



Title	Culture and Modernisation : From the Perspectives of Young People in Bhutan
Author(s)	Ueda, Akiko
Citation	
Version Type	VoR
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The Centre for Bhutan Studies



# Culture and Modernisation

From the Perspectives of Young People in Bhutan

Akiko Ueda

*Culture and Modernisation : From the Perspectives of Young People in Bhutan* is a path-breaking book that explores modernisation and development in Bhutan particularly the development policy based on the idea of maximisation of Gross National Happiness (GNH), which provides a new perspective to development thinking. It examines in great depth the concepts of “modernisation” and “culture and tradition” in contemporary Bhutan. The book is based on an extensive and rich body of fieldwork data related to young people in the country.

This lively and engaging book will be of interest not only to the scholars who are interested in development discourse, but also to development policy makers and practitioners in the field of human resource development.

**Culture and Modernisation: From the Perspectives  
of Young People in Bhutan**

**Akiko Ueda**



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By Akiko Ueda

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First Published: 2003

Published by

The Centre for Bhutan Studies  
Post Box No. 1111  
Thimphu, Bhutan

Tel: 975-02-321005, 321111  
Facimile: 975-02-321001  
Email: [cbs@druknet.bt](mailto:cbs@druknet.bt)

<http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt>

**ISBN 99936-14-12-2**

## **Abstract**

This book is an investigation of discourses of modernisation, culture and tradition and how these interact with and shape the state development policies of Bhutan and the attitudes of young Bhutanese people. A fundamental aim of Bhutanese development policy is to maintain a balance between modernisation on one side and culture and tradition on the other. Young people in society are generally accused of being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition and of being influenced by Western media and culture. This book examines the dynamic interactions between state policy and local discourses among young people.

The book argues, firstly, that the Bhutanese development policy of preservation of culture and tradition and the prevalent social norm that one must be culturally aware is derived from Bhutan's position as a small country sandwiched between two giants, China and India. The state defines Bhutanese culture and tradition as guardians of the nation's independence. Secondly, and following the same logic, the Bhutanese government constantly presents its development policy as being original and unique, and insists on its distinctiveness from Western development discourse. Thirdly, the book finds that the state's development discourse influences but is by no means hegemonic among young people.

Using educational differences as a way of investigating competing discourses among young people, the book establishes the existence of important differences pertaining to discourses of modernisation, culture and tradition between three groups of young people; those in English medium education, Dzongkha (the national language) medium education and monastic education. Furthermore, it examines the social background of these differences applying Pierre Bourdieu's framework. The book argues that young people's identification of their position is not only in terms of their career (economic capital) but also in terms of how they

present themselves as being culturally aware (cultural capital). This is clearly limited by state discourses but does not represent a single imposition of a hegemonic discourse.

Finally the book contextualises development discourses within theories of globalisation and discourse analyses of development. It criticises globalisation theories for concealing the existence of power imbalances between the West and the non-West. However, it is also argued that the capacity of the Bhutanese government and of Bhutanese youth to indigenise Western development discourse shows that Western development discourse is not as powerful as posited by mainstream discursive analyses of development.

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## **Acknowledgements**

This book is based upon my Ph.D. thesis titled Multiple Discourses on Modernisation Culture and Tradition in Bhutan: State Development Policies and Development Discourses among Young People in Education, which was submitted to the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, in 2001. Although I have made some minor modifications, the material presented in this book is largely as it appears in the Ph.D. thesis. The data and information contained in this book mostly dates from the time of my fieldwork in Bhutan which took place from April 1997 to April 1998.

In the process of the research for the thesis a number of people supported me, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to them by recording their names in this book as well. I only regret that I cannot record the names of all the people who deserve my appreciation.

Firstly, I am enormously indebted to Dr. Jens Lerche for his encouragement, understanding, patience and generosity, as well as his valuable and thoughtful advice. I could not have wished for a better supervisor.

The fieldwork in Bhutan was realised through the support of many people in Bhutan. Without them the book could not have existed in its present form. They also showed their warm hospitality and kindness during my stay in Bhutan. I would like to express my humble appreciation especially to: Dasho Tshewang Rixin, the then Deputy Minister of Health and Education, for his support and understanding; Lyonpo C. Dorji, the then Planning Minister, for his warm encouragement; Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, the Minister of Health and Education, for his support and valuable advice; Mr. Nima Wangdi, the then Director of Education, for his support; Mr. Kinley Dorji, the Head of the Youth Guidance and Counselling Section, for his understanding. I also would like to thank Dasho Karma Gayleg, a former Royal Advisory

Councillor, Dasho Sangay Dorji, the Secretary of Dzongkha Development Commission, and Ms. Neten Zangmo, the then Director of the Ministry of Planning, for their generosity in sharing their knowledge.

My special thanks are due to Mr. Karma Ura, Head of the Centre for Bhutan Studies, and Lupon Kunzang Dorji, Deputy Director of the National Environment Commission Secretariat, for their friendship, warm encouragement, considerate support and countless pieces of practical advice and assistance which made my fieldwork fruitful and enjoyable. In particular, I would like to thank Mr. Karma Ura, without whose help my fieldwork in Bhutan would not have taken place. He was also instrumental in publishing the thesis as a book. My sincere appreciation goes to Lupon Kunzang Dorji for designing the cover of this book.

I am very much thankful for each young person who shared time with me and cooperated with my research by engaging with me in conversation. Meeting with young people was always full of excitement and a source of inspiration, and I cannot help wishing each one of them a bright and happy future. I cannot name everyone here, but, instead, I would like to express my appreciation towards the principals and staff of some of the schools and institutes where I was privileged to receive kind cooperation when I was conducting my interviews. At the Institute for Language and Cultural Studies, Simtokha, Mr. Singye Namgyel, the then Principal, encouraged me and facilitated my research. At Drukgyel High School, Paro, Ms. Namgay Om, the then Principal, kindly allowed me to conduct interviews with students. Ms. Tshering Dolkar and Ms. Tshering Yangzom, then in Drukgyel High School, introduced me to the Principal, and provided me with accommodation, warm hospitality and friendship. At the Sherubtse College, Kanglung, Mr. Pema Thinley, the then Principal, and Mr. Thakur Singh Powdyal, the then Vice Principal, kindly extended their helping hands toward me.

I am also thankful to Ms. Tashi Yangzom for acting as an interpreter during some interviews. For technical support with "page-making", I am grateful to Mr. Kesang Tshering.

In England, I am indebted to Mr. Michael Rutland, Vice-Chairman of the Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom, for his encouragement. My warm thanks are also due to Mr. Michael Rowson for bravely taking up the enormous work of shaping my English throughout the book. In addition I would like to acknowledge a grant for fieldwork from the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Lastly, but not least, I thank my parents for their strong support, encouragement and understanding.

It must be noted that any individuals and organisations are, by their association with the book, not responsible for any opinions and errors in it: for these I accept full responsibility.

**Akiko Ueda**

## Glossary

<b>Ashi</b>	Honorific title used of women of the royal family and of the nobility.
<b>Ama</b>	Polite form of address for an adult woman.
<b>Apa</b>	Polite form of address for a man.
<b>Ara</b>	Home made whisky, usually distilled from barley, wheat or rice.
<b>Bukhari</b>	Wood-burning stove.
<b>Chang</b>	Mild alcoholic beverage made of cereals.
<b>Chimi</b>	Elected member of the National Assembly.
<b>Chodom</b>	Low table.
<b>Choekey</b>	The religious language; classical Tibetan.
<b>Choku</b>	Ritual, religious ceremony.
<b>Chorten</b>	A Buddhist monument, which represent Buddha's Mind. It is erected in memory of an eminent lama or to ward off evil spirits from places normally considered dangerous, such as crossroads, bridges and mountain passes.
<b>Dasho</b>	A non-transferable title given by the king to certain officials in recognition of service.
<b>Desi</b>	Temporal ruler of Bhutan before the monarchy.
<b>Driglam Namzha</b>	Code of disciplined behaviour.
<b>Drukpa</b>	School of Buddhism, offshoot of the Kagyu tradition.
<b>Dungtsho</b>	Doctor of Bhutanese indigenous medicine.
<b>Dzong</b>	Fortress-monastery, in which civil and religious authorities have been housed jointly since the seventeenth century.
<b>Dzongda</b>	District governor.
<b>Dzongkha</b>	"Language of the <i>dzong</i> "; national language of Bhutan.



<b>Dzongkhag</b>	District; Bhutan has twenty districts.
<b>Dzongkhag Yargye</b>	
<b>Tshogchung</b>	District Development Committee.
<b>Dzongpon</b>	The old term for <i>dzongda</i> , now no longer in use.
<b>Gelong</b>	A fully ordained monk.
<b>Gewog</b>	Block; administrative division of several villages within a district.
<b>Gewog Yargye</b>	
<b>Tshogchung</b>	Block Development Committee.
<b>Gho</b>	Men's dress.
<b>Gomchen</b>	A lay priest, sometimes married.
<b>Gung</b>	Household.
<b>Gup</b>	Headman of a block ( <i>gewog</i> ).
<b>Guru Rimpoche</b>	The Tantric saint who converted Bhutan to Buddhism in the eighth century.
<b>Hemchu</b>	Pouch created by blousing a <i>gho</i> generously at the waist.
<b>Je Khenpo</b>	Chief Abbot of Bhutan.
<b>Kabne</b>	A man's ceremonial shoulder cloth.
<b>Kasho</b>	Royal Decree.
<b>Kharang</b>	Semi-ground maize food.
<b>Kira</b>	Women's dress.
<b>Lama</b>	Buddhist monk of a senior rank.
<b>Lhakhang</b>	Buddhist temple.
<b>Lhotshampa</b>	"People of the southern border"; generally people of Nepalese descent settled in southern Bhutan.
<b>Lopon</b>	"Master"; term of address for educated persons and monks.
<b>Loser</b>	Bhutanese New Year.
<b>Lo-zey</b>	Ballad.
<b>Lyonpo</b>	Minister.
<b>Mang-ap</b>	"Community father"; assistant to the <i>gup</i> .
<b>Mathra</b>	A twill woollen plaid fabric, predominantly maroon or red; that is closely associated with central Bhutan.

<b>Minap</b>	"A black man"; a villager or a farmer.
<b>Ngultrum</b>	Bhutanese currency.
<b>Nyingmapa</b>	Important religious school in central and eastern Bhutan; founded by Guru Rimpoche in the eighth century.
<b>Onju</b>	A woman's blouse.
<b>Pchillip</b>	Outsiders, especially people from the West.
<b>Penlop</b>	Historical title of regional governors of Paro, Trongsa and Daga.
<b>Phop</b>	A wooden cup.
<b>Puja</b>	Ritual, religious ceremony.
<b>Rachu</b>	A woman's ceremonial shoulder cloth.
<b>Ngawang Namgyal</b>	Shabdrung He unified Bhutan under the Drukpa Kagyupa authority and established an administrative and judicial system. "Shabdrung" is the title of Ngawang Namgyal and his reincarnations, and means "at whose feet one prostrates".
<b>Shar chopikha</b>	"Language of the east (Bhutan's eastern region)". It is also known as Tshangla.
<b>Shaydra</b>	Monastic school.
<b>Toego</b>	A woman's jacket.
<b>Tshechu</b>	Religious festival honouring Guru Rimpoche which normally begins on the 10th day of the Bhutanese month.
<b>Wang</b>	Religious blessing.
<b>Zangdopelri</b>	"The heaven of Guru Rimpoche"; a temple which represents Guru Rimpoche's paradise.
<b>Zao</b>	Toasted rice.

## **Acronyms**

BBE	Bhutan Board of Examination
BBS	Bhutan Broadcasting Service
BDFC	Bhutan Development Finance Corporation
BHU	Basic Health Unit
CAPSS	Curriculum and Professional Support Section
DYT	Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogchung
EVS	Food Corporation of Bhutan
FYP	Five Year Plan
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GYT	Gewog Yargye Tshogchung
ICSE	Indian Certificate for School Examination
ISC	Indian School Certificate
NIE	National Institute of Education
NRTI	Natural Resource Training Institute
RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission
RGOB	Royal Government of Bhutan
RIM	Royal Institute of Management
YGCS	Youth Guidance and Counselling Section

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This is a study of what a people and a government in a so-called developing country think about modernisation and culture and tradition. It is an attempt to understand "development" from the perspectives of people and government in a developing country, the place where, after all, development activities are actually taking place. The location of the study is Bhutan and the focus is on the young generation in that society.

The reasons behind me taking up this topic and writing a book on it are twofold. The first hails from my encounter with a small Himalayan country, Bhutan, and especially its development policy. Bhutan first came to my attention when I saw a small article in a Japanese newspaper, dated September 1993. The article was about Bhutan's "unique" development path, which was trying to balance modernisation on the one hand, and the conservation of the natural environment and the traditional Bhutanese way of life on the other. To a student of international relations with a strong interest in development in the Third World, it seemed an intriguing case; however, a lack of literature on Bhutan and the routine of course work did not provide me with an opportunity to explore Bhutan's development further. The desire to know more about this small Himalayan country had to be set aside for a while.

Secondly my interest in these issues also started from a simple question which arose for me whilst reading development studies in a master's course in 1994/95; Do people in the so-called Third World really want development? The developed countries have long been involved in, and often taken the lead in, development activities in the Third World all the while presuming that people in developing countries want development. But has anyone ever actually asked them? Shrestha writes:



We still insist that the poor need the kind of development we have practised since the early 1950s. Although the poor were never asked if they wanted to be helped or preferred Westernised development at all. (1995: p. 276)

I strongly felt that "development" must be a culturally bounded concept, which should incorporate people's perceptions of "a good life" or "a better life". I thought that unless we understand how people see development, modernisation, and their own culture and tradition, development activities become an imposition of Western values onto the non-West. Unless theories and practices of development incorporate the perception of people in the Third World, development cannot escape the accusation of hypocrisy. Towards the end of the master's course however I was disappointed to find that not much of the literature I had read examined these cultural aspects of development seriously enough to satisfy my intellectual curiosity. Modernisation theories and development theories in the Marxist tradition seemed to overemphasise economic aspects of development, and their unilinear idea of development as a transformation of society from the traditional to the modern appeared to be too rigid to accommodate the diversity of the real world.

At the same time I came to know from the limited amount of material available on Bhutan, about the concept of Gross National Happiness, which is the ultimate aim of development for the Bhutanese government. Happiness? Some people might tilt their heads. Some might smile at the concept, but wonder about its practical implications. The concept might sound utopian, or even Epicurean. Some people may claim that happiness is too personal to be a development policy. But here is a government which in reality appears to strive for the maximisation of Gross National Happiness; which states the importance of striking a balance between modernisation and tradition; and which places emphasis on non-material aspects of human life. There were many questions I wanted to explore. I wondered what Bhutanese development policies have been

like both historically as well as in terms of sectoral details. I wondered what ordinary people in the country think about modernisation and their own culture and tradition. Thus the book is about the meaning of "culture" and "tradition" and how they are used by the state and local people. It is also about "modernisation" and "development", since talking about culture in the context of development is at the same time to talk about modernity. The book examines these issues using discourse analysis in its broadest sense. It deals with the background and motivations which lie behind the usages and meanings of words such as "modernisation" and "culture". It also investigates the interactions between two levels of development discourses - namely the state and the grassroots. The book presents different views on modernisation, culture and tradition in order to avoid an essentialised representation of the society, and the "motivations" for each of these views are investigated. Motivation in this context means the reason behind a particular view and how social structuring leads to the formation of certain views in people. At the same time it will also contextualise all the development discourses in Bhutan within the even wider context of globalisation.

Representation was always an issue for me, as I believe that development must be defined by the people who are supposed to be benefiting from it. It initially seemed to me that the representation of other societies would inevitably entail a mixture of hope, imagination, expectation and prejudice on the part of the one that undertakes the representation. I thought the representation of a society by people who belong to it is more "accurate" and "authentic" than the analysis of outsiders. During the fieldwork and during the course of writing this book representation has continued to be an issue for me. It has however become an issue in a different sense from before. Questions have now arisen about how best to narrate an intricate reality in a linear fashion, how to connect complexity of day to day life with theories which generalise and trim reality, and how to "translate" from one culture into another. As I put myself into a position whereby I began to represent "others", the issue seemed to become a more practical matter. The issue of representation matters not so

much because of problems with authenticity or accuracy: the fieldwork experience taught me that people speak about "others" in a stereotyped way even within a society. Furthermore, my personal experience tells me that after living abroad for several years, my representation of my home country, Japan, is becoming different from that of my friends who have lived there throughout their lives. In the end, there are as many representations as the number of people who can talk, and I think each representation is more or less "accurate" within its own limitations. An important point instead would be to clearly define the limits of how the process of representation is undertaken.<sup>1</sup> This subject will be covered in detail in Chapter 3.

Bhutan started planned development activities in 1961. As modernisation has progressed, the preservation of Bhutanese culture and tradition has become an intense concern for both the Bhutanese people and the government alike. The government is making a strong attempt to preserve Bhutanese culture and tradition in the face of modernisation. Also as a small country surrounded by two giant nations, China and India, a sense of insecurity is constantly in the Bhutanese mind. The government therefore promotes the country's unique culture as a weapon which can be used to preserve national sovereignty. The Eighth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) states that for a small country a distinct cultural identity is an important means by which national security may be safeguarded and strengthened (Ministry of Planning, 1996: pp. 25-26). In this context, culture and tradition in Bhutan is not linked with backwardness but instead highlighted to become a focal point of issues surrounding development, modernisation, westernisation, national identity, and the nation's independence. It is on this point that the

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<sup>1</sup> It cannot be stated too strongly that I have spent *only* fourteen months in Bhutan so far, of which twelve months were for proper fieldwork for this thesis. My understanding of Bhutan comes primarily from this very limited period. I cannot forget a question from a graduate which I received during my visit to Bhutan from December 1999 to January 2000: "You came to our college. You stayed with us, participated in our life and interviewed us. And you now write about us. Do you think it is fair?"

case of Bhutan holds special interest when considering modernisation, culture and tradition.

The book uses data collected during one year's fieldwork in Bhutan between 1997 and 1998. In the course of the fieldwork, many young people and government officials agreed to be interviewed. The focus on young people is largely because of the fieldwork circumstances, details of which will be found in Chapter 3: as such it arises from practical rather than theoretical concerns. It however happened to be a relevant focus in terms of the theoretical concerns of the research. In Bhutan young people are the focal point for the production of discourses on culture, tradition and modernisation in the society as a whole, because they are the group who are perceived, by society at large, to be most exposed to the outside world through modern education and the media. The social situation and the kind of education which they have grown up with is said to be very different from the one which the older generation experienced. The generation gap is perceived to be widening in the society. The older generation deplore young people for being fascinated by English films rather than old stories of Bhutan's past. The book will examine how this older generation's view of young people is seen, by young people, how young people see themselves, and how these competing views between the generations play themselves out in society. It also investigates the existence of competing identities *among* young people.

In order to analyse the various discourses, I utilise Bourdieu's framework. This is used as a tool for analysis, and the book does not aim to examine the framework itself.

The structure of the book is as follows. Chapter 2 aims to establish the point of departure for the discussion both in terms of theory and the situation in Bhutan. It consists of three parts. It will firstly undertake a review of the theories with which this book is concerned. Works which discuss "development alternatives" as well as works which examine development employing the method of discursive analysis will



be investigated in detail. Issues of representation and Orientalism will be explored, and this will lead to a discussion of Occidentalism, the mirror image of Orientalism, and multiple discourse. Attention will be also given to theories of globalisation, within which Bhutanese discourses of modernisation, culture and tradition will be contextualised in a later chapter of the book. The second part of the chapter will present Bourdieu's framework and the third part will briefly introduce Bhutan, its education system and the regional environment.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the book. The context of the fieldwork will be presented in detail. Sampling methods and other sources of data will also be discussed.

Chapter 4 and 5 are devoted to exploring development discourses in Bhutan. Chapter 4 examines the official development discourse, while Chapter 5 is concerned with discourses among young people in Bhutan. The first half of Chapter 4 will investigate the meaning of development in the five-year development plans and other official documents, and also focus on the position of culture and tradition in development policies. The concept of Gross National Happiness will be given special attention. The second half will concentrate on education policy as a juncture between general development policy and young people, and also as an expression of official views about young people. The concluding part of the chapter will examine the extent to which the hegemony of Western development discourse has influenced Bhutanese development thinking.

Chapter 5 aims to understand the different views on modernisation, culture and tradition which exist amongst young people. It will investigate the discourses in relation to the country's three different education sectors, namely English medium education, Dzongkha<sup>2</sup> medium education

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<sup>2</sup> Dzongkha, pronounced with a silent "d", is the national language of Bhutan. Renderings of Bhutanese names and words in this book largely follow what is found in *Kuensel*, the national newspaper, and government documents,

and monastic education. Firstly, the different career paths for young people will be described in order to show the different contexts and positions of young people in society, and to help contextualise the analysis which follows. It will illustrate the way in which different modes of education, and the degree of success within these different modes, lead to varying career paths. Secondly, the key terms of discourses (such as modernisation, westernisation, exposure, and culture and tradition) will be deconstructed. In Bhutan, development provides an arena where different views on modernisation, culture and tradition contest. Both positive and negative meanings are attributed to the competing views. The book will explore the relation between these different views and the different kinds of education, in terms of both the curriculum and the medium of education. Students in each education sector are exposed to different kinds of knowledge and language. In this context, it is to be expected that differences in the medium of education and the curriculum will contribute to the production of different views about the outside world, and especially about the West. The book will investigate how differences in language and curriculum have affected young people's exposure to the outside world, and how they have impacted on the formulation of images of the West, Bhutanese Occidentalism, and created views about modernisation, culture and tradition. Thirdly the chapter will identify what Bourdieu calls "doxa", the universe of the undiscussed. These are the shared understandings which are taken for granted by all agents in the society, and are therefore left unquestioned. The universe of the undiscussed will be identified through observing the way in which young people defend their views against the elder generation and young people in other sectors of education.

Chapter 6 offers a concluding discussion. It tries to put Bhutanese development discourses in the context of the recent literature on globalisation and discuss them with reference to the discourse analysis of development.

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although spellings are not always consistent even within a document. For instance, a place name, Lhuntse, sometimes appears as Lhuentse.

The book attempts to understand a dimension of Bhutanese state and society on which not much research has so far been undertaken. By examining Bhutanese perceptions of development, it at the same time tries to make a contribution to understanding the idea of “development”.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the theoretical point of departure and to give an overview of Bhutan. It starts firstly by examining a range of theories with which the book is concerned. Particular attention will be paid to discourse analyses of development and theories about development alternatives. Works which investigate Occidentalism as a counter discourse and which explore the production of multiple discourses will be reviewed, as will ideas about the homogenising and heterogenising effects of globalisation. Bourdieu's framework will also be introduced. In addition, the chapter will provide basic information about Bhutan, its development activities, its education system and its regional geo-political circumstances, and discuss the relevance of these various theoretical approaches to Bhutan's situation.

### **2.1 Theoretical points of departure**

The present study concerns the perception of modernisation, culture and tradition amongst young people in Bhutan. The first part of this section reviews development theories in terms of their stance towards local culture and tradition.

Local culture and tradition did not draw much attention as a focal point of analysis in the study of development until the mid-1980s. Economic development was overemphasised, and economic indicators were supposedly powerful enough to classify and accurately describe all countries from the least developed to the developed, despite inherent shortcomings of these indicators.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the prime indicator of development, but its definition is the total monetary value of all goods and services produced within the geographic boundaries of the nation during a given year, and it is calculated by valuing the output of all final goods and services at the actual prices at which they are bought and sold (Todaro, 1992: p. 16). GDP therefore can only count goods and services which are actually bought and sold, and effectively excludes goods and services produced for the producer's own consumption or barter. Thus a significant amount of goods are not counted for this reason. A practice which tries to classify all countries in the world according to GDP simply reveals an

Unilinear thinking about development as a progression from the pre-modern to the modern appears to have preoccupied the study, as well as practice, of development. In modernisation theories, for instance, local culture was seen as simply backward and Western society as the model which non-Western society should attempt to realise. Harrison (1988: pp. 35-36) writes that in Talcott Parsons' theory society evolves from the primitive stage to modernity, which is seen as primarily the result of new, more efficient social arrangements, with bureaucracy and the money market pre-eminent. Harrison continues:

Parsons goes further, when he states that it was English Common Law and its application to the English-speaking world that is 'the most important single hallmark of modern society'. (Harrison, 1988: p. 36)

Local culture in developing countries is seen as an obstacle to development or projected as something which is destined to become extinct. For modernisation theorists' the West is universal and mobile; as a result their theories cannot accommodate the diversity of the world. Their narrow perspective has infused many development activities, which accordingly embody the ignorance, arrogance and rigidity of Western attitudes towards different cultures.

Since the mid-1980s two new approaches have increasingly gained recognition and popularity in studies of development. One of these approaches has largely been pioneered by the work of Robert Chambers, and its methodology is widely known as PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal).<sup>2</sup> Chambers' approach tries to put the poor first, rather than development

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ignorant assumption that economic activity all over the world is more or less the same as what is observed in the West, namely that the market is central to economic life.

<sup>2</sup>There are several approaches similar to PRA. Chambers points out the following as sources and cousins of PRA: action-reflection research, agro-ecosystem analysis, applied anthropology, field research on farming systems and rapid rural appraisal (RRA) (Chambers, 1997: p. 106).

professionals from North or South. The PRA and its family embody "changes and reversals - of role, behaviour, relationship and learning" (Chambers, 1997: p. 102). Outsiders - development professionals from outside the "community" - have to facilitate, sit down, listen and learn from local people rather than lecturing and transferring knowledge. In this approach, outsiders are not supposed to impose their views, but to encourage and enable local people to express their own reality (Chambers, 1997: pp. 102-103). He insists that rural people are themselves knowledgeable on many subjects which touch their lives. What became known as indigenous technical knowledge, he continues, has been increasingly seen to have richness and value for practical purposes (Chambers, 1997: p. 111). In this approach, local people are consulted primarily because of the technical and utilitarian value of their knowledge. Quoting Hatch, Chambers says that the small farmer's expertise represents the single largest knowledge resource not yet mobilised in the development enterprise (Chambers, 1983: p. 92). When arguing for the strength of the PRA approach, he appears to claim that local people's knowledge is "correct" more often than that of development professionals (Chambers, 1997: pp. 15-32). What he means by encouraging and enabling local people to express their own reality seems to be largely concerned with the means to achieve development rather than considering the meaning of development itself. He does not doubt the necessity of development - his focus is more on its methodology. In this sense PRA is understood as "a development alternative" since it offers a different way of doing things from conventional development, but nevertheless shares many of the same values of the development paradigm.

Another new set of approaches which emerged in the mid-1980s can be understood as "alternatives to development" as they represent a rejection of the whole concept of development. This body of work is largely inspired by Foucault's discourse analysis. Foucault investigates the specific ways in which the deployment of power has taken place and focuses upon the discursive practices whereby power and knowledge are joined together. He argues that in every society the production of

discourse is controlled, organised and redistributed in a specific manner. In the face of this critique, Western ideas and knowledge can no longer be taken as universally applicable, and local culture is seen more positively. Esteva (1987) and Parajuli (1991) radically reject the conventional Western model of development and emphasise the indigenous way of development. Esteva argues:

It is now becoming more easy to arrive at a consensus on the evaluation of the damages wrought by development. ... the experiment is over, ... development is dead (Esteva, 1987: pp. 136-137)

Parajuli's work on new social movements in India gives the impression that all people in the Third World are victims of development and that they resist it. Furthermore he argues (p. 183) that knowledge of indigenous people, women and other marginalised groups has been subjugated in the process of development activities, and that through new social movements these groups reassert their own knowledge which reflects their autonomy and identity.

His work however, can be seen to bolster a Western paternalistic attitude, namely that "we" have to help "those victims". Also the picture we get from the work focusing on the new social movements is fairly monocolour, and there is no diversity in the views and opinions of the people he is describing. Both Esteva (1987) and Parajuli (1991), I would argue, romanticise people living in non-Western societies in the sense that their arguments tend to praise the "purity" of local culture. They can be criticised for providing a mirror image of conventional development thinking, since calling for purely indigenous ways of living is also a projection of a Western idea of what non-Western society should be.

The works of Escobar (1984, 1995a), Ferguson (1990), Crush (ed. 1995) and Du Bois (1991) focus more on analysing development as a regime of representation by the West, and as a system of power relations between the West and the non-West. They maintain that the West has obtained hegemony

over non-Western societies through the power of discourse, and that conventional development thinking on the lines of both modernisation and Marxist theories is the force behind the power relation. Development is a discourse created in order to claim Western superiority and to justify Western intervention in the non-Western world. As Western experts and politicians started to see certain conditions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as a problem, Escobar argues (1995a: p. 6), a new domain of thought and experience, namely development, came into being, resulting in a new strategy for dealing with the alleged problems, such as poverty, hunger and sustainability. Using Said's work on Orientalism, development is analysed as a Western style of dominating and restructuring Asia, Africa and Latin America after World War II (Escobar, 1992). In this anti-development thesis, development is portrayed as a battlefield in which the hegemonic West controls non-Western societies successfully. The nature of the analysis has thus turned towards cultural analysis, and the present book also shares the same sort of concern.

Discursive analysis, however, contains some weaknesses also. In a similar way to Said's *Orientalism*, which investigates Western representations of the Orient using Foucault's discourse analysis, discursive analysis is largely concerned with what is articulated in the West. The scholars in this tradition analyse how the West has represented the non-West; in other words they articulate a Western perspective. They leave out of the picture the perspective of people in non-Western societies, let alone the *diverse* views which exist within a non-Western society. Certainly Escobar (1992, 1995a, 1995b) realises this point, and he suggests (but does not engage himself in) a new direction of research, the new social movements, which he feels will reflect different voices coming from the so-called Third World.

Modernisation and Marxist theories of development as well as the "development alternatives" approach insist on the necessity of development in the Third World, while discursive



analysis is rather more critical about it. For modernisation and Marxist theories local culture means backwardness, whereas the PRA approach and the anti-development thesis take local culture positively. But what do the people in the Third World think about development and their own culture? The starting point of this book is to try to understand views concerning culture, tradition and modernisation from the perspective of people in a non-Western society. It will show that the themes of modernisation, culture and tradition cannot be captured by the simple dichotomy of "advanced" and "backward". As we will see, in Bhutan local discourses embody a chaotic situation in which both positive and negative views on modernisation, culture and tradition are interwound with social norms and a desire for the survival of their culture and the nation's independence.

One might ask what is meant by "culture" and "tradition". In fact these questions are central to what follows. Examining meanings of "culture", "tradition" and "modernisation" among local people as well as for a government, however, requires some consideration of the issue of representation, which is something that has been frequently debated since the publication of Said's *Orientalism*. If we are going to talk about a non-Western society, we cannot escape from reflecting on this issue.

### **Issues of representation and Orientalism**

The issue of Western representations of non-Western society has often been the focus of discussion not only in development studies but also in anthropology especially after the emergence of *Orientalism*. Classifications such as the "West", the "East", the "Occident", the "Orient", the "developed", the "developing", the "centre", the "periphery", the "Third World", the "North", and the "South" are commonly used. But if we are asked what these terms actually refer to, as Coronil rightly points out, the question only reveals the remarkable fluidity of these terms (Coronil, 1996: p. 53). For instance the "Orient" refers to the Middle East in Said's *Orientalism* but nowadays commonly also means Asia, Africa,

and Latin America. Chomsky, in turn, explains that he uses the phrase "Europe" as a metaphor (Chomsky, 1991: p. 13 in Coronil, 1996: p. 53). In order to use these terms we add footnotes.

Bearing in mind this fluidity inherent in the terms, we can proceed to discuss the issue of representation. The power relations which exist between the West and non-Western societies are articulated in a persuasive manner by Said. Western discourse, in which the West represents the non-West in an essentialising manner, has certainly been instrumental in the domination of non-Western societies. Here we look at two arguments, Moore (1996) and Jewitt (1995), which concern Western representation of the non-West and the power relations between the two categories. Moore (1996: pp. 12-13) finds that all the social science disciplines are very much part of a new form of controlling the population (what Foucault calls "bio-politics") through providing expert knowledge. According to her, the domain of anthropological enquiry includes everything from the organisation of household space and eating habits to the regulation of production cycles and the ritual enactment of cosmological principles. This information is exactly what Foucault points to as a necessity for 'bio-politics': in modern society, Foucault argues, science is the truth setter. According to science, what is correct and what is incorrect are defined, and anomaly is created or discovered. Intervention, under the name of development, according to DuBois (1991) who uses Foucault's framework, is made on behalf of a problem, namely an anomaly. An "ought" floats around villages and towns and an "ought" governs the people's way of thinking. An "ought" is power which corrects anomaly. Through providing expert knowledge, many anthropologists are involved in this technique of government. This concerns not only those who engage in development work and consultancy, but also those who provide the ethnographic information on which plans and policies depend (Moore, 1996: p. 13). At the same time, and quite ironically, governmentality is a proper object of anthropological enquiry (Moore, 1996: p. 13). Anthropologists find themselves operating within the very

structure which they criticise. Contrary to this self-reflective view, Jewitt (1995) retains the paternalistic attitude of the West when she insists that the West has brought benefits to the Third World (p. 78). She claims that a useful input into development planning can be made by outside observers who have the power to speak and act on behalf of people in the Third World (p. 87). Moreover she writes that some of the Western knowledge of people in the Third World is better than local people's own understanding of themselves (p. 69).

Extreme conclusions can follow from both these arguments. Even if we find ourselves in the very power relations which we criticise, it does not seem that complete withdrawal from the discourse and practice of development by cutting all connection with the non-West, if this is at all possible, helps us to solve problems that have already been created. On the other hand, it is no longer an option to retain traditional Western attitudes to the non-West, which are paternalistic and arrogant, in the face of persuasive works which outline the processes of Western domination.

In fact people in the Third World themselves realise how they are represented in the West and sometimes object to the essentialised image of themselves. For example, the Bhutanese newspaper, *Kuensel*,<sup>3</sup> talking about a new film on Bhutan made by a European director, is cynical about its typical Western representation of Bhutan saying: "[O]ne flaw in the film is a patronising western fascination with eastern 'mysticism'" (8th August 1998). The article concludes that the film was made not for the Bhutanese but for an international audience.

It is, however, also the case that just as Westerners represent the Third World, people living in the Third World also represent the West.<sup>4</sup> As we will see later in this chapter, their

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<sup>3</sup> This is the only newspaper in Bhutan. It is published in three languages, Dzongkha, Nepali and English, and is issued weekly.

<sup>4</sup> There is an important difference between Orientalism and Occidentalism, and this will be discussed in the next section.

image of the West is regularly essentialised to the same extent that the non-West is by the Orientalists.<sup>5</sup> For instance, in New Zealand, the Maoris consider human relations among Western people to be lacking in passion and spontaneity, and that Western culture pollutes the environment and lacks close ties with the land (Hanson, 1989: p. 894). It appears that people in both the West and the non-West represent and essentialise each other wherever they are in the world. In this situation it could be argued that it is an overreaction to insist on strongly criticising the Western representation of the non-West. If the Western representation of the Third World is focused on and blamed without recognising the essentialisation of the West by the people in the Third World and their own criticism of the West's essentialisation of them, it only recreates the idea of people in the Third World as victims of powerful Western discourse and reinforces the image of the "weak" Orient.

What we should be aware of as a person who writes between cultures is, I would argue, firstly the need to make a clear distinction between the researcher's point of view and that of the researched in the narrative. One might wonder whether it is at all possible. Considering that the whole narrative is nobody's but the researcher's point of view, it is not easy. In this sense the narrative is essentially biased.

Secondly we should make an effort to illustrate many different views within the society we are trying to understand and thereby avoid essentialism. For instance, a Bhutanese young man who wears Levi 501s and a Calvin Klein shirt would claim that it is simply because it is easier to move in and more comfortable to wear compared to the national dress, *gho*.<sup>6</sup> Some older people in Bhutanese society, however, would see him as westernised, in a very negative sense. Yet other people would see him as "cool" in his brand name jeans and

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<sup>5</sup> As Said writes (1978: p. 7), while the West has defined the Orient, the definition of the Orient in turn became the boundary between the West and the non-West - thereby creating "we" and "others". In this way Orientalism has been a construction of Western identity.

<sup>6</sup> *Gho* is men's national dress. Women's national dress is called *kira*.

T-shirt. In other words, providing various viewpoints from within the local society and illustrating the different positions in that society which those views emanate from seems one possible way of escaping from essentialising another culture and of writing in a context where the power balance between cultures is far from equal.

### **Occidentalism as a counter-discourse**

Another weakness of discursive analysis is that it effectively excludes the possibility of a counter-discourse emerging, since it sees discourse as hegemonic. However, people in the Third World do create counter-discourses. Giving a picture in which they are overwhelmed by hegemonic discourse therefore only reinforces the existing power relations between the West and the non-West. If we are aware of the power relations between the West and the non-West, it is an absolute necessity to pay more attention to the production of counter-discourses and the multiplicity of discourses within non-Western society. In this sense, Occidentalism is a good point at which to start to investigate these counter-discourses.

Occidentalism, or “stylized images of the West” (Carrier, 1995: p. 1), is the other side of Orientalism. The encounter between the West and the non-West has provided both positive and negative images of the West to people in non-Western societies, and these images are as essentialised as those of its counter part, Orientalism. The important difference between them is, however, that while Orientalism is “a strategy of Western world domination” (Chen, 1992: p. 688), Occidentalism is not as powerful as Orientalism because the direction of its influence tends to be *within* a non-Western society (Chen, 1992: p. 688). Since Occidentalism is a series of images, it can be easily manipulated by various forces in society. Chen (1992) and Nader (1989) illustrate this well with examples from China and the Muslim world, respectively. We can see from these works that there is both a positive and a negative Occidentalism. Positive Occidentalism, the image of a superior West, is not only the internalisation of the hegemonic discourse. Chen’s work shows that it is also used by the

intelligentsia to justify and to consolidate their anti-official stance in China where the government provides negative images of the West in order to support nationalism. According to Chen, this anti-official Occidentalism was evident in a television series, "He Shang". "He Shang" was noted, Chen continues, "for its almost embarrassingly positive evaluation of all things Western" (p. 692). Negative Occidentalism, on the other hand, seems to form a counter force to the powerful West, because of its critical, derogative description of the West. Nader (1989) illustrates this when she writes that women who are part of nationalist, religious or ethnic movements in the Muslim world sometimes believe that they are better off than exploited women in Western societies. From their standpoint American women are sex objects and under daily threat of rape in their society. Nader sees this as a challenge to a widespread belief that the position of women in the West is better than that in developing countries (p. 323).

Occidentalism is only part of a range of counter-discourses, however. As Escobar suggests (1995a: p. 95), subaltern identity and new social movements seem also to be a mine of counter-discourses. It is however not a very applicable perspective for the case of Bhutan, since new social movements are unknown, and there are no strong subaltern identities. Bhutan however is an example in which negative Occidentalism is an important trait of the Bhutanese discussion of culture, tradition and modernisation. Negative Occidentalism provides a start and end point for both justification and criticism of modernisation and the preservation of culture and tradition. This point will be closely examined later in this book.

### **Multiple discourse**

Amongst the large literature dealing with multiple discourse here we shall examine important works on modernity by Pigg (1996) and on culture by Keesing (1989) and Hanson (1989). Pigg (1996) investigates multiple discourse on modernity in Nepal focusing on villagers' belief in shamans and modern medicine. Various views on villagers' beliefs and modern

medicine are presented. The government officials and aid workers represent the villagers as ignorantly and blindly believing in shamans, and in turn represent themselves as modern beings who have been exposed to Western medicine. The villagers on the other hand do not find modern medicine remarkably efficacious or always desirable. At the same time, however, they also criticise useless shamans and overly-trusting patients, but in the local context these comments mean something different from modern commentary about beliefs of what the shaman does - namely that it is all "superstition". We can find an analogy between how the villagers talk about shamans in Pigg's article, and how we, in the West, talk about doctors. Finding a shaman who "knows" is the first step for villagers, while finding a "good" doctor is important for us. Some shamans "know" more than others, whereas some doctors have a better reputation than others. Shamans have insight into an unseen dimension of the world through their ability to see spirits, hear their voices, and communicate their desires, and through their awareness of how to persuade them to release their hold on bodies they are troubling. Doctors understand the unseen functioning of human organs, viruses, and medications, through experimentation and reading. Both doctors and shamans work on a level which is beyond ordinary people's understanding. "*Dhamis* (shamans) can make mistakes", one villager says. Doctors sometimes also make mistakes. Pigg concludes:

Both believing too much and believing too little are unwise and injudicious. The *biswas*<sup>7</sup> that people in Chandithan<sup>8</sup> understand themselves as having, and the kind of *biswas* they value, is a *biswas* based on careful judgement. To be a believer, then, is to be a conscious agent, a thoughtful subject. (Pigg, 1996: p. 190)

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<sup>7</sup> *Biswas* can be translated as "belief", but it generally connotes trust and is used most often to talk about social relationships rather than sets of ideas (Pigg, 1996: p. 190).

<sup>8</sup> The site of Pigg's fieldwork.

While knowing that others see them as credulous, ignorant and backward, the villagers choose carefully which healers to rely on in particular circumstances. In Pigg's example villagers are no longer a caricature, a different species, but are conscious agents. Some may point to the danger of seeing people in the Third World as the same as or very similar to us in the West. Certainly conventional development thinking is accused of being insensitive to cultural differences. The anti-development thesis, however, does not get rid of the essentialised image of Others either. In their narrative people in the Third World are described as if they are totally different species, being a victim of arrogant Western development activities. However, Pigg's work shows enough differences between the West and the Third World, and by presenting both developer's and villager's point of view - a multiple discourse on shaman - she shows similarities within the differences. However, a shortcoming of her work is that there is little examination of how their different views are formulated. I would argue that behind each statement there should be always a reason and a socially structured motivation. As will be discussed, the present book regards it as important to extend the examination to these aspects. In this sense the study moves from the usual discursive analysis seen in Said and Escobar to a much wider social analysis.

Keesing (1989) and Hanson (1989) are examples of writers who deal with multiple discourse on culture - both examine the case of the Maoris. They analyse the multiple discourse that arises in the process of inventing culture and tradition. However, the common weakness of their articles is again a lack of analysis of the socio-political background and the motivations behind the various statements which they report. In Hanson's case, for example, if the Maori tradition has been invented by the local people, government officials, anthropologists and other scholars (p. 890), one should ask what has motivated this invention. What "motivation" means here is not an intention to invent culture, but rather a socially structured subconsciousness which formulates a certain view in a person. Motivation, in this context, therefore, does not



indicate a will to participate in the discourse on culture and tradition, but instead a process of conscious and subconscious reference to social norms. If we look at works on the invention of tradition, the significance of understanding the motivation behind various statements will be more apparent. Trevor-Roper (1983) examines how the Scottish kilt became "tradition" in Scotland. He argues that the Scottish kilt is not the "original" or not as old as the word, tradition, sounds. His work shows that the tradition is in fact invented and therefore not "authentic". However, one may wonder what is the significance of such work, which undermines people's representation of their own culture and tradition under the claim of "truth", namely objectivism. If we apply this perspective to the Third World, it leads to the confrontation between truth-value representation by Western intellectuals and "native" representation. Moreover, the claim based on objectivism, that there is an authentic culture somewhere, gives an impression that invented culture is fake and illusory, "distorted". It could therefore easily justify a single representation of culture.

What I object to here is an outsider's attempt to justify their own representation under the claim of "truthfulness" and to ignore the people's representation of their own culture. What we want to understand, being aware of power relations between the West and non-West, is how people represent themselves, and why people want to represent themselves as they do. What we should focus on is, in Friedman's words, "the practice of social groups...constructing themselves by making history" (1994: p. 118). Friedman says that all cultural creation is motivated (1994: p. 13). Without understanding motivation the study of the discourses of culture and tradition ends up showing a picture of "distorted culture" as opposed to "authentic culture". Hanson's work (1989) is an example here. It shows, contrary to the intention of the author, that the dichotomy of objectivism and subjectivism is itself a product of an objectivist's view. Furthermore, examining the motivation and social background of cultural invention would reveal both the

agent's position in the society and how the society works, and thereby signify the presence of a multiplicity of discourses.

## **Globalisation**

The concept of globalisation is broad and ambiguous. Almost all parts of the social sciences can relate themselves to "globalisation", but the multiplicity of the contribution seems to have resulted in a lack of coherence in the discussion. As Nederveen Pieterse points out, in the social sciences there are as many conceptualisations of globalisation as there are disciplines (1995: p. 45).<sup>9</sup>

In this situation only very limited common ground for debate can be found. In the literature emanating from sociology and cultural studies, the improvement of communication technologies is cited as the main factor behind globalisation. Exchanges of ideas, materials and people are taking place at a much faster speed than at any other time in the history. This gives, according to Featherstone, a sense of integration and interdependence - a feeling that "we are all in each other's backyard" (Featherstone, 1993: p. 169). Globalisation has become so fashionable that UNDP's Human Development Report featured globalisation in its issue of 1999. However, the Report only identifies globalisation with increasing "contacts between people across national boundaries in economy, in technology, in culture and in governance" (UNDP, 1999: p. 25), and maintains that the cultural effects of globalisation are still in open debate (p. 34).

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<sup>9</sup> Nederveen Pieterse continues that in economics, globalisation refers to economic internationalisation and the spread of capitalist market relations. In international relations, the focus is on the increasing density of interstate relations and the development of global politics. In sociology, the concern is with increasing world-wide social densities and the emergence of "world society". In cultural studies, the focus is on global communications and world-wide cultural standardisation, as in Coca Colonisation and McDonaldisation, and on post colonial culture (Nederveen Pieterse, 1995: p. 45).

One of the main points of discussion around the concept of globalisation is whether globalisation promotes cultural homogenisation or heterogenisation across the world. For Smith (1990), globalisation means cultural homogenisation. He argues that today's decline of nation-state is the sign that "a genuinely global culture" will be eventually created. According to him, nation states have been eroded since the end of the World War II by the possibilities of constructing much larger institutional units on the basis of vast telecommunications systems and computerised networks of information. Any attempt to limit such networks to national boundaries is doomed to failure. Meanwhile transnational corporations have become more and more powerful. He insists that consequently, although earlier imperialisms were usually extensions of ethnic or national sentiments and ideologies, whether they be French, British or Russian, today's cultural imperialisms are non-national and include capitalism, socialism and Europeanism. These are, he argues, "supported by technological infrastructure which is truly 'cosmopolitan', in the sense that the same telecommunications base will eventually erode cultural differences and create a genuinely 'global culture'" (Smith, 1990: p. 176). He says that today's emerging global culture is tied to no place or period. It is context-less, a true melange of disparate components drawn from everywhere and nowhere. He goes on to claim that unlike national cultures, a global culture is essentially memoryless.

It is not clear on what grounds he bases his argument that the power of the nation-state has been eroded. He does not provide enough evidence to explain the exact ways in which cultural differences are eroded by the same media machine. Moreover recent anthropological works on indigenous knowledge show that the interaction between local and Western scientific knowledge is not an easy process of harmonisation, but rather one of conflicts. Hobart (1993) observes that the West represents the people in the Third World as ignorant, and thereby the West is able to represent itself as possessing knowledge. Local knowledge is devalued or ignored in favour of Western scientific, technical and

managerial knowledge. These anthropological works recognise that technology and science are not “universal”, but very much a product of Western civilisation (Alvares, 1992). After all, Smith can only envisage the creation of “genuinely global culture”. He argues that the construction of a global identity is difficult because “collective identity ... is always historically specific because it is based on shared memories and a sense of continuity between generations” (p. 180). This, however, appears to be an acceptance of the continuing strength of nation-states, or of nationalism based upon a sense of community. Despite improvements in communication systems, what he calls genuinely global culture could not be created so easily in the near future.

In contrast to Smith, Featherstone (1995: p. 102) expects that increasing contact between various nation-states and civilisations will create a dialogue space, with a good deal of potential for disagreement, clashes of perspective and conflict. His argument emphasises the heterogenising effects of globalisation. According to him, one consequence of globalisation is “to familiarise us with greater diversity”, and globalisation leads to an increasing sensitivity to diversity (1993: pp. 169-170). He argues that an increasing cultural flow lead to a disturbing sense of engulfment and immersion, which produces “a retreat from the threat of cultural disorder into the security of ethnicity, traditionalism or fundamentalism, or the active assertion of the integrity of the national culture” (1993: p. 174). This deglobalising reaction, he continues, could result in a strong assertion of local cultures (1993: p. 177).

A more nuanced picture is painted by Robertson. He argues that homogenisation and heterogenisation are two processes, both of which are ongoing simultaneously:

the debate about global homogenization versus heterogenization should be transcended. It is not a question of *either* homogenization or heterogenization, but rather of the ways in which both of these two

tendencies have become features of life across much of the late-twentieth-century world.<sup>10</sup> (Robertson, 1995: p. 27)

He suggests that in various aspects of contemporary life, there are ongoing attempts to combine homogeneity with heterogeneity and universalism with particularism, and therefore that questions should be directed toward the ways in which homogenising and heterogenising tendencies are mutually implicative (Robertson, 1995: p. 27). From this perspective he introduces the concept of "glocalization". He points out that the nation-state is an aspect of the glocalization, in the sense that the idea of nation-state is global, while each nation-state introduces ideas and practices from other societies differently, and consequently this leads to diversity and hybridisation (Robertson, 1995: p. 41). Robertson is firmly against the view that the entire world is being swamped by Western culture. He argues that the virtually overwhelming evidence shows that even 'cultural messages' from the West are differentially received and interpreted in local contexts, and thereby diversity continues to be maintained.

Hannerz emphasises that globalisation does not create cultural homogeneity on a global scale (1987: p. 555). He argues:

The world system ... is replacing one diversity with another. We must be aware that openness to foreign cultural influences need not involve only an impoverishment of local and national culture. It may give people access to technological and symbolic resources for dealing with their own ideas, managing their own culture, in new ways. (Hannerz, 1987: p. 555)

He writes that although contemporary cultures in the Third World keep growing out of the interplay between imported and

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<sup>10</sup> Emphasis is in original.

indigenous cultures, most anthropologists choose not to write about this. Instead, he claims, they retreat deeper into the hinterland, and study "an Other as different as possible from a modern, urban, post industrial, capitalist self" (1987: p. 547). He appears to argue that what is lacking in anthropological study is a mind that is able to perceive the fact that both "they" and "we" live in the same period, and that consequently anthropologists seek after "pure" tradition. He argues that in the present world of movement and mixture every culture has drawn in some way on two or more historical sources, and concludes that "In the end, it seems, we are all being creolised." He also points out the significance of macro anthropology, which is supposed to provide "an improved overall understanding of how ideas and their public manifestations are organised, in those social structures of considerable scale and complexity which now encompass Third World lives just as certainly as they encompass our own" (1987: p. 547).

Similarly, Nederveen Pieterse (1995) argues that cultural experiences have not been simply moving in the direction of cultural uniformity and standardisation. If we only focus on the homogenising tendency, he writes, this would downplay the ambivalence of the globalising momentum and ignores the role of local reception of Western culture, for example the indigenisation of Western ideas and attitudes. He also points out that there are countercurrents to westernisation, noting the impact non-Western cultures have been making on the West (p. 53). Relations of power and hegemony are inscribed and reproduced within this hybridity, he argues, therefore it is important to study the terms of the mixture, and the condition under which mixing takes place (p. 57).

Appadurai (1990) also suggests that today's global interaction has to be understood in terms of the two processes of cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation. He criticises arguments which see globalisation as cultural homogenisation, and more specifically Americanisation, for failing to consider the fact that ideas and materials from the centre tend to become "indigenised" once they are introduced

in the local context. He emphasises the need for further study of the dynamics of indigenisation.

These four authors, Robertson, Hannerz, Nederveen Pieterse and Appadurai, appear to agree on the importance of research about the process in which ideas and materials from other cultural areas are digested in local contexts. However, there are problems with their view. Firstly, aspects of power derived from the discourse between the West and the non-West are conspicuously absent or very much down-played in this literature on globalisation. When discussing examples of cultures influencing each other, issues of Western cultural hegemony are omitted from their discussions. Yet Western power over the non-Western world has been a very significant point of discussion, especially since the appearance of Said's *Orientalism*: it should thus be very important for researchers working on cultural globalisation issues to engage in discussion of the power relations which exist between the West and the non-West. By not talking about the power of Western culture, some of this work may well be criticised for concealing power relations, especially by those who argue that we need to understand how the West influences the non-West.

Secondly, this group of works on globalisation give only a bird's-eye view of the situation. For instance, Hannerz introduces an example of a Nigerian women taking dried milk and baby clothes from London to sell in Lagos (Hannerz, 1990: p. 238). Without a detailed examination, however, he concludes that these imported or smuggled items hardly alter structures of meaning in urban Nigerian culture.

There are anthropological works on globalisation containing proper, detailed examinations of the process of homogenisation and heterogenisation in different localities. Examples are Kang (1998), Diouf (1998), Meyer (1998), and Geschiere (1998).<sup>11</sup> All four works deal with the indigenisation

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<sup>11</sup> Kang's work (1998) looks at current Chinese debates about different modernities. He examines Chinese interpretation and indigenisation of the Western concept of nationalism. Diouf (1998) explores the construction of

of the West in non-Western societies, or the construction of local identity in a non-Western society in the context of globalisation. These works provide strong and valuable testimonies that the non-Western world is not completely dominated by the West, and they highlight the local capacity to digest and interpret influences from the West and to produce a new discourse out of this interpretation. They therefore testify that each locality can never be same. These works provide valuable materials against the thesis that globalisation is a process of homogenisation.

### **Friedman's "global anthropology" and his concept of hegemony**

Friedman (1994) examines the formation and transformation of local identity in relation to "hegemony". The strength of his works (1990, 1994, 1995) is that he combines a global system perspective and anthropological approach in a meaningful way. Friedman's concept of hegemony is generally expressed in terms of economic and political power. He says that hegemonic power is impossible in the absence of military-political power. And, according to him, accumulation of wealth is the key to understanding the rise and demise of hegemony (Friedman, 1994: p. 21) - a critical difference from concept of hegemony as based upon the influence of discourse.

He suggests the importance of taking a global anthropological perspective, arguing that, in explaining expressions of identity, the expansion and contraction of global system provides significant insights. According to him:

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local identities in Senegal under French colonial rule in the nineteenth century. Meyer (1998) looks at the indigenisation of the West in Ghana by examining the way in which the consumption of Western commodities is viewed at the local level. Geschiere (1998) mainly studies the "modernising capacity of witchcraft discourses" in Africa. He examines the way in which the discourses around witchcraft incorporate socio-political changes occurring as a result of the impact of global processes. All four articles argue that the domination of Western modernity has never been monolithic, and that the each locality has produced its own discourse under changes caused by globalisation.



The global arena is a product of a definite set of dynamic properties including the formation of centre-periphery structures and their expansion, contraction, fragmentation and re-establishment throughout cycles of shifting hegemony. This set of dynamic properties are what we refer to as the global system, or global processes. There are numerous cultural processes that are directly generated in global system. These are the processes of identity formation and fragmentation ... (Friedman, 1994: p. 199)

He argues that cultural process in global systems cannot be understood without considering the phenomena of hegemony, of countervailing identities, of dominant and subaltern discourses, and therefore that research on identity should be directed towards the way in which a culture is diffused in the process of imperial expansion and the way in which local cultures reassert themselves in periods of declining hegemony (1994: pp. 25-27). He explains that the proliferation of modern identity, which is characterised by the possibility of individual and social development, mobility and liberation from the fixed and concrete structures of surviving non-capitalist forms (family, community, religion) depends on the existence of an expanding modern sector in a global system. When such expansion ends or begins to decline, according to Friedman, modern identity becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. There is thus a link between cycles of hegemony, cycles of shifting centres of accumulation of wealth in the world system and cycles of cultural identity (1994: p. 96).

He explains this relationship between shifting hegemonies and the formation of identity using the case of Hawaii (pp. 173-181). Hawaii became increasingly integrated into the US economy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In these times the Hawaiian language was forbidden, and its dance and much of its culture were considered to be expressions of barbarism. They were seen to be totally at odds with civilisation. Throughout the twentieth century, he argues, the process of integration has led to a loss of Hawaiian identity. However, in the 1970s this integrating power began

to wane, as tourism declined and unemployment rose. It was at this time when the Hawaiian movement began. The movement was increasingly consolidated around the issue of sovereignty, the regaining of lands lost by an unconstitutional coup d'état in 1893, and the re-establishment of Hawaiian culture. It coincided with much of the political activity in other parts of the Western world. Some say, Friedman writes, that it drew many of its ideas from the Black Power movement, but, Friedman argues, there is ample evidence that it had roots in Hawaiian rural areas that had for years opposed the destruction reaped by American-style development. He then shows an interesting statistic,

In the period between the census of 1970 and 1980, the number of Hawaiians who identified as such increased significantly, from 130,000 to more than 190,000. But in the same period the population of North American Indians increased from 700,000 to 1,400,000. This is not a fact of biology. Many Hawaiians and a great many Indians who were formerly 'mixed' enough to be able to identify as something else have now begun to assert their identities as indigenous peoples. (Friedman, 1994: p. 177)

Hawaii is almost completely integrated into the United States - it is after all part of it. Therefore the rise and demise of the hegemony of the US would directly affect it, much more than it would have affected Bhutan. Rising and declining hegemony does not affect every part of the world to an equal degree. In the case of Bhutan, the government has taken a cautious stance in its relations with superpowers such as the USA and Russia. Bhutan has not received significant amounts of development assistance from any of the five countries which hold a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. This has been a conscious decision, taken in order to avoid being pulled into the kind of conflicts in which some developing

countries were involved during the cold war.<sup>12</sup> In these circumstances a hegemony-shift in the world system, namely the apparent decline of the United States, has not had as much influence on the construction of cultural identity in Bhutan as it has in Hawaii.

We can apply Friedman's perspective of connecting international circumstances with local discourses in two ways to help us to examine Bhutan's case. Firstly, instead of US hegemony, other regional influences on Bhutan should be investigated in relation to the formation of local discourses. As a small country between two giant nations, Bhutan has had to navigate a difficult path with its neighbours, and the regional climate has probably affected the formation and transformation of local discourses.

The concept of hegemony needs more examination. With respect to Friedman's view on the issue, one might wonder if the ability to produce a competing ideology depends only on economic and political power. In this respect, Friedman's argument seems too simple, since it neglects the power of discourse. Escobar and Said, among others, who are inspired by Foucault, explain hegemony from the perspective of discursive analysis. Said is rather straightforward in arguing that it is cultural hegemony that gives durability and strength to Orientalism, "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978: p. 3). What makes Western culture hegemonic is, according to him, the idea of Western identity as superior to those of all non-Western peoples and cultures (p. 7). On this basis the West has regulated the discourse of development, bringing the "right knowledge" to the non-Western world and thereby constructing a justification for intervention (Escobar, 1995a; Ferguson, 1990). This view also seems to be an

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<sup>12</sup> The first Bhutanese Ambassador to the United Nations, Lyonpo Sangay Penjor said in a lecture in Japan that "Bhutan's fundamental foreign policy is non-alignment. The government is very careful not to be involved in a power game of the superpowers by establishing diplomatic relations with these countries without a serious thoughts on the implications of it." (Imaeda, 1994: p. 54).

oversimplification, since it makes it sound as though any society can achieve hegemony if many people in that society believe that their own culture is superior to others. For instance, the Bhutanese often say that their own culture is better than Western culture: materialistic Westerners cannot understand their altruistic and hospitable mentality, they argue. As we will see later in this book, their image of the West is also essentialised: however, the Bhutanese have not obtained hegemony over other parts of the world. Furthermore, Escobar himself points out the significance of development institutions in establishing Western hegemony, and he notes that those institutions would not have been deployed so widely and effectively without the financial capacity of the West to sustain them. For Said Western hegemony is a cultural matter whereas for Friedman it is mainly economic. However, I would argue that Western hegemony has been consolidated by forms of both cultural and economic power which have reinforced each other.

The book is primarily concerned with the power of discourse, however the Foucauldians' argument about Western hegemony does not give a comprehensive account of how hegemony can change, and how cultural hegemony can be linked with economic power. Therefore their analysis ultimately fails to give a dynamic nature to our understanding of discourse. Inspired by Friedman's global-anthropology, this book will examine the relation between Western and local development discourses and in particular to what extent Western development discourse has become hegemonic in relation to local development discourses. The book explores the extent of the hegemony of Western development discourse over Bhutanese discourses by looking in particular at the influence of modernisation theories.

## **2.2 Beyond discursive analysis: the relevance of Bourdieu**

To analyse Bhutanese discourses on modernisation, culture and tradition, the theoretical framework offered by Pierre Bourdieu is helpful. This section outlines how Bourdieu's theoretical framework will be used in the following chapters,

and considers its strengths and weaknesses for analysing Bhutanese discourses with regard to the concerns presented in the previous section.

Bourdieu suggests that each agent's position and his or her view of the world has to be defined based not upon the observer's perception but upon the agent's own perception. Making people's subjectivity an object of research does not mean that the study itself is subjective. On the contrary, as argued in the last section, seemingly objective economic indicators fail to reflect people's actual living standards, and so require a more detailed analysis since judgement of whether a living standard is high or low has to be based upon people's perceptions and observers cannot impose a certain standard as a dividing line. Bourdieu argues:

The most resolutely objective theory has to integrate the agents' representation of the social world; more precisely, it must take account of the contribution that agents make towards constructing the view of the social world, and ... by means of the *work of representation* ... that they constantly perform in order to impose their view of the world or the view of their own position in this world - their social identity. (Bourdieu, 1985: p. 727)

The previous section emphasised the need to look at multiple discourses, in which various views contest with each other, and the importance of examining the social context in which the discourse is produced. In this respect, although it does not provide a complete conceptual framework for this study, Bourdieu's theory is useful as a signpost for investigation. In what follows, the usefulness of each of Bourdieu's concepts is examined in the context of the concerns of this analysis.

To assist in the analysis of discourses, Bourdieu offers a framework comprised of the concepts of *doxa*, *orthodoxy* and *heterodoxy*. *Doxa* is a condition in which the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary,

but as a self-evident and is taken for granted (the universe of the undiscussed). According to Bourdieu, when the natural order or facts which are taken for granted are questioned, the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon and the doxa is transformed to the universe of discourse, which contains orthodoxy and heterodoxy (1977: pp. 166-169). The strength of this framework is, firstly, that these three concepts make it possible to look at the transformation of discourse, and thereby the picture of discourse we get is not one in which the hegemonic discourse simply dominates, but one in which various views and questions arise. In other words discourse is conceived in more dynamic terms. Secondly, the concept of doxa clearly shows that Bourdieu's analytical scope is much wider than that of Foucault's often used discourse analysis, since Bourdieu's framework allows us to investigate the undiscussed parts, whereas Foucault's framework focuses only on what is said, i.e. the discourse. It is this conceptualisation of doxa which enables us to examine those areas which are too natural for agents to question.

Although Bourdieu uses the expression that doxa is the part which goes without "saying" (1977: p. 166), this can reasonably be interpreted as "without arguing" or "without being questioned", in other words "as part of a consensus". This interpretation is founded on both practical considerations for anthropological "data collection" methods and on theoretical considerations. During anthropological fieldwork, researchers ask many questions of local people, and there is always a possibility that a researcher will ask about something which is very natural to them; and, even when people talk about something it can be the case that in the end they always come to a consensus on a certain point. In terms of theory, Bourdieu uses the "universe of the undiscussed" as a second definition of doxa: hence doxa is regarded as that which is not questioned. Therefore, even if a researcher actually hears statements, as far as these statements are monolithic, they can be considered as doxa. The analysis presented in this book also takes this to be the case. Through examining how culture, tradition and negative Occidentalism are used as justifications within the context of

a struggle between generations the present study includes an analysis of doxa, i.e. the underlying assumptions present in people's statements about modernisation, culture and tradition.

Heterodoxy, by questioning the formerly unquestioned, functions as a critical break with doxa and brings the dominant agents out of their silence and forces them to produce a defensive discourse of the orthodoxy. The universe of discourse is thus presented as opposed to doxa (Bourdieu, 1993: p. 73). As we have seen the importance of paying more attention to multiple discourse in the previous section, different views about modernisation, culture and tradition in Bhutan shall be examined, and the concepts of heterodoxy and orthodoxy are helpful in this context.

Bourdieu (1977: p. 169) also says that *crisis* is a necessary condition for questioning doxa. Bourdieu describes the transformation of doxa into the universe of discourse in the following way:

The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion has objective crisis which ... destroys self-evidence practically. It is when the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon that the question of the natural or conventional character of social facts can be raised. (Bourdieu, 1977: pp. 168-169)

The concept of crisis inevitably shifts our attention towards the economic, political and social background to the emergence of a counter-discourse. We will see later in this book how social changes, state policy and international circumstances (in their perceived forms) have encouraged and discouraged the emergence of different views.

While crisis is understood as wider socio-economic change, the book will also examine matters more closely relevant to individual agents. In Bourdieu's framework social space is

comprised of many *fields*, and each field is defined by specific *stakes*<sup>13</sup> and *interests* (Bourdieu, 1993: p. 72). *Capital* represents power over that field and the position of each agent in a field is defined by the distribution of certain capitals that are present within a field. These capitals are, Bourdieu suggests, *economic capital*, *social capital* and *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1985: p. 724). The struggles taking place within a field are twofold. Firstly, each agent tries to accumulate more capital according to the existing definition of stakes of a field. Secondly, agents raise question about the very definition of the stakes of a field (Bourdieu, 1985: p. 734). Different views are articulated in order to change definitions of active capitals in a field and thereby to increase the amount of capital possessed by an agent. In this context, we shall be informed by an approach which incorporates the agent's background and position in the "Bhutanese ladder of success"<sup>14</sup> to think about the motivation behind statements and assumptions. The motivation of, or rather logic behind, a particular view is socially structured; hence, in examining heterodoxy and orthodoxy, we must look at an agent's position in the society. We will see that the educational background of agents gives, if not a complete, at least a reasonable account for these differences.

It must be clearly stated that "the youth" itself is not the subject of this study and Bourdieu's framework is employed not to understand youth *per se* but primarily to understand the dynamic nature of multiple discourse, and the background and social context of each discourse. In other words Bourdieu's framework could be applied to a similar investigation of any other group – based on age or any other social distinction. Related to this, we must recognise a weakness in his framework. Bourdieu emphasises how each agent tries to maximise their capital, and so his view has led

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<sup>13</sup> According to Bourdieu, these specific stakes and interests of a field are irreducible to the stakes and interests of other fields. Exemplifying the point he said that you cannot make a philosopher compete for the prizes that interest a geographer (Bourdieu, 1993: p. 72).

<sup>14</sup> The "Bhutanese ladder of success" will be explained in the next section.



me, in my research context, to place more emphasis on young people's future prospects. The framework does not therefore incorporate other dimensions of the lives of young people and excludes factors which are derived from, for example, being "young" and "youthful".

In explaining the background to doxa, namely why a particular view has a consensus among the Bhutanese, the concept of *habitus* is helpful. Although Bourdieu does not say explicitly that doxa can be explained by habitus, the following definition of habitus holds insights when investigating the background of "the Bhutanese doxa". According to Bourdieu, habitus is internalised history and produces individual and collective practices (Bourdieu, 1990: pp. 53-56). Habitus is spontaneity without consciousness or will, which nevertheless means that practices within a certain group of people are reasonably homogeneous in the absence of any direct interaction or explicit coordination. The objective homogeneity of group habitus results from the homogeneity of the conditions of existence (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 85). Thus, although in theory habitus is possessed by each agent and each habitus is supposed to be different, in reality, the same habitus is shared by the whole group, and this is explained by homogeneity in practices within the group.

This framework can be applied to explain Bhutanese doxa. Doxa is by definition what everyone agrees with, therefore it can be seen as a homogeneous practice. If the practice is the same, following Bourdieu's framework, the habitus is also supposed to be shared and so are the conditions of existences. Hence, to explain the background of doxa it is relevant to examine the Bhutanese habitus, their conditions of existence in their perceived form. The Bhutanese perception of their country's position in the world can explain both their unique views about culture, tradition and modernisation, as well as Bhutan's difference from many other developing countries,

where introducing something “modern” and “Western”<sup>15</sup> appears to be seen as much more important than preserving indigenous culture and tradition. The investigation is directed towards examining what the West means to Bhutanese people and also how they see themselves; the international circumstances in which Bhutan has to survive will also be incorporated into the scope of this study.

This investigation is at the same time based upon the following criticism of conventional Western development thinking and the discursive analysis of development. For all developing countries face similar conditions of existence: in terms of conventional development thinking their economic indicators reveal similar living standards, and in terms of discursive analysis they are mostly in a similar power relationship with the West. Neither mode of analysis can explain the particularity of different societies in the Third World. One of the reasons for this seems to be that even if people are living under the same objective structure, the structure in its perceived form (the habitus) is different. Both conventional development thinking and the discursive analysis of development have not been successful in incorporating people’s points of view in their scope. By using Bourdieu’s idea of habitus, in a slightly modified form,<sup>16</sup> the study aims to explain the particularity of Bhutan which is prominent in its doxa.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Pigg (1996: p. 162) writes that in the everyday logic of development practice, “modern medicine” is positioned as the eventual replacement for existing modes of healing.

<sup>16</sup> The term habitus in this context is not used on the same level as Bourdieu situates it in relation to heterodoxy, orthodoxy and doxa. Habitus is originally used to explain class/group practices. In my investigation of the background of the doxa, the *Bhutanese people as a whole* are seen as a group among the many societies in the world which have been classified on a scale from least developed to developed. Habitus in this context is the habitus of the Bhutanese people who are supposed to have experienced more or less the same conditions of existence. Therefore, the difference in the usage of habitus between Bourdieu and this study is that while Bourdieu uses habitus to explain practices of different groups *within* a society, this study analyses the whole of the Bhutanese people as a group.

With respect to the role of the state in the transformation of discourses, Bourdieu indentifies the state with the dominant class.

The state is the culmination of a process of a concentration of different species of capital: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural or (better) informational capital, and symbolic capital. It is this concentration as such which constitutes the state as the holder of a sort of metacapital granting power over other species of capital and over their holders. (Bourdieu, 1998: p. 41)

In Bourdieu's framework, an agent's power is defined by the overall volume of capital each agent possesses, and by the composition of this capital (Bourdieu, 1985: p. 724). Therefore the state, which is described as the culmination of a process of concentration of different capitals, is regarded as the dominant class in society. The dominant class, in turn, is orthodoxy. Bourdieu says:

The dominated class have an interest in pushing back the limits of doxa and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted, the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, orthodoxy. (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 169)

According to Bourdieu, therefore, the state is considered to be the guardian of orthodoxy, and it defends its view after a crisis. Crisis is caused by the emergence of heterodoxy which questions what was hitherto doxa. The book will consider the applicability of this model that heterodoxy triggers a transformation of discourse by questioning doxa, while the state defends orthodox view.

In order to explain the mechanisms through which the pre-crisis dominant class is weakened and in which the post-

crisis dominant class rises, I would like to use Boudieu's concept of "mode of domination". Bourdieu presents two very different forms of domination, which are located at each end of a scale, and argues that any particular mode of domination must fall somewhere between these two forms. The first kind of domination is the domination which is maintained by constant personal interactions. The dominant agents, according to Bourdieu:

have to work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination.... ...they are obliged to resort to the elementary forms of domination, in other words the direct domination of one person over another.... They cannot appropriate the labour services, goods, homage and respect of others without 'winning' them personally, 'tying' them, in short, creating a bond between persons. (Bourdieu, 1990: p. 129)

It is when "a system of mechanisms automatically ensuring the reproduction of the established order is constituted" that the dominant agents can be content with letting the system they dominate follow its own course (Bourdieu, 1990: p. 129). Bourdieu's second form of domination refers to a system of mechanisms which ensures the reproduction of the relationship between the dominant and the dominated and which entails objective mechanisms "such as those producing and guaranteeing the distribution of 'titles' (titles of nobility, deeds of possession, academic degrees etc.)." (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 184). This objectification, Bourdieu argues, guarantees the permanence and cumulativeness of material and symbolic acquisitions. It also tends to reproduce the structure of present relations of domination and dependence (Bourdieu, 1990: p. 130). This mode of domination, through its objectification of institutions, does not need the personal touch any more, as the system reproduces the relationship between the dominant and the dominated almost automatically.

Bourdieu argues that the effects of objectification are greater in magnitude for those coming out of the educational system. He says:

By giving the same value to all holders of the same certificate, so that any one of them can take the place of any other, the educational system, minimizes the obstacles to the free circulation of cultural capital... it makes it possible to relate all qualification-holders (and also, negatively, all unqualified individuals) to a single standard, thereby setting up a *single market*<sup>17</sup> for all cultural capacities and guaranteeing the convertibility of cultural capital into money (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 187)

This objectifying mechanism is useful in explaining the change in the composition of those representing orthodoxy in Bhutan from people who have grown up in Dzongkha medium education to those educated in English medium education.

The order of the investigation into the multiple discourses around modernisation, culture and tradition will be as follows. Firstly, the development policy of Bhutan will be examined as the official discourse. The state has played an increasingly important role in formulating people's views about modernisation, culture and tradition, largely because development has almost always been initiated by the government. Since the book focuses on the views of young people in Bhutan, education policy is given special attention. Secondly, this book will illustrate the formation and transformation of views about modernisation, culture and tradition among young people in Bhutan. It will also investigate the background of agents with differing views. The book will discuss the role of the state in the transformation of discourses. Thirdly, this book will explore doxa - the underlying assumptions and formation of consensus and try to analyse how the doxa has been formulated and maintained.

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<sup>17</sup> Emphasis in original.

## 2.3 Bhutan: an overview

This section has two aims. One is to provide a background to Bhutanese discourses on modernisation, culture and tradition which the following chapters will examine more closely. The other aim is to discuss how Bourdieu's framework is relevant in the Bhutanese context. The first part includes a brief introduction to Bhutan and its development policy and short descriptions of the socio-economic changes which have taken place over the last four decades from the perspective of different people. The second part will focus on the situation of young people, offering a brief illustration of their social context and also Bhutan's education system. Thirdly it discusses Bhutan's geo-political environment and the external threats the country has faced over several centuries. Later on this book will argue that the regional environment has played a significant role in the formation of development discourses and doxa in Bhutan. Finally the relevance of the theoretical perspective of this study to the Bhutanese context will be considered. The focus on young people in this study is, as will be shown in the next chapter, largely because of the fieldwork environment. Young people, the group most influenced by the modernisation process, were questioned in order to provide an interesting perspective on issues surrounding modernisation, culture and tradition.

Bhutan, nestled in the Himalayas, is bordered by the Tibetan region of China and the Indian states of Sikkim, Assam, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. This extremely rugged and mountainous territory of approximately 46,500 square kilometres, about the same size as Switzerland, is the home of about six hundred thousand people.<sup>18</sup> The country is often

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<sup>18</sup> This is an official estimated population (Planning Commission, 1991; Ministry of Planning, 1996). UNDP however shows different population figures. According to the *Human Development Report 2000*, the population of Bhutan was two million in 1998 (UNDP, 2000). However, a UNDP report on Bhutan published in 1998 estimates the population to be 600,000 (UNDP, 1998). It is sometimes difficult to obtain precise statistical data on Bhutan. Even the official development plan document points to the lack of reliable data not only on population but also on other areas. I have tried to obtain

divided into three geographical regions: the south, the southern foothills, is between 150m and 1,500m above sea level, and has a subtropical climate. The north region, the higher Himalayas, lies above 3,000m and contains several peaks above 7,000m, such as Gangkhar Puensum (7,497m) and Jumolhari (7,316m). The central area between the two regions, the inner Himalayas, is between 1,500m and 3,000m and has a temperate climate. This is the area where the main valleys are situated (Navara, 1997). Both Thimphu, the capital, and Paro where the country's only airport is located are in this region. The climate in Bhutan is largely dependant on altitude, and even varies within regions. Vegetation may vary considerably within one hour of driving, and so do the agricultural activities. As one Bhutanese puts it, "In Bhutan while people are harvesting in one valley, people in the next are sowing seeds." Seventy-two percent of the country is covered by forest (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 1). Winding roads connects most of the twenty district headquarters which are located throughout the county. The total road network is about 3,200 km. Main routes consists of an east-west "high-way" and two north-south "high-ways". The biggest town, Thimphu, has a population of between 30,000 and 40,000 (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 6). Other major towns are Phuntsholing and Trashigang.<sup>19</sup> Small towns are developing around district headquarters.

The currency of the country is Ngultrum, which has been held at par with the Indian rupee since its introduction in 1974. Per capita income was US\$470 in 1995,<sup>20</sup> and agriculture

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information which is as new and reliable as possible, however readers have to keep in mind of limitations of the data.

<sup>19</sup> During the period of the Seventh Five Year Plan (1992-1997), the Bhutanese government published a document outlining the official spelling of Dzongkha terms in the Roman alphabet. It contained several changes from the conventional spellings which had been widely used before. One example is "Trashigang", which used to be spelt "Tashigang".

<sup>20</sup> The fact that most rural settlements are far from market and hence less incorporated in the cash economy suggests that per capita income is not very adequate as an indicator of material conditions.

accounts for thirty-eight percent of GDP. Eighty-five percent of the population derive a living from agriculture.

The cash economy is a relatively new phenomenon in Bhutan. Until 1970, most taxes were collected in kind and in several forms of labour tax. Even today in rural areas there are various forms of labour contribution, such as participating in the construction of a local school or hospital and renovation of *dzong*.<sup>21</sup> As modernisation progresses, more roads have been constructed, and people have become increasingly mobile.<sup>22</sup> The civil service has expanded and more people live on cash incomes.<sup>23</sup> More towns have weekend markets where farmers can sell vegetables, cheese and grains. More materials come in from India, Thailand and other foreign countries.<sup>24</sup> More and more farmers cultivate cash crops, such as oranges, apples, asparagus, cardamom and potatoes, and export them to neighbouring countries.<sup>25</sup> Needless to say the degree of monetisation is greater in urban areas than in rural ones.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> According to the Eighth Five Year Plan, a labour tax based on the household (*gungda woola*) was abolished during the period of the Seventh Five Year Plan, and emphasis has now been placed on a voluntary and free labour contribution by people during the implementation of development programmes which benefit them directly (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 53). Concerning the various kinds of labour tax, see Imaeda (1994: p. 90).

<sup>22</sup> There was no motorable road in Bhutan before 1961. The number of vehicles, including two wheelers, increased from 700 in 1980 to 7002 in 1988 (Planning Commission, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Between 1977 and 1987 the size of the civil service doubled (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 45).

<sup>24</sup> Druk Air started cargo flights between Paro and Bangkok four times a month from 2000 (*Kuensel*, 29th January 2000).

<sup>25</sup> For example, potato growers in Bumthang district earned about Nu.4,154 million from selling 850 tons of potatoes to India in 1995. That increased in 1996 to an income of Nu.4,614 million from 873 tons of potatoes. An agriculture expert from the district says that potato cultivation "spread like wild fire" as farmers found it a rewarding crop. These figures exclude direct sales to Indian buyers (and sales in the domestic market) and only refer to transactions through the FCB (Food Corporation of Bhutan) auction yard (*Kuensel*, 29th November 1997).

<sup>26</sup> A student in Sherubtse College told me that in his natal village in Lhuntse, which is three days walk from the nearest motorable road, the average



Within the South Asian context, Bhutan has a much better record on most basic welfare indicators. Life expectancy in 1995 was 66.1 years. The infant mortality rate was 7.07 per cent, and the literacy rate 54 per cent.<sup>27</sup> The gross enrolment rate at the primary level was estimated to be 72% in 1995. The population growth rate is said to be 3.1 per cent per year (Ministry of Planning, 1996).

According to official accounts, Bhutan became a unified country in the seventeenth century under Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1652<sup>28</sup>), a religious leader of the Drukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. He established a theocracy in 1652 and gave Bhutan an administrative system and a code of law. This theocracy came to an end in 1907 when Ugyen Wangchuck (1862-1926; regn. 1907-1926) was elected to be the First King of Bhutan (Ministry of Planning, 1996).<sup>29</sup> The present king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck (1955-; regn. 1972- ), is the fourth King in this hereditary monarchy. Karma Ura writes that Bhutan emerged from its self-imposed isolation and started development activities in 1961 under the leadership of the third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1928-1972; regn. 1952-1972) (Ura,<sup>30</sup> 1994: p. 35). Karma Ura

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farmer's cash income is about Nu.3,000 per year. Considering that the monthly salary of a newly qualified high school teacher is a little less than Nu.6,000, this amount is very low. It may be imagined that in his village, households are largely self-subsistence, and a large part of trade is barter and with minimal cash transactions.

<sup>27</sup> In 1997, for example, the adult literacy rates in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan were 53.5%, 38.9%, 38.1% and 40.9%, respectively (UNDP, 1999: p. 136).

<sup>28</sup> There are different views on the exact year Shabdrung died in. Pommaret (1997a: p. 200) writes that he died in 1651, and Aris (1994a: p. 15) says it was *around* 1651. These different views are probably because of the fact that Shabdrung entered strict seclusion for meditation in 1651, and never reappeared. This is not unusual for high monks of Tibetan Buddhism. His death was kept secret until 1705 (Pommaret, 1997a: p. 200).

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed account of Bhutan's past, Aris (1979) and Aris (1994a) are comprehensive works. For concise but useful works, see Pommaret (1997a) and Pommaret (1997b).

<sup>30</sup> Originally Bhutanese names do not make a distinction between the first name and family name as we know them in the West. In this book however

designates the period from 1652 to 1961 “medieval Bhutan”, and gives an extensive illustration of the differences between medieval Bhutan and “modern Bhutan”, the period after 1961.<sup>31</sup> For Karma Ura the transformation of Bhutan from a society imbued with medieval characteristics to one with more modern features can also be expressed as a change “from a customary self-subsistence economy to a planned trading economy” and “from a state whose ideology was the support of religious orders to one with a commitment to the socio-economic development of the country” (p. 25). In “medieval Bhutan”, governance took the form of a dual system of a state clergy headed by *Je Khenpo*<sup>32</sup> and a theocracy administered by monks and headed by temporal rulers or *Desi*. The “medieval economy” was very successful within a context of poor internal communications and isolation from the outside world. It afforded a degree of affluence at the subsistence level. Trans-Himalayan and Indo-Bhutanese trade did take place by caravan to a limited extent. Among the valley communities, however there was a vigorous exchange of goods and merchandise (Ura, 1994: pp. 27-28). The socio-economic changes since the launch of development activities, however, as well as the political reforms since the end of the 1950s could be seen to have been significant and dynamic enough to create two different eras in Bhutan.<sup>33</sup>

Development activities were started in 1961, and almost entirely financed by India for the first two five-year plans. Since then the source of development assistance has been diversified, and at present Bhutan receives external

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the second name of Bhutanese authors is treated as the same as the family name of other (non-Bhutanese) writers. In addition, titles such as *Dasho* (high officials who are awarded a red scarf and a sword by the king) and *Lyonpo* (minister) are used almost as if they are part of people’s names in Bhutan. In this book these titles are used in the text but not included in the reference section at the end of the book.

<sup>31</sup> This type of view, which divides Bhutan’s history at 1961, is not uncommon. Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba (1996) also shares this perspective.

<sup>32</sup> The Chief Abbot of Bhutan.

<sup>33</sup> A fully-fledged parliament was convened in 1953. The third king declared the freedom of the serfs in 1956 (Ura, 1994: p. 31).

assistance from nineteen multilateral donors, nineteen bilateral donors and some non-governmental organisations. One of the features of the government documents concerning development activities is the coexistence of modernist voices which assess development as an achievement, and of constant reminders of the importance of preserving the "unique Bhutanese culture and tradition". This is because the government maintains as a publicly-stated aim the harmonisation of economic development and the preservation of its cultural heritage. Among the objectives of the Eighth Five Year Plan (Ministry of Planning, 1996), "sustainability" (which includes the conservation of cultural values) and the "preservation and promotion of cultural and traditional values" are given as much importance as other objectives such as "self-reliance", "national security", "decentralisation and community participation", and "privatisation and private sector development". This feature can also be observed to be part of sectoral development strategies. For example, in the renewable natural resources sector, while the government says that the export of oranges, apples, potatoes, cardamom, and mushrooms to India, Bangladesh and Japan results in rising cash incomes for farmers, it acknowledges that traditional soil conservation techniques can keep soil erosion to a minimum (Planning Commission, 1991). Similarly, in the health sector it is noted that "Since the introduction of modern health care services in Bhutan in the 1960s, careful attention has been given to traditional practice and the people's perception of illness" (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 165). At the same time it states that the health status of the population has improved remarkably, pointing out the dramatic fall in the infant mortality rate and improvement in other indicators. In the section on education, an official document notes that:

The modern, western form of education in Bhutan started in the 1950s. Until then, monastic education was almost the only form of formal education available in the country. While monastic education continues to be an important part of the national culture, western education has been promoted and expanded.... The

gross primary enrolment rate is estimated to be 72% (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 178).

A close examination of each development plan will be undertaken later in this book. Here I would like to introduce various accounts of development and the socio-economic changes which accompanied it that I heard from Bhutanese people. These accounts aim not only to illustrate the multiplicity of discourses on social change, but also to cover some background information which will be of assistance in the following chapters. I will take a couple of aspects of social change as examples: firstly, accounts from urban and rural areas, and secondly responses to both Bhutanese and Western knowledge.

Four decades of development activities appear to have brought many economic and social changes to Bhutan. Although the majority of people in Bhutan live at least half a day's walking distance from a road (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 114), the impact of development activities, as Karma Ura writes, are felt even in the remote mountains (1997: p. 239). People know through various means about life in towns<sup>34</sup> and this inflow of information makes some people aspire to a certain degree to a "colourful" town life.

As Kunzang Chöden remarks, the emergence of urban areas in Bhutan is a new experience, which has only taken place over the last thirty years (Chöden, 1997: p. 253). Villages are still considered as a place where "the real Bhutanese life" takes place and as the source of the Bhutanese community spirit of reciprocity, hospitality and helpfulness. I was often told in Thimphu that I must experience the real Bhutanese life in a village. The people who suggested this said to me, "Thimphu is not the real Bhutan. This is only 'semi-Bhutan'". The first generation of town inhabitants still has a strong connection with their natal village. It is not uncommon for

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<sup>34</sup> People in villages get to know about the "colourful" town life, when, for example, someone from the village working in town comes back to the village for an annual ritual or festival.

both older and younger generations to go back to their villages for the annual religious ritual and other occasions. For example, a hairdresser in her mid-twenties<sup>35</sup> described herself as from the village where her parents come from,<sup>36</sup> although she has been brought up in Thimphu. She told me that she still feels a strong attachment to the village and often goes back to her parents' house there.

The introduction of Western medicine and Western education appears to have made a great impact on society. I would like to introduce a few examples of people's interactions with it. A lady in her late twenties working in a tour agency described how when one becomes sick in the village people first go to see an astrologer to find out the cause and do the relevant *puja*<sup>37</sup> (depending on the cause), and then, if they are not cured, they go to a Basic Health Unit (BHU)<sup>38</sup> or a hospital. In

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<sup>35</sup> She had finished Class 10. This is, in Bhutan's context, reasonably well-educated. According to the statistics (Education Division, 1997: p. 6) between one third and a quarter of students in Class 10 go on to Class 11. Also passing Class 10 is these days a usual requirement in order to get a town job, like a teaching or nursing post. Her brothers and sisters are also well-educated. Most of them work in the civil service and BBS (Bhutan Broadcasting Service). The interview took place in August 1997.

<sup>36</sup> The identification of oneself with one's parents' place of origin can often be observed in Bhutan. This is for one of the following reasons or a combination of them. Firstly, registration often takes place in their parents' village, whether or not a person is a resident of that village. Secondly, in Bhutan the household rather than the individual is often the social and legal unit. Thirdly, while their registration is in the father's village people present themselves from the place their mother originates from, or they refer to both the mother's and the father's place of origin. In this case their mother tongue seems to give a psychological attachment.

<sup>37</sup> *Puja* is a word for religious ritual, borrowed from Nepali or Hindi. In Dzongkha it is *choku*, but people frequently use *puja*, especially when they talk in English.

<sup>38</sup> According to an official document, the Basic Health Unit is a primary level institution in the health care system and caters for about 1,500-5,000 people. It is staffed by a Health Assistant, Auxiliary Nurse Midwife and Basic Health worker. There are ninety-seven BHUs and twenty-six hospitals in Bhutan. For indigenous medicine there is one indigenous hospital in Thimphu and ten indigenous units attached to district hospitals. The relatively small number of units and hospitals for indigenous medicine is, according to a health official, partly because of the limited availability of the

town, meanwhile, people go to a hospital and at the same time do *puja*. People are not always dependant on religious practitioners<sup>39</sup> and doctors of indigenous medicine, because they now have an alternative - modern medicine. An education officer confessed that in the modern education sector it is becoming difficult to teach indigenous beliefs, such as belief in spirits, since they cannot be probed scientifically. One old gentleman told me, "With the introduction of Western medicine and Western education, many aspects of Bhutanese life started to be questioned". In other words, as Karma Ura points out (1997: p. 247), Bhutanese culture and values have been relativised.

What I wish to highlight here is the existence of a multiplicity of viewpoints about social change. Urban life are recognised to have positive and negative connotations, and both modern scientific medicine and traditional healers are perceived differently according to a person's position in the society. This multiplicity of discourses is a central concern of this book.

### **The education system and young people**

There are three modes of education in Bhutan, namely monastic education, modern education,<sup>40</sup> described as secular English medium education, and one focusing on Bhutanese culture, religion and language.<sup>41</sup> The latter is taught mainly in Dzongkha, Bhutan's national language,<sup>42</sup> whereas in the modern education sector English is the medium of instruction and this is the dominant sector of Bhutanese education at the

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medication, which cannot be mass-produced (Ministry of Planning, 1996: pp. 166-168).

<sup>39</sup> Religious practitioners include shamans, astrologers, lay monks (*gomchen*) and ordained monks (*gelong*).

<sup>40</sup> According to Driem, the medium of instruction in secular Western-inspired education in Bhutan was Hindi until 1964 (Driem, 1994: p. 95).

<sup>41</sup> The third group of schools includes the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, Simtokha, the School of Arts and Crafts, Royal Academy of Performing Arts, National Institute of Traditional Medicine, Thimphu, and the Trashiyangtse Rigney Institute.

<sup>42</sup> In one of these schools mathematics and science are taught in English.

present time. In monastic education Dzongkha is the medium of instruction.

Education is an expanding sector in Bhutan. With regard to modern education, before the advent of planned development, there were fifty-nine primary schools and no junior or higher secondary schools, let alone a college. The number of pupils was only three thousand (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 4). In 1997, there were one hundred and seven community schools,<sup>43</sup> one hundred and fifty-seven primary schools,<sup>44</sup> twenty five junior high schools, thirteen high schools and two institutions which provide undergraduate level education. There were about ninety thousand students both in primary education and in secondary education (Education Division, 1997). Beyond secondary education, besides degree courses, there are several training institutes, most of which are for students who have finished Class 10.<sup>45</sup> However, not all of them are under the Education Division. For instance, the Natural Resources Training Institute is under the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Royal Institute of Health Sciences is administered by the Health Division. Dzongkha medium education is not in the mainstream in terms of the number of students and schools. There are two Dzongkha medium schools which are administered by the Education Division, with about four hundreds students (Education Division, 1997).<sup>46</sup> The same sort of data is not available for monastic

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<sup>43</sup> Community schools provide primary education. They are built and maintained by the community where at least thirty students are found to be within one hour's walking distance. According to a planning document, the establishment of community schools within easier reach of children's homes has contributed to an increase in the numbers of children attending school (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 74).

<sup>44</sup> This figure includes seven private schools.

<sup>45</sup> Enrolment rate at primary level is estimated to be 72% which corresponds to about 75,000 students. Enrolment rate for secondary level and above is not available, however, the number of students in secondary education is about 16,000, and in tertiary education (Class 11 and above including training institutes) about 2,700. (Education Division, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Other institutions providing Dzongkha medium training are the School of Arts and Crafts and Royal Academy of Performing Arts, both of which are

education, primarily because not all young monks are in *shaydras*<sup>47</sup> (monastic schools), - many of them are instead in monasteries and *dzong*.<sup>48</sup> It is also because figures broken down by age are not available for the monk body. There are about four thousand monks supported by the state (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 66), and the number of monks who are not supported by the state, but who live from private patronage, is estimated to be about three thousand (Pommaret, 1994: p. 54). This study will examine young people from all three education sectors, and also those who have left school early.

When Bhutan introduced a modern education programme<sup>49</sup> the entire curriculum mirrored Indian educational practices, and a large proportion of the teaching staff actually came from India. Since then a tremendous effort has been made by the government to "Bhutanise" the education system, as well

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under the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, and the National Institute of Traditional Medicine which is administered by the Health Division.

<sup>47</sup> There is no distinction between singular and plural nouns in Dzongkha as is found in the English language. However I have added "s" to the nouns which are supposed to be plural in order to help readers.

<sup>48</sup> A *dzong* is described as a fortress-monastery, which houses a monastic body and the state/district administration.

<sup>49</sup> This does not mean that there was absolutely nobody in the country at that time who had been educated in modern secular education. The first king and his chamberlain, Ugyen Dorji, were said to be keen on modern education. In 1914 forty-six boys from Bhutan were put into the Scottish mission school in Kalimpong, India, known as Dr. Graham's Homes. Out of these students, twelve were trained in the 1920s as teachers, forest rangers, mining engineers, and so on (Aris, 1994a: p. 104; Collister, 1987: p. 175). Kalimpong, which belonged to Bhutan until 1865, and Darjeeling have continued to be the places which provide education for the Bhutanese. According to Solverson (1995: p. 80), around 1960 Bhutanese students made up almost 80% of the boarders in one school in Darjeeling. Crosette writes that she kept running into public officials who had been pupils at Dr. Graham's Homes (Crosette, 1998). She is not the only one. I also met many officials of various ranks and also people working in the private sector who studied in missionary schools in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Even now some children of relatively well-to-do families are sent to these schools. Enrolment figures of this book however do not include those who are in schools abroad, including schools in these areas.



as expanding schools and improving the quality of education. As early as the Third Five Year Plan (1971-76), the government called for the translation of textbooks into the Bhutanese language, and the Sixth Five Year Plan (1987-92) states, "Having been structured on the Indian System, the education system in Bhutan needs to be reformed to relate it to the values, environment and the history of Bhutanese people" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 33).

The position of modern education in society has changed during the last forty years, according to several government officials. When the government started modern education the parents generally did not want to send their children to school, because they believed that monastic education, rather than modern education, would give their children a better next life,<sup>50</sup> and also because children represented a valuable source of work in the fields. They said that parents used to beg government officials not to take their children to the modern school, which was often ten days, and sometimes twenty days, walk from home. More recently, officials continue, parents are willing to send their children to school, and the scene of parents rushing to school to gain admission for their children is regularly featured in the newspaper at the beginning of the academic year. Although there are various views on modern education in Bhutan, here I would point out that this general change in attitude towards modern education seems to reflect well the changes over the last forty years in people's perception of what a desirable career is.

I will argue that it is generally accepted in society that a high official in the government is well respected and has one of the most desirable jobs in Bhutan. Formerly young people in Bhutan did not have much choice of occupation. Farming was the way of life for the majority. These days, a successful

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<sup>50</sup> Many Bhutanese believe in the next life. Tibetan Buddhism teaches that all creatures repeat death and life until they achieve Enlightenment. People believe that they are a reincarnation of something, maybe a human being, maybe an animal, and that the quality of their next life will be determined by the religious merits they accumulate during this life.

career in Bhutan seems to encompass completing a bachelor's degree in Sherubtse College - the only college in Bhutan - or other universities abroad, being selected to join the civil service,<sup>51</sup> and eventually becoming a *dasho*,<sup>52</sup> a high official in the government. To ascend this "Bhutanese ladder of success" one has to be educated in the modern education sector, and this seems to be one of the biggest factors behind the inflation of the value of modern education in Bhutan.

### **Bhutan's geo-political environment**

The regional environment is important for this small country. Bhutan is sandwiched between two giant nations, India and China, a situation which has meant that Bhutan has had to deal carefully in its external relations. Bhutan has been the subject of external threats for many centuries, and a feeling of insecurity about the nation's independence appears to be constantly in the Bhutanese mind. Firstly, from the sixteenth century onwards, Bhutan has been attacked by the Tibetans several times. Historically Bhutan has had many contacts with Tibet, and people in western Bhutan are considered to be descendants of those who emigrated from Tibet;<sup>53</sup> in the ninth and tenth centuries many people, particularly aristocrats, fled from Tibet<sup>54</sup> and settled in the valleys of central and eastern Bhutan, where they assumed power (Pommaret, 1994: p. 53). Many religious men came to Bhutan from Tibet between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries (Pommaret, 1994: p. 56).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Those who get the scholarship for so-called "professionals", such as doctors, engineers, and architects, do not have to sit this examination. They can automatically join the civil service after completing their studies.

<sup>52</sup> *Dasho* is a title awarded by the king of Bhutan to certain officials. A *dasho* wears a red scarf and carries a sword (Pommaret, 1994: p. 263).

<sup>53</sup> According to Pommaret (1997c: p. 47), the migrations from Tibet are thought to have occurred in different waves starting from the sixth or seventh century onwards.

<sup>54</sup> Pommaret (1997a: pp. 181-183) writes that this happened because the situation in Tibet became chaotic after the assassination of the anti-Buddhist king Langdarma in 842.

<sup>55</sup> Among these people, prominent figures are Phajo Drukgom Shigpo (1184 - 1251), who introduced the Drukpa Kagyupa school of Tibetan Buddhism to

Moreover the country was a major trading partner with Bhutan for many centuries until the border was closed in 1959. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (the founding father of Bhutan) was also from Tibet. He was born into the Gya family, which was the head of the Drukpa Kagyupa school of Tibetan Buddhism (Pommaret, 1997a: p. 192). He became the eighteenth abbot of Ralung, the great Drukpa monastery in Tibet near the northern border of Bhutan, and was recognised as the incarnation of a famous Drukpa scholar, Pema Karpo (1527 - 92). But this recognition was challenged by the Tsang Desi, who was the ruler of the Tibetan province of Tsang and virtually king of Tibet (Imaeda, 1994: p. 37), and who had his own candidate. In 1616, fearing for his life, Ngawang Namgyal fled from Ralung and sought refuge in western Bhutan, where he was invited by followers of the Drukpa school which had been firmly established in the region since the thirteen century (Pommaret, 1994: p. 60). Shortly after the arrival of Ngawang Namgyal in Bhutan, Tsang Desi attacked Bhutan. Forced back, the Tibetans attacked again in 1634 and 1639 but without great success. In 1645 and 1648, they made equally vain attempts at conquest. For the Bhutanese, Shabdrung is the man who unified Bhutan and laid the foundation of Bhutanese system of administration and law and, at the same time, he is seen as the figure who guarded Bhutan's independence from Tibetan aggression.

More recently, Chinese aggression against Tibet in 1950 has posed a serious threat to Bhutan's security. Mathou points out that because Bhutan had very strong cultural and historic ties with Tibet, it worried a lot about the conquest of its neighbour (Mathou, 1994: p. 53). The Chinese occupation of Tibet meant the elimination of Tibet as a buffer between China and India. Bhutan came to face China directly. More ominously in 1939 China included Bhutan in a list of its "lost territories", and thereafter Chinese cartographers included

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Bhutan, Thangtong Gyelpo (1385 - 1464) and Drukpa Kunle (1455 - 1529) (Pommaret, 1997a: pp. 184-187).

part of Bhutan in China (Mathou, 1994: p. 53).<sup>56</sup> Aris reports a tense atmosphere inside Bhutan, "I remember my own surprise in the 1960s when I witnessed fully ordained monks of the state monastic body receiving formal military training at Punakha at a time when invasion from the north was reckoned a real possibility"<sup>57</sup> (Aris, 1994c: p. 23). Up to the summer of 1959, according to Rahul (1997: p. 42), there was flourishing border trade between Bhutan and Tibet. Several trade agents looked after Bhutanese trade interests in Tibet, and Bhutan used to appoint its representative in Lhasa from among the Bhutanese traders engaged in this trade. Bhutan had also been administering eight enclaves in West Tibet since the seventeenth century, which China seized in 1959. In 1960, Bhutan closed its border with Tibet, cut all communication with China, and banned trade (Kohli, 1993: p. 71). The Chinese aggression against Tibet and the resulting insecurity felt by the Bhutanese was, as we will see later, one of the main reasons that the Bhutanese government started constructing motorable roads connecting the country with India, and launched development activities in general. Since then Bhutan has strengthened its ties with India. The country's first and second five year plans were almost entirely financed by India and the education system was modelled on that of India. This was probably not only because of the possibility that Bhutan might be the next target of Chinese aggression, but also because Bhutan could be involved in a confrontation between China and India. This possibility came close to being a reality in 1962 when the Sino-Indian dispute resulted in a military clash. According to Rose, Kameng district in India's North-East Frontier, bordering on eastern Bhutan, was the scene of the largest and most decisive battles in this border war (Rose, 1977: pp. 80-81).<sup>58</sup> If Bhutan had

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<sup>56</sup> Since 1984 the Chinese and Bhutanese governments have met every year to negotiate border issues (Mathou, 1994: p. 83).

<sup>57</sup> Historically, according to Aris, cases in which monks have acted as soldiers are not uncommon. Numerous examples can be found of Bhutanese monks acting as commanders of troops (Aris, 1994b: p. 24).

<sup>58</sup> The Himalayan pass most critical to the support of Chinese operations in the Kameng district of the North-East Frontier is situated on the Bhutan-Tibet border. This pass is the only pass in the eastern Himalayas that is

been involved in the confrontation between these two countries, its survival as a small state would have been difficult.

Another country which was swallowed by a big neighbouring nation was Sikkim, and this event showed that even India may not be a good friend to Bhutan. Sikkim was also a kingdom which had Tibetan Buddhism as its religious background. However in 1975 Sikkim was annexed by India. The country had been a protectorate of British India, and after India gained independence in 1947 it continued to be India's protectorate (Mathou, 1994: p. 78). The immigration of the Nepali-speaking population from Darjeeling and eastern Nepal was encouraged by the British, and by 1891, according to Hutt, the Nepali speaking population far outnumbered the Lepchas, the original population of Sikkim, and the Bhutias, who are of Tibetan origin (Hutt, 1994: p. 9). The Nepali-speaking population took a stance against the government which was dominated by the Lepchas and Bhutias. After the independence of India, this anti-government stance was intensified. In 1949, India took Sikkim under direct administrative control when the anti-government movement seemed to be on the verge of getting out of control. India intervened at the request of Sikkim's ruler, but, according to Rose, there was a suspicion among the Bhutanese that the intervention was engineered by the Indian government and that it represented the first stage in a contrived accession of Sikkim to the Indian Union (Rose, 1977: p. 72). In the 1974 general election a political party which advocated Sikkim's participation in the political and economic institutions of India dominated, gaining thirty-one out of thirty-two seats in the Assembly. The result was the complete dissolution of the monarchy and the merger of Sikkim with India (Bhattacharya, 1997: pp. 4-5).

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usually snow-free during the winter season. If the Chinese had intended to continue military operations in that area, according to Rose, they would have had to use this pass for logistical support. Rose argues that this would have brought Bhutan into the war (Rose, 1977: pp. 80-81).

Sikkim's case shows two kinds of possible threats to Bhutan. One is Indian expansion, and the other is a threat of growing migration into the country, especially of the Nepali-speaking population. From the Bhutanese point of view, Sikkim is an example of a Buddhist kingdom which was brought down by a newly migrated Nepali population - something which the Bhutanese do not want repeated in their own land.

Another threat to Bhutan has become apparent more recently. Militant organisations, such as ULFA (the United Liberation Front of Assam) and the Bodos,<sup>59</sup> which are active in the state of Assam in India, have started to create serious problems for country. Their activities in south-eastern Bhutan demand careful handling from the government, since the issue holds the possibility that relations with India may become delicate. Bhutan has an open border with India from Sikkim to West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and the militants are intruding into the south-eastern area of Bhutan as a result. The ULFA and Bodo militants have established their camps in the forest areas of south-east Bhutan<sup>60</sup> which are close to their villages in Assam, and from there continue their militant activities against the state government of Assam. It is difficult to control movements of people between the two countries, according to the former Home Minister, because of this open border which the people of these countries can cross freely. It is difficult to distinguish a Bodo or ULFA militant from other Indians. He also points out that because the border area is covered by dense forests, which make good hiding places for

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<sup>59</sup> According to *Kuensel* (25th July 1998), the ULFA is a militant organisation fighting for the independence of Assam from India, and the Bodos are a tribal group fighting for the creation of a separate state of Bodoland. The militants might eventually affect the relationship between India and Bhutan because they are committing terrorist and criminal acts in India and escaping to camps which they have established in Bhutan. There have been several incidents, in one of which four Bhutanese policemen were killed by Bodo militants (*Kuensel*, 4th October 1997).

<sup>60</sup> Priesner reports that according to an Indian weekly, *Sunday* (5th-11th October 1997), the ULFA has four hundred and fifty militants in Bhutan; the *Telegraph* (20th October 1997) on the other hand claims there are twenty camps sheltering two thousand five hundred militants in Bhutan (Priesner, 1998: p. 158).

the militants, it is almost impossible for Bhutanese security troops to cordon off the entire area and to take measures against the militants (*Kuensel*, 12th July 1997).

Among Bhutanese these activities are perceived as a serious threat to Bhutan's sovereignty, and since 1997 the National Assembly has had lengthy discussions about this issue. Members of the Assembly have described the infiltration of the ULFA-Bodo militants into Bhutan as the greatest problem that Bhutan has ever faced (*Kuensel*, 25th July 1998). During the Eighth Five Year Plan Meeting in the district of Samdrup Jongkhar which was chaired by the King, people expressed their great concern over the issue. From the discussions, the main problems arising from the presence of these militants in Bhutan's territory seem to be threefold. Firstly, it is a serious security issue. The militants planted bombs in Samdrup Jongkhar, kidnapped Bhutanese, and even killed four Bhutanese policemen (*Kuensel*, 4th October 1997). A former *chimi* of Nganglam<sup>61</sup> said that the militants shot at vehicles on the road, harassed and robbed people, and stole cattle and other livestock (*Kuensel*, 25th April 1998). Forest rangers of the area are also becoming targets for their attacks.<sup>62</sup> People are also concerned by reports that the Indian army is entering Bhutanese territory in pursuit of the militants (*Kuensel*, 12th July 1997). Secondly, as pointed out in the National Assembly in 1997, the situation could affect the relationship between Bhutan and India, thereby eventually threatening national security. Members of the Assembly are aware of allegations made on foreign radio stations and in newspapers that Bhutan is feeding and sustaining the militants. If the Indian government took these allegations seriously, it would affect relations between the two countries, though so far there is no sign of this happening. Thirdly, people fear that the anti-government movement of ethnic Nepalese people may join these militants and create an even more serious threat to

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<sup>61</sup> Nganlam area in Samdrup Jongkhar is seen as a high risk area, according to the *dzongda* of the district (*Kuensel*, 25th July 1998).

<sup>62</sup> Incidents are reported in 4th October 1997, 13th February 1999 and 5th June 1999 editions of *Kuensel*.

Bhutan's sovereignty and independence. These delicate external relations and the perceived threats to Bhutan – felt by both government and people alike – have played an important role in production of Bhutanese discourses and, as we will see later, this is one of powerful explanatory factors of Bhutanese doxa.

### **Multiple discourse in Bhutan**

The present study shares some of the same concerns as discursive analyses of development in the sense that it also understands that development theories and practices have been Eurocentric, and that the West has achieved power over the non-West through the discourse of development itself. This book however argues that we must search for an approach beyond discourse analysis in order to incorporate the perspective of people in non-Western societies into the discussion of the idea of development. Considering that one of the sources of the power of Orientalism is the essentialisation of the non-Western world, an approach which goes beyond discourse analyses must firstly try to avoid essentialised representation by focusing on the multiplicity of discourses that exist in any given context.

In one of the very few studies of Bhutan's culture and tradition in the transitional period of modernisation, Dujardin argues in his study of Bhutanese architecture that the Bhutanese no longer seem to be aware of the unique potential and dynamic character of their tradition (1994: p. 137), and that tradition appears to have been narrowed down to the level of wall-paper decorations, by providing each "westernised" urban building with a "Bhutanese" character (1997: p. 65). This book will argue that his view is only partly relevant, since it represents one of many views on modernisation, culture and tradition among young people in Bhutan.

There are many sources of multiple discourse. For example, different meanings are often attached to the same term. In Bhutan undesirable situations, such as juvenile delinquency



and robbery of *chorten*,<sup>63</sup> tend to be attributed to modernisation, and thereby the down side of modernisation is emphasised socially, even though at the same time many positive effects of modernisation are acknowledged. Also being “westernised” has many connotations which vary depending on who is talking: the terms “westernised” and “traditional” are used flexibly to criticise someone, to praise another’s behaviour, and to justify one’s own view.

The second example of multiple discourse would be the different kinds of education. The fact that different types of education are taught in different languages would appear to contribute to the formation of different views in Bhutan. English seems to be the main mediator with the outside world: although radio programmes<sup>64</sup> and newspapers are in both English and Dzongkha<sup>65</sup> and there is not much difference between the different language versions of programmes and newspapers, other media such as magazines and videos are in English or to a lesser extent in Hindi. At the time of my fieldwork, radio broadcasting only took place for about four hours a day, and the newspaper, *Kuensel*, was issued once a week. On the other hand, Indian daily newspapers, journals such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, and fashion magazines are available in Thimphu, and they are written in English. Besides the medium of education, the curriculum is also different from one education sector to another. Students in each education sector are exposed to different kinds of knowledge.

Bourdieu’s theoretical framework is useful when examining multiple discourses. His concepts of orthodoxy and heterodoxy enable us to include the different views held by

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<sup>63</sup> Buddhist monuments. In Bhutan all *chorten* contain religious relics.

<sup>64</sup> TV broadcasting did not exist at the time of my fieldwork - it started from June 1999.

<sup>65</sup> Besides English and Dzongkha, radio programmes are also broadcast in *Shar chopikha* (or *Tshangla*) and in Nepali and the newspaper is available in Nepali as well. *Shar chopikha* is the language which is dominant in eastern Bhutan.

society into the scope of the investigation. Moreover, the concept of doxa brings what is “undiscussed” into the focus of the study. This means that when compared to the discourse analysis of Foucault, an advantage of Bourdieu’s framework is that it can give a much wider scope to the research.

Related to this point, Bourdieu’s framework also brings a dynamic nature into the analysis of discourse. Since Foucault argues that discourse is hegemonic, there is little room left in his theory for counter-discourses to emerge. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, there are in fact competing views on subject such as modernisation in Bhutan, and different meanings are often attached to the same phenomenon or object. Discourses in Bhutan must be thus examined bearing this dynamic nature in mind. Bourdieu’s concepts of heterodoxy, orthodoxy, doxa and crisis enable us to examine the ways in which counter-discourses emerge: as Bourdieu says, crisis is the point at which heterodoxy (counter discourse) emerges through a questioning of doxa and the transformation of the “universe of the undiscussed” into orthodoxy.

I would argue rather hypothetically for a moment that the launch of the development programmes was the point of crisis, which opened up a new universe of discourse. This was the time when Western inspired “modern” education – described as secular English medium education – was introduced, and since then modern English medium education has been one of the most important channels for introducing Western scientific knowledge. Modern education has injected a totally different kind of knowledge, a different way of thinking and different perspectives into the society. Dasho Karma Gayleg, a former Councillor of the Royal Advisory Council, remarks,

In the past the red robe of monks itself was the object of respect in the society. There was no question about it. But these days young people are not very convinced by monks. Monks have to explain and convince them. It is because of modern education and Western knowledge. Young people always ask, ‘why, why’.

His comments show that those people who had had a modern education started to question areas in which previously not a single question had been raised. I will argue that they started to put the Bhutanese way of life and manner of thinking under the spotlight: as Bourdieu says, social orders which were taken for granted started to be questioned. For instance, before the advent of modern education there were no questions raised in society about how sick people were healed. People went to see the astrologer, shaman, *gomchen*<sup>66</sup> or monks and had *puja*. Western knowledge however insists that sick people have to see a doctor of Western medicine. On agricultural matters, people previously consulted with astrologers or other religious practitioners about their work in the fields. But agriculture extension workers armed with Western knowledge would argue that there were better ways of planting and harvesting which were scientifically proven. Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, the Minister of Health and Education points out another area in which the old social order started to be questioned:

If parents are uneducated and children are educated, the children start to look down upon their parents, and they do not respect their parents any more. It is same for the people who have been respected in society and regarded as having authority, such as *gup*.<sup>67</sup> In this way, traditional hierarchy is collapsing. The value of respect toward elders and authority, which is a very important part of Bhutanese values, is declining.

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<sup>66</sup> *Gomchen* is often described as a lay priest - seemingly a contradiction in terms. *Gomchen* are in fact half-layman and half-clergy, as they live at home, have a family, and earn their living in secular occupations, such as agriculture or the civil service. At the same time, they receive religious teachings that permit them to perform ceremonies. According to Pommaré (1994: p. 55), the number of *gomchen* is estimated at about 15,000. They play a very significant role in isolated villages where they stand in for monks in all the rituals that villagers need to have performed.

<sup>67</sup> Head man of a *gewog*, or block (Ura, 1995: p. 366). A *gewog* consists of several villages (Ura, 1994: p. 39).

Thus I would hypothesise that the introduction of modern education as part of development activities led to a crisis in which questions were raised about what hitherto had been the normal social order. As the existing doxa was questioned, a new universe of discourse opened up. However this hypothesis does have a problem, because in Bourdieu's theory the crisis is lead by heterodoxy while in Bhutan's case the state itself seems to have initiated the change. I shall come back to this point later in this book and examine the relevance of Bourdieu's framework to Bhutanese discourses by looking more closely at the discourses circulating among young people and also by providing a more comprehensive picture of the transformation of these discourses. Crisis will be discussed in the context of the regional situation and the book will argue that Bhutan's changing geopolitical environment was one of the most important factors in understanding why the Bhutanese government initiated the crisis (i.e. development programmes).

The book also argues for the importance of understanding why people represent themselves as they do. This is, I argue, a very useful window through which to view the society, because each representation reflects a person's position in that society and how they reflect social norms. In other words, we try to understand the socially structured subconsciousness which allows certain views to be formulated by a person, and the social context of these different views. The scope of investigation of this book is not only discourses and doxa, but it is also extended to encompass a much wider field of social analysis: the "Bhutanese ladder of success" is seen as one of the reference points for how most young people can tell what their position is in the society. Different future projections associated with each of three kinds of education also signify a young person's position. The prevalent social norms and the history of the society can also be expected to at least partly explain how each view has been formulated. Bourdieu's concepts of capital and field are used in this context in order to understand the stakes of the field and

each agent's position in that field. This in turn allows us to understand the "motivations" behind discourses.

Furthermore, the book tries to consider local discourses and their interaction with the state discourse in the much wider context of globalisation. Inspired by Friedman's "global anthropology", the book will examine the influence of the regional geo-political situation, and also the influence of Western development discourse, on the formation and transformation of Bhutanese discourses. Throughout the book Bhutanese development discourses - both those of officials and those of young people - are constantly compared and contrasted with Western development discourse, especially modernisation theories. The book thereby considers the extent to which the hegemony of the Western development discourse influences Bhutanese development discourses.

Having established the departure point for the discussion, the book will next clarify the context of the fieldwork and its methodology.

### **Chapter 3: Fieldwork Methodology**

Anthropological work usually depends for its information on fieldwork which takes place in a certain time period and in a certain geographical location. Needless to say, there is a limit on what a researcher can collect as “data” in these circumstances. Much more importantly, anthropological data is largely created in the relation between a researcher and the people studied. The text presented here is about the Bhutanese, and “the Bhutanese” are often the subject of the sentence. However, it is ultimately “my” narrative that is the narrative through my eyes and through my experiences. Clifford’s words, that ethnographic truths are partial truths (Clifford, 1986: p. 7) have relevance here. What I am going to write is within the knowledge of what I saw and experienced during the fieldwork. And what I saw or experienced depends on who I am, both individually, socially and historically (Caplan, 1988: p. 10). Therefore it is essential to clarify the individual dimension of fieldwork. This chapter aims to provide information about the location and the context I was situated in during my fieldwork. As Crick remarks, context is defined from two sides. That is, as the ethnographer is theorising about the people studied, they too are imposing meanings on the situation (Crick, 1982: p. 25). The chapter is about how the Bhutanese saw my role and how I found myself in that society.

#### **3.1 Location and Context**

When I started research on Bhutan’s development in 1995, nobody, including myself, was sure if long-term fieldwork would be possible in Bhutan. Various inquiries I made to people related to Bhutan in one way or another only held little prospect. The only encouragement I heard was from a person who kept strong ties with the Bhutanese. He said, “A strong point for you is that you are Japanese. The Bhutanese have a very good impression of the Japanese.” How much my nationality actually affected the consideration of my research proposal by the government is beyond my knowledge, but during my stay in Bhutan I encountered many comments

which supported this statement. Among people from developed countries, the Japanese are clearly distinguished from *pchillip* (the Westerners) in Bhutan. *Pchillip* literally means "outsiders", but in the present usage it only refers to Westerners. One Bhutanese told me that the Bhutanese tend to think that Japan is located just beyond Trashigang.<sup>1</sup> Another Bhutanese remarked that the Japanese and the Bhutanese share attributes of politeness and sensitive consideration towards others, while *pchillip* are self-confident, selfish, and sometimes arrogant. Those comments show their feeling of closeness to Japan compared to other developed countries. Considering these views it may be the case that my nationality and appearance have resulted in the collection of different data from what could have been collected by Westerners.

In June 1996, on the verge of giving up the idea of research on Bhutan, I visited the country for the first time. During my three week stay as a tourist I was given opportunities to meet many government officials and talk about my research. My tactic was to keep my research agenda flexible to their views and demands. I was looking for a person who was open-minded to academic research. These meetings turned out to be a lesson in reading between the lines. The Bhutanese generally do not like to give a negative reply, so even if an actual answer is "No", they do not say so explicitly. For a person who had not had much direct contact with the Bhutanese until then, it was not an easy task. I somehow managed to see a few people who seemed to be understanding towards my research, and from discussions with these people an idea arose: I should be attached to the Education Division during the fieldwork and that the research would focus on young people. My research interest was therefore constructed not only by my theoretical concern - as presented in the previous chapter - but also by this particular situation.

After coming back from Bhutan, I rewrote a research proposal and sent it to the Ministry of Health and Education. What

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<sup>1</sup> Trashigang is an eastern district of Bhutan.

followed was a nerve-racking and patience-testing seven months. During that period many people asked me, "Why is Bhutan so closed?" "What do they want to hide from the outside?" Those questions came out from sympathy towards me, as I was experiencing days of frustration and badly wanted to go back to Bhutan. However, I was still uncomfortable with these questions. The questions reveal prejudices and one-sided expectations that countries are normally open to outsiders and that those countries which are closed are to be regarded with suspicion. Bhutan does not maintain a cautious stance to the outside without reason. The officials told me that they do not want a flood of tourists, pollution, environmental degradation and the decline of traditional life style which many developing countries experience. On the other hand I was surprised during my three week stay by the accessibility of high officials. Ministers, deputy ministers and other officials of various ministries were kind and hospitable enough to give time to a student who visited the country as a tourist and to listen to an idea about research. In which country on earth are such high officials so accessible? There is only a very fine line between "mysterious" and "suspicious", and both attributes encourage speculation. In this uncertain situation it was not only people around me but also myself who speculated about the prospect, thereby frustrating myself even more.

During Easter 1997, I got a phone call which delighted me. It said that my research proposal had been approved by the government. In late April 1997 I went to Bhutan again, expecting to stay for one year. I was attached to the Youth Guidance and Counselling Section (YGCS) of the Education Division during my fieldwork. The data on which this study was based was collected during this time by "a Japanese single female Ph.D. student in her late twenties studying in London". What does this description mean in Bhutan?

The fact that I am from a so-called developed country and that I am well educated from their point of view meant that people expected me to say something about Bhutan's development and its education programmes. I had two



interviews with the BBS (Bhutan Broadcasting Services), the only broadcasting company in Bhutan, and I was asked to give a talk in the college. Being female and single, on the other hand, did not seem to impose a specific role on me socially. In fact the Bhutanese generally do not ascribe specific roles to either sex or a certain marital status to an age group. As Imaeda writes, both men and women are involved in domestic chores. It is widely observed that men take care of their children, his younger brothers and sisters and sometimes nephews and nieces. It is not unusual that women are the main income earners in a household (Imaeda, 1994: p. 228).

During the course of the fieldwork I tried to make arrangements informally to visit schools and training institutes to talk with young people. Some people I came across were kind enough to help my research. They introduced me to young people from various parts of society, educated and non-educated, from single mothers to shopkeepers. As I came to know more people it became easier to make such arrangements. With the help of some teachers I managed to visit a few high schools. Some people in different ministries were also helpful towards my research. Some young people I got to know through the research became very good friends. With them I went on weekend picnics to temples and an overnight trip to see one of the endangered species of birds, and enjoyed several dancing and drinking evenings. Also I discussed with them social structure, culture, tradition, and social changes. The research went better and I immersed myself more in Bhutanese society. In everyday life, the distinction between "work" and "fun" became a blur. The phone in my house kept ringing and friends made typical Bhutanese "all of a sudden visits", knocking on the door without advance notice, and I heard complaints from friends that it was difficult to catch me. Hundreds of cups of tea were consumed and I was getting "data".

At the beginning of the fieldwork, I struggled to grasp underlying assumptions and the social background of what people talked about. A simple sentence like, "He is going to

Bangkok for training", raised many questions. What is training for them? What is Bangkok for them? Why is she telling me so proudly that her husband is going for training? Gradually I learnt that I needed to feel as they feel. That was more than finding a context. That is to say, for example, even if a researcher knows that an altar room is important for them, without feeling spiritual, it is hard to behave properly in the room. Similarly when I heard that someone was going for training, I was supposed to be pleased as his friends were, not more, not less. I found the Bhutanese sensed a subtle difference between understanding and feeling. My behaviour was probably telling them whether I understood or felt. "When in Rome do as the Romans do" is probably a useful saying for anthropologists, but I learnt that in order to do as the Romans do, first I need to feel as the Romans feel. I found that the Bhutanese accurately assessed how much each foreigner adjusted to Bhutanese life, and their way of treating foreigners was different according to the degree of adjustment that had been made. Naturally as one behaves more properly, accommodates Bhutanese diet more, and shows more appreciation to Bhutanese life more generally, they open the door more widely.

Since most time during the fieldwork I lived in Thimphu, the capital, many of my friends were well-educated in the modern education sector and spoke English very well. Apart from staying in schools, I spent much time with them, researching them and having fun with them. Inevitably my view has been affected by their point of view. For example, they asked, "How is your research going?" I answered, "I went to [insert a name of a school] and stayed there for some time." Then they commented, "Oh, many students of that school are from an urban (for example) background." It would probably be included in the researcher's task to analyse this kind of comment itself. Who commented? From what point of view? What is the position of a particular school or a particular mode of education in the society? However, I admit that my analysis itself has also been influenced by this kind of comment to a certain extent. This point will become clearer in the next scene. Sometimes I would be asked about my

findings and my own views about young people. In Thimphu these days young people have become an issue: drug abuse and juvenile delinquency, though small in scale, are a concern in urban society. When I said something which was the same as the socially acknowledged fact, people did not make a further question or comment but simply agreed. But when my view was different from a socially acknowledged view, people tended to say, "You have first hand information, because you actually talked with the young people. My view is just what I feel from everyday life." I tended to reflect more and try to justify my position when what I thought I had found was different from the socially acknowledged view; while when it was the same as the socially acknowledged view I tended to leave my own perception as it was. Finding the socially acknowledged view is finding a context, and this is an essential part of anthropological fieldwork. But at the same time a researcher's view also tends to be more or less influenced by this socially acknowledged view, and this would probably be one of the inherent biases of research. In my case this bias came primarily from a well educated group of people who live in an urban area.

Living in the capital seems to have given an urban bias to the data. Although a few chances of travelling in a rural area gave me a glimpse of rural life, it did not constitute sufficient material on which I could give a proper analysis. If I had stayed in a village for some time and talked with young people engaged in agriculture who had not been to school, a picture of Bhutanese society might have been different from the one I present here.

### **3.2 Sampling**

Young people in this book are both students and working people mainly from eighteen to thirty years old, but in some cases it includes students of sixteen and seventeen years old. It must be clearly stated here that "young people" in this book are the young people whom I met during the fieldwork. I interviewed about two hundred students and about fifty young people who have a job. This is not a statistically

significant portion of young people considering the fact that students in all levels of education in Bhutan number over ninety thousand (Education Division, 1997). I did however try to see young people from all three education sectors, namely English medium modern education, Dzongkha medium monastic education and the schools in the middle ground which teach Bhutanese culture and language in Dzongkha (Dzongkha medium education), and also early school leavers. I spent the first three months visiting various training institutes and schools in Thimphu and Paro in order to identify relevant fieldwork sites for later stages of the fieldwork.

For modern education, there were several options. I made several visits to Motithang High School in Thimphu. However it seemed to me to be difficult to engage in a substantial conversation with them and to know their lifestyle because almost all students in Thimphu are day scholars. I happened to know young teachers of the Drukgyel High School in Paro, western Bhutan. Since they offered to help in my research I decided to stay there for three weeks. Most of the students in that high school lived in student hostels and these young teachers were also matrons. I stayed with the young teachers and tried to spend as much time as possible with students. The fact that I was staying with the teachers gave me the concern that students might tell me only "a good answer" rather than honest answers. I tried to talk with them when teachers were not around. I interviewed about forty students from Class 10 to 12. Many students in the high school were from urban backgrounds, and, though there were students from rural areas, many of their parents were civil servants or businessmen. It should be noted that in Bhutan not all students go to the nearest high school. Therefore students in any school are from both rural and urban backgrounds and geographically they are mixture of people from all over the Bhutan. The main difference is probably that of the proportion from different areas in each school.

With regard to higher education, I could stay in the Sherubtse College in Kanglung, eastern Bhutan for about two weeks.

Within this limited time I tried to see as many students as possible. About seventy students across various departments engaged in casual conversation with me. Compared with the Drukgyel High School where I could see the students only after classes, the varying timetables for each student in the college helped me to utilise time efficiently. I made an "appointment" with students, hung around with them from morning till evening, and chatted. We sat and talked on the grass or in the student canteen. In Thimphu, I also met young people who were educated in the modern education sector and who already had a job. They include civil servants, businessmen, traders, teachers, doctors, housewives and so on.

To gain an understanding of Dzongkha medium education, I stayed in the Institute for Language and Cultural Studies, Simtokha and talked with about forty students, who were mainly from a rural background. I stayed in one of the student hostels for about a month. Here I literally lived with the students: in the morning I went to the Simtokha Dzong with them for morning prayer where I sat with them for about half an hour while they were chanting prayer, then had breakfast in the students canteen and attended morning assembly. I enjoyed "my own time" while students were in class. I took my fieldwork notes, and thought about the questions I would ask. In the afternoon I chatted with the students, went to evening prayer which lasted between one hour and two hours depending on whether it was an auspicious or an inauspicious day. The evening meal was followed by so-called study time, which I could also utilise with the teacher's permission to talk with students. Since this was the first school I stayed at for some time, I revisited it a couple of times to ask new questions which were raised during my visits to other schools. I also made a few visits to the Institute of Traditional Medicine in Thimphu where doctors for so-called indigenous medicine are trained. The students in this institute are all from the Institute for Language and Cultural Studies.

Interviews with young people in monastic education were the only occasion which created some inconvenience for a female researcher. I could not stay in monasteries overnight, therefore I could see monks only during the day time. Moreover, these monasteries are often far away from the capital, preventing me from undertaking in depth research on monks. I visited Dechenphodrang Shaydra in Thimphu, but I could only manage to talk with a few of its inhabitants. Monks working in the Special Commission for the Cultural Affairs also cooperated with my research, but in this case also, I visited them only once. Data collected from monks should be seen as supplementary to data from other groups of young people.

The definition of "early school leavers" in this study is those who did not pass Class 10. These days, in Bhutan passing Class 10 is a point which divides the educated and the not well-educated. Whether a student passes Class 10 or not also makes a lot of difference with respect to the possibility of him or her taking an office job. Early school leavers were found in the Wood Craft Centre in Thimphu, and I also visited some textile weavers, wood carvers and painters who were often not well educated people: I made several trips to each of their workplaces, and chatted with them.

Questions asked during the interviews were more or less the same for all sectors. Questions were divided into two sorts. One set was about their career and their own vision of "a good life". At the beginning of my fieldwork my main aim was to examine various visions of "a good life" among young people. I started to ask why they had chosen the present school or job, what their parents, brothers and sisters did, where they lived, and what the interviewees wanted to do in the future and why. Answers were often developed to the extent that they become a life history. I also asked about how important money, family and friends were for them, what would improve their life and so on. Another set of questions were about Bhutan's development, culture and tradition. Questions were about the pace of development, positive and negative aspects of modernisation, what Bhutanese culture and tradition meant

for them, what were the most visible changes in society, and where they wanted Bhutan to be in thirty years time. During the sessions I made sure that interviewees felt comfortable with both the interview situations and my questions. My prime intention was to create a friendly atmosphere. Because of this consideration I did not take notes while talking with young people. Some were surprised, because they expected me, as a researcher, to take notes. Some did not notice until halfway through an interview that this was actually an interview for research purposes.

The second point I concentrated on was to stick to a flow of conversation rather than a list of the questions I had in mind. Sometimes I could not get enough information. But prepared questions seem to me a simple reflection of my expectation of what is important and what is not. The danger of an expectation is that it sets a form of question and thereby sets an answer. When I asked the students in the Sherubtse College what they would like to be in the future, for example, conversation was not lively at all. I tried to let them speak through different questions, which were nevertheless based on the assumption that what they "wanted" to be was an important question for them. At last they spoke out, not about what they wanted to be, but about how my questions were irrelevant for the situation. They taught me that since there were only a small number of options regarding jobs, what they first thought about was availability of jobs rather than what they wanted to do. In this case I was fortunate because they made me realise how biased I was, but the next example reveals a real difficulty of fieldwork and made me reflect on how much I might have misinterpreted Bhutanese context. One day in London I was asked by a British friend of mine how useful the Japanese tea ceremony was. In Japan people in general do not think about a tea ceremony in terms of its usefulness. It is rather considered to be a form of art. But being asked about its usefulness I tried to think about it and gave an answer. I did not even bother to tell him that the Japanese do not usually think about tea ceremony in terms of its usefulness. It was not a conscious choice, but the unconscious response of simply answering a question. I was

in his position in Bhutan. It is frightening for me to imagine that I would never know how many of my questions were of this sort and how many were context conscious questions. Bias in questions is recognised as bias only after a researcher notices how his or her question is somehow missing the point. Through following the flow of conversation I tried to find what was actually significant for them, and thereby to find a context. Unexpected answers had the potential to give me a clue about how to get away from my own expectations and to get more into the context. When an unexpected answer puzzled me at first I tried to understand the context further by asking an interviewee. But when it could not be solved, I relied on good cultural translators. They could be other students in the same school in which I was conducting research at that time, or they could be one of my friends in Thimphu.

Some teachers in schools which were far away from the capital offered to help my research by distributing questionnaires and sending them back to me. I was not very keen on the idea of distributing questionnaires. It seemed to me that the information I could get through a questionnaire was of a very limited type. However asking students to write down something in a short essay style proved fruitful in getting an honest answer. This method was particularly useful in the early stage of the research when I was not familiar with either young students and the context they were in.

The language used in fieldwork is often a big consideration: in this case I tried to talk in English as much as possible. Although I was learning Dzongkha during my fieldwork, my command of Dzongkha was not good enough to conduct interviews, and also Dzongkha was often not a mother tongue of interviewees.<sup>2</sup> Moreover I saw direct communication with interviewees as important. Although it depended on the character of the field assistant, it was often the case for me

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<sup>2</sup> According to Driem (1994: p. 87), there are nineteen different languages spoken in Bhutan.



that when someone mediated the communication, the atmosphere tended to become less relaxed. When I needed an interpreter I asked some of my Bhutanese friends, who spoke several local languages.

Meeting with young people was often an exciting and interesting experience. Some students in the college imagined that I was a fortune teller, since I asked about their future career. Most of the time interviewees were my age group and it was easy to make a friendly atmosphere, and I actually became friends with some of them. Towards the end of my fieldwork I held a presentation and seminar in the Education Division to lay out and discuss my findings. Not only educationists but also officials from other ministries attended. One of them asked me how I was able to have a close relationship with the students, pointing out that in some cases I was asked advice by students who were considering leaving school. That was also my question. Although I did not see myself as keeping a particularly close relationship with interviewees, the response I had from young people sometimes overwhelmed me. Another participant suggested that although I was attached to the Education Division, young people saw me as neutral compared to teachers and thereby felt it easier to open up.

Apart from "chatting" with young people, various other people who were knowledgeable about Bhutan's past, culture and tradition were also interviewed. On Bhutan's development policy, information largely relies on government publications and discussion with officials in various ministries.

## **Chapter 4: Culture and Tradition as a Development Policy**

### **4.1 Review of Five Year Plans and other official documents**

This section ultimately aims to understand the Bhutanese government's concept of development. I will explore the Bhutanese concept of development and compare it with notions of economic development, on which modernisation theories and development theories emanating from the Marxist schools of thought have put utmost priority. Bhutan started its development programme in 1961.<sup>1</sup> Since then development plans have been formulated every five years. This section considers why development planning was introduced at this particular juncture, and reviews the development plans. Some of the development objectives, such as self-sufficiency and sustainable development, will be given particular attention. The introduction of a policy of preservation of culture and tradition is also discussed. Finally the section examines the idea of Gross National Happiness as a uniquely Bhutanese philosophy of development.

Several works have been published on the subject of Bhutan's development policy, however most of them only give somewhat superficial accounts. Karan (1987, 1990) provides a brief overview of the development programme only in the last chapter. Bhattacharya (1996), Lama (1996), Mehrotra (1996) and Dharamdhasani (1996) have written short articles on development and development policy, and Basu (1996) and Misra (1988) can be classed as introductory works. What is common in these works is a unilinear perspective of development as a process in which traditional institutions are replaced by modern ones. They are therefore preoccupied in

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<sup>1</sup> Priesner (1996: p. 13) sees the year 1959 as the starting point of Bhutan's economic development based on his view that a major foreign policy shift took place in that year. In this book, however, the official launch of development programme in 1961 is considered as the starting point of Bhutan's development, as is maintained by other authors, for instance Ura (1994).

assessing, for instance, an "improvement" of the communication network both within Bhutan and between Bhutan and the outside world, and the establishment of modern health and education facilities. In Bhutan however the negative effects of modernisation, such as pollution and the possibility of deforestation, have also drawn much attention from government officials. These negative effects have lead to a policy of preservation of the natural environment and Bhutanese culture and tradition. Former minister of planning, Lyonpo C. Dorji, emphasises the significance of these preservation policies by pointing to them as "the corner stone of Bhutanese development policy."<sup>2</sup> The rigid perspective of much of the writing on Bhutanese development policy fails to incorporate these features of the development programme into the scope of their analysis. From their perspective the preservation policies are at best something "extra" which is worthy of only one line - as is in Lama (1996). Often they are effectively excluded.

Two works which give a closer examination of Bhutanese development policy are Pain (1996) and Priesner (1996). Pain notes that the word "mountainous" is extensively used in Bhutan's development policy documents, and that its negative connotations are emphasised too much. He suggests alternative policy options, which arise from the positive attributes of being "mountainous" and "small."<sup>3</sup> Priesner (1996) focuses on unique aspects of Bhutanese development

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<sup>2</sup> Interview. April 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Pain's rather contrived argument is that being "mountainous" and at the same time "small" does not necessarily represent a problem since the disadvantages of being either "mountainous" or "small" can offset one another. According to Pain, while small countries generally tend to have less diversified economies largely because smaller areas have less diversity of raw materials, Bhutan's mountainous environment leads to high diversity in both biological and human adaptations. Also, while smaller countries tend to lack import protection, Bhutan's physical inaccessibility (derived from being mountainous) provides in some respects an effective trade barrier, as is clear from Bhutan's history in which limited and clearly defined routes of access to the country enabled control to be placed on trade routes and trading opportunities. Above all, being small can mean lower transportation costs (Pain, 1996).

policy, such as cultural preservation, environmental preservation, self-reliance and human development. He argues that the uniqueness of Bhutanese development policy "originates in the distinct Buddhist and feudal value base which evolved due to the country's century-long international isolation" (p. ii).

A striking difference between these two works is that while Pain sees Bhutan's development policy as being framed by normative models of development and modernisation, Priesner views it as one of the rare examples of a "genuine indigenously-generated approach to development" which "self-confidently resisted to adopt [sic] donor-driven concepts" of development. These contradictory views on Bhutan's development arise from the differences in attention paid to the "goal" of development and the "methods" used to reach the goal. Certainly most pages of development policy documents follow the Western approach to development when they emphasise income generation, increases in production, and improvements in health, education and communication facilities. For example, in the Eighth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) in the renewable natural resources sector implementation of irrigation schemes is expected to continue to raise productivity and thereby to increase rural incomes (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 102). In the health sector the building of more hospitals is planned and immunisation programmes are to be expanded (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 165). However, at the level of discussion of the goal of development, the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), and emotional and spiritual well being are emphasised. Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley, the Foreign Minister, said in his speech to the UNDP Regional Millennium Meeting for Asia and the Pacific, "Happiness is the ultimate desire of every human being. All else is a means to achieve this end. It should logically follow then that all individual and collective efforts should be devoted to this common goal... Happiness must be a policy objective." (Thinley, 1998: p. 2). The discrepancy between these two levels is embodied in these two views about Bhutan's development. I will argue that Bhutan's

development goal is indeed unique, in the sense that, as far as I know, no other country on earth has suggested that the maximisation of Gross National Happiness should be the ultimate goal of development. I will return to a more detailed discussion of this issue below.

We shall begin this chapter by briefly looking at the starting point of development, namely how and why did Bhutan initiate its development programmes?

### **Start of the development programme**

Planned economic development was started in 1961 during the reign of the third King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (regn. 1952-1972). Before planned development activities started, there were attempts made by the kings and his chamberlains to introduce limited modernisation programmes to Bhutan. According to Collister (1987: p. 163), in 1907, the first king, Ugyen Wangchuck, and John Claud White, then the Political Officer in Sikkim, discussed schemes for development including projects for education, trade, roads, minerals and the possible cultivation of tea. According to Aris (1994a: pp. 104-105), Ugyen Wangchuck and his chamberlain, Ugyen Dorji, were said to be keen to develop the modern education of selected boys. In 1914 forty-six boys were sent to a Scottish mission school in Kalimpong. In the same year a school was started in Ha, and in 1915 one was founded at the king's palace in Bumthang, especially for his heir and a few other boys. Lack of funds however prevented many other projects from getting off the ground. Aris (1994a: pp. 136-138) also points out that the second king, Jigme Wangchuck (1905-1952, regn. 1926-1952) repeatedly requested British aid through the Political Officer in Sikkim. He was advocating projects such as conservation of forests and improvement of communications. Aris reports that although the Political Officers in Sikkim who continued to make tours to Bhutan usually did their best to secure a greater commitment for development assistance, their approach invariably "fell on deaf ears in Delhi and London" (1994a: p. 105). Bhutan thus

had to wait until 1961 for the launch of comprehensive modernisation activities.

There are several different views on why Bhutan started comprehensive development programmes in 1961, but their differences seem to be ones of emphasis. Mehra (1974) and Pommaret (1997b) focus on initiatives by the third King. Rose (1977), and Karan and Jenkins (1963) analyse Bhutan's internal and external environment which, Rose argues, dramatically changed between 1947 and 1960 (p. 125). These views are not mutually exclusive, and the general agreement seems to be that changes in the external and internal environments convinced the third King and parts of the elite to launch modernisation activities in order to secure the nation's sovereignty and independence. The immediate threat was perceived to come from the country's northern neighbour. China's occupation of Tibet in 1950/51 revealed a possible Chinese military threat to Bhutan. In 1959, Bhutan closed its border with Tibet (Mathou, 1994: p. 53). This situation must have been particularly threatening to the Bhutanese because Tibet is the country with which it shares its cultural background, based on Tibetan Buddhism. Mehra (1974: p. 124) notes that the general feeling of security, well-being and tranquillity changed overnight to one of apprehension and concern. Another perceived threat arose from the Sino-Indian War in 1962. The conflict showed that there was a real possibility that Bhutan could be involved in a war between the two giant nations which sandwiched it. As Mathou remarks, Bhutan became aware that as long as it lacked an international presence, it would be vulnerable.<sup>4</sup>

There were also internal pressures which arose from the closing of the border with Tibet. According to Karan and Jenkins (1963: pp. 48-49), there had been trade between Tibet and Bhutan. Bhutanese rice was sold at high prices in Tibet and Bhutanese traders brought back salt, wool and other essential items. With the closing of the border, the price of rice in Bhutan fell by half, because the surplus could not

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<sup>4</sup> This view is also supported by Rose (1977: p. 125).

be taken to Tibet any more. There were complaints of the government's failure to provide an alternative market for rice in 1960. The reply of the government was "wait for the road", which was expected to connect Bhutan with India and was built with funding from the Indian government. The decision to cut off the country from all exchange with Tibet required Bhutan to open itself up to the south.

According to Pammaret (1997b: p. 233), the third King was determined to preserve the independence of his country. He knew that without strong international links, his country could be in danger and that self-imposed isolation had to end. Even before the launch of modernisation programmes, he initiated some major socio-economic reforms: in 1956, he abolished serfdom and proceeded to a redistribution of land. The ceiling on land holdings was fixed at twenty-five acres, and lands above this ceiling were given to landless people who were also exempted from taxes.<sup>5</sup> These structural changes were accompanied by important constitutional reforms. In 1953, the King established a National Assembly with one hundred and fifty members, of which one hundred and five were elected representatives of the people,<sup>6</sup> twelve represented the monk-body, and thirty-three were nominated representatives of the government (Pommaret, 1997b: p. 234).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to Rose (1977: p. 128), while tenants constituted only a small proportion of the country's population, a large proportion of former tenants and former slaves were allocated land through the reform.

<sup>6</sup> According to Imaeda (1994: p. 74), the method of selection of the people's representatives is as follows. Each household (*gung*) is represented by one person. These representatives of the households within a constituency hold a meeting to chose a *chimi* (a member of the National Assembly) through consensus. He adds that this process of decision-making through consensus is observed not only in the National Assembly and government organisations, but also in whole society, and that even in everyday life it is rare to decide by majority.

<sup>7</sup> When the National Assembly was established in 1953, all Assembly decisions could be changed by the King. In 1968, however, the King ceased to exercise this power, and all decisions of the National Assembly are now treated as final and do not require the approval of the King. In 1969, the King proposed that the King should be forced to resign if he receives a no-

Bhutan tried to secure its independence by obtaining recognition from the international community that it was a sovereign state and by acquiring equal status with other countries. In 1962 Bhutan joined the Colombo Plan,<sup>8</sup> and in 1971, the country became a member of the United Nations.

As we have seen, the regional environment played a significant role in convincing the third King and the political elite to start planned development. Moreover, "planned development" was common elsewhere in the early 1950s, and besides India, China also followed this path. In addition, the availability of financial and technical assistance from India was also an important factor, as India viewed Bhutan being situated on a frontier of critical strategic importance. One of the incidents through which India was convinced of Bhutan's importance to its security was the Sino-Indian War in 1962 (Rose, 1997: pp. 80-81). Karan and Jenkins (1963: p. 45) argued that India was eager to bring the Bhutanese, who had ethnic ties with Tibetans, closer to India by improving communications. At the same time, they write, the development of transport would help build defences in Bhutan to combat possible aggression by the Chinese. India saw Bhutan's development in the context of its own security needs and therefore agreed to give assistance to Bhutan's development programmes.

The launch of development programmes, however, was not without opposition. A concern centred around the undesirable

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confidence vote of two thirds of the members of the National Assembly, and this proposal was approved by the Assembly. Although this was abolished by a proposal from the National Assembly in 1973, the vote of confidence in the King was reintroduced in 1998. From 1998, all cabinet ministers are to be elected by the National Assembly (Imaeda, 1994: p. 75; Kuensel, 4th July 1998 and 11th July 1998).

<sup>8</sup> The Colombo Plan was established in January 1950, and has twenty regional members in Asia and the Pacific and six major donor countries. It focuses on economic development and social changes (Ziring and Kim, 1985). Assistance under the Plan is approved by ministers at meetings of the Consultative Committee (the highest deliberative body), but each aid programme is negotiated bilaterally on a government-to-government basis within the framework of the Plan (Arnold, 1989).



effects of modernisation, such as changes in the values and lifestyle of the people. Even a decade after launching the development programmes, the then Foreign Minister claimed, "Modernisation exacts a high price. I'm not sure it's ideal, but we have no choice. In the modern world you can't live isolated.... But there is going to be an effect on peoples' values and way of life." (*New York Times*, December 11, 1973 in Priesner, 1996: p. 21).<sup>9</sup> Against this background, it is not surprising, as we will see shortly, that the development programmes were not exclusively about economic development and the introduction of "the modern". Instead, Bhutan's development seems to be a constant quest to achieve a balance between the introduction of "modern" aspects of life and maintaining Bhutanese identity.

### **Review of the development programmes**

This part reviews selected Five Year Plans, namely the Second (1966-71), the Third (1971-76), the Fifth (1981-87), the Sixth (1987-92), the Seventh (1992-97) and the Eighth (1997-2002). This "selection" is due to the availability of documents.<sup>10</sup> With regard to the two Five Year Plans which are lacking from this review, firstly, it should be noted that, according to other sources, the Second Five Year Plan does not show many changes from the First Five Year Plan in terms of priorities.

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<sup>9</sup> Although the simple opposition between the traditionalists and the modernisers is relevant to some extent, it should also be noted that the same opposition can be observed in one person's mind. For example, during fieldwork I encountered young people who recognised the importance of preserving national dress, but at the same time tried to minimise opportunities to wear them. For details, see chapters four and five.

<sup>10</sup> The author consulted various ministries in Thimphu, the British Library and the US Congress Library with regard to the two missing Five Year Plans, but failed to obtain them. Although there are secondary sources which refer to the Fourth Five Year Plan, its references seem to come from sources other than the Fourth Five Year Plan itself. For example Parmanand (1992) appears to have obtained information about the outlay of the Fourth Plan from statistical data published by the Bhutanese government in 1989. As I enquired further about the Fourth Plan, I became more doubtful about its very existence in the form of a printed copy. The closest I reached was when an official in the then Planning Ministry found a file titled Fourth Five Year Plan in a computer in the office but was unable to open it.

Both plans put the highest emphasis on building roads in order to end Bhutan's isolation and on building transportation links with India (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 29). The Fourth Five Year Plan, however, seems to contain some changes from the previous three Five Year Plans in terms of the allocation of the budget. In a break with the past the agriculture sector received the highest priority (29% of the total outlay). Several large scale investments, some outside the Plan, emerged such as the Chukha Hydel Project and the Penden Cement Plant (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 31). As far as the overall aim of development is concerned, however, not much change can be observed. According to the Fifth Five Year Plan, the fundamental postulates of national economic policy remained unchanged during the first Five Year Plans: that is to improve the living standard of the people and ultimately achieve overall economic self-reliance (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 27). The changes in the allocation of the budget should therefore be understood in the light of the overall aims of the development activities and interpreted as an effort to strengthen the country's economic base. The plan documents which are not examined in this book do not therefore appear to be key documents which might reveal a turning point in the overall state development discourse.

Development documents usually encompass almost all activities undertaken by the government, except those in the area of security, i.e. the army. The development plans include both capital and recurrent budgets, and cover a wide range of subjects, from irrigation programmes to spending on the National Assembly. In the plan outlay, however, commercial projects funded by state, such as the construction of huge hydroelectric power plants, are excluded even if these are mentioned in the plan documents.<sup>11</sup>

The appearance and structure of Five Year Plan documents have changed over time. Their expanding volume itself shows the increase in development activities in Bhutan. The Second Five Year Plan is ninety-five pages and the Third Plan fifty-

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<sup>11</sup> According to Karma Ura, interview on 15th March 1999.

nine pages, whereas the Eighth Plan takes up two hundred and eleven pages.<sup>12</sup> This also represents an evolution from a document which was little more than a brochure to a colour printed book containing many maps and tables. During the early plan periods, overall development activities were small enough for details of each project to be written down in a small brochure. Secondly, the structure of the contents has also developed. For instance, the Second Plan is no more than a collection of project proposals, which are detailed enough to include, for example, the exact number of cows and pigs to be kept by livestock farms in various parts of the country, whereas in the Eighth Five Year Plan the main document does not provide such details but simply the overall aims and objectives of both the development activities as a whole and sector-by-sector. The Second and the Third Five Year Plans start with a very brief introduction of the country, its geography and economy, and then show plan aims, which are followed by a plan of each sector. From the Fifth Plan onwards, the economic condition of the country is examined more closely and there is a careful review of past development activities. A new chapter on the government's approach to development, which expresses a more holistic Bhutanese idea of development, is also added. Moreover, the Fifth and the Eighth Plans have a chapter which discusses development prospects for the next twenty years. From the Seventh Plan onwards new chapters are added on issues which encompass several sectors, for instance women's involvement in development, and environment and sustainable development. In other words, from the Fifth Plan onwards the plan documents began to present the wider, longer and holistic views and objectives of development more clearly, while earlier development plans tended to concentrate on describing individual projects and schemes. Development planning has become more visionary with clearer aims and objectives, and with longer and wider perspectives.

Sources of foreign assistance have been diversified a great deal. The first two plans were financed entirely by the Indian

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<sup>12</sup> This comparison concerns only the main plan documents.

government.<sup>13</sup> As well as funding, the Indian government provided much skilled and unskilled manpower. From the Third Five Year Plan onwards Bhutan started to receive aid from UN agencies, and also began to gradually diversify the source of foreign assistance. During the Fifth Five Year Plan Bhutan received external assistance from fourteen multilateral agencies, six countries and two NGOs (Planning Commission, 1981), whereas during the Eighth Five Year Plan sources of external assistance to Bhutan include nineteen multilateral organisations, nineteen individual donor countries, such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark and Japan, and some international NGOs (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 41). The share of aid from India has gradually decreased, from almost one hundred percent during the first two Five Year Plans to thirty-seven percent of the total official external assistance Bhutan received in 1996 (UNDP, 1998).

The following review of the Five Year Plans is primarily concerned with how the official discourse of development is expressed. I shall start by giving an overview of the Plans, and then proceed to examine the development plans in relation to four themes which are important in the context of Bhutan's development programmes, namely, (1) attitudes towards Western science and technology, (2) the preservation of culture and tradition, (3) the attempt at "self-reliance" and (4) environmental preservation and "sustainability".

The basic development thinking behind the Second Five Year Plan is not stated explicitly in the plan: it does however appear that here development is seen primarily as economic development. Thus, the main aims of the plan include economic growth through increasing production in agriculture

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<sup>13</sup> This excludes assistance provided through the Colombo Plan. Although exact figures are not available, it can be imagined that assistance from the Colombo Plan during the period of the first two Five Year Plans amounted to a very small sum, especially considering the fact that during the Third Five Year Plan period assistance from UN agencies and from the Colombo Plan combined amounted to only 3% of the total external aid Bhutan received (Planning Commission, 1981).

and improvement of education in order to provide the skilled manpower which is necessary for "development" activities (See Table 1). Construction of roads was not only for the purpose of opening the country to the outside but also to facilitate the search for alternative markets for the country's surplus cereal. Bhutan used to export the surplus to Tibet and to import items such as salt and wool, but the border with Tibet was closed in 1959, as the situation in Tibet became more tense. The Second Plan highlights the decline in production incentives after the closure of the Tibetan border, because the plains of India were too far for profitable export from the northern part of Bhutan, and also because traditional markets for the export of Bhutan's surplus cereal do not exist in India (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. vii). In the Second Five Year Plan the road sector is given the highest priority in terms of the budget, although as a proportion of the total outlay it declined from sixty-six percent in the First Five Year Plan to forty percent. With regard to the Third Five Year Plan, in terms of outlay, the share of the road programme declined to twenty percent, whereas the share of education and health services increased.

### **Table 1: Development Objectives of Five Year Plans**

<b>Second Plan</b> (1966-1971)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) increase agricultural production</li> <li>(b) improvement of the level of education</li> <li>(c) construction of roads</li> <li>(d) exploring the possibility of exploiting the gypsum and limestone deposits.</li> </ul>
<b>Third Plan</b> (1971-1976)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) increase in agricultural production</li> <li>(b) improvement in infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and power supply</li> <li>(c) development of industries</li> <li>(d) improvement in education facilities</li> <li>(e) improvement in health services</li> <li>(f) urban development of Thimphu</li> <li>(g) protection and preservation of ancient monuments.</li> </ul>

- Fifth Plan**  
(1981-1987)
- (a) an acceptable and sustainable rate of growth of the economy
  - (b) economic self-reliance through attaining a level of internal resource generation
  - (c) distributional equity among various sections and regions
  - (d) involvement of the people in the planning and execution of development programmes decentralisation.

- Sixth Plan**  
(1987-1992)
- (a) strengthening of the development administration of the government
  - (b) preservation and promotion of national identity
  - (c) mobilisation of internal resources through increasing income and strengthening the tax collection system.
  - (d) rural development including increasing income and improvement of housing
  - (e) improvement of development services including providing health services, sanitation facilities, education, and extension services in the areas of agriculture and livestock
  - (f) development of human resources
  - (g) promotion of people's participation and decentralisation
  - (h) promotion of national self-reliance

- Seventh Plan**  
(1992-1997)
- (a) self-reliance
  - (b) sustainability
  - (c) development of the private sector
  - (d) people's participation and decentralisation
  - (e) human resource development
  - (f) regionally balanced development

- Eighth Plan**  
(1997-2002)
- (a) self-reliance
  - (b) sustainability
  - (c) preservation and promotion of culture and traditional values

- (d) national security
- (e) regionally balanced development
- (f) improving the quality of life
- (g) institutional strengthening and human resource development
- (h) decentralisation and community participation
- (i) privatisation and private sector development

The Fifth Five Year Plan shows some important changes in terms of overall aims. Economic self-reliance is for the first time explicitly stated as being an aim of development. Another feature of the Fifth Plan is the emphasis placed on decentralisation. The plan states, "It is expected that as a result of the decentralization process, people's participation in the development effort would be sustainably expanded and plans formulated at the dzongkhag<sup>14</sup> level would reflect the specific priorities of the individual dzongkhag." (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 48). With regard to the reason for implementing decentralisation the Plan explains:

It has been long felt by His Majesty that the development process so far has progressively given the feeling to the people that it would be the Government alone which would bring about improvements in their living conditions. As a result, rising expectations has been increasingly translated into demands on Government. It is recognized that no development effort can succeed without the people's co-operation and commitment and effective development cannot be only a top down process. While Government would give the lead in the overall direction of development and provide for resources and technical inputs which are beyond the capacity of the people, plans would have to be formulated in consultation with the people in order that these plans reflect felt needs and

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<sup>14</sup> *Dzongkhag* means a district in Dzongkha. Bhutan is divided into twenty *dzongkhag*.

execution is within the capabilities of the people. It is the Government's conviction that only when these conditions are satisfied and effectively pursued that the benefits of development would actually reach all sections of the population leading to increased distributional equity. (Planning Commission, 1981: pp. 48-49)

As part of the implementation of the decentralisation process the *Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogchung* (District Development Committees) are given a more effective role. The DYT is chaired by the *Dzongda*<sup>15</sup> (District Governor), and its members are heads of the various sectors in the *dzongkhag* administration, *chimi* (elected members of the National Assembly from the *dzongkhag*), *gups*<sup>16</sup> and *mang-aps*<sup>17</sup> in the *dzongkhag* (Ura, 1994: p. 41). The DYT carries out the formulation of each *dzongkhag* plan within the overall framework provided by the government. Also the DYT is responsible for ensuring that the plans that are prepared are in keeping with the capability of the people to provide voluntary labour which will form a major input both in the execution of plan projects and in their maintenance. Decentralisation continues to be one of the aims of the Five Year Plans right up to the present time. In 1991 a further step was taken to promote the decentralisation process by taking the decision-making process to the village level, and *Gewog Yargye Tshogchung* (Block Development Committees) were formulated under the aegis of the DYT.<sup>18</sup>

One of the features of the Sixth Five Year Plan is that the preservation of the national identity is for the first time clearly

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<sup>15</sup> The civil administrator of a district (Ura, 1995: p. 366).

<sup>16</sup> Head man of a *gewog*, or block (Ura, 1995: p. 366). In administrative terms, Bhutan is divided into districts (*dzongkhag*), and districts are further divided into blocks or *gewogs*. There are twenty districts and one hundred and ninety-six *gewogs*. A *gewog* consists of several villages (Ura, 1994: p. 39).

<sup>17</sup> *Mang-ap* literally means "father of the community". A *mang-ap* is elected in each village and he or she assists a *gup*.

<sup>18</sup> For details about decentralisation, see Ura (1994).



stated as an aim of Bhutan's development. Although the protection and preservation of ancient monuments is included in the Third Five Year Plan, the emphasis of the Sixth Plan is more on intangible Bhutanese values and ways of life. Most important of all, this new emphasis is associated with safeguarding the sovereignty and security of the nation. Several officials claim that at the time when the Sixth Plan was formulated in the mid-1980s people in Thimphu were starting to feel the negative effects of development.<sup>19</sup> These officials recount that from that time traditional Bhutanese values started to decline, and that the urbanisation of Thimphu accelerated. The concern to preserve national identity appears to have intensified during this period, and the emphasis on rural development can also be seen as a strategy to prevent excessive urbanisation. National self-reliance also continues to be a main aim: for example, one of the objectives of human resource development seems to be to replace expatriate personnel, which the country's development work had become increasingly dependent upon.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the aims of the Seventh Five Year Plan and the Eighth Five Year Plan are continuing those of the Sixth Plan or even earlier Plans. Although preservation of Bhutanese culture and identity is not in the main aims of the Seventh Plan, "ensuring the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the population" and "the preservation of Bhutan's cultural heritage" are explicitly stated as less quantifiable objectives of the development of Bhutan (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 27). A new development aim included from the Seventh Plan is sustainability. In the Plans sustainability encompasses two areas, environmental considerations and population growth. In the Seventh and Eighth Plans, mobilisation of internal resources and increasing income do not appear to be the

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<sup>19</sup> Interviews with Tshering Dorji, on 27th December 1997 and Kunzang Dorji on 3rd February 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Bhutan employed over 113,000 expatriate personnel at the beginning of the Sixth Plan as compared to about 10,000 during the Fourth Plan period (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 20).

main aims, but they are considered to be components of self-reliance and improving the quality of life.

The trend of the changes in the objectives of the development plans is from an emphasis on sectoral objectives, such as the construction of roads, improving education facilities and enhancing agricultural production, to broader objectives which encompass different sectors, such as the promotion of national identity, decentralisation and sustainable development. In this sense the Fifth Five Year Plan seems to be the major turning point.

This change from sector divided objectives to cross-sector aims appears to show the way in which Bhutanese official thinking has developed. Development planning seems to have meant delivering modern infrastructure and services in the Second and Third Plans, whereas since the Fifth Plan it has meant a vision of what the government wants Bhutan to be in the future. In other words, as I have pointed out already, development planning has become more holistic and more visionary. At the same time, discussion about cross sectoral issues has made it possible to raise issues concerning the methodology of development, including matters such as people's participation and decentralisation.

The earlier plans show a tendency towards aiming for increases in agricultural production. The first two plans, which were formulated in consultation with the Planning Commission of India, <sup>21</sup> do not explicitly state what development means in Bhutan. It is however indicated that it is taken for granted that development means the

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<sup>21</sup> There are different views with regard to the influence of India over Bhutan's development plans. Holsti claims that the number of Indian advisers and officials swelled in Bhutan in the 1960s, and that by the end of the decade the Indian government had virtually taken over the entire planning function of Bhutan (Holsti, 1982: p. 26). Rose, on the other hand, points out the relative liberality of the Indian aid programme by saying that the Indian government granted a sum of money, and left it to the discretion of the Bhutanese government to decide on the allocation of funds to the various development programmes (Rose, 1977: pp. 91-92).

transformation of society from the traditional to the modern by means of economic growth. This assumption resonates with arguments made in both modernisation theories and work in the Marxist tradition. The broader development objectives which emerge after the Fifth Plan such as sustainability, decentralisation and participation have also become popular among Western donor agencies.<sup>22</sup> The following section will examine how these objectives are interpreted and adapted in the Bhutanese context. We will observe that some objectives which have been highlighted by Western donor agencies are also given Bhutanese contents, and that these are then presented as originating in Bhutan. I will also examine the idea of "Gross National Happiness", a new perspective brought to development debates by the Bhutanese government. The concept was coined by the present king in the late 1980s, and it is said to be the fundamental principal behind Bhutan's development.

### *Attitudes towards Western science and technology*

Attitudes towards Western scientific knowledge have changed over the plans. In the Second, Third and Fifth Five Year Plans the discourse of modernisation leads to an emphasis on scientific development, and focuses on technological solutions as opposed to social or institutional solutions. It is observed, firstly, that lack of manpower trained in Western scientific knowledge and technology can create great implementation difficulties in various areas of development such as health services and agriculture. For instance, in the Second Five Year Plan, the section on forestry says, "Unless the deficiency in technical staff is overcome, it will hamper to implement [sic] the programmes..." (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966:

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<sup>22</sup> According to Sachs (1992), environmental concerns moved to centre stage in the international debate with the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (1987). UNDP for example features sustainability in its 1992 *Human Development Report*. Participation and decentralisation are featured in the 1993 edition of the *Human Development Report* (UNDP, 1993) and the World Bank's *World Development Report 1997* (World Bank, 1997).

p. 43).<sup>23</sup> The section on health services notes, a "shortage of qualified technical personnel at all levels from Nurses and Compounders upwards to man the hospital and dispensaries" as one of the major difficulties (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 51). The section on engineering services also points to the "shortage of experienced technical personnel" as a major difficulty (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 89).

Secondly, the transformation of the "traditional" into the "modern" is presented as an achievement. The Fifth Plan notes that "in the past twenty years of planned development,... the predominantly rural barter economy has been progressively transformed into a modern one." (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 27). A more striking comment contained in the documents is that one of the most important achievements of the agricultural development programmes during the first four plan periods was "to bring about a distinct and favourable change in farmers' attitudes towards modern scientific practices" (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 33). On the other hand, Bhutanese counterparts of Western scientific knowledge are seldom mentioned in these early plan documents. In the health services section, indigenous medicine is not touched upon. In the forestry section, the traditional practice of forest conservation is not given attention, probably because it was not regarded as "scientific". The overall consequence is that the documents emphasize what Bhutan did not have, namely Western scientific knowledge, rather than what it had. Bhutan seems to present itself as dependent in the area of science and technology, not only on developed countries but also on India which provided the entire funding and many of the technical personnel during the first two Five Year Plans.

However, from the Sixth Five Year Plan onwards we observe significant differences. The Sixth Five Year Plan includes, for

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<sup>23</sup> Some of direct quotations in this book are grammatically incorrect. However I have chosen not to alert the reader to this fact any further, unless it influences the meaning of the quotation or makes the quotation difficult to understand.

the first time, the promotion of indigenous medical practices in the overall objective of health services provision (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 39). The Seventh Five Year Plan even says:

Indigenous medicine remains a popular form of health care in Bhutan.... The Department of Health recognises that traditional medicine has an important role to play in the health services and will take steps to increase access to traditional medical services and to integrate these services into the formal health care system. Traditional *Dungtshos* (doctors) will receive training at the National Research and Training Institute of Bhutanese Traditional Medicine in Thimphu, with the aim of increasing their skills and adding to the numbers of trained doctors.... A herbal garden for cultivating rare and valuable medicinal plant will also be established. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 102)

The tendency for traditional medicine to be much more emphasised compared to before is also confirmed in the Eighth Five Year Plan. It says:

Since the introduction of modern health care services in Bhutan in the 1960's, careful attention has been given to traditional practice and the people's perception of illness. This has ensured the option for the people to seek services from the system they are comfortable with,... (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 165)

This does not mean that in these plans the role of Western medicine is downgraded. What is remarkable is, however, the way in which traditional medicine is acknowledged and integrated into the plan documents. The same tendency can also be observed in the agriculture sector. The Seventh Five Year Plan acknowledges that traditional soil conservation techniques can be effective in keeping soil erosion to a

minimum (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 102). An even more noticeable change in attitude can be seen in forestry sector. In the Second Five Year Plan scientific management of forests is seen as the most important and useful method of planning (p. 46), whereas the Seventh Plan also highlights the Buddhist faith, which plays an important role in the preservation of natural resources (p. 27).

In the section on Constraints to Development in the Seventh Five Year Plan, though the problem of the small supply of manpower is often mentioned, this tends to mean simply "the number of people who work", rather than lack of scientific knowledge. Overall, the frequency with which the reader encounters phrases such as, "shortage of trained personnel" or "lack of skilled manpower", is drastically reduced compared with the earlier plan documents. This is probably because trained personnel have increased as education proliferates in the country. But more significantly, it also appears to signify changing attitudes towards Western science as well as Bhutanese tradition. The change since the Sixth Five Year Plan is not a simple technical issue of which knowledge to use, for instance, in order to cure a disease, to prevent soil erosion, and to preserve forestry. I would argue that this appears to be a matter of cultural identity, since the change in attitudes towards Western scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge coincides with policy changes which have led to greater emphasis on national identity and the preservation of culture and tradition. Furthermore, the negative effects of modernisation began to be perceived in society at about the same time.

### *Preservation of culture and tradition*

An emphasis on the preservation of culture and tradition is one of the features of Bhutan's development programmes, and starts to be articulated consistently from the Sixth Five Year Plan onwards. Previous plans, however, also show an awareness of the importance of preserving Bhutanese culture.

For instance the Second Plan allocates some of the budget<sup>24</sup> for the preservation of valuable ancient monuments and old *dzongs* which have deteriorated over the course of time (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 95). The Third Plan proposes the establishment of a school of Dzongkha medium education to help in the preservation of the cultural heritage of the country and to provide a supply of Bhutanese language (Dzongkha) teachers (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 50). The Fifth Plan extends the range of culture not only to the ancient monuments but also to intangibles, namely traditional values. It points out the significance of the education sector in this context by saying that the preservation of traditional values is one of the fundamental ends of education (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 133). The Fifth Plan also reveals the government's view on tourism and cultural preservation. It says that although certain cultural monuments and art can be open to visitors, monasteries and *dzongs* where monks are involved in spiritual teaching and meditation have to be kept out of tourists' reach (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 131). Thus the preservation of culture and tradition is not a very recent idea - the Bhutanese government has been aware of it since a very early stage in the development process.

The Sixth Five Year Plan, however, is seen as a watershed in cultural policy both in terms of its emphasis and its logic. Since the Sixth Plan preservation of culture and tradition have been major objectives of development in Bhutan. The Sixth Plan describes the need for the "preservation and promotion of national identity through promoting all aspects of the nation's traditions, culture and customs" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 17). The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs was established in 1985 and plays a pivotal role in preserving both material and non-material aspects of Bhutan's culture and tradition. It aims to consolidate and strengthen Bhutan's spiritual traditions, to promote *driglam namzha* (the official code of etiquette), to renovate ancient

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<sup>24</sup> Five hundred thousand Indian rupees. This is about 0.2 percent of the total plan outlay.

monasteries, to keep a record of cultural sites, monuments and articles of antiquity, to preserve ancient documents and literature, and to strengthen existing cultural centres and institutions (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 193).

Moreover, the preservation of culture and tradition is seen as being directly connected to the nation's independence and sovereignty. The Sixth Plan explicitly states that measures to promote the nation's traditions, culture and customs are taken in order "to consolidate and safeguard the sovereignty and security of the nation" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 17). According to the Eighth Plan:

For a small country with neither military might nor economic strength the distinct cultural identity is seen as an important means to safeguard and strengthen the national identity and security. (Ministry of Planning, 1996: pp. 25-26)

The impetus for such statements is not spelled out in the planning documents, but it is clearly related to the fact that Bhutan is a small country sandwiched by two giants, India and China, and as such the nation's security must be always of concern to the authorities. Bhutan's northern neighbour, Tibet, has been invaded by China and its western neighbour, Sikkim, was annexed by India. Both Tibet and Sikkim have a cultural background based on Tibetan Buddhism, which is also extremely important in Bhutan. Furthermore, Bhutan has had a border dispute with China. Cultural policy, therefore, can be interpreted as a serious attempt to ensure the nation's security and independence through emphasising Bhutan's "distinct culture".

The preservation of culture and tradition is also emphasised as a fundamental principle of Bhutan's development policy. The Seventh Plan, for example, says:

Simply imposing development models from outside which do not take religion and tradition into account will not only serve to diminish existing culture, but



will also meet with limited success.... The preservation of cultural traditions and religious institutions is one of the major objectives of the Royal Government and the need to give full recognition to these factors has been realised, particularly in health and education. This does not mean that new technologies will not have a place in the development of Bhutan or that the Government intends Bhutan to remain static, but that the relevance and impact on society of new technologies will need to be carefully assessed. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 66)

The former minister of planning, Lyonpo C. Dorji, also writes:

An important objective underpinning our development approach have always been the preservation of our culture and values. Programmes for social and economic change must not ever precipitate any decline in our hallowed tradition and institutions. We have witnessed...the coming of modern conveniences in our society; and we are justly proud of advances that improve the general standard of living. But I am convinced that such achievements would be hollow if the development process leads to any loss of our cultural identity and value system. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. xvi)

In addition to the earlier accounts given by government officials, both the Fifth Five Year Plan and interviews with another two government officials<sup>25</sup> reveal a perception that, since the launch of modernisation, traditional Bhutanese values have started to decline: this was realised from mid-1980s. Social changes such as the urbanisation of Thimphu are said to have become more visible during the 1980s. The Sixth Plan, which was prepared in the mid-1980s, suggests that Bhutan's unique identity must be preserved and safeguarded from the negative attitudes and influences that

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Dasho Sangay Dorji in February 1998 and with Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup in March 1998.

emerge during the development process (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 17). The development of a policy of preservation of culture and tradition can therefore be seen to be a reflection of an official recognition of the negative effects of modernisation.

However, whilst the negative effects of modernisation are well recognised, the basic stand point of the government is that in principle socio-economic development and cultural integrity are not mutually exclusive (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 18). The government therefore says that its development efforts are directed towards harmonising the benefits of economic prosperity with spiritual well-being (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. i). Nevertheless "Bhutanese culture and tradition" and "modernisation" are presented as being separate, if not actually in opposition. This separation makes it possible to talk about what is Bhutanese tradition and what is not. For instance, indigenous medicine falls under in the sphere of Bhutanese tradition whereas Western scientific medicine does not. Monastic education and Dzongkha medium education are traditional by definition, while modern education is not. Thus the dichotomy of the traditional and the modern remains.

However, in Bhutan, this powerful dualism of traditional and modern is seen in a different light to the way it is normally presented in modernisation theories and Marxist development theories. In these theories the word "tradition" has a negative meaning, such as backward and static, while being "modern" is worthy of praise. In the plan documents of Bhutan, however, there is an official recognition of the negative effects of modernisation which legitimises a cautious stance towards it. On the other hand, "tradition" is seen as something precious and vital. The meaning of "tradition" became positive through its connection with the nation's independence and the spiritual well-being of the population. This positive view of tradition infuses every discussions about development, modernisation, culture and tradition, backwardness, westernisation, people's well-being, national identity and the nation's very survival.

### *"Self-reliance"*

Since the Fifth Five Year Plan "self-reliance" has been included as a core idea in the development objectives of Bhutan. What follows will examine the history of the Bhutanese idea of "self-reliance". Before the Fifth Plan, Bhutan's self-reliance, or even self-sufficiency is seen as "a used-to-be story". The Third Five Year Plan says:

Before the advent of planned development in Bhutan, ... [e]xcept for a few pockets here and there, all regions in Bhutan were self-sufficient in foodgrains, a small surplus of foodgrains being exchanged for salt and other essential articles from neighbouring countries. (Ministry of Development, 1971: pp. 3-4)

Although the idea that Bhutan should become self-sufficient once again appears as early as the Second Five Year Plan, it only suggests this should be the case in the area of agricultural production, and even this idea is not listed as one of the main objectives. It is the Fifth Plan in which self-reliance is explicitly stated as one of the most important development objectives. According to the Plan, Bhutan had by this time started to see the negative effects of modernisation. One such effect was Bhutan's increasing dependence on external aid. This was stated by the fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck in his coronation address as early as June 1974. He said:

From year to year Bhutan is receiving increasing financial and technical assistance.... [W]e have achieved tremendous progress within a short span of time. In spite of this progress, our present internal revenue cannot even meet a fraction of our Government expenditure. Therefore, the most important task before us at present is to achieve economic self-reliance to ensure the continued

progress of our country in the future. (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 48)

The Sixth Plan shows the government's firm determination on this point:

Prior to the initiation of development activities, the country even without external aid assistance was fully self-sufficient. With the introduction of major development programmes in 1961, including large scale development infrastructure works, it became necessary for the Government to rely on external assistance. Every effort must now be made to bring the country to its original self-reliant state as soon as possible. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 22).

It must be noticed firstly that the Bhutanese concept of "self-reliance" is different from the idea which is generally used in discussions in the development literature. Rist (1997) defines it as a strategy to avoid exploitation or trade related inequality through reducing ties with the outside world. For dependency theorists it then becomes a logical conclusion to operate a strategy of "delinking" from the system (pp. 123-139). Bhutan's case is different however. I will not try to assess whether Bhutan has been inserted into the "international system", or whether it has been "exploited" through unequal trade. These are questions too broad to answer, and dependent upon assumptions employed by the dependency school. What can be said is that in Bhutan's development policy the discourse of the dependency school is not prevalent. Rather Bhutan's idea of "self-reliance" is derived from its sense of "independence" and not from a sense that the nation has unequal trade relations with the outside world. The present king gives a definition of "self-reliance":

National self-reliance in the Bhutanese context means ultimately to be able to stand on one's own feet, have the power of decision in one's own hands, and not be dependent on others. (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 25)

Practically speaking this means aiming at a state of development where there is no external assistance. The Seventh Five Year Plan says:

Although Bhutan's development has been greatly assisted by development cooperation with the Government of India and with other aid donors, the Royal Government is determined not to perpetuate dependence on external assistance. Efforts are thus being made and will continue during the 7FYP to increase Bhutan's technical capacity, through human resource development and through effective technology transfer. In addition, the ability to finance RGOB [Royal Government of Bhutan] activities continues to remain a priority, particularly self-sufficiency in the recurrent and the Royal Government recognises the need to increase domestic revenues. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 23)

Therefore Bhutan's "self-reliance" does not aim at reducing trade ties with the outside world. The Seventh Plan explains:

Self-reliance does not mean that Bhutan will aim to produce all its requirements but that the Government will encourage the production of those goods and services that can compete in export markets. The revenue earned will provide for the import of goods and services that cannot be efficiently produced in Bhutan. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 23)

In other words, as far as Bhutan can pay for development from its own pockets, it is self-reliant. One official in the Planning Commission told me,<sup>26</sup> "We are not beggars. We know what we are doing, and we are fully responsible for matters concerning our own country." The Seventh Plan also states that aid must complement Bhutan's own efforts and

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Neten Zangmo, then Director of the Ministry of Planning - April 1997.

must not be a substitute for them, and that the responsibility for deciding national priorities and development strategy must remain with the Royal Government (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 61). It is a sense of independence, rather than exploitation, which seems to propel Bhutan toward its goal of self-reliance.

The objective of "self-reliance" also includes a strategic focus on mobilising internal resources and raising domestic revenues. Apart from strengthening the tax collection system, economic development in general is given importance in this context. In other words the ultimate aim of economic development, besides raising people's living standards, is to achieve national self-reliance. Development of industry (especially hydropower) is seen as very important. During the Seventh Five Year Plan the hydroelectric power sector<sup>27</sup> accounted for almost twenty-five percent of government revenue (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 146). Several other hydropower plants are under construction. They are supposed to contribute further to government revenues by exporting electricity to India and also through providing power to domestic industries. The Eighth Plan forecasts that although for the next ten years or so, social and economic development is likely to require continued external assistance, towards the end of that period Bhutan will become increasingly self-sufficient in terms of both capital and recurrent resources (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 25).

Finally, it should also be noted that the concept of self-reliance is strongly connected with the nation's sovereignty and the dignity of its people. The Sixth Plan states:

In fact all social, economic, political, cultural and development objectives and efforts will have no

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<sup>27</sup>Hydropower plants in Bhutan are said to be relatively environmentally friendly. According to Munro (1989: p. 20), Chukha hydroelectric plant, the biggest power plant in operation in Bhutan at present, does not involve any damming of the river. The plant is composed of an underground tunnel and artificial waterfall with turbines at the bottom.

meaning if an acceptable level of national self reliance is not achieved. The quest for self reliance ... is vital for the sovereignty and dignity of the people and the country. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 22)

Indeed economic development is not the only area which has been promoted in the name of self-reliance. Human resource development is another area which has been focused upon with the aim of replacing foreign expatriates. The "Bhutanisation" of the material and human resources of development and an emphasis on "standing on one's own feet" would be the best description of the Bhutanese idea of self-reliance. Furthermore, one of the features of Bhutan's development policy is the connection it makes between its development objectives and the ultimate national goal - the nation's security and independence. The policy of preservation of culture and tradition and the promotion of national identity is, as has been seen, also connected to this more fundamental aim. The effect of this is that the significance of both objectives - self-reliance and preservation of culture and tradition - is enhanced.

### *Sustainable Development*

The concept of sustainable development is often discussed in the context of debates about the impact of economic development on the natural environment. As Lélé (1991) points out, sustainability is understood as ecological sustainability, therefore the phrase, sustainable development, is interpreted as environmentally sound development (p. 608). The Bhutanese concept of sustainable development however seems to be different in the sense that it incorporates not only the natural environment but also religion and culture. In Bhutan, the official definition of sustainable development is:

The capacity and political will to effectively address today's development and environmental problems and tomorrow's challenges without compromising Bhutan's unique cultural integrity and historical heritage or the

quality of life of future generations of Bhutanese citizens. (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 28)

It is not a completely new idea to incorporate culture and religion into the concept of sustainable development, and some of the theoretical literature pays attention to indigenous knowledge in the context of environment management. Redclift (1987), for example, argues that the practices of indigenous people are sustainable because of the sheer need to guarantee survival (p. 150). Developing the argument, he remarks that although the practices make sense, the epistemology employed in arriving at these practices is usually obscure to outsiders. This, he continues, is because indigenous people see nature differently. He claims that in order to incorporate environment management effectively in development planning, we need to be aware not only of differing epistemological positions, but also of different cosmologies (p. 155).

In Bhutan's development plan documents, before the Sixth Five Year Plan the only environmental issues raised are about forest management. It is from the Seventh Five Year Plan that sustainable development starts to be emphasised and that culture starts to be explicitly included in the concept. It is also from this point that environmental considerations are extended to all the sectors of development, such as forestry, construction of roads, industry and mining, population and urban development. The environment and sustainable development are stressed to such an extent that they are allocated their own chapter in Plan documents. Moreover a feature of Bhutan's approach to sustainable development is the constant reference to culture, and the assertion that culture and tradition should be seen as not only the means but also the aim of sustainable development. The Seventh Plan says:

Sustainable development, we believe, is a concept that is in harmony with the cultural and religious traditions of Bhutan. Our nation already has a strong



conservation ethic, and indeed, respect for the natural world is a central tenet of Buddhism. It is therefore essential that the traditional culture be kept strong so that its values can guide our sustainable development path. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 28)

Here, traditional beliefs and religion are seen as "useful" for the preservation of the natural environment. In addition, it is not only religion which is seen as significant in preserving natural environment: indigenous farming practices and knowledge are also valued in several documents. *The Middle Path*, a document published by the National Environment Commission Secretariat, gives a brief description of indigenous practices which are environmentally sustainable, and also highlights some examples of indigenous institutions which manage community grazing land, irrigation channels, forests, breeding stock, foot paths and bridges. The document insists on the importance of preserving these institutions and clearly shows that it is farmers' everyday practices which have maintained the environment. It states that there is a need to better understand how farmers think strategically, and to get to know what their objectives, constraints, and long-term priorities are (National Environment Commission, 1998: pp. 40-44).

Sustainability also requires "that all development is consistent with environmental conservation and cultural values" (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 25). In other words, in the government's view, without cultural consciousness, any development programmes and projects will not be sustainable. This is because, as one official<sup>28</sup> told me, indigenous beliefs are very strong amongst the population. *The Middle Path* says that Bhutan's mountains, rivers, lakes, streams, rocks, and soil are the domain of spirits and that preserving them is one of the many intangible aspects of Bhutan's development, whose ultimate aim is maximisation of "Gross National Happiness" (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 31).

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<sup>28</sup> Kunzang Dorji, National Environment Commission. January 1998.

Indeed, "the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the population, [and] the preservation of Bhutan's cultural heritage" are included in Bhutan's development objectives (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 22).

There is a parallel between theoretical works on indigenous environment management (such as Redclift's) and Bhutan's policy of sustainable development, in the sense that both see indigenous practice as useful for environmentally sustainable development, and therefore as a necessary component of development planning. The difference is that Redclift does not really examine what "development" should aim at, while Bhutan's Plan documents constantly examine, reflect, and ponder over what development means for them. According to Redclift indigenous practices are simply the means to achieve the goal of development, whereas in Bhutanese documents - where spiritual well-being is included in the purpose of development - indigenous practices, religion and Bhutanese culture in general are both the means and the end of Bhutan's development.

### **Gross National Happiness**

"Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product."

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck

Since the Seventh Five Year Plan, development plan documents have been more confident in stating that gross national product is too narrow a concept to be used as a measure of Bhutan's development. That is to say that Bhutan's development objectives include, apart from increasing GNP at the national level and income at the household level, ensuring the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the population, and preserving Bhutan's cultural heritage and its rich and varied natural resources (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 22). King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's innovative expression, "Gross National Happiness" (GNH),

sums up Bhutan's holistic idea of development. The concept indicates, as government documents suggest, that development has many more dimensions than those usually associated with gross national product, and that development should be understood as a process that seeks to maximise happiness rather than economic growth. It asserts that spiritual and emotional development cannot and should not be defined in exclusively materialistic terms of increased consumption of goods and services (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 45).

The idea of incorporating "happiness" into its development policy does not seem to be very new in Bhutan. If we look simply at a single word "happiness", rather than GNH, we can find references to it in the Sixth Five Year Plan. In the section on rural housing we find the statement that

Since a comfortable house is a source of security, happiness and contentment for people particularly in the rural areas, the objective during the Sixth Plan will be to improve the overall standard of rural housing and enhance the quality of village life and living standards. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 19)

According to Priesner (1996: p. 16), much earlier, in 1968, the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck expressed his view about development: "There would be no point in developing our country if our people are to suffer. After all the objective of development is to make the people prosperous and happy." Although the term GNH appears little in the successive Five Year Plans, it does not mean that it has been a neglected concept. The emphasis on the emotional and spiritual well-being of the population can be seen to be a translation of GNH into the development plans.

The concept is a challenge to the conventional definition of development. It poses a fundamental question for us. Does more wealth make people happier? The government document,

called *Bhutan 2020*, which presents the direction of Bhutan's development for the next twenty years, explains:

The concept of Gross National Happiness ... rejects the notion that there is a direct and unambiguous relationship between wealth and happiness. If such a relationship existed, it would follow that those in the richest countries should be the happiest in the world. We know that this is not the case. This marginal increase [of population that consider themselves to be happy] has also been accompanied by the growth of many social problems as well as such phenomena as stress-related diseases as well as suicides - surely the antithesis of happiness. (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 46)

The concept of GNH does not reject economic development. It recognises the importance of material progress, but emphasises that economic development is only a means to development. The role of economic growth is only to lay the basis for a society in which people feel secure and enjoy the peace and comfort, and in which human lives flourishes in all its richness (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 16). GNH, according to *Bhutan 2020*, highlights the importance of continuing to seek a balance between the material and non-material components of development and of ensuring that the non-material aspects are not overwhelmed by the negative forces of modernisation (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 47).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> To explain the Bhutanese way of balancing material and non-material (emotional and spiritual) aspects of life, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley illustrates the example of a farmer:

There are many telling experiences of how ordinary Bhutanese themselves strive for a balance between spiritualism and materialism. When I was the regional governor of Eastern Bhutan some years ago, a prominent man was persuaded to undertake double cropping of a high yield rice variety. The man was rewarded with two bumper harvests that year. We had a perfect success story to motivate other farmers. Then, to our astonishment, our model farmer refused to grow any crop the following year. His decision was

There are parallels between the Bhutanese way of thinking and some of the development literature. The idea that economic development should not be the end but the means of development can be also found elsewhere. The UNDP's *Human Development Report 1990* for example says that "the expansion of output and wealth is only a means. The end of development must be human well-being" (p. 10). Furthermore, the idea of a utopian world which human society is predicted to reach eventually can be found in classic socialist thought. In this sense, Bhutan's development strategy may not be as unique as Bhutan insists. Nevertheless the concept of GNH was invented in Bhutan, and no other countries, development agencies or academics have ever referred to it. The uniqueness of Bhutan's development philosophy is that "happiness" is the fundamental objective of development. No other development alternatives have been as comprehensive as GNH, or probably as evocative as GNH in expressing the antithesis to the conventional idea of economic development as the ultimate development goal.

The way in which the Bhutanese government presents its development discourses as being different from the classical, Western inspired discourse has, in the 1990s, become increasingly clearly defined. This appears to form part of a process of cementing the overall official Bhutanese development thinking in Five Year Plans, and in other official documents such as *Bhutan 2020*, and *the Middle Path*.<sup>30</sup> Throughout these official documents there are several points which persistently come up. Firstly, the negative aspects of modernisation have been repeatedly emphasised in a

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to live leisurely and spiritually rather than allow himself to be trapped by greed. (Thinley, 1998)

<sup>30</sup> More recently, inspired by the address by the Foreign Minister, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley at the UNDP Regional Millennium Meeting in 1998 in Seoul, and also after the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the coronation of the present King of Bhutan in 1999, the discussion of the concept of GNH has been enriched. A workshop and a conference were held on the theme of GNH. For the proceedings of the workshop and the conference, see Centre for Bhutan Studies (ed.) (1999) and Royal Institute of Management (ed.) (1999).

particular manner. The points always raised are that traditional Bhutanese values and cultural heritage have been and will be eroded by the forces of modernisation. Many socio-economic changes are talked about, but when they are judged to be negative this is mostly because of their connection with the decline of Bhutanese culture and tradition. Urbanisation is, for example, recognised as being a negative effect of modernisation largely because it is seen as one of the factors which erodes traditional Bhutanese values and customs, such as community support.

Before the beginning of modernization, the subsistence level of most Bhutanese households served to make villagers interdependent. Back then, if a person wanted to construct a house, most of the other households in the village would generously contribute their labour. Today, however, most people are unwilling to help unless they are compensated financially. This loss of community spirit is widely bemoaned,... (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 77)

This is not a call for going back to the period of inconvenience and relative poverty before modernisation started, but it does represent an acknowledgement of one of the negative impacts of modernisation on culture. The following quotation is more direct.

We must recognize that many powerful forces are arrayed against Bhutan as it seeks to safeguard its sovereignty and identity and to implement an approach to development that falls outside the development orthodoxy. Many of the forces will be antithetical to the values we seek to conserve and to build upon (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 50)

Secondly, throughout the official documents, the state is represented as neither a moderniser nor a traditionalist. It is not seen as a moderniser because it takes pride in Bhutan's culture and tradition, and never presents culture and

tradition as backward. It does not see culture and tradition as a harmful force preventing the modernisation of the country. It is however not an obstinate traditionalist, as it commits to modernisation and acknowledges some of its positive aspects. Examining both the growth in per capita income and the improvement in Bhutan's position in UNDP's Human Development Index, the government takes pride in the progress Bhutan has recorded. It attributes the success of nearly four decades of modernisation to Bhutan's "development assets". Among twelve development assets identified, nine are seen as being derived from its history and traditional values, customs and institutions.<sup>31</sup> The state is modernising the country utilising the development assets which are inherent to Bhutan.

The state defines its role as a "social synthesizer" (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 27), exercising a cultural imperative to distinguish between the positive and negative forces of changes and also to "assimilate the positive forces for change, making them our own and accommodating them within our own distinctive model of "development" (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 27). In other words the state is a filter and at the same time a processor of the numerous changes occurring during the process of modernisation; it also judges modernisation against Bhutanese values. *Bhutan 2020* says:

Our belief and values, so deeply rooted in the perceptions and behaviour of our people, provide us with the prisms through which we will continue to interpret the world and to distinguish between positive

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<sup>31</sup> The nine development assets are (1) unity as a nation, (2) maintaining independence (avoiding being colonised), (3) the monarchy, which has played a pivotal role in the formation of policies, (4) an approach to development which has been shaped by the beliefs and values of the faith the Bhutanese have held for more than one thousand years, (5) strong tradition of self-reliance, (6) the Bhutanese character traits of being strong-willed, disciplined and law-abiding, (7) hard-working and enterprising people, (8) sound policies which have been especially bold in the field of social development, and (9) institutions such as decentralised systems of decision-making (Planning Commission, 1999).

and negative forces of change. (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 50)

We can see that culture and tradition are interpreted in two ways: one is as something which has to be preserved. Culture and tradition are externalised in this context, as if they are tangible entities. The other is as something which works as a "prism". Traditional values act as a criterion against which developments are assessed as good or bad, positive or negative, proper or improper. In this interpretation, culture and tradition is more intangible, and something to be used.

The most distinctive feature of the official documents is their insistence on Bhutan's development policy being original and independent, and their strong claim that Bhutan is the owner of its own development path: the word "unique" is frequently used. With regard to terms which are in fashion and used by international development agencies and in the area of development studies, it insists that these should be placed in the context of Bhutan's history. For example, with regard to decentralisation and people's participation, the Sixth Five Year Plan says, "decentralized administration has been a traditional practice in Bhutan..." (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 13). "People's participation in community and public works is not a new practice in Bhutan; it has a long tradition" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 14). Other terms such as sustainable development and self-reliance are given new interpretations, which are often slightly different from what they usually mean in the development literature. In this sense the following quotation is very Bhutanese:

... many of the priorities now advocated by international development institutions, such as human development, environmental conservation, self-reliance, decentralization, participation and empowerment, and gender sensitivity, are not new for Bhutan. Although we have not always referred to these priorities in the terminology favoured today, they have for decades been essential component of our



distinctively Bhutanese approach to development.  
(Planning Commission, 1999: p. 25)

Bhutan does not want to be identified with either mainstream development thinking or other countries' development paths:

Bhutan stands apart from many other developing countries for our more cautious interpretation of the benefits of modernization and for the way in which we have chosen to articulate a cultural imperative in formulating our development priorities and policies. Our approach to and model of development differs in important respects from 'mainstream' development strategies, while some of the values we choose to stress cannot easily be accommodated in the theoretical orthodoxy advocated by others. Our decision to adopt a distinctively Bhutanese approach to development has led us to follow a path along which few other developing countries have travelled.  
(Ministry of Planning, 1998: p. 3)

Bhutan finds the source of its uniqueness and distinctiveness in its history, and the fact that Bhutan has never been colonised appears to be a strong source of pride:

Unlike many other developing countries, we were able to resist colonization and we entered the modern world in the confident knowledge that we were our own masters. We were never forced to assimilate an ideology of inferiority and subservience that colonial masters imposed on subjugated peoples.... We realized and accepted early on that, while others may have considered us poor and backward, our future was firmly in our own hands and that whatever future we built would be the result of our own efforts. (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 21)

This is an expression of identity, pride and the desire to be independent physically and spiritually, unlike Sikkim or Tibet, two neighbouring Buddhist countries which have been

assimilated by India and China respectively, and unlike many developing countries which, from Bhutan's point of view, have been overwhelmed by Western ideas of economic development. It is an expression of the nation's firm determination to be a sovereign independent state and to be the owner of its own future.

I would argue that the idea of Gross National Happiness can be seen as embodying an almost instinctive and natural response to the Western concept of development as material progress, which to the Bhutanese feels so alien. *Bhutan 2020* says:

[F]rom our traditional perspective, poverty and underdevelopment should not be defined only in terms of the absence of wealth but also in terms of the persistence of ignorance and prejudice. (Planning Commission, 1999: p. 25)

This assertion in turn clearly shows how the conventional concept of development is culturally defined, and the argument that development as material progress is a Euro-centric concept has real validity here. Through the lens of such a different definition of development, we can now see vividly how biased the "conventional" idea of development is.

There is an ambiguous but curious dichotomy in Bhutanese attitudes towards tradition and modernisation which runs through many of the official documents. On the one hand they emphasise the importance of seeking a balance between spiritual well-being and material progress, and they assert the necessity of harmonising the traditional and the modern. The documents insist that the preservation of Bhutanese traditions should not be understood as a conservative (or static) act, and that Bhutanese values change as society alters during the process of modernisation. The important thing is to maintain a sense of "Bhutanese identity" amidst modernisation and rapid socio-economic changes. On the other hand, however, the documents constantly state that

Bhutanese values have been eroded by the forces of modernisation. In this context the picture is clearly an either/or story: Bhutan cannot have it both ways - culture and tradition are something which cannot be consistent with modernisation. This coexistence of seemingly contradictory comments might be ascribed to the official recognition that traditional Bhutanese values have been declining as modernisation progresses, and to the desire of officials, who want modernisation without losing Bhutanese culture, tradition and, most of all, Bhutanese identity.

#### **4.2 Education policy and culture and tradition**

This section focuses on education policy as an element of Bhutan's development policy. Firstly, it looks at education policy as a point of juncture between modernisation and cultural policies on the one hand, and the young people of Bhutan on the other. Secondly, it examines education policy as an expression of the official view of young people, and the generalisations it makes about young people as a group. This section is also particularly concerned with the discourse around "wholesome education" and "value education", both of which are relatively new terms in Bhutan and which can be seen as interpretations of cultural policy.

#### **Overall structure of the education system**

In the Second and Third Five Year Plans the main aim of education seems to be to provide the technical personnel needed for the implementation and planning of Bhutan's development (according to the description in the Second Plan, this was also the same for the First Five Year Plan (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 29)). The nation's ultimate aim is to "become self-sufficient in regard to the need of educated personnel for its developmental programmes" (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 48). Consequently the emphasis is on the quality of education rather than quantity during the first three Five Year Plans, "in order to create cadres of qualified technical personnel at all levels of manning the various services" (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p.

ix). The Third Plan even expects to close down some primary schools where attendance was very poor, and to upgrade some of the primary schools to junior high schools. This policy seems to reflect the low priority given to Western education among ordinary people. An ex-official of the Education Division said:

When modern education started, nobody wanted to send their children to school. Parents used to say, 'Western education is useless. It does not send children to heaven when they die.' They did not see any significance in Western education at all.

Before modern education started, education meant monastic education, and the above impression arises from a comparison between modern education and monastic education. Modern education did not seem to be important for ordinary people in the society at the beginning of the modernisation processes.

The Fifth Plan still emphasises the quality rather than the quantity of education. It also aims at providing educated and trained manpower to meet the needs of development programmes. More importantly, education is given an additional role, namely preserving and promoting "the country's rich cultural and spiritual heritage, preventing the alienation of the educated from this heritage." (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 118). The Plan clearly states that preserving the traditional values and rich culture of the country is one of the fundamental ends of education (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 133). The preservation of culture and tradition was also referred to in the Second and the Third Plans. In the context of establishing the National Museum, the Second Plan says:

... with the impact of Education and modern living condition much of the cultural heritage of Bhutan is being lost. It is therefore, felt necessary to preserve example of the ancient culture such as paintings, photographs, old books, armour and arms carvings,

handicrafts, old archives ... in a properly organised museum. (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 35)

The Third Plan touches on a Dzongkha medium school established during the First Plan and says

This institution intended to help preserve the cultural heritage of the country is also providing Bhutanese language teachers required for the school. (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 10)

Thus it is not appropriate to say that education policies were not sensitive to the need for preservation of culture and tradition at an early stage. However a clear difference is that the Fifth Plan for the first time situates the preservation and promotion of culture and tradition as amongst the main objectives of education. Moreover, cultural policy in the area of education has been more or less the same since then. It has pointed out the need to maintain, or to infuse if necessary, traditional Bhutanese values among young people. Yet it was only from the Sixth Plan that the preservation of culture and tradition became one of the overall development objectives of Bhutan: the education sector was therefore one step advance in this respect.

From the Sixth Plan onwards, not surprisingly, the preservation of culture and national identity has been more strongly asserted in education policy. One of the roles of the education sector is to promote "loyalty to the monarchy, a sense of pride and commitment to the nation and a feeling of communal harmony and shared destiny based on the country's rich traditions and customs and the values of the Bhutanese System"<sup>32</sup> (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 18). Furthermore, as preservation of culture and promotion of national identity is emphasised in connection with the nation's security, providing educated and trained manpower is discussed within the same context.

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<sup>32</sup> The Plan documents do not give any definition of "Bhutanese System".

... Bhutan employed over 113,000 expatriate personnel in the beginning of the Sixth Plan compared to about 10,000 during the Fourth Plan period (1976 - 81). 80% of the country's development work was therefore dependent on non-nationals<sup>33</sup>.... It is essential to close this gap [between the volume of its development programmes and Bhutan's ability to implement them] to a manageable level by developing the nation's own human resources. Otherwise, the need to protect the country's long term security and well-being would make it necessary to slow down the pace of work and cut back on development programmes. (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 20)

Education is expected to play the main role in producing the trained and educated manpower necessary for the country's development process, and to allow the replacement of expatriates with Bhutanese.

In this context the actual contents of Bhutanese education become relevant. Making the curriculum contents more relevant to Bhutan - the Bhutanisation of curriculum - becomes a new focus of education policy from the Sixth Plan onwards. The Plan is also a turning point in terms of the emphasis placed on the quantity rather than the quality of education. It sets the goal of "Universal Primary Education and eradication of illiteracy" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 33).

The Seventh and the Eighth Plans are not much different from the Sixth Plan in terms of priority areas and objectives. Both put importance on the expansion of education, preservation of traditional Bhutanese values and the Bhutanisation of the curriculum. A difference can be found however in an introductory comment in the education section of the Plan. The Seventh Plan (as well as the Eighth Plan) for

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<sup>33</sup> Until very recent, in Bhutan "non-national" is conventionally used to mean "non-Bhutanese".

the first time refers to monastic education as Bhutan's "traditional" form of education.

Education has been an important part of religious life in Bhutan for centuries and continues to be so today with approximately 4,000 monks, nuns and lay priests receiving education in religious institutions, supported by the state, throughout the country. This figure does not include those studying in private monasteries. Monastic education involves the study of religious rituals as well as other skills, including literacy, numeracy, philosophy, astrology, literature, arts and in some cases traditional medicine. Formal western education was started in the 1950s. (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 72)

In previous plan documents education has automatically meant modern education: in this sense these comments represent a change. However, it does not mean that the government stance to modern education has altered dramatically. Apart from the introductory section of the chapter on education, "education" is taken to mean "modern education" without the need to add qualifying adjectives such as "modern" or "Western". The main sector of education is still predominantly modern English medium education, and the government places enormous attention on its facilities, curriculum and staff. The reference to monastic education can be seen as a part of the overall trend in the development plans in which Bhutan's culture and tradition has been increasingly emphasised. Also it should be noted that there is an institutional constraint: the monk body is under a different administration, and so is not a concern of the Education Division.

### **Bhutanisation**

Modern education in Bhutan started with the adoption of the Indian education system: this was unavoidable because of the acute shortage of qualified teachers and administrators. Not just staff but also the whole curriculum were imported from

India (Rose, 1977: p. 133). English was also set up as the medium of instruction in modern schools in Bhutan (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 29).<sup>34</sup> This was convenient and inevitable at this first stage considering the fact that almost all of the higher education of Bhutanese students took place in India (Holsti, 1982: p. 28), and so these students had to be prepared for entry into the Indian university system.

This situation did raise the question of the relevance of education to Bhutan's needs and from then onwards, the education policy of Bhutan appears to be a constant effort to Bhutanise the education system. The focus of the Bhutanisation of education however has been changed over time. The Second and the Third Five Year Plans suggest translating textbooks into the Bhutanese language. From the Sixth Plan onwards however the translation of textbooks is not central issue for policy-makers. Instead of translation, Bhutanisation meant making the contents of the curriculum more relevant to Bhutan's own needs and situation. The Sixth Plan says that "having been structured on the Indian system, the education system in Bhutan needs to be reformed to relate it to the values, environment and the history of Bhutanese people" (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 33). Hence textbooks were to be rewritten rather than translated. Revision of the contents of curriculum was necessary "to incorporate the history, values and environment of the Bhutanese people" (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 74) starting from the lower levels of the education system. English textbooks were re-written, and environmental studies, Bhutanese history and geography textbooks were prepared (Planning Commission, 1991: p. 77). From the 1995 academic year onwards Environmental Studies (EVS), which combines history, geography and social studies, began to be taught in Dzongkha in Pre-Primary (PP) Class in twenty-six selected schools. From 1997 it has been implemented nationwide. The Eighth Plan directs that environmental studies should be taught in Dzongkha between the Pre-Primary Class and Class

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<sup>34</sup> Initially the medium of instruction in secular education was Hindi. Hindi was replaced by English in 1964 (Driem, 1994: p. 95).



3. Here, the issue of language comes back. Dzongkha is seen by educationists as "a powerful and effective means to teach Bhutanese values, belief and religion."<sup>35</sup> The separate policy of the promotion of Dzongkha as the national language also seems to have given an impetus to this policy direction. A document by the Education Division even indicates the possibility of a change in the medium of instruction from English to Dzongkha (Education Division, 1994b: p. 5).

However, for secondary education the fact that the students have to take the Indian Certificate for School Examination (Class 10) and Indian School Certificate (Class 12) makes it difficult for Bhutan to launch an independent curriculum.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Bhutanisation of education does not stop at the revision of textbooks. Under the slogan of "wholesome education" and new phrases such as "value education", "dignity of labour" and "career counselling", it goes beyond the academic curriculum. I will now examine these terms as well as the context in which they are used.

### **Wholesome Education**

The phrase "wholesome education" appears in official education documents as early as 1989 (Department of Education, 1993: p. 18). It "aims at the all-around development of a child, including mental, emotional and physical education."<sup>37</sup> The Minister of Health and Education, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, says that wholesome education means a move away from exam-oriented and academic studies as the sole purpose of school education to an emphasis on the overall development of the child. Therefore, he continues, education should include appreciation of and the development of skills in music, art and sport, which are

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<sup>35</sup> An interview with an official in CAPSS (Curriculum and Professional Support Section), the Education Division, on 9th February 1998.

<sup>36</sup> The first joint examination between BBE (Bhutan Board of Examinations) and ICSE took place in March 1996 (Education Division, 1996b: p. 5).

<sup>37</sup> Pema Thinley, the Director of Education Division, then the principal of the Sherubtse College, speaking to BBS on 16th March 1998.

not in the curriculum, and also an appreciation for physical labour (CAPSS<sup>38</sup> *Newsletter*, April 1997).

One area which is highlighted under the banner of wholesome education is "skills"; alongside this, "dignity of labour" is a phrase which has been used to promote so-called "blue-collar jobs" or manual labour. As early as the Sixth Plan the need for education in Bhutan to impart to students "a healthy attitude towards agricultural occupation and psychological acceptance of rural life" is addressed (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 34). The reason that the government has to promote "skills" and manual labour is strongly connected with the socio-economic changes which Bhutan has experienced for almost forty years, and the changes in people's aspirations which have run alongside them. The Eighth Five Year Plan addresses the problem as one of "students' expectations."<sup>39</sup>

One of the growing concerns facing the development of education in Bhutan is the increasing expectation amongst students for 'white-collar' employment in government. Related to this is the general reluctance to under take any manual work and the preference, instead, for office-related jobs no matter how unproductive and lowly paid these may be. This has led to the disproportionate demand for academic education compared to training in technical and agricultural skills, which has further contributed to

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<sup>38</sup> Curriculum and Professional Support Section.

<sup>39</sup> A similar change in education policy in which a debate about the relevance of an imported curriculum has led to an emphasis being placed on practical subjects is also observed elsewhere. In Swaziland, for example, educational planners have continually debated the relevance of the colonial school curriculum for Swaziland's new national goals and development plans. According to Both, the Ministry of Education expressed official concern over the academic emphasis of the colonial curriculum, and started to diversify the curriculum at the primary level to include practical subjects, such as agriculture and home science, from the early 1990s. The trend towards white-collar job among students is a concern for the country's elite. Furthermore, modern education is perceived by many people, and parents and students alike, as the key to access to modern sector employment and economic success (Both, 1997).

the emerging problems related to youth and rural-urban migration. (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 182)

It has been pointed out in previous chapters that the value of modern English medium education has these days been inflated in Bhutan. This is largely because modern education is almost the only entrance to the "Bhutanese ladder of success", which would ultimately result in a student becoming a high official, or a *dasho*. A *dasho* with his red scarf signifies power, privilege and respect in society. Even if a person has not aspired to that high level, education and being in school mean an escape from hard physical labour in the fields. Therefore manual labour implies going down (or being unable to climb up) the ladder of success. Furthermore, according to an official in the Planning Commission,<sup>40</sup> students are inspired by the colourful and exciting town life, and do not want to live in a remote village. This Bhutanese ladder of success has in fact been socially imposed on many young people in one way or another. One foreign volunteer teacher, who worked in a school in eastern Bhutan for two years told me:

One day we were in a town with some students. A Bhutanese teacher pointed to road maintenance workers from a distance and told to students, 'If you do not want to be like that in the future, you must study hard.' It is disgraceful because a parent of those students might be in similar kind of manual work!

A man, who runs a hotel in Thimphu, told me on my casual visit to his office:

I feel sorry for children. For them school is headache. They have to carry a heavy bag everyday, and they have got lot of pressure at school. But they have to study hard to get a white collar job. A white collar job means luxury, television, video, refrigerator... I brought my child to this hotel the other day and told

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Neten Zangmo on 27th November 1997.

him, 'If you do not want to sweep the floor like that in the future,' I was pointing at one of the sweepers of the hotel, 'You've got to study hard'.

From a student's point of view, it is the same picture again. They feel the social pressure imposed by the "ladder of success". One graduate, who climbed up the ladder, presents his observation in the newspaper:

Going abroad has become such a passion [in Bhutan].... In the wake of ISC result declaration, we see many of our students and their parents suffering from a frustration syndrome,<sup>41</sup> one that is socially induced. We have always told them that qualifying for professional courses in India and abroad is the better ultimate.... Many students do not question as to why they prefer to go for professional courses. They say they are interested. On closer discussion, you realise that their interests are quite often forced upon them by our social attitude. (*Kuensel*, 3rd October 1998)

While young people are under pressure from various directions, and also aspire to climb up the ladder of success, the government is concerned about a possible situation in which many educated people are going to be unemployed. The Education Division says:

While the general education system ... face every year severe pressure for enrolment and is already over congested, the various technical institutes ... are finding it increasingly difficult to attract school leavers to join their respective training programmes. The unfortunate scenario exists mainly because our students and, worst still, their parents carry

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<sup>41</sup> Based on the results of the ISC examination at the end of the Class 12, it is decided whether a student can get a scholarship to study on a professional course in a college in India or abroad. For those who can get the scholarship, a future job in a government office is guaranteed in the current system.

unrealistically too high aspirations and expectations on the career prospects. ... It has become imperative on part of all our teachers and the other concerned authorities to appropriately caution our students and their parents on the real danger of educated unemployment in the very near future. Students completing formal schooling system, unless equipped with some specialised skills of one form or another generally provided in one of the training institutes, have the real danger of not getting any employment. (Education Division, 1994b: pp. 12-13)

It is however not very easy to get rid of the psychological barriers against going down the ladder of success after a certain amount of formal schooling has occurred. It is disappointing and frustrating for young people to feel they might have to take up blue-collar jobs. The slogan of "dignity of labour" is used by the Education Division and other concerned sections of the government to help crack this perception barrier, and to moderate students' aspirations. One of the programmes which has been developed along this line is Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) which includes agriculture and social forestry. Agriculture and social forestry "as practical experience programs are carried out by all schools in the form of creating and maintaining kitchen garden and social forestry programs" (Education Division, 1996a: p. 6). Its aims encompass, among others, the need to "develop respect for manual labour and agriculture" and also to "build positive attitude towards agricultural occupation" (Education Division, 1996a: p. 50). Furthermore, vocational education programmes have been introduced in schools. The Education Division has conducted some vocational courses such as barbering, plumbing and carpentry in selected high schools and junior high schools in order to provide "life-related skills" for students (Education Division, 1996b: p. 9).

Another area which has been enthusiastically promoted by the government is "Value Education". The phrases "value education" or "moral education" have appeared in official documents since the mid-1990s, although similar concerns

and policies have become explicit since the Fifth Five Year Plan. The kind of values which the Education Division has tried to promote may be divided into three areas, namely patriotism, awareness of Bhutanese culture and tradition, and good manners and consideration for other people. The first two areas have been present since the Fifth Plan, while the last area is relatively new, and has been raised in the context of "Value Education". The Fifth Plan includes the introduction of a strong national-cultural orientation to educational content (Planning Commission, 1981: p. 118). The Sixth Plan takes on a more nationalistic tone, as promotion of national identity is included in the objectives of overall development. It directs that the curriculum in the schools should be oriented towards cultivating ethical values and patriotism and fostering an understanding and appreciation for the salient features of Bhutanese culture and ethos, and a sense of "oneness" which can cut across linguistic and regional differences (Planning Commission, 1987: p. 34). The concentration on Value Education was initiated by the *kasho*<sup>42</sup> of 1996, which recommends the formation and launch of value education programmes.<sup>43</sup> The recognition of a decline in Bhutanese values among young people has also given a strong impulse to the introduction of value education. This decline has been felt not only by officials of the various ministries but also by ordinary adults above thirty years of age. Furthermore, it is stated that manners and self-discipline are deteriorating (Education Division, 1994b: p. 14). *The CAPSS Newsletter* notes that the following kind of comments are increasingly heard in social gatherings where education is discussed.

Modern society is becoming increasingly more lawless, violent, undisciplined and permissive and this trend is most apparent among the younger generation. There is a general decline in such things as respect for authority, politeness and good manners, resulting in

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<sup>42</sup> Royal Decree.

<sup>43</sup> Information from an interview with an official in CAPSS on 9th February 1998.

children today being ruder, using more bad language and caring less about their appearance and dress than ever before. (CAPSS Newsletter, April 1996)

Juvenile delinquency is another area with which educationists in urban areas, especially in Thimphu and Phuntsholing, are increasingly concerned. The Youth Guidance and Counselling Section (YGCS), which was established in 1996, was set up to address the issues of declining Bhutanese values, to implement value education through various youth programmes, as well as to provide career counselling and run the Youth Centre in Thimphu (Education Division, 1996b: pp. 5-7). The YGCS is also expected to provide some rehabilitation for young people who have committed juvenile delinquency.<sup>44</sup>

A document issued by the Education Division presents the wide range of "values" which schools should stand for. The document - called *The Purpose of School Education in Bhutan* (Education Division, 1996a) - divides values into three categories, "Values Relating to Education", "Values Relating to Self and Others" and "Values Relating to Civic Responsibilities": the second and third categories are probably most relevant to the discussion here. They include the following recommendations.

2.1.1 The love and loyalty to the king, country and the people or Tsa Wa Sum; the traditional values of "Phada Bugi Thadamtse Lay Jumdey" or mutual trust will be encouraged and developed in the children.

2.2 The students in the schools will be helped to recognise their own worth as individuals... the school education in Bhutan will :

2.2.1 promote individual growth in relation to social needs through the provision of knowledge, information and skills relevant to a pre-dominantly agricultural economy and responsive to other needs of the over all economy;

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with an official in the YGCS in May 1997.

2.2.2 develop in students an attitude of resourcefulness and self-reliance which can lead to self employment as well as to seek out and find employment in the private sector;

2.2.3 promote in students a sense of self-discipline and duty; this would involve accepting responsibility for one's own actions, being punctual and fulfilling commitments, taking pride in personal cleanliness, and grooming, and actively pursuing personal health and fitness;

2.2.4 help students to learn to be honest, open and being co-operative in their dealing and relationship with other people;

2.2.5 help develop an attitude of pursuing excellence in their personal and group endeavour;

2.2.6 help children to learn to think not only of their **material advantage**,<sup>45</sup> but also how to serve others, less fortunate than themselves and to think of the positive welfare of others in a warm and caring fashion.

3.1 Students in Bhutan will be helped to:

3.1.1 develop a pride in being Bhutanese in a world community and sharing its unique cultural heritage;

3.1.2 realise and appreciate the importance of the unique Bhutanese identity as a sovereign nation;

3.1.3 develop a commitment to the Buddhist Philosophy of non-violence, tolerance, compassion, love and peace which has enabled the Bhutanese to live in harmony, respecting individual differences.

3.2 Schools in Bhutan will also promote positive attitude towards lawful and just authority ...

3.4 The students will be encouraged to participate and support economic development efforts of the government, the conservation of heritage and environment and to care for the public and private properties as one's own.

The Education Division tries to promote these values, as well as Bhutanese curriculum contents, through certain school

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<sup>45</sup> Emphasis in original.



activities and also everyday interaction between teachers and students. Several activities are suggested such as morning assembly which consists of a prayer, a short talk on important religious, cultural, moral values and discipline by the head of the school, teachers or students, and the singing of the national anthem. Wearing *gho* and *kira* as a school uniform is compulsory. As regards everyday interaction, a document suggests:

All teachers in their interactions with individuals, groups and classes are seen to support certain values by their encouragement of certain forms of behaviour. What teachers say and do, what they reward and punish, what they smile and frown at indicate the importance they place on values such as, truthfulness, perseverance, considerateness, tolerance, patience and so on. (Education Division, 1996c)

To conclude this chapter on official development discourse, I would like to examine the extent to which Western development discourse has influenced Bhutanese official discourse. As we have seen, conventional development thinking, which projects Western society as a model of development and regards economic indicators as the prime index of development began to be criticised as early as the 1970s. As Nederveen Pieterse (1998) points out, the dissatisfaction with conventional development thinking crystallised into an alternative, people-centred approach, and this approach has been further carried out under the leadership of the basic needs and alternative development schools of thought (p. 346). According to Nederveen Pieterse, this alternative development approach has been incorporated into the policies of donors, bilateral and multilateral, over the years, and a commitment to participation, sustainability and equity is shared by various donors, including NGOs, donor states and international agencies (pp. 369-370). The UNDP *Human Development Report* which has been published annually since 1989 is testimony of this. It highlights the Human Development Index as an alternative indicator of

development. In the 1980s, a group of people, including Escobar, went further and started to reject the whole idea of development, and to seek alternatives to development. What this group shares is an interest in culture, local knowledge, the critique of science and the promotion of localised, pluralistic grassroots movements (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998: p. 362).

This situation can be interpreted in two ways: firstly that Bhutanese development policy, which is culturally-aware and environment-friendly, is mainly influenced by Western development discourse; or secondly, that the Bhutanese government has exploited a change of climate within Western development discourse in order to realise development priorities which it has had for a long time. Changes in development discourse and the focus of donors may have created an environment in which a different idea of development is more acceptable to donors. The environment has certainly been conducive for Bhutan to press forward with its own development policy which emphasises not only socio-economic development but also the importance of preserving culture, tradition and the natural environment. It has become easier for the government to articulate a culturally-aware development policy.

It is unlikely that donors have pressurised Bhutan to follow their development discourse. Firstly at the policy level, we have seen that attention to the preservation of culture and tradition has been observed at a very early stage in the development plans in Bhutan, and that this was because the government, at the point of introduction of modernisation, tried to show its cultural awareness, as we will see later in this book, in order to keep up its posture of observing the doxa. For instance the Second Five Year Plan (1966 - 1971) states that the country's rich cultural heritage has to be preserved (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1966: p. 95). The Fifth Five Year Plan (1981 - 1987), which was prepared around 1980, suggests that traditional Bhutanese values have to be preserved through education (Planning

Commission, 1981: p. 133). Therefore the policy of the preservation of culture and tradition, and its harmonisation with modernisation is not very new to Bhutan. Furthermore, this policy has been expressed even more strongly since the Sixth Five Year Plan (1987 - 92), probably as a result of a growing perception of negative effects of modernisation (especially in town areas), rather than changes in views among donors or in development discourse.

Secondly, the government has carefully chosen donor countries and agencies which fit Bhutan's development objectives. Major donors to Bhutan have expressed their appreciation towards the development policy. For instance, the Chairman of the Danish Parliament's Finance Committee said on his visit to Bhutan in May 1999 that he hoped Bhutan would be able to continue to protect its culture and identity and to maintain the balance between its traditions and modernisation (*Kuensel*, 8th May 1999).<sup>46</sup> The Dutch government has committed funds towards the restoration of cultural monuments in Bhutan.<sup>47</sup> A member of the Asian Development Bank's Board of Directors commented on his visit to Bhutan, "the ministers here are very committed to development and modernisation and to preserving the cultural identity of Bhutan. In Asia, some countries have lost their culture and are now facing difficulties." He also said that if he were a Bhutanese minister, he would do exactly what Bhutanese Ministers are doing (*Kuensel*, 29th August 1998).<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Bhutanese development policies in general have drawn sympathy and gained in their persuasive power. The Danish Development Minister said:

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<sup>46</sup> In 1996 assistance from Denmark made up 9.7% (US\$10.5 million) of total external assistance to Bhutan. Denmark is the second largest bilateral donor to Bhutan (UNDP, 1998: p. 44).

<sup>47</sup> According to *Kuensel*, the Dutch government committed Nu 5.5 million for the renovation of ten temples and monasteries. The agreement was signed in December 1997. Eight temples and monasteries were also renovated with Dutch assistance in 1994 (*Kuensel*, 27th December 1997).

<sup>48</sup> In 1996 assistance from the ADB made up 4.9% (US\$5.0 million) of total external assistance to Bhutan (UNDP, 1998: p. 43).

Visiting this country, seeing the nature, and meeting people face to face is realising that there is still in this world such a thing as alternatives and different ways of doing things. The right to be different should be preserved as not only a human right but also a right of nations in this world of globalisation where it is actually in our best interests. And I think Bhutan's contribution in this respect should be seen and cherished and not just be looked upon as something curious. (*Kuensel*, 19th September 1998)

Thus the view that Bhutan's development policy has been directly and indirectly forced on the country by donors and Western development discourse does not take into account the fact that the Bhutanese government has also manipulated its environment for its own ends. Thirdly, a very important aspect of Bhutanese development policy is not even envisaged in Western development discourse: this is the idea of Gross National Happiness, the main aim of current Bhutanese development policy. The fact that the phrase resembles "Gross National Product" is a clear signal that this idea is in competition with the Western model of development. Finally, throughout the formulation of development policies the government has described these policies as unique and original. This is another indication of their determination to be different. Bhutan's case suggests that the real world is not as hegemonic as these theories of discursive analysis of development would suggest.

Bhutanese official development thinking appears to have developed its own discourses. I would argue that this is because Bhutanese development policy and development discourses have neither been motivated primarily by economic factors nor encouraged by Western models. The path of development which Bhutan is trying to trace is mainly directed by political motivations, that is survival of the country in difficult geopolitical circumstances and the survival of Bhutanese identity in the face of a huge wave of modernisation. That is to say that in order to articulate

Bhutanese identity, Bhutan must be different from the West and the Western model of development.

## **Chapter 5: Culture and Tradition in Opposition to Westernisation**

This chapter aims to understand the different discourses about modernisation, culture and tradition which exist among young people in Bhutan. Following Bourdieu's framework, the chapter will examine the universe of discourse and the universe of the undiscussed by deconstructing both "modernisation", and "culture and tradition". In order to provide the setting of the multiple discourse in Bhutan this chapter firstly describes the background to the different kinds of education system which operate within the society. There are three kinds of education in Bhutan, namely English medium education, Dzongkha medium education and monastic education. The social context of each educational system will be discussed in terms of their influence on an individual's career scope. The first part of this chapter also examines this social context in relation to Bourdieu's idea of "mode of domination", a perspective which provides several historical and theoretical insights. Secondly, I will introduce discourses on modernisation, culture and tradition. By deconstructing perceptions of "modernisation" and "Bhutanese culture and tradition", the different opinions of young people will be examined. The ways in which young people criticise other people's opinions and defend their own point of view will be investigated and the background/motivation of each discourse will be examined using Bourdieu's framework. The last part of the chapter will investigate the universe of the undiscussed, the doxa, and its background.

### **5.1 Contexts of multiple discourse**

Modern English medium education is the dominant mode of education today and encompasses the largest number of schools and students of the three types of system. Formal secular education, according to Driem, was introduced into Bhutan by the first king, Ugyen Wangchuck, with the opening of two schools. This number was expanded to five schools during the reign of the second king, Jigme Wangchuck. In the

mid-1950s, during the reign of the third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, it was decided to set up a nationwide network of formal secular education (Driem, 1994: p. 95). In 1959, there were fifty-nine primary schools and 1,500 students in the country (Imaeda, 1994: p. 111). Before the launch of the First Five Year Plan (1961-1966), education covered only the primary level (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 40). Thus, almost all of the higher education of Bhutanese students took place in India (Holsti, 1982: p. 28). In 1997 there were more than three hundred schools and institutions from primary to college level with about 90,000 students in them (Education Division, 1997). The gross primary enrolment rate, according to the Eighth Five Year Plan, is estimated to be seventy-two percent (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 178).<sup>1</sup>

In modern English medium education students are taught science, mathematics, English and social studies in English. Dzongkha is the only subject which is taught in the national language. <sup>2</sup> The present structure of English medium education consists of one year pre-primary, six years of primary education, four years of secondary education (two years in junior high school level and two years in high school level), two years of the junior college programme and three years in the under-graduate programme. Courses in training institutes are available for students who have passed various levels of education, however most courses are for those who

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<sup>1</sup> Enrolment rates at higher levels of education are not available. A comparison of the crude number of students in each level of education shows the following: 74,709 students at primary level, 17,436 students at secondary level (Class 7-12), and 570 students at the university level and above (Education Division, 1997). These figures include both students in Dzongkha medium education and English medium education, but do not include those in schools abroad. The number of students who study abroad is not available. However, many students at university level are in foreign countries. For example in 1997 the government offered one hundred scholarships for undergraduates to study abroad (the majority in India) (*Kuensel*, 3rd May 1997). In addition to this, many civil servants study abroad at postgraduate level. Thus the number of students inside the country shown above tends to underestimate the volume of education the country offers.

<sup>2</sup> Up to Class 3 Environment Studies is also taught in Dzongkha.

have passed Class 10. English medium education is seen as the mainstream mode of education in Bhutan not only because of the number of students enrolled in the system but also in terms of the social attention given to it. When people talk about education, it almost automatically means English medium education. These days in Thimphu, "young people" are becoming an issue, because of problems of drugs, smoking and alcohol, and also, people think, because respect for Bhutanese culture and tradition is declining amongst young people. But when people talk about young people in this context they usually only mean those in English medium education. The opinions held by those young people educated in English medium schools therefore can be seen as the dominant view among young people in Bhutan.

Dzongkha medium education on the other hand is a minor partner in terms of number of schools and students. In 1997, there were five educational institutions<sup>3</sup> and one Dzongkha Honours Course in Sherubtse College. There are approximately five hundred students enrolled in these institutes and on the course. The curriculum of these schools are specialised: amongst them all the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, where my fieldwork was conducted, provides the most comprehensive and general curriculum. The students learn Dzongkha, Choekey,<sup>4</sup> English, Buddhist philosophy, folk music, mask dancing, astrology, Buddhist painting, Bhutanese carpentry, as well as mathematics and science.<sup>5</sup> Teaching staff includes both monks and teachers trained in English medium institutes or colleges. This institute used to provide classes from primary level to Class 12. However, at the time of my fieldwork, primary education was gradually being phased out, and a new curriculum had started for Classes 11 and 12 which was available for those

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<sup>3</sup> These are the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, National Institute of Traditional Medicine, School of Fine Arts and Crafts, Royal Academy of Performing Arts and the Trashiyangtse Rigney Institute.

<sup>4</sup> Choekey is classical Tibetan, the language in which the texts of Tibetan Buddhism are written.

<sup>5</sup> Mathematics and science are taught in English, but the standard is lower than in the equivalent classes of English medium education.



who had passed Class 10 in English medium education. The phasing out of the primary level in this Institute appears to have important implications for Bhutan's education in general. By phasing out the primary level, all secular primary education is now in English medium education. In other words all people who want a secular education must go through six years of English medium education where Dzongkha is treated as only one among other subjects. It is expected that the secular education system will not produce Dzongkha experts in the same quantity as it used to do and the quality will lessen. Dzongkha experts in this context include Dzongkha teachers and *dungtsho*, doctors of so-called "traditional medicine."<sup>6</sup> The phasing out also appears to reflect changes in employment demands in the society, and also the government's own view about the human resources of the country. Students of this Institute are increasingly aware of a narrowing in the careers open to them. Young people who have grown up in English medium education are much more in demand from both the public and the private sectors. However, this trend does not necessarily mean that Bhutan's education as a whole is shifting from Dzongkha to English. In fact, in English medium education the range of subjects taught in Dzongkha is expected to gradually increase in the near future. From 1995 Environmental Studies has been taught in Dzongkha, initially at the Pre-Primary level, and from 1997 up to Class 3. The Education Division plans to widen the scope of Dzongkha medium teaching in the English medium education sector.<sup>7</sup> Also students in English medium education now have a choice about whether or not to specialise in Dzongkha and its related subjects, such as Buddhist philosophy, at a higher level of education, whereas before there was a clear division between English medium education and Dzongkha medium education. The trend is towards a bilingualism of English and Dzongkha.

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<sup>6</sup> This is a kind of medicine which has developed in Tibet based upon the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism (National Institute of Traditional Medicine, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> An interview with an official in CAPSS, the Education division, on 9th February 1998.

Before modern education started, monastic education was almost the only form of education in Bhutan. At the present time figures for those engaged in monastic education are not very clear, primarily because statistics on the numbers of monks (with age break down) are not available. The total number of monks who are supported by the state is five thousand (Ministry of Planning, 1996: p. 190). In addition to that, there are about three thousand monks living on private patronage (Pommaret, 1994: p. 54).<sup>8</sup> According to Pommaret-Imaeda and Imaeda (1984), boys are admitted to the monasteries at an early age, i.e. five or six years old. The young monks first learn to read and write. Then they learn numerous religious texts by heart, which includes two major Buddhist texts, the complete works of eminent masters, and treatises of philosophy, medicine and astrology. In addition they participate in performing rituals in the monasteries as well as in local households (Pommaret-Imaeda and Imaeda, 1984: pp. 73-74).

Socio-economic changes in Bhutan since development activities started in 1961 are often described as "rapid" not only in official documents but also in the Bhutanese newspapers. These seem to reflect people's feeling that they have experienced and are experiencing rapid socio-economic changes. To give an example from the area of communication networks: a man in his mid-thirties recalled the time when he first got into a vehicle in his childhood. He told me how fast the scenery passed by, how wind blew his hair and how much he enjoyed his first ride. When he was in a college, at the time when the road between western and eastern Bhutan was not yet paved, he was covered completely with dust during any journey he took on it. Now he drives his landcruiser comfortably on asphalt-paved roads. The younger generation also feel the changes. A young businessman in his early twenties told me that five years ago he could drive on Thimphu's main street at a speed of one hundred kilometres

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<sup>8</sup> These figures are confined to ordained monks, *gelong*, and therefore exclude so-called lay priests, *gomchens*, whose number is estimated to be around 15,000 (Pommaret, 1994: p. 55).

per hour, because there were far fewer vehicles than there are today. These days he has to negotiate for a parking space.

The growth of the transportation network has had many implications for people's everyday life. For instance, it has become easier to take a sick person to a hospital for those who live near a roadhead.<sup>9</sup> This transformation may well have been accompanied by changes in people's perception of illness and their attitudes towards methods of healing. A growing transportation network also means that people living along the roads are more involved in the cash economy both through selling cash crops and buying necessary materials, which were in the past either obtained through barter, or produced domestically.

As we have seen earlier, people's views of education have also changed. Formerly, education meant monastic education, and literacy in Dzongkha and Choekey used to be the hallmark of being well-educated. Today, people generally see English medium education as the means of success and English has become an important language among the well-educated.

The sense of gender relations among young people is also said to have been changed. According to one Bhutanese man, because of an influx of novels, films and videos from India, America, Britain and other English speaking countries, the idea that girls are shy and weak creatures and therefore have to be protected is becoming prevalent among the younger generation especially in urban areas. In the past, he says, the notion that girls have to be protected was not present in society.

As socio-economic conditions change rapidly, the meaning of "success" has also changed. According to Imaeda (1994: p. 229), before development activities started, almost all the

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<sup>9</sup> The distance of one day's walk is roughly equivalent to one hour's drive in Bhutan. This estimation is based on a comparison between driving on a paved road and walking on a conventional foot path, therefore the route taken is not necessarily the same.

population lived largely on subsistence farming with limited trade between neighbouring valleys through barter.<sup>10</sup> This meant that there was little change in a person's social position. Success came rarely, and was usually restricted to the small number of officials who worked for the king, who might be given the rank of *dasho*.<sup>11</sup> Ura (1998: p. 228) also notes that the society was very stable and that people imagined they would live in the same way as their parents and grandparents had lived. While his description may overemphasise the contrast between the present and the past, he nonetheless provides a careful outline of the life of a village. Recalling his childhood he writes:

Most of my friends thought the future would be like the past and saw no reason to continue their studies. They dropped out of the village school, which had difficulty in getting enough students to keep going. (1998: p. 228)

Probably not many people thought of life in terms of success, because success was not usually achieved by individual effort, but rather it was more often "given" by birth and social position.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Nishioka and Nishioka (1978) describe the situation of Paro in the mid-1960s, which was already connected by a motorable road with Phuntsholing, a border town near India, which is now one of the main commercial towns in Bhutan. They were two of the first foreigners who lived in Bhutan as development (agriculture) experts. They write that in the 1960s, apart from some traders, money was not used by people and that almost all everyday necessities were, if they had to be obtained from outside the household, bartered. According to these observers, people were self-sufficient at least as far as food was concerned.

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent description of the life of a courtier during the period of the second and third kings, see Ura (1995).

<sup>12</sup> At least some professions were hereditary in the past. Ura (1995) writes that during the time of the second king, retainers of the court (a position which was considered to be a privilege) were drawn from elite and well established families, and the profession was largely hereditary (p. 19). His work also shows that there have been hereditary lamaist families (families whose hereditary profession is monk). While it suggests that people were less mobile in terms of their occupation, it does not mean that each family was completely locked into one profession. In Ura (1995), for instance, a person

Further describing life about twenty-five years ago, Ura remarks that children learnt prayers by rote and acquired basic literacy in Dzongkha and Choekey through the teaching of Buddhist priests. He continues:

People turned to lamas to be cured of illness.... Death was not always prevented by rituals, which were the remedies of first choice. But the bereaved took solace in knowing that the best that could have been attempted was done. For more than a generation, a few enlightened lamas and respected elders provided remarkable leadership for the village. With a moral stature that set them above others, they together possessed an alchemy of leadership that allowed them to keep peace and order, never betraying the motto that within a village, achievements are collective and misfortune should be shared. (Ura, 1998)

Religious practitioners were relied on by the people for every occasion. They were multi-functional, offering basic education, healing people, governing the village with village elders and providing moral and ethical guidance based on Buddhism. They were respected and hence had a certain social status. This status was acquired through their useful knowledge of people's everyday lives, and also through people's perception of their enlightened nature as religious practitioners. These figures may not have been seen as "success" stories, but they are people whom villagers looked up to.

This was the situation, according to Ura, twenty-five years ago. These days, he continues, with parents realising that education leads to jobs and financial success, enrolment in the primary school of his natal village has jumped to more than eighty percent. This is not only the case in his village - in the rest of the country as well enrolment rates have

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who was born into a hereditary lamaist family became a retainer of the court of the second king. This change of profession however was not achieved by his effort, but because he was a substitute for a relative who had abandoned his service as a court attendant.

increased dramatically. More and more schools have been built, and more and more children are being absorbed into the modern education sector.<sup>13</sup> Life for these children is not the same as in their parent's days any more. People have started to see that they have a choice about their own future. As more people go on to higher education, a certain number of people have to be "selected" based on the examination. This procedure has defined and produced losers and winners. And more importantly "the ladder of success" has been come into existence.

This description of change resonates with modernisation theories, especially those of Talcott Parsons. He presents a scheme of pattern variables which govern the orientation of action (Preston, 1996: p. 171). One of the five sets of value orientations is ascription/achievement. He suggests that people in non-industrial societies see social objects in terms of their background, while those in industrial society see them in terms of their performance (Harrison, 1988: p. 9; Hulme and Turner, 1990: p. 40; Parsons and Shils, 1951: pp. 82-83). The above description of social changes in Bhutan indicates that people are increasingly assessed in terms of their performance in school rather than their background, for example their family background or age. The mechanisms through which this change in value has happened appear to be different from what is Parsons arguing, however. In Bhutan's case the change has happened less because of economic development, and more due to changes in the system of recruitment to the civil service.

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<sup>13</sup> The elder generation see that as young people have got to know more about Western science, society and literature due to modern English medium education, they have started not to pay as much respect towards religious practitioners and elders. The elder generation say that young people think that they know more than religious practitioners and elders. It is often heard in society that illiterate parents cannot educate their educated children. These views have lead to a perception that the traditional social hierarchy, in which religious practitioners and elder people are much respected, is starting to collapse. This perception is prevalent amongst the older generation in the society and they think this is a problem.

For the majority of young people these days, "success" means going to a college, becoming a civil servant and hopefully becoming a *dasho*. The factors which make the civil service a popular and envied career are manifold. Firstly, it is an occupation which can only be attained after achieving successful examination results. In other words, one has to be a winner in the current education system. Secondly, as stated in numerous interviews with young people, a civil servant has job security. In the current situation in which the private sector is embryonic in Bhutan, it is a common perception that if you are employed in the private sector, you are employed entirely at the employer's discretion. Moreover, if you are self-employed a day off, for sickness or otherwise, directly affects your income, whereas one can expect regular payment in the civil service, and people do not have to worry so much when they become sick. The third reason is that some people, especially college students perceive that working in the government is "prestigious". One student in the Sherubtse College says:

Authority and power are attached to a government job. And this makes life easier, because one can get lots of conveniences, such as being able to build your own house cheaply because of some favours from a contractor. Therefore people join the government. Also the way people treat you is different. Even if getting the same amount of salary and responsibility, if one is in government, people show respect, but if one is in private business they do not. Although salary is not very good compared to the private sector, if you think about the various conveniences, overall expenditure will be less.

This student is talking about a government officer and his description is not applicable to all government employers. Many students have reservations about becoming a teacher for instance, as they say that people in general do not pay respect to teachers. One student relates that:

Teaching is generally seen as inferior to the position of a government officer. For example one who became an officer, and one who joined in teaching, even if they were classmates, after some years, the officer drives a government vehicle, while the teacher is still riding on a scooter, though their grade<sup>14</sup> is the same.

The fourth reason is an opportunity to go abroad, especially a training opportunity and further degrees. Getting a training opportunity is something most people desire. Whether it is easier to get these opportunities sometimes even becomes a determining factor in choosing a job. A student in the college told me, "A lecturer in a college does not have a chance to get a training. So a high school teacher is better. They can get the opportunity to do master's degree abroad."

There are several ways of climbing up this Bhutanese ladder of success. The most desirable way for young people in Bhutan is to get the so-called "professionals" after finishing Class 12 of English medium education. The "professionals" are courses which offer an opportunity to study abroad and to get a degree in a university. These are financed either by the government or donor countries/agencies, and are available for the brightest group of students. The courses offered are mostly in scientific subjects and usually in specialised areas, such as medicine, engineering, and architecture. For people in these fields a job in the government sector is guaranteed, and in most cases they can join offices at the highest starting grade, Grade 7. In the grade system of civil service in Bhutan, it takes five years to be promoted to the next grade. Therefore people at any level think carefully about their entry grade. In some cases this is not consistent with the length of the training period needed to be able to take up a particular type of job. For instance, the course for the Certificate in Financial Management at the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) is available for students who have passed Class 10 and takes

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<sup>14</sup> There is a grading system in government jobs. The starting grade is different depending on the position, but after joining the service an employee in principle gets one grade promotion every five years.



two years to complete. The entry grade on the completion of the course is 12. Similarly, the Primary Teacher Certificate Course at the National Institute of Education (NIE) is for students who have passed Class 10 and also takes two years. However, the entry grade for those who finish this course is 10. The difference between these two grades equates to ten years of work. This means those who finished the course in RIM can enjoy the same level of income and responsibility as primary school teachers only after ten years of service. One of the main reasons for this is that the government tends to give incentives to areas where more human resources are needed.<sup>15</sup> Getting your "professionals" guarantees a job in the civil service at the highest entry grade possible.

Most courses which fall under the heading of "professionals" are in the field of science.<sup>16</sup> This in turn makes the science stream of Classes 11 and 12 very popular. There is a perception in society that students in the science stream are brighter than those in any other streams.<sup>17</sup> One educationist explains that this is because mathematics and science are subjects in which most Bhutanese students do not take much interest, and so they struggle with them. There are also less Bhutanese science teachers<sup>18</sup> compared with other subjects. It seems to be also the case that the fact that a student gets their highest chance to obtain their "professionals" in the science stream, raises the popularity of science subjects. Thus among Class 10 students, for whom the result of the exam at the end of the year determines whether they can go on to Class 11 or not, the science stream is the most popular.

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<sup>15</sup> Similarly amongst teachers those employed in schools in rural areas have priority in training opportunities over those employed in town areas. This is an incentive to get people to work in remote areas.

<sup>16</sup> In 1997 out of one hundred places offered science related subjects accounted for ninety-six seats, of which engineering courses accounted for sixty-seven places. Most of these bachelor's degree programmes are in Indian universities (*Kuensel*, 3rd May 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Apart from the science stream, there are art and commerce streams in Classes 11 and 12.

<sup>18</sup> Many science teachers, especially at junior high school and high school levels are from India.

Almost everyone told me that they wanted to be in the science stream. Not surprisingly the requirements for being admitted to the science stream are the most demanding. In the essays which I asked students in Classes 8 and 9 to write in one of the high schools in Thimphu, the two most popular occupations were doctor and engineer.

Another way of climbing up the ladder of success is to go to a college, obtain a bachelor's degree, and then to try to be selected in the examination held by the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC). The examination to select government officers among graduates is seen as somewhat opaque by college students, mainly because the number of officers taken each year is not fixed and known only when names of the selected graduates are announced based on the exam results. In 1997 twenty-two graduates took the examination, and fifteen were selected.<sup>19</sup> If you are selected to be a government officer through this examination, the entry grade is eight. This is the second best way to climb up the ladder of success, after getting your "professionals". In this way, you can start in government service from Grade 8, one level lower than those who have obtained their professionals. It should also be noted that you have to take the RCSC examination to become an officer, whereas for those who get professionals this is not necessary, since the post of officer is guaranteed at the time when they get their "professionals".

Another way of joining the civil service in Grade 8 is through the national financial services course which is offered to graduates with economics or commerce degrees. Becoming a high school teacher is another way of joining the government sector at Grade 8, and is achieved by taking the postgraduate certificate in education course at the National Institute of Education. However, as we have seen, teaching jobs tend to be seen as of a lower status than those of government officials or professions such as doctors and engineers. One college student remarks, "Respect towards teachers exists only within the school campus, whereas the power of and respect

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<sup>19</sup> In 1998 twelve were selected out of twenty-one candidates.

towards government officials exists all over the country." A senior government officer recalls her experience. She went to India to study engineering, but after getting a bachelor's degree she worked as a lecturer in one of the training institutes specialising in engineering for some time. She says:

When I went back to my village during holiday, I met an old lady who knew me from my childhood. She asked, 'Where are you working now?' I said, 'I am teaching'. Then she replied in so derogative manner, 'You went to all the way to India to become an engineer. And now you only became a teacher!?!'

These then are the four ways to climb up towards the top of the ladder of success. From these four the first two are seen as probably the most successful and glamorous. They are respected office jobs with good job security, a reasonable amount of power and income, and hold the prospect of training opportunities abroad. These jobs are accessible almost exclusively through the modern education sector. There is one job for which entry grade is seven, the highest, and accessible exclusively for those from Dzongkha medium education. This is as a doctor of so-called traditional medicine,<sup>20</sup> or *dungtsho*. However, the course to become a *dungtsho* is not available for the coming years due to a shortage of medicine, which is made of medicinal plants, minerals and parts of animals. The Sherubtse College started a Dzongkha Honours course in 1997, but at the time of writing it is not clear what kind of opportunities are available for Dzongkha graduates.

For those people who could not climb up to this top stage of the success ladder, there are still various options available in the government sector. Almost all options are through training institutes. This means that one has to undertake a certain period of specialised training after completing a level of general education in school. For those who have passed

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<sup>20</sup> For a brief introduction to the origins and practices of Bhutanese "indigenous medicine", see National Institute of Traditional Medicine (1989).

Class 12 but could not manage to get enough exam marks to go on to a college, a course of diploma in financial management in RIM is an option. After two years of training on this course, you will be posted to a government office at Grade 10. For those who have passed Class 10 there are several options. A diploma course in agriculture in the Natural Resource Training Institute (NRTI) is one example. Trainees are posted to agriculture extension centres in different parts of the country at Grade 10 after completing a three year long course. There are also several options available for students who have passed Class 8.<sup>21</sup> However, these days people see that passing Class 10 is a minimum qualification to get a decent, clean, office job, whether in the private or in the government sector.<sup>22</sup>

As is probably noticeable from the above description of the various options available for people with different educational qualifications, most training courses are directly related to a job which one can obtain on the completion of the course. Being admitted to a training institute therefore, in most cases, guarantees a job in the government sector. On the other hand, despite a gradually growing (but still embryonic) private sector, it means that there are roughly only the same number of areas for employment as there are training courses. Historically a job has been provided by the government for the educated population. However, the result of this lack of choice is a situation in which young people have to look first at available options rather than thinking about their own interest and aptitudes.

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<sup>21</sup> This includes, for instance, the two year Basic Health Workers Course at the Royal Institute of Health Sciences, which leads to Grade 14 on completion, and several four year courses mainly related to engineering at the Royal Technical Institute, after which one can start from Grade 12.

<sup>22</sup> This dividing line is clear from comparing the number of places available in training institutes for students who have passed Class 8 and Class 10. In 1996 there were eight courses (about 150 places) for students who have passed Class 8 (There were 3,678 students in Class 8 in 1996.), whereas there are about eighteen courses, more than 330 places for students who have passed Class 10 (There were about 1,400 students in Class 10 in 1996.).

Whatever position on the ladder of success you have reached, the desirable job is a job in the government sector. Although generally speaking income is much higher in the private sector and young people know this, the majority of them still prefer a job in the government sector. However, recently there has been a small change in this trend. One of these changes is that graduates have started to look for employment in public corporations. Public corporations are those which have previously been owned by the government, but which have now become independent companies. The only newspaper company, Kuensel, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS), and the Food Corporation of Bhutan can be included in this category. *Kuensel* has noted this new trend among graduates:

For university graduates seeking employment the civil service has always been the first choice. But this could be changing going by the decreasing number of graduates appearing for the civil service examinations every year. Out of this year's total 98 (non-professional) graduates only 18 (excluding four from previous batches) sat for the RCSC examination compared with 49 in 1993 and 27 in 1995. (*Kuensel*, 1st November 1997)

This trend can be explained from some of the responses I gathered from college students in Sherubtse. Before I started interviewing the students, I expected to hear many ambitious comments about their future, since the college is the highest in the Bhutan's education system. It was the place, I thought, where the country's elite were concentrated. As I talked with the students however, I found their attitude more modest than I expected. Less students than expected seriously considered taking the RCSC examination. This is firstly because everyone recognises that getting through the RCSC examination is very tough. They said they would decide whether to take the exam after looking at possibilities in the private sector, corporations and other opportunities in the government sector. In 1997, when I was in Bhutan for fieldwork, the RCSC examination was scheduled at the end of

the period in which job interviews were conducted by various public corporations and private companies and for different cadres of government sector, such as teaching. Thus by the time of the RCSC examination the majority of graduates had found a job which held a reasonable level of satisfaction. Only very confident and determined students waited for the RCSC examination. It does not seem to be a common practice to retain other job offers as an insurance and yet still take the examination. The implication is however that if you wait for the examination and then you are not selected, you must lose a year. This is perceived by young people as a serious loss of time. Most of the students pointed to the fear and disappointment of not being selected in the examination as reasons for not taking it. It is thus not only physically losing one year, but also psychological factors, which make them hesitant to take the examination.

Secondly, public corporations have started to be recognised by graduates as a decent job option in terms of the job security they offer. A student in his final year tells me,

Corporations like Kuensel, BBS, and BDFC (Bhutan Development Finance Corporation) have a security as good as the government services, and the salary is a little better in the corporations. Before nobody wanted to join the corporations.

A student in the first year says that he thinks a job in one of the corporations is as respectable as one in the government service. These responses show that confidence in public corporations is building among students. They see that employees are not laid off abruptly, and the corporations will not go bankrupt easily. At the same time, there is a tendency to want to avoid tough competition. As the number of well-educated people increases, competition among them is becoming greater. A government official tells me his impression as a father of two children, "It is really difficult to become a civil servant through the RCSC examination these

days. Probably it is almost impossible to be a civil servant, unless one can get the professionals.”<sup>23</sup>

This new trend amongst graduates however does not seem to show that the criteria for a good job have changed. “Job security” is still a key word for them. What has changed however is that they have started to see job security as achievable within public corporation. A student explains from a slightly different perspective why job security, rather than salary or one’s own interests, is so important:

Wanting security is the Bhutanese mentality. Bhutanese people try to avoid risk. People want a permanent contract rather than a short contract because they want security. So I prefer a permanent contract for a not very interesting job to a short contract for an interesting job.

More radical change has been observed among even younger people, including high school students. In Drukgyel High School, many students told me that the salary-level is the main criteria for selecting a job. Some students prefer the private sector to the government, simply because the wages are better. Some students answered that they do not mind working in either the private sector or the government, but that they will go for the job with the higher income attached to it. Job security is not the main criteria, and thus the government sector is not the prime choice. There are fundamental changes occurring in young people’s criteria for employment. Even amongst those who prefer the government sector, the reason is not status but overall economic gain. They say that, if one calculates overall benefits, such as using a government vehicle and living in a government quarter, working in the government sector leaves you better off. The social status attached to government officers however in itself

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<sup>23</sup> This statement probably does not mean that it is easier to get a “professional” than selected in an RCSC examination, rather it seems to be based on the fact that for those who get a “professional”, placement in the civil service after graduation is automatic.

does not mean much for these high school students. Economic gain is now the main criteria. They say, "Everyone is crazy about money these days." One student explains:

Nowadays if one is rich, people respect that person. In the past a businessman was someone who cheats [to make profits]. But these days people respect a rich person. In these days everyone goes for money.

In most cases salary is the determinant factor for students in terms of their choice of job. Most of the students on the commerce course dream about becoming a chartered accountant believing that they will be in demand and earn a high income. Younger people perceive that richer people get more respect. This appears to be a reflection of social changes: we have seen earlier how far money has penetrated a society in which barter used to be predominant until the 1970s: naturally people have started to see it as more important. A student says, "With money I can get everything. Money talks!" Another student says, "If you are rich you can wear nice clothes. Then people show respect. Even if you fail to go on to Class 10 or Class 12 in Bhutan, if you have money you can go to a school or a university abroad. Then you can get a degree." It may sound a little unrealistic to say that a person who fails to go on to the next level of education in one country can do so in another place. But in Bhutan it happens. Some young people who are not qualified to go on to the next level of education in Bhutan are financed privately to go to high school or college in India.

What do young people think is best way of climbing up the ladder of success? In both Sherubtse College and Drukgyel High School, most students answered "connections and a good family background". Another very suggestive answer was the ability to speak "English". The students who responded in this way told me, "If a person can speak English fluently, people think that the person is well-educated." This statement shows how dominant English medium education is in Bhutan and that despite the existence of three kinds of education



from which they can choose, "education" nowadays almost automatically means English medium education.

So far we have seen that different career options are available at various stages of the ladder for young people in modern English medium education. For those in Dzongkha medium education, options are fairly narrow. For those who have passed Class 10 in the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies in Simtokha, only three training courses are available. The most popular of the three is a training course to become a Dzongkha teacher in an English medium school. After completing a two year course you will be posted to a school on Grade 10. Almost all the students in the Institute opt for this course. This is because one of the other options, a course at RIM leading to work in a government office where strong Dzongkha ability is needed, equates only to Grade 13, in spite of it necessitating the same length of training. The last option is a compounder's course at the National Institute of Traditional Medicine. However, the course can accommodate only a few people each year, and not many students opt for that. For students who have passed Class 12 of the old curriculum,<sup>24</sup> there are even fewer options: they can either go on to a Dzongkha Honours course in Sherubtse College or on to the above mentioned course to become a Dzongkha teacher. But for the students who have passed Class 12 prospects are grim. Since the Dzongkha Honours course has only just been launched, they do not know what kind of options will actually be available after graduation. For the teacher training course, they will get the same grade as those who have passed only Class 10 and went straight on to the teacher training course. A diminution of future prospects is very much felt by students taking the old curriculum in Simtokha. Students told me,

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<sup>24</sup> At the time of my fieldwork, two kinds of curriculum co-existed at the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, as the institution started new courses in Classes 11 and 12 for students from English medium education, and gradually phased out the courses for those who have studied in Dzongkha medium education from the primary level. In this book, the curriculum for those from English medium education is called the "new curriculum", and the one for those who have grown up in Dzongkha medium education is called the "old curriculum".

"This school is good to have a better next life, because we learn lots about religion. But as for career prospects the scope is very narrow." Some students even said that they regretted joining the school. As regards the students in the new curriculum of Class 11, which started in 1997, students did not know for certain what kind of options would be available, since there was no one who had completed the course at the time of the fieldwork. Although the school brochure which has been distributed to the students suggests a ranges of possible options, the principal of the school told me that some negotiation with concerned authorities must still take place to make those options available for the students.

Young people in English medium education and Dzongkha medium education are eventually included in the same grading system in the government sector. This fact makes the two different education sectors comparable in terms of career prospects. The wider job scope of English medium education has made it more attractive to people. Furthermore, in the current situation opportunities to climb up the ladder of the success to the top are almost exclusively for those in English medium education. This is, I would argue, the main reason for the inflation of modern English medium education and at the same time the downgrading of Dzongkha medium education in society. The fact that among new Class 11 students in Simtokha, who finished Class 10 in English medium education, all of them, except two, were not qualified to go on to Class 12 of English medium education further shows people's preference for English medium education to Dzongkha medium. At the same time this also suggests that majority of the population see education as a means to get a decent job. Education is judged in terms of the kind of job which follows, and the grade which is attached to it. A young lady in her mid-twenties, who studied in Sherubtse College, told me that, "Parents in Thimphu would not usually send their children to Dzongkha medium school. There is no future prospect." With diminished career prospects for most people, and especially those in town areas, Dzongkha medium education is seen as less colourful and less glamorous. There are far less students from urban backgrounds in Simtokha

than in Drukgyel High School. While I was in Drukgyel High School, I constantly encountered the children of high officials. In Simtokha on the other hand, this was very rare, and I saw many students who were from remote villages.

The position of monastic education in Bhutanese society is very different. Monks do not participate in the ladder of success of the secular world. There are several views among young people in English medium education about people who have become monks, and about becoming a monk as "a career". A girl who passed Class 10 in English medium education and then worked as a house-help for a foreign expatriate tells me that people say that naughty boys would become monks, because in monastic education discipline is very strict. "And also," she continues, "People who are physically weak, and become ill constantly are sometimes recommended by a monk to become a monk, so that he can practice religion more, gain more religious merit and would not suffer from being ill so much." A student in Sherubtse College gives his perspective:

If I hear that a bright student who has passed Class 10 has joined in the monk body, first I would be surprised, because it is rare that a student passing Class 10 with decent academic performance becomes a monk. Secondly I would appreciate his decision, because he will sacrifice all his life, giving up marriage, smoking, and having fun. He will devote himself into a religious life, and pray for the well-being of all the creatures in this world and for the next life. Thirdly I would doubt if he will continue the life as a monk, and suspect that he might quit and get a job. If a student who finished Class 8 decided to be a monk I would think that he had made a right decision.

Becoming a monk is not related to climbing up the ladder of success. People see that joining the monk body is not something for those who are educated in English medium education. It does not mean much in terms of success which, in the secular world, is measured by income and power. But it

has its own merit, which is also recognised by young people in English medium education. Religious life is something sacred in their eyes. For them it is something which needs determination, and the ability to sacrifice one's own pleasure. The college student also says:

Many people send one of their sons or daughters to the monk body, because it is a tradition and also useful. Usually people send other children to English medium school or keep them at home to work in the fields. People think that if they send one child to monk body, it is enough. It is useful to have their son or daughter in the monk body, because it is easier to call monks to their house for *puja*. In other words, *puja* is guaranteed. That is very important. If you do not have anyone you know in the monk body, sometimes no monks are available for your *puja*. Also you can call more monks for a *puja*. It is also very important. People who are invited for *puja* first ask the host how many monks are there. If there are only two or three monks, the host feels ashamed. But if there are more than fifteen monks, the host feels very proud and he will announce very loudly, (for example) 'Seventeen monks!!'. Also if the altar room is full of monks, that itself signifies good fortune. Another reason that many people send their son or daughter to the monk body is that monks and nuns are respected in the society. The respect shown towards monks is different in nature from the respect shown toward high officials in its nature. People show their respect to high officials because they are powerful and people have their own interests to keep in mind. It is a respect which is obliged in someway. On the other hand, respect towards monks and nuns comes naturally from inside of people. The red robe of monks itself signifies something to people. On special occasions, monks are always there.

It seems that monks are people upon whom everyone in society depends in one way or another. However, even though monks may be seen as ethically and morally purer, a monk's life is certainly less glamorous in the eyes of those in English medium education. They say that monks are respected. But becoming a monk is totally another issue. When they think about their careers, becoming a monk is not even an option. It is probably more precise to say that a monk is not considered as a "career". Thus, as seen above, a college student would be surprised if he heard that a student who had passed Class 10 had become a monk, and might also start to suspect whether or not he would quit at some point in the future. However, he would not be surprised to hear that a student who has passed Class 8 has joined the monk body - in fact he would probably think that the student has made the right decision.

It also appears that the monk body works as a kind of social security net. From interviews with some monks, it seems that they are often from "humble" backgrounds. A monk in a *shaydra* told me that his father died when he was small, and that his mother and sisters live in a village in eastern Bhutan. Because of his "humble background", he thought it would be better to become a monk. He did not tell me about his "humble background" in detail, but a friend of mine, who acted as an interpreter during the interview, said that probably his family are not well-off, and so he had thought it would be sensible to become a monk. Although there is no tuition fee, these days in Bhutan parents have to buy school uniforms and other necessary items to send their children to an English medium school.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> There is a certain hierarchy within the monk body, and desirable and less desirable paths in the hierarchy. One young monk in *shaydra* in Thimphu told me, for instance, that after completing study in the *shaydra*, he would like to go to Tango Monastery for more study and meditation, but that a certain number of monks have to go to a *dzong* to perform *puja*. He says that life in a *dzong* provides less opportunity for further study, therefore he would not like to do this. Another young monk told me of his hope to go to a famous Buddhist temple in India for further study and meditation. From these conversations, I came to realise that there must be another kind of

Among monks there is a perception that they are losing status compared to the past, when they were accorded the highest level of respect. One monk said that they are not treated with as much respect as monks used to be, and this tendency is more obvious in urban areas and amongst young people. Once, their knowledge had both religious value and usefulness in everyday life. Religious rituals were an absolute necessity for a good harvest, healing sick people and being reborn in a better next life. With the introduction of development programmes people started to go, for example, to consult agriculture extension workers about getting in a good harvest and to a hospital for treatment. As competing forms of knowledge emerged, monks saw the value accorded to religious practitioners decline, especially compared to past times when development programmes had not taken place in the country.

We have seen that in order to climb up the ladder of success, one has to be in the modern education sector. Students in English medium education see a less bright future for those in Dzongkha medium education. Becoming a monk is simply not an option. Students in Dzongkha medium education agree that there is not much scope for them in terms of future job options. The validity and usefulness of knowledge which is acquired in English medium education is appreciated in society in the form of higher grades in the civil service for those who have achieved good levels of academic performance in English medium education. The usefulness of knowledge acquired through English medium education is confirmed and further reinforced through its association with a regular and decent income, power and status, and in the case of the younger generation, simply through its association with a higher future income and prospects of greater luxury in life. On the other hand, the validity and usefulness of knowledge acquired in Dzongkha medium education has declined relatively. The present government grading system has

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ladder of success within the monk body, though I could not explore this further.

contributed to this situation. Combined with the tendency among young people to seek job security and a better salary, it has reinforced the high value given to English medium education, and at the same time devalued Dzongkha medium education. The sacred status accorded to a monk places monastic education on a completely different level, and the fact that the government grading system does not apply to monks makes it impossible to compare monastic education with the two other kinds of education.

The emphasis on modern English medium education, not least in relation to government jobs, was associated with the change of policy and the initiation of development activities. This shift of policy meant that the existing cultural capital of the dominant class was re-valued. Developmental values gained ground in relation to the old Bhutanese cultural values. Before development programmes started in Bhutan, the civil service was not considered to be the domain of those people who had been educated in the modern education sector.<sup>26</sup> This was not least because modern education was practically non-existent. There were a very small number of primary schools which provided modern education, and as for higher education, a very limited number of people went to India to study.<sup>27</sup> Hence, when the crisis began (i.e. at the time of the launch of the development programmes) or just before it, the dominant class were the kind of people who had Dzongkha medium education,<sup>28</sup> and who, it seems clear, were not very much exposed to Western knowledge.

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<sup>26</sup> For an example of the life of a courtier who had worked since the reign of the second king, see Ura (1995). The late Prime Minister Jigmi Dorji (1919 - 1964) was educated in India, but he seems to be a rare case.

<sup>27</sup> In 1959, there were fifty-nine primary schools and 1,500 students in the country (Imaeda, 1994: p. 111). Before the launch of the First Five Year Plan (1961-1966), education covered only the primary level (Ministry of Development, 1971: p. 40). Thus, almost all of the higher education of Bhutanese students took place in India (Holsti, 1982: p. 28).

<sup>28</sup> This does not mean Dzongkha medium education, which is centrally managed by the government. It would be more accurate to understand the phrase here as literacy in Dzongkha and Choekey.

As modernisation has progressed, the status of this group of people has been undermined. Crisis was not only the point at which what was hitherto doxa started to be questioned. It was also the time when a previously dominant group started to be gradually replaced by other groups who possessed different educational backgrounds. As modernisation has taken place, the civil service has become the domain of people who are educated in English medium education. For instance, a capable civil servant, who worked as the Secretary of the Royal Secretariat and was once elected as the speaker of the National Assembly felt sidelined after the late 1970s: an observer writes that his lack of English ability circumscribed his sphere of influence within policy-making circles, though he was a person who was particularly praised for his Dzongkha ability during the time of the second king (Ura, 1995: pp. 356-358). In terms of the family background of civil servants, however, it is arguable to what extent the composition of the dominant group has been changed. Rose found that, in the early 1970s, a high percentage of students in local schools in most areas of the country came from non-elite families, and that many of the children in the local elite families saw no need for an education beyond the first few years since their families had dominated the local areas without formal education for several generations (Rose, 1994: p. 185). On the other hand, my interviews with the graduates who were selected in the RCSC examination show that about the half of them have a parent working in the civil service. It is unlikely that the trend laid out by Rose has been sustained until today. It seems that the process of replacement of the former dominant group by a new dominant group has been more dramatic in terms of their educational background than their family background.

It is here that Bourdieu's theories about the "mode of domination" and "objectifying mechanisms" provides a useful insight in explaining the change in the composition of the dominant class in Bhutan from those people who had grown up in Dzongkha medium education to those educated in English medium schools. Bourdieu says that the dominant class reproduces itself through the objectification of



institutions, and thereby the structure of the relationships between the dominant and the dominated is almost automatically maintained. Since the launch of development activities in Bhutan in 1961, when this process of change was set in motion by the state, an increasing number of civil servants have received modern English medium education. This emerging dominant group has consolidated the validity of their educational qualification firstly by creating more modern education schools. Thereby more and more people have been absorbed into a single scale of measurement, what Bourdieu calls "objectification". Secondly, the state puts people from the Dzongkha medium education in the same government grading system despite the fact that qualifications gained in the Dzongkha medium education system cannot, in any academically meaningful way, be compared to those gained in the English medium education system. Thus these two different education systems have eventually become comparable in terms of their conversion rate into economic capital and social capital. This represents a process of incorporating more and more people in society into a single objectified scale. In this scale the ladder of success is made more difficult to climb for those who are educated in Dzongkha medium education. That is, the conversion rate between a Dzongkha medium education and income and social status is worse than for English medium education, and thereby the dominant class reproduces itself.

It must be however noted that of three education sectors in Bhutan only two have been made somewhat comparable. Monastic education is still outside the objectification process. Monks, I would argue, can be seen as part of the dominant class, still have a certain social status which relates to the special historical and political position of the monk body in Bhutanese society. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who unified Bhutan in the seventeenth century, himself was a monk (Imaeda, 1994: p. 37). He created the office of *Desi*, which looks after the temporal administration, and the *Je*

*Khenpo*, who looks after religious matters.<sup>29</sup> Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and his incarnations<sup>30</sup> were on the top of this dual system of administration. Although the actual administrative power of these offices since the mid-eighteenth century is questionable due to the power struggles which have taken place among the *Desi*, the *Penlops*<sup>31</sup> and the *Dzongpons*<sup>32</sup>, the institution remained until 1907 when the hereditary monarchy was established (Pommaret, 1994: p. 61). Even today *Je Khenpo*, the head abbot of Bhutan, enjoys a status equivalent to the king. According to Rose (1977: p. 29), he is the only person in Bhutan other than the king entitled to wear the saffron-coloured scarf, a symbol of the former's spiritual authority and the latter's temporal authority. Out of one hundred and fifty members of the National Assembly, ten members represent the monk body. The Royal Advisory Council which consists of nine councillors includes two monks. According to Imaeda (1994: p. 65), temporal authority and spiritual authority are independent from each other, and therefore in principal even the king cannot intervene religious matters.

The social and religious status enjoyed by the monks seems to be different from the status attached to high officials of the government. A student in Sherubtse College remarked:

Monks and nuns are respected in society. This respect is different from the respect shown to the high officials.

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<sup>29</sup> Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal also founded the first monastic body. (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 75).

<sup>30</sup> After the death of Shabdrung his distant relative, Tenzin Rabgye, became the representative of the Shabdrung in 1672 (Pommaret, 1997a: p. 204). In the first half of the eighteenth century, the theory of the triple reincarnation - the Body, Speech and Mind of the Shabdrung - was established. However, only Mind incarnations were recognised as providing official successors to the Shabdrung as heads of state (Pommaret, 1994: p. 61).

<sup>31</sup> The title given to the governors of the three big provinces of Paro, Trongsa and Daga from 1651 to 1905. It is no longer used except in the title of Trongsa Penlop which is usually conferred on the Crown Prince (Pommaret, 1994: p. 265).

<sup>32</sup> The old term for *dzongda*, or district governors, now no longer in use (Pommaret, 1994: p. 263).

People show their respect to high officials because they are powerful and people have something to do with them. This respect is kind of obliged. On the other hand, respect towards monks and nuns comes naturally, because they are religious beings. The red robe of the monks signifies something to people. And on the special occasions monks are always there.

Another student emphasises the importance of religion in society:

Religion has mobilising power. If something religious is happening, young and old, uneducated and well-educated, everyone comes without being asked by anyone.

Through the objectifying mechanisms those people coming out of Dzongkha medium education have had their ability to accumulate economic capital and social capital weakened; in turn, those from English medium education have started to replace them as a dominant class. The position of monks is outside of this objectifying process, and they thus seem to be able to maintain a relatively high social and cultural status.

This section has discussed the social context of each education system in terms of its influence on an individual's career scope, and further considered them in historical and theoretical perspective. Discourses on modernisation, culture and tradition, which will be examined in detail in the next section, also operate within this social setting.

## **5.2 Various views on modernisation, culture and tradition**

This section aims to present the various views about modernisation, culture and tradition prevalent among young people in Bhutan, and to examine these discourses by applying Bourdieu's framework. The section is divided into four parts. Firstly I will present the contexts of the fieldwork for each research site, and then briefly show young people's views on modernisation, culture and tradition in general.

Secondly, I will examine the different meanings and perceptions of modernisation in detail. Thirdly, I will deconstruct how young people understand culture and tradition. The views of young people in English medium education and of those in Dzongkha medium education and monastic education will be compared and contrasted throughout. In the section on deconstructing culture and tradition, I will also present the views of those whom I will call the "new traditionalists". These are people who have been educated in English medium school, but hold a distinctively different view about culture and tradition from others taught in English medium education establishments. The fourth part will attempt to understand these discourses by applying Bourdieu's framework.

The term "young people" in this book refers largely to those between Class 10 (about seventeen years old<sup>33</sup>) and thirty years of age. It must be stated here very clearly that young people in this book include not only students but also those who have finished/left school and have a job. With regard to those who already have a job, their views are presented in the sections relating to the education system they were raised within.

## **Contexts of fieldwork**

### *English medium education*

During the first three months of my fieldwork, I visited many schools and training institutes in the Thimphu area in order to have exposure to a variety of educational establishments and to identify sites for in-depth research. Not all schools in Thimphu have hostel facilities, which made it inconvenient to access students during their free time and talk with them. I felt I needed a high school where most of the students stay in a hostel, so I could observe their life and have easier access to

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<sup>33</sup> This is based upon the assumption that a child starts schooling at age seven. However, it should be noted that in Bhutan there are many people who started education later.

them. Whilst I was pondering over the research site, I met two teachers during a workshop held by the Education Division. One of them was in her late twenties, and the other had just completed a postgraduate course in education. They were from Drukgyel High School in Paro, which is about one and a half hours drive from Thimphu. They kindly offered to help my research by introducing me to the principal of the high school and by letting me stay with them during my research in the school. They also acted as matrons of a girls' hostel, and so the situation seemed to provide almost ideal access to students.

Drukgyel High School is situated towards the northwest end of the Paro valley, about fifteen kilometres away from Paro town, where the country's only airport is located. Surrounded by farm houses and paddy fields, the school campus is on a gentle slope: classroom buildings are on the upper side of the campus, the auditorium and the playground in the middle, and the hostels are on the lower side. The school is one of the newest high schools in Bhutan, and thus is considered to be a very good facility.<sup>34</sup> About seven hundred students between Class 7 and Class 12 study here. Among these only those who are in Classes between 9 and 12 are boarders. Classes 11 and 12 have two streams, namely Science and Commerce. My research focused on the students in Class 10 and above.

A day in school starts, after the routine of washing and having breakfast, with morning assembly. Classes end at about three o'clock, and are then followed by prayer in the auditorium. For the first week, I tried to visit various classrooms and sit with students during lessons with the teacher's permission. So-called library classes were useful to become acquainted with students and introduce myself, but generally students were interviewed after classes, when they, mostly girls, were chatting with friends in dormitories, or when the others, mostly boys, were sweating after a session on the basketball court. They were generally very friendly,

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<sup>34</sup> In Bhutan "a good school" tends to mean a school with good physical facilities rather than a school whose students achieve good academic results.

especially the boys. I did not usually have to make an approach from my side, but rather they tried to speak to me. It made my work smooth and easy.

Another research site was the Sherubtse College. As the only college in Bhutan it seemed very necessary to visit this college if I was to gain a full picture of both young people and the education system in Bhutan. The location of the college however required me to prepare carefully. Sherubtse College is in the eastern district of Trashigang. It takes three days to reach Trashigang from the capital, driving down winding roads and crossing several passes whose altitude is between three and four thousand metres. Furthermore as a foreigner and as a person attached to the Education Division I needed to get a permit from the Home Ministry and the Ministry of Health and Education. It was expected to take some time to go through all the official procedures. After obtaining the permits, a friend of mine helped me to arrange details of my stay with the then principal of the college. The principal is the man who used to head the Curriculum and Professional Support Section (CAPSS) of the Education Division, and I had met him in Thimphu previously. Having this acquaintance made these arrangements a little easier. He generously offered the college guest house for my stay. Although I spent most of my time in teaching buildings and students hostels, the reception area of the guest house also provided a relaxed space to talk with students.

The Sherubtse College in Kanglung is situated half way up a hill 25 km south of Trashigang town. It is at an altitude of about two thousand metres and the climate is reasonably mild. Sherubtse was founded as a high school in 1968 with a Jesuit Father as its head, and admitted its first undergraduate students in 1983. The principal at the time of my fieldwork was the second Bhutanese principal of the college. The college is affiliated with the University of Delhi, India, and even today many academic staff are from India. The campus is on a gentle spacious slope, which accommodates teaching buildings, students hostels, staff

quarters, a training ground and a college *zangdopelri* or temple. Outside the college gates there is another *zangdopelri*, plus several shops and small restaurants. Students who are bored with the diet of the college canteen come out here in search of some comfort. The view from the campus over the Himalayas is spectacular, and there is one point along the road where the view is particularly beautiful. Conveniently there is a small bench, which students call "the lover's bench". The college houses about three hundred degree students studying English, Geography, Science, Economics, Commerce and Dzongkha. Students in the Dzongkha Honours course are not included with those from English medium education in this study, and instead included with those in Dzongkha medium education.

In the college, as expected, there was no single timetable applied to all students. Consequently I could utilise the whole day by talking to students who were free. Sitting on lawn or on a bench outside the teaching buildings, I chatted with students in groups of three or four. Sometimes it was one to one. Some curious and sociable students passing by sometimes joined the group. I also visited the girls' hostel. Empty classrooms were also utilised. Apart from these chats I was also asked to speak from the platform of the school auditorium. On the first day, I was asked to introduce myself in the morning assembly. Next I was given a role in handing out the prizes to students at Quiz Night, a role almost every foreigner is given. I was also asked to give a talk about Japanese development one evening, in which slides taken in Japan were immensely useful. I found that exposing myself in this way was beneficial to my research, as it made my presence familiar to students. I hoped that perception of me as an odd addition to the college scenery would change and that I would become more approachable to the students. Judging by the enormous response and cooperation I got from them, I think this happened.

Both in Drukgyel High School and Sherubtse College, I did not employ an outside interpreter. Both schools are English

medium schools, thus it was easy to carry on interviews with students in English. As for cultural and context translation, some students were quite good at explaining issues related to the general background. At Drukgyel High School, the teachers were also a valuable source of information. They were curious as to what I was talking to students about and what student response would be. Their feedback sometimes had to be dealt with carefully, because it might have reflected their own interpretation of students. However at other times it proved to be very useful and interesting to have a discussion with the teachers, and especially the younger ones.

Interviews were also carried out in the Wood Craft Centre in Thimphu. This is a training institute operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Trade and Industry<sup>35</sup> which trains young people to make wooden furniture. At the time of my fieldwork, the minimum requirement to join the Centre was, according to the managing director, that the student had passed Class 8. I however saw some trainees who had not reached Class 8. Among all the various training institutes in Bhutan the Centre has probably the lowest entry requirements. This therefore gave me a chance to meet young people who were not so well-educated. The Centre provides not only training, but also makes furniture for various government offices and hospitals. Although it is made by trainees, the quality was satisfactory in my eyes, and is acknowledged to be by rest of the society as well. The furniture is sold at high price, and thus it is mainly for offices. What is produced here is different from Bhutanese style furniture such as *chodom*,<sup>36</sup> which is decorated with colourful paintings and intricate carving. It is rather simple, plain and functional. It is probably difficult to identify it as being made in Bhutan at first glance. The Centre was established with financial and technical assistance from Denmark, and offers a four year training course. During the training period uniforms are provided, and trainees are even paid. The training

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<sup>35</sup> The Wood Craft Centre now has the status of an autonomous body.

<sup>36</sup> *Chodom* is a low table which is often decorated with auspicious motifs such as phoenixes and dragons.



includes a one year "field attachment" to factories outside the Centre. After completing the course, most trainees are employed in factories in both private and public sectors, except for a few of the more skilful ones who remain at the Centre as instructors. The director says that there is more demand for trainees than the number the Centre can provide. In this sense the Centre is successful, as the popularity of training courses in Bhutan is largely determined by how much they influence an individual's future prospects. The number of applicants for the course is increasing year by year.

When I first visited the Centre, I was impressed by the enthusiasm of trainees for their work. It was obvious from the scene in front of me that these trainees like furniture making and work with confidence and pride. This is probably because they know that they provide quality furniture at a good price to the National Assembly and various ministries, and that their products are appreciated. At the same time I could instantly understand the reason why the number of applicants were increasing. This was the kind of place which young people would like, with its huge machines and its relatively clean work environment. I remembered the time when I had paid a visit to one of the food processing factories: seeing various food processing machines and listening to an explanation of how the machines worked, a Bhutanese student who accompanied me commented, "This is like I have stepped into the future!" Not surprisingly, the most enjoyable work in the factory is, as a trainee remarked, "operating machines."

Interviews with trainees were not very easy. First of all, the fact that they were occupied during the working day and that most trainees live in their own home made it difficult to have any substantial amount of time to talk with them. Yet this was one of the few places where I could meet a group of early school leavers, who are scattered across the society. In the end I made several visits to the Centre. The director and other staff were very helpful and arranged opportunities for me to talk with the trainees. Their English ability varied very much: some were hesitant to express themselves in English; others

helped me by interpreting, but interviews tended to concentrate on those who could speak in English fluently.

With regard to those who had grown up in English medium education and now had a job, I had to utilise my network of friends, as this group is also scattered across society. Most of the time I visited interviewees at their work place. I asked my friends for information about the interviewee's background. Young teachers at Drukgyel High School were also interviewed. I visited them with my friends who are also teachers, or they visited my friends' homes on evenings when I was also present. The discussion was lively. My friend tactfully provoked them in order to draw out answers. Apart from young teachers, I also met and talked with young government officials, as well as young people working in private companies, such as a travel agent.

#### *Dzongkha medium education and monastic education*

From a selection of one course and five institutes of Dzongkha medium education, I chose the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies as my main research site. This is the biggest school of Dzongkha medium education and is situated in an area called Simtokha, about six kilometres south of Thimphu. The Simtokha Dzong is raised on a hill above the busy main road which connects Thimphu, with Paro and Phuntsholing and was the first *dzong* built by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who united Bhutan in the seventeenth century. Generally speaking, a *dzong* houses both the national/regional administration and the monk body. But the Simtokha Dzong, at the time of my fieldwork, included neither of them.<sup>37</sup> Part of the *dzong* was used by the Institute for prayers and other activities. The main school buildings and most of the students' hostels were further up the hill. Some of the boys' hostels were down the hill, by the main road.

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<sup>37</sup> Shortly after my fieldwork in the Institute, the Simtokha Dzong started to be used as a *shaydra*.

The Institute is dedicated to the study of Bhutanese language, religion and arts. Before, the Institute used to accept students who had passed Class 5.<sup>38</sup> However, the Institute now plans to phase out these old curricula, and eventually to establish courses at Class 11 and higher for students from English medium education. The new curriculum places more emphasis on teaching bilingualism in Dzongkha/Choekey and English. At the time of the fieldwork, two curricula coexisted in the Institute, one for the students who have grown up in traditional Dzongkha medium education, and the other for a group of students who recently joined Class 11 of the Institute after passing Class 10 in an English medium school.

The Institute was originally aimed at producing Dzongkha teachers for English medium schools, and this function continues today. About ninety percent of students become Dzongkha teachers. A small number of students go on to the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, which trains people to be doctors and compounders of indigenous medicine. According to the Principal of the Institute:

In the early 1970s there were only a few educated people, therefore there was no problem in getting a job in the civil service. Even now there are some graduates from the Institutes who are high ranking officials. From the 1980s onwards, however, the number of students in the whole of Bhutan increased, and so the job market became tighter. Especially, the emphasis on alien subjects such as science and mathematics in the modern education sector has affected the graduates of the Institute. In the job market English speakers have been much more wanted. There is not much demand for Dzongkha speakers, although the government encourages the use of Dzongkha in official documents. If this had been implemented much more effectively, there would

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<sup>38</sup> During fieldwork, I met students who had studied in the Institute since Class 2. The Institute had accepted students in lower classes than Class 5 in earlier times.

have been more demand for the Institute's graduates. The changes in the curriculum also results from these considerations arising from the higher demand for English speakers in the job market.

The Principal holds the view that the Institute is a place which can give "lifetime skills":

The skills acquired in Simtokha such as carpentry, painting, and astrology are in much demand in the villages. So, if one cannot get a job, one can be self-employed in the villages instead. This is the place to teach survival skills.

He also informed me that the majority of the students wanted an office job in an urban area, because they think that it is insecure to be self-employed. The view that jobs in the public sector are secure is prevalent in Bhutan. This is one of the main reasons that jobs in government offices, whether an officer, a driver or a clerk, have been so popular in Bhutan, even if the salary is lower than in the private sector.

When I visited the Institute for the first time, I was accompanied by an officer from the Education Division and formally introduced to the Principal. He showed his interest in my fieldwork. Later when I asked if I could stay in a girls' dormitory and carry out some interviews with students, the Principal, who is probably in his forties and a teacher of mathematics and science, extended his helping hands generously. He gave me a space in one of two girls' dormitories where each girl has her own space to sleep and a small locker to keep their belongings - usually some clothes, containers for meals, *zao*<sup>39</sup> brought from home, soap and text books. There are about thirty girls in one dormitory. The Principal and other teachers were worried if I could take food from the students' "mess" without digestive and taste problems. One of the teachers warned me on the first day, "Have you ever tasted *kharang*? *Kharang* is made of maize and

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<sup>39</sup> A common Bhutanese snack, which is made by toasting rice.

rice. It's very difficult to digest. You may have to do a lot of exercise."

Girls were initially shy, but they were also kind and considerate enough to help me orient myself to life in Simtokha. Before we went down to the *dzong* for an evening prayer, they told me to take a dish, a cup and a spoon in a plastic bag for supper. The students' dining hall is between the *dzong* and the dormitory. It was therefore their routine to take plates for supper when they are going to an evening prayer and to hang them on the wall of the dining hall. Immediately after the prayer was the evening meal, so they can go to supper straight from the *dzong*. It saved more climbing up and down between the dining hall and the dormitory. The meal time was very short: I looked around at the students and noticed they ate very little. After the "formal" meal in the dining hall, they take food back to their dormitory. Now the real meal starts. They take out from their lockers some pickles or relishes to liven up the somewhat boring mess food, and eat while chatting with friends. This was a very useful time for me to chat with them.

A day in Simtokha starts quite early, at about half past five. Students get up, use the bathroom and wash their clothes. Morning prayer and breakfast follow. They come back to their dormitory, change into school uniform (which is an orange checked *kira* and *gho*) and go to morning assembly with their text books. Morning assembly starts with the singing of the national anthem and is followed by talks by the Principal and a student. Classes finish at about three o'clock. Girls come back to the dormitory, change into their own *kira* from school uniform and enjoy the free time until evening prayer by chatting with friends and drinking tea from the school mess. Most of the boys get tea on their way back to their dormitory. I used this time to talk with boys, because being in a girls' hostel made it a little difficult to visit the boys' hostel after dark. The path going down to the boys' hostel is a series of steps and even though it is lit, the narrow footpath in the middle of the small grove by the *dzong* looks haunted. Not all

of the students participate in evening prayer. Some students are exempted if they engage in similar religious activities, such as mask dances, practising of rituals and carving religious text on wood for printing. Since I could not conduct interviews while students are chanting prayer, I decided to join a wood carving group. Students in lower classes have to learn and practice how to carve small Tibetan letters on rectangular wood. Older students write the texts on paper, transfer them to wood, carve them and then use the blocks to print. Lettering has to conform to a certain style, so one student specialises in calligraphy. Some students repair wood that has previously been carved. This is the way religious texts have been produced and maintained in Bhutan for hundreds of years and probably in the world of Tibetan Buddhism at large. The atmosphere in the room was relaxed. Each student, about twelve of them from Class 10 and above, has their space and carving instruments. Fine wood chips are everywhere. Sounds of Bhutanese cymbals tapping out a beat for the mask dancing come in through the open window. A monk teacher comes in and out between this room and the next in order to supervise the lower class students. Here, I could also talk with students, if not so loudly.

Young people in monastic education are the group of people I had most difficulty in accessing during my fieldwork. I conducted interviews in a *shaydra* and a nunnery and asked the help of friends in interpreting. However, both of these visits were very short and I had to find a more meaningful way of approaching young people in monastic education. Then a friend of mine told me that one of his nephews was a monk working in the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs. As a result of this introduction I managed to talk to his nephew and a colleague in his office: they worked in the examination board for various *shaydra* and monasteries in the country. The monk, my friend's nephew, decided to join the monk body when he was in Class 10 in an English medium school. His history made me curious about the motives which made him leave English medium education, after all if he could have continued his education in the English medium school, a pass

from Class 10 is a good enough qualification to get a decent job in government office. It is also the minimum qualification for various training courses, which in most cases guarantee a job in the government sector on completion. He could have gone on to Class 12 or even college. Did not he find any significance in "success" in this transitory world? I started our conversation by asking about his uncommon career. He explained:

One day when I was in Class 10, the then Secretary of the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, the late Dasho Rigzin Dorji, came to the high school I was studying, and he gave a talk about Bhutanese culture and religion. I was so impressed by his talk. Though I cannot now remember his words exactly which moved me, his talk actually made me decide to join in the monk body. Apparently it was not only me who was moved by that talk. At that time about thirty students joined in the monk body from Class 10 of that high school. It was an unprecedented event, and probably will never happen again. There was pressure from friends also. Not so much verbal, but more psychological. I thought, 'This boy and that boy are also becoming monks. Why not me? Why can't I?'

This kind of peer-group pressure is often heard of in society and is used to explain many different phenomena. For instance, when questioned about the reasons why some young people use drugs, people explain, "if friends around you have already used drugs, you feel that you have to show that **you can** also do the same." Using drugs and joining the monk body seem very different matters, but it appears that the actual pressure that young people feel is of the same kind. The monk continued by contrasting the lives of students and that of a monk.

The difference between monastic life and student life is huge. Life in a monastic body is more independent. Cooking for myself, and one room for each person.... For students there is a timetable, but for monks there

is no rigid timetable. If you want to continue studying, you can go on. It's up to you. But discipline is strict. And it leads to a fear that I might offend the discipline, for example, monks are not supposed to eat after mid-day. But sometimes we eat snacks in the afternoon. What we are supposed to do and what we are not supposed to do is very clear.

Listening to his story of life as a monk, I remembered nuns I had talked with before. They said that they seldom go down to the town to shop or to watch films. I repeated this conversation to him. He says, "Young monks go to town and watch films during weekends. But some elder monks are leading a life as if they live high up on cloud." It may be the case that monks are more aware of issues in the secular world.

### **Fieldwork Vignettes**

What follows are some scenes from my fieldwork. They are placed here to illustrate some general tendencies in the way in which students talk about modernisation, culture and tradition, before we move on to a detailed examination and deconstruction of what modernisation, and culture and tradition mean.

#### *English medium education*

After classes in Drukgyel High School boys come down to the basketball court. Most of them are in school uniform *gho*, and they take out the upper part of their clothing and tuck it into a belt. Basketball is probably the most popular sport among young people in Bhutan. Although they did not seem to have set a firm rule about how long each student should play, they gave each other opportunities to take to the court. I sat with students who were waiting for their turn or who were just watching others' playing. A boy in Class 11 of the Commerce stream said, "I think that development and culture can coexist. But the pace of development at this moment is



retarded in order to preserve culture." A boy in Class 10 tells me his ambitious vision of a future Bhutan. "Bhutan needs development more. For example a train. We can make a tunnel through the mountains and have railways." He points to the mountains surrounding the Paro valley. "Then we can go to Ha or Thimphu from here in five minutes." Ha is a valley situated south west of Paro valley. To go to Ha from Paro people have to cross a four thousand metre high pass called Chelela.

In the girls' hostel, students are having tea and chatting. Sitting on their beds, a group of girls from Class 11 and Class 10 told me that "modernisation and culture cannot coexist. It is easy to say but hard to practice. People do not seem to regret that Bhutanese culture is fading. But I think that culture and tradition have to be preserved to some extent." Another girl in Class 12 from southern Bhutan insisted, "culture and tradition have to be preserved, and it has to be side by side with modernisation." The tendency is that although they say that both modernisation and culture and tradition have to be promoted, relative emphasis is placed on the need for modernisation.

This tendency is also the same in Sherubtse College. First year students in the English Department say, "Development should coexist with culture and tradition. But government regulation on architectural style<sup>40</sup> is not very good." He pointed to the college auditorium, and continued. "Compulsory is not good. The government is too strict and rigid." Another group of students in English Department say:

Culture and tradition has to compromise in order for Bhutan to develop. Those who say that development has to be compromised in order to preserve Bhutan's culture and tradition are narrow minded, because they are closed to things from outside.

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<sup>40</sup> Government regulations decree that new buildings should conform to the style of the Bhutanese tradition of architecture (Imaeda, 1994: p. 195)

The terms "narrow mind" and "broad mind" were often heard during my research. But information from a friend suggests that they have slightly different meanings from how they are used in English (i.e. to mean "tolerant" and "intolerant"). According to him, broad-minded and narrow-minded are direct translations from Dzongkha terms. The Dzongkha equivalent of the phrase broad mind means "not easily provoked", "stable", or "unmovable". Thus "a broad minded person" means a person who would not be easily upset by change. On the contrary "a narrow minded person" means a person who would be upset by a small change. Interestingly these terms are used to denigrate those with "anti-modernisation/pro-preservation" opinions by those who are pro-modernisation and less concerned about preservation.

### *Dzongkha medium and monastic education*

In the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies in Simtokha, students were always kept busy. The school organises an event or a big prayer session almost every weekend. When I interviewed the students of the new Class 11 in the auditorium, they were practising a short drama to be performed on the evening of the following Saturday. I sat on the floor and looked at their rehearsal on the stage with other students who did not have anything in particular to do at that moment. Curious students soon started asking me why I was there, what my impression of Bhutan was, where I stayed in Thimphu and so on. I slowly directed the conversation towards the modernisation of Bhutan. Soon various view points emerged.

"Modernisation should be kept to a certain limit, and should not hamper culture and tradition."

"Yeah, balance between modernisation and our own culture and tradition is very important."

"Modernisation is good, as long as economy develops **and** it does not hamper our culture and tradition. We should not wear pants and shirts, which can be worn only inside house, because the dress is **the** way to

represent culture, the way of securing our country's independence and country's identity."

These views suggest that modernisation is welcome only if Bhutan's culture and tradition is not damaged, and they emphasise the need for a balance to be kept between modernisation and Bhutan's culture and tradition. Some other students however think that it is optimistic to presume that modernisation and Bhutan's culture and tradition can be harmonised.

"Modernisation and tradition cannot coexist. It is good to know other's tradition, but we should not adopt. We have to keep our own culture."

"I hate modernisation. It destroys Bhutanese culture."

"Yes, modernisation is bad. Like China conquered Tibet, modernisation is going to conquer Bhutan!"

"Bhutanese culture should be preserved, because it is unique and good."

Some students are sceptical about the feasibility of absolute preservation of culture and tradition. One student murmured, "But you cannot preserve all..."

In Sherubtse college, a students in Dzongkha Honours course voiced his view:

Development is not good for Bhutan. If I can work in the government in the future, I would like to stop all the development activities. In urban area, though buildings are modern, the tradition is declining, and it is not good at all.

A monk in the Special Commission similarly holds a very negative view about modernisation: "Development has far bigger negative side when compared to its positive effects. For example, Thimphu becomes more crowded, more dirty, and there are more crimes, although life is becoming more convenient, for example, through the use of vehicles."

This is a noticeable contrast from the views of young people in English medium education: young people in Dzongkha medium education and monastic education are much more cautious about modernisation. They place much more emphasis on the importance of preserving Bhutan's culture and tradition. We have seen some difference in opinions among young people in Dzongkha medium education. However none of them says, as young people in English medium education say, that more emphasis should be placed on modernisation than the preservation of culture and tradition.

In both sectors of education, young people eloquently express their views on modernisation and culture and tradition. But what exactly do they mean by those words? On what basis do they say that a balance between culture and tradition is important, that culture and tradition has to compromise in favour of developing Bhutan more, and that modernisation has done more harm than good? What are the issues which draw the attention of young people in the area of modernisation and preservation of culture and tradition? We will examine these questions in the following section by deconstructing the meanings of modernisation and culture and tradition.

### **Deconstruction of Modernisation**

In Bhutan, maintaining culture and tradition during the modernisation process is not only an issue for the government: it is part and parcel of how people think about the development process. Modernisation, culture and tradition are seen as phenomena which have direct impact on everyday life. The nation's sovereignty and independence, the routes taken by new roads, new hospitals, employment opportunities, the architectural style of houses and the type of clothes that are worn, for example, may all be discussed with reference to modernisation, culture and tradition. In Bhutan "development" and "modernisation" tend to be used interchangeably in casual everyday conversation, and in

many cases both of these terms are contrasted with culture and tradition.

This section attempts to deconstruct the meaning of modernisation among young people. We shall examine the views held by young people in each education sector, starting with the English medium education.

### *English medium education*

As shown already, young people in English medium education view modernisation in a positive light. They nevertheless recognise that modernisation has both positive and negative implications. The main meaning attached to "modernisation" is straightforward: it is seen as referring to improvements in facilities and infrastructure. A student in Class 12 in Drukgyel High School presents a generally held viewpoint when he states, "People think that development means infrastructure, communication facilities such as roads, sanitation facilities and schools and so on." A girl in Class 12 of the Science stream says, "The word development makes me imagine roads, medical facilities, lots of shops, entertainment facilities such as a swimming pool and basketball courts." Many students simply take it for granted that modernisation means improvements in infrastructure. A student in Class 12 from southern Bhutan, for instance, assumes that by modernisation I mean the development of new facilities, and jumps ahead to emphasise the importance of improving education and medical facilities and the road network. In Sherubtse College as well the same assumption is strong. When I presented myself as being interested in modernisation in Bhutan, students in English Department talked about "high-tech transportation" such as an underground railway and aeroplanes and insisted that Bhutan needed them too.

Improvement in facilities is seen as one of the most positive results of modernisation among young people, both students and professionals alike. A young teacher in Drukgyel High School told me that, "Development helps to make life easier

with machines, roads network and vehicles." A young gentleman in his mid-twenties who is running a business made a similar point:

When my parents were young there was not a good road network like today. They had to walk or to ride on a horse most of their journey. From Thimphu to Bumthang it took more than a week. Now there are good roads, and a journey to Bumthang is just one day's drive. We are lucky.

At the personal level, students' attention is focused on the material aspects of life. The tendency is that the younger a person is, the stronger the emphasis on the importance of money. Boys in Class 12 in the Commerce stream in Drukgyel High School insisted that

Money is very important. Probably 4.5 out of 5. With money one can get everything, even a sweet and beautiful wife, because nowadays girls want to marry a rich man. My vision of a good life is to have a good comfortable house with three bedrooms with attached bathrooms, TV and video, a refrigerator, and a new car from Japan, and a sweet wife.

This statement betrays the longing for a life which is materially better than that of most people, but which is actually attainable only for the top rank of the urban elite. Having a TV,<sup>41</sup> a video recorder and a refrigerator is getting more common in Thimphu these days. Buying a new Japanese car,<sup>42</sup> however, would be very difficult on an

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<sup>41</sup> TV broadcasting started in June 1999 within the Thimphu area. At the time of my fieldwork in Bhutan, however, a TV was used exclusively to watch videos. There were many video rental shops in Thimphu. Hollywood movies and Hong Kong action movies as well as Hindi "Bollywood" movies were easily obtainable and popular.

<sup>42</sup> The specification of a "Japanese car" should be seen in the context that in Bhutan almost all vehicles are from either from India or Japan. Compared to Indian vehicles, Japanese vehicles are seen to be of higher quality, more comfortable, and more expensive, and therefore more desired.

ordinary civil servants' salary, though for people engaged in business it may be easier. As regards a house, Bhutanese dwellings are renowned for their relatively large size. It would not be very difficult to find a house with more than three spacious rooms in an ordinary village. But a bedroom with a bathroom is a different story. The older generation condemn these young people's ambitious attitudes as "materialistic".

Another aspect of modernisation which is much talked about among young people is exposure to the outside world. A young lady in her mid-twenties working in a tour company compares village life with town life in terms of degree of exposure:

In a village people are traditional and they are not exposed to other ideas. There are people who haven't even seen vehicles. Women wear *kira* shorter and make their pockets bigger. And they fill up the pockets with lots of things.

She puts the words traditional and unexposed side by side. Villagers are not exposed to technology such as vehicles. They do not know the smart way to wear *kira*: because it is just a rectangular cloth, it is largely in the wearer's hands whether it is worn smartly or messily. In town, fashion conscious young ladies wear their *kira* so long that they almost touch the ground, sometimes inviting a joke from male colleagues that their *kira* is "sweeping the floor". "A pocket" is made at the front of the upper body by folding the *kira* and tying it with a belt. Unlike men's version of the pocket, *hemchu*, the capacity of which is almost unlimited, the women's pocket provides less space. The ladies may keep some money and keys in it, but smart, fashion conscious young ladies would not put things in the pocket as it would swell too much.

The young lady went on to explain that having greater exposure to the outside world is desirable and necessary for herself as well.

If I could improve my life, I would want more exposure to the outside world. Seeing different people and knowing different views. It's very good. In this sense working in a tour company is an advantage. I can see lots of different people. Most of them are very nice in my experience.

Hence, we are presented here with a dichotomy between those who know only one way of thinking, villagers, and those who know different ideas. Needless to say, the latter group of people are seen in a positive light. Her view is common in Bhutan - virtually everyone is passionate about going abroad. When I asked the question, "Why do you want to visit foreign countries?", one of the most popular and almost pre-set answers is "to get exposure."<sup>43</sup>

Also in Sherubtse College, exposure to the outside world is strongly connected to modernisation. A student in the second year comments, "Bhutan in the next thirty years? More exposure is needed. This is a conservative society." The logic we can observe being applied in these answers is "traditional" and "conservative" means "unexposed", on the one hand versus, "exposed" equals "modernised", on the other.

The passion for getting exposure among young people in English medium education is hinted at in these students' positive impressions of the West. What can be gained through "exposure" is both knowledge and modern behaviour. To be westernised is seen as something positive. A student in Drukgyel High School put it this way:

Compared to my parents, maybe I am more westernised. Parents think Bhutan is the world. We study about lots of things in school and know a lot. For instance, this stone. For my parents this is just a stone, but we think about minerals in the stone. We have got a wider horizon on the world.

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<sup>43</sup> This however does not usually mean settling down in a foreign country permanently, but taking a trip to have a glance at the outside world.



Another student in Class 11 in Drukgyel High School imagines westernised people as follows:

When we, the younger generation, talk about a westernised person, it is in a positive sense. It means a gentleman, with wide knowledge, civilised, frank, open, intelligent, capacity to talk in better ways, exposed to the world, ambitious, adventurous, and competitive, although they probably always go after money and material comfort. The people in the Western countries are frank, intelligent, good in expressing themselves and ambitious, aren't they?

Furthermore, certain Western cultural symbols have been incorporated into youth culture in Bhutan. In Drukgyel High School, English films and music tend to be seen as "cool" among students. Students in the high school often sing Western pop songs. One female student in Class 12 remarked that Western dresses, such as jeans and T-shirts are more fashionable than *kira*. When I suggested to her that Bhutanese *kira* are beautiful with many designs, she replied that *kira* which have many designs on them are for special occasions, not for everyday use. Although the younger generation does not have a derogatory attitude towards the Bhutanese national dress, as everyday-wear Western casual clothes are popular among young people.

Comments from those who have graduated from English medium education are similar. A young teacher in Drukgyel High School explains:

When you say westernised positively, it refers to the people who are educated in the West and influenced by Western ideas. These people are seen in a positive light. A typical person of this kind does not care what people gossip about him or her, does not join in gossiping, is open to others and listens to others, does

whatever he or she thinks right without caring what people talk about him or her.

She exemplified her arguments by referring to two persons both of whom have a degree from a university in the West and now work in government offices. Both of them are seen to have a drive to get things done, rather than to spend much time in negotiating and contemplating. The positive image of the West and the westernised appears to drive young people in English medium education further towards exposure to the outside world.

Modernisation also connotes "freedom" and "openness" among young people in English medium education. A student in Sherubtse College says:

If we compare ourselves with the older generation, they are traditional. But I wonder if I will be like them when I get to their age. The only difference would be that we are a little more open minded because we know Western freedom, like going to parties and so on.

In his statement it appears that "Western freedom" is made equivalent to "going to a party", and this student is not the only one for whom these two phrases are synonyms. A lady working for a tour company tells me:

My parents object to my going to a party. They say that if I go to a party, I will have a bad influence from those naughty people. I am going just to have fun... But if it was in America, their parents would say, 'Go on and have fun.'...

While this person was educated in India, she has not, to my knowledge, been to the United States. Thus she is probably talking based on images she has got from films and magazines and so on. Freedom in this context is not meant to be political freedom, namely freedom of expression and democracy: rather it is talked about in the sense of escaping

from the watchful and supervising eyes of parents and teachers.

In Thimphu, discos are becoming a fashionable spot for young people, though there are less than a handful. It was often indicated to me that I ought to go there as part of my research on young people in Thimphu. Most discos open only at weekends, although some hotels offer them on special occasions such as Christmas<sup>44</sup> and New Year. Clubs were absolutely unprecedented in Bhutan until recently. Western pop and rock music are now loudly played, and young people enjoy dancing and drinking in cool, fashionable clothes - jeans and a leather jacket maybe.

Modernisation however does not only mean positive things for young people in English medium education. The negative effects of modernisation are also recognised even among those young people who are thought to be most pro-modernisation in the society. A student in Class 12 in Drukgyel High School points out:

People's attitudes are also changing. For instance crime and drug problems etc..., although these are still micro in magnitude. Also fashion is changing. People have started to copy the Western way of dressing.

A young teacher in Drukgyel High School also points out that in town areas, young people make gangs, and use drugs, and he insists that these kind of things did not happen before. These days "youth issues" are of concern to the whole society.<sup>45</sup> Especially in Thimphu, people are worried that

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<sup>44</sup> For almost all Bhutanese people in Thimphu Christmas does not mean much. Offices and shops are open as usual. These days however it is becoming "a party time" amongst young people.

<sup>45</sup> One feature of juvenile delinquency in Bhutan is that many young people who are engaged in it are from well-to-do families. People told me that their parents are busy in their business or socialising themselves, and that they do not pay much attention to their children. They give money to their children, but are not very keen on knowing what they spend it on.

groups of young people occasionally fight each other, and that young people are using drugs, alcohol and cigarettes. Stories of students sniffing correction fluid often used to appear in the newspaper and some of the users were even caught by the police.<sup>46</sup> Recently shopkeepers in one town agreed to stop selling tobacco because students are "picking up the habit of smoking" (*Kuensel*, 8th May 1999). As the newspaper features youth issues and because the subject is often talked about in government publications, workshops and meetings, youth problems are highlighted. The young people I interviewed talked about certain "youth issues" as a negative effect of modernisation in the same tones as government officials and newspapers, because they do not identify themselves with the young people who are accused of improper behaviour.

It is not only youth issues that concern people, but also robberies from *chorten* and even murders. These problems are perceived in society as signs which show that the society is becoming less moral and more violent. Robberies from *chorten* are especially symbolic because they are religious monuments. People insist that these problems are increasing as modernisation progress, and that problems are more serious in the places where there is "a touch of modernisation", namely town areas.

As regards dressing, as I have already pointed out, Western dress such as jeans, shirts and leather jackets are seen as cool among young people. It should however be also noted that the position of Western dress is always casual in the spectrum of formality of attire. This is because in Bhutan people wear national dress on formal occasions, and so Western dresses sometimes also connotes a tatty style. Moreover when people say that someone "copies" Western fashion, it usually has a derogatory meaning. It sounds as if a person is confused about their identity, and that they are also failing to pay due respect towards Bhutanese national dress. One of the young teachers in Drukgyel High School remarked:

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<sup>46</sup> Various issues of *Kuensel*. For example, 26th April 1997 and 24th May 1997.

'A westernised person' can be also used in a negative sense. Those people who copy the actor's way of behaviour in English films, way of dressing in the films, wearing tone jeans, using drugs, and roaming around town are also seen as westernised. They do not know who they are. They are just copying.

Pollution and environmental degradation are also talked about as negative effects of modernisation. Students in Classes 10 and 11 in Drukgyel High School point out that people cut down trees in order to import goods from other countries, and that there is increasing air pollution because of the growing number of vehicles. They refer to air pollution and traffic jams in Calcutta and Bangkok, and say that they do not want Bhutan to become like those polluted places. When people talk about dirty streets with litter scattered everywhere, air pollution caused by emission from trucks, or traffic jams, they say "Oh, Bhutan is becoming like India." - even though a traffic jam in the Bhutanese context means a line of ten cars. The environment is another area which is highlighted, especially on Social Forestry Day when schools organise tree plantations. Forestry is strictly protected in Bhutan, thus no one can cut down a tree without permission from the authority. In recent years the government has restricted the cutting of hard wood for *bukhari*<sup>47</sup> in the winter in the Thimphu area because of a scarcity of resources.

Another negative effect of modernisation remarked upon by students is increasing competition in society which has meant that life is becoming tough. For instance as the number of students increases, one requires better qualifications to get a job compared to before. According to trainees in the Wood Craft Centre:

The society as a whole is becoming competitive, because there are more educated people than before. In the past even students who have passed Class 6

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<sup>47</sup> A wood-burning stove.

could get a decent job, but now Class 6 is nothing. In the near future it is going to be more difficult to have a training opportunity in the Wood Craft Centre.

A student in Sherubtse College commented:

As modernisation goes on, people's attitudes have been changing, probably because of influence from the Indians. The Bhutanese have started to copy the Indian business attitudes which are very selfish and dishonest. Also competition is increasing in the society, therefore people think, 'I have to do better than others.' As a result of that people have started not to help others.

According to him, modernisation is a force which has led to people becoming more selfish. In Bhutan people see mutual help and reciprocity as traditional customs with significant value, and so selfish attitudes are very much looked down upon. It is a violation of Bhutanese-ness. Attribution of selfishness and dishonesty to the Indians reflect a Bhutanese image of India and the Indians which is not always positive.

A trainee in the Wood Craft Centre also remarked that people were more kind five years ago, and it is probably true that increasing competition is felt on an everyday basis. The kind of job which can be gained by students who have passed Class 6 ten years ago is probably only accessible for students who have passed Class 10 today. The increasing number of students simply means more competition. One educationist told me that when he was in Class 12 about fifteen years ago a score of sixty percent marked the boundary between first and second divisions in examinations, but that now such a score is only the minimum requirement to go on to the college.

However it appears also to be the case that there is a rigid image deeply embedded in people's minds that the society becomes competitive, and people becomes less kind, as modernisation progresses. This seems to be largely influenced by their negative image and experiences of the West and the

Westerners. Those people who have been abroad told me about their impressions of developed countries. While the higher material standards of life in developed countries are seen in a positive light, Bhutan is much praised for its "human touches". A lady in her early twenties, for example, stayed in the USA for about seven months. She complained about her busy life there which lacked safety and friends. She was tired out by the culture of "dry human relations". "People do not have time to talk with you in America. They are too busy. Here, life is more relaxed and people are more helpful and kind. People here have lots of time to share with family, friends and colleagues."

A young lady who lived in Austria for eight months for her training told me about her experiences:

The biggest difference between life in Austria and here is that people here have much more time. In Austria, I had to make an appointment in advance even to visit my friends. Here I can visit my friends whenever I want. And I can stay for lunch, tea, supper, and on and on. People do not mind at all if I stay there for long. I met a very rich couple in Germany. But they do not have their own children, so they adopted two Indonesian children. I felt very sorry for them. Money may be important. But even if you have money I do not think it is a happy life, if you do not have your own children. There are lots of things which you cannot buy with money.

"Dry human relations" are also experienced in Thimphu by those who have expatriate friends. Many people complain that they have to ring expatriate friends before they visit. Even those who experienced life in the West complain, "Why do I have to call beforehand to visit him? We are friends! It is not like making a formal visit to an office." In Bhutan it is expected that friends should show warm intimacy to each other. Even if you visit a friend without prior warning, you are sure that you will be always welcome. Making a phone call beforehand is something too formal to happen between

friends. People ask, "Why do *pchillip* distance themselves from each other so much?" Compared to life in developed countries, people say that life in Bhutan is very relaxed, and that people have lots of time to talk and to share with family, friends and colleagues.

We have seen that young people in English medium education recognise that there are both positive and negative aspects to modernisation. They feel that improvements in the material aspects of life, more exposure to the outside world and "freedom" are positive. But crimes, juvenile delinquency, environmental degradation and increasing competition in the society are seen as negative. Consequently, modernisation is not something to be pursued without reservation, and therefore their future vision of Bhutan is not entirely one of increasing modernisation. Their images of the West and the Westerners are linked with what modernisation means to them. While positive images of the West are presented, at the same time negative images are used as a counterforce to modernisation.

#### *Dzongkha medium education and monastic education*

At the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies in Simtokha, new Class 11 students and old Class 10 students pointed out the effects of modernisation:

Modernisation has both good and bad effects. Good effects are in the area of education, transportation, communication and agriculture. There are better facilities in school. People started to use fertiliser and machines in their fields. There is better transportation, so we can trade with other countries.

This is a similar response to that made by young people in English medium education. First and foremost they point to improvement in facilities and material aspects of life as an aspect of modernisation. "Facilities" have become such an important aspect of development for society that "better



facilities", rather than the quality of teaching and students' academic performance, are one of the main ways of distinguishing better schools from the rest.<sup>48</sup>

The students moved on to explain the negative aspects of modernisation:

But modernisation can also be an enemy of culture and tradition. People started to copy foreigners' behaviour, like wearing torn jeans, pants, mini-skirts.... Foreign films have influenced a lot. Girls are putting cosmetics on. People sometimes hug and kiss in public. English songs are very popular. People speak in English more. In this way Bhutanese culture is fading. Also because the importance of money has increased, thefts of *chorten* have also gone up. This is against our culture and tradition.

A sharp dichotomy between modernisation, on the one hand, and culture and tradition on the other, is presented here.

"Exposure" to the outside world is also linked to modernisation among young people in Dzongkha medium education, as it is in English medium education. The link between exposure and modernisation can be seen for example in the following answer.

Modernisation? It is good to know another country's lifestyle, to have good relations with other countries and to know other languages. But we should not be overwhelmed by these. Important aspects of Bhutanese culture must be preserved.

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<sup>48</sup> I recall a conversation with a Japanese volunteer teacher I met during my first visit to Bhutan in 1996. He told me that since the school in which he was working was seen as "a good school", pupils were coming from all over the country to it. I assumed that description of "a good school" was determined by the quality of teaching and students' academic performance, and wondered if there was a scale which measures these aspects. He answered "a good school" is measured in terms of the facilities it offers. People think that this school has better facilities."

This connection is also observed among young people in English medium education. There is however a subtle difference in the way in which getting exposure is presented. In Simtokha, "not-exposed" has a less derogatory meaning than when it is presented by the people in, or who have grown up in, English medium education. A student in Simtokha uses the word "innocent", meaning not knowing what is happening outside the country, instead of not-exposed. Furthermore, students in Simtokha emphasise the importance of preserving Bhutanese culture. In opposition to this, as we have seen, young people in English medium education often use the phrase "less exposed" in a negative. It connotes a narrow view, backwardness and unsophisticatedness. As presented earlier, among young people in English medium education, a stronger word - "westernised" - holds a more positive meaning.

A monk in the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs emphasises the negative aspects of modernisation. Although he acknowledges positive sides by saying that life became more convenient through being able to use vehicles, for example, he also emphasises the negative effects of modernisation thus:

These days children do not know culture and religion at all. Their parents do not tell them either. So young people are becoming less and less religious, and less and less appreciate culture. They are more interested in movies. The people are increasingly materialistic. They are always talking about buying a nice landcruiser, and going abroad on holiday. I feel a big difference between me and my friends who were my classmates in the high school. For me material objects are a secondary thing. Mental and spiritual things are far more important. But they do not talk about religion, and mental and spiritual things.

Respect towards monks is declining. People think that monks are less productive. They feel that the

government wastes money by spending huge amount on the monk body. They compare monks in Bhutan with Mother Teresa and Father Mackey<sup>49</sup> who have done social welfare work for the poor people, and think that the monks in Bhutan should also contribute to the society through social services and so on. And we, young monks, also think so.

The society is becoming more and more competitive. Small school children are also subject of competition. My small niece cannot sleep if she is not the top of the class in an exam. Everyone thinks that he or she wants to be better than others. Parents also force their children to study to get better position in exams, because people think that a better position and a better grade means a more secure future and more income. Children should not suffer from such mental pressure.

For him, modernisation means isolation from Bhutanese culture and religion, materialism, increasing competition in the society, and more mental pressure derived from competition. Materialism has an especially negative meaning in Bhutan, because it is part of Buddhist teaching to detach oneself from material desire. He observes that people judge one's significance from the viewpoint of productivity, and that they do not think only performing *choku* and giving *wang*<sup>50</sup> is enough. In these changing social circumstances, he also agrees to the idea that monks should take up some social welfare work. It is in fact not new that monks take part in development activities: *Je Khenpo* for instance supports programmes to eradicate iodine deficiency disorders in those rural areas where this presents a serious problem (*Kuensel*, 6th September 1997).

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<sup>49</sup> Father Mackey is a Canadian Jesuit. He worked in Bhutan since 1960s. He established and ran three high schools in Trashigang district, among which is Sherubtse College, laying the foundation of modern education in Bhutan. For an account of his life, see Solverson (1995).

<sup>50</sup> A blessing.

A young monk in a *shaydra* in Thimphu expressed a similar view: he had not been to an English medium school. Instead, he started his life as a monk in the *dzong* in Lhuntse, and studied in the *shaydra* for five years. He, my friend and I talked in a *lhakhang*<sup>51</sup> of the *shaydra* sitting on well-scrubbed floor. My friend translated. The monk was not at all shy towards strangers. The view that people become less religious as modernisation progresses is resonant with modernisation theories. But the monk saw this prognosis as totally undesirable.

During the past five years, Thimphu has been changed quite a lot. Main changes are more vehicles, more houses, and more people. People's attitudes toward monks are also changing. This can be observed from their way of talking and behaviour towards monks. This may be because the people do not have to depend on monks in matters of sickness and so on. In the past monks used to be relied upon. In the rural areas respect towards monks is the same as before, and monks are treated decently. Older people express more respect than younger people.

Here I would like to make several points about these different discourses. Firstly, one of the important differences is that for young people in Dzongkha medium education, the benefits of modernisation are perceived to lie only with improvements in material life, and modernisation is generally seen as a force which will destroy Bhutanese culture and tradition. In their descriptions the word "westernised", is mostly used in a negative sense. Material progress and improvement of facilities are not seen as "westernisation". "Westernisation" or "westernised" is usually used when describing "problems", such as the use of drugs among young people, "copying Western film actors' fashion", "people becoming unkind" and so on. On the other hand, for young people from an English

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<sup>51</sup> A temple.

medium education background, "westernised", is sometimes used in a positive sense. Some young people in English medium education make positive remarks about the westerners being ambitious and exposed to the world. The word "westernised" is a stronger word in Bhutan than modernisation. It connotes changes in the cultural sphere, such as shifts in people's attitudes and values rather than simply meaning technological changes and material progress. It is a stronger word in a place like Bhutan where culture and tradition have been perceived as declining, and where this decline is regarded as one of the biggest social problems. In this context, the use of the word "westernised" in a positive sense clearly distinguishes students in English medium education from those in Dzongkha medium education.

Nevertheless, both groups agree on the negative aspects of modernisation. Increasing crime in general, and specifically juvenile delinquency, is said to be an effect of modernisation. Young people explained that those problems are seen more in the town areas where there is "a touch of modernisation." Copying Westerners' behaviour and fashion is derogated as "westernised" when it is not seen as good and polite behaviour in Bhutanese eyes. Increasing competition makes life more stressful, and increasing materialism makes people unkind and less generous. Negative aspects of modernisation come under close scrutiny in society, through the tendency to attribute socially undesirable situations to modernisation. Furthermore, terms which describe positive aspects of modernisation are carefully neutralised. They are described as "improvement in facilities", "exposure" and so on and thereby escape from being identified with either the West or Bhutan.

These positive and negative aspects of modernisation appear to reflect Bhutanese images of the West and the Westerners. These images are often conflicting, but at the same time stylised. Young people, regardless of their education sector, would agree that while Western countries are seen as places where there has been technological and material progress, they are also places where people are unkind and materialistic, and managing a busy, stressful life. At the same

time, some other young people in English medium education think that in a big city like London air is polluted by emissions from vehicles and factories. Images of a colourful and fashionable life in the West (especially as seen in films) is prominent in the minds of young people in English medium education, but they also think that Westerners are individualistic and do not care for their family and friends as much as people do in Bhutan. This stylised image of the West is a counterpart to Orientalism.

The positive and negative descriptions of modernisation are actually two sides of the same coin. For instance, exposure is necessary to know the outside world better. But too much exposure or the "wrong kind" of exposure could lead to a person being branded as "westernised" in a negative sense. The standard of what extent of exposure is described as "exposure" and how different kinds of exposure are classified as either right or wrong, is the subject of everyday negotiation and manipulation. Different agents can manipulate these terms in order to bolster their own position. For example a monk accused those who have grown up in English medium education of only talking about the material aspects of life, such as cars and going abroad on holiday, and of not being interested in the spiritual aspects of life. In this monk's view these people are materialistic and westernised. However, those who have grown up in English medium education would say that they are much more exposed to the outside world. Some college students compare themselves with an even younger generation and present themselves as "traditional". But they themselves are among those who are accused by the older generation of being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. We will examine these manipulations and construction of identity in detail later. Here I would point out that the deconstruction of modernisation tells us that the same phenomenon can be interpreted in opposite ways. The way it is interpreted and described in turn signifies how each agent perceives their position in society. However, the college students described above know that they cannot present themselves as "traditional" compared to the older generation. It appears that there is somehow an objectified spectrum in

existence in their minds along which different groups in the society are located and classified according to whether they are “traditional”, “exposed” or “westernised”. Therefore the manipulation of these terms is not entirely at the discretion of each agent. Rather manipulation takes place within the boundaries imposed by the scale.

For students in Dzongkha medium education and monastic education modernisation is also seen in both a positive and negative light. However, the negative aspects are much more focused upon than the positive ones. It appears that students in Simtokha assume that as modernisation progresses, culture and tradition will decline in Bhutanese society. A dichotomy thus arises between modernisation on the one hand and culture and tradition on the other. Furthermore, the way of thinking among young people in English medium education also seems to be based on this assumption.

## **Deconstruction of culture and tradition**

### *English medium education*

In this section I will examine the meanings attached to Bhutanese culture and tradition by deconstructing them. The deconstruction will show that there are complex negotiations going on between the ideal and the practical. I will start this investigation in the area of national dress, where this gap between ideal and real is most apparent.

At the present time, national dress is in the process of becoming a symbol of Bhutanese culture and tradition. This is not only because it is a very obvious signifier of culture but also because the government itself is promoting the national dress as one of the most important means of expressing Bhutanese identity. Especially amongst young people, national dress has become a focal point of discussion. A student in Class 12 at Drukgyel High School told me:

Cultural preservation is dependant on the people's attitudes. Farmers do not know the Western lifestyle and have kept to their traditional way of life, so they are OK. The problem is the kind of people who are not well educated and live in the town area. They do not know the value of unique Bhutanese culture, so they rush to copy Western lifestyle, dressing and cosmetics. Everyone has to know the importance of cultural preservation. But actually jeans and shirts are better than *gho* and *kira* because it is easier to move.

It is a common response for young people to say that it is important to keep national dress as a symbol of national identity and as an important aspect of Bhutanese tradition, however practically-speaking it is not convenient to wear national dress all the time. They think it is too much to have to wear national dress just to go to a video rental shop that is five minutes walk away. In general, practicality is presented by young people as the main reason that they try to minimise the number of occasion when they are wearing national dress. "Less easy to move", "uncomfortable", and "too warm in low altitude areas" are the excuses often heard. A typical comment would be similar to the one made by a young lady working in a tour company, who has been educated in India from primary school level. She told me, "Although I respect *kira*, I feel uncomfortable wearing it." Moreover, Western casual dress tends to be seen as fashionable among young people. This does not mean that they hate to wear national dress. To translate the social position of Bhutanese national dress into a Western context, it is somehow equivalent to how people in some Western countries regard formal suits these days. When people go to offices, schools, *dzong*, temples and monasteries, and other formal occasions, there is no argument about whether they wear national dress or Western dress. They wear national dress. Just as we relax when we take off suits on coming back home from office, they take off their national dress at home and wear something relaxing, maybe jeans and a sweatshirt. Consequently Western dress in Bhutan has become an item of clothing suitable for casual



situations, and formal Western dress can seldom be seen in Bhutan. This in turn helps lower the position of Western dress by creating the image of Western dress as being casual, and improper for formal occasions.

Not only does the preservation of culture and tradition tend to be reduced to an issue of national dress among young people, but clothing is also an issue on which much negotiation is taking place on a daily basis. The inventions of the half-*kira*<sup>52</sup> and half-*gho*<sup>53</sup> are products of these negotiations. With the half-*kira* and half-*gho* people can be free from wearing a tight belt while still maintaining a pretence that they "respect" Bhutanese culture and tradition. A boy who wears jeans under his *gho* is also taking part in these same cultural negotiations, though he will be sneered at by his parents' generation. The older generation say that wearing jeans under *gho* is simply "funny", but at the same time it is seen as a sign that young people are becoming alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. Although one government official argued that Bhutanese culture and tradition means far more than just the material aspects of life, let alone your style of dressing, for most young people national dress comes top of the list when asked what Bhutanese culture and tradition means.

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<sup>52</sup> The half-*kira* resembles the lower part of a (full-) *kira*. The garment has the same length as a *kira*, but its width is about two thirds of it. It is therefore wrapped in the same way as a *kira*, but only around the lower part of the body and fastened at the waist, resembling a tight long skirt. With half-*kira*, a woman wears, as she does with a *kira*, an *onju* (blouse) and a *toego* (jacket), pinned closed at the front. As Myers (1994: p. 106) points out, a half-*kira* looks like a normal full-*kira*, but at the same time it frees wearers from using a tight belt, and also from a brooch at the shoulders, whose sharp pin sometimes pricks one's back. During fieldwork, many women were seen in half-*kira* while shopping, however, it was not considered to be suitable attire for visiting *dzong* and offices, and for other formal occasions.

<sup>53</sup> Similar to the half-*kira*, the half-*gho* is only the lower part of the *gho*. Men can wear a sweater or a jacket instead of the upper part. It seems to free the wearer from having to wear a tight belt. The half-*gho* however hardly resembles a *gho*. Thus it is much less seen than the half-*kira*.

In Sherubtse College as well, discussion about culture and tradition centres on government rules regarding national dress and architecture. Some students say that making the wearing of national dress compulsory is not a good idea, because it spoils the joy of dressing up. Here again this is not a complaint about national dress itself. They wear national dress without being told by anyone, "when the situation demands". Nobody would dream of visiting a monastery or *dzong* in jeans and a T-shirt. However the regulations make them feel suffocated. They feel they are forced to wear national dress. The then Director of Education summarised the situation: "Youth problems' are not problems for youth. For young people authority is the problem." The regulations about national dress have led to disputes within Bhutanese society. The result is that so much attention is focused on national dress that among young people the meaning of Bhutanese culture and tradition is reduced to national dress together with only a few other issues, such as religion. Therefore even when government officials argue against Bhutanese culture and tradition being limited to its material aspects,<sup>54</sup> and emphasise that there are many more non-material aspects with a long history which should be respected, these sentiments do not resonate with young people very readily.

Another aspect of Bhutanese culture on which the attention of young people is concentrated is religion. In Sherubtse College, on the day after I arrived, a special *wang* was held at the *zangdopelri* outside the campus. The principal and vice principal invited me along, since in this particular *wang* people can get a blessing from religious objects which are rarely shown to the public. There were many people present both in and outside the *zangdopelri*, including students and staff of the college and people from nearby villages. The aroma of incense sticks was in the air. We walked around the

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<sup>54</sup> According to Dasho Karma Gayleg, *gho* and *kira* are worn not merely for appearance, but also as a manifestation of Bhutanese social protocol and etiquette. The length of the *gho* and the width of the white cuffs, for instance, signifies the wearer's social status.

*zangdopelri* clockwise, then entered; inside, monks were reciting religious texts. One of the students commented,

Religion has mobilising power in Bhutan. If it is something religious, everyone, from young to old, from uneducated to well-educated, comes together without being asked by anyone. They sit on hard cold floor for long hours, yet there is no complaint heard.

Unlike the issue of national dress I heard few conflicting views on the importance of religion among young people. Not only the principal and the vice-principal of the college, but also students indicated that I should come to the *wang*, because it was a valuable opportunity. They did not even ask me if I was a Buddhist or not. It appears that for them it is quite natural to go to the *wang*. Moreover, as we will see later, there are many occasions on which young people attend *puja* and *wang*, and visit temples.

At the same time, however, young people feel that the older generation have a different attitude towards religion. A young dentist, in his late twenties, tells me that religion is the most obvious way in which he feels the generation gap. He says:

My parents always count the beads, and hold *puja* often. They also care auspicious days and inauspicious days. But I do not believe in that as much as they do. It might be waste of money to hold *puja* too many times. But when I become my parents age, I will probably also pray a lot, hold many *puja* and care about auspicious and inauspicious days.

A young lady running one of the few beauty salons in Thimphu made similar remarks. She added that her parents are more religious than herself but also that she thought that she was religious for her own generation. Another lady working in a tour company says that she cannot live without religion. According to her:

Even for young people *puja* is necessary. Whether rich or poor, people have to hold *puja* at least once a year. Otherwise bad things will happen. We were born in this religious environment and believe in it.

I remembered seeing a small altar at the side of a bed in a hostel at Drukgyel High School. For young people temples and monasteries are the main destinations for their weekend picnics.

Nevertheless the older generation perceive that religion is declining among young people. One senior educationist suggests that young people go to temples to pray for their own success, for instance for good exam results, whereas the older generation pray for peace in the world and the happiness of all beings on the earth. He says that this indicates that young people are becoming more and more selfish. This is, he insists, surely a sign of declining religious belief among young people. It should be noted that there is a difference in what "religious" means for younger and older generations. By "religious" the older generation tends to mean ethical and moral acts or behaviour in general. This is not at all surprising, because Buddhism teaches people to do good deeds, and being "religious" is meant to mean being ethically and morally pure. One of my friends, in his late thirties, told me whilst pointing to another friend of mine, "He is always very religious." I asked him what he meant and he replied, "he never thinks that a person he is dealing with is ill intentioned. And he himself is never ill intentioned." This is what he meant by "religious". However even this interpretation is different from what the word "religious" generally means amongst young people. For most it refers to a certain action, such as counting beads, chanting prayers, visiting temples and holding *puja*. A dentist says, for example, "My parents are very religious. They always count beads and have lots of *puja*. I do not do this as much as they do now. But when I get to my parents age, I may be like them."

The issue of languages is another area which is widely discussed in society. The government has tried to promote the use of Dzongkha. The Dzongkha Development Commission holds a Dzongkha Drama Competition once a year, and the Education Division launched a curricula in Environmental Studies in Dzongkha in the lower classes of English medium school. However for high school students, Dzongkha is still seen as an easy subject. In Drukgyel High School, a student in Class 12 in Science stream explains the situation:

The subject I spend most time on is maths, and the least time on English and Dzongkha. It does not mean that I discount Dzongkha, but Dzongkha is my mother tongue, so it is easy. But other people may think that to be a doctor one does not need Dzongkha, so just a pass mark is enough.

Another student in Class 10 remarked:

Dzongkha is an easy subject. Above Class 9 it is easy to get pass mark. The reason that English is important is that it related to all other subjects, maths, science, history and geography.... If one is not good in English one cannot get a good mark in these subjects either.

It appears that the same attitudes are being applied to language as to national dress amongst students that is "It is ideal to keep Dzongkha and to promote Dzongkhanisation, but in reality there are many inconveniences and difficulties in using Dzongkha." The followings are illustrative. A boy in Class 11 objected to the use of Dzongkha by saying, "It is hard to translate scientific terms and we learned all in English in anyway, so it is not convenient for us." A girl in Class 10 says that she uses Dzongkha when she talks. But when she writes, it is in English. She explains: "Dzongkha spelling is difficult and it is very slow to write in it." Apart from these personal inconveniences, there is also concern about Bhutan's situation as a developing country which introduces both materials and knowledge from outside. A boy in Class 11 in the Commerce stream says;

Of course it is good to know both Dzongkha and English well, but for education we should keep English as the medium of education, because Bhutan is at this moment dependent on other countries. Japan is independent, so education can be done in Japanese. But if the Bhutanese know only Dzongkha, it would be difficult, because the things from outside are all in English.

A discussion with young teachers in Drukgyel High School got very heated one evening. One of them knew about my research interests, and she started the conversation by asking which is easier for them to use, Dzongkha or English. One teacher answered, "It's difficult to say, but when I talk with friends or family I use both." "Both" means that he sometimes uses Dzongkha, and sometimes English. But foreigners would notice in early stages of their stay that in many conversations, especially in Thimphu, many English words are inserted into Dzongkha conversation. Sometimes this happens to such an extent a non-Dzongkha speaker can guess the main thrust of a conversation. The discussion with the teachers continued:

'Well, let's think about the situation when you are thinking about something. Not very serious or difficult things. Suppose you are walking along the road, and wondering about something. In which language are we thinking?'

'Maybe in English.'

'Yeah, these days we, young people speak in English even when we talk with friends. This is a direct result of English medium education. It is a tremendous amount of work to translate all the English terms into Dzongkha. And it is easy to use English words. In order to change this trend education has to be in Dzongkha. But I don't think it will happen. In the future, Dzongkha will be used but English will stay as dominant.'

'No, I don't think so. The situation is changing. The government encourages the use of Dzongkha in official

letters and documents and so on. From now on we will need a solid command of both Dzongkha and English. This probably means that more Dzongkha ability will be needed than in the present situation.'

I did not perceive that the teacher who insisted that more Dzongkha ability is needed was particularly inclined to use Dzongkha herself. Although Dzongkha was her mother tongue, English is now such a big part of her life that she once joked when writing in her native tongue, "Oh, I didn't realise that I could write a letter in Dzongkha!!" However this does not undermine her views: it is simply the way she feels things should be.

Another young teacher explained the changing position of Dzongkha in society over the years.

In an uneducated family Dzongkha is seen as more important than English. In the past a monastery was the only educational institution, so reading and writing in Dzongkha meant education. Also in the past circulars from the government were all written in Dzongkha. So if one could read it in the village, people respected that person. Also a person educated in a monastery was respected because he could perform *puja*. On the other hand people from educated family put much more importance on English, and this tendency is apparent especially in town area in these days. When I was in primary school, Dzongkha had more importance than English, but now English is more important.

He describes the situation within the dichotomy of educated - uneducated, and town - village. In the trend which he describes as a change from Dzongkha to English, Dzongkhanisation is implausible. He says, "I do not think that the process of Dzongkhanisation would get very far, because high officials have spent so much time, energy and money on English."

### *Dzongkha medium education*

At the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies some students say that important aspects of Bhutanese culture must be preserved - a statement which implies that there are more important and less important aspects of Bhutanese culture and tradition. This in fact was the question with which I started my investigation of the meaning of Bhutanese culture and tradition during fieldwork in Dzongkha medium school. I asked students what the important aspects of Bhutanese culture are. One student told me:

Important aspects of Bhutanese culture are the national dress and *driglam namzha*. *Kira* and *gho* have to be worn in offices, *dzong* and school, and when visiting high officials, holy places and *tshechu*.<sup>55</sup>

*Driglam namzha*,<sup>56</sup> usually explained as a code of etiquette, is often referred to when people talk about "Bhutanese culture" and Bhutanese identity. When asked about this, the student explained further gesturing as he did so:

*Driglam namzha* is about a way of talking, way of dressing, way of eating, way of walking and so on. For

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<sup>55</sup> A festival which normally begins on the tenth of the Bhutanese month. This religious festival is held to honour Guru Rimpoche, the Tantric saint who converted Bhutan to Buddhism in the eighth century.

<sup>56</sup> According to an official publication, *driglam namzha* was created by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in order to carve out a distinct Bhutanese identity. It further explains:

In addition to promoting a national dress..., *driglam namzha* is built upon a strict observance of vows (*tha-damtshig*) that emphasise strong kinship loyalty, community-oriented behaviour, hospitality to guests, respect for one's parents, elders and superiors, and mutual cooperation between rulers and ruled, parents and children, and teachers and students. (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 75)



example for a way of talking, it's about showing respect when you speak to elders and superiors, using honorific terms etc... When we address other people, we have to call them by their title. Strangers have to be called something like, 'Apa,' or 'Ama,'<sup>57</sup> but foreigners call people by name, like 'John!', without title. It's more polite to address as 'Apa' or 'Ama'. The special way of eating is mainly reserved for ceremonies. You have to use a white cloth and *phop*,<sup>58</sup> and say a prayer before eating. Way of walking... you should walk quietly. You should not walk with noise, tramp, tramp.

On another occasion, I sat with Class 12 students and talked. One student expressed a similar view to the one above.

Bhutanese culture should be preserved, because it is unique and good. Bhutanese culture means wearing *kira* and *gho*, and, in a *dzong*, *kabne*<sup>59</sup> as well, eating manners for special occasions, respect for older people, and a way of walking and talking. All these traditions should coexist with modernisation.

The national dress and *driglam namzha* come at the top of the list of "important aspects of Bhutanese culture and tradition" which must be preserved.

My own observations told me that there is less conflict between the ideal and the real with regard to the issue of

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<sup>57</sup> *Apa* and *Ama* are terms of address for a man and a married woman, respectively.

<sup>58</sup> A *phop* is a wooden cup produced mainly in the area of Trashiyangtse in eastern Bhutan. Apart from ceremonial occasions, *phop* are also in everyday use, especially in eastern Bhutan. People carry their own *phop* to accept an offer of tea or alcohol called *ara* or *chang* from a host.

<sup>59</sup> *Kabne* is a big scarf to be worn in *dzong* and other formal occasions by men. The female version of it is called *rachu*, which is much smaller than men's *kabne*. The different designs and colours of *kabne* signify the status of a wearer, for instance red is for the high officials in the government called *dasho*, orange is for ministers, and white is for ordinary people.

national dress among students in Dzongkha medium education. The difference is that while students in Drukgyel High School and Sherubtse College were seen wearing casual Western dress after classes, those in the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies could seldom be seen in Western dress. They too changed after classes. But they changed from the *gho* and *kira* of school uniform into their own *gho* and *kira*.

One student pointed out some aspects of Bhutanese culture which can tend to be dismissed:

I do not like a traditional Bhutanese house which keeps animals on the ground floor. It is dirty. Cleanliness is important. In the traditional house there is less light coming in because of small windows. I like a house with big windows.

And another said:

Something like cleaning hands with rice before eating,<sup>60</sup> for example, is minor part of our culture. So we do not pay much attention to whether it is preserved or not.

Their attitudes toward the issue of language can also be contrasted with those of young people in English medium schools. On one occasion, when I was sitting with students in their room in a hostel, one student said, "Both English and Dzongkha are important." A discussion proceeded to take place:

'Yeah, but it is important that once inside the country everything should be in Dzongkha. And people can learn English in case they go abroad.'

'Dzongkhanisation is good to preserve the culture, but bad for making connections with the outside world.'

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<sup>60</sup> Before start eating, the Bhutanese take a small amount of rice in hand, make a rice ball by pressing and rubbing it together, and thereby clean their hands.

'Yes, and it will take hundred of years to translate everything into Dzongkha.'

'English is the international language and it is important to learn it.'

The tendency for students in Dzongkha medium education to see English as an important language and want to learn more, was also observed in another Dzongkha medium school. But when I asked them whether this meant that they wanted the ability to speak English even if this meant them sacrificing their ability to use Dzongkha, they denied it. They do not seem to think that English was more important than Dzongkha, but as Dzongkha experts they wanted to have the option to use another language as well. On another occasion a student told me that once Bhutan becomes a developed country, everything will be in Dzongkha. He sees Dzongkhanisation as a vision of Bhutan's future. Although students in Dzongkha medium education understand the usefulness of English in the current social situation, they hope, as Dzongkha experts, that Dzongkha will increase in its utility and importance in the future.

Discourses on culture and tradition tend to concentrate on the areas of national dress, religion, *driglam namzha* and language. These are the areas in which in people's eyes there is a clear dividing line between what is Bhutanese and what is non-Bhutanese. This line has been consolidated and sharpened during the discussions about culture and tradition. Accusations about young people being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition in the society also seem to have been intensified by the creation of this dividing-line between the Bhutanese and the non-Bhutanese. However, as we have seen in the dialogue with young people in Dzongkha medium education, there are some areas of Bhutanese culture and tradition which have been less emphasised or even dismissed. What is taking place is very much a process of redefinition of culture.

Furthermore, this redefinition is even taking place within the most prominent areas of culture and tradition. For instance, with respect to the half-*kira*, Myers (1994) remarks that this is not regarded as suitable attire for "even running errands in town." During my fieldwork from 1997 to 1998, however, there were many women shopping in the market in half-*kira* with *onju* and *toego*. It looked as though the half-*kira* was accepted as a dress to be worn in town, though one would not be allowed to enter a *dzong* in half-*kira*. I would speculate that a cultural negotiation was taking place in society about how proper half-*kira* was. During that process the half-*kira* must have started to be perceived as more fitting: and so the garment which was once only regarded as proper within the confinement of the home (Myers, 1994: p. 106) has now begun to be seen as acceptable for casual outings.

It appears that a discomfort with the gap between the ideal and the practical has produced this negotiation, which has then led to a redefinition of Bhutanese culture and tradition: young people's complaints about the practicality of certain styles of dressing appears to have led to the adoption of the half-*kira* and half-*gho*. During the subsequent process of negotiation these inventions have come to be seen as more appropriate modes of attire. In the case of the language, whilst the government has promoted Dzongkhanisation through widening the scope of Dzongkha medium subjects in English medium schools, in everyday life people increasingly use "mixed" Dzongkha, inserting English terms into Dzongkha conversation. In writing, young people tend to write in English, but I sometimes encountered Dzongkha sentences written with the Roman alphabet.

Thus the redefinition of Bhutanese culture and tradition as a whole is a continuous and multi-layered processes. The next group of young people, the new traditionalists, adds another layer to the redefinition process.

### *New Traditionalists*

We have already noticed the tendency for students in English medium education to be less inclined towards the preservation of Bhutan's culture and tradition than those in Dzongkha medium education. There is however a counter tendency emerging in which some college graduates are becoming more vocal in calling for the preservation of culture and tradition. At the same time, however, they provide a different definition of culture and tradition. They are an extremely well-educated group of people who have climbed up "the ladder of success", having graduated from a college and begun working in a government office. They are still a small number of people, literally a handful probably. But they express their views frequently in the newspaper, and some of them have already published books, such as a collection of Bhutanese folktales.

They deplore the fact that culture and tradition is declining amongst the younger generation, just as the older generation do. One of the then trainee officers writes in the newspaper:

Our schools have become the killing fields for our culture, tradition, religion and everything that is Bhutanese. We over-educate and over-school them beyond social needs. Their knowledge of Hollywood and Bollywood is encyclopaedic but some of them cannot recall the names of their grandparents. A sixth standard student can write a love letter in verse but cannot write a correct sentence in prose in examination papers.... Christmas interests them more than *loser*.<sup>61</sup> Traditional parent-children after-dinner chats have been replaced by late-night home videos. Is something wrong with the curriculum? We all must be guilty of what they are and what is false within us. (Kuensel, 14th March 1998)

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<sup>61</sup> Bhutanese new year. This usually takes place in February of the Gregorian calendar.

Not only does he deplore the values of the younger generation, but he also accepts that this type of criticism is relevant to himself and his friends. Reflecting on the orientation programme, which is held once a year to brief graduates from both home and abroad about government policy in general, the employment situation and Bhutan's culture and tradition, he notes:

As usual this year's graduates orientation programmes saw two weeks of cultural orientation by the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, followed by the various ministerial orientations ... and the *Driglam Namzha* test on its last day. Now that all is over I can't but reflect the days when three *Driglam Namzha* lopens<sup>62</sup> lectured, demonstrated and taught us our culture and tradition, especially the etiquette of body, speech and mind while interacting with one's superiors, inferiors and equals. No wonder for most of the graduates (for what the RCSC secretary called as the 'cream' of our education system) the culture is not only new to be imbibed but a source of raw material to play over and create laughter amongst ourselves.... The point which all of us must ponder here is, is something wrong with our much talked about but least cared about education system and its finest products? The majority of the 'cream' did sweat, blush, bunk [off] and sleep in the process of training and practising to perfect the technical details of our culture and many of us providing that practice does not always make a man perfect. In fact we did learn only to forget the next day. (*Kuensel*, 25th October 1997)

He points out that students are alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition which is represented by *driglam namzha*. But at the same time he implies that the "technical details of our culture" have been given too much emphasis.

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<sup>62</sup> A Dzongkha word meaning a teacher. It is also spelled *lopon*.

To every citizen the culture of his or her nation must evolve from within. During the orientation the etiquette of body was given greater stress than that of speech, and much lesser to the [etiquette of] mind. (Kuensel, 25th October 1997)

The etiquette of the body includes meticulous rules about the movements of a body through which social relations are portrayed. His own definition of culture and tradition moves towards a more everyday understanding.

Culture, besides being the badge of our national identity, exists with us to meet our life's necessities and to forward and advance the purpose of life.... Our culture has its root in people dwelling in remote villages and not in gaily sophisticated urban Thimphu inhabitants or in the schools where students learn more about less only to be saturated with information so as to forget their own culture. Bhutanese culture evolved from within. ... It is seated deep in our subconscious minds that we are not aware of it. It is our way of life. (Kuensel, 25th October 1997)

He identifies Bhutanese culture with rural life. And he further argues that young people are alienated from rural life, "the root of Bhutanese culture and tradition". He writes that "years of modern education in our temples of learning have shaken our rural roots and borne bitter-sweet urban fruits. We have strayed too long from our foundations to worlds far divorced from our own" (Kuensel, 2nd May 1998). He calls for establishing the Bhutanese identity firmly amidst globalisation by going back to "the roots".

When the cultural winds blow ever stronger to alter our cultural topography, it is everybody's and especially the students' responsibilities to return to our roots.... Our unique and rich cultural roots can only help us stand the wind of change. Perhaps it is

high time that we look with a much clearer vision, think a much loftier thought and take a renewed interest in our neglected culture that hangs daily on our backs. Time will come when we all mourn the death of our culture, when we yearn for the culture that is no more with us and when we start from the scratch to bring about a renaissance in our culture which we now neglect, dilute and erode with foreign imports. (*Kuensel*, 25th October 1997)

He asks, "Does not globalisation symbolise the American Dream?" Continuing:

Universalisation dissociates people from their cultural roots and traditional solidarity. It alienates and atomises individuals from one another. It associates the concept of modernity with the consumption of media-hyped goods. As the old family and community bond loosen, the gold chain of corporate power and commercial markets tighten. ... We have before us a choice: do we live in someone else's dream or in our own reality? (*Kuensel*, 2nd May 1998)

His interest is directed towards what we call in the West an indigenous way of living, and he describes his impression of village life, which he experienced when he was in a village on the Rural Development Course for trainee officers.

A 78 year old man had this to say about the relative values of the urban fast lane and the rural slow track. 'Urban money flows; it comes and goes but the land is still and will forever feed.' ... This old man,...his ancient wisdom often clashed with our quasi-knowledge information-based intelligence. He represented a repository of thoughts and experiences accumulated over years. His use of words, phrases, idioms and proverbs, unprescribed in our syllabi, were way beyond my comprehension. His empirical wisdom shone beside our garish graduate knowledge. When he



dies, he will take with him a priceless and irretrievable treasure. (Kuensel, 2nd May 1998)

It is not only this commentator who is diverting his attention to rural life and folklore and away from issues such as religion, national dress and languages as sources of Bhutanese culture and tradition. Two collections of folktales compiled by a young lady have also recently been published, the first book written in Dzongkha and the second in English.<sup>63</sup> She visited many villages, and collected folktales which have been passed down from generation to generation. She recounts her fieldwork experience.

I went to villages at first as a field assistant of a lady from abroad who was interested in folktales of Bhutan. The schedule was tight, and we were literally running around to collect folktales from as many as possible within the limited time. But that was the first time that I took an interest in Bhutanese folktales. About one and half year later I went back to the villages this time to write my own book about folktales. There are always one or two excellent story tellers in a village, usually old people. I met one of those story tellers again, but sadly I found that his memory was almost gone with his age. It was so sad to hear him stop in the middle of the story and try to remember the rest, or go back to a scene before correcting the story.

Her attitude is not that dying folktales are saved by her book. She just talks about her experiences and impressions of how things are. She is proud of the fact that she pursued her own interest in folktales, although she does not identify herself as being in the front line of a struggle to defend the fort of tradition against modernisation.

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<sup>63</sup> Wangmo, Kinley (1997) *Tales from Rural Bhutan* (Thimphu: Kinley Wangmo). For those who are interested in folktales in Bhutan, there are also two collections by Kunzang Choden. See Choden (1994, 1997).

Interest in indigenous culture is also gradually rising among students. One day I encountered a student from Sherubtse College who was training in one of the ministries. He showed his interest in indigenous knowledge and told me that he was about to do some research in a village near the college, and would contribute to a journal.<sup>64</sup> Recently, moreover, a graduate, now an officer in the Centre for Bhutan Studies, published a book of Bhutanese *lo-zey*, or ballads.<sup>65</sup>

This interest in indigenous culture marks a contrast in the definition of culture between different generations. There was a particular case in which these different definitions clashed which was during the Dzongkha Drama Competition organised by the Dzongkha Development Commission as an activity to promote the national language. A dozen organisations participated, mostly schools. I went to the swimming pool complex in Thimphu (the venue of the competition) for several evenings to witness the dramas. The event brought in a large audience, both young and old, educated and uneducated. Many of the dramas presented were based upon religious stories or the life stories of religious figures. A traditional wedding ceremony was shown on the stage, making the most of limited space. Amongst them all however, the most outstanding was the one produced by the graduates of Sherubtse College. It received an overwhelming response from the audience, in fact such a response that they had to act it out again even after the competition finished. It was outstanding also because it was an adapted version of *A Pot of Gold*, a Roman comedy. The scriptwriter injected some scenes and characters that do not appear in the original, included some Bhutanese sayings, and also scrapped some original scenes and characters in order to make it relevant and appealing to the Bhutanese setting and audience. However, much to the disappointment of the audience and the performers as well, the Bhutanese version of *A Pot of Gold*

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<sup>64</sup> Bhutanese Indigenous Knowledge (BIK) Newsletter has been published since 1994.

<sup>65</sup> Kinga, S. (1998) *Gaylong Sumdar Tashi: Songs of Sorrow* (Thimphu: Sonam Kinga)

ended up with the second prize. The first prize went to a play adapted from the biography of a renowned Buddhist teacher, and which included beautifully performed *driglam namzha*. What was at stake here were different perceptions of Bhutanese culture. The scriptwriter of the Bhutanese *A Pot of Gold* wrote a review of the competition later. In it he asks:

For the Dzongkha Development Commission, the festival was an opportunity to experiment with a powerful medium in promoting indigenous art, language, and culture.... [But] Can we actually promote our culture and tradition by reproducing something like a 'Zhugdrel' ceremony on stage? (Kuensel, 24th January 1998)

He also noted, "Criteria were minus the audience reaction. On the other hand we had to pay more attention to how we [wore] our *kabney*<sup>66</sup> lest we lose points." He is thus clearly frustrated that the formal aspects of the culture is too much emphasised by the judges and other performing groups as well, and that his own cultural sensitivity was not appreciated. For him the audience reaction itself is an embodiment of Bhutanese culture. He made many "cultural adjustments" to the original Roman comedy and transformed it for the Bhutanese audience based upon his own real-life experiences. An audience's responses are an intimate expression of people's everyday life, sense and taste.

Here we see a significant redefinition of Bhutanese culture taking place. The direction of the new traditionalists' quest to find Bhutanese culture points inward. Firstly, inward towards the country: the indigenous knowledge of farmers, and folktales passed down through many generations, are alive in a village in the interior of Bhutan, probably three day's walk from the nearest road. Inward also in the sense of the inside of the Bhutanese spirit. The process of transforming a Roman comedy is in fact a quest to find a Bhutanese mentality, a

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<sup>66</sup> Same as *kabne*.

journey deep into the popular subconsciousness. For the new traditionalists national dress and *driglam namzha* are only badges of national identity. Perhaps "old traditionalists", namely the culture conscious older generation and those who have studied in Dzongkha medium education and monastic education would object to this by saying that national dress and *driglam namzha* are also important embodiments of the Bhutanese mentality and history. They would insist perhaps that behind the particular length of a *gho*, for instance, there lies a sense of social hierarchy, social protocol and also an aesthetic sense which have developed over the hundreds of years in Bhutan. Nevertheless, the new traditionalists argue that even if young people wear national dress, they are gradually being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. They say that younger people's knowledge of Hollywood and Bollywood is encyclopaedic but some of them cannot recall the names of their grandparents. They appear to insist that Bhutanese culture and tradition has to be sought beyond the outer shells of national dress and the visually obvious etiquette of the body. They ring alarm bells when they insist that if culture does not evolve from within the Bhutanese themselves, it will only find itself in a museum showcase.

Perhaps I could speculate on how these different perceptions of Bhutanese culture emerged. The much talked about aspects of Bhutanese culture and tradition, namely national dress, language and *driglam namzha*, are very apparent from the outsider's point of view. These aspects were emphasised by the authority at first probably in order to give a distinctiveness to the Bhutanese. It was and still is very important to maintain a distinctive identity which is obvious to outsiders. On the other hand, the generation of new traditionalists have grown up in modern English medium education. Exposure to foreign influences seems to have had two different effects. One is to shake their identity as a Bhutanese and another is to sharpen it. The new traditionalists have experienced the latter phenomenon. Learning English sayings and Shakespeare might well have

interested the new traditionalists in their own sayings and folktales, and the publication of works about life in olden days in Bhutan, such as *The Hero with a Thousand Eyes* and *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi* both by Karma Ura, might have encouraged the new traditionalists further.

The new traditionalists' perspective is however also criticised by modernisers. One day I was talking with a young man who had just got a degree abroad and was going to join a ministry. After four years of living abroad, he complained, "In Thimphu people are not appreciative of what they have. And they have started to go for foreign goods and ideas. It was not like this four years ago." Several days later, in another office I was talking with a young officer, to whom I made casual visits from time to time. When I told him about the conversation with the young man, he said to me:

Well, I don't think that people in Thimphu would appreciate the clean air of Bhutan until they breathed in the polluted air in Calcutta. They would not appreciate the fact that Thimphu does not have traffic jam, until they are caught up in a traffic jam for hours in Bangkok. It seems to me that those people who insist that the Bhutanese people should appreciate what they have are even more westernised themselves. It is an outsider's perspective. For those people who live in this environment throughout their lives, good things should be introduced, and bad things should be declined, whether they are from abroad or made in Bhutan.

I will not examine here whether new traditionalists are westernised. But it seems to be relevant to note that their perspective was born when they managed to detach themselves from their own society and take a slightly distant view of their culture. Their position is perhaps a reflection of their own search for identity.

The views of the new traditionalists overlap with those of post-modern anthropologists, such as Escobar (1995a). A similarity is that both of them take a distance from the culture they are referring to. However, for Bhutanese new traditionalists, it is also a matter of their own identity. A new traditionalist writes, "Our unique and rich cultural roots can ... help us stand the wind of change." What drives them is a sense of crisis and urgency that their culture and identity might be going to be flattened by the forces of globalisation.

Before we move on to analysing these diverse discourses in relation to Bourdieu's framework, let us summarise the various perceptions of modernisation, culture and tradition which exist among young people. Except for some students in Dzongkha medium education who argue that all modernisation has to be stopped, young people generally want both modernisation and the preservation of culture and tradition. The difference in opinion occurs when they have to choose which should be emphasised more than the other. Most students in Dzongkha medium education tend to be less enthusiastic about modernisation and more in favour of the preservation of culture and tradition. In English medium education the trend is in the opposite direction. Young people in English medium education are more enthusiastic about modernisation and less keen on the preservation of culture and tradition. New traditionalists are a group who have been educated in English medium education and have climbed up the ladder of success. They are active on cultural issues, and often express their views on cultural preservation in books and newspapers. They take an enthusiastic stance towards the preservation of Bhutanese culture and tradition. Analytically, however, they suggest a new definition for it: this redefinition does not deny that religion and *driglam namzha* are a part of Bhutanese culture and tradition. Rather it is as an attempt to broaden Bhutanese culture and tradition, by focusing more on indigenous culture. Among the different social actors in Bhutan, however, the new traditionalists' commitment to culture and tradition is perceived as more important than their redefinition of it.

## **Discussion across education sectors: Bourdieu's capital and background of discourses**

The different positions and points of conflicts in the discourses on modernisation, culture and tradition among young people become clearer when we examine the ways in which they represent and criticise those in other sectors of education. One evening in the girls' hostel at the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, I was talking with students when one of them said, "People here [in Bhutan] believe that if one becomes a Christian, he or she will go mad, because once one stops being a Buddhist the Gods of Buddhism will not bless him or her any more." I asked them about accumulating religious merits. In Bhutan, where Buddhism teaches that the consequences of actions in previous lives force all beings to reincarnate, people believe that they can have a better next life by accumulating religious merit mainly through religious activities.<sup>67</sup> I asked her whether she thought that students in her Institute accumulated much more merit than students in the English medium school. She did not answer this question directly, but told me, "In this Institute we learn lots about religion and Bhutanese culture. In the English medium school the students do not know much about it. It is very important to know more about religion and culture, and the students in English medium school should know more." Some students in Simtokha criticised students from English medium education by saying that they cannot pronounce religious prayer correctly.

Most of the students in the old curriculum in the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies have literally grown up in the Institute. When students in Classes 10, 11, and 12 were small, the Institute used to have lower classes than Class 5. However those who moved from English medium education had to start from two classes lower than the one they had reached, because of the higher level of Dzongkha and Choekey in the Institute. Now they are experts in Dzongkha and

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<sup>67</sup> In Tibetan Buddhism, the world is considered to be a miserable place and the ultimate aim is to get out of the cycle of death and re-birth. Those who have not attained Enlightenment have to be re-born into this world.

Choekey. I talked with students from Classes 10, 11 and 12, during the time for wood carving, in a small room in the *dzong* while other students were chanting evening prayers. Most of the students in the room said that they were going to be Dzongkha teachers, except two students one of whom wanted to be a *gup*, and another a clerk. The student who wants to be a *gup* said that he would like to bring changes to his village, such as piped water and electricity. My field assistant was surprised to hear their future visions, and later told me, "They are much less ambitious than those in English medium schools. Wanting to be a *gup* or a clerk after Class 10 and 11!?!? Unbelievable." The students in Class 10 or 11 in English medium school wanted to continue their education up until degree level in a college, and dream about being a government officer in the future. Students in Simtokha, however, looked at the situation from their own perspective and have their own vision. They said,

There is no place in the government service for Simtokha students. In the government service one does not have to be a Dzongkha expert except for Dzongkha Development Commission and Kuensel,<sup>68</sup> because all the circulars and—documents in government are written in English. Once Bhutan becomes a developed country, all will be in Dzongkha.

A monk who joined in the monk body after finishing Class 9 of an English medium school says about his former classmates:

They do not talk about religion, and mental and spiritual issues. They talk only about material things, like buying a new vehicle or going abroad for holiday.

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<sup>68</sup> To be precise, Kuensel Corporation has been separated from the government since 1993, when it was established as an autonomous organisation. It publishes the only newspaper in Bhutan providing, on a weekly basis, national and international news in three languages, Dzongkha, Nepali and English.



For me material things are secondary. Mental and spiritual things are far more important.

On the other hand, a student in English medium education remarks of students in Dzongkha medium education:

Students in Dzongkha medium education are backward. They are less exposed. They are conservative, pessimistic and not ambitious. Their English is not very good. Their way of talking and dressing and other behaviours are less polished and less smart. I can make out instantly whether a person is from English medium education or Dzongkha medium. For instance when a person from Dzongkha medium education talks with you, he does not look at you straight, but look at you with upturned eyes.

I would argue that the whole discourse on modernisation, culture and tradition can be explained by the fact that every agent tries to get greater recognition from society for the validity of their own knowledge and skills. Young people in Dzongkha medium education and monastic education are less enthusiastic about further modernisation, and keen on preserving Bhutan's culture and tradition. This can be understood as an attempt to claw back the validity and usefulness of the knowledge they have acquired. The insistence on more modernisation by students in English medium education can be similarly understood: it is their attempt to maintain the current level of validity of their knowledge and qualifications. New traditionalists are a group of people who have climbed up the ladder of success. However, having experienced criticism in English medium education from the older generation for being "westernised", and "isolated from Bhutanese values and tradition", new traditionalists try to show their cultural awareness by using a slightly different definition of Bhutanese culture and tradition. Through these efforts their own position in society is reinforced and defined. They can thus lay claim to a combination of high educational qualifications and success in Bhutan, and back it up with a strong commitment to

preserving Bhutanese culture and tradition. This is a powerful combination as it encapsulates the modernist and traditionalist positions at the same time, insulating them from criticism from either side.

English medium education is more conducive to a decent office job than Dzongkha medium education, and so people can accumulate more economic and social capital. In terms of cultural capital, on the other hand, English medium education holds out the possibility of being exposed to foreign culture. Excessive exposure to and being too much influenced by foreign cultures is not appreciated in society and the person lays themselves open to being accused of being alienated from Bhutanese culture or of losing one's own identity as a Bhutanese. Thus young people in English medium education gain less cultural capital. On the other hand, Dzongkha medium education is perceived as holding out the prospect of a narrower range of employment options. However, being experts in Dzongkha and Choekey people from Dzongkha medium education are seen as existing on a higher plane, religiously and morally. Hence they possess more cultural capital. The new traditionalists present themselves as possessing all capitals - economic, social and cultural - through having acquired the highest educational qualifications and also by being culturally aware.

This explanation of the distribution of different capitals helps to explain the background against which these social actors engage in a specific narration about modernisation, culture and tradition. Their assertion of the validity and usefulness of the knowledge and skills they have acquired in their respective education sectors can be seen as an attempt to improve the conversion rate from cultural capital to economic and social capital - or, to put it another way, from an educational qualification to employment opportunities.

In analysing these discourses in relation to Bourdieu's concepts of orthodoxy, heterodoxy and his mechanism of the transformation of the universe of discourse, I would like to go back to my arguments, which were presented in Chapter 2,

that the point of crisis was the time when development activities were started. Here Bourdieu's thesis - that heterodoxy triggers crisis by questioning doxa - is not applicable to Bhutan's case. In Bhutan, the state, the dominant class, created the crisis, whereas in Bourdieu's framework, crisis is initiated by heterodoxy, the dominated class. One possible reason of this mismatch between theory and reality is that the launch of development activities was not in fact a point of crisis. However, there is ample evidence that as a consequence of the start of development activities questions began to be raised about many aspects of Bhutanese life, from the way in which sick people were treated to agricultural practices. Furthermore, we have observed a significant change in the composition of the dominant class in terms of educational background in the period before and after the launch of development programmes. At the same time, as we have already seen in Chapter 4, regional circumstances played an important role in convincing the king and the country's elite to launch development activities. The launch of development activities thus can be seen as a response of the government to the changing regional environment rather than a purely spontaneous move. The government needed to start development programmes in order to ensure the nation's independence and sovereignty.

An analytical problem derived from this mismatch is relating local discourses to Bourdieu's framework of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and examining and conceptualising the transformation of Bhutanese development discourses. In order to solve this analytical problem, we need to look again at how Bourdieu views the relationship between capital, orthodoxy and heterodoxy. In Bourdieu's framework, orthodoxy and heterodoxy can be defined according to the amount of capital which is accumulated by agents. Bourdieu writes:

The structure of the field is a *state* of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in

the struggle, or, to put it another way, a state of the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies.... The struggles which take place within the field are about the monopoly of the legitimate violence (specific authority) which is characteristic of the field in question, which means, ultimately, the conservation or subversion of the distribution of the specific capital.... Those who ... more or less completely monopolise the specific capital ... are inclined to conservation strategies - those which ... tend to defend *orthodoxy* - whereas those least endowed with capital ... are inclined towards subversion strategies, the strategies of *heresy*.<sup>69</sup> (Bourdieu, 1993: p. 73)

According to this explanation, heterodoxy has less capital attached to it than orthodoxy. As we have seen, it is obvious that English medium education is the way to climb up the ladder of success in Bhutan. Consequently Dzongkha medium education has become a less useful way to climb up the ladder of success. Nevertheless, students in English medium education have recently been criticised by the older generation for being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. So although they can attain a higher position in the ladder of success, namely they can accumulate more economic capital and social capital than those in Dzongkha medium education, they are still seen as lacking cultural capital. Hence, both groups are not fully successful in accumulating capital. This is hardly surprising as, in fact, most members of both these groups will not succeed in gaining access to the most coveted and influential elite jobs - only a minority will. Both those in English medium education (except the new traditionalists) and those in Dzongkha medium education may therefore be placed in heterodoxy, a position reflecting their, at best, partial success in joining the Bhutanese elite. I will call the view of the majority of young people in English medium education as heterodoxy I, and the

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<sup>69</sup> Emphasises in original.

view of young people in Dzongkha medium education as heterodoxy II.

In this situation new traditionalists are the group of people who attain the greatest height in the competition to accumulate economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. Therefore, this group should be seen as orthodoxy, and I will call them orthodoxy I. Through asserting the importance of preserving culture and tradition, they escape criticism from the older generation. They are not necessarily against modernisation, but they argue that more attention has to be paid to culture and tradition, if modernisation is to be pursued further. They provide a new definition of Bhutanese culture and tradition, which, in this observer's eyes, sometimes conflicts with conventional definitions. However, in society this difference draws little attention: being culturally-aware is more important than the specifics of what culture and tradition actually mean, therefore in society they are seen as culture-enthusiasts, rather than reformers of Bhutanese culture and tradition.

A difficult case is the position of the view of people from monastic education. This is primarily because monks do not acquire economic capital in the same way as those in English medium education or in Dzongkha medium education. They are outside the state's objectifying process, thus their ladder of success is, if such a thing exists, very different and obviously not comparable with those in other education sectors. Nevertheless, I would see them as holding orthodoxy, and name this orthodoxy II. The first reason for this is the fact that they are outside state's objectification means that they are outside of the state's domination. Secondly, the monk body is actually part of the state institutions. To put it more precisely, in relation to the first point, the monk body has escaped from the secular state's domination, but they are still part of authority. As has been noted already, historically and politically, the monk body has enjoyed a special status in Bhutan: the secular state and the monk body are in principle independent, and do not interfere with each other. The third reason is that in terms of cultural capital they possess the

greatest amount of all groups of young people. Although people often say that respect for monks is declining *compared with the past*, in the present social situation the amount of cultural capital acquired by them is unquestionably the highest. The fourth reason for seeing monks as holding orthodoxy is the fact that they represent continuity from the past and, as we will see shortly, because of their role as a guardian of the doxa of religion. The monk body has always been a part of authority in Bhutanese history, at least since the time when Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal established the dual system of governance consisting of *Desi* and *Je Khenpo*; and they are the guardians of the doxa of religion.

One might point out that those in Dzongkha medium education and those in monastic education share similar views on modernisation, culture and tradition. There are however important differences in their position in society. The kind of skills and knowledge acquired in Dzongkha medium school are tested by their validity and usefulness in the secular world, in which the objectifying mechanism of the (secular) state operates, although their skills and knowledge have a connection with religion. As a result of the application of the objectifying mechanism, they are relatively marginalised in terms of accumulating economic capital and social capital. On the other hand, monks are exclusively concerned with religious matters. The validity and usefulness of their skills and knowledge are not measured by the same government grading system used to assess qualification from Dzongkha medium education and English medium education. Therefore, even if they share similar views on modernisation, culture and tradition, the implications of these views will be different. Those coming out of Dzongkha medium education may be seen as employing what Bourdieu calls "subversion strategies" in the struggle to change the structure of the distribution of capitals. More concretely, in this context, they should be seen as attempts to widen their career choices and obtain more advantageous grades.<sup>70</sup> As for monks, on the

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<sup>70</sup> One of the most common complaints from students in Dzongkha medium education is that they have a narrow range of career choices. Most of them

other hand, the foremost result of their view would be the maintenance of doxa.

It is however also true that in Bhutan's case, the relation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy is not as antagonistic as portrayed in Bourdieu's framework. This is partly because this field is largely concerned with educated groups in the society – and perhaps is thus not as diverse as it would have been if uneducated young people in rural area had been included.

### **5.3 Discussions across generations: in search of the universe of the undiscussed**

While so far we have examined the area which Bourdieu calls the universe of discourse, this section will focus on what he calls universe of the undiscussed, *doxa*. Firstly, through examining various statements from young people, especially from those who are in English medium education, we will investigate the existence of underlying agreements in the society. This means an understanding which everyone takes for granted, and which therefore nobody has to express or talk about. Doxa is examined by looking at the ways in which young people defend themselves against criticism from those in different sectors of education and elder generations. It is also investigated by looking at the behaviour and activities of young people. Secondly, the section explores how doxa has been successfully maintained in the society.

#### **In search of doxa**

Both the older generation and officials alike deplore the fact that traditional Bhutanese values are declining amongst young people. Shaking their heads they told me that young people do not pay respect to their parents, and that they wear national dress in improper way. These grown-ups knit their eyebrows and say that young people are selfish, materialistic,

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opt to become a Dzongkha teacher in English medium schools, primarily because it gives them a better grade than other options, such as secretarial work in government offices.

westernised and unrealistically ambitious. They worry that young people in English medium education are increasingly alienated from village life, which is regarded as the home of Bhutanese traditional lifestyle and values. A man in his mid-thirties tells me,

A generation born after 1970 are really disconnected from Bhutanese tradition and rural life. They might have encyclopaedic knowledge about Western films and actors. But as they are in school in town, they are detached from village life. I met a high school student in a village in Wangdue Phodrang. She goes to a school in Thimphu and stays with her relatives. At that time when I visited the village, it was winter holiday and she was in her parents place. But she cannot even tell me the name of neighbouring villages.

This type of accusation from the older generation appears to be derived from an anxiety that too much exposure might make younger generations inclined towards Western culture and thereby erode Bhutanese culture and tradition.

In fact the representation, always accompanied by a tone of warning and regret, that society as a whole is becoming materialistic than before is often seen in the newspaper and government publications. The younger generation are seen as at the forefront of this trend. Furthermore, "one of the main reasons that materialism is despised in society is because of the edicts of Buddhism, which teaches people to detach themselves from different desires, including material desires. There is even a ritual in which people have to abandon valuables in order to desert their attachment to materials. Influenced by Buddhist teaching, a generous person who has less material desire but who is still contented, is praised by society. Phrase such as, "he is very simple", are complements in Bhutanese society. "A simple person" in this context is someone who has a plain living style and does not behave as if he or she is a big person, even if he or she is a respected high official.



One of the features of this whole discourse of declining values and deterioration of manners is that modernisation is identified as the prime cause. One educationist explains:

As the modernisation process goes on, the society becomes more competitive. For instance, it is becoming more difficult to get a decent job and to get a place in higher education. Consequently, people become more individualistic and selfish. At the same time people become more materialistic.<sup>71</sup>

Dasho Sangay Dorji argues that the material comfort brought by modernisation is a reason why people have started to leave behind the pursuit of mental happiness, which can be attained through the Buddhist path.<sup>72</sup> Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup explains the psychological condition which drives people towards material gain in a selfish manner.

When a person sees that someone has what he does not have, he also wants those things. If someone is richer than a person, he wants to be rich also. If someone is successful in business, one would think, 'I can also be successful', and comes from a village to a town. When annual *puja* is held, people in Thimphu go back to their village with various materials, like a rice cooker or a pair of fashionable track shoes, then neighbours are envious and they also want the same things.<sup>73</sup>

A man working in a government office presents his explanation of how people become more selfish and forgetful of the Bhutanese value of reciprocity as socio-economic changes proceed.

You know, a good example is a place like Trashiyangtse, where a quiet village is now in the very

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with an official in Education Division on 9th February 1998.

<sup>72</sup> Interview on 17th February 1998.

<sup>73</sup> Interview on 4th March 1998.

process of being transformed into a town. As small shops and bars appear here and there, perhaps a weekend market is there, then people start to think of many things in terms of money: For example, a neighbour comes to the door step and ask for a handful of coriander. Before people used to give without hesitation. It's reciprocity. Bhutanese human relations have always been based on the reciprocity. Now people would think, 'Well, if I sell this coriander in a market, it is three ngultrum for a bunch...' Then, he or she might become a bit reluctant to give it to the neighbour.

These views suggest that socio-economic changes have affected the whole population, but perhaps more in the towns than in the villages. The younger generation however is widely seen as the most affected group. A monk told me:

society becomes more and more competitive. Small school children are no exception. Everyone wants to be better than others. Also parents force their children to study to get a better mark in exams. Better academic performance means better chance to be employed in the government offices in a higher grade. That means a secure future and material prosperity.

Dasho Karma Gayleg, a former royal councillor complains that whereas parents used to give ethical advice before, nowadays they instruct their children on how to be successful.<sup>74</sup>

A second sets of views emphasises the influence of the media, especially videos. An educationist regards videos and films from India, the West, and Hong Kong as influencing youth in the wrong way. She says:

These videos have introduced Western culture and are one of the causes of social problems such as gang

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<sup>74</sup> Interview on 2nd February, 1998.

fight. Young people who are influenced by the videos are more attracted by Western ways of dressing and try to imitate actors' fashion, and look down on Bhutanese culture, for example, national dress. You see the boys hanging around the town. They wear jeans under their *gho*. It looks very funny to us, but they think that is cool. Among youth Bhutanese values, morals and ethics are declining.<sup>75</sup>

Dasho Karma Gayleg points to the way that young people speak. Even after the introduction of English as a medium of education, people used to speak English in a very polite manner. But since the 1970s young people have started to use dirty words. This is, he concludes, because of the influence of videos.<sup>76</sup> Since I heard from many people the same kind of comments about the influence of media, I was tempted to challenge it during my fieldwork. I asked a friend of mine in his mid-thirties, who works in a government office and has two children, "those Hollywood movies and Hong Kong action movies have been seen all over the world, but I do not think that young people around the world are more badly behaved than before." He responded, "The Hong Kong movies and Hollywood movies are non-Buddhistic with stories of revenge, killing and violence. These lead to young people's gangs, drinking and drugs. The model of such behaviours come from outside. We, the Bhutanese, have not had such a culture."

Finally modern education itself, being very much a part of modernisation, becomes a target. The minister of health and education, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup,<sup>77</sup> asked in his uniquely enthusiastic and convincing way:

If parents are uneducated and children are educated, the children start to look down on their parents, and they do not respect their parents any more. It is same for the people who have been respected in the society

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<sup>75</sup> Interview on 9th February, 1998.

<sup>76</sup> Interview on 2nd February, 1998.

and regarded as having authority, such as *gup*. In this way, traditional hierarchy is collapsing. Value of respect toward elders and authority, which is very important part of Bhutanese values, is declining. How can we regain the traditional Bhutanese value? This is the reason that the value education started. But is it too late already?<sup>77</sup>

Dasho Karma Gayleg takes another example.

I think interest in Bhutanese culture is increasing among the young people these two or three years. Some students came to me to learn Bhutan's history, religion and so on. But I can see things are different from the way it used to be in the past. Before, the red robe of a monk itself signified something and deserved respect from the people. No question about it. Nowadays young people are not very convinced by what monks say, because of modern education and scientific knowledge.

According to him, because of the different knowledge modern education provides, respect for monks is declining. A similar point was put forward by an educationist. She said:

it is important to teach about traditional beliefs in local deity or spirits. The Bhutanese have believed in those for long time. For instance, people say that this tree should not be cut because local deity lives in it, or that this stone should not be disturbed because a spirit lives underneath. Some of the beliefs are also useful for environmental preservation. But teachers increasingly feel it difficult to teach these things, because they cannot be proved scientifically. In the classes they have to tell children about what can be proved scientifically.

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<sup>77</sup> Interview on 4th March, 1998.

Another aspect of modern education which is pointed to as a cause of declining traditional Bhutanese values is boarding schools. A former education officer told me:

People started to become more aware of declining Bhutanese values, such as respect for elders, and ways to talk to elders, seniors and juniors, and so on around mid-1980s. Bhutanese values started to decline largely because of schooling. Since Bhutan started modern education, most of the schools have been boarding schools, in which it became difficult to transmit traditional values from parents to children. Also most of the teachers, especially in the initial period of modern education in Bhutan, were foreign expatriates from India or developed countries, who did not know about Bhutanese values at all.

However there is also disagreement about the effects of boarding schools. A man probably in his early thirties contested this view:

I have grown up in boarding school. But I do not think that boarding school has alienated students from Bhutanese tradition. At least in my case it did not work in that way. I spent vacations in my parents place or my relative's, both of which were in remote villages. And I could experience ordinary village life a lot, where Bhutanese tradition is literally alive.

It is not the aim of this book to examine either whether modernisation is actually the cause of declining Bhutanese values among young people, or which of these three factors - economic change, the media or the education system - is most responsible for this happening. This study does not ask whether or not it is true that Bhutanese values are declining. What we are concerned about is which social issues attract people's attention. A lot of attention is paid to the decline in traditional Bhutanese values among young people, and it is an issue for officials and non-officials alike. The resulting discussion emphasises certain aspects of Bhutanese values,

and excludes others. It might be much more relevant to say that the discussion defines what Bhutanese values are and what they are not through focusing people's attention on particular points.

Examining the different discourses can give us a sense of the values which are felt to be declining among young people. From the statement that people are becoming more selfish and individualistic, we can observe the presence of values of altruism, community spirit and reciprocity, which the Bhutanese people consider to be the main components of their value system. The decline in politeness, paying respect to elders and parents, and in interests in traditional beliefs are another concern. Using dirty words, imitating Western film stars, and the strange ways of wearing national dress are also regarded as disgraceful by the authorities and elder people. The gang fighting, students' smoking and drinking alcohol are social problems which are also perceived to be a sign of the decline in Bhutanese values. Most of these phenomena are attributed to the modernisation process, and thus the negative connotation attached to the modernisation process has been socially created.

Furthermore, a stereotype of young people has also been created. In the stereotype, young people are more interested in Western music, films and fashion rather than Bhutanese folk songs and indigenous beliefs; they are ambitious, individualistic and materialistic, and want to be rich in one day; they like to speak in English rather than their mother tongue. The list goes on. The typical character of a young person portrayed in the stereotype is someone who is alienated from Bhutanese culture. Young people themselves admit to being like the stereotype in some ways, but not in all. Young people identify their own place in the spectrum between modern and traditional, and give responses to this socially created image of young people.

*Being culturally-aware*

When the grown-ups condemn the actions or behaviour of young people, they almost always mean young people in English medium education. These young people however know that they are target of criticism, and how they are talked about, and they in turn defend their views. In Drukgyel High School, two students in Class 12 insisted that more development was needed, especially in the areas of industry, roads and agriculture. They said that more technology had to be introduced in agriculture.

Modernisation and westernisation are different. Modernisation refers to the area of technology, whereas westernisation is copying fashion and Western behaviour. So modernisation and Bhutanese culture can go along side by side, but westernisation and Bhutanese culture cannot coexist.

"Copying fashion and Western behaviour" generally has negative implications in society, and it also does for young people. So they try and justify their view by connecting development with technology and arguing that technological progress does not harm Bhutanese culture and tradition. I encountered similar comments in Sherubtse College. Students in the first year said:

But development should coexist with culture and tradition. Modernisation and westernisation are different things. Modernisation means introducing things from the West with the Bhutanese identity. We have to select only what is good for us and to dismiss what is bad. But westernisation is introducing Western things blindly. Introducing whatever from the West without proper judgements. Therefore, modernisation is good, but westernisation is not good.

This is another justification of their pro-modernisation stance: modernisation is in fact consistent with Bhutanese culture and Bhutanese identity. But who are they making this justification for? And for what end? It is not the case that someone, such as their teachers, parents or the government,

told them that they have to present themselves in this way. This representation on the part of young people is confirmation of the presence of a social norm that Bhutanese culture and tradition must be kept alive. The fact that copying Western fashion and behaviour has negative implications seems to suggest this. Even if they are modernisers, it does not mean that their attitude is derogative towards Bhutanese culture and tradition. The modernisers do not think that Bhutanese culture and tradition have to be conquered by modernisation - in fact this is something they are also worried about.

Modernisers also present themselves as "traditional" by comparing themselves with even younger generations. Another group of first year students in Sherubtse College said:

We think that we have been brought up in a traditional family. So Bhutanese traditional values are still alive with us. But younger people are really westernised these days. You know, those in junior high school?

Similar kinds of points of view are heard from those who have already started to work. A lady, who has just graduated from a university in India, and who works as an engineer in a ministry says,

People in our age group know about village life. Our parents are from the village and often keep their house there, even after they moved to town. We often go back to the village with parents for *puja* or other occasions. But children these days do not know about the village at all.

"Younger people are really westernised" - this is a phrase I have heard so often in other settings, I thought. It has probably always been the case in Bhutan, at least since development activities started, that people have presented



themselves as "traditional" and "cultured" compared to younger generations. A man in his mid-thirties, who always criticises young people as being alienated from the traditional Bhutanese way of life and values, one day told me a story from his youth. He said that he was a fan of a football player who was famous then.

At that time long hair was fashionable, so we youngsters tried to grow our hair long, like a star football player. And I also fancied blue jeans and a denim jacket. I went all the way to Kathmandu to get a pair of jeans and a denim jacket.

Then I asked him, teasingly, "You always say that young people these days are much too westernised, copying Western fashion and behaviour. But I think your parents would probably have thought about you in the same way as you see the youngsters today." He laughed and said, "You made me blush.", but no more than that. By comparing themselves with an even younger generation, people present themselves as traditional. It appears that in Bhutanese society it is almost moral to present oneself as being culturally-aware.

Another example which shows this social norm, or "ethic", are the reasons that they give for only wearing national dress when the situation demands. These are mostly confined to practical points: "It is much easier to move in jeans and shirts." "It is too warm in summer especially in areas at low altitudes." There is nothing here which is derogatory about national dress itself. National dress has firmly secured its position in society as dress for schools, offices, temples, *dzong*, and formal occasions. Furthermore young people say that national dress has to be preserved, but at the same time they try to minimise the amount of time they spend wearing it. The reason that there is a gap between what they say and what they actually practice, I would argue, is because to have an idea that Bhutanese culture and tradition have to be preserved is a sort of social ethic in Bhutan. Added to that, it might also be a factor that they were talking to a foreigner.

The Bhutanese people tend to become more defensive when they present their culture and tradition to foreigners.<sup>78</sup>

Being culturally-aware also appears to mean being aware of your origin, and therefore your identity, as Bhutanese. A young high school teacher says:

If you say 'a westernised person', one example is the kind of people who are educated in the West and influenced by Western ideas. These people are seen in a positive light. A typical person of this kind does not care what people gossip about him, does not join in gossiping, is open to others and listens to them, and does whatever he thinks right without caring what people say about him. Another example of a westernised person would refer to people who copy the actors' behaviour and way of dressing in English films, wear tone jeans, use drugs, and roam around town. They do not know who they are, they just copy. In this sense westernised is used in a negative sense.

She is saying that being westernised is not in itself an accusation. It could work both ways, positively and negatively. But if one is losing one's own identity as a Bhutanese, he or she is condemned severely by the society. It is a sign that a person is not proud of who he or she is and represents a denial of one's own culture and tradition. A student in Drukgyel High School says, "A westernised person... wears tone jeans, and uses drugs. Some do not believe in Buddhism. They are not Christian either. They do not believe in any religion." It is a sign a person is losing his or her identity and becoming a nobody, and this is what is condemned by society.

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<sup>78</sup> The same sort of attitudes were observed also in other areas among students in English medium education. One high school student became slightly defensive when he said, "Liking English films and music does not mean that we do not like Bhutanese ones. But English music is pleasant to listen to." He presented himself as not having derogative attitudes to something Bhutanese, even if he likes English films and music.

Another example which shows the Bhutanese ethic of maintaining identity is found in some "advice" I was given by a Bhutanese. A young man working in a government office asked me one day if I was going back to Japan when I finished the thesis. I told him that I did not know. Then he suggested, "you have been abroad for quite some time, haven't you? Seven years? That's a long time. It is better if you go back to Japan once after Ph.D. If you have been away from your own country for a long time, you will forget your roots." He presumes that it is always important to keep a sense of one's own roots, and that being abroad for a long time makes a person confused about their own identity. He appears to suggest that it is something one has to consider more than anything else associated with a job, salary and one's own interests and lifestyle. He believes in it as much as he suggested it to me, a foreigner.

### *Dichotomy of modernisation and culture*

It can be observed that the whole discourse about modernisation, culture and tradition sits on the dichotomy of modernisation on the one hand, and culture and tradition on the other. In fact it is astonishing that almost all of the people interviewed, whether young or old, regardless of mode of education, appear to speak about modernisation and culture based upon the assumption that as modernisation progresses, culture and tradition naturally decline. In the area of language, it is an often heard argument that Dzongkha is fighting a losing battle against English. One article in the newspaper argued that

Something close to what might be regarded as a cultural identity crisis is ... seen taking place in recent times. There is already an interesting class of educated Bhutanese fast emerging,... Some of them do not speak a syllable of the national language and can make presence to fluency in hackneyed English styled in phony American accents and mannerisms. The folk dances, songs, music and art traditions are for this

class fossilised stuff to be kept in their 'rightful' place - the museum. (*Kuensel*, 10th October 1998)

From a different perspective, a man who was studying in the US writes about the danger of losing "Bhutanese-ness" during the modernisation process.

For the three long years I've been away from home in pursuit of higher education in the United States. I've been thinking a lot lately, pondering such questions as what it means for Bhutan to be categorized as a 'developing' country. Will Bhutan be fully 'developed' when she becomes like the U.S. in terms of technological complexity? Will we be considered developed when every person in Bhutan - from the poorest *minap*<sup>79</sup> to the wealthiest *Dasho* - has a car, a house with air conditioning, videos, refrigerators, telephones, etc? If so what is the price we pay for such luxuries? Do we compromise our Buddhist values of non-attachment? More importantly do we adjust our cultural values from family and community oriented to being individualistic...? Do we then not lose our 'Bhutanese-ness'?

Foreigners who visit Bhutan ... are of the view that we in Bhutan have found the true meaning of life. How ironic then it is when we who have achieved this happiness wish to sacrifice it and instead desire to be like those who have lost it.

I am not implying that people in the U.S. lead thoroughly rotten lives. Material benefits indeed allow a high degree of physical comfort. But emotionally and spiritually, many people here are decidedly at a lower level relative to the average Bhutanese. (*Kuensel*, 29th May 1993)

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<sup>79</sup> *Minap* literally means a black man and is used to mean a villager or a farmer.

The underlying assumption of this article is that technological advancement always means a trade-off with local culture and tradition. Observing life in a developed country, he assumes that technological and material advancement means becoming emotionally and spiritually poor. He does not ask whether the Americans were individualistic, before that country achieved today's level of technological advancement.

Globalisation is widely interpreted as homogenisation, and more specifically westernisation and Americanisation. A leading Bhutanese intellectual, Karma Ura, writes:

The impact of the West on Bhutan's material conditions and 'philosophy of life' is gradually being felt, even in the remote mountains and among the migratory cattle-herders in the deep forest. Its general influence is quite relentless and strong along the highways and in towns, and a traveller may already notice some signs of homogenization and blurred cultural identities. Import of both artifacts and ideologies of Western origin are on the rise.

Globally, lifestyles may be imploding or converging rather than diversifying. The Bhutanese too are becoming oriented to western culture, which by and large represents global culture. Traditional values and cultures get ... submerged under the weight of global culture. The diffusion of transnational culture set in motion forces of silent dissolution of local language, knowledge, beliefs, customs, skills, trades, institutions and communities.... If left to themselves, these changes will subdue rather than enhance the cultural distinctiveness of Bhutan. (Ura, 1997: p. 239, p. 247)

Modernisation and globalisation are seen as enemies of Bhutanese culture and tradition - a threat to Bhutanese-ness.

## Religion

Religion is another area which the older generation say that young people are increasingly alienated from. One of ex-councillors of the Royal Advisory Council, for instance, told me, "Declining Bhutanese values among youth is found in the increasing incidence of theft, and taking drug and so on. All of them are against religion." One of the educationists pointed out, "These days young people go to a temple to pray for their own interest and success, such as good exam results. We, the older generation, pray for well-being and happiness of all the creatures on the earth. Young people think only about themselves."

On the other hand, young people present themselves as religious in their own terms, and my own observations show that religion does in fact have a place in young people's everyday lives. A lady in her early twenties, for instance, one day asked me to go to Phajoding Monastery with her. She had just come back from the US, which used to be her dream place. But after staying for over six months, her busy life in America disappointed her so much that she quit her studies there. Her mother said she had become more religious since she came back. She recited religious texts and counted beads very frequently. Sometimes she would throw money as an offering towards a temple, when she was driving by in a car. This is something rare to see in Bhutan. In the end our plan to go to the monastery did not materialise for some reason. But I witnessed her making offerings to temples whenever I was in her car. She said that she was religious because her parents were.

My parents, especially my mother is very religious. She holds lots of *puja*, and she explains lots of things about religion to me. My sister and younger brother are also religious. But my elder brother is not. He goes on hunting. Killing animals is very bad. But what can we do? We can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. Isn't it?

She was also taking private lessons in Dzongkha. She said that since most of her education was in India, her Dzongkha ability was weak, and she therefore wanted to spend more time strengthening her grasp of the language. Nevertheless, at the same time, she was also a young lady who always looked out for the latest fashions. She would never be found outside without make up on. She cares about the colour combination of her *kira*, *onju* and *toego*. She of course wears *kira* as long as it touches floor. And she is often found in a party at one of the few discos in Thimphu, where she sometime appears in a skirt which is radically short. Yet, she says she came back to Bhutan because "this is the place my heart belongs to."

Temples and monasteries seem to be a major picnic destination. In the course of fieldwork, I became friends with a group of several well-educated young ladies. They all had a job (most of them in government offices) but none of them had married. They had studied in the same school since they were in junior high school. Most of them had got a degree from a university outside Bhutan. I spent lots of time together with them. One sunny day in autumn, we went on a picnic to Sangaygang area, which is where "the telecom tower" stands, and where a great view of Thimphu is promised. We got out of the car there, and started to walk towards a small temple further up the hill, passing through the numerous prayer flags offered by people as we climbed up. When my heart was pumping at its limit, a small temple suddenly came into sight. A caretaker opened an altar room for us to pray. We prostrated ourselves and made a little offering of incense sticks, butter for the butter lamps and a small amount of money. Then the caretaker showed us the old tooth of a high monk and we lowered our heads to receive a blessing from it. The caretaker told us that the tooth was growing little by little as the years passed. Having visited the temple and received a blessing from the sacred tooth, we felt satisfied. We walked on a little further to find a good place to sit down and have lunch, and laughed and screamed while we played some silly card games, looking down on the view of Thimphu.

About a month after this picnic, we set off to Phobjikha which is one of the places in Bhutan where rare and endangered black-necked cranes come from Tibet to stay during winter.<sup>80</sup> Having heard the cranes had arrived, we were tempted to go and see them. It is more than five hours drive from Thimphu, including short stops for lunch and tea and so we stayed in a guesthouse there overnight. Next morning, when we got up, the sun was about to rise. We hastened to walk to a marsh. There, in the morning light, were the cranes, quacking. We spent a few hours watching and admiring their beauty. Back in the guesthouse, we had breakfast and packed up. Loading luggage into the car, my friends talked about going to Gantey Gompa, the biggest Nyingmapa<sup>81</sup> monastery in Bhutan, which is on the top of a small hill that rises from the valley floor. It is such a famous monastery in Bhutan that people use the word, "Gantey", when referring to the Phobjikha valley. However, I was totally unprepared for this visit: I was not told that we were visiting the monastery, although it was taken for granted by the others. Coming to the Phobjikha valley all the way from Thimphu, more than five hours of drive, nobody goes back without visiting the monastery. The girls took out *kira* from their rucksack and changed quickly. Inside the monastery a monk lead us to several very fine and beautiful altar rooms. We prostrated and made a small offering in each room. It was a magnificent monastery. One of the group had a cousin studying in it as a young monk, and we met him and gave him a box of pastries from Thimphu. It is not uncommon in Bhutan for one of the family or relatives to be a monk.

One of this group of friends asked me to come to her sister's place one day, because there was *puja*. In *puja* many people are invited and enjoy a feast while monks chant prayers. All five of us headed for her sister's place near Khasadrapchu,

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<sup>80</sup> According to the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature, about five hundred and fifty black-necked cranes came to Bhutan to roost for the winter in 1996 (*Kuensei*, 8th November 1997).

<sup>81</sup> Nyingmapa is a religious school of Tibetan Buddhism popular in central and eastern parts of Bhutan. It was founded by Guru Rimpoche in the eighth century (Pommaret, 1994: p. 265).



about half an hour's drive from Thimphu. All the people from the village were also invited. We enjoyed the occasion, and came back with several pieces of dried pork. Village pork is much tastier than the kind we buy in the shop, my friends said.

As these examples show, religion has a place in everyday routines even among young people. It is still deeply embedded in their lives. Nobody among my friends asked why we were visiting the monastery. Nobody asked how the tooth of a high monk had grown: it is simply a precious item from which everyone gets blessing. For Bhutanese people *puja* is a special occasion, in which not only almost everyone in a village but even a relative's friends are invited. Nobody asked why we had to go all the way to Khasadrapchu to the *puja* taking a box of pastries as a gift for the host. No questions were raised. For them it is a way of life.

There is an obvious stereotyping of young people taking place in the society. The stereotype is that Bhutanese culture and tradition are declining among young people, especially in the area of religion. The older generation shake their heads and say that they are too much westernised, and that they do not observe religious teachings any more. Youngsters are ambitious and therefore selfish, they say. However, when we listen to what young people say, in actual fact they try to present themselves as traditional and religious. In order to do that, they compare themselves with even younger generations. In order to present themselves as thinking that culture and tradition is important in the process of modernisation, they make a distinction between westernisation and modernisation, and argue that modernisation at the same time as keeping a Bhutanese identity is vital. Furthermore the reasons that they do not like national dress are all practical. The statement from a young lady, who was educated mostly in India and who works in a travel company, expresses the stance well: "I do respect *kira*. It is just a little uncomfortable because of the thick material and tight belt." The line they do not cross over is respect for Bhutanese culture and tradition. Preservation of

culture and tradition is almost a moral value in Bhutan, and is expressed as such by every young person I met. Therefore they need a defence against the popular stereotype of themselves and for their position as modernisers in the society. Some students in Drukgyel High School told me, as we have seen already, that the pace of modernisation has been retarded because of the need to preserve culture and tradition. This however does not mean that culture and tradition are preventing the country from modernisation, the sort of argument we often find in modernisation theories. They meant, as I understood it, that resources (both human and financial) have been diverted to preserving culture and tradition, and that therefore modernisation programmes do not have as many resources allocated to them as they would have received otherwise. They did not mean that old and traditional beliefs, for example, are something which inherently prevent modernisation. This is an argument we find in modernisation theories, but not in Bhutan.

### **Maintaining doxa**

Although the new orthodoxy appears to have been strengthened through using objectification, and by making this objectifying scale favour those who are educated in the modern education sector, the state still observes the doxa of being culturally-aware. Even if the state is dominated by the people with qualification from modern education, it observes this doxa. The policy of preservation of culture and tradition can be seen as a manifestation of doxa. The state has reiterated the link between cultural preservation and the nation's independence, in the same way as it was emphasised at the time of the unification of the country in the seventeenth century. According to Dasho Rigzin Dorji, then Secretary of the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (the founding father of Bhutan as a nation) found it necessary to promote a distinct cultural identity for Bhutan in order to preserve its sovereignty in the face of the then hostile and hegemonic attitude of the rulers of Tibet. He, therefore

developed distinct Bhutanese characteristics in religious ceremonies and rituals as well as in the dress and customs of the people. He also introduced a code of conduct and etiquette known as *Driglam Namzha* to further project a distinct identity for the Bhutanese people and to instill in them an abiding sense of love and pride in their customs and way of life. (Kuensel, 26th February 1994)

Dasho Rigzin Dorji writes that as a result of the distinct identity inculcated by Shabdrung, Bhutan was able to maintain sovereignty in the face of overwhelming odds in the years that followed, withstanding challenges both from the Tibetans in the north and the British in the south.

The policy of preservation of culture and tradition is a necessity in order to carry out modernisation in a society in which being culturally-aware is almost an ethic, or *doxa*. In this way the new dominant class reproduces the *doxa*. Since it is connected to the nation's sovereignty and independence, no one can show a derogatory attitude to culture and tradition in this small landlocked country sandwiched between two giant neighbours, China and India. This situation has continuously reproduced the *doxa*.

At the same time the symbolic value of Shabdrung has been very effective in making the link between the nation's independence and preserving Bhutan's culture and tradition. Shabdrung, as the founding father of Bhutan, is a revered figure in Bhutan. His statue sits on many altars of temples and monasteries along with statues of Buddha, Guru Rimpoche<sup>82</sup> and other Buddhist saints.<sup>83</sup> Through using the symbolic value of Shabdrung, the whole argument that Bhutanese culture and tradition has to be preserved in order

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<sup>82</sup> A Tantrist from present-day Pakistan. He introduced Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan and Tibet in the eighth century (Pommaret, 1994: p. 53). He is revered as the second Buddha in Tibetan Buddhism (Imaeda, 1994: p. 32).

<sup>83</sup> Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal himself was a high monk of the Drukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism.

to safeguard the nation's independence and sovereignty has become so persuasive that there is little room left in society for doubt or questions.

Apart from the symbolic value of Shabdrung, the doxa of being culturally-aware appears to have been maintained by the perception that Bhutan exists in a delicate geo-political environment. As has been described in detail earlier in the book, the country has been a target for invaders for centuries. This small country sandwiched between two giant nations has seen neighbouring countries, which share similar cultural backgrounds, absorbed into India and China. More recently the problems caused by ULFA and Bodo militants have been perceived to be serious security threats.

Another threat comes in a very different form. This is the force of globalisation. In Bhutan modernisation on the one hand, and culture and tradition on the other are seen as opposites. They are not naturally reconcilable. Modernisation is perceived by the Bhutanese as a threat to Bhutanese culture and Bhutanese identity. The "youth" have been a social problem in Bhutan not only because some of them commit crimes such as theft and drug abuse, but also because they are seen in the society as the group who are most alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. A harsher interpretation perceives them as being influenced by the Western media and armed with English and Western scientific knowledge, the very forces which undermine Bhutanese tradition. In the older generation's eyes, they look less and less Bhutanese and increasingly influenced by Western culture. Modernisation and globalisation are seen as synonyms. In the newspapers and in literature, as we have seen in the previous chapter, globalisation is described as a fundamental force which is destroying Bhutanese culture, tradition and identity. In an article which appeared in *Kuensel* (29th May 1993) a student who studied in the USA seems to assume that becoming a developed country means losing Bhutanese-ness, and that a materially abundant life would inevitably ruin the country's mental and spiritual

richness. In his view modernisation and the Bhutanese way of life are incompatible. Karma Ura argues that globalisation means homogenisation, and that it more or less means westernisation. I would once again quote part of one of his writings:

Globally, lifestyles may be imploding or converging rather than diversifying. The Bhutanese too are becoming oriented to western culture, which by and large represents global culture. Traditional values and cultures get ... submerged under the weight of global culture. The diffusion of transnational culture set in motion forces of silent dissolution of local language, knowledge, beliefs, customs, skills, trades, institutions and communities.... If left to themselves, these changes will subdue rather than enhance the cultural distinctiveness of Bhutan. (Ura, 1997: p. 239, p. 247)

He argues that, overwhelmed by the "relentless and strong" wave of globalisation, a distinct cultural identity is fading. Therefore globalisation is perceived to be an enemy of efforts to maintain Bhutanese identity, and as a threat to the country's cultural distinctiveness. In the arena of language for example, it is often heard that Dzongkha is losing a battle against English. People are afraid that Bhutan might be swallowed by this homogenising force, and in a context where culture and tradition is promoted as a means of safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, globalisation represents a serious threat.

The government repeatedly emphasises that national identity, derived from Bhutanese culture and tradition, is the most powerful way of safeguarding the independence and sovereignty of Bhutan. Having experienced external and internal threats for centuries, maintaining the nation's independence appears to be a powerful rallying cry. Being intimately connected to the nation's independence, the preservation of culture and tradition, whatever that means, is a line which no one can even dream of crossing. Through the link between nation's sovereignty and preservation of culture

and tradition, this doxa of being culturally-aware has been successfully maintained.

## **Chapter 6: Concluding Discussion**

This concluding chapter begins by discussing Bhutanese discourses and doxa in the wider context of globalisation. The indigenisation process of Western development discourse will also be examined. The chapter will also consider the extent to which Western discourse has influenced the formation of discourses in Bhutan. Finally it provides an overall conclusion to the book.

### **6.1 Globalisation**

#### **Bhutanese discourses and indigenisation**

We have seen earlier in this book that Bhutanese discourses on modernisation, culture and tradition are constructed upon the basis of a presumed dichotomy between modernisation on the one hand, and culture and tradition on the other. People in Bhutan generally think that modernisation is a force which destroys culture and tradition. This unilinear thinking resembles what modernisation theories argue, and this assumption is in doxa, the universe of the undiscussed.

However, the following part of what modernisation theorists argue is distinctively different from what is said in Bhutan. Modernisation theorists take a derogatory attitudes towards what is perceived as local culture and tradition. They would argue that traditional beliefs and local traditions are the forces which prevent society from modernising, and that it is therefore both natural and ideal that local culture and tradition should disappear in the end. The Bhutanese discourses produce various responses to this unilinear way of thinking, and none of them resemble what modernisation theorists say. Young people in Dzongkha medium education would say, "As modernisation progresses, culture and tradition declines, therefore we must stop, or retard the pace of modernisation." Those in English medium education would say, "We need modernisation, but at the same time the decline of culture and tradition is to some extent inevitable.

We therefore must aim at striking a balance between modernisation and culture." And, finally, the new traditionalists say, "As modernisation progresses, culture and tradition decline. Therefore, we must make a special effort to preserve culture and tradition, and culture and tradition have to be alive in our everyday life." These variations have been produced within a local context in which each group produces their own opinion in order to enhance their position in society. Above all, state policy is enthusiastic about the preservation of culture and tradition. So although both modernisation theories and Bhutanese discourses start from a recognition of the dichotomy between the modern and the traditional, the arguments which follow from it are very different.

It seems that an indigenising process is taking place, whereby the unilinear thinking of modernisation theories is received and digested in the locality according to the differing context. However, it may be more correct to say that processes of homogenisation and heterogenisation are ongoing simultaneously. In this context, the acceptance of unilinear thinking represents a homogenisation and the existence of other various opinions represents heterogenisation. Homogenisation does not mean that everything discussed or done in the West is known about or accepted in Bhutan. Only some of the arguments that make up modernisation theories are reflected in Bhutanese discourses, and the rest are ignored. Moreover, the Marxist line of thinking is virtually unheard. The view of the new traditionalists is very similar to what anthropologists working on indigenous knowledge argue, but the new traditionalists are only one group of young people in Bhutan. In the local context in which "being culturally-aware" is a social norm, it is implausible that the derogatory attitudes of modernisation theorists toward local culture and tradition could become prevalent in Bhutan. Also it is in this local context in which arguments made by anthropologists which tend to praise local culture are exploited and adjusted to the Bhutanese situation by the new traditionalists. Usage of these arguments by new traditionalists has worked to enhance their position in the society, especially because the arguments particularly fit the doxa of "being culturally-aware".



and also it helps them deflect criticisms from orthodoxy II (young people from monastic education) and heterodoxy II (young people from Dzongkha medium education) of being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition.

Secondly, the context of this particular way of seeing the world - that modernisation destroys local culture and tradition - is completely different in the West and in Bhutan. In the West, according to discursive analysts such as Escobar, this way of thinking is used to present the West as superior to the rest of the world. It has contributed to the idea of Western identity as modern and advanced against the rest of the world, which has been seen in turn as barbarian, backward and traditional. In Bhutan, on the other hand, this same way of thinking has been used as a warning against modernisation. Modernisation is considered to be a threat to Bhutanese culture and tradition. This way of thinking has come about as a result of Bhutan's history in which cultural distinctiveness has been projected as being a prime safeguard of the country's independence.

Thirdly, ideas and materials are introduced in the locality only when they relate to the local context. The unilinear thinking of modernisation theories seems to fit the local context: modernisation thus perceived as a threat in the society because in this particular locality being culturally-aware is doxa. In a situation in which everyone presents himself or herself as being culturally-aware, everyone has something to say about modernisation, culture and tradition and these subjects become a focal point of discussion.

Fourthly, a simultaneous heterogenising process has produced several different opinions which flow from the position of different agents in Bhutanese society. The unilinear way of thinking is digested and exploited to establish and enhance one's own position in the society. In Bhutan, heterodoxy II tries to enhance the validity and usefulness of their knowledge and skills by asserting that modernisation has to be stopped or slowed down. Heterodoxy I (young people from English medium education) emphasises

the harmonisation of culture and modernisation, in which they can maintain the current level of appreciation of their knowledge and skills in the society, which they have acquired through modern English medium education. Orthodoxy<sup>1</sup> (the new traditionalists) have attained new heights in accumulating capital by incorporating the arguments for preserving and promoting culture and tradition into their pro-modernisation stance. The "indigenisation" of external influences is thus composed of several complex processes. Depending on the local context, ideas are filtered, digested, adjusted and exploited.

### **Hegemony of the West and development discourses in Bhutan**

The work of Jonathan Friedman provides some inspiration when examining Bhutanese discourses in the context of globalisation. He explores the formation and transformation of identity in relation to hegemonic shifts taking place around the globe, and his perspective can be applied in two ways to Bhutan's case. One way is to look at the regional situation and then, to a lesser extent, the world political climate. We have already examined the regional circumstances, and the problems which follow from Bhutan being sandwiched between two giant nations in Asia. It is not hard to imagine that Bhutan's cautious stance to the USA and Russia is because of the tremendous difficulties it has had in managing its own immediate neighbours. Furthermore, relations with either the US or Russia might have significant, maybe fatal, implications for Bhutan's relationship with India and China, and hence hold the possibility that the very survival of the nation might be at stake. The reluctance to establish formal diplomatic relations with the US and Russia implies that a global hegemony shift in Friedman's sense has not had much direct influence on Bhutan. However, regional circumstances, as we have seen, have worked to strengthen the expression of Bhutanese identity. Bhutan has witnessed two neighbouring counties, Tibet and Sikkim, which share a similar cultural background based on Tibetan Buddhism, being swallowed by two big neighbours. These events threatened the survival of

the nation's identity, and in turn lead to a stronger assertion of its particularity.

Turning to the hegemony of Western development discourse over Bhutanese official discourses, we have already seen that although the environment has certainly been conducive for Bhutan to press forward with its own development policy which emphasises not only socio-economic development but also the importance of preserving culture, tradition and the natural environment, it is also unlikely that donor countries have pressurised Bhutan to follow their development discourse. Firstly this is because the Bhutanese government started to pay attention to the preservation of culture and tradition even before Western development thinking turned its attention to aspects of human lives other than material progress. The Bhutanese government was already determined to preserve Bhutan's culture and tradition at the point of introduction of modernisation. Secondly it is because the government has carefully chosen donor countries and agencies whose policies fit Bhutan's development objectives. The Bhutanese government has therefore to some extent manipulated its environment for its own ends. Thirdly, a very important aspect of Bhutan's development policy is completely outside of Western development discourse: that is the idea of Gross National Happiness. Finally, throughout the formation of development policies the government has described these policies as unique and original. The case of Bhutan suggests that the real world is not as hegemonic as theories of discursive analysis of development would suggest. The path of development which Bhutan is trying to trace is mainly directed by political motivations, that is the survival of the country in difficult geopolitical circumstances, rather than by economic factors or by Western models of development.

It does not seem as though the Western discourse of development has achieved overwhelming power over the discourses of development in Bhutan to the extent that Escobar and others<sup>1</sup> argue in their discursive analyses of

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Crush (ed.) (1995) and Sachs (ed.) (1992).

development. Works on the discourse of development are concerned with the thought-patterns and particular ways of representation that have supported and legitimated Western intervention into non-Western societies. Escobar himself writes that there has been a growing will to transform drastically two-thirds of the world in the pursuit of the goal of material prosperity and economic progress. "By the early 1950s such a will had become hegemonic at the level of the circles of power." (Escobar, 1995a: p. 4) Works such as Escobar's lead us to imagine that people in the Third World are also brainwashed by this particular way of seeing the world. However, these works are largely about how the West has represented the rest of the world, and not about how these representations have been received among people in the Third World. Words such as "Western domination" and "authority" make us think that Western representations are accepted in the Third World without any resistance or alteration. However, people in Bhutan are not brainwashed by the discourse of development: in fact, as we have seen, in the formation of Bhutanese discourses of development, the local context seems to play a greater role than the supposed hegemony of Western development discourse.

The Western representation of the non-West does not always remain unchallenged. As is shown in the second chapter, people in Bhutan sometimes criticise the way the West represents them. They have their own knowledge of their society. Though Edward Said says that the West has defined the non-Western world, actually saying that Western knowledge has had this degree of authority itself may appear to be an exercise of discursive power. It is also a fact that the Bhutanese exploit Orientalist attitudes for their own benefit. Bhutan earns significant amount of foreign exchange by attracting tourists, and the brochures of Bhutanese tour operators are full of words and images of "the isolated Buddhist kingdom with rich and unique cultural heritage", which appeal to the Orientalist imagination.<sup>2</sup> I am not trying

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<sup>2</sup> Advertisements by one of the biggest Bhutanese tour operators are filled with phrases such as, "Bhutan: A paradise in the heart of the Himalayas"

to argue that the West has not had power over the non-Western world. However, I have come to think that the power of the West is not as strong as used to be thought among the post-structuralist scholars of the discourse analysis of development.<sup>3</sup>

## 6.2 Conclusion

### Local discourses

We have seen different views about modernisation, culture and tradition among young people in Bhutan. The views presented are classifiable into three categories, which in turn are largely related to young people's educational backgrounds. The features of the local discourses are threefold. Firstly, there is much competition and negotiation among young people over access to economic, social and cultural capital. Under the circumstances in which there is a single ladder of

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and "Bhutan. The Last Shangrila". (*Tashi Delek*, Nov/Dec 1996). Moreover a brochure from the Tourism Authority of Bhutan, the regulatory body of tourism industry in Bhutan, reads:

The Kingdom of Bhutan...is today a unique and exotic tourist destination. When the rest of the world has mostly adopted the blue jeans or the western suit culture, Bhutanese have deliberately safeguarded their ancient way of life in all its aspects. Immediately on landing at the country's only airport by the national airline, the visitor is in the midst of people dressed in [G]hos and Kiras, a landscape with Dzongs, temples and houses with architecture found nowhere else in the world. (Tourism Authority of Bhutan)

The government takes a careful line on tourism. In order to gain maximum revenue with minimum damage to the natural environment and people's everyday life, it is a policy that each tourist has to pay US\$200 per night of which 35% goes into the national treasury and the rest is to provide food, accommodation, transportation and a tour guide. In 1995 tourism generated US\$6.55 million from a total of 5,415 tourists (UNDP, 1998: p. 33).

<sup>3</sup> A criticism of the discourse analysis of development also comes from Sivaramakrishnam and Agrawal (1999). They point out that "The idea that development is entirely a northern imposition on southern societies can only be sustained by holding at bay the immense evidence on the polyvocal, polylocal nature of development performance and appropriations".

success in society encompassing both Dzongkha medium education and English medium education, it is more or less obvious for everyone that young people in Dzongkha medium education are less advantaged than those in English medium education. In terms of cultural capital, people in Dzongkha medium education are regarded as having more than those in English medium education, and people in monastic education are perceived to have attained the highest levels. Those in Dzongkha medium education criticise people in English medium education for not knowing enough about Bhutanese religion and culture. On the other hand, people in English medium education perceive Dzongkha medium education as not very useful, and narrow in the options it presents. In this competition, the young people who I have called "new traditionalists" seem to have attained new heights in accumulating economic, social and cultural capital. They have climbed up to the top of the ladder of success, and at the same time have shown their enthusiasm for preserving culture and tradition.

Secondly, all the discourses should also be understood as expressions of the validity and usefulness of different types of knowledge and skills in a society in transition. Enthusiasm for preserving Bhutanese culture and tradition is stronger among young people in Dzongkha medium education than it is amongst those in English medium education. On the other hand, young people in English medium education are more likely to point out positive aspects of modernisation than those in Dzongkha medium education.

The third and very important feature of the Bhutanese local discourses is the doxa of cultural awareness. This doxa is obvious, as we have seen, in the ways in which young people defend and justify their own views against criticisms levelled against them by the older generations in society. They always try to present themselves as being culturally-aware. Being culturally-aware is also a moral issue in society to the extent that one Bhutanese told me, "If you are labelled as not being cultural aware by your seniors and elder people, you are socially dead." Young people are seen as a problem in society:

they are one of the issues. This is primarily because they are seen to be alienated from Bhutanese culture, tradition and values. Even taking drugs, smoking and thefts are seen, besides being criminal activities or harmful to health, as a violation of traditional Bhutanese values. In this environment, a derogatory view of culture and tradition, such as that is found in modernisation theories, is identified with the socially unacceptable, and receives only severe criticism in society.

In Bhutan, culture and tradition is a much discussed issue. Culture and tradition provide an arena which discussions about modernisation, development, national identity, and nation's independence start from and come back to. But what do culture and tradition mean in Bhutan? This is a question which I posed at the beginning of this book. Is it at all possible to obtain a definition of Bhutanese culture and tradition through analysing the different discourses? Some issues, such as architecture, language, national dress and *driglhon namzha* have drawn most attention. *Tshechu*, mask dances, are seen as somewhat symbolic of "authentic Bhutanese culture". However, it appears that the definition of Bhutanese culture and tradition itself has not been an important issue in the society. Differences in the meaning of culture and tradition have not become a focus of discussion. As we have observed, what new traditionalists mean by Bhutanese culture and tradition is, though overlapping in some areas, different from what the older generations mean. Differences in meaning, however, do not draw much attention and hence do not cause controversy. The important point for society is that the new traditionalists are enthusiastic about preserving Bhutanese culture and tradition. Culture and tradition is perceived to be vulnerable in Bhutan, therefore it needs to be preserved - rather than discussions about its meaning, the *preservation* of culture is seen as much more important in Bhutan.

### **Government policy**

In a society in which being culturally-aware is doxa, even the government cannot escape. However, one feature which I have

noted here is that the government initiated crisis, a fact which stands in opposition to Bourdieu's theory that crisis is caused by forces other than orthodoxy. In Bhutan's case, orthodoxy (the government) caused a crisis by introducing development activities in 1961. Although this significant change of policy has affected a whole constellation of the discourses, we can still observe some continuities from the past which signifies the role of orthodoxy, as described by Bourdieu, as the guardian of doxa. This is the policy of preservation of culture and tradition. This policy has been included in Five Year Plans since a very early stage in planned development, and from the Sixth Five Year Plan much more emphasis has been placed on it.

As modernisation progresses in society, the decline of Bhutanese culture and tradition has become a concern for many people, especially for the older generation and the authorities. But this does not mean that the policy of preservation of culture and tradition has not been successful. I would argue that because of the policy, preservation of culture and tradition has drawn much more attention in society, and made people more conscious about Bhutanese culture and tradition. Moreover, since Bhutanese culture and tradition is portrayed as if it is contradictory in nature to modernisation, it has produced a big arena of discourses. To put it more simply, people frequently talk about Bhutanese culture and tradition: they are terms which are not ignored. They are not fossils which can be found only in museums and historical dramas on television. They are very much issues of everyday life in Bhutan. Whether they feel comfortable in national dress or not, people talk about Bhutanese culture and tradition. One of the most important contributions of the policy of preservation of culture and tradition is in making Bhutanese culture and tradition a focal point for discussion in society.

The main factor which has maintained this doxa is the connection between Bhutanese culture and tradition, on the one hand, and the nation's independence and sovereignty, on the other. This connection has its origins in Bhutan's geo-



political position between two giant nations, China and India. I have introduced Bourdieu's concept of habitus in a modified form to explain Bhutanese doxa. Habitus is a (perceived) form of history produced by collective practices. Bhutan as a small country between two giants has been perceived to be in a vulnerable position by its inhabitants. History shows enough examples of how small neighbouring countries have vanished from the map as independent countries. The government has played a prime role in connecting Bhutanese culture and Bhutanese identity with the nation's independence and sovereignty, and this argument now has so much persuasiveness that no one will cross the line and express a lack of concern about cultural issues.

The government's initiatives in terms of planned development activities should also be seen in the same light. The desire to gain material prosperity and economic growth was a minor motivation behind the government's decision to launch development activities in the early 1960s. Rather than being pushed by an economic impetus, it was changes of political climate in the region and a change in judgement by the authorities of the time that lead the country to open up and start modernisation. In other words, the government launched development activities primarily to ensure the political survival of the nation.

If India and China are physical threats to the country, modernisation has been perceived as an ideological threat. The government has repeatedly asserted the "uniqueness" and "originality" of its development policies. These assertions, I would argue, should be seen as a maintenance of identity, and as a guarantor of the survival of the nation. Development policies must be different from other countries' development policies and they should not be identified with the "standard model of modernisation". There is always present a desire to be "original", and a political imperative to be "unique", because, in the mind of the authorities it directly relates to the country's survival as an independent nation. Bhutan has

to be "unique", "original" and "different", because it is the country's one *raison d'être*.

Since development activities in Bhutan were started due to political imperatives, the government appears to have retained a firm grip in formulating development policies. These policies do not make economic growth the first priority and the idea of Gross National Happiness as a competing concept to Gross National Product is prominent amongst these "unique" approaches. Discursive analyses of development, such as those produced by Escobar, argue that whole world has been engulfed by a single discourse of development, and they paint a picture in which the whole world blindly follows the Western model of development. However, examination of the case of Bhutan certainly shows us that the world is more complex and diversified than that. Western hegemony over non-Western society is not as solid or overwhelming as the discursive analyses of development would have us believe.

### **Feedback to development theories**

At the level of local discourses, as has been shown already, the doxa shares a common assumption with Western development discourse: that is the view that as modernisation progresses, culture and tradition decline. There are however complex indigenising processes in which social actors compete and negotiate, and in this process, different development discourses have been produced. One might argue that this is still "a variation" of Western development idea by emphasising a common part of development discourses between the West and Bhutan. However, I would like to point out some dangers in seeing the Bhutanese development path as "a variation". Firstly, this creates the impression that there is an authentic, orthodox, development concept. Moreover, it can imply that this authentic and orthodox development concept originated in the West. It suggests a one way flow of development ideas and gives the impression that the West is the producer of development ideas, and the rest of the world can only follow it. Most importantly the variation thesis underestimates the

dynamism of different societies, which will inevitably produce their own development discourses and development ideas. It downplays, to an unreasonable degree, the particular political, economic, social and historical conditions of a society and the development discourses and development ideas that are produced by it.

Throughout the book, I have shown the dynamism of Bhutanese society in producing its own discourses of modernisation, culture and tradition. I have argued that the influence of Western development discourse is not as overwhelming as is suggested by the post-structuralists' discursive analyses of development. This however does not mean that there is not a power imbalance between the West and the non-West. Power relations exist between the West and the non-West, but in a slightly different sense from how Edward Said outlines them in *Orientalism*. Said writes that Europe has defined non-Europe, and that the systematic Western representation of the non-West as inferior to the West is the source of Western domination over the non-West. However I would argue that the power relation is not primarily derived from the belief that the way in which the West has represented the world (in which the West is always superior to the non-West) is the sole representation of the world. Western representation of non-Western societies does not occur without being challenged. Rather, power relations between the West and non-West arise directly from how much attention has been drawn to the West in the non-West, and vice versa. For example, students in Class 10 in Bhutan can recite a play of Shakespeare and a poem of Wordsworth; many of them can sing the songs of the Beatles and Bryan Adams. But we do not expect seventeen year old students in England to name a Bhutanese singer or a Bhutanese author. In one sense this shows the relative ignorance of people in the West compared with their counterparts in the non-West. However, more importantly, it signifies the fact that in Bhutan more attention has been paid to the West, compared to the attention which a non-Western society would receive in the West. This is where the power imbalance is derived from. The

fact the negative images of the West are utilised in the development discourses in Bhutan does not necessarily mean that the power of the West is declining. The important point is that the West is one of the main points of reference in the discourses - it still draws the most attention.

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ISBN 99936-14-12-2



**Published by**  
**The Centre for Bhutan Studies**  
**P.O. Box 1111, Thimphu, Bhutan.**