

A BRIEF RELIGIOUS,
CULTURAL AND SECULAR
HISTORY OF BHUTAN



THE ASIA SOCIETY GALLERIES

A BRIEF RELIGIOUS,
CULTURAL AND SECULAR
HISTORY OF BHUTAN

DASHO RIGZIN DORJI

SECRETARY, SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS
ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN

THE ASIA SOCIETY GALLERIES, NEW YORK

LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

Gangteng Monastery

Lami Gonpa Khentse

National Library, Thimphu

Ta-Dzong National Museum, Paro

Paro Dzong

Private Collection

Punakha Dzong

Tashichho Dzong

Tongsa Dzong

Wangdiphodrang Dzong

This exhibition and book have been made possible by the generous support of Mr. Hajime Onishi, Honorary Consul of Bhutan in Osaka, Japan, the National Endowment for the Arts, Lisina and Frank Hoch, John and Henrietta Goelet, Thai Airways International, Ltd., and the New York State Council on the Arts. Additional Support was provided by The Starr Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Friends of The Asia Society Galleries.

Published on the occasion of

*Art from the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan,
Land of the Thunder Dragon*

an exhibition organized by
The Asia Society Galleries, New York and
the Royal Government of Bhutan
January 18 – June 17, 1990.

Published by The Asia Society Galleries, New York
Andrew Pekarik, Director, The Asia Society Galleries
Osa Brown, Associate Director, Publisher
Becky Mikalson, Production
Design: Abby Goldstein
Black-and-white photography: Andrew Pekarik
Map: courtesy of Serindia Publications

Printed and bound in the United States of America
Copyright © 1989 by The Asia Society Galleries,
New York

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN 0-87848-071-4

Library of Congress Catalogue Number 89-82260

On the cover: Paro Dzong
Photograph by Andrew Pekarik

TABLE OF CONTENTS

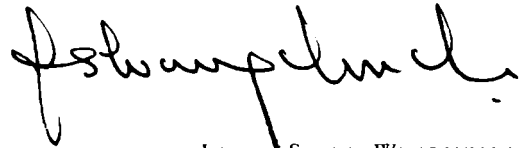
Foreword	
<i>His Royal Highness King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, King of Bhutan</i>	5
Preface	
<i>Andrew Pekarik</i>	6
The National Anthem of Bhutan	7
Map of Bhutan	8
The Geographical Background	9
Prehistory	9
Introduction of Buddhism	10
The Age of Ngawang Namgyal	11
Medieval Bhutanese Society	11
The Theory of the Triple Incarnation of the Zhabdrung	11
The Advent of the British and the Establishment of Monarchy	12
Political Institutions and Organization of Government	12
National Assembly	13
Royal Advisory Council	13
Judiciary	13
Council of Ministers and the Central Secretariat	13
District Development Committee	14
Local Administration	14
Zonal Administration	14
Royal Civil Service Commission	15
Bhutan in International Affairs	15
The Clergy	15
Conclusion	15
The Buddhism of Bhutan	16
Key Figures of Bhutanese Buddhism	16
The Monastic Community	18
Rites and Rituals	19
Buddhism and Medicine	20
The Artistic Tradition in Bhutan	22
Paintings	23
Sculpture	24
Architecture	25
The Agrarian Economy	27
Dress	27
Diet	27
The Astrological and Astronomical Perspective	28
Sports and Pastimes	28
Festivals	29
Ceremonials and Customs	30
The Flag and Official Seal of Bhutan	30

FOREWORD

I am very happy that the people of the United States of America, for whom we have great affection and high esteem, will have the opportunity to learn more about Bhutan through the exhibition at The Asia Society entitled: "Art from the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon." Bhutan is an independent nation which is proud of its rich and ancient cultural heritage. As a Buddhist kingdom it maintains a unique relationship between religious and social life that has kept the nation strong and resilient through the ages. These continuing beliefs and structures are compellingly represented by the art gathered for this exhibition from monasteries and temples in Bhutan. For centuries the artists of Bhutan have expressed their devotion to spiritual truths through religious objects and paintings. As they were used in ceremonies and daily worship and then handed on to later generations, these artworks came to play important roles in the religious life of the nation and became the physical embodiment of its cultural history. The altar and paintings that were specially made for this exhibi-

tion demonstrate the continuing strength and vitality of the living artistic traditions of Bhutan today. As we face the challenges of the future, we will keep active the skills and wisdom of the past, for it is our firm belief that only through a proper blend of tradition and modernity that we can truly enhance the quality of life of our people.

I hope our American friends will get a valuable insight into a unique, living culture of a Himalayan kingdom through this exhibition. I must thank The Asia Society and the numerous friends and well-wishers of Bhutan for making this exhibition possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jigme Singye Wangchuck', written in a fluid, cursive style.

JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK
King of Bhutan

PREFACE

This project, a collaboration of the Royal Government of Bhutan and The Asia Society Galleries, would not have been possible without the gracious approval and encouragement of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck and the very generous cooperation of the Royal Government, particularly, Lyonpo Dawa Tsering, Foreign Minister; the late Lyonpo Jagar, Chairman of the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs; Dasho Rigzin Dorji, Secretary of the Special Commission; and His Excellency Ambassador Ugyen Tshering.

I am especially grateful to Dasho Rigzin Dorji for preparing this text on Bhutan and for working closely with me in selecting the objects, commissioning the altar and paintings, and helping to shape the exhibition and its presentation. Visiting the holy places of Bhutan together with Dasho Rigzin was an unforgettable spiritual and personal pilgrimage that awakened me to the depth and power of the Buddhist faith in Bhutan. We have worked together to communicate as much of this experience as possible.

On the American side Lisina and Frank Hoch have been the inspiration and guiding force behind this exhibition from the very beginning through every stage of its development. They have worked tirelessly as full members of the exhibition preparation team. Osa Brown has been the principal organizer of this team and has expertly managed the details of the project.

Because of the unique nature of this exhibition, the logistics of packing and shipping were unusually complex. Dana Stein Dince handled all of these details superbly. Jack Lucivero assisted her with the packing. Becky Mikalson very skillfully handled all of the texts and printed materials and served as the central coordinator of all aspects of the project. Joanna Ekman copy-edited the book and Merantine Hens assisted with its production. Cleo Nichols created a design for the exhibition that, as usual, is sensitive to the art while at the same time imaginative and practical. David Harvey designed the graphics that communicate the educational messages of the exhibition.

Throughout the four years of planning this exhibition we have benefited from the knowledge and encouragement of many friends. Among

them I wish to acknowledge Senator Claiborne Pell for his enthusiastic support and encouragement; Bruce Bunting of the World Wildlife Fund for his generous advice and assistance; Valdino R. Franceschinis and Fritz Loppacher, who granted us permission to use their photographs; Françoise Pommaret-Imaeda, who helped train the docents and clarified the complex meanings of many of the objects; Anthony Aris, Serindia Publications, who granted us use of his map in the book and the exhibition; and the clergy and members of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra in Woodstock, New York, who helped with the altar and the consecration ceremony.

We are deeply grateful to all of the generous funders who joined us in making this exhibition happen. In addition to the Royal Government of Bhutan, there are six principal sponsors for this exhibition: Mr. Hajime Onishi, Honorary Consul of Bhutan in Osaka, Japan; the National Endowment for the Arts; Lisina and Frank Hoch; John and Henrietta Goelet; Thai Airways International, Ltd.; and the New York State Council for the Arts.

Additional support was provided by The Starr Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Friends of The Asia Society Galleries as well as by Mr. and Mrs. Fritz von Schulthess, Mr. and Mrs. Fernand Oltramare, the Albert Kunstadter Family Foundation and the Philology Trust.

No exhibition can adequately represent a people and their history, and no exhibition can replace the experience of a place. The dawn prayer ritual of the monks in the upper temple of the Wangdiphodrang Dzong citadel, which was my direct inspiration for the presentation of this exhibition, can not be repeated in New York. But we hope that this exhibition will open a door in the imagination of our visitors and introduce them to the heritage, beauty and strength of a proud Asian kingdom that deserves to be better known.

ANDREW J. PEKARIK
Director, The Asia Society Galleries

The National Anthem of Bhutan

In the Thunder Dragon Kingdom
Adorned with sandalwood
The protector who guards the
Teachings of the dual system
He, the precious and glorious ruler,
Causes dominion to spread
While his unchanging person abides
in constancy
As the doctrine of the Buddha
flourishes
May the sun of peace and happiness
shine on the people.



A BRIEF RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL AND SECULAR HISTORY OF BHUTAN

The Geographical Background

Situated along the southern slopes of the great Himalayan range between 26°5' and 28°5' north latitude and 88° and 92° east longitude, the kingdom of Bhutan, with an area of 18,000 square miles and a population of 1.2 million, lies like a picturesque fairyland between China to the north and India to the south, east, and west.

The British emissary Captain R. Boileau Pemberton, who visited the country a century and a half ago, dramatically described Bhutan's topography: "With the exception of the narrow strip of land at the foot of the mountains, the whole of Bootan (sic) territory presents a succession of the most lofty and rugged mountains on the surface of the globe . . . the consequence is that the traveller appears to be shut out on every side from the rest of the world."

The area now occupied by the Bhutan Himalayas is described as the site of the shallow Tethys Sea millions of years ago; during the Tertiary period, powerful forces of earth, water, and ice transformed it into a land of irregular mountain masses. Concurrent elevation and erosion during a period of millions of years formed the present mountain system.

Geographers divide Bhutan into three distinct zones: southern, central, and northern. Southern Bhutan consists of low foothills covered with dense tropical forests. The subtropical monsoon climate of this region is hot and humid, and the average temperature is 20° centigrade.

Central Bhutan, where the majority of the population lives and where the capital, Thimphu, is located, lies at the foot of the majestic northern mountains and consists mainly of fertile valleys at altitudes ranging from 3,500 to 10,000 feet. In these valleys are grown a wide variety of crops, including rice, wheat, and maize, while on the surrounding slopes thrive fruits such as apples, plums, and peaches. The central zone is rich in forests of oak, pine, and fir. With the exception of a few valleys like Punakha and Wangdiphodrang situated at comparatively low altitudes, valleys are extremely cold during winter, when the tem-

perature drops to -10° or lower. Strong winds sweeping through the valley increase the cold.

The valleys of the northern region, which are at heights of between 11,000 and 18,000 feet, are sparsely populated, mainly by nomadic yak herdsman. The zone forms part of the Great Himalayas, with high peaks along the Tibetan borders, the most prominent among which are the Jomo Lhari in the west (24,000 feet), and Masang Gang (23,700 feet) and Tshering Gang (21,400 feet) in the north. The tree line is generally at 13,000 feet, with coniferous forests of pine and fir.

Bhutan abounds in a rich variety of wildlife, including elephants, rhinos, tigers, musk deer, snow leopards, brown bears, red pandas, takins, and blue sheep, and there is a widespread belief in the existence of the elusive yeti.

The people of Bhutan are of three ethnic groups: the Sharchops, believed to be the earliest inhabitants, who live largely in eastern Bhutan; the Ngalops, who live mostly in western Bhutan; and the people of Nepalese origin who settled in southern Bhutan toward the end of the nineteenth century. While a number of dialects are spoken in different parts of the country, Dzongkha is the national language of Bhutan.

Prehistory

Bhutan's prehistoric period, of which there is neither ethnic, paleobotanic, geographic, or physiographic record, fell roughly between 500 B.C. and A.D. 500. Fire, earthquake, flood, and internecine warfare unfortunately destroyed whatever records may once have existed. The accidental burning in 1832 of the *dzong* (monastery-fortress) in Punakha, at that time one of the capitals of Bhutan, and the widespread destruction caused at the same site by an earthquake in 1897 were especially responsible for the destruction of Bhutanese historical documents relating to the period. However, a number of stone tools and megaliths available suggest that Bhutan was populated from a relatively early date, probably around 2000-1500 B.C.

Little is known about the early history of

Bhutan. From the available artifacts preserved in a small number of ancient monasteries, we find that Bonism, a shamanistic ritual, was followed in Bhutan prior to the advent of Buddhism. The Bon tradition and rituals are still practiced in some parts of Bhutan during the celebration of local festivals.

Introduction of Buddhism

The real historical period of Bhutan, however, starts with the introduction of Buddhism in the seventh century A.D.. Since then, Buddhism has always played an important role both in the history of Bhutan and in the way of life of its people. Religious and secular powers were not clearly separated until the seventeenth century, when Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal established a new dual system of government. Even today, it is evident that the supreme head of the religious institutions known as the *Je Khenpo* holds a prominent place in the social and cultural life of the Bhutanese people.

Although the two most sacred and historical Buddhist temples, Kyerchu and Byamspa, were built in the seventh century A.D., it was not until the visit of the great Indian saint Guru Padmasambhava in A.D. 746 that Buddhism took firm root in Bhutan. Padmasambhava converted a king (Sendha) reigning in the Bumthang valley to Buddhism, after which the faith gradually spread to other parts of Bhutan.

Legend has it that, at the end of the eighth century, King Sendha built an iron castle in Bumthang containing all the treasures of the world. His territory was invaded by King Nabudara or Nauche (Big Nose), who ruled the Duar plains to the south. Prior to the battle outside the iron castle, King Sendha performed a grand ceremony in which he invoked the local guardian deities for their help. But it was all in vain: the Bumthang forces were defeated, and King Sendha's son Taglamebar slain. The distressed king lost faith in the deities and ordered all temples in his kingdom to be desecrated and destroyed. A Bhutanese chronicle narrates what ensued: "The deities, deeply offended at the sacrilegious vandalism of the mortal king, grew irate, and misfortune befell the entire kingdom. King Sendha was struck down with a fatal illness. The deities had sapped his vital strength and his life seemed to be evaporating. People close to the king felt lost and forsaken."

Officers of the royal court held discussions to

seek a solution, and the leading astrologers of the region suggested remedies that failed to take effect. At that time Guru Padmasambhava (known as Guru Rinpoche, or Most Precious Teacher), one of the greatest Buddhist masters of Ugyan country known for his miraculous powers, happened to be meditating in a cave called Yanglehoe in Nepal. Messengers carrying gifts and cups filled with gold dust visited the great guru, beseeching his help to destroy the evil deities and rescue their monarch.

Accepting the invitation, Guru Padmasambhava traveled via Nubjikorphu in the Khen region to Bumthang, where he organized a festival of ritual dances and, with his magic powers, assumed eight manifestations in eight forms of dance in order to subdue the evil spirits. The encounter culminated with the guru, now transformed into the primeval bird Garuda, retrieving King Sendha's vital strength from the chief of the local deities, who had appeared at the spectacle as a lion and is now known as Shelging Karpo, chief protective deity of Kurje temple in Bumthang.

Following these miraculous events, King Sendha and his subjects were converted to the Buddhist faith and undertook to propagate the new religion and reestablish all the holy places.

One salient feature of Guru Padmasambhava's religious policy was his incorporation of the Bon deities into the Buddhist pantheon, having, as the legend relates, bound them through oaths not only to serve the Buddhist faith, but also, in the process, to become its protectors. The psychological implications of this development should not be underestimated, for it lent a sense of continuity to the beliefs of the new adherents and satisfied the needs of their stage of consciousness.

With the emergence of the anti-Buddhist king Langdarma in the northern kingdom of Tibet, a wave of religious persecution and political turmoil swept through that country. The ninth and tenth centuries witnessed an exodus of monks to Kham in eastern Tibet and Bhutan, the latter quickly being recognized as a *Balyul*, or Sacred Hidden Land of Spiritual Treasures, that had received the blessings of Guru Rinpoche. Among the innumerable monks and Tibetan religious practitioners who thus took refuge in Bhutan, many rose to eminence through their mystic practices and contributed significantly to the several schools of later Buddhism in the Himalayan region—among them the Kadampa, the Kagyudpa, the Sakyapa and the Gelugpa—that sprang up with the revival of the

religion in Tibet in the eleventh century. A highlight of the religious history of this period was the appearance of *Tertons*, or Treasure-Discoverers, in Paro and Bumthang, who revealed, at predestined, opportune moments, texts and sacred objects hidden for posterity by Guru Padmasambhava and other saints.

In the first half of the thirteenth century, a spiritual master by the name of Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo (1208–1276) arrived in Bhutan. He is regarded as a very important figure in Bhutan because he was the forerunner of the Drukpa Kargyu tradition, which ultimately gained preeminence in the country. As soon as he arrived, Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo came into conflict with the Lhapas, who were already firmly established in western Bhutan. However, Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo finally won his struggle with the Lhapas and married a woman from the Thimphu valley. Their four sons further spread the Drukpa Kargyu traditions in the country. Nevertheless, the Lhapa school continued until the seventeenth century, when it was totally crushed by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal.

The Age of Ngawang Namgyal

The person who had the greatest impact on the history of Bhutan was Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594–1651). Zhabdrung Rinpoche meaning “the precious jewel at whose feet one submits”, as he is reverently referred to, was both a great spiritual personality, and a statesman and leader of exceptional ability, as well as a great architect and builder. He crushed several foreign aggressions and in the process set up a chain of sturdy monastery-fortresses called dzongs, which became centers of stability to the country by establishing a strong and dynamic administrative system and by codifying a set of strict but fair and just laws of such enduring value that they have formed the framework for the present judicial system of Bhutan.

The dual system of administration that Ngawang Namgyal established, whereby a spiritual leader looked after the clergy and a temporal ruler looked after the affairs of state, endured until the establishment of hereditary monarchy in 1907.

Medieval Bhutanese Society

Though Bhutanese society under the theocracy established by Ngawang Namgyal can generally be described as feudalistic, it was neither hereditary nor oppressive in the medieval European

sense and was characterized by an absence of strong social stratification.

Broadly, there may be said to have been three classes—the monastic community, who were, in fact, the nobility of the country; the lay civil servants, brought up in dzongs and palaces, who supervised public services of labor such as ascertaining that necessary provisions were duly supplied by the common people by way of tax; and the farmers, who comprised the overwhelming majority, lived in self-sufficient village units, and provided the core of almost all the classes of people (a phenomenon which, to a great extent, eliminated class distinctions). In the words of George Bogle of the Bengal Civil Service, who was dispatched on a mission to Bhutan and Tibet by the East India Company in 1774, “Among a people where there is no pre-eminence of birth, there cannot well be much pride. The Bhutanese seem to have none of it, and live among their servants on the most familiar footing.” In times of war, all sections of the population took up arms against the enemy.

Besides the three main classes, there was a community of serfs, who were generally prisoners of war from the Duar plains to the south or their descendants. They were free to marry and own houses (though not land), and were provided with food, clothing and shelter by the state.

The medieval Bhutanese social structure included elements of democratic socialism, whereby all officials starting from the village headman, or *Gup*, at the bottom rung of the ladder to the *Desi* at the top were chosen through elective processes, and the prevalence of a barter economy dovetailed with the strictures of religion to lend society a high moral tone, all vices associated with the lust for money being practically unknown. George Bogle observed, “The more I see of the Bhutanese, the more I am pleased with them. The common people are good-humored, downright and I think thoroughly trusty.”

The Theory of the Triple Incarnation of the Zhabdrung

Ngawang Namgyal had divided the country into various dzongs, and appointed a *Penlop* (Governor) or *Dzongpon* (Lieutenant Governor) for each. The absence of a suitable successor to him was followed, in the first half of the eighteenth century, by the institutionalization of the theory of the triple incarnation of the Body, Speech and Mind of the Zhabdrung in the form of three

people. The “mental” incarnation referred to by the British in India as the Dharma Raja, or King of Religion, was recognized as the legitimate head of state. Though in practice the Zhabdrungs rarely wielded actual power, they did serve as effective symbols of national identity. Civil authority was held by their theoretical nominees, the Debs, or Desis, of whom there were no fewer than fifty-four in the troubled, fractious and unstable times between Nhawang Namgyal and the monarchy, from 1651 to 1907.

The Advent of the British and the Establishment of Monarchy

Meanwhile, a new crisis loomed beyond the nation’s frontiers. The question of control of the Duars, a narrow tract of country extending along the foot of the lower range of the Himalayan mountains that separated British territory from Bhutan proper, rapidly wore down the goodwill established between the two countries by eighteenth-century British trading missions. These developments led to the Duar War of 1864, during which the British forcibly annexed the eighteen Duars.

By the second half of the nineteenth century the greatest authority in the land lay in the hands of quasi-independent, nonhereditary baronies. The same period saw the powerful British seeking to incorporate Tibet within their sphere of influence—a development that posed a threat to Bhutan but was overcome by the political acumen of Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck, a dynamic leader who successfully played the role of mediator between British India and Tibet. The inspired maneuver helped in furthering his authority within Bhutan against a background that was characterized by a widespread desire for political stability and internal peace, and in 1907 an assembly of the clergy, the government, and the people unanimously elected him the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan, with the title of Druk Gyalpo (Precious King of the Thunder Dragon).

Ugyen Wangchuck displayed extraordinary qualities as a leader and statesman. He was a deeply devout and religious man and imbued with a genuine desire to improve the condition of his people. He possessed remarkable administrative and diplomatic skills. With his outstanding qualities of leadership and statesmanship, he was undoubtedly Bhutan’s man of destiny. By uniting the country and establishing a central authority, he

brought peace and stability to the country and laid the foundation for the emergence of modern Bhutan. He was succeeded by Jigme Wangchuck, during whose reign (1926–52) the nation continued to enjoy peace and stability.

The reign of the third monarch King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1952–72) was marked by the progressive opening of the country to the outside world. In 1962 Bhutan joined the Colombo Plan and in 1971 Bhutan became a member of the United Nations. Restructuring of the country’s social, economic and political institutions was also carried out under his wise and enlightened leadership.

The present king, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who has always stressed the need to bring greater participation of the people in the nation building process, has decentralized the administration and established District Development Committees in all eighteen districts of the kingdom. As Bhutan is a small country with a small population, His Majesty the King has given topmost priority to building a small, compact and efficient government with a system of administration that is not dependent on individuals or personalities but will function effectively because of inbuilt merits. Due importance is also being given to the constructive role that can be played by the clergy in the promotion of the high values of the country’s rich social and cultural heritage.

At the same time, under the wise leadership of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Bhutan has rapidly established good bilateral relations with many countries both within and outside its region. Over the years, Bhutan has achieved significant success in enhancing its image in the community of nations through the balanced and pragmatic positions it has consistently adopted as an active member of numerous multilateral organizations.

His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s reign has witnessed the dawn of a new era in Bhutan—an era marked by great political stability, all-round economic progress and development, and a social and cultural renaissance that has sought to harmoniously blend the best of the old and the new.

Political Institutions and Organization of Government

Under the system instituted by Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the King is the head of state and government. There are four main organizations of

the government: National Assembly; Royal Advisory Council; Judiciary and the Council of Ministers; and the Central Secretariat.

National Assembly

The National Assembly was established by the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck in 1953. The initiative to establish the National Assembly emanated from the throne. King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck wanted to develop political consciousness among his people and give them a greater say in the running of the country. The main functions of the National Assembly are to enact laws, approve senior appointments in the government, and advise on all matters of national importance. It normally meets twice a year and consists of 150 members comprised of 105 elected representatives of the people, 10 representatives of the clergy, and 33 nominated representatives of the government. They all serve for a term of three years. The Speaker and the Deputy Speakers are elected by the National Assembly from among its members. It is significant to note that when the National Assembly was set up in 1953, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck took the deliberate decision to reserve seventy percent of the seats for the people, eight percent for the clergy, and only twenty-two percent for the government. This was to ensure that the people would have a decisive say in decision making.

Royal Advisory Council

The Royal Advisory Council, which was established in 1965, consists of nine members, six representing the people, two representing the clergy and one nominee of the King. They hold office for five years.

The main functions of the body are to make its advice available to the King and his Council of Ministers on all matters of national importance, to promote the welfare of the people and the national interests of the kingdom, to develop friendly and harmonious relations between the government and the people, and to ensure that the laws and resolutions passed by the National Assembly are faithfully implemented by the government and the people.

In 1984, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck further strengthened the position of the Royal Advisory Council. Although the Council had the authority to advise the King and to watch over the performance of the government, His Majesty felt

that they lacked the necessary clout to carry out their important responsibilities. A revised set of rules and regulations for the functions and responsibilities of the Royal Advisory Council was therefore formulated on the instruction of His Majesty the King. The most notable addition is the inclusion of a clause that 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 to the Cabinet and the National Assembly." The National Assembly strongly objected to this clause empowering the Royal Advisory Council to report against the King. The Assembly felt that this was a violation of traditional values and that it undermined the sacred principles of loyalty and devotion to the throne. His Majesty the King, however, insisted that this clause was of great importance and was very necessary, as no one can predict or guarantee the actions and sense of responsibility to the nation of future rulers.

Judiciary

All the laws of the kingdom are codified. Minor offenses are judged by the village headmen. Above them, the District Court has both original and appellate jurisdiction. The next higher court is the High Court in Thimphu. The final appeal is made to the King, who then delegates the Royal Advisory Council to investigate and ensure that the courts have dispensed justice in keeping with the laws of the country.

Council of Ministers and the Central Secretariat

Bhutan took a major step in the direction of a modernized administrative system in 1968 when the National Assembly, at the request of the King, approved the formation of a Council of Ministers. The Ministers are responsible to the Cabinet, which is an important decision-making body second only in importance to the National Assembly. The Cabinet is presided over by the King and consists of Ministers, Deputy Ministers and all Royal Advisory Councillors.

There are, at present, seven Ministries dealing with the following activities: Agriculture and Forestry, Communications, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Social Services, and Trade, Industry and Tourism.

District Development Committee

The present King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, has decentralized the administration and established District Development Committees in all eighteen districts of the kingdom in order to bring about greater participation of the people in nation-building activities. The King has repeatedly stressed the fact that the future destiny of Bhutan lies in the hands of the people, and whatever administrative system is established must receive the full and active cooperation and support of the people in order to become effective and lasting. The King has repeatedly exhorted the people to shoulder their responsibilities as loyal and dedicated citizens who are willing to place the interests of the nation before their own. Such an attitude on the part of the government and the people is of vital importance to a small country like Bhutan.

Local Administration

The kingdom is divided into eighteen districts (*dzongkhags*), each of which is under a District Administrator, or *Dzongdag*. Village headmen (*Gups*) are elected by the people of their villages. The *Dzongdags* are not only responsible for the day-to-day administration of the districts, but also for implementing development plans under the decentralized system of development administration.

Zonal Administration

In order to bring the government closer to the people, the Kingdom's Fifth Socio-Economic Development Plan (1981–1986/87) devolved greater executive powers from the central government to the districts. Serious reflections on this experiment, however, point to several limitations that forced development administration in the districts to an incredibly slow pace. While the need to improve the technical competence of all sectors in the districts was fully recognized, effective functioning was greatly hampered by an acute dearth of manpower. Not only did the districts suffer from the lack of administrative and technical back-up from the center, on whom they continued to rely; advice and guidance from their own local expertise, whenever available, were also found wanting. The experience underscores the need for a more efficient deployment of limited resources and manpower by creating more manageable, functional administrative units. To this

end, the government has decided, at the beginning of the Sixth Plan, to introduce four zonal administrative units, in line with His Majesty's express desire to institute a system of governance that is more responsive to people's needs.

The division of the country into four zones is dictated by geophysical and agro-climatic considerations, within which regional potential can best be harnessed. Geophysically, the country's landforms are distinctly characterized by the land divides, valleys and rivers running from the higher altitudes of the north to the lower altitudes of the south. These physical features relate to the agrometeorological phenomena of alpine temperatures and low rainfall in the north, graduating to temperate-subtropical temperature and heavy precipitation in the south. The deep north-south valleys also offer easier north-south communication with the existing road system, showing four principal north-to-south patterns. These north-south arterial roads are now interconnected by the existing lateral road running centrally from west to east. Moreover, the boundaries of the zones are coterminous with spatially defined natural watersheds, with catchment areas covering four to five districts being drained by major river systems.

All these features provide the logical basis for subdividing the country into four administrative regions: the western region; the west-central region; the east-central region; and the eastern region. The western region would comprise the territories of Haa, Paro, Chukha and Samchi; the west-central region drained by the "Puna Tsangchu," or the Sankosh, would cover Punakha, Wangdiphodrang, Dagana and Chirang; the east-central region would consist of Gaylepphug, Tongsa, Shemgang and Bumthang; and the fourth region would be formed by the easternmost districts, namely, Lhuntse, Mongar, Tashigang, Pema Gatshel and Samdrub Jongkhar.

Thus, the institution of the four zonal administrations is envisaged to feel the administrative and physical problems that currently exist between the center and the districts. Serving as a suitably congenial and accessible link between the center and the districts, the zonal administrations are best placed to direct development initiatives in the districts within them toward the fulfillment of nationally stated objectives. At the same time, the zonal administrations will ensure that national objectives adequately account for local development circumstances and requirements. The new set-up also calls for a sharing of technical expertise

among the districts so that the limited number of technically competent personnel are optimally utilized.

Administratively, the delegation of responsibilities to the four zones is expected to bring the pressure of governance to a manageable level with each unit, including central ministries, adequately attending to its fair share of governmental tasks. Equally important, it is hoped that the system of Zonalisation of governmental activities will provide an effective framework for achieving greater equity and for enlisting increased community involvement and participation in the development process.

Finally, governed as they are by homogeneity and complementarity in natural attributes, as well as accessibility, the zonal divisions are envisaged to allow for a more coordinated and integrated planning of interdistrict activities, utilizing the agri-forestry and industrial development potential of their common watersheds for accelerated production toward self-reliance.

Royal Civil Service Commission

In order to set up an administration that is small, dynamic, dedicated and effective, and which is not only responsive to the needs of the people and can earn their confidence, but is also capable of meeting the challenges of development and nation-building, the King established the Royal Civil Service Commission in 1982. It is responsible for formulating and ensuring implementation of personnel policies in order to promote efficiency, loyalty and integrity among civil servants and to maintain a high level of morale. It is also responsible for appointments, transfers, promotions and discipline of all civil servants.

Bhutan in International Affairs

In order to preserve the sovereignty, independence, security and territorial integrity of the kingdom, Bhutan followed a policy of isolationism for several centuries. It opened its doors to the outside world only in the early 1960s. Since then Bhutan has made rapid strides in establishing diplomatic relations with numerous countries and in joining the United Nations (1971), Non-Aligned Movement (1973), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (1985), and other important regional and international organizations. Bhutan's membership in the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank enables it to supplement financial and technical assistance re-

ceived from the United Nations system and friendly countries.

As a kingdom subscribing to Buddhist ideals and values, Bhutan seeks friendly relations with all states. Bhutan is fully committed to the Charter of the United Nations and the principles and objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Active participation in these and other organizations has enabled Bhutan to make a positive contribution to international peace, security and development.

The political system and system of government in Bhutan is still undergoing dramatic changes. His Majesty the King is constantly trying to create a system that is best suited to promote and safeguard both the short- and long-term interests of the country. This important objective is best summed up in His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck's own words:

A good system of Government that is not dependent on any individual or personalities, a system that will function effectively because of its inbuilt merits—that is a legacy we must create for our future generations. Because of our small size and because we are presently at the crossroads of development, we have the necessary flexibility and unique opportunity to create a system of administration that will be of the greatest benefit to our country's future interests, security and well-being.

The Clergy

Another institution that does not form part of the political structure of the kingdom but has an important social and cultural role to play in the life of the nation is the clergy. The clergy is headed by the Je Khenpo (Chief Abbot) who is equivalent in status to the King. He is assisted by four *Lopons* (Masters) who are equivalent in rank to Ministers. The status and powers of the clergy have undergone severe erosion over the years and the Je Khenpo has become a mere figurehead. The King has repeatedly stressed the need to delegate sufficient authority to the clergy on religious matters in order to restore it to its former position of respect and influence. Although Buddhism is the state religion, there is complete religious freedom in Bhutan. However, open proselytization by any religion and criticism against other religions are not permitted in the country.

Conclusion

The Bhutanese call their country Druk Yul (Land of the Thunder Dragon). The name derives from a

legend: Yeshe Dorji, a twelfth-century saint of the Kagyupa sect of Buddhism, was consecrating a new monastery when he heard thunder in the sky. As popular belief associated thunder with the voice of the dragon (*druk*), he took this to be an omen and changed the name of his sect to Drukpa Kagyupa. As we have seen, it was this sect that ultimately became the state religion of Bhutan.

The Buddhism of Bhutan

Although all the Buddha's teachings form one unified body, they may be separated into different layers of the same entity. Buddhists refer to these layers as "vehicles," which may be defined as systems of practice by which one progresses to a higher spiritual state.

Not everyone has the same emotional, intellectual, or spiritual capacities. We are the product of our past thoughts and actions, or *Karma*, and since our Karma varies, so do our inherent abilities. It is with these differences in mind that the Buddha propagated his various teachings. That is, he did not teach everyone in the same way. To some he taught simple truths, to others more complex ones, and even the simple and the complex had their own gradations. That does not mean, however, that his teachings were ever contradictory. Rather, they graduated from simplicity to complexity, even while dealing with the same subject.

Bhutanese Buddhists believe that the three main vehicles of Buddhism can be arranged in their increasing order or complexity and advancement as follows:

Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle, which is dedicated to the proposition that each person has to work out his own salvation through monastic self-discipline. Hinayana has been compared to a slow but fruitful walk towards a state of liberation from cyclic existence which, however, falls short of Buddhahood.

Mahayana or the Great Vehicle, which proposes salvation for the entire universe through the intervention of Bodhisattvas—potentially divine Buddhas who, out of compassion, refuse to enter Nirvana until all sentient beings have been saved. Mahayana has been compared to traveling in a car, where progress is quicker but, at the same time, an accident can be more serious.

Tantrayana, or Vajrayana, or the Secret Mantra Vehicle, which may be said to be a higher expression of Mahayana, and is both esoteric in nature and the quickest path to enlightenment, affording precise techniques to advanced and initiated pupils for attaining the supreme spiritual goal in a single life-

time. Tantrayana has been compared to taking a trip on a supersonic plane—an intoxicating experience granting that no accident occurs, which may very well prove fatal!

Buddhist scholar-saints have brought out the interdependence of the three "yanas" in the following observation:

Outward conduct is practiced in accordance with Vinaya (Hinayana).

Inwardly, mental activity is practiced with Bodhi-mind (Mahayana).

Practiced in secrecy is Tantra (Vajrayana).'

The state religion of Bhutan is Buddhism of the Mahayana tradition, including Vajrayana. In the light of what has been said above, it may be added that, from the Mahayana point of view, it is erroneous to talk, as many nonpracticing scholars do, in such terms as "original Buddhism" and "later developments of Buddhism", since all the various traditions of Buddhism have coexisted since the time of the Buddha and form different strands of the same stream.

It may also be noted that Buddhists do not normally speak of their own religion as "Buddhism," but usually refer to it as the "Dharma"—a Sanskrit word that in this context, means "to hold one back from impending disaster."

Key Figures of Bhutanese Buddhism

While the numerous famous religious figures that dot the history of Buddhism in Bhutan cannot all be described within the scope of this book, Bhutanese Buddhism derives much from the genius of the following persons, all of whom are unanimously acclaimed as the spiritual ancestors of the Nyingmapa and Drukpa Kargyu schools: Guru Padmasambhava, Longchen Rabjampa, Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo, Dorji Lingpa, Choeji Kunga Paljor, Padma Lingpa, Drukpa Kunlay, Yongzin Ngagi Wangchuck, Mipham Tenpi Nyima, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye.

Though foreigners often refer to Bhutanese Buddhism as Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism, this is no more than a misconception fostered by the superficial similarities between the two. In point of fact, however, though both belong to the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions of Buddhism, they differ widely with respect to rituals and liturgy, and in such other particulars as monastic organization and the system of education.

The Kagyupas, whose Drukpa branch even-

tually gained pre-eminence in Bhutan, came closest of all the Buddhist schools to what is known in philosophical jargon as subjective idealism. They gave particular emphasis to Tantric exercises and the practice of Amuttara yoga. This school is connected with the Indian teacher Naropa, who was a superintendent of the famous Nalanda University in India, through his student Marpa Choeki Lodro of Tibet, better known as Marpa.

Although it was Marpa who founded the Kagyupa sect in the latter half of the eleventh century, the establishment of the sect owes more to his illustrious student Milarepa, whose name literally means "the cotton-clad." A thinly clad ascetic who endured great extremes of climate while wandering in the mountains, Milarepa possessed many occult powers and was the composer of 100,000 popular songs.

The form of Buddhism introduced into Bhutan was Tantric, adaptable, highly flexible and metaphysical. It admits of numerous gods, demons and female energies or consorts of gods, who are invoked purely for the sake of worldly concerns. On the other hand, the veneration accorded to the Bodhisattvas, among whom the omniscient Chenrezi, or Avalokiteshvara of Infinite Mercy, occupies a position of special importance, stems from a totally different motive: to seek spiritual guidance in the path of salvation. Guru Padmasambhava in his eightfold manifestations is the object of special veneration as the second historical Buddha.

Bhutanese Buddhism recognizes six realms of existence:

1. The Deva Loka, or Realm of the Gods, characterized by the ceaseless gratification of its inhabitants and, usually, their eventual rebirth into a lower state;
2. The Asura Loka, or Realm of the Demigods, characterized by discontent, misery, envy of the splendor of the gods, and constant battling with them;
3. The Manushya Loka, or Realm of Human Beings, characterized by birth, old age, disease, and death, from whose cycle human beings can attain liberation only through the attainment of Nirvana;
4. The Pashu Loka, or Realm of Animals, characterized by stupidity, powerlessness, fear and suffering, with the animals not only preying on one another but being used by man as food and beasts of burden;

5. The Preta Loka, or Realm of Hungry Ghosts, the abode of those who, in their previous life, had been avaricious or had remained preoccupied with material possessions. It is characterized by the perpetual hunger and thirst of its inhabitants, whose previous Karma prevents them from seeking food or water even when these are placed before them;
6. The Naraka Loka, or Cold and Hot Hells, the realm of infernal pain, where those who have sinned through anger are accordingly doomed.

Connected with these six states is the popular and ancient religious formula *Om Mani Padme Hum* (literally, "Om, the Jewel on the Lotus"), which is commonly displayed on prayer flags and carved on slate, rocks, and prayer wheels throughout Bhutan. It is also constantly recited by lamas and laity alike; the exercise is credited with the power to stop the cycle of rebirths and bring about spiritual deliverance. Each of the mantric syllables is believed to close rebirth in a specific state of existence: *Om* among the gods, *Ma* among the demons, *Ni* among mankind, *Pad* among beasts, *Me* among hungry ghosts, and *Hum* among hell-beings.

There are three chief spiritual paths in Mahayana Buddhist teachings: renunciation; *bodhicitta*, or the altruistic mind; and the correct view of emptiness.

Human existence in Buddhism, as we have seen, is conceived of as a wheel or cycle of birth, death and rebirth in which suffering is inherent. Renunciation connotes the desire to free oneself from cyclic existence and enter the higher state of full enlightenment known as Buddhahood.

By *bodhicitta* is understood the sincere wish to attain enlightenment, not merely for one's own sake but for the sake of all sentient beings. One who possesses *bodhicitta* is referred to by the term *Bodhisattva*. The motivating factor in the development of *bodhicitta* is compassion, and various steps and methods are prescribed for its unfolding.

The correct view of emptiness recognizes that all that we feel and experience in our ordinary daily life can be shown to be without substance at the level of absolute truth. An analogy is the dream, which appears real to the dreamer but, upon his waking up, is seen as a short-lived product of the mind, with no independent existence. In Buddhism, emptiness is called "Dharma itself" or "Truth itself." Wisdom, which acts in the uni-

verse through compassion, is achieved when one understands emptiness as the reality of our individual and collective existence. The experience of wisdom is, of course, enlightenment, and the fundamental change that takes place during its attainment is from a self- or ego-centered perspective to one of selflessness.

Another important idea in the understanding of Buddhism is Karma, literally “deed” or “act,” which implies that as you sow, so shall you reap: good actions lead to good results and bad actions to bad results. The former are known as positive Karma and the latter as negative Karma. We are the product of our Karma, not only of this life, but of numerous previous lives, and all of us have an accumulation of both positive and negative Karmas, which bear fruit when the moment is ripe and make us either happy or miserable.

Buddhism holds that there is no permanent happiness in material existence, that what goes by the name of happiness in this state is like the reverse side of a coin whose obverse side is misery and pain. It is only when, by following the Dharma, we destroy Karma and transcend relative truth that we reach an eternally blissful state beyond sorrow known as Nirvana.

Bhutanese Buddhism recognizes three main types of Nirvana: Natural Nirvana, Peaceful Nirvana and Ultimate Nirvana.

Briefly, Natural Nirvana may be said to be the sum of one’s total human attributes and social status. The Peaceful Nirvana of Arhatship is achieved purely for personal ends, and the Ultimate Nirvana of Buddhahood is achieved for altruistic purposes.

The Monastic Community

There are two intertwined strands to Bhutanese Buddhism represented respectively by the monastic and lay communities. Because the layman, insofar as his circumstances compel him to live a worldly existence, is generally unable to reach that level of religious experience that is vouchsafed only to the monks, it becomes his duty to accumulate merit through the worship of the Triple Gems, or Three Jewels, symbolic of the Trinity: the Buddha, his Doctrine and the Church or Order. For its part, the monastic community serves the nation and its people through its teachings and the performance of religious rites and ceremonies.

In the past each family entered at least one of its sons into a monastery, so that monks constituted a

considerable percentage of the male population. Although this percentage has inevitably declined with the passage of time, the monastic community continues to play an eminent role in national life. The Head Abbot, or Je Khenpo, who is responsible for the nation’s religious affairs, enjoys a prominent place in the social and cultural life of the people.

He is assisted by four deputies known as *Loponzhibs* (Four Masters): *Dorji Lopon* (Master of Vajrayana Tradition); *Yangbi Lopon* (Master of Rhetoric or Liturgy); *Drabi Lopon* (Master of Lexicography); and *Tshennyi Lopon* (Master of Metaphysics or Logic). Among the Four Masters, Dorji Lopon is the chief and the likely successor to the position of Je Khenpo. Below them are the *Umdzay* (head of Liturgical Congregation) and three *Kudrungs* (Aides-de-camp), who together are known as *Chothrimzhi* (Four Religious Administrators). Next in the hierarchy are other junior Lopons such as *Kilkhor Lopon* (Master of Graphic Arts), *Dungbi Lopon* (Master of Trumpets), *Tormi Lopon* (Master of Torma) and so on.

The 108-volume *Kanjur* (Collection of the Words of the Buddha) and the 225-volume *Tenjur* (Collection of Commentaries, by various scholarsaints) form the core of the extensive religious literature of Bhutan, which also includes the works of eminent teachers, expositions on subjects like *Zhungchen Chusum* (The Thirteen Great Philosophical Texts), astrology and medicine, and the authoritative Nyingmapa texts such as *Nyingma Gyuebum*, *Rinchem Terdzoe*, and *Nyeso Korsum*, *Kuenkhen Kabum* and various biographies, precepts (Sungbum), and liturgical texts of both the Drukpa Kargyu and Nyingma traditions.

Besides emphasizing liturgical, doctrinal and esoteric scriptures, monastic education also offers training in the auxiliary sciences and arts such as medicine, astrology, calligraphy, painting and grammar. The novitiate is eligible for full ordination only after the successful completion of a graded nine-year course, and the entire period of study encompasses fifteen to twenty years. Needless to say, many whose abilities fail to meet the progressively higher standards settle for the lesser monastic grades, while the select few, in accordance with their accomplishments, rise up the hierarchical ladder.

Daily, monthly and annual rituals form an integral part of monastic life and are accompanied by wind and percussion musical instruments including the trumpet, the shawm, the drum and the

cymbal. Since almost every important occasion in the life of the average Bhutanese is invested with religious significance, monks visit households as well to perform rites related to diverse events such as birth, marriage, sickness, death, construction of houses, promotion of senior officials, inaugural functions and many other day-to-day functions.

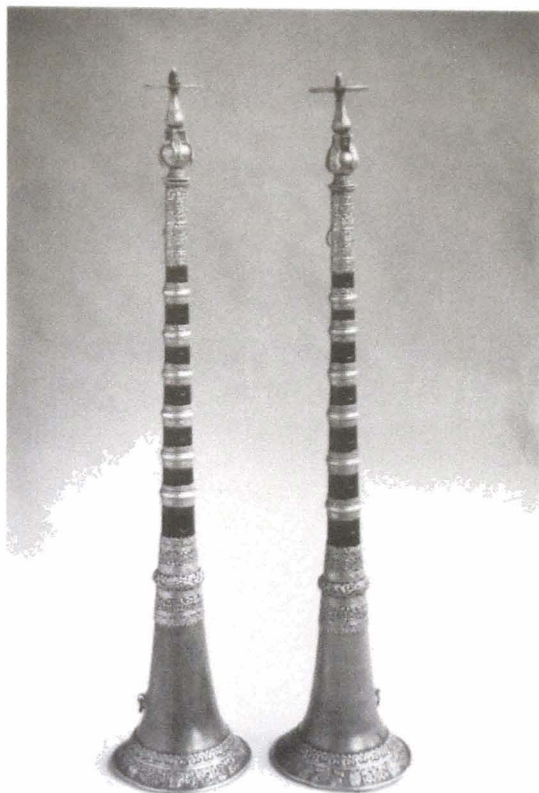
Monasteries meet their expenses from their assets and estates and the support of the general public who, apart from donations in cash and kind, hand over the first produce of their crops to the monks of their locality. In the event that the endowments of a monastery are found to be insufficient to meet its needs, the government grants a subsidy. This and other innovations such as monastic welfare schemes are a direct outcome of the 1984 reorganization of the Monk Body, or *Dratshang*, instituted by the present king with a view to enabling the monks to fulfil their ever-increasing duties and obligations in a positive climate of security, contentment and well-being. One important facet of the *Dratshang*'s new role is to adapt itself to the necessities and demands of a cautiously modernizing and more outward-looking Bhutan. To help it meet these objectives, a high-powered *Dratshang Lhentshog* (Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs) has been set up, along with its own Secretariat.

While monks of Bhutanese monasteries of the Drukpa school are strictly celibate, those of the Nyingmapa order are not obliged to be so. *Gomchebs*, who raise families and work as peasants, but also carry out liturgical functions in temples and homes, comprise a special category of people who may be termed lay priests (*upasaka*). They wield a great deal of social influence in the rural areas.

Rites and Rituals

In his time, the Buddha opposed the performance of rites and rituals merely for their own sake—a practice that was increasingly gaining ground in the prevalent Brahminism—and, in fact, considered them an obstacle to the attainment of enlightenment. While the Tantric viewpoint disapproves of utilizing rites and rituals for narrow material ends, it upholds their validity and value to genuine seekers of heightened inner consciousness. At the same time, however, it in no way deems them essential, recognizing that *sadhanas* can be effectively carried out in a bare cave, with *mantras* and *mudras* as the only aids.

Most *sadhanas* commence with the throwing of



Pair of shawms, ca. 19th century. Gold and silver, h: 25 in. Tongsa Dzong.

rice grains into the air—an act that is accompanied by the metaphysical visualization of the universe in miniature emanating from one's hands, scattering in myriad specks of brilliant light, and then merging with the void. The rite is symbolic both of one's own altruistic concern for the whole universe and the Buddhist truth that the entire universe is the void creation of one's own mind. Similarly, other rites serve as reminders of other core tenets of the Buddha Dharma.

Rites and rituals in one form or another are part and parcel of every religion, and Buddhism, even of the austere Theravadin and Zen variety, is no exception. Without them, Buddhism would simply be a system of ethics and psychology. The practice of meditation without accompanying rites and rituals often has the tendency of promoting the very ego-consciousness that it seeks to overcome, inducing vanity in the wake of achievement. It is in this context that rites and rituals

effect the necessary balance of self-reliance and humility, for while in meditation one essentially seeks the Buddha within, through rites and rituals one pays obeisance to the outward symbol of the Buddhas as represented in statues and sacred pictures. Nevertheless, in its truest sense, the immanent and external Buddha are one and the same: Truth is all-pervading.

Though ascetics inhabiting secluded caves may do without material adjuncts altogether, the common Bhutanese do find them helpful in leading pious lives, and elaborate shrines in temples and in private homes form an indispensable feature of Bhutanese national life. A high table or cabinet containing sacred symbols standing behind a lower table for offerings and implements and backed by hanging scrolls constitutes the typical Bhutanese Buddhist household shrine. Morning devotions consist of offering water (*yon-chab*) and the incense (*sangs*) of sweet-smelling trees and shrubs like birch, rhododendron and juniper to the images of the gods, before which a lamp (*marme*) is kept continually burning. *Sangs* connotes a different category of liturgical act from *Choga*, which can be performed only by an initiated monk in accordance with fixed liturgical prescriptions. Failure to comply with this stipulation is believed to lead to harmful consequences.

Tantric shrines feature the Buddha in the center, a maroon or yellow cloth-wrapped sacred text on the left, and a miniature reliquary tower on the right. These alternatively represent the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, or the triple faculty of Body, Speech, and Mind. Pictures of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and other deities provide a backdrop. The adept sits cross-legged on a square cushion before the shrine.

The seven essential symbolic offerings include two bowls of water (representing purity of mind and body), one of rice with an inlaid flower (beauty), one of rice holding an unlit incense taper (the Dharma's all-pervasiveness), one of oil with a lighted wick (illumination), one of scented water (devotion), and one of rice with a fruit upon it (gratitude). While there may also be other offerings, one particular kind peculiar to the Himalayan region consists of the *Torma*: a small butter-and-dough figure to which a red pigment is sometimes applied. A mixture of flour and butter, or even pure butter alone, is also used to model intricately patterned deities, demons, birds and animals.

The main ritual implements of the Bhutanese Buddhists include the vajra-scepter (*dorje*), the vajra bell (*drilbu*), and the clapper-drum with sounding pellets attached to it by leather thongs (*damari*). Their use is strictly limited to the priests. These instruments engender elemental sound combinations that, at one and the same time, help the meditator arrive at deeper levels of consciousness and bring about a mood of heightened urgency toward breaking free of the Sam-saric cycle of repeated births, deaths and suffering.

Daily devotions, which serve as a background to the adept's main sadhana, include Calling Upon the Lama to Arouse Him or a similar rite directed to the Guru; Taking Refuge; Invocation of the Yidam (tutelary deity); The Generation of Bodhicitta; a brief Vajrasattva meditation upon the Ten Evils and Ten Virtues accompanied by confession; Meditation upon the Voidness of the Ego and Non-Duality; and Entering Samadhi.

Special rites and rituals also mark specific days of the Bhutanese calendar dedicated to Guru Rinpoche, Zhabdrung Tara (the mother of all Buddhas) an individual's personal Bodhisattva, and the guardian deities of his sect. Other rites relate to such activities as healing the sick or securing the good fortune of a household or community.

The supernatural powers that exercise such a great hold on Bhutanese Buddhist beliefs, and that constitute the subjects of its rites and rituals, may be divided into two groups of white and good (*phyogs dkar*) and black and evil (*phyogs nag*). While the good powers are propitiated, the inimical ones are repelled. The purpose of rites and rituals may vary from bringing about prosperity, health, good fortune, riches and victory to invoking rain, banishing hail and halting epidemics.

The worship of every Buddhist divinity in Bhutan involves seven stages. First is the invocation—calling to the feast of sacrifice. Next, the deity is invited to be seated. Offerings are then presented: sacred cake, rice, water, flowers, incense, lamps, music and occasionally a mandala or magic circle in accordance with the stipulations of a special manual. Hymns of praise, repetition of the special spell or mantra, prayers for present and future benefits, and a benediction follow.

Buddhism and Medicine

Lord Buddha is reported to have once said, "If you desire to wait on me, you should wait upon the sick." That, in brief, may be said to sum up

the Buddhist attitude toward disease. Mahayana Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion and altruism, has always attached great importance to the alleviation of all kinds of suffering, not only of human beings, but of all sentient beings.

At the outset it should be made clear that the Buddhist attitude toward disease, based as it is on metaphysics, is radically different from that of its prevailing secular Western counterpart. All diseases, whether physical or mental, are considered to be the inevitable fallout of Karma, and well-being is necessarily connected with leading a virtuous life in accordance with Buddhist precepts. Further, since negative Karma is rooted in erroneous thought, diseases are held to be not only the result of such factors as deficiencies in diet and insufficient exercise, but, more important, of wrong thinking. It is interesting to note that, of late, modern medical science also has been coming around to the view that the mind plays a larger than hitherto-suspected role in the contraction and cure of diseases.

A salient feature of Buddhist medicine is its fundamental presupposition of an intermediate world, which is the only means of contact between the purely spiritual and material worlds. Just as thought precedes action, the subtle is considered the cause, and the gross the product. Even physical ailments, therefore, have their origin not in the apparent body, but in its subtle counterpart, the second body, which permeates the physical body and is characterized by various channels of differing density. Hence, any curative system of the body that does not take into account its subtle counterpart is, at best, superficial. Working on this basis, acupuncture, for instance, has effected many an authenticated cure, whose logic until today has remained a mystery to material scientific research.

Buddhist medicine posits the presence of the three universal humors of air, bile and phlegm, on whose interaction a person's health rests. The terms are not to be confused with their literal workaday meaning, but in fact represent their subtle equivalents, which are not obvious to the eye. Air is dry and light, bile hot and phlegm cold, viscous and heavy. When good health prevails, one acts upon the other in a harmonious balance whereby none is in short supply or exceeds its proper quantity. For instance, bile warms phlegm, which for its part keeps bile's heat in check. The workings of the mind and body have a



Vajra (*dorje*) and bell (*drihu*), ca. 18th century. Bell metal and brass, vajra: 1'2" x 3'4" in.; bell: 7'2" x 4 in. Punakha Dzong.

direct bearing on the functioning of the humors. Thus, drinking alcoholic beverages increases the production of bile, while spiritual development leads to an increase in air.

Mahayana Buddhist medical practices have achieved marked successes in the field of mental disorders, which are primarily attributed to two causes: incorrect lifestyle and so-called demonic influences.

An incorrect lifestyle connotes a pattern of living that is inherently at odds with an individual's personality and contrary to his spiritual destiny.

To understand what goes by the name of demonic influences, it is necessary first to acquaint oneself with the Buddhist theory of the nature of man. The universe is conceived of as a unity, with the human microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm and both composed of an aggregation of

ideal atoms that may be classified into five categories of "vehicles": material properties and attributes; sensations; abstract ideas; tendencies and potentialities; and reason. The integrated self, which is the foundation of sound mental health, maintains a fluid harmony between the various layers of personality or the "vehicles" in man. Disharmony may lead to a displacement of these layers and a subsequent invasion by extraneous vehicles, which are in essence nothing but mental projections of the afflicted, or psychic fields of force, but, in lay terms, are referred to as demons.

In passing it may be mentioned that, according to Buddhist belief, thoughts constitute a hidden force of vibrations to which we are continually exposed. Hence the lower that men sink in their mental life all around the globe, the greater becomes the possibility of so-called possession by outside vehicles. Conversely, an inwardly pious life has a morally, and thus mentally and physically (the three are interrelated), beneficial effect on the subtle plane of our surroundings.

The treatment of the type of mental disease cited above falls in the realm of the esoteric and involves not only measures such as the prescription of an appropriate diet and the administration of medicines, but also practices such as the burning of incense and exorcism. In the latter, intonation of mantras in order to influence the subtle level—for example, to moderate the air humor—play a vital role.

Different volumes of different editions of the *Tanjur* contain as many as twenty-two works on medicine, and medical science was well advanced and still progressing when the early literature of Buddhism was compiled. As many as eight branches of medicine (general medicine; diseases of the eye, ear, nose and throat; surgery; pox-icology; psychiatry and emonology; pediatrics, including obstetrics and gynecology; elixirs; and aphrodisiacs) were taught in ancient times at the famed *Taxilla* University, and there is even mention of an eyeball transplant and rhinoplasty in the *Sibi-Jataka*. The *Tanjur* and *Kanjur* as repositories of medical knowledge are still to be exhaustively researched and elucidated. While scholars work on these and comparative texts of other cultures, and delve deeper into the realm of comparative medicine, there is reason to look forward to a new era in the field of medical science that would combine the best in the traditional religious and modern secular systems.

The Artistic Tradition in Bhutan

Inspired by their close-to-nature ethos and the intense, vivid colors of the high Himalayan mountains, Bhutanese craftsmen possess consummate and age-old skills in working with clay and wood, as well as bronze, iron, silver and other fine metals. Another area where the Bhutanese attained renown centuries ago was in calligraphy. Of late these arts and crafts have been undergoing a period of enthusiastic revival, and the second objective of the government's Sixth Plan lays special emphasis on the preservation and promotion of the nation's rich cultural heritage.

The development of a high order of Buddhist arts and crafts in Bhutan may be traced to the great fifteenth-century Terton Pema Lingpa, who was at one and the same time an accomplished xylographer, painter, sculptor and architect. Examples of his artistic genius are still in evidence at his seat in *Tamzhing* Monastery.

Subsequently, the country's arts and crafts received a further boost when in 1680 *Desi Tenzin Rabgye*, under instructions from *Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal*, opened the *School of Zorichusum* or thirteen types of Bhutanese arts and crafts, that included painting, sculpture, embroidery, xylography, and bronze-, silver-, and goldwork.

These traditional forms of Bhutanese artistry have been maintained not only through the zealous patronage of the royal family, nobility and clergy, but also with the active support of the common people, who have depended on the artisans for the wide variety of wooden and metal objects that are indispensable elements of the typical Bhutanese household.

Bhutanese art has two main characteristics: it is religious and anonymous. The Bhutanese consider the commissioning of paintings and statues a pious act, which gains them merit. The name of the donor is sometimes written on the work so that his pious act may be remembered. The artist is often a religious man who also gains merit from creating the work. However, the artist's name is almost never mentioned.

Since the iconographic conventions in Bhutanese art are very strict, the first responsibility of the Bhutanese artist is to observe them scrupulously. However, he can also express his own personality in minor details or scenes.

The subjects of Bhutanese art include the *Wheel*

of Life; the four Guardians; the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezi) in his multiple forms; the Sixteen Arhats (*Neten Chudrug*); the Eighty-four Mahasiddhas (*Drubthob Gyechushi*); the Thousand Buddhas; Guru Rinpoche and his Eight Manifestations; Buddha Amitayus (Tsepamey); the highest deities of Tantric Cycles like Hevagriwa (Kyedorje) and Cakrasamvara (Demchog); the protective deities such as the different forms of Mahakala (Gompo), Palden Lhamo, Gyelzo Pehar; and various diagrams (*mandalas, kyilkhor*). Some of the most beautiful and astonishing paintings are the cosmic mandalas, which show the conception of the world according to the Adhidharmakosha, an encyclopedic treaty on Buddhist cosmology and philosophy composed by an Indian scholar, Vasubandhu, in the fifth century A.D., and the Kalacakra (Wheel of Time) tantra, a text of the tenth century A.D. that presents the basic conception of cosmology and astrology of Tantric Buddhism. We find them in Paro Dzong, Punakha Dzong and Gantey Gompa. As Bhutan has been the stronghold of the Nyingmapa and Drukpa Kagyupa sects, many paintings depict the spiritual lineage of these two sects, as well as the different religious and temporal Drukpa rulers of Bhutan (Zhabdrung, Desis and Je Khenpos).

Paints are traditionally made from earth, minerals and vegetables, though in recent times chemical colors have also been in use. The material is first reduced into powder and then mixed with water, glue and chalk. The brushes are made from twigs and animal hair. The colors are applied in a particular order with symbolic meaning.

Paintings and sculptures are executed by monks or laymen who work in special workshops. The disciples of a master do all the preliminary work, while the fine work is executed by the master himself.

Paintings

Bhutanese paintings can be classified into three categories: those on statues; wall paintings; and scroll paintings called *thankas*. Clay statues are entirely painted, while bronzes are only painted on the face to emphasize the eyes and details such as a moustache.

Wall paintings are found throughout Bhutan. The technique of the fresco is unknown; rather, the surfaces of the inside walls of all the monasteries and temples are covered with a plaster of earth that is smoothed and allowed to dry before

being painted. Another technique, which may be specific to Bhutan, is widely used: a very thin piece of cloth is applied to the plaster with much care so that it is almost impossible to detect the cloth unless it peels off the wall; a special paste made of wheat flour and pepper powder is used to prevent worms from eating the cloth.

Numerous scroll paintings, or *thankas*, exist in Bhutan, but they are not placed on permanent display in the temples and monasteries. They are kept rolled in huge boxes in the storerooms of the temples and are taken out only for special religious occasions. To make the *thanka*, a damp piece of cotton is fixed to a wooden frame. A mixture of lime or chalk and gum is then rubbed on the surface of the cloth and smoothed. A grid is drawn to help the artist lay out the composition. Sometimes, he simply presses the cloth against a xylographic block on which the design is already engraved. He could also use the system of the pounce, or spray, pattern, which consists of a figure printed on paper with pricked holes through which charcoal is pressed to produce a dotted pattern. This preliminary sketch disappears when the colors are applied. While numerous colors are generally used, some *thankas* have a totally golden background on which the design is executed in fine black or red lines. Other *thankas* executed for special rituals are black with white and red designs. When the *thanka* is finished, it is surrounded with a silk and brocade border of many colors, which also have symbolic meaning, and two staves are stitched to the upper and lower borders for suspension and stretching.

Thankas are executed in embroidery and applique, as well as painting. Applique is used for the huge *thankas* that are hung on the outside walls of temples on festival days.

The style of paintings has changed greatly over the centuries, but it is very difficult to date Bhutanese paintings precisely because those on temples that are undoubtedly old have been repainted many times. In the earliest temples that have kept their original paintings, like Tamshing in Bumthang (fifteenth-century A.D.), the central figure, soberly drawn, occupies most of the painting while the edges are divided into small compartments for the minor figures. Although in the fifteenth century Chinese art had already exerted a strong influence on Tibetan paintings, it does not appear to have reached Bhutan. However, some examples of this influence may have disappeared



Buddha Maitreya (Future Buddha), ca. 19th century.
Applied thanka, 132 x 77 in.
Paro Dzong.

when many early paintings were repainted much later as a meritorious act.

Bhutanese paintings always favored, even after the fifteenth century, a central composition with adjacent figures, as in the monasteries of Taktsang (seventeenth-century), Tango (seventeenth-century) and Phajoding (eighteenth-century). Other artists used the entire space of the walls or of the cloth and produced asymmetrical compositions, in which many figures or scenes occupy the space and the interest is not focused on one main figure. Sometimes, the artist would freely illustrate scenes of a famous person's life around a central figure. An example is the illustration of Milarepa's life in Paro Dzong. Over the centuries Bhutanese style has become more and more ornate, with increasingly lavish use of gold paint and landscape elements treated after the Chinese manner. Chinese influences, mixed with earlier influences into a harmonious Bhutanese blend,

can be seen from the seventeenth century onward. Many of the paintings are inscribed with the names of the figures represented, which help to date the works.

Sculpture

As Bhutan is very rich in slate, a number of large pieces of that material are intricately engraved with deities, monks and saints of Tantric Buddhism. The most beautiful adorn the central tower of the Simtokha Dzong and, as they are all inscribed, are a treasure of Bhutanese art.

Clay images are very common and are entirely painted. Their size can vary greatly, from the very small images that are placed in the portable chapels called *tashigomangs* to the huge statues of two or three meters high, as in Kurje and Phajoding monasteries. Fine and even clay is either molded on a core of wood wrapped in cloth or molded directly without any support, with the statue remaining hollow. Some small additions may then be molded before being added to the main body. Miniature stupas made of clay and sometimes mixed with the ashes of the dead are called *tshatsha* and are very common in holy places. They are molded before being painted or whitewashed.

Metal images are called by the conventional term bronzes but are usually made from other copper alloys. Silver and gold statues, although rare, do exist. The lost-wax, or *cire perdue*, casting technique, which was introduced in Bhutan by Newari craftsmen from Nepal, is widely used for the medium-sized images. The tall images and the large commemorative stupas, however, are first hammered from sheets of various sizes and then embossed and engraved, and finally the separate parts are joined by riveting. Most of the metal images and stupas are gilded, and some are even ornamented with coral and turquoise. The statues are frequently inlaid with silver and copper, and paints are applied to the faces, to emphasize the eyes and details such as the moustache and the headdress. From the eighteenth century, altars and stupas were frequently ornamented with sheets of beautifully embossed and chiseled gilded copper, primarily in western Bhutan (in Phajoding, Gantey, and Thadra Gumpa). Some images are made of lacquered wood and have a striking expression, such as Milarepa's statue in Dumtse Lhakhang in Paro.

Religious book covers are also made of wood, and when the books are quite precious, the upper

covers are finely carved with deities and often painted or covered with sheets of embossed copper.

Other statues, which may date back to the sixteenth century, have very simple but striking features. Their bases are not carved, and no definite influence can be discerned in them. The statue of the fourth Sha-mar Chhoekyi Dragpa (1453–1524) at Thangbi Lhakhang in Bumthang is a good example. From the eighteenth century onward, statues were much more ornate, very often inlaid with semiprecious stones and having a base carved in a double row of lotus petals.

Paintings and statues are consecrated in a religious ceremony destined to give life to the painting or the statue. A holy lama may even apply his handprints at the back of the scroll, while inside the statue will be placed a piece of wood and papers inscribed with sacred formulas.

Architecture

The architectural forms in Bhutan are very diverse: *chortens* (stupas), *mani*-walls, temples, monasteries, fortresses, palaces and village houses compose a landscape that is unique to Bhutan.

Chortens are erected in memory of an eminent lama or to protect against evil spirits at dangerous places such as crossroads and passes. They are of three styles: huge stone chortens, often white-washed, like Chendebji and Chorten Kora; small stone chortens which are common throughout central and eastern Bhutan, and are often protected by a wooden superstructure; and finally, chortens whose outer structure is a square stone tower with a red stripe at the upper level and shingle roof. Sometimes a memorial chorten is erected inside. This third kind of chorten is primarily widespread in western Bhutan and may be an elaborate form derived from the chorten with wooden superstructure.

Some of the chortens are linked together by *mani*-walls. These are stone walls that support a multitude of stones carved with sacred formulas, either of the three protective Bodhisattvas—Chenrezi, Jampelyang, Chana Dorje—or simply with the Chenrezi's formula, "Om Mani Padme Hum," from which the name *mani*-wall is derived. However, *mani*-walls may also stand by themselves, without chortens.

Wood is used plentifully in Bhutanese architecture. The windows have distinctive trefoil-shaped tops and elaborate lintels, which are painted with geometrical motifs. The pitched roof, covered

with shingles weighed down with stones, is a very striking and original structure. The use of nails was unknown in olden times but has now become more common. Temples, monasteries, fortresses and houses have been, and are still, frequently destroyed by fire, but they are generally rebuilt after the same mode.

Temples (*lhakhang*) are usually simple one- or two-storied buildings with a wide red stripe at the upper level of the walls and a gilded roof ornament. They may have a small courtyard. Inside the temple the walls are covered with paintings, and the space is generally divided by pillars into an antechamber and a shrine. These buildings seem to be one of the earliest forms of religious architecture and have survived for centuries, remaining intact to this day. Notable examples are the Kichu Lhakhang in Paro and Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang, both said to have been built around the seventh century. Temples and monasteries are the property of the state or of a family. Hence, temples are kept by a caretaker who belongs to the owner's family or who is delegated by the state.

Bhutanese monasteries (*gompa*) are of two architectural types: the cluster type and the dzong type. The cluster type is probably the more ancient. It consists of a core of one or two temples, around which small houses of habitation and meditation are built for the monks. Some examples of the cluster type are Dzong-drakha in Paro valley, Phajoding and Tashigang in Thimphu valley, and Kunzangdra and Tharpaling in Bumthang valley. The dzong type is a monastery built like a fortress with a main tower housing many temples and a surrounding outer wall that serves as quarters for the monks. The most impressive examples of this architecture are Gantey Gompa near Pelcla Pass, Tango in upper Thimphu, and Talo near Punakha, all dating to the late seventeenth century. Cheri Gompa, built in 1620 by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in the upper Thimphu valley, presents the characteristics of both styles with a dzong-like main building and a cluster of small houses around it.

The castlelike dzong, or Bhutanese fortress, with its gently tapering walls, classic lines, large courtyards and beautiful galleries, dates back to the seventeenth century. Constructed so as to be self-sufficient and withstand siege, its main purpose was to hold off potential attacks by the Tibetans to the north and the British to the south. It



Dumtse Lhakhang in Paro.

can be defined as a state monastery and a district administration housed together in a fortress that is situated dramatically in a commanding position either on a hilltop or at the confluence of rivers. The solidity of the sloping white walls combines with the elegant richness of the woodwork and the aerial feature of the pitched roof to make the dzong one of the most impressive forms of architecture in Asia.

The basic pattern of a dzong is a main tower (*utse*) and a courtyard, surrounded by walls, that houses monks' quarters, kitchens and administrative offices. Gasa Dzong and Simtokha Dzong can be given as examples; however, very few dzongs strictly follow this pattern. Most have two courtyards delineated by the central tower. One courtyard delineates the monastery and one the administrative section, as in Punakha, Wangdiphodrang and Thimphu Dzongs. The courtyard and the buildings may also be located on different levels and follow the slope of the hill. Paro, Jakar and Tongsa dzongs conform to this pattern. Tongsa is the most complex dzong,

with an intricate pattern of buildings, towers and courtyards.

The building of palaces seems to have coincided with the advent of the monarchy at the beginning of the twentieth century. They are mainly found in the Bumthang-Tongsa area, and their basic pattern is very similar to that of a dzong: a main building where the masters reside is surrounded by outer walls, in which the servants' quarters are located. However, because they serve a different purpose, palaces have a much less severe architecture than the dzongs. They are profusely decorated with woodwork, and even the outer walls are pierced by numerous beautifully carved and gaily painted windows. One upper room of the main building is always devoted to religion. This room, called *choesha*, is a real temple with wall paintings, altar, statues and books for the rituals. Lame Gompa, Wangdunchhoeling and Ugyenchhoeling in Bhumthang, Kunga Rabten south of Tongsa Dzong, and Gantey Palace in Paro valley are among the major palaces of Bhutan.

Village houses are not built of the same material all over Bhutan. In western Bhutan the walls are made of packed earth, while in central and eastern Bhutan, mainly stone is used. In eastern Bhutan, bamboo mats are also used to build and to cover small houses that rest on poles. However, all over the country Bhutanese houses display distinctive features: they have a rectangular shape and are two or three stories high; the upper floors are almost totally made of a framework of wood and plastered bamboo lattices; and the windows are closed from inside by wooden shutters, though now glass is common in the bigger villages. Although in olden times the framework was rarely painted, today it is more and more often ornamented by colored motifs. The roof, as discussed above, is pitched on trusses and the open space between the flat top of the upper floor and the wooden shingles is used for stacking firewood and fodder. In the farmhouses, which were seldom whitewashed, the ground floor was traditionally reserved for the cattle. The other floors were reached by a ladder cut out from a tree trunk and the walls of these floors were almost windowless. The intermediate floor, if there was one, was used to store grains, seeds and other foodstuff. The upper floor, the living quarters, was divided into small rooms that had no definite function except the bathroom (if existing), the kitchen and the prayer room, which also served as the guestroom. The furniture was sparse: low tables, sleeping mats that were rolled in a corner during the day, shelves for the crockery, carpets, trunks for valuable possessions, an altar, and one or two looms. There was a courtyard, often covered, on one side of the house. Nowadays, this kind of farmhouse is still found throughout the country with slight regional differences. Almost all, however, are now whitewashed, and in the towns, because the house is no longer associated with a farm, windows are located at the first floor as well. The ground floor has become servants' quarters, storeroom and kitchen, and there is a tendency to build the kitchen and the bathroom in a separate little building detached from the back of the house. The ground floor can also be used for a shop.

The Agrarian Economy

Even today, practically every traditional household in Bhutan is self-sufficient in terms of land and food. Eighty percent of the people are farmers living in small villages in valleys or sloping hill-

sides overlooking terraced fields and pasturelands. Work is shared by men and women, and the latter are contributing increasingly to the family income with supplementary activities such as weaving.

In the higher altitudes, which are not conducive to agriculture, nomadic herdsmen tend cattle, mostly the sturdy and shaggy-haired yaks, whose many uses make them an integral part of their owners' lives. Not only are they the source of milk, butter, cheese and meat, but clothing is also woven from their hair and their tails fetch a good price, serving as both fans and decorations. Additionally, yak excrement is used as fuel beyond the treeline at 13,000 feet.

Dress

The official dress for men is the majestic *gho*, a long robe tied around the waist by a woolen or cotton belt known as a *kera*. A pouchlike fold in front substitutes for a pocket to hold objects and a sheathed multipurpose dagger, usually used for slicing betel nuts or chopping wood, is tucked into the belt. The newcomer who rubs shoulders with the Bhutanese may at first find this disconcerting, to say the least, but familiarity will lead him to the discovery that Bhutanese society, notwithstanding the sturdy build of the Bhutanese, is conspicuously brawl-free and crime-resistant.

Bhutanese women, who enjoy an emancipated status, wear the graceful *kira*, also a long robe, but fixed near the shoulders with a pair of silver brooches, or *komas*, and held together at the waist by a broad cloth belt called a *kera*. Over the *kira* is worn a loose-sleeved shirt, or *tyogo*. Necklaces are fashioned from coral, pearls, turquoises and the precious onyx.

Both the *gho* and the *kira* are proud symbols of the national identity of the Bhutanese. At the same time, these highly distinctive costumes never fail to attract the immediate admiration of outsiders.

Diet

The typical Bhutanese diet consists of rice, dried beef, or pork and chillies, sometimes cooked with *datshi*, soft white cheese made from cow's milk, to give a special flavor. The penchant for chillies produces a memorable sight: bright red chillies set out to dry on rooftops constitute one of the unsung charms of the Bhutanese landscape.

Tea, or *sooja*, the most popular beverage, was originally made by each household from indige-

nous leaves. However, its preparation has now evolved into a cottage industry and takes the form of tea balls known as *jhari*. The required quantity of the leaves is put in water and set to boil. Once the desired coloration is achieved, the liquid is transferred to a cylindrical bamboo or wooden vessel, fed with butter, salt and soda (occasionally milk, to give it added flavor), and churned. The tea is then poured into a kettle and is ready to be served.

The Astrological and Astronomical Perspective

Astrology plays an important part in the life of the Bhutanese, who believe that supernatural powers, both good and evil, as well as the stars and planets, exert a profound influence on human life. The Bhutanese turn to astrology not only to understand these influences, but also to ward off potentially unfavorable times and heighten the effects of favorable periods. Thus the Bhutanese will consult astrologers on the birth of a child, before setting out on a journey, on the occasion of a marriage in the family, prior to the construction of a house, to ascertain the auspicious hours for a funeral, and for numerous other purposes. Horoscopes are also cast at the beginning of each year to have a forecast of the year's illfortunes and to determine appropriate remedies.

Since astrology is closely linked to astronomy, both occupy a position of honor in traditional Bhutanese scholarship. While Bhutanese astrology is derived from the Indian system, its astronomy is of Chinese origin.

The evolution of the unique Bhutanese system known as Dandue Thunmongi Tsizhi owes itself to Kunkhen Padma Karpo, the great spiritual ancestor of the Drukpa Kargyu tradition. It was formally adopted in the seventeenth century, after Lama Lhawang Lodro, the chief tutor of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, meditatively authenticated its veracity at Chari Dorjidan, the main seat of the Drukpa Kargyu tradition in Bhutan.

The twelve- and sixty-year cycles of Jupiter are used respectively for reckoning short and long periods of time, each year of the former bearing the name of one of the twelve cyclic animals: mouse, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, serpent, horse, sheep, monkey, bird, dog, and hog.

In the sixty-year cycles, the names of years consist of a combination of one of these animals and one of the five elements of wood, fire, earth,

iron and water, which in turn is associated with a pair of animals, the first of which is male and the second female. Thus, one year may be designated an Iron-Mouse Year and another a Wood-Tiger Year.

Bhutanese astrological calculations derive to a large extent from assigning a specific meaning to each of these various elements and animals. To cite a simple example, water extinguishes fire, and therefore a man and a woman under these respective symbols would be ill-suited to each other as marriage partners.

Sports and Pastimes

The national sport of archery constitutes one of the chief amusements of the Bhutanese. The marks generally shot at during archery consist of pieces of V-shaped wood about eighteen inches in length and seventeen inches in width. These are placed in a reclining position on the ground at a distance of about 160 yards. In almost every village, there is a spot particularly set apart for this manly exercise.

The bow is held in the left hand. A quiver of arrows is slung by a belt behind the back. The arrows are drawn commodiously from it over the left shoulder. The bow is commonly six feet long, made of a special type of bamboo called *zhushing*, and when unstrung, is perfectly straight. The bow string (*zhuthag*) is a small cord of hemp of appropriate length, its tension and the consequent curvature of the bow depending on the degree of twist given to it before the bow is bent. The arrow is shot at a high degree of elevation and the rapidity of its flight is a testimony of the physical power of the Bhutanese. The arrow is generally made of a very small species of bamboo (*seim*) which is remarkable for its extreme straightness and strength. The head used on ordinary occasions is a plain-pointed iron one. In ancient times, the Bhutanese used barbed and poisoned arrows during warfare.

In national tournaments, a team comprises of thirteen members and the winning number of points is twenty-five. Matches are decided on a best-of-three-games basis. However, in village matches, there are no fixed rules regarding the number of contestants.

An interesting feature of an archery contest are the antics and exploits of the *Daphotami* and the *Batemi*. The former attempts to distract the opponent by placing himself directly in front of the

target at the moment of shooting, dexterously averting the arrow as it whizzes toward him by ducking or leaping or sidestepping, as the situation warrants. The Batemi, on the other hand, serves the very opposite function of egging a colleague on by standing near the target and, by shouts and animated gestures, directing his efforts.

An archery competition between one village and another, or one dzongkhag (district) and another, is an important event. Rites are offered to the local deities before a match, and the contest is considered as much a trial of strength between the deities as between the participants themselves. Each side engages an astrologer, who even prescribes the direction of entry onto the archery grounds. The visiting side is traditionally given the right of choosing the target it wants to aim at first and also the food it wishes to take during its stay.

A *marshang* ceremony, wherein offerings are made to the local deities, is performed at the venue and the supporters of each team, accompanied by seven, nine, or eleven women dancers, take positions along the ground. The dancers act as cheerleaders, as it were, and apart from encouraging their side, they also try to dishearten their opponents with cries and gestures. Whenever a player scores a point, his colleagues jump and shout and jubilantly leap into the air. The hero of the winning team is joyfully carried off the field in procession on the shoulders of his teammates, and drinking and festivities follow. The losers offer prayers so as to avenge the defeat in the next encounter.

Other traditional sports include *soksom*, *khuru*, *dego*, *key-shey*, *pungdo*, and *sheray-parey*.

Soksom is a spear that, from time immemorial, has been used by young Bhutanese lads in villages to indulge in sport while their cattle grazed. Two small wooden targets are placed apart at a distance of twenty to twenty-five yards and the *soksom* is thrown from either end toward the target. The procedure for getting points is: a hit on the target fetches two points, and if the spear falls within a distance of one hand span of the player from the target, one point accrues. In competitions, two teams take part and any team winning two games out of three is declared the winning team.

Khuru, a very popular sport in rural Bhutan, is played with a miniature pointed missile, very akin to a dart, with a sharp nail at one end and a

number of feathers on the other. It is flung through the air toward a small wooden target placed at a distance of twenty to thirty yards. The procedure for getting points is: a hit on the target fetches two points, and if the *khuru* falls within the length of a *khuru* from the target, one point accrues. Two teams take part in the competition, and any team winning two games out of three is declared the winner.

Dego, a compromise between grenade throwing and shot put, requires participants to hurl a round piece of stone weighing about one kilogram from one end toward a peg placed at a distance of twenty to twenty-five yards. The stone is thrown underhand and the competitors try to hurl it as close to the peg as possible. They can also aim at dislodging a rival's stone from near the peg. *Dego*, as a sport, originated among the monks, who pursued it as their favorite recreation. The procedure for counting the points is: if the stone falls on the peg or is within a distance of one hand span from the peg, the thrower earns one point. In competitions, two teams take part and the team that wins two games out of three is declared the winner.

Keyshey is a sport where men match their physical prowess and challenge one another to wrestling bouts. With rippling muscles and iron nerves, these giants among men fight fiercely and stake their honor and pride to emerge as winners by pinning their opponents to the ground.

Pungdo is a modification of the normal shot put event and brings out the power of muscles. A participant is required to lift a heavy stone above his head and throw it forward. The farther he throws, the greater the laurels the competitor wins.

In *sheray-parey*, two men match their physical strength. One man holds the wrist of the other with both hands. If the man with his wrist held manages to free himself, he is the winner. If not, the laurels go to the other man.

Modern sports like football, tennis, table tennis, badminton, basketball, volleyball, golf and the martial arts have gained great popularity, and of late Bhutan has increasingly been participating in regional and international meets, including Olympic Games.

Festivals

The Bhutanese are carefree and individualistic by nature, and take great pleasure in the annual fes-

tivals of Tshechu and Dromchen. Just as the life of the Buddha is depicted through twelve deeds such as his birth, enlightenment and Nirvana, the life of Guru Rinpoche is highlighted through twelve episodes, all of which occurred on the tenth day of different months at different periods of his life. Tsechu, in fact, means the tenth day (of the month), and though the time and duration of the festival varies from region to region and monastery to monastery, it always takes place on or around the tenth day of the month in the Bhutanese lunar calendar. The venue—either the dzong or the monastery—comes alive with people decked out in their smartest clothes, for whom the occasion serves both as a picnic and an opportunity for acquiring merit, for the Bhutanese believe that by participating in or witnessing these dances they receive heavenly blessing.

The symbolic dances themselves are mostly religious in nature and have a common theme: to destroy and trample the evil spirits. Special costumes, music and the thunderous steps of the dancers lend drama and color to the performances. Jesters, wearing burlesque masks, provide comic relief and raise howls of laughter.

Large-scale festivities also mark occasions such as the National Day on December 17, which commemorates the establishment of hereditary monarchy in the kingdom. A unique feature of this celebration is that the king himself, following a royal tradition, serves his subjects food and joins them in the games and dances.

Ceremonials and Customs

Kamne, or colored scarves, are awarded to meritorious officials who have made significant contributions to their country in one capacity or another. The convention is somewhat similar to the conferment of knighthood in the United Kingdom. The list below shows the different colors of scarves prevalent, along with the ranks of the persons entitled to wear them:

Yellow	The King and the Je Khenpo
Orange	Ministers and Deputy Ministers
Red	Senior officials
Red with white stripes in the middle	Deputy Administrators in the districts
White with red stripes	Assistant Administrator
White	General public

Orange and red scarves are presented personally by the king. The recipient of the honor is carried home in procession by friends, admirers, and well-wishers. Once home, he sits cross-legged on an elevated seat in traditional Bhutanese style, with Bhutanese tea and a variety of fruits and sweets set before him in silver bowls and containers that rest on an intricately patterned table. Thankas hang behind and around him on the walls, while groups of lamas and associates place themselves on the floor facing him. A religious ceremony called *zhugdrel*, which is performed on all auspicious occasions, is then carried out, solemnizing the promotion.

Later, at a convenient opportunity, he throws a party for relatives, well-wishers, and friends.

While it is not possible, within the brief confines of this essay, to touch upon each and every aspect of the Bhutanese lifestyle, passing mention may be made of some interesting and ancient customs that have been suitably modified with the changing times.

In the olden days a person approaching a dzong had to dismount from his horse at the *satsham* chorten, or chorten in the neighborhood of the dzong; take off his hat if he wore one, put on his kamne, or scarf; and proceed on foot the rest of the way. If he donned a sword, he would have to keep it hanging by his side, while entering or passing the premises of the dzong rather than have it hang behind him for easier walking. Even today, it is obligatory for all Bhutanese to wear a scarf while entering a dzong, and senior officials must also carry a sword in the prescribed fashion. Neither officials nor visitors may cover their heads in the immediate vicinity of a dzong, and even open umbrellas, which are a symbol of royal and religious authority, are strictly forbidden.

In conclusion, it may be said that Bhutanese society is organized in an intricate hierarchy and bound by a rigorous code of customs and etiquette. Tolerant and fun-loving; it is above all deeply religious, with temples, monasteries, chortens and prayer flags gracing the landscape and every traditional household boasting at least an altar bedecked with statues or images of sacred personages and other religious objects.

The Flag and Official Seal of Bhutan

The upper yellow half of the flag signifies the secular authority of the king. It is the color of fruitful action in the affairs of both religion and state. The orange half personifies religious prac-

tice and the spiritual power of the Buddhist doctrines manifest in the Kargyupa and Nyingmapa traditions. The dragon symbolizes the name of the kingdom (*Druk*), and its color, the white of purity, is indicative of the loyalty of the country's many racial and linguistic groups. The snarling mouth expresses the stern strength of the male and female deities protecting Bhutan, while the jewels clasped in its claws symbolize the wealth and perfection of the country.

The sacred jewel symbol at the top of the royal crest signifies the Precious Sovereign raised supreme above all heads, in the compassionate form of the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The crossed *vajras* in the center represent the harmony between the ancient customs of secular and spiritual law, and modern power and authority. The male and female turquoise thunder dragons embraced in unity symbolize the name of the kingdom: *Druk* means "Thunder Dragon."