according to the occasion. It is a subtle code which is different from the Driglam Namzha official etiquette but which has to be adhered to, for fear of appearing totally ignorant or

*démodée*. Again, it is less obvious in villages where women have ordinary dresses for everyday use and a beautiful one for important occasions. But in urban areas, with social gatherings, the emergence of monetary power, and the multiplication of administrative ranks, etiquette plays an important role.

According to the occasion, women carefully plan their outfits so that they are not underdressed or overdressed and this notion is itself relative to their rank in society. Certain patterns are reserved for certain occasions and it would be a *faute de goût* to wear them in inappropriate circumstances. For particularly important functions, women consult each other beforehand about what to wear, in order not to outdo more important people, while at the same time they also have to be careful not to shame their hosts or disgrace the occasion by being underdressed.

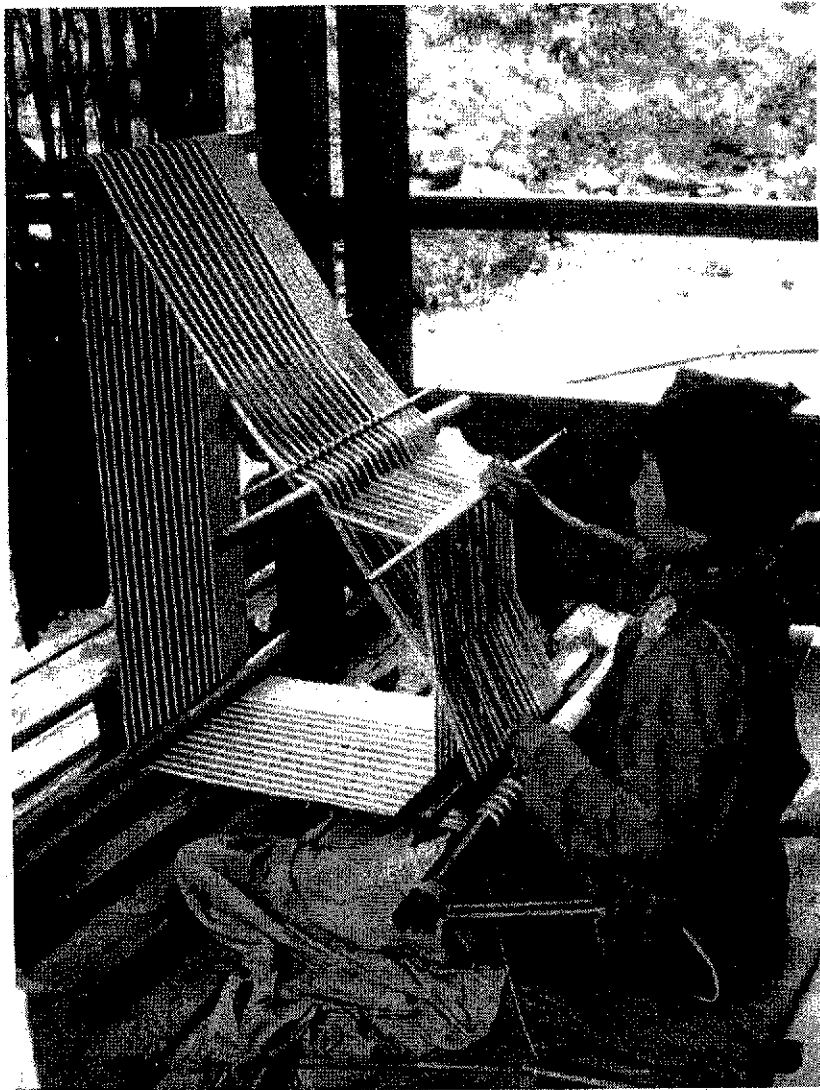
This concern, which may appear trivial, is in fact very important because in Bhutan notions of fashion and etiquette are associated with the notion of hierarchy. Although everybody wears an outfit which has the same cut, the social status of the wearer is immediately recognised by other Bhutanese. Men's scarves provide one indication of rank but Bhutanese further recognise status because of their intimate knowledge not only of etiquette, but also of weaving quality and intricacies. There might be no other country in the world where weaving has so much relevance to the understanding of a society. Although nowadays, for practical reasons, Bhutanese wear a daily costume often made of imported machine-made cloth which is easier to maintain, they proudly don traditional fabrics for any social or religious gathering. It would be a breach of etiquette to wear a non-hand-woven costume on these occasions and society would frown upon this blunder.

One of the most powerful expressions of the collective mentality of the Drukpas is found in an apparently mundane subject, weaving and costume. But in Bhutan, the weight of tradition, its socio-economic implications, and its importance in the way of life has also made this a political statement and an identity symbol.

Far from being a thing of the past, fabrics in Bhutan today have multiple functions: clothing, bartering items, gifts for foreign powers, marks of hierarchy and social awareness, investments and symbols of wealth. These functions give to a traditional craft inside the Bhutanese Drukpa society an astonishing dynamism which is lost in most of the

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countries where ethnic fabrics are manufactured for the tourist trade and have no or little relevance any more in their own society.



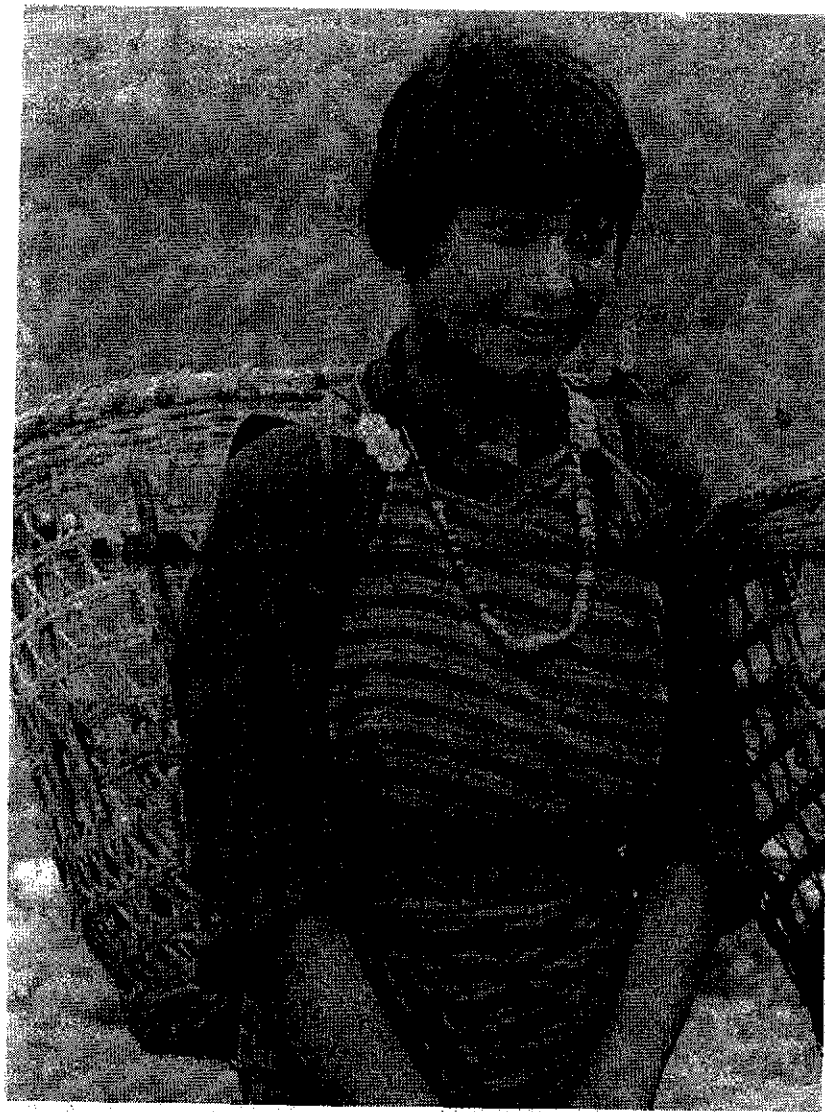
1. Weaving a cotton dress on a traditional backstrap loom (Thimphu 1989).



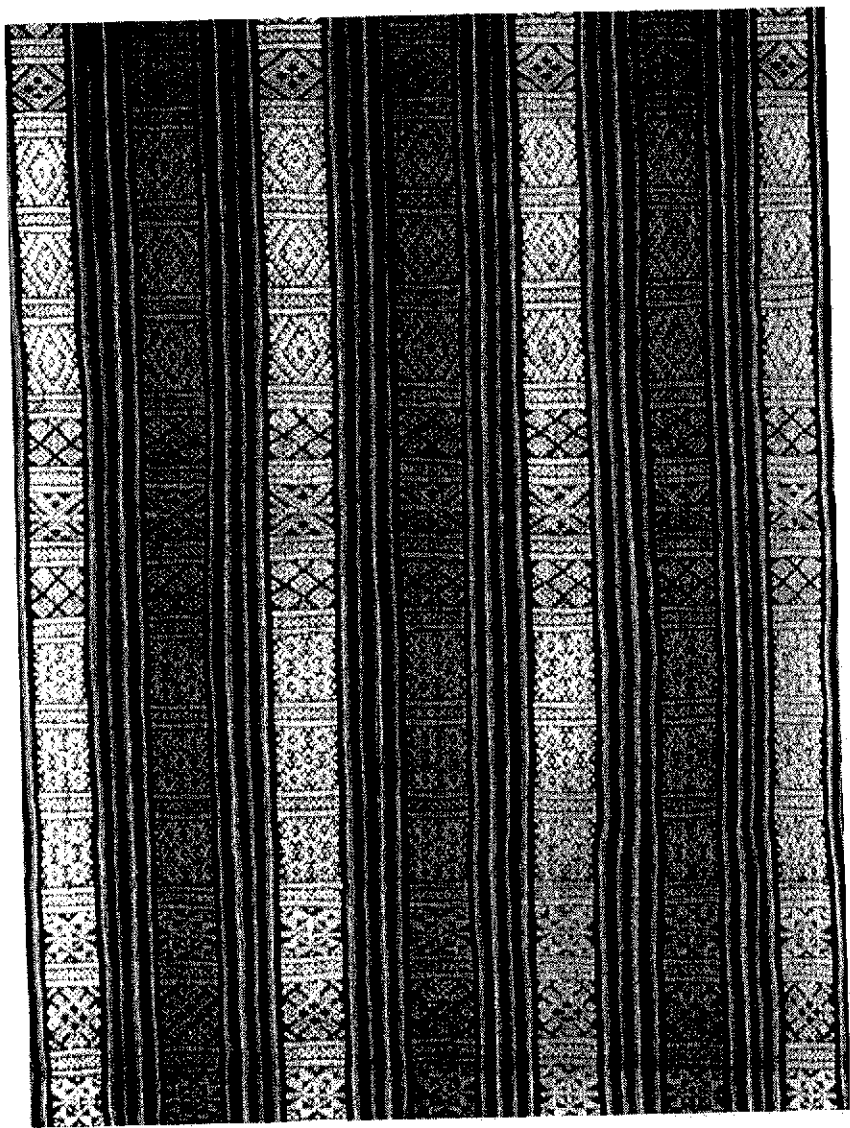
2. Young officeworkers wearing their winter outfit: handwoven wool dresses and jackets of heavy material (Thimphu 1983).



3. Children dressed in traditional costume: the little girl on the right wears the red ceremonial scarf reserved for women (Pemagatshel 1990).



4. A young peasant woman wearing a machine-woven dress with a hand-woven belt (Paro 1982).



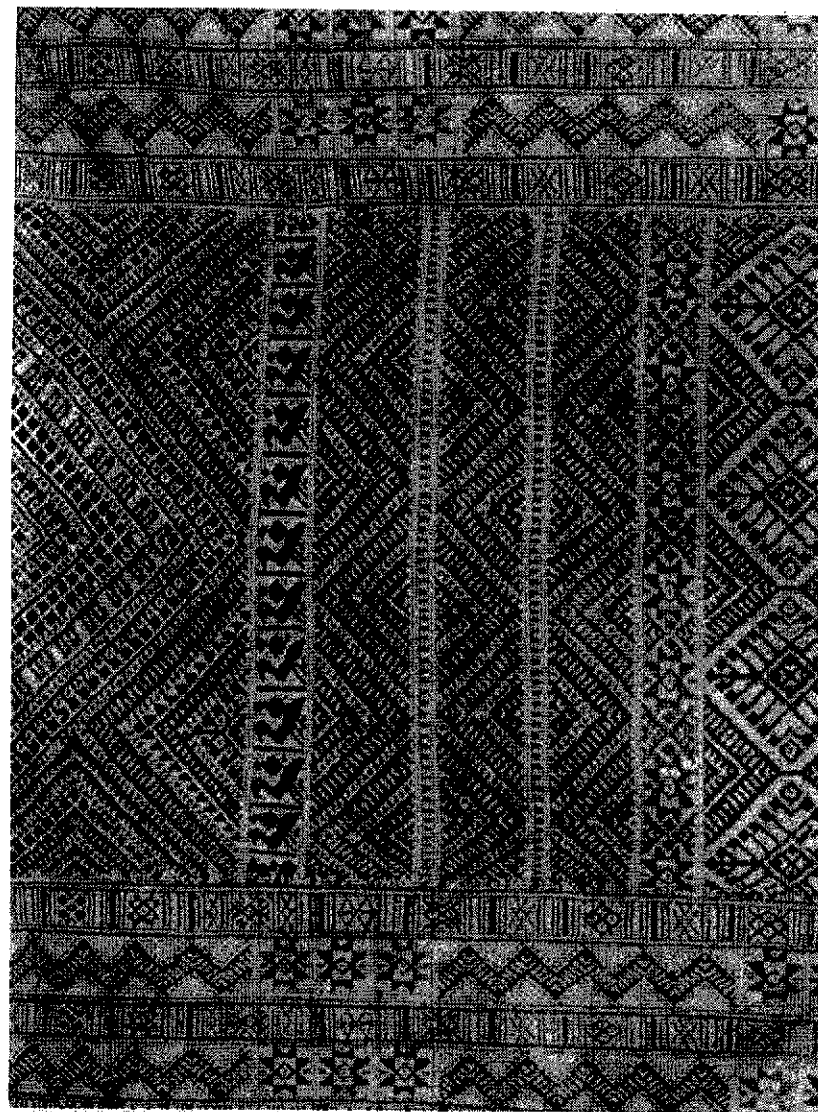
5. Detail of raw silk cloth for male costume, from eastern Bhutan: yellow, red and white bands with supplementary weft patterns.



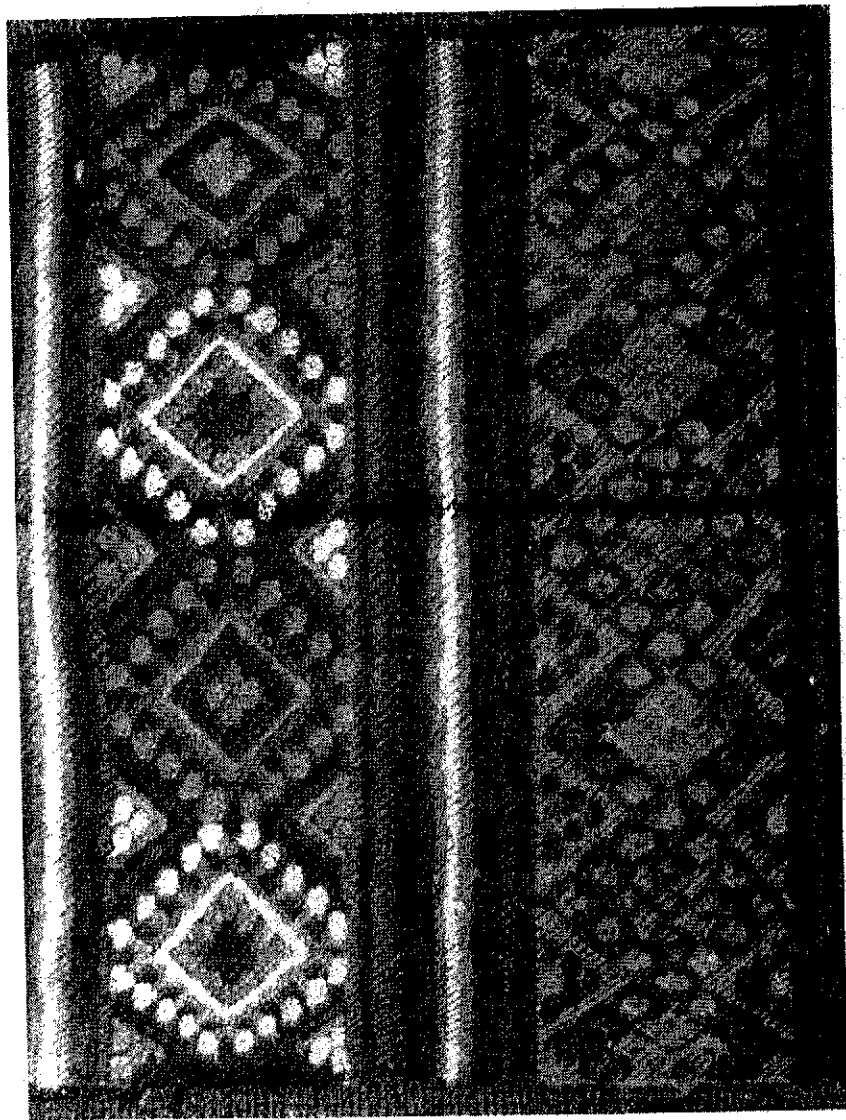
6. A young woman cheering her team at an archery contest. She wears her red ceremonial scarf (rachu) around her body in a manner appropriate for dancing, and not on the left shoulder as on formal occasions (Thimphu 1982).



7. A woman's dress called *kushütara* from Kurtö in eastern Bhutan, worn on special occasions.



8. Detail of the ceremonial cloth called *chasi pangkheb*. The row of animal designs is unusual and indicates the cloth was probably woven in eastern Bhutan.



9. Close-up of a woollen *yatra* from Bumthang in central Bhutan.



10. Detail of a ceremonial dress from Kurtö with a dark background showing various intricate patterns in supplementary warp (brocade) technique.

## Textiles in Bhutan II: Cloth, Gender and Society

Diana K. Myers

(Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts)

No visitor to Bhutan fails to notice the country's beautiful and varied textiles, one of the last great Asian textile art traditions to be internationally recognised. It was as a weaver that I first appreciated the craftsmanship and splendour of Bhutanese cloth. However, as is the case with Guatemalan, Indonesian and other great weaving traditions, Bhutanese textiles invite us beyond admiration to a deeper understanding of their makers and users. Bhutanese cloth is significant as more than art, because the basic features of social organisation in Bhutan are expressed in this cloth, its production, its appearance and its use.

The textiles of Bhutan reflect the complementary but separate worlds of men and women. They give form to corresponding gender-linked differences between the religious and secular realms in Bhutanese society. Cloth reveals tensions between newness and change on the one hand and the continuation of traditions on the other — processes the Bhutanese are seeking to balance in areas from governance to tourism policy. Finally, the activity of producing cloth gives a dimension to Bhutanese concepts of gender: it helps express the essence of being a woman or a man in Bhutan.

This paper examines what cloth reveals about selected aspects of Bhutanese society, particularly the roles of women and men. I will discuss the production of cloth, its uses, and the significance of dress styles from two perspectives: "Weaving, Women and Everyday Life" and "Textiles, Men and the Church-State".

**Weaving, Women and Everyday Life**

*The Production of Cloth*

The weaving of cloth is the domain of women in Bhutan. As is true

throughout neighbouring northeast India and in cultures farther to the southeast, weaving is integral to a woman's gender identity. Weaving is the most important way in which a woman displays her inventiveness and individuality; it is an expression of her reproductive nature.

As weavers, women have tremendous latitude in composing cloth that expresses their personal aesthetic choices, and hence their creative talents. Working within broad parameters depending on the type of cloth they are weaving, they interpret, combine and even invent designs and motifs. The cloth they make is judged by its fibres and dyes, its colour scheme, its patterning, and its overall quality. Societal and commercial value arises from harmonious colour combinations, intricacy in a pattern, tightness of the weave, and the introduction of innovative elements into traditional weaving formats. Skills in dyeing and weaving are talents men seek in choosing wives and, along with family and wealth, are significant measures of a woman's prestige in society and desirability as a spouse.

Taboos associated with dyeing and weaving reinforce the importance of women's role in "giving birth" to colours and cloth. For example, dyeing should always be done in a quiet place and not observed by outsiders, lest they steal the colour. A pregnant woman should avoid dyeing yarns so that her baby may not steal the colour. The weaver's workplace is honoured in admonitions not to step over a backstrap loom, its warp or the wooden implement used to beat down the weft. If one does, it is said that one will not marry, or will not have children, or will have a dumb child, or suffer other consequences to one's own fertility.

In spite of the esteem in which women are held as weavers, beliefs about cloth also reflect the folk view that women are not as spiritually advanced as men. Although Buddhist doctrine does not discriminate between the sexes, many older and rural Bhutanese say that women need to be reborn nine more times to enjoy life as a man. Similar beliefs exist in Tibet, where even the common word for "woman" (*skyes-dman*) means "inferior birth". In Bhutan, one way that the notion of women as lesser beings is practically expressed is in the feeling that cloth woven by a man is more valuable than cloth made by a woman — in spite of the fact that very few men weave. Similarly, Bhutanese pollution concepts related to cloth are not reciprocal: men should avoid walking under a woman's lower garments that have been

hung out to dry, but women will not become polluted by walking under a man's garment.

*The Uses and Significance of Cloth*

The cloth woven by women is integrated into everyday life in a multitude of ways that firmly establish women's role as producers of temporal wealth. First, woven panels taken straight from the loom have functioned literally as a kind of currency. Half a dozen kinds were important tax payments until the 1950s, and some were redistributed as state payments to officers and common labourers. Today, panels of cloth, mostly woven by women, still comprise the gifts that are essential at births, weddings, promotions and other social transactions linking individuals, families, communities and the church and state. Gifts of cloth do not just flow from inferior to superior, but also from superior to inferior, and among peers.

Beyond being tax payments and gifts, lengths of woven cloth are cut and stitched into finished textiles of every sort. They are fashioned into articles of ordinary and formal wearing apparel, animal trappings, lamp wicks, doorway hangings, cushion covers, baby wraps, bundle carriers. Some woven textiles are important devices for demonstrating awareness of the protocols that govern polite society. For example, squares of fabric ought to be carried at all times for use as a "plate" from which to eat rice. One's dress or robe should be worn at a prescribed length that reflects one's social status. And, of course, the shoulder cloths that all Bhutanese wear on formal occasions — that is, the *kabné* and *rachu* — must be properly draped and flourished to show deference to one's superiors.

Given all these uses for woven cloth, ownership and display of this cloth are conventional signs of affluence. Wearing two or more garments on top of each other formerly provided warmth and attested to the economic status of the wearer, and today well-to-do Bhutanese women — and men — may own dozens of garments. Fine, decorated clothes are also assets that a family may sell when it needs money. Not surprisingly, every family keeps some woven cloths in its "treasure box" (*yangkhang*). Along with silver and gold jewellery and grains from one's crops, kept from year to year, these textiles represent the resources of the home and are one of the three key items that must be blessed during annual rituals to ensure continued household prosperity. Woven



cloth is thus an essential component of wealth, whose literal and symbolic importance in society adds lustre to the status of women as weavers.

*The Significance of Dress Style*

Some of the most complex cloth woven by women is made into women's dresses whose appearance and style also shed light on the place of women in Bhutanese society. The national dress is the *kira*, an unfitted garment that is wrapped around the body and belted at the waist. Like other aspects of the country's secular material culture, the *kira* reminds us of Bhutan's proximity to Southeast Asia. The style of wearing the cloth, the names of the patterns the Bhutanese consider indigenous and very old, their similarity to weaving designs in northeast India, Burma and even distant Laos, and the backstrap loom itself, give us ample reason to assume that this dress style long predates Bhutan's conversion to Buddhism. In some communities in Kurtoe, women formerly wore tunics that are associated with or still seen among tribal groups to the east, such as the Mera Saktengpas, and the Monpas of Tawang in India. While these villagers in the northeast presumably adopted the dress of the dominant culture group as they became integrated into a new nation-state in the 17th century, the coming of the Drukpas did not fundamentally alter the dress style of most women in Bhutan.

The cloth that women wear and weave shows that Bhutanese value newness and change as well as creative innovation. During the past 100 years, there has been a proliferation of new fibres, colours, and designs — and even the adoption of a new weaving technology, the Tibetan horizontal frame loom. Some transformations flow from political and economic changes, while others reflect shifting tastes. Queens, princesses and other well-to-do women have influenced trends in weaving and fashion, adopting Tibetan-style blouses, seeking out the Tibetan loom, designing more complex colour schemes, and popularising new patterns which depart from traditional formats. As a women's activity, weaving today remains dynamic and responsive to new influences.

**Textiles, Men and the Church-State**

*The Production of Cloth*

Bhutanese men also produce textiles, but as a rule they do not weave: they cut ready-woven cloth and sew it into finished forms. Some are tailors, an all-male occupation. I will focus on a second group, the trained monks and skilled laymen who manufacture textiles by stitching appliqué, sewing patchwork and embroidering. Unlike women, who traditionally used local dyes and fibres, these men have always worked with imported goods: mainly pieces of broadcloth and silk brocade from India, China and Tibet, which by virtue of their origins and/or fibres are relatively costly and special.

The trained monks and laymen are participating in what is essentially a tradition of Buddhist religious art. The textiles they make are modelled on Tibetan prototypes and resemble examples produced elsewhere in the Buddhist Himalayas. The goal of the men's work is to faithfully reproduce art forms whose colours, content and composition or assembly are defined by convention, to re-create ritual icons which are executed in cloth. When making some textiles, like tents, which are not solely for religious purposes, men can make choices about which symbols and colours to use, but their presentation is nevertheless conventional. The objective is still to re-create an honoured, even sacred ideal rather than to express originality. The cloth that men produce thus is not creative in the same sense as the cloth that is woven by women.

If women have a primary "reproductive" function as weavers at looms, one could then say that men's role is that of secondary "producers" because they generally work with the cloth that comes from the loom. There are only a very few laymen who weave. The first group of Bhutanese to receive formal education outside Bhutan included a young man to be trained in weaving in India, and Ashi Wangmo, the second king's sister, selected a male weaver from Kurtoe to go to Tibet to learn weaving on a Tibetan loom. Today, however, there is strong social pressure against men weaving. Young boys who show interest in weaving are teased and shamed into weaving "in secret" if they must, and two men who weave in Thimphu and Bumthang are even called by feminine pronouns, reinforcing the notion that weaving is a fundamentally female activity.

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### *The Uses and Significance of Cloth*

In contrast to the cloth women weave, the textiles men produce are almost exclusively for ecclesiastic and ceremonial rather than secular purposes. They include throne covers, saddle covers and ceremonial cloths patterned with applique of Buddhist motifs; altar covers, temple hangings, ceiling canopies and shrine furnishings made of patchworked or joined brocades and silks; *thangkas* executed in embroidery, applique or both; and tents decorated with applique under which outdoor functions and rituals take place.

By their nature, these refined and highly decorative textiles are not owned by most people nor integrated into everyday lay life. They were made chiefly for the dzongs and monasteries, where religious activities and government business take place, and where men rather than women preside. These cloths traditionally were used only by lamas, monks, ranking civil officials, and later the kings. Tents can be used more broadly for secular functions, for example, at outdoor weddings to seat the guests.

### *The Significance of Dress Style*

While men wear many of the same woven fabrics that women do, men's dress style links its wearers to the world of church and state, where preservation of the past and continuity are valued. As he laid the foundations of religious and civil administration in the early 17th century, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal is said to have introduced customs to distinguish Bhutan from Tibet, from which so much Drukpa influence emanated. The Bhutanese credit the Shabdrung with modifying the Tibetan *chuba* into the Bhutanese *go*. The custom of wearing a shoulder sash (*kamne*) derived from monk's dress also dates from this period, and initially denoted the enhanced spiritual nature of men, particularly those who served the church-state.

Earlier men's dress, at least in some areas of Bhutan, was a wrapped garment like the *pakhi* still known among the Doyas of southwest Bhutan. Cloth knotted over one or both shoulders is also worn by the Lepchas of Sikkim and the Nagas of northeast India. Since the *go* was widely adopted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the conservatism that characterises Buddhism, its rituals and its art has evidently extended to the dress of those who dominate in ecclesiastic and state affairs. Robes of Chinese brocade that were favoured by the

## *Textiles in Bhutan II*

elite up until the time of the third king are no longer as fashionable, but otherwise twentieth-century changes in men's fashions and styles are far less dramatic than those in women's fashions. On important occasions, it is still very proper for a man to wear a handwoven *aikapur* essentially identical to patterns seen in watercolours from the 1770s and photographs from the early 1900s.

Beliefs about men's dress reinforce the connection between maleness and the world of religious (and other) authority. Not only does a layman's shoulder sash resemble that of a monk, but a man's belt is also believed to have sacred power. It is said to be as precious as a blessing cord (*sungkü*, and treated as if it were actually a sanctified necklace received from a lama. A man's belt is therefore never washed during its wearer's life and women must never step over a belt on the floor. If picked up with a knot in it, like a blessing cord it should be worn that way for three days. And as a remedy for bad dreams, one has only to fold a man's belt in three and sleep with it under one's pillow or over one's blanket. There are no comparable beliefs about any aspect or article of women's dress.

My final observation concerns two fabrics that are strongly associated with gender, perhaps uniquely so, and the significance of this association. Usually men and women can wear exactly the same cloth; the only difference is that stripes in the pattern will be oriented horizontally in the women's dress and vertically in the man's robe. However, Bhutanese views of gender again limit this reciprocity in wearing apparel: women's clothing can be stitched of all the fabrics used for men's robes, but not vice versa. The two types of cloth men ordinarily do not wear are both quintessentially "female" and associated somehow with a non-Buddhist past. The first is decorated with the elaborate extra weft patterning typical of Lhuntse in the northeast (*kushü*, as in *kushüthara*). The second is *mönthag*, a pattern the Bhutanese consider very early and indigenous. Special uses for these two kinds of cloth seem to align female gender with a position outside Bhutan's current Buddhist culture, making them therefore inappropriate for men.

Bhutanese agree that cloth decorated with *kushü* is unsuitable for men's garments, ostensibly because it is so decorative. Notably, this type of patterning is most closely identified with archaic tunics called *kushung* and the elaborate set of contemporary women's dresses called

### *Bhutan: aspects of culture and development*

*kushüthara*. The earliest examples of *kushü* patterning are the tunics, which seem to have been an ancient dress of women in some areas of north central Bhutan. Today both the *kushung* and another tunic called *shingkha* are worn by women during festivals known as *pcha*, rituals which recall and explicitly place women in a non-Buddhist world. Observed in central and eastern Bhutan, the ceremonies propitiate local mountain deities; they involve closing down one's Buddhist household altar during a two-week period, observing dietary taboos, sacrificing birds and fish, symbolically offering "brides" to the gods, and other practices which are not Buddhist. Related rituals in the Mangde region bestow blessings on women with childbearing problems, and both may recall fertility rites celebrated before the consolidation of the Drukpa state.

The other type of "women's" cloth is *mönthag*, loosely, "Bhutanese weaving", whose name includes the element "Mön", an early name for the unenlightened, that is non-Buddhist, regions south of Tibet. This pattern is so essentially female that it is often worn by men playing the parts of women in folk dances. One of these is the Polé-Molé dance which deals with marital fidelity — its content is secular, and somewhat ribald. *Mönthag* dresses are also commonly seen at archery contests, where female servants (usually weavers) or men dressed as women traditionally danced and teased the archers. In this context, Bhutanese say men took the role of a *phento*, the shabby but loyal servant-joker in traditional dramas. Like the *atsara* of the *tsechu* dances, the *phento* has a complex background and origin. He is an odd figure, comical, somewhat lowly, and rather peripheral to mainstream Buddhist culture. Could the fact that only the *phento* and women dress in *mönthag* identify this cloth not just with the secular world but with a status of somewhat limited integration in the current social order? What we do know is that *mönthag* and *kushü* are both so strongly linked to women and through them to a non-Buddhist past that they cannot be worn by men under normal circumstances.

### *Conclusion*

Notable for its aesthetic qualities, Bhutanese cloth is far more than an art. Cloth and its production and uses are emanations of the organising principles that underlie Bhutanese society. Dress styles and beliefs

### *Textiles in Bhutan II*

about cloth support the proposition that women are associated with secular (non-Buddhist) life, creativity and change, while men hold a special position vis-à-vis the church, the state and the preservation of sacred traditions. Textiles exhibit the dichotomy which exists between the worlds of religion and everyday life, the endurance of non-Buddhist beliefs about women's reproductive role in life and weaving, and the co-existence of values relating to continuity and change.

## Glossary

Note: The items in the left-hand column provide "common" but unstandardized spellings of the Dzongkha and Tibetan terms as found in the body of this book. Those identified as R(oman) D(zongkha) are taken from Van Driem's contribution. The central column provides exact transliterations of the Dzongkha and Tibetan spellings according to the Wylie System. A question mark indicates that the spelling is unknown or uncertain. The English definitions supplied in the right-hand column are not intended to be exhaustive. For the transliterations of all proper nouns (place names, personal names, languages etc.) see the Index.

## Dzongkha /Tibetan term

## transliterated spellings

aikapur	a'i-ka-pur/a'i-ka-spur	a traditional striped weave
atsara	A-tsa-ra	festival clown
bay-chapni	rbad rgyab-ni	ritual war-dance
beyul	sbas-yul	legendary "hidden land"
byamdo		gabled roof
chala	cha-lag	tool, used vulgarly in the sense of penis
chang	chang	ale
chasi pangkheb	phyag-gsil pang-khebs	ceremonial lap-cover
chathrim	bca'-khrims	written constitution
chimi	spyi-mi	representative of the people in the National Assembly
cho	chos	religion, dharma
chokshé	chog-shes	"the awareness of sufficiency", Sanskrit <i>samtusti</i>
chöjé	chos-rje	hereditary religious nobility
chöki gyalpo	chos-kyi rgyal-po	"king of religion" <i>dharmaraja</i>
Chöké (RD Chöke)	chos-skad	"the language of religion", the literary language of classical Tibetan used in Bhutan
chösham	mchod-bshams	altar, shrine room
chösung	chos-srung	deities who protect the Buddhist faith
chöten	mchod-rten	Buddhist stupa
chu	khyu	measure from elbow to fingertip

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chuba	phyu-ba	common robe worn by Tibetans
chudré	chu-'dre	local water-spirit
chupön	bcu-dpon	"leader of ten households", lowest village functionary (cf. <i>pirpön</i> , also heard as <i>pshipön</i> = <i>spyi-dpon</i> )
cholu(RD co'lu)	skyo-lu	"song of lament"
damchen	dam-can	"oath-bound" protective deities
darshing	dar-shing	prayer flag
Dasho (RD Dr'asho)	drag-shos	lit. "The Finest", title of senior govern- ment officials
desho	dal-shog	traditional paper of Bhutan made from the bark of the Daphne tree
Desi	sde-srid	civil rulers of Bhutan before the monar- chy, the so-called Deb Rajas
dom	'dom	span measure between fingertips of out- stretched arms
dorje		rdo-rjeritual "thunderbolt" weapon
dozou	rdo-bzo-bo	mason
dre	'dre	evil spirit
Driglam Namzha	sGrigs-lam rNam-gzhag	official code of etiquette, "Code of Disciplined Behaviour"
drilbu	dril-bu	ritual hand-bell
drirrim	sgrigs-khrims	code of discipline (see next item)
dromchö	sgrub-mchod	extended tantric ritual, notably of the New Year festival at Punakha
drung/drungpa	drung/drung-pa	subdistrict governor
drungkhag	drung-khag	subdistrict (abolished)
dü	bdud	demon
dung	gdung	hereditary lay nobility of central Bhutan
durtrö	dur-khrod	cremation ground
dzomdu	'dzoms-'du	meeting, gathering
dzong	rdzong	fortress-monastery
dzongda	rdzong-bdag	civil administrator of a district
dzongkhag	rdzong-khag	district under the administration of a <i>dzong</i>
Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchung		rDzong-khag Yar-rgyas Tshogs-chung District Development Committee
dzongpön	rdzong-dpon	district governor

*Glossary*

gewog	rged-'og	administrative block or unit
Gewog Yargay Tshogchung		rGed-'og Yar-rgyas Tshog-chung Gewog Development Committee
go	bgo, gos	robe worn by men in Bhutan
go	sgo	door
gompa	dgon-pa	Buddhist monastery
gönpo	mgon-po	protective deities
gung	gung	household
gungdar	dgung-dar	prayer flag on roof
gungda ula	gung-zla (?) 'u-lag	labour service as a form of taxation
gup	rgedp (rged-pa)	headman
jabmi	rgyab-mi	legal representative, pleader
jabzhi	rgyab-bzhi	four-sided pitch roof with lantern
jamtho	rgyam-thog	attic room with gabled roof
jatho		rgya-tho measure from tip of thumb to tip of index finger in outstretched hand
Je Khenpo	rJe mKhan-po	head abbot of Bhutan
jikten	'jig-rten	the mundane world
jinlab	byin-rlabs	grace, blessing
jou	rgyo (?)	serf
ka	ka (?)	measure from tip of thumb to first joint
kabné	bkab-ni	shoulder scarf worn by men
kamtrel	skam-khral	cash taxes
khandro	mkha'-'gro	goddess of the sky, <i>dakini</i>
khey	khod (?)	serf
kira	dkyis-ras	common dress worn by women in Bhutan
kushung	ku-shung	archaic female tunic
kushüthara	ku-shud thags-ras	elaborate female robe woven with "extra weft"
lagshep	?	assistant carpenter
la	la	mountain pass
lam	blam (bla-ma)	lama
lam-chop	blam-chosp (bla-ma chos-pa)	lamas and priests
lapön	las-dpon / la'-dpon	works overseer
letshen	las-tshan	household assisting the <i>chupön</i> in Bumthang
lha dre mi sum	lha 'dre mi gsum	the triad of gods, demons and humans, in habitants of the "upper realms" of existence
lhakhang	lha-khang	Buddhist temple

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lhace	lag-tshād (?)	measure of the width of four fingers
lochaklo-chags	lo-phyag	annual mission (to Tibet)
Lodrö Tshogdey	bL o-gros Tshogs-sde	Royal Advisory Council
löntrel	rlon-khral	taxes in kind
lopön (RD 'löbö)	slob-dpon	teacher
lozé (RD 'loze)	blo-gsal, blo-bsral, blo-ze	vernacular poem or verse epic
lu	klu	serpent spirit (Sk. <i>naga</i> ) of the underworld
lukhang	klu-khang	shrine dedicated to the <i>naga</i> serpent spirits
lungten	lung-bstan	prophecy
mang	dmangs	public, community, commonalty
mang-ap	mang-Ap	"community father", assistant to the <i>gup</i>
mikha kayni	mi-kha 'khal-ni	ritual to avert malicious gossip
misergyi kyiduk	mi-ser-gyi skyid-sdug	public welfare
mönthag	mon-thags	textile design for women's dress
namshé	rnam-shes	consciousness
nenjorm	rnal-'byor-ma (?)	female medium or oracle
nep	gnas-po	protective deity of a locality or valley
ngi	?	measure from tip of thumb to second joint of index finger
nyerchen	gnyer-chen	store-master
pawo	dpa'-bo	male medium or oracle
pazap	dpa'-rtsalp (-pa)	militia, now of a ceremonial character
pazou	par-bzo-bo (?)	pisé constructor
pcha	phywa (?)	local, non-Buddhist festival of N Bhutan
phento	phan-thog	servant-joker in traditional drama
pirpön	spyi-dpon	term for <i>chupön</i> in C. Bhutan
pönlob	dpon-slob	regional governor
pön	dpon	official, chief; also used familiarly for the king of Bhutan
po'u	?	phallic symbol, spo-chen in the literary language
rabsé	rab-gsal	room or floor with the most windows
rachu	rags-chung	shoulder scarf worn by women
raksha marcham	raksha dmar-'cham	"The Red Dance of the Rakshas" during which the judgement of a deceased person's morality is enacted

*Glossary*

rigamen	ri-ga-sman	female mountain-divinity
rigné	rig-gnas	"arts and letters", "culture", Sanskrit <i>vidhāyāśhāna</i>
sabdak	sa-bdag	"owner of the land", local deity
sachog	sa-chog	"earth ritual", to prepare the ground for building
sathram	sa-khram	land register
sem	sems	mind (or heart)
shingkha	shing-kha (?)	archaic tunic worn by women in local festival of N-E Bhutan
shingzou	shing-bzo-bo	carpenter
sin(po)	srin(-po)	<i>yaksha</i> spirits
sok	srog	life-force
sökha rimdro	gsol-kha rim-gro	invocatory ritual to secure blessings on a household or individual
sor	sor	measure from tip of thumb to first joint
sungkü	srung-skud	protective cord blessed by lama
surshing	zur-shing	lit. "corner stick", phallic symbol hanging below the eaves at corners of a house
ta dzong	ltag rdzong	citadel above main fort
ten	rten	"support"
tapsang	thab-tshang	kitchen
terma	gter-ma	hidden texts and religious objects
tertön	gter-ston	discoverer of hidden texts
thangka	thang-ka	Buddhist scroll painting
tharpa	thar-pa	spiritual liberation
tho	mtho	measure from tip of thumb to tip of middle finger of outstretched hand
thongdröl	mthong-sgrol	the giant silk appliqué banners depicting Buddhist saints and deities whose name means "deliverance on sight"
thümi	'thus-mi	another term for the <i>mang-ap</i>
tondé	rtogs-ldan	"the one possessed of insight", an epithet applied to yogins
torma	gtor-ma	ritual dough-cakes of various designs
Tsawa Sum	rTsa-ba gsum	"The Three Foundations" of the state, i.e. king, country and people

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tsechu	tshes-bchu	"Tenth Day" festivals held in honour of Padmasambhava in the <i>dzongs</i>
tseu	?	measure of width of middle finger
tson	?	measure of top joint of thumb
tstünthrä (RD)	bstun-khral	"monk tax", the obligation to enroll a son in a state monastery
tshik	tshig	verse; word
Tshogdu	Tshogs-'du	National Assembly
tsholob	tsho-slob	term for <i>chupön</i> in E. Bhutan
tshomen	tsho-sman	female lake-divinity
tshongkhor	tshogs-'khor	"circle of offerings" ritual; Sk. <i>ganacakra</i>
tshulthrim	tshul-khrims	discipline, virtue, moral conduct
wang	dbang	power, blessing, initiation
Wang tshochen gye	Wang tsho-chen bgyad	"The Eight Great Hosts of Wang", administrative divisions of the Wang region
yang-gam	g.yang-sgam	"treasure box" kept in shrine room to bring prosperity to a household
yul-lha	yul-lha	local deity
rachu	rag-chung	ceremonial scarf worn by women
ringa	rigs-linga	five-paneled crown
zaden	za-bran	serf
zimpön (RD zimbö)	gzim-dpon	chamberlain
zhungdra	gzhung-sgra	lit. "sound of the centre", musical style of the capital region
zopön	bzo-dpon	master-builder, head carpenter
Zorik Chichap	bZo-rig sPyi-khyab	highest title for master architect
Zorik Lapön	bZo-rig Las-dpon (La'-dpon)	master architect

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