

# *Pttingo*

## **from the Field**



**Student Journal of the Anthropology Programme,  
Royal Thimphu College**

**Vol. 4, No. 1 (2024)**

Jottings from the Field

Student Journal of the Anthropology Programme,

Royal Thimphu College

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*Jottings from the Field* is a student lead journal intended to showcase the writings of Anthropology students in RTC. This is the fourth volume of the journal, which highlights some of the best ethnographic research and experiences of the students. It also provides an opportunity for interested students to learn the skills needed to run a publication.

## Contents

### Introduction to the Journal

DOLMA CHODEN RODER, AND RICHARD KAMEI 5

NAMGAY CHODEN, AND SONAM ZANGMO 6

### Gruesome Encounters with Deities, Spirits and Headcutters: Stories and Experiences of the People of Khuruthang, Punakha

NAMGAY CHODEN 7

### “Tsen are gods:” The impact of deity belief and rituals on the experience of health and subjective well-being in Gawaithang village, Bhutan

SONAM PELRAB 8

### “Shouldn’t Our Behavior Speak Louder than Our Hairstyles?:” Contextualising student bodies in Thimphu and Punakha Schools.

PEMA LHAZOM NAMGAY 9

### Interview with an Anthropologist: Dr. Jelle J.P. Wouters

JELLE J.P. WOUTERS 10

### Interview with Alumnus: Tashi Chopel

TASHI CHOPHEL 13

### STEM College: Experience of a First Year Student

NAMGAY CHODEN 16

### Biography of Bhutanese commodity: Alcohol

CHOENING PELMO, AND NGAWANG GYATSHO 22

### Wearing *Gho* and *Kira* to College and its Cultural Significance

SONAM DORJI, TSHETEN WANGMO, RIGZIN NIMA, YOEDZER  
YOEDSEL DORJI, TASHI CHODEN, AND ASHA GHALLEY 27

**Us and Superstitions**

CHHIMI WANGMO 40

***Deep Hanging out in the Eastern Himalayas: Imagination & ‘Not-Knowing’ in Bhutan***

GILBERT SABAH AKAL 42

***Siestas, Hand-made Pasta, and a Whole Lot of Museums: The Experiences of An Anthropology Student Abroad***

SUREKHA SUBBA 48

**Exchange Program Experience in Europe**

SONAM PELRAB 52

**“Chimi in Spain”: Exploring Identity, Culture, and Community During a Study Abroad**

CHIMI WANGMO 54

**ཆ་བཟུགས་ལྗོངས་ཀྱི་ རྩོམ་སྒྲིག་ལུ།**

NORBU ZANGPO 57

**Thoughts and Reflections on a Field Visit to the Parliament**

SONAM DORJI 66

**Constructing Meaning through the Experience of Tuberculosis**

PEMA DORJI 70

**Daily Life at the Dzong**

PEMA SELDEN

74

**Applied Anthropology: Snippets of applied project work from the  
years 2023 and 2024**

CHIMI ZANGMO, DORJI LHADON, KINLEY DORJI, PASSANG OM,  
PEMA LHAZOM NAMGAY, PEMA WANGCHUK, RIGYEL PHUNTSHO,  
SANGAY TENZIN, TENZIN RABYANG, AND TSHERING CHODEN

79

**Introduction to the Journal**

*From the journal's Faculty Advisors*

We are back with “Jottings from the Field”, a journal from the anthropology programme of Royal Thimphu College (RTC). The issue for this year has entered its fourth year since it was launched first in 2021. The journal introduces anthropology students to the academic world by equipping them with the skills and process of publication and running a journal.

The issue for this year, 2024, represents a year-long journey where we orient students to pick up the skills of running a journal- correspondence, copy editing, peer-reviewing, photo editing, and publishing. Additionally, we organised a writing workshop for the student's editorial team early this year. This helped them pick up the skills required in copy editing and peer reviewing. Through this journal, we also actively make students adhere to anthropological principles of being empathetic, ethical, and enthusiastic about everything that concerns humans.

In this fourth issue, “Jottings from the field”, we received even more submissions on various topics. This year's issue covered various topics of Bhutan from anthropological perspectives. This year, we also have an interview with an anthropologist and anthropology student alumni, a comic strip, and an article in Dzongkha.

We want to acknowledge the hard work, dedication and rigourness of our twelve journal members. We would also like to thank our anthropology colleagues for their continued support in various capacities: Dr Pheiga Amanda Giangthandunliu, Dr Shawn Christopher Rowlands, Dr Kevingu Khate, Dr Tiatemsu Longkumer, and Deki Yangzom. We also want to extend our gratitude to Rudrarup Mukherjee, Kencho Chophel, Chenchu Dorji, and Nima Norbu. Finally, we want to thank Ms Tashi Choden, our former faculty advisor of the journal, for her contribution, early this year to our journal's journey and for her constant guidance and direction to our journal members. We look forward to the next chapter of our journal in 2025.

We hope our students' writings and stories will engage with our journal's readers.

Dolma Choden Roder and Richard Kamei

*From the Journal's Senior Editors*

Welcome back to another issue of “Jottings from the Field”. This marks the fourth edition of our student-led journal of the Anthropology program at Royal Thimphu College (RTC). We are thrilled to once again present a collection of insightful articles, research paper abstracts, reports and creative pieces that showcase the diverse interests and talents of the Anthropology students. This year's journal delves into a range of topics. Through the exploration of these topics, our students demonstrate a deep commitment to understanding the complexities of human societies.

We want to express our sincere gratitude to the dedicated editorial team who worked tirelessly to bring this journal to life. Their hard work and passion are evident on every page. We also extend our thanks to the authors who shared their research and insights, as well as the faculty advisors and the students who submitted pictures for the journal cover. We lastly thank our journal advisor and supervisor, Dr. Richard Kamei, who provided unwavering guidance and support. He was instrumental in every step of the journal making process. We again thank all of the people who were involved in the making of this issue. This would not have been possible without all their efforts.

This journal is more than just a collection of various articles; it is a platform for students to share their voices, challenge assumptions, and inspire critical thinking. We hope that this issue will spark conversations, foster intellectual curiosity, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the human experience.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed creating it.

Warm regards,

Sonam Zangmo and Namgay Choden, Student Senior Editors

# Gruesome Encounters with Deities, Spirits and Headcutters: Stories and Experiences of the People of Khuruthang, Punakha



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Anthropology 2024 graduate

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Selected Final Year Project Abstract of 2024 Anthropology Graduate

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## Abstract

The underappreciated genre of gruesome stories often offers insights into societal anxieties and cultural values. This thesis explores the gruesome stories of Khuruthang, a small town located in Punakha, Bhutan, focusing on stories of deities, spirits, and headcutters. Taking the theoretical approach of biopower, a concept by Michel Foucault, the paper reveals the society's beliefs, values, and anxieties embedded in these stories. It discusses systems of power such as gender and age in the society as depicted in the stories by drawing real life parallels. With the additional framework of moral panics, a concept by Stanley Cohen, in regards to head cutter and murder stories, it finds the underlying anxiety to be tied to modernity. It puts forward that gruesome stories can be a means through which biopower is exercised.

**Keywords:** Biopower, Moral panics, Feminist perspective, Folk stories, Bhutan

# **“*Tsen* are gods”: The impact of deity belief and rituals on the experience of health and subjective well-being in Gawaithang village, Bhutan**



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## **Abstract**

This research investigates the impact of deity beliefs and rituals on health and subjective well-being in Gawaithang village, Bhutan. The study explores how the villagers' spiritual practices are interwoven with their daily lives and health experiences. Drawing on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and autoethnography, the research highlights the significant role of 'Tsens' (deities) in shaping social norms and communal identity. It suggests that the deity rituals, deeply rooted in villager's spiritual beliefs, are essential for both physical and emotional healing for villagers. The findings indicate the importance of understanding local ritual practices and beliefs to appreciate the holistic nature of health in Gawaithang and possibly beyond. This research contributes to the anthropology of religion and medical anthropology by providing insights into the interplay between spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, health-seeking behaviours and well-being.

**Keywords:** Deities ritual in Bhutan, spiritual beliefs, subjective well-being, health-seeking behaviors.

# “Shouldn’t Our Behavior Speak Louder than Our Hairstyles?:” Contextualising student bodies in Thimphu and Punakha Schools



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## Abstract

This study delves into the dynamics of the Bhutanese educational system, examining how socio-cultural norms and power structures manifest through students' embodied experiences, using the body as a site for exploring these themes. The analysis is based on two key frameworks: the web of power dynamics that influences gender norms and cultural standards in schools, and the omnipresent impact of *Driglam Namzha* (ཐྲིག་ལམ་ནམ་པ་ཀླུ་པ་ཀླུ་པ་). This research illustrates how prescribed practices—like the requirement that male students have haircuts(buzzcut) and the use of formal language—act as social cohesion and cultural continuity mechanisms. The study also explores the power relationships in Bhutanese schools, emphasising how hierarchical respect, punishments, and surveillance uphold societal norms. It investigates how schools uphold societal order by enforcing normal gender roles and closely examining non-conforming identities, drawing on the ideas of Judith Butler. The research further delves into how monastic rituals like prayer and prostration are still practiced in secular institutions, illustrating the constant struggle between tradition and modernity in education. This research offers an understanding of the Bhutanese educational system as an agent for societal regulation and cultural reproduction through a detailed investigation of students' bodies. It provides significant insights into how schools function by highlighting the interactions between preserving culture and adjusting to modern standards of learning.

**Keywords:** Bhutanese Students, Embodiment, Power dynamics, *Driglam Namzha*

# Interview with an Anthropologist: Dr. Jelle J.P. Wouters



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The current second-year anthropology student, Pema Dorji, conducted this interview

## 1. What inspired you to pursue a career in anthropology?

Some of it was by happenstance, but I think I was driven by a broad interest in the human condition, both past and present, and in exploring deeper, diverse meanings and values of humanity. Anthropology seemed to best suit this interest. As you learn in your classes, and in the words of the anthropologist Horace Miner, anthropology is about making ‘the strange familiar and the familiar strange.’ It is both fascinating and humbling to learn that there are countless ways in which societies can create meaning and organise their lives. Relatedly, the reason I stayed with anthropology was the appeal of ethnographic research, for it forces us to question our conceptual and theoretical assumptions about the world around us, and to co-create knowledge and perspectives that are new, were earlier reduced to the margins.

## 2. Who are some of your biggest influences or mentors in the field of anthropology?

There are many. My biggest mentor is my PhD supervisor, Professor T.B. Subba, who was a professor of Anthropology in North-Eastern Hill University in Shillong, as well as Vice-Chancellor of Sikkim University. He retired a few years ago and has visited RTC on several occasions. In fact, his father was for many years a primary school headmaster in eastern Bhutan. But there are many others, including Professor Willem van Schendel, who incidentally will visit RTC this November to give a key-note in the Multispecies Migration Symposium we are organising. At Oxford University, where I studied for my MPhil, I was made to read a lot of anthropological classics, and while times have changed since then, as have approaches in Anthropology, whenever I feel I need some inspiration I often return to these classics. I have also learned a lot from, and have been inspired by, my students and

colleagues over the years, at RTC, as well as in Sikkim University and the Eberhard Karls University in Tübingen, Germany, where I taught previously.

### **3. What is your key theoretical orientation, and how does it shape your research?**

I am a little restless theoretically, and my orientations are often shifting, or perhaps multiplying. I also think that different themes require different theoretical orientations. Some of my earlier work, including the books *In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency* and *Vernacular Politics in Northeast India* were written in the tradition of political anthropology. My later theoretical work, in *Subaltern Studies 2.0: Being Against the Capitalocene* was informed by my readings on capitalism, community, and history. Most recently, I am working in the fields of Environmental Humanities, and affiliated post-humanist currents that seek to somewhat decentralise the human by opening up more-than-human perspectives. We now have an interesting project at the Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities which is called ‘more-than-human conversations in Bhutan’, and which shows how communities in Bhutan variously and intimately relate to other-than-humans, be they yaks or other animals, water-bodies, mountains, or deities.

### **4. How do you make your research accessible to the public?**

This is a good question as we often write in a language that is difficult to apprehend by non-specialists, as well as lose ourselves in what are ultimately rather minor debates. I have also been a little guilty of that. Overall, it seems that anthropology has turned inward and abrogated its public responsibility. Once, anthropologists wanted to enhance our understanding of and empathy towards other ways of living – to borrow Ruth Benedict’s words, to enable ‘a world made safe for differences.’ As a discipline, anthropology has been a little poor in making its knowledge to bear on public debates. We have to get better at this. My current position as the Chair of the Himalayan Centre for Environmental Humanities (HCEH) at RTC forces me, in a small way, to make ethnographic findings more actionable as we collaborate with policy-makers, government departments, and other stakeholders. I hope that all of you, in your module applied anthropology and far beyond, will be able to promote the relevance of anthropology to society, policy, and governance.

### **5. How has been your experience working in Bhutan as an anthropologist?**

I still have a long way to go and much to learn about the anthropology of Bhutan. Most of my ethnographic work was done in Northeast India, and I am still not done writing all of this up. However, the current projects at HCEH allow me to carry out research on a range of topics, but mostly related to climate change and the environment, and I have been struck by the profoundly relational ways in which many communities in Bhutan live in/with the landscape and its many other-than-human beings.

#### **6. What are the scopes of career and opportunities for budding anthropologists from Bhutan?**

Opportunities are endless, and anthropology offers an invitation to many fields, both in academia and elsewhere, but you need to be good and serious in what you are doing. This starts with reading. We all need to read more, and I am also telling this to myself.

#### **7. In a time when the world is increasingly changing, what do you think anthropologists can contribute to Bhutanese society and state?**

It is my conviction that anthropology is more important than ever before, in Bhutan specifically and elsewhere. In our age of intensifying anthropogenic activity, conditions of life are now being undermined at a planetary scale. This shows how our currently dominant knowledge traditions and global institutions are not up to the task. We often talk about sustainable development goals, but perhaps we first need sustainable intelligence; that is a way of knowing, relating, and being in the world that promotes pan-being (meaning: not just humans, but also other species and the life-giving earth itself) sustainable futures. I believe that anthropology has a big role to play in showing that alternative futures are not only possible, but are currently being pursued by a range of communities, including in Bhutan, whose voices and experiences are often not counted seriously, but which anthropology, through its hallmark method of ethnography, is able to hear. Thus, while anthropology can make a major contribution to our understanding of Bhutanese society and state, I urge you to simultaneously think broader by asking what anthropology in Bhutan can contribute to the world at large.

# Interview with Alumnus: Tashi Chophel



Anthropology 2022 Graduate

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The current third-year anthropology student, Sherab Wangmo, conducted this interview

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## **1. Tell us about yourself, including your educational background, current professional status, and future goals.**

I am Tashi Chophel from Trashigang, and I have spent most of my life in the western parts of our country. I graduated from RTC with a Bachelor's in Anthropology and currently work at BBS as an English producer. It's been more than a year since I started working at BBS. I have produced a couple of programs/documentaries, and I plan to keep on doing that for the next couple of years if things are all going well. I want to keep on telling stories until my brain is out of all the ideas and motivation.

## **2. How did you come to know about the anthropology programme at Royal Thimphu College (RTC), and what led you to choose it?**

I came to know about anthropology at the very last moment. The story goes like this: I had to come to Thimphu because I had gotten the DAHE scholarship, and I was supposedly given three options of courses to choose from. 1. BA English 2. BA Mass Communication 3. BA Anthropology. So I went to Google and looked up anthropology. As I was reading the definitions and other things related to anthropology, it got me excited and interested in learning more about anthropology. So then I made up my mind to take anthropology as my course at RTC.

## **3. Looking back at your time as an anthropology student at RTC, are there any reflections or thoughts you would like to share?**

Looking back, I am glad I had taken anthropology. It has steered my life in a meaningful way and is always present in all my fondest memories. It still shapes my decisions, my perception and my understanding of all things encompassing my life. One of the thoughts that played a

very vital role in my understanding of anthropology is that there is no right or wrong answer so long as you can substantiate your answers with the needed evidence and points. There is always more than one way of looking and understanding a question or statement. It is also necessary to put ourselves in someone else's shoes to understand their perception and understanding to come up with your own understanding and answers.

**4. Could you share details about the professional work you are currently doing?**

My work involves telling stories from around Bhutan to the world. We can tell stories of individuals, societies, phenomena, etc. much like what I had studied in anthropology. However, the only thing that has changed is that now I work more with technical stuff like cameras, software such as Premiere Pro, etc. which in turn is an added bonus for me as I get to tell my stories visually.

**5. Would you like to share insights into your research interests and what inspired you to pursue them?**

Anthropology, being a holistic subject, made it fun to try out various topics. That is why, during my college days, I chose to do my research on films and the process of production of films. Films are visual spectacles that tell stories of peoples, places and times. A lot of people are involved, and it has its own community and culture. Likewise, other subjects like studying diverse languages and dialects could also be topics that I would've liked to work on. Now that I'm working in a space involved with films, I find it funny how things like destiny or something along those lines are all at play

**6. Do you have any advice for current anthropology students at RTC regarding career prospects and opportunities after graduation?**

I would like to say to the current batch of anthropology students that life outside is as scary as advertised. It's a whole new level but it's not an impossible task. In terms of the availability of opportunities, I cannot give you my word that there'll be plenty of opportunities outside as that is not under my control. What worked for me may not work for you. Follow your own path and strive to do what's best for you. Mistakes and failures are only lessons that teach you how to strive forward. What you learn in your anthropology classes will go on to help you at some point in your life. Anthropology worked for me and my friends, and to this day, we still keep on

saying how it was never a mistake to take anthropology and how much they appreciate having learned anthropology.

**7. Would you like to share how anthropology shapes who you are today?**

Anthropology is literally a huge part of me because no matter where I go whether it is for a job application or just a conversation with some new friends, anthropology will define who I am. Additionally, the lessons learned from anthropology continue to shape my perception. I only have fond memories of having studied anthropology. I am glad I did it.

# STEM College: Experience of a First Year Student



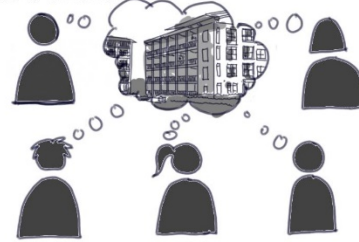
By Namgay Choden  
(2021 Cohort)  
bionicedohc@gmail.com



It's not that the college was bad.

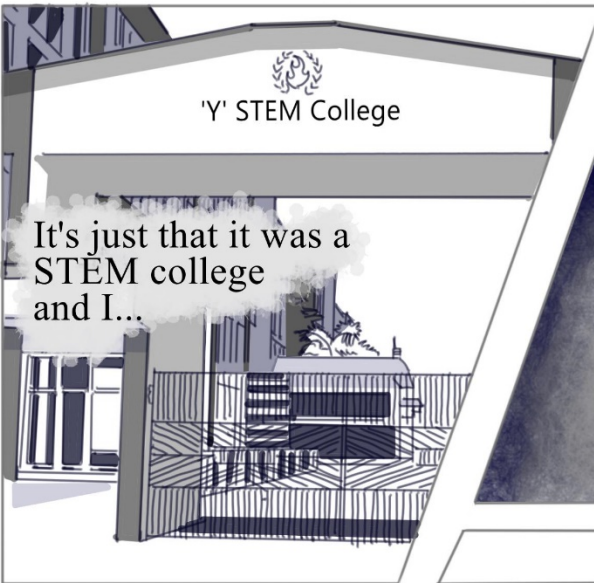


In fact, I'm sure that many aspire to be accepted there.



'Y' STEM College

It's just that it was a STEM college and I...

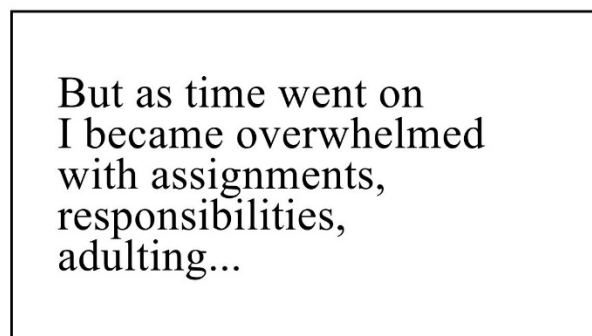
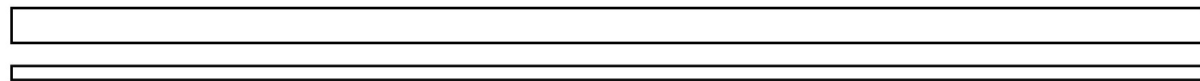


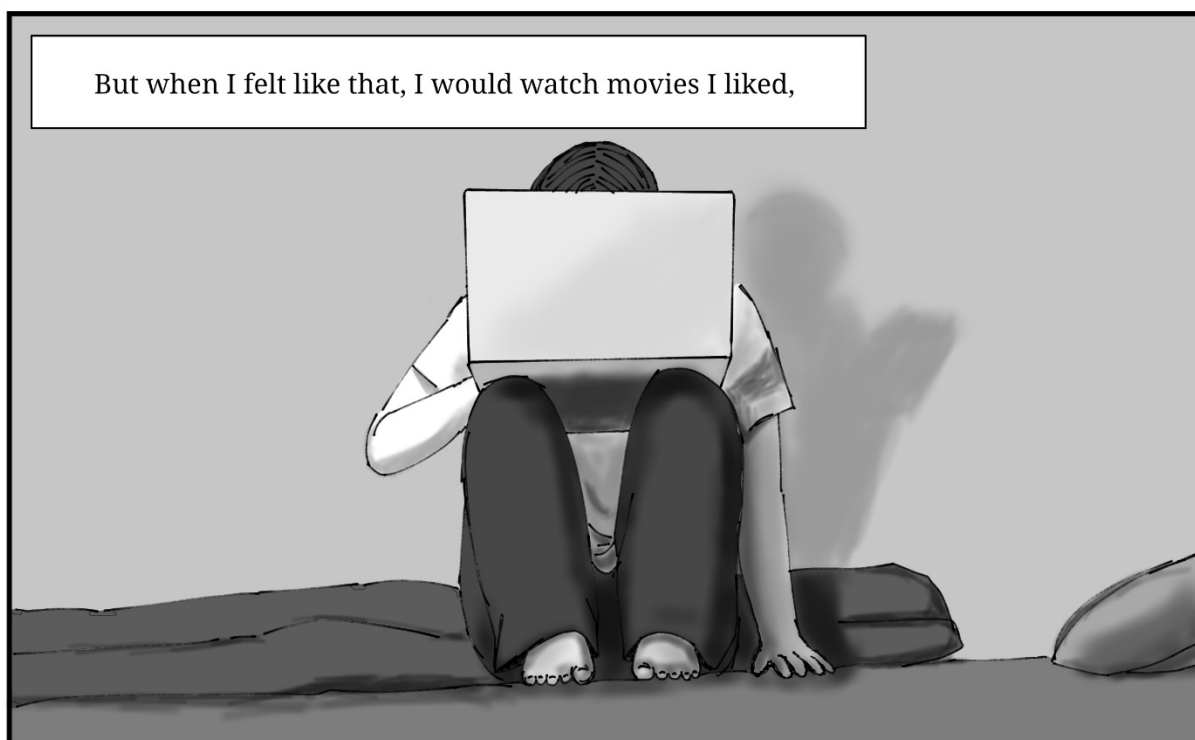
didn't really want to pursue a career in STEM.



My move to the college dorms was swift.









# Biography of Bhutanese commodity: Alcohol



**Choening Pelmo, and Ngawang Gyatsho**

Third-year Anthropology students

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Alcohol holds significant cultural and social importance in Bhutan, mirroring its role in other societies worldwide. In the Dzongkha language, the word "*chang*" (alcohol) is reflected in oral traditions, songs, proverbs, and social customs. *Ara*, a traditional alcoholic beverage, is recognised as part of Bhutan's intangible cultural heritage, with religious-historical origins. Legends suggest that gods like *Lha Tsangpa* and *Lha Jajin*<sup>1</sup> used wine for medicinal purposes in battles against demigods, while another hypothesis links alcohol to nectar tied to immortality, originating from the moon (Dorji, 2011). Throughout history, alcohol has been offered to local deities as a form of devotion and used by Bon priests and shamans to connect with supernatural forces.

In contemporary Bhutanese society, alcohol plays a significant role in various celebrations, including weddings, New Year festivities (Losar), family gatherings, and religious ceremonies such as the annual rituals (*lochoe*). Beyond these special occasions, sharing a drink with friends serves as a means of connection, reflecting respect and hospitality. Additionally, many consider its medicinal properties, underscoring its importance in everyday life. This cultural significance has a connection with Bhutan's alcohol production and popularity, which includes both traditional homemade drinks and industrially produced beverages, also contributing to the country's economy. The essay will portray the production, distribution, and consumption of alcohol in Bhutan and analyse local and global perceptions of it. Primary and secondary data were used for this essay. For primary data, interviews were conducted in person, and consent was obtained before recording the audio. The two informants: one youth and one adult were chosen to gather insights into how alcohol consumption patterns, tastes, and views vary between generations in Bhutanese society. The interviews were later transcribed and categorised to obtain meaningful data.

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<sup>1</sup> In Buddhism, *Lha Tsangpa* represents Hindu Lord Vishnu, whereas *Lha Jajin* represents Lord Indra.

Bhutan's alcohol production includes both traditional handmade drinks like *chang*, and industrially produced beverages like beer, Vintria dry wine or Zumzin wine. *Chang*, a Bhutanese traditional alcohol, is made by heating grains such as maize, millet, and buckwheat. After cooling, homemade yeast is added to the cooked grains, which are then allowed to ferment for approximately two weeks, first in an open vessel and then in a sealed container. Unfiltered wines, such as *bangchang* and *singchang*<sup>2</sup>, are created by adding hot or cold water to brewed grains and then straining the liquid with a bamboo strainer. To distill *chang* spirit, the matured mash is heated in a large pot, with a smaller pot inside on a tripod collecting the distillate. A basin of cold water is put over the pot to cool the vapours, which condense and drip into the inner collection jar (Miyamoto, 2020). During the distillation process, the temperature must be carefully controlled by adding cold water and gently spinning the basin. The distilled alcohol is called *ara*.

The Army Welfare Project (AWP), established in 1976 to improve the well-being of Bhutanese army members, has had a considerable impact on the business (Dorji, 2011). As Bhutan's primary alcohol producer, AWP has significantly shaped the alcohol industry, influencing local production practices and contributing to the country's economy. It manufactures a variety of spirits brands, including wine (Vintria dry wine), whisky (K5 whiskey), rum, and brandy (Rockbee Blended Grape Brandy). The AWP has distilleries in Gelephu and Samtse that use natural spring water in the production process. Many alcoholic beverages manufactured in Bhutan, particularly by the AWP and Bhutan Brewery, are sold within the country. These beverages are distributed through various outlets including grocery stores, bars, restaurants, and hotels to meet the local demand. Additionally, some Bhutanese alcoholic beverages are exported to international markets including the Indian markets, with major sales concentrations in Delhi, Karnataka, and Assam. In 2000, the AWP produced approximately 6.2 million litres of alcoholic beverages, with 4.9 million litres sold domestically and 1.6 million litres exported. According to Bhutan Trade Statistics (2023), the earnings from alcohol sales in Bhutanese currency (Nu.) for beverages, spirits, and vinegar amounted to Nu. 1,702,103,862. Beer emerged as the top revenue source, generating Nu. 455,234,625, followed by whiskies, rum, vodka, and wines.

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<sup>2</sup> *Bangchang* and *singchang* are traditional alcoholic beverages manufactured in Bhutan.

The consumption pattern of alcoholic beverages in Bhutan is evolving, with a growing preference for commercial brands like Spy and Breezer alongside traditional homemade drinks such as *ara*, *bang chang*, and *changkyod*. These beverages are served on various occasions, from welcoming guests (*tshogchang*) to religious ceremonies in libation offerings (*ser-kyems*). During celebrations, sharing drinks whether traditional or contemporary, develops feelings of unity, happiness, and friendship. Alcohol acts as a bonding agent, bringing people closer together in social settings. Similarly, in religious ceremonies, alcohol is transformed into a precious gift, acting as a link between the human and spiritual worlds. Its spiritual significance is demonstrated by its use in ceremonial rites performed by Bon priests and shamans.

Furthermore, in the daily lives of Bhutanese people, alcohol serves as a companion that promotes socialisation and provides a sense of relaxation. The prominent role of alcohol here indicates that Bhutanese social, cultural, and ritual aspects are sustained and practiced around alcohol. All in all, the intricate tie between alcohol and Bhutanese people encompasses every aspect from the past and present.

The most popular type of alcoholic drink in Bhutan is homemade *chang* such as *ara*. According to one of the respondents, a young college student, he loves to drink Bhutan Grain Whisky produced by AWP when he has the money, but when the budget is limited, he turns to local alcohol products such as *ara*. He also stated that several youngsters his age prefer imported alcohol over local alcoholic beverages since it has a different flavour and quality, and he believes that his choices may differ from others. Another businesswoman also offered her thoughts on alcohol, describing it as a way to release stress and socialise with friends. She urged balance in drinking, comparing alcohol to medicine in tiny doses and poison in excess. Like the previous respondent, she appreciates both imported and locally produced alcohol, emphasising the importance of responsible drinking and respecting one's boundaries. Both respondents agreed that alcohol is a significant element of Bhutanese culture, with roots dating back to the past when it was frequently consumed during rituals, and that this custom must be preserved. The significance of alcohol in Bhutanese lives tells us that it very much assumes its form as a commodity and the demand it has, as per the data from secondary sources covered in the essay.

According to Bhutan's 2012 National Health Survey, roughly 31% of Bhutanese people currently consume alcohol. Males and widows were at the top of the list regarding alcohol use

(Wangdi & Jamtsho, 2019). Individuals with primary, high school, or university education consume less alcohol (Wangdi & Jamtsho, 2019). Furthermore, certain occupational groupings, such as service and sales workers, have lower rates of alcohol consumption than unskilled workers. The evolution of alcohol use in Bhutan, influenced by Appadurai's (1988) idea of commodification, demonstrates a transition in which traditional drinks, which were historically part of cultural traditions, such as the use of alcohol in religious ceremonies while offering it to god and the people in festivals, are now commercialised to meet global market demands, which is done through export. AWP and Bhutan Brewery play an important part in this shift, combining local beverages with imported items to meet changing consumer tastes. This process reflects the greater impact of cultural globalisation and economic progress, transforming cultural traditions to fit within a global market context showing the impact of the financial landscape. This financial landscape, formed by economic factors such as income and affordability, impacts production, distribution, and consumption patterns.

In the context of Bhutan, Kopytoff's (1986) concept of the cultural biography of objects can be understood by looking at the evolution of traditional alcoholic beverages. These drinks, such as *ara* and *singchang*, are firmly established in Bhutanese culture and are often used in religious rituals, and celebrations representing respect, hospitality, and social gatherings. These traditional drinks have evolved into more commercialised forms to meet market needs, indicating a shift in their social and cultural significance in the era of globalisation. This change exemplifies how cultural beliefs and values influence items, such as traditional beverages, allowing them to adapt to changing societal patterns while remaining culturally relevant to the Bhutanese people. Friedman (1994) suggests that alcohol consumption patterns reflect identity and social belonging, as seen in choices between traditional drinks and commercially produced brands like Spy and Breezer. These choices represent connections to cultural history or goals for modernity, demonstrating how consumption may function as a symbolic representation of personal and social identity within the context of commodified goods.

In conclusion, alcohol in Bhutan represents the combination of tradition and modernity influenced by globalisation, as evidenced by its production, distribution, and consumption. Traditional drinks, alongside commercial brands, represent cultural tradition while adjusting to modern tastes. This development represents the commodification of cultural commodities to fulfil global demand where the beverages are distributed domestically through shops, with

selected brands also making their way into international markets, particularly in neighbouring India. As Bhutanese society develops economically and culturally, alcohol becomes not merely a beverage but also a symbol of identity and social belonging.

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# Wearing *Gho* and *Kira* to College and its Cultural Significance

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## Introduction

Clothing and culture share a profound relationship. Moreover, the two assist in shaping people's identity and help them express a sense of belonging to a cultural group. Beyond language, religion, and other factors relevant to a community in preserving their identity, clothing in the context of Bhutan also preserves and enhances Bhutanese identity. Our research focused on understanding how the practice of wearing *gho* and *kira* among Royal Thimphu College (RTC) students contributes to their sense of Bhutanese identity in the contemporary period. Furthermore, the student's role in preserving or strengthening cultural identity through *gho* and *kira* are our symbols of national identity, they can be considered to bring forth our sense of belonging and heritage. Our research focuses on the importance of wearing *gho* and *kira* to RTC students and how they are relevant in contemporary culture. We also addressed the increasing dominance of Western clothes. Ethnography is the research methodology that our group applied within the RTC campus as we focused on students and lecturers to present context, background, and in-depth understanding (Nelson, 2020). Participant observation and in-depth interviews were used in this research to study the RTC community to assess Bhutan's unique cultural identity, particularly its national dress – the *gho* for men and *kira* for women. Through our research, we presented the cultural significance of wearing *gho* and *kira* on the RTC campus.

## Literature review

This review explores the existing literature on Bhutanese cultural identity, examining the role of *gho* and *kira* and the cultural significance of wearing them within contemporary educational spaces, specifically in a college setting. As institutions where young Bhutanese often encounter diverse global influences, colleges serve as key sites for negotiating tradition and modernity, making them particularly relevant for studying how traditional attire like *gho* and *kira* shapes and reinforces Bhutanese identity today.

Bhutan's national dress, the *gho* for men and *kira* for women, is more than just clothing. They are symbols of the nation's rich cultural heritage and play a central role in shaping its national identity. At the same time, we integrated insights from anthropological discourse on clothes. Hansen (2004), emphasises that clothing influences socialisation, upholds cultural values, and plays a role in shaping individual and collective identity. In presenting these facets tied to clothing, he highlighted the complexity and diversity of dress practices across different cultures and contexts.

Preserving cultural identity in the face of globalisation is important, as Phuntsho (2017, 2020) highlights. He discusses the Bhutanese government's efforts to safeguard its cultural identity by promoting Dzongkha, the national language, and encouraging traditional practices like archery,<sup>3</sup> arts, and wearing *gho* and *kira*. This emphasis on cultural preservation arises from the perceived threat of globalisation and its potential to erode traditional values. Phuntsho (2020) argues that Bhutan faces the "adaptation, alteration, decline, and disappearance of traditional cultures at an unprecedented rate, as evidenced by the decline of traditional crafts, the erosion of indigenous languages, and the loss of ancient rituals. (p. 70) " This seems to be resonating with the effort from the Bhutan government where they promote cultural unity through a "one nation, one people" approach, raising questions about inclusivity and the representation of diverse identities within Bhutan (Phuntsho, 2020). Additionally, Craik and Jansen (n.d.) explored the complexities of fashion and identity in Bhutan, challenging Western perceptions of the country as an untouched paradise that is not influenced by the West. They delved into the interplay among globalisation, nationalism, modernity, and economic aspects. This refers to, how globalisation affects the Bhutanese economy and the emergence of hybrid identities which combine traditional and modern. These hybrid

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<sup>3</sup>Archery became Bhutan's national game when it joined the United Nation in 1971. People in Bhutan played archery before this, but it became more popular after that. Bhutan is known worldwide for its archery game (Phuntsho, 2020).

identities represent a blending of traditional and modern factors, reflecting the adaptation and evolution of cultural practices in response to globalisation.

Dick (2016) discusses the tension between traditional dress and modern trends, particularly the influence of Western and Korean fashion on Bhutanese youth. The introduction of television in 1999 exposed young people to the outside world, leading to a gradual clash between preserving traditional values, such as wearing the *gho* and *kira*, and embracing modern fashion trends like jeans and T-shirts. Filmmakers like Khyentse Norbu urge the youth to balance tradition with modernity (Dick, 2016). Supporting this argument, Naidu (1986) explores Bhutan's search for identity amidst external influences. As a small, landlocked country, Bhutan faces the challenge of maintaining its unique cultural heritage while engaging with larger nations like India and China, including their cultural dominance. Naidu's (1986) writing emphasises the importance of balancing economic development with cultural preservation and navigating complex diplomatic relations while maintaining a distinct Bhutanese identity. This also extends into the increasing impact of exposure to the outside world, particularly cultures, on the younger generation.

Phuntsho (2021) highlights the crucial role of a strong and distinct Bhutanese culture in maintaining the country's sovereignty. He argues that cultural identity acts as a shield against the negative influences from modernisation. However, he argues that the lack of understanding and preservation of Bhutan's cultural heritage is concerning amongst Bhutanese people. The youths at RTC wear *gho* and *kira* due to the college policy in consistent with the policy of Bhutanese office workers, leading to youths overlooking the purpose. The youths overlook the value of wearing *kira* and *gho* due to external influence and fashion trends where students prefer wearing fashionable clothes imitating the outsiders. This connects to Naidu's (1986) points about how external influence on Bhutanese cultural identity should be contextualised. He argued that external influence brings several impacts on the way people practice culture. Thus, creating threat towards the cultural practice of wearing *gho* and *kira* making a strong basis for the protection of cultural identity.

Theys (2017) underscores that Bhutan's national interest is to preserve its sovereignty, hence bringing an 'independent' amongst Bhutanese strengthening ones belongingness. Bhutan's national identity has been strengthened since the 1980s when the fourth king implemented the 'One Nation, One People' policy (Theys, 2017). This policy required adhering to a code

of conduct called *Driglam Namzha*<sup>4</sup>. The code of conduct emphasises strict adherence to vows, including kinship loyalty, respect for elders, and cooperation between rulers and ruled. Thus, the practice of *Driglam Namzha* reinforces the national dress with significance and nationalist fervour through such protocol. Similarly, Robles (2014) outlines guidelines for "wholesome" behavior, *Driglam Namzha*<sup>5</sup> also establishes morals, values, and dress codes. During the *Zhabdrung*<sup>6</sup> rule, the traditional dress code of *gho* for men and *kira* for women was established. It is required in most professional settings, government offices, and educational institutions. Bean (1995) similarly highlights the importance of the royal edict issued in 1990 that required all citizens to wear Bhutanese national dress in public, schools, offices, and official functions. Further, Bean (1995) argues that *gho* and *kira* are not only traditional attire but a visual emblem that represents Bhutanese identity both to Bhutanese citizens and to the global community. All these sources strongly support the role of sovereignty, nationalism, and culture in shaping *gho* and *kira*, and how they still stand in the time of globalisation and social media.

Koopman (2022) emphasises that the *gho* and *kira* are important to the students' sense of belonging to a Bhutanese identity and that external influences such as global influence act as a threat to the Bhutanese identity. Furthermore, the Bhutanese attire is seen as a protective mechanism and plays a significant role in preserving Bhutanese traditions, preventing cultural depletion, and reinforcing a sense of national pride and recognition. All these accounts invite one's attention to look into the younger generation in the contemporary period to see the significance of traditional clothes among them. Taking notes on the discourse on clothes and culture and their response to contemporary times, we want to conduct research on *gho* and *kira*. By conducting this research, we want to present the study's findings regarding RTC student's and teachers' perceptions towards wearing the national dress to college. Moreover, there is scant literature about this topic in Bhutan. Furthermore, through the research we would like to examine and understand the significance of wearing a *gho* or *kira* to college.

Drawing on existing literature on clothes and culture, it demonstrates how garments reflect and influence societal values. However, this conversation has been largely overlooked in the context of Bhutan. Due to this research gap about how younger generations view traditional

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<sup>4</sup>*Driglam Namzha* is Bhutan's code of manners. "*Drig*" means order and following rules, so "*driglam*" means they way to keep order. "*Namzha*" means a system or concept (Karma Phuntsho, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Bhutan's code of etiquette

<sup>6</sup>It was introduced in the 17th century by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel to give Bhutan a unique identity (Phuntsho, 2020).

dresses, like *gho* and *kira*, our research directly addresses this gap by investigating the relevance of *gho* and *kira* among RTC students in Bhutan. Moreover, Penjore (2013) urges Bhutanese to write about the cultures of Bhutan as there is scant research work written by Bhutanese on anthropological topics. Our research work is also an attempt to contribute to scholarship on Bhutanese anthropology.

After conducting a literature review, it has become apparent that Bhutan, a country renowned for its unique cultural heritage, could be a case to explore the relationship between dress and culture in a contemporary setting. Clothes are often influenced by the prevailing cultural norms and values of a society, and the response to changes the society experiences. Our literature shows that Bhutanese society is exposed to globalisation and outside bringing in several changes to Bhutan. Focusing on this topic could provide insights into how Bhutanese culture is expressed and preserved through traditional clothing.

Moreover, drawing from recent developments among the younger generation being exposed to the outside world to a greater degree and the popularity of cultures from outside into Bhutan's context, there is a need to examine whether the relevance of *gho* and *kira* is still intact. In this context, we aim to conduct research among RTC students to see the relevance of *gho* and *kira* and what they mean to them, as the youth at RTC are comparatively modern and cosmopolitan.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To understand students' perceptions and attitudes towards wearing *gho* and *kira* in a college setting. This includes exploring their views on the cultural significance, practicality, and personal identity associated with the national dress.
2. To analyse how exposure to external cultures and fashion trends impacts RTC students' appreciation and adherence to traditional attire
3. To explore issues of comfort, convenience, self-expression, and peer pressure.
4. To identify and analyse the challenges and tensions associated with wearing *gho* and *kira* in a modern college setting, including issues of practicality, inclusivity, and the impact of evolving fashion trends on their continued relevance.

## Methodology

The research study employed a qualitative research method and focused on understanding the experiences, ideas, and opinions of those who wear *gho* and *kira* at RTC. We chose to focus on RTC as we conducted the research during regular class hours, and it was difficult due to the time constraint. We were not able to account for respondents from outside RTC or other students.

Through the methods, we studied the significance of traditional attire in an educational institution like RTC, which can provide insights into how younger generations perceive and engage with cultural practices in a modern context. We deployed ethnography as our approach and aimed to provide a deep understanding of the reality by asking participants their perceptions and understanding of the use and significance of the *gho* and *kira*. The researchers spent extensive time in the field, interacting with people, conducting interviews, and observing the use and significance of the *gho* and *kira* in the college. The researchers' understanding of the Bhutanese culture, history, language and connection aided in building rapport and gaining access to prospective respondents.

The research explored the intersections of tradition, identity, and modernity in the context of the *gho* and *kira*, focusing on aspects such as influence in culture. This focus allows for furthering the understanding of the role of the *gho* and *kira* in Bhutanese society, beyond our focus in RTC. To gain a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of the *gho* and *kira*, the research includes interviews with knowledgeable persons such as the *Dzongkha* tutors of the college.

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with individuals who wore *gho* and *kira*, especially students, exploring their personal experiences, motivations, and attitudes toward the traditional dress. This was done by using the questions seen in Appendix A as an interview guide. The analysis and inference drawn from the data collected were aligned with the objectives of the study. The outcome of the study was a description of a part of Bhutanese culture, providing meaningful insights into the experiences, feelings, and perceptions of people who wear *gho* and *kira*. This analysis sheds light on how these garments are viewed and integrated into contemporary Bhutanese settings, particularly among RTC students.

## Research Ethics

We conducted our research in strict adherence to research ethics. In alignment with the tradition of anthropological research, we maintained a cultural relativistic perspective by focusing on the emic perspective. We obtained informed consent and permission from our interviews and observations. Wherever respondents sought confidentiality, we strictly respected their choice and maintained it during fieldwork, the writing process, and the final report. Furthermore, we aimed to maintain empathy, safety, dignity, and privacy while building rapport, keeping close to our research objectives as much as possible with a comparative analytical stance and avoiding ethnocentrism. Additionally, we clearly stated the purpose and content to the interviewees before proceeding with the interviews so that our respondents would be informed about the agenda of our research, including the use of pseudonyms to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of our respondents. We did not share any deep personal information through the use of pseudonyms, prioritising the well-being and autonomy of the respondents since sharing such information could risk the safety of our respondents in the research.

## Analysis and Discussion

We used thematic and content analysis for our study. The thematic analysis helped in identifying and analysing key themes such as cultural identity, practicality, individuality, and external influences. As stated in class lectures (Kamei, 2024), thematic analysis involves examining qualitative data to identify patterns and derive themes. By coding data, we uncovered themes within the individuals' personal experiences regarding wearing the national dress on campus. Content analysis has been used to systematically coding and analysing qualitative and quantitative data (Kamei, 2024). In addition, the systematic coding and deciphering of the contents of the texts, such as the interview transcripts, assisted in categorising the concepts or themes. With the combination of thematic and content analysis, we were able to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspective of our interviewees about wearing *gho* and *kira* on campus. For this research, we conducted six semi-structured interviews; the interviewees consisted of two tutors and four students.

For analysis, we focused on the five factors by coding the six transcriptions to identify the themes for analysis and discussion. Thus, based on this analysis, we identified the following five themes.

## The origins of *kira* and *gho* as national attire

The data highlights the deep cultural significance and historical roots of wearing Bhutan's traditional *gho* and *kira* attire. Our interview participants acknowledged that the practice dates to the 17th century and was introduced by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, establishing it as a core part of Bhutanese cultural identity (Phuntsho, 2020).

They recognised the symbolic meanings and connotations associated with wearing the attire correctly, representing respect for cultural norms and values passed down through generations.

## Formulation and maintenance of identity

This theme delves into the significance of *gho* and *kira* as emblems of Bhutanese cultural heritage and the sense of pride, belonging, and connection to one's roots that wearing traditional attire fosters, particularly among the college community. Participants expressed a sense of pride, belonging, and cultural connection when donning the traditional attire, particularly in a college setting. They viewed it as more than just clothing, but rather a symbol of their cultural heritage and a visible representation of their identity as Bhutanese people. As Thinley (21 years old, RTC student) stated:

To me, wearing *gho* and *kira* in college is a reflection of my cultural identity. It is not just about putting on clothes; it's about embracing centuries-old traditions that define who we are as Bhutanese. When I wear *gho and kira*, I feel connected to my roots, and it gives a sense of pride and belonging.

It is a deliberate cultural expression that grounds individuals within their history and social context. By wearing these clothes, people actively feel a sense of pride and belonging. This practice reinforces cultural identity and fosters a connection to their roots. This practice not only reinforces their sense of identity but also contributes to the broader cultural landscape. It's a tangible way to connect with the past, present, and future, ensuring that Bhutan's rich traditions continue to thrive in the face of globalisation.

## Preservation and Promotion

This theme focuses on the responsibilities and strategies of educational institutions, such as colleges, in fostering cultural awareness, appreciation, and preservation among students through the promotion of traditional attire and related cultural practices or wearing *gho* and *kira*. Closely tied to the concepts of cultural knowledge and identity attached to *gho* and *kira* is the idea of preserving and promoting Bhutanese culture through the practice of wearing *gho* and *kira*. Participants recognised the role of traditional attire in safeguarding cultural traditions, especially among younger generations in the modern college setting. They expressed a desire to keep the culture alive and showcase their pride in Bhutanese heritage to both domestic and international audiences. According to Karma Choden<sup>7</sup>, "The practice of wearing *gho* and *kira* within the community like the college community can help students to stay rooted in Bhutanese culture and identity despite the modern college setting." She further emphasised that, "Wearing traditional *gho* and *kira* at college can contribute to the preservation and promotion of Bhutanese culture and identity by keeping the cultural strong among the younger generations."

This suggests that wearing *gho* and *kira* allows students to stay connected to their Bhutanese heritage in the modern-day setting. This practice serves as a reminder and anchor for their cultural identity. By incorporating *gho* and *kira* into the college setting, students help keep these traditions alive and ensure that they are passed down to future generations. This keeps them from fading away in the face of modernisation.

## External Influence

This theme explores how students navigate the tension between preserving their cultural identity through traditional attire and the influences of globalisation, modernisation, and changing fashion trends. It examines how external factors shape their perceptions and attitudes towards wearing *gho* and *kira* in college. Additionally, it investigates the balance between upholding cultural traditions and practices associated with wearing traditional attire and the desire for individual expression, comfort, and convenience among college students. In doing so, it examines how students negotiate these potentially competing factors. This theme further explores the potential generational differences in attitudes towards traditional attire

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<sup>7</sup>Karma Choden (Respondent)

and the influence of peer pressure and social norms within the college community on students' perceptions and decisions regarding wearing *gho* and *kira*.

The data from our interviews indicated the impact of external influences, such as modernisation, globalisation, and Western fashion trends, on the way *gho* and *kira* are worn and perceived. Participants noted changes in the structure, styles, and materials used in traditional attire, as well as the emergence of fashion competitions that blend traditional elements with modern interpretations. Some participants expressed concern about the potential dilution of cultural essence due to these external influences. Sangay Phuntsho<sup>8</sup> stated that:

“The structure of how people wear has changed tremendously. Long ago people used to wear *tego* and *wonju* but now college students do not wear them anymore due to the absence of a national flag in college there is a lack of respect for the dress and secondly we can see many fashion competitions and in a way, they are trying to promote our national culture but due to modernisation the way they wear *gho* and *kira* changes in the fashion competition.”

Through the respondent's interview, it was noted that the absence of students with national pride indicates a lack of the need to wear *gho* and *kira*. This shows that students do not feel it is obligatory to wear traditional Bhutanese attire in college. Additionally, external influences have impacted fashion trends, particularly in fashion competitions, where a blend of Bhutanese and international styles is evident. This aligns with Dick's (2016) statement regarding the influence of Western and Korean fashion, which has manifested in the incorporation of modern elements, such as vibrant colours and contemporary fabrics, into traditional Bhutanese attire.

## Practicality and Comfort

While cultural significance and identity were prominent themes, the data also highlighted on practical aspects and comfort levels associated with wearing *gho* and *kira* in the college setting. Some participants found the attire comfortable and connected to their roots. However, others noted instances where students appeared uncomfortable or adopted more casual attire, such

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<sup>8</sup>Sangay Phuntsho (Respondent)

as wearing hoodies or slippers, indicating a desire for greater flexibility and practicality. According to Karma Choden<sup>9</sup>:

Maybe as I was groomed in a community where we all wear *gho* and *kira*, I think that most of the time I rather wear *gho* and *kira* than wear, like, casuals, so for me it is very comfortable and I think that we should wear more of *gho* and *kira*, like whenever we can.

The respondent emphasises the importance of wearing *gho* and *kira*, which comes from the practice rooted in the cultural and habitual environment. A sense of affiliation to the community provides comfort that invokes the respondent's cultural identity, evoking feelings of belonging and pride. Furthermore, the respondents derive a sense of comfort with the cultural practice.

## Conclusion

Our research at Royal Thimphu College (RTC) looks at why wearing traditional Bhutanese clothes, *gho*, and *kira*, is important in upholding the national identity. Our findings inform different attitudes towards traditional attire and the influence of social norms within the college community. We conducted interviews with students and teachers to understand their experiences and views. We focused on staying ethical by getting consent and keeping personal information private. Different methods were used to find key themes like cultural knowledge, identity, and preservation, showing how these clothes help maintain Bhutanese heritage and identity.

However, our familiarity with Bhutanese culture might have caused some bias, due to our own identity as a Bhutanese that could have affected our data. Our study only covers a specific time and does not account for changing attitudes over time. By focusing only on RTC, we missed out on perspectives from other colleges and those who do not wear traditional attire. Future research should incorporate more schools and colleges across Bhutan for diverse views, do long-term studies to see changes over time, and explore why some people choose not to wear *gho* and *kira*. Lastly, examining into how government policies and education influence the preservation of traditional dress among youth could provide deeper insights.

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<sup>9</sup>Karma Choden (Respondent)

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# Us and Superstitions



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"Chhimi, I told you not to cut your hair at night!"

My mother exclaimed while I had a scissor halfway through my hair. I remember stealing glances at her through the mirror and could see the disapproving glares she shot my way. The next thing I recall is a half-done hair, to be finished the next day.

I was born and raised in Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan, a place that has embraced modern development over the years. Despite the changes, one aspect remains deeply rooted in our superstitions. They are not seen as mere irrational beliefs but as cultural treasures. From the moment of my birth, I was destined to be named Chhimi Wangmo, after the great saint of fertility, Drukpa Kuenley. Deviating from this name was believed to bring ill omens upon me and my parents.

Growing up, our visits to *Lhakhangs* and Chortens became more than just religious rituals, they symbolised our connection to our heritage and traditions. Whenever significant events occurred, such as exams, long journeys, or starting a new business, it was customary to seek the blessings of these sacred places. The prayer flags, inscribed prayer scripts on stones, and the paintings of phalluses on the walls were not merely symbols; they were sources of protection and blessings that our ancestors had bestowed upon us.

These superstitious beliefs were not limited to the physical objects we encountered but also to the stories and folklore that shaped our behaviour. For instance, we were told that farting in the presence of a Lama (Great Saint) was considered a sin. Such tales, though seemingly odd, moulded our actions and fostered a sense of respect and reverence.

Just the other day, as I sat in Dechenphu *Lhakhang*, I observed groups of people gathered around, engaged in animated conversations. It struck me how deeply intertwined superstitions were in our daily lives. The prayer beads clutched tightly by the elder ones, their rhythmic flicking of the beads, the protective bracelets and necklaces adorning the children, and the religious pictures cherished in purses—all these rituals showcased our unwavering faith. They provided us with solace, a sense of belonging, and a shared identity.

In our society, superstitions serve as a binding force, connecting us to our roots and strengthening our sense of unity. They offer a framework for navigating the uncertainties of life and provide a source of comfort and hope. The belief in amulets, such as the black string I wear, not only serves as a shield against malevolent spirits but also instills in us a sense of confidence and courage.

While outsiders may dismiss our superstitions as mere irrationality, they fail to grasp the deeper meanings embedded within them. Our superstitions are an integral part of our culture, passed down through generations, and they bring us closer to our ancestors and their wisdom. Superstitions have permeated every thread of my existence, becoming a part of who I am. These ideas mold our identities and offer us a sense of security and connectedness, from the names we are given to the rituals we engage in. They demonstrate the influence of tradition and the need for purpose and security in human beings rather than being mere quirks.

So, the next time someone scoffs at our superstitious practices, I proudly wear my black string, knowing that it represents not just a belief, but a tapestry of traditions, customs, and a collective faith that binds us together as a resilient and proud community.

# ***Deep Hanging out in the Eastern Himalayas: Imagination & ‘Not-Knowing’ in Bhutan***



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## **Theory-overload**

Shiva, the destroyer, enters Earth in human appearance. The air is filled with soap bubbles and the heavy scent of *sang* (smoke-offerings). “Are you doing your homework?” The little girls are giggling. While I think about my answer and Shiva continues his mission of revenge, ripping bodies apart and spearing people with all kinds of pointy objects, I hear myself saying, “Yes, something like homework, I would say.”

The reason for me sitting in a well-decorated Bhutanese living room, surrounded by my hosts’ cousin sisters, scribbling, taking pictures, and asking questions, is my anthropological research on a specific domestic ritual called *lho choe* (Annual Offering) in Thimphu, West Bhutan.

A friend of mine invited me to her family’s *lho choe* after I told her what my research topic was about. “Please come to my family’s annual ritual. You can ask questions and there will be good food,” she said smiling, “It will be nice...the more the merrier.”

Initially, I didn’t plan to research on rituals in the Bhutanese Buddhist context. Based on my impressions and experiences of my first stay in Bhutan in spring 2020, I wanted to know *how young people in Bhutan perceive modernity and how the term is used in everyday conversation*. In preparation for my project, and for the sake of securing a scholarship, I had to write a research proposal, for which I explored the existing body of literature and theoretical approaches based around

the question of modernity. By doing so, I put on, understanding this in retrospect, a specific set of lenses, which, for a while, I forgot I was wearing.

Several months later, being finally back in Bhutan, I found myself looking for phenomena either validating or disapproving things I came across during my appropriation of theoretical knowledge. While writing my fieldwork diary, I used big terms and fancy words, acting as if I were a specialist on that topic, drawing on knowledge and information I gathered myself during my years of fieldwork.

Obviously, that was not the case, and I was merely copying what I had read before, which is, I guess, part of the educational structure, but it was not satisfying for me in any way back then.

### **Starting by ‘Not-Knowing’**

Realising that “*I actually don’t know anything*”, and more importantly so, that it is totally fine, was a great relief, and this marked the starting point for creating space and time for myself, which eventually led me to my new research question.

From there on, I embarked on a beautiful and exciting *journey of exploration and friendship*. I then mostly spent my time *hanging out* with my local friends. Sitting in small rooms, smoking cheap Indian cigarettes, drinking sweet tea, and eating crackers and cheese balls. I just wanted to be there. Seeing, feeling, smelling, and listening. It felt like breaking the barrier of being an outsider who urges the need to be entertained and becoming part of what is just there. Leaving the observing position of supposed objectivity for the sake of forgetting myself and getting a deeper understanding of what surrounded me, became way more important for me than any research question.

It was one of those nights, sitting on the floor, with a stomach full of rice, heavy eyelids, and a cup of tea in front of me, *hanging out real deep* as one could say, when one of my good friends told me about the *choe sham* (altar room) and its importance for Bhutanese Buddhist families and households.

My general fascination for the esthetics of *Vajrayana* Buddhism i.e., the visualisation of concepts like *deities* and *yidams* (personal meditation deities), including the religious practices,

and the rare opportunity of being able to spend a relatively long time in a *Vajrayana Buddhist Kingdom*, led me to the decision of taking up the *choe sham* as my topic of inquiry.

## Research on the *Lho Choe*

After a while, I figured that for conducting domestic rituals, having the appropriate surroundings, including the ritual instruments, for the much-needed religious specialists, is very important. I also figured that the domestic rituals are, in the context of Bhutanese Buddhist cosmology, an inalienable event for a lot of people. In the following 13 Months, I attended eight different *lho choe* rituals and several more *rimdros* in the Thimphu and Paro district, which was all possible due to my friends' invitations.

Besides learning a lot about the Bhutanese Buddhist ritual universe, the cosmology in which it is embedded, its inhabitants, specialists, the contextuality, limitations and rules, I learned a lot about what it means to do anthropological research.

I ended up writing my thesis on 'How the *lho choe* creates a sense of "safety-ness" on different levels'. One level being the religious technical aspect of the ritual, the appeasing of local deities, which is performed by the religious specialists in the *choe sham*. I described this as being '*protected from*', which I distinguished from being '*protection in*'. The latter is created within the well-known structure of the family, by coming together in annual circles, performing similar actions over and over again and experiencing similar phenomena in a familiar surrounding.

I would be glad to share a few of my takeaways, which I would be delighted to explain in greater detail, but due to the limitations of this paper, I will only be able to note them in a bullet point manner and let you, whoever reads this, relate it to, or create, your own contextual embedment, which is more valuable in any case.

## Sharing Experience

Based on my experiences I feel like one cannot and should *not force* anything in anthropological research. One can merely be ready, trying to get oneself in a specific situation that could possibly lead to the production of knowledge and then seizing it as much as possible.

Stay away from using the term *Interview*, it can create unnecessary tension, and understand the value of everyday conversation.

Prioritise *experience* over theory for the sake of coming across things, and eventually understanding them, which you did not know even existed before. It is impossible to understand everything, and *research never comes to an end*. It can just be stopped at a specific point, from which it can be, of course, be picked up again. Be aware of your responsibility regarding *representation*, may it be in written form, pictures, or film.

*Do not be afraid* of making mistakes or a fool out of yourself. It is an inevitable part of trying to understand a different world in which you must learn new things every day.

Make it your responsibility to recognise opportunities for *reciprocity*. From my experience, reciprocity needs not to be directed all the time but can also happen indirectly (if you get a lot of support from person xy and you cannot help xy at the time, but you can help or support a friend or family member of xy. In that way you can indirectly support your friend xy.)

Although being described as not easy and often problematic, I feel like one has merely opened the eyes because a helping hand is needed everywhere, all the time.

Which leads to my final point. *Time*. Obviously, nothing happens without it, but I feel one must appreciate it and work with it on a more conscious level. Therefore, one can, if the reasoning behind it is valid, change the initial research question and use one's time in the best possible way. It is important to point out though, that one should not be changing the topic for the sake of comfort.

Research can be quite *challenging* in many ways, but it is worth being resilient and not shying away from difficult circumstances, may it be for personal growth or the production of knowledge.

My most important takeaway, though, on a personal level, is all the beautiful friendships which made me richer in life and are the root cause of every single note I took, every picture I framed, every video I shot, and every memo I recorded. Without my friends (due to the intimate and strong connection we were able to establish, I refer to some of them as brothers and sisters now), my experience would have been that of a tourist. And as we know, there are not many accounts of tourists producing interesting knowledge, based on valid ethnographic

research. So therefore, a *huge thank you* to them for the opportunity of bonding, which leads to the byproduct of doing ethnographic research in one of the most beautiful places on earth.

## **Conclusion**

In the thesis, which emerged from my time in Bhutan, I stated that ‘I think my research was very successful’. I got scolded for this statement and my supervisor told me that it is embarrassing to praise oneself. “You should leave this to the people who are reading and evaluating your work”, he said. Honestly speaking, it was not much about self-praise, but rather was I surprised and amazed how well everything worked out. I guess I framed it predetermined for misunderstanding. What I meant was that my time in Bhutan was more exiting and fruitful than I could have ever *imagined*. Besides of me being lucky, at the right place at the right time, I feel like this is also due to the limitations of our imagination.

‘Limitations’ in this case refers not to the dimension of imagination but to its accuracy. We can think about a future event all day long just to get our assumed future reality shattered in seconds by an unpredictable incident.

Before I started shooting an ethnographic short film about a mask dance i.e., *dole cham* in the Paro Area, I had a talk with my supervisor (Prof. Dr. Frank Heidemann). Besides telling me that I should let my interlocutors talk about what is important for them and not what I feel like is important, he told me about the ‘Co-Creation of the Ethnographic Object’. He told me that there is nothing out there, just being there by itself, that one can simply research on. He argued that by the mere act of researching something, one has an impact on it and, therefore, co-creates the object of research. He asked me to think about a method of how I could trace this co-creation during the process. So, I decided, that during the day and before certain events, we as a crew (consisting of two of my Bhutanese brothers, one being an RTC Anthropology graduate, the other one a religious specialist, and me) would gather and talk about how we imagine what would soon to happen.

We were wrong almost all the time and we had a lot to laugh about, on how wrong we actually were. Like I said, one studied anthropology, grew up in Bhutan and attended countless *rindros* and *chams*, while the other is a specialist on Buddhist religion in the Bhutanese context. Of course, I am a *chilip* (foreigner), nevertheless, I had visited the same

ritual one year prior, stayed for overall 2 years in Bhutan and researched extensively for 13 months on Bhutanese Buddhist rituals. Still, we were wrong almost all the time.

Besides the importance of friendship and intimacy as a key element of being able to understand, besides the fact that there is no reason to be afraid of making a fool of yourself, that one should put experience first, that reciprocity can be indirect, that time is valuable, that one cannot force anything, that representation is a huge responsibility, and that research can never come to an end, I came to the understanding of how misleading our imagination can be and that this is a huge factor in the process of planning, practising and writing anthropological research, which should be seriously considered. My imagination about my research topic and the context it was embedded in, was misleading to such a degree that I even had to change it. Realising afterwards that I just do not know felt at the time like a big relief and was a great starting point for the time to come.

Obviously, it is inevitable for us to imagine, and we will not stop doing so until we leave this life behind for good. What I propose, though, is that it might be very helpful trying to understand what our imaginations are based on and how, besides the co-creation of ethnographic objects, our imagination is constructed. I feel like taking it not so seriously can help as well, which, of course, is much easier to say than to do.

# ***Siestas*, Hand-made Pasta, and a Whole Lot of Museums: The Experiences of an Anthropology Student Abroad**



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From *siestas*<sup>10</sup> in Spain to hand-made pasta in Italy, during my one-year study abroad, I realised that the grand monuments of Europe were not what captivated people but, rather, the subtle aspects of the mundane. Through the Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan, I was allowed to take part in the Erasmus+<sup>11</sup> mobility program from October 2022 to July 2023. While life abroad was not without its challenges, the experience was rewarding in terms of personal growth and exposure, something that just sitting in a classroom would not have taught me. I spent one semester at the University of Oviedo in Spain and another at the University of Tuscia in Italy. While most of the participants were offered one country to study in, I was one of the fortunate given the chance to study in two countries. With laid-back evenings in Spain and a strong sense of community in Italy, I came to understand that each country had its own way of experiencing life shaped by social norms and deep-rooted connections to community. Through my study abroad experience and as an anthropology student, I have come to further realise how cultural identity is greatly shaped by the mundane practices of society and individuals, demonstrating how the boring or normal everyday life is also an essence of culture.

Hauser (2009, p.3) states that cultural identities “are attached to local contexts, such as values, symbols, and language, and specified historically” However, like Hauser, many others also overlook the aspects of everyday life that create cultural identities. As an individual who

<sup>10</sup> A custom of mid-day rest. An old tradition in Spain that is still practised in the country as well as in other countries through Spanish influence.

<sup>11</sup> Erasmus+ Study Mobility is an EU program that allows higher education students to study abroad at partner institutions in Europe for 3 to 12 months, with financial support and recognition of academic credits.

takes afternoon naps very seriously, *siestas* in Spain were, in actuality, quite cumbersome to someone who comes from a culture where 9 to 5 working hours are considered the bare minimum of being employed. With the two other Bhutanese students who also studied in Oviedo- Pema, and Tenzin- we found it difficult to get used to the concept of *siestas* because the most free time we had from official work was in the afternoon, which unfortunately turned out to be useless because all offices would close for *siesta* during these hours. Eventually, we adapted by adjusting our schedule and came to enjoy this custom of taking a break from the hustle and bustle of one's daily life.

One of the challenges I faced in Italy was different from Spain in terms of how closely knit the community in Italy was. While the Spanish were also very closely knit as a community they were also very open and friendly towards "outsiders"<sup>12</sup>. Although the Italians were not outwardly rude to foreigners, they were more of a community who would rather stick with their people. As a Bhutanese who is taught to treat guests as gods, this may come off as being impertinent, however, this was not the case. As an anthropology student I have learned that such behaviour is never something to take personally, rather, it is something that showcases how Italians feel a deep sense of connection to their own people just like any other society. Whether it was a father walking his kids at the park or a group of senior citizens enjoying dinner together, the Italians showed a deep sense of connection to their people.

During my study abroad, I was fortunate to visit other countries during Christmas and New Year's break. I visited Geneva, Switzerland during Christmas with my friend Pema and was kindly hosted by her cousins who lived there. My two-week holiday in Switzerland was the most memorable part of my study abroad with its culture and society also being the most different out of the other European countries I had visited. First, they have one of the most efficient public transportation system I have ever experienced. Second, it was the most multicultural society among all the other European countries I had visited, with refugees from different parts of the world. Matyja (2018, p.18) states that "multicultural Switzerland has been ethnically diverse from the beginnings of its statehood." This was very noticeable, especially in the city where a large part of the refugees I noticed consisted of Tibetans, some of whom were immigrants and some who were born and raised there. Others included immigrants from Mongolia, Taiwan, Italy, France, and Germany, all of whom were living and working in Switzerland. Due to such multiculturalism, it was also noticeable how most

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<sup>12</sup> Here, the word outsider refers more specifically to foreigners.

people there were polyglots. Susen (2024, p.33) states that “one of the most striking features of cultural (including inter- and cross-cultural) dynamics is the relationship between familiarity and unfamiliarity—.” Similarly, this multilingualism was mostly noticeable to me because the majority of the Bhutanese population is also multilingual. The only difference is that most Bhutanese are multilingual because of Bhutan’s regional dialects and the Swiss are multilingual because of refugees and immigrants.

I also visited Paris in France, and Rome (which I visited before my study abroad in Italy)<sup>13</sup>. The majority of the trip included “museum hopping” which personally induced a deep love for museums in me. We visited the Louvre, the Museum of Art and History, and the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. These museums told stories of historical artefacts and paintings that daily life alone couldn’t reveal. They presented a curated and organised version of history and culture while the everyday experiences of life in the countries I visited were, in contrast, more fluid and lived. Visiting these museums created an understanding of how museums showcase the preservation of chosen stories<sup>14</sup> while daily life shows how these stories are lived in real-time.

Reflecting on my year abroad, the revelation of cultural identities as being manifested in different aspects of life was brought to light. Through cultural customs like siestas, social kinship, cuisines, museums, and languages, cultural identities were manifested, negotiated, and lived. It is undeniable that my time spent abroad deepened my academic knowledge, but it also provided me with a more personal understanding of how cultural identity is formed and experienced not only in the grand things of life but also in the mundane. Such an experience is something I will always look back at as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and has left a lasting imprint on my view of what it means to truly engage with a culture.

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<sup>13</sup> Some of the other museums I visited include The Museum of Art and History in Geneva, Switzerland, The Sistine Chapel and St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican City, and the Palatine Hills and Roman Forum in Rome, Italy.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Chosen stories’ here refers to the political nature of museums and how people in authority can bring which stories to light and which to keep hidden.

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# Exchange Program Experience in Europe



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In 2022, I received the Erasmus+ exchange program opportunity to study in Europe for two semesters. I was enrolled at Palacky University in Olomouc, a serene and small city in the Czech Republic. It was just a three-hour train ride from the bustling streets of Prague. From September 9, 2022, to June 30, 2023, I called Olomouc home. To be honest, before this, I had little knowledge about European countries; I had only studied and heard about them. But, living there was a different thrill. It felt both challenging and rewarding to step into a foreign land and leave my comfort zone. This experience tested my adaptability and broadened my understanding of the world beyond Bhutan. This connects with the anthropological idea of stepping outside one's own cultural lens to truly appreciate and understand another culture from within.

Being a student at Palacky University offered a unique learning experience compared to what I was used to at Royal Thimphu College (RTC). At RTC, we followed a more structured and rigorous schedule, with classes running from 9 AM to 3 PM, five days a week. The long hours often left us sapped of energy and struggling to stay alert in class. In contrast, at Palacky, we had the flexibility to choose courses that matched our interests. I was even able to take psychology courses outside my main field of study. This was an exciting opportunity to learn outside my discipline. The classes were usually lighter because they focused more on class activities and student-led discussions. There was much free time to write and read assigned works. Reflecting on this, the exchange program helped me gain a broader perspective on different educational systems. It allowed me to see the value in less rigid structures where students have more agency in their studies.

In terms of cross-cultural interactions, the Erasmus coordinator at Palacky University organized many events that nurtured meaningful exchanges between students from different countries. One of the most significant events was the weekly cultural presentation. A group of students from one nation had the opportunity to introduce their country. These events were particularly engaging, attracting those eager to learn about different cultures. A highlight of these events was tasting different national cuisines. When it was our turn to present Bhutan, we prepared traditional dishes like *ema datshi*, *kewa datshi*, *kabzay*, and *shakam datshi*. We also presented Bhutanese traditional dances, which sparked curiosity and interest among the attendees. Similarly, I attended presentations from various countries. Every time, I learned something new from each country, such as their customs, history, or food. As an anthropology student, these interactions were especially fulfilling as they offered firsthand experiences of cultural exchange. Moreover, the dormitory kitchen became a hub for cultural exchange. Cooking our own meals provided an informal yet rich setting for conversations about our interests, backgrounds, and culinary traditions. Through these daily interactions, I learned about African, Italian, and Chinese cuisine while forming bonds with friends from across the globe.

Occasionally, we would plan group dinners, rotating between Bhutanese dishes and meals from their own cultures. However, these exchanges also brought moments of culture shock. Interestingly, one of the most talked-about aspects of our culture was the amount of chilli we consume. I recall one instance when I was cooking a red chilli dish, and a Spanish student was visibly shocked by the amount of chilli I was using. Her reaction, mouth agape, was a clear example of the cultural differences in food preferences and tolerances. Nonetheless, these moments were some of the most valuable ones as they allowed us to connect deeply through food, a core element of culture.

# “Chimi in Spain”: Exploring Identity, Culture, and Community During a Study Abroad



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On 30th September 2022, I can vividly recall my memories of how I eagerly and anxiously packed my bags and backed my adventurous journey, moving beyond seeing the majestic mountains of Bhutan to the lively Spanish streets of Andalusia. As a Royal Thimphu College anthropology student, I had the opportunity to participate in the Erasmus+ exchange program. I have spent one semester at the University of Huelva and one semester at the University of Cadiz, bisecting my time between two cities. It was my first time living independently beyond Bhutan but not my first living away from home. Living in Spain, and immersing myself in a different culture, helped me a lot as an anthropology student and made me grow beyond the classroom. Surprisingly, despite being advised at home about experiencing cultural shock, I experienced no issue even though there was a language barrier but technology solved the issue. In fact, what struck me was how anthropology had equipped me to see the world in a way that dissolved these issues. This exhibited the beauty and power of anthropology that had been instilled in me.

Huelva is located between the rivers of Tinto and Odiel. This city was more of a traditional Spanish city however it has been influenced by globalisation. Taking walks around the Muelle de Riotinto captured my attention while watching fishermen and I could not help but see their lives through anthropological perspectives. It reflected on concepts of localisation. Despite the touch of global influences, the practice of fishing, which is a traditional practice in

Spain, is still navigating its way, where the local traditions meet with the Global forces<sup>15</sup>. It is possible that the fishermen's methods still adhere to community traditions, values, and lifestyles, providing a glimpse of understanding how local livelihoods interact with globalisation.

Meanwhile, Cadiz provided a distinct kind of experience. This made me feel as if I was wandering through a living museum as I passed through this city. This city had a blend of Moorish architecture, Spanish vibrancy, Roman ruins and the ocean surrounded from all directions. One of my Spanish classmates from Huelva told me that people in Cadiz are known to be funny, someone who loves to laugh and make others laugh. This was, in fact true when we made contact with the people of Cadiz.

An example of this can be of the Cadiz Carnival which I witnessed on the 19th February 2023 caught my attention and learned that the carnival is renowned for its humour. Manjavacas and Tom (2016, p.139) state that the “carnival transmits social satires and ingenious political transgression based on socio-cultural references that are very much anchored in local memory and identity... performers and carnival-goers partake in a singular ritual that contests social order, ridicules what is ‘politically correct,’ and resists homogenising cultural trends by affirming their identity”. They incorporate satire and comedy to deal with social and political matters. People embrace the freedom of expression. The entire street is transformed into a stage. It demonstrates that it can be both amusement and group contemplation, proving that sometimes sharing a good laugh is the greatest way to deal with life’s difficult problems. The Cadiz Carnival is a demonstration of local identity, and how the community exhibits its identity. The humour of the city's residents is well-known and embraces it. Such festivals offer a chance to consider what it means to be a member of the community. Through common experiences, customs, and a public demonstration of values like humour and persistence, the group performances strengthen cultural identity. Through anthropology it made me understand that I was able to make connections between what I was seeing and experiencing and theories I had learned in class, such as Victor Turner's idea of *communitas*, which is the idea that individuals come together in a sense of equality while they are transitioning.

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<sup>15</sup> Here, I am referring to how Fishing, although it is a traditional practice, is diminishing because of the impact of the creation of other jobs. This has made the Spanish, who were solely dependent on fishing traditionally, shift to opting for other jobs that offer higher pay and lesser effort.

My time in Spain, opened an opportunity to look and experience anthropology beyond my classroom. This opportunity made me grow and learn to appreciate anthropology as more than a discipline, it is a way of being a part of the world. The ability to recognise cultural differences, comprehend the relationship between identity and community, and consider relationships on a local versus global scale. Wherever my location was, anthropology equipped me to actively engage with and comprehend people's daily lives through their perspectives. Note to the reader; study anthropology.

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## ཐུག་ལ་ཡོང་གི་ ཉམ་ཞོར་ལྟ་ལྟ།



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དེ་ཡང་ སུ་མེ་ཡོང་ལག་ཆ་འདུས་བྱ་རུ་ཆེད་འོག་གི་བྱ་བ་དབང་ནང་ ལའི་རྒྱ་ཚད་ཡོ་ཀླ་ར་བཅུ་ཐམ་དེ་ཅིག་གིས་གོ་ནང་ བཞུངས་ཀྱི་  
འདུག། དེ་ཅུང་ སུ་མེ་འདྲེ་ལྟོ་ཡོང་ལས་བཅུ་སོ་པ་ཅིན་ ལ་ཡར་ཉམ་ མི་ཇུ་པ་༥༠༠ དེ་ཅིག་གིས་ལ་དང་། རྒྱ་ལ་ཡོངས་ཉམ་  
ཡོང་ལས་ ལྷུ་མ་འཁོར་ནང་འཛུལ་ཀྱི་ རྟོ་མ་མ་༢༠ དེ་ཅིག་འགྲོ་འགྲུལ་འབད་དགོ་པའི་ ས་གནས་འདི་ནང་ཆགས་ཀྱི་འདུག། ཡིན་  
ཅུང་ བས་རྟོགས་ཅིག་ལས་ བདག་མདེལ་འབད་ལུ་སོ་པ་ལས་བརྩེན་ དེ་མེས་ནངས་པ་ ཐུག་ལ་ཡོང་འདི་ བྱང་ལོག་ཅིག་ལས་  
བརྒྱུ་མཇུག་མི་ཚུགས་པས།

A photograph showing a stone wall, likely part of a fortification, with a large, dark green pine tree growing on top. The wall is made of rough-hewn stones and is partially covered by green vegetation at its base. In the background, another stone structure is visible through the haze. The sky is overcast and grey. A person's head and shoulders are visible in the bottom right corner, looking towards the wall.

58

2. 2014-2015-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34-35-36-37-38-39-40-41-42-43-44-45-46-47-48-49-50-51-52-53-54-55-56-57-58-59-60-61-62-63-64-65-66-67-68-69-70-71-72-73-74-75-76-77-78-79-80-81-82-83-84-85-86-87-88-89-90-91-92-93-94-95-96-97-98-99-100-101-102-103-104-105-106-107-108-109-110-111-112-113-114-115-116-117-118-119-120-121-122-123-124-125-126-127-128-129-130-131-132-133-134-135-136-137-138-139-140-141-142-143-144-145-146-147-148-149-150-151-152-153-154-155-156-157-158-159-160-161-162-163-164-165-166-167-168-169-170-171-172-173-174-175-176-177-178-179-180-181-182-183-184-185-186-187-188-189-190-191-192-193-194-195-196-197-198-199-200-201-202-203-204-205-206-207-208-209-210-211-212-213-214-215-216-217-218-219-220-221-222-223-224-225-226-227-228-229-230-231-232-233-234-235-236-237-238-239-240-241-242-243-244-245-246-247-248-249-250-251-252-253-254-255-256-257-258-259-260-261-262-263-264-265-266-267-268-269-270-271-272-273-274-275-276-277-278-279-280-281-282-283-284-285-286-287-288-289-290-291-292-293-294-295-296-297-298-299-300-301-302-303-304-305-306-307-308-309-310-311-312-313-314-315-316-317-318-319-320-321-322-323-324-325-326-327-328-329-330-331-332-333-334-335-336-337-338-339-340-341-342-343-344-345-346-347-348-349-350-351-352-353-354-355-356-357-358-359-360-361-362-363-364-365-366-367-368-369-370-371-372-373-374-375-376-377-378-379-380-381-382-383-384-385-386-387-388-389-390-391-392-393-394-395-396-397-398-399-400-401-402-403-404-405-406-407-408-409-410-411-412-413-414-415-416-417-418-419-420-421-422-423-424-425-426-427-428-429-430-431-432-433-434-435-436-437-438-439-440-441-442-443-444-445-446-447-448-449-450-451-452-453-454-455-456-457-458-459-460-461-462-463-464-465-466-467-468-469-470-471-472-473-474-475-476-477-478-479-480-481-482-483-484-485-486-487-488-489-490-491-492-493-494-495-496-497-498-499-500-501-502-503-504-505-506-507-508-509-510-511-512-513-514-515-516-517-518-519-520-521-522-523-524-525-526-527-528-529-530-531-532-533-534-535-536-537-538-539-540-541-542-543-544-545-546-547-548-549-550-551-552-553-554-555-556-557-558-559-560-561-562-563-564-565-566-567-568-569-570-571-572-573-574-575-576-577-578-579-580-581-582-583-584-585-586-587-588-589-590-591-592-593-594-595-596-597-598-599-600-601-602-603-604-605-606-607-608-609-610-611-612-613-614-615-616-617-618-619-620-621-622-623-624-625-626-627-628-629-630-631-632-633-634-635-636-637-638-639-640-641-642-643-644-645-646-647-648-649-650-651-652-653-654-655-656-657-658-659-660-661-662-663-664-665-666-667-668-669-670-671-672-673-674-675-676-677-678-679-680-681-682-683-684-685-686-687-688-689-690-691-692-693-694-695-696-697-698-699-700-701-702-703-704-705-706-707-708-709-710-711-712-713-714-715-716-717-718-719-720-721-722-723-724-725-726-727-728-729-730-731-732-733-734-735-736-737-738-739-740-741-742-743-744-745-746-747-748-749-750-751-752-753-754-755-756-757-758-759-760-761-762-763-764-765-766-767-768-769-770-771-772-773-774-775-776-777-778-779-780-781-782-783-784-785-786-787-788-789-790-791-792-793-794-795-796-797-798-799-800-801-802-803-804-805-806-807-808-809-810-811-812-813-814-815-816-817-818-819-820-821-822-823-824-825-826-827-828-829-830-831-832-833-834-835-836-837-838-839-840-841-842-843-844-845-846-847-848-849-850-851-852-853-854-855-856-857-858-859-860-861-862-863-864-865-866-867-868-869-870-871-872-873-874-875-876-877-878-879-880-881-882-883-884-885-886-887-888-889-890-891-892-893-894-895-896-897-898-899-900-901-902-903-904-905-906-907-908-909-910-911-912-913-914-915-916-917-918-919-920-921-922-923-924-925-926-927-928-929-930-931-932-933-934-935-936-937-938-939-940-941-942-943-944-945-946-947-948-949-950-951-952-953-954-955-956-957-958-959-960-961-962-963-964-965-966-967-968-969-970-971-972-973-974-975-976-977-978-979-980-981-982-983-984-985-986-987-988-989-990-991-992-993-994-995-996-997-998-999-1000-1001-1002-1003-1004-1005-1006-1007-1008-1009-1010-1011-1012-1013-1014-1015-1016-1017-1018-1019-1020-1021-1022-1023-1024-1025-1026-1027-1028-1029-1030-1031-1032-1033-1034-1035-1036-1037-1038-1039-1040-1041-1042-1043-104



59



པར་སྤྲོད་པ། དཀར་མེ་འཕྲུལ་ལོད་པའི་མཚོང་ལྟ་།

[https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/3000/1460/products/image\\_e67](https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/3000/1460/products/image_e6716c3b-76e4-c2f4-d63-e7ec0607bc4c_1024x1024.jpg?v=1607640449)

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e7ec0607bc4c\_1024x1024.jpg?v=1607640449

**མེ་འཕྲུལ་དཀོ་པའི་ རྒྱུ་ཁྲུང་མེ་འཕྲུལ།**

རྒྱུ་ཁྲུང་མེ་འཕྲུལ་དཀོ་པའི་ རྒྱུ་ཁྲུང་མེ་འཕྲུལ་གྱི་ལྟ་ལ་ བཀའ་ཉི་ལུག།

དང་པ་ ཆོས་བཟང་དུས་བཟང་གི་སྐབས་ལུ་ དཀར་མེ་ཡུལ་བཞག་ཡོད་མི་དེ་ གྲེ་ཅིག་གིས་འབད་ས་ཁར་བཟུད་དེ་ གོ་ལའི་དེགས་

ཅིག་ལུ་བཤེད་ཆིན་ཅག། དེ་གིས་འབད་ མེ་གྲེ་བུང་ཡོད་པའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་འདུག།

གཉིས་པ་ ཡོང་གཞིས་འདི་ མི་གུང་ས་ལེ་གི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཅིག་འབད་ལས་ གསལ་ཆོགས་ཡང་ ཡུལ་ཆེ་ལག་ལཱ་འབད་

ཉེ་ འབད་དགོ་ནི་དེ་གིས་ མེ་ཡུལ་སའི་ཐང་ཁ་ལས་ མེ་གྲེ་ཤོར་ཡོད་པའི་ དོགས་པ་བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡིན་པས།

གསུམ་པ་ ཡོང་གཞིས་འདི་ དག་བུང་ཡུད་ཀྱི་ལག་པར་ཚུད་དེ་ ཁོང་གིས་ མེ་ཡུལ་ས་བཟུང་པའི་ ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཡང་བཤེད་སྒོལ་འདུག་

ཟེར་ཁྱེད་ཡིན།

### ཆུ་བྱ་ཁའི་ཡོང་བཞེད་ས་ཚུ་ལ།

ཡོང་གི་མཐའ་བསྐོར་ཉེ་ དག་འི་གཞོན་གྲེ་ལས་བཞོན་གྱི་འོ་ལུ་ ཅིག་ནི་གིས་ཀྱང་ཡོད་པའི་ ཡི་འི་ཆགས་མི་གིས་བསྐོར་ཉེ་ ཉེ་

བུང་དང་འདྲམ་སྐྱེ་འདུག། ཡོང་གི་ བུང་ལའི་བཞོན་གྲེ་ཚུ་ཡང་ འབྱུང་བ་མེད་པར་ རང་གི་ཡི་འི་མ་སྐྱེ་མཇུག་ཡིན་པས།

དེ་ཡང་ ཡོང་གི་བྱང་ག་ར་ རྫོང་ལས་གིས་ཀྱང་ཀྱང་། དེ་གུར་ ཀ་ར་དང་ས་ཆོན་དམར་པོ་བཟུང་ཉེ་ འོ་ལའི་ཆེ་བཞོན། ཤིང་ཆ་ག་

ར་ པ་རྩ་བཞོན་པོ་ལ། ལྷི་མ་ཐོག་ནི་ ཤིང་དང་སྐྱ་ལེ་བའི་ལས་འབད་ ཆགས་གཟེར་ག་ནི་ཡང་ལག་ལཱ་མ་འབད་པར་ འཇུག་ཆི་

སྐྱེ་ བཀའ་ཉེ་བཞེད་ས་ཚུ་ཟེར་ཁྱེད་ཡིན།



པར་རིས་༤ པ། ལྷ་ཐུག་ཁའི་ཕྱོད་ཀྱི་ རྩི་ལྷགས་རིའི་མཐོང་ལྷང་།



པར་རིས་༥ པ། རྩེ་ལྷགས་མོན་མཐོང་ལྷང་པའི་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱི་

ॐ བུཌ་ཁའི་ཡོང་གཞིས་ཀྱི་ བཟོ་བཞོན་ལ་དེ་ བྱུག་ལུ་ དབུ་ཅེ་དང་བཅས་པ་སྟེ་ ཁྱིམ་གྱི་ཐོག་ཚད་ལ་འབད་བཞེད་ས་ཏེ་འདུག། དབུ་

ॐ འེ་མཐའ་བསྐོར་ཏེ་ ཏུ་ཡོང་ཏེ་ དེ་མ་ཅིག་ཡོད་པ་སྟེ་མཇུག་ཡིན་མས། ཏུ་པར་འེས་ཏེ་ པ་ནུང་ གཟིགས་དེ།

དེ་སྟེ་བཞེད་ས་དུ་གོ་མི་དེ་ཡང་ བྱུགས་བཞི་མཚམས་བཞི་ལས་ དུ་ག་བྱང་ལྟ་ཏེ་ཏེ་ཁ་རེ་ཡོད་མེད་ཏུ་ཞིབ་འབད་ནི་འདི་དོན་ལུ་ ཡིན་

མས། ཏུ་ཡོང་མཁུ་ལས་བཏུ་མ་དུ་ སུ་འེ་ལུང་ག་ཤོད་ལ་དེ་ ག་ནི་བ་མཐོང་གསལ་ཆེ་མ་སྟེ་འདུག་དུ་ཅུང་ ཏུ་ཡོང་/ཏུ་མཇོད་ཁང་

གསུམ་དེ་ཅིག་ཡང་ ཡོང་གི་ས་ཁོངས་དང་ འིང་བྱང་དམའ་ཤོས་ཡོད་པ་འདི་ ཏུ་ཡོང་གི་བར་ན་བཞེད་ས་ཏེ་འདུག། ཏུ་པར་འེས་

ॐ པ་ནུང་ གཟིགས་དེ།

ན་པེལ་དངས་པའི་ གནས་ཉངས་ཅིག་སྤྱད་འབྲུལ་ཁུ་བ་ཅིན་ ཉ་ཡོང་གུར་ ལོ་ཤིང་དང་ཉླ་ཤོང་ཚུ་སྒྲེལ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཚད་ གུང་གི་

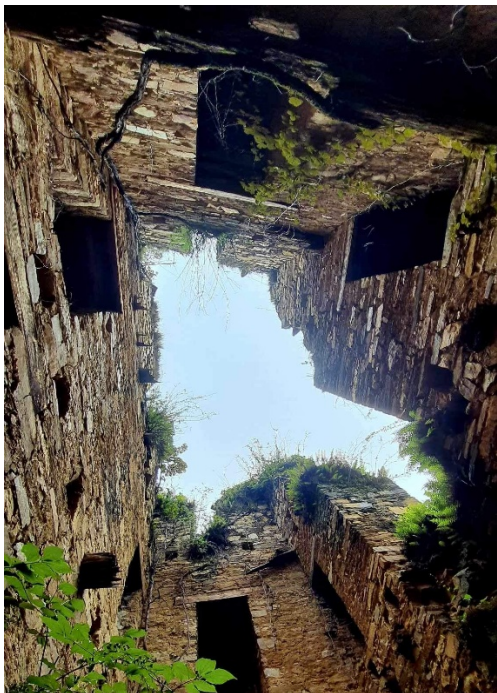
ཆག་ཤོག་དང་ཤིང་ཤིག་ཚུ་གིས་ སྤར་ཏེ་ ཡོང་འདྲི་ གུང་ཁོག་ཅིག་ལས་བརྒྱུ་མཇུག་མི་ཚུ་གས་པས།



63



པ་མེ་མེ་ལྷ་པོ་ལྷ་པོ་ལྷ་པོ་



པ་མེ་མེ་ལྷ་པོ་ལྷ་པོ་ལྷ་པོ་



**མཆན་བུ་ལྟོས།**

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**ནོར་བུ་བཟང་པོ།****མི་ལམ་མི་ལྟོས་པ།****ལོ་ངོ་ལྟོས་པ།**

# Thoughts and Reflections on a Field Visit to the Parliament



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On 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023, the second-year Anthropology students visited the National Assembly with our tutor, Dr Richard Kamei, who taught the module Political Anthropology (ATH204). We started our journey by 9 am, and without delay, we proceeded inside the hall to attend the meeting. The purpose of the visit to the parliament is to gain special opportunities beyond the classroom for a real-world perspective, improve our knowledge, and make learning interesting and memorable. Since it is mainly connected to what we are learning in the module Political Anthropology, like power, legitimacy, citizenship, and many other topics of political anthropology,

The session on 12<sup>th</sup> October was a joint sitting in the parliament discussing the important topic on cyber security and growing concerns surrounding it. The session, with 67 members, nodded to the recommendations on the preparedness for cyber security. The recommendations include establishing coordinating leadership, offering strategic direction, and enabling the relevant cyber security agency to carry out the draft National Cyber Security Strategy's implementation, complete with an implementation plan, budget, and framework for monitoring and assessment.

To provide the background about Bhutan's Parliament, it is the nation's highest legislative body. This body comprises the National Council (NC), the National Assembly (NA), and the Druk Gyalpo. The House of Review is another name for the National Council, which performs both legislative and review duties. One member of the NC is directly chosen from each of the 20 districts in a separate election conducted every five years, and five members of the NC are appointed by His Majesty for terms of five years. In the NA, the party that

receives the largest number of votes and seats in the general election becomes the government, with the opposing party serving as the Opposition. The year 2008 marked the start of this constitutional arrangement aligning with the introduction of democracy. The Parliament held its first joint session from May 8 to 30, 2008 (Government of Bhutan, n. d.) Another important event from June 17 to 24, 2008, saw the inaugural meeting of the National Council in Langjophakha's Banquet Hall. They examined and commented on the government's goals, programs, and policies. Members who have been elected are eligible if they possess a formal university degree and are not a member of any political party, a registered voters in a constituency, a citizen of Bhutan as verified by their citizenship identity card, and are at least 25 years old and up to 65 years old at the time of registration.

Within the National Council, each member is treated equally, and the presiding authority is the Chairperson, who is chosen from among the members (Government of Bhutan, n.d.).

In the National Assembly, there are two political parties. The party with the most seats wins the majority and forms the government, with the other party serving as the opposition. There are 47 members of the House at the moment. According to the clause in the Constitution, each Dzongkhag, or district, would elect up to 55 members of the House, based on the district's population (Government of Bhutan, n.d.) No Dzongkhag, however, may have fewer than two members or more than seven. The National Council (Gyelyong Tshogde) and the National Assembly (Gyelyong Tshogdu) are elected bodies that share authority with the King (Druk Gyalpo). An elected administration led by a prime minister coexists with the monarchy, which is the major political institution. This shared power system ensures the collaboration of the government, elected officials, and the monarchy in making crucial national choices.

Bhutan's distinct constitutional monarchy provides the country with political legitimacy. The people of Bhutan hold their King in the highest regard and honour him. By allowing the people to participate in the political process, the 2008 approval of the Bhutanese Constitution, which established a democratic system, strengthened the government's legitimacy. The administration gains further legitimacy from the elections of National Assembly and National Council representatives. Bhutan is a country that values its people's interest and well-being. Bhutan's political institution strongly emphasises Gross National Happiness (GNH), focusing on people's well-being over economic progress. The government preserves its distinct cultural history while attempting to advance its people's social, cultural,

and economic well-being. A key component of this strategy is citizenship, as the government works to guarantee that Bhutanese citizens actively participate in determining the destiny of their country.

Reflecting on my visit to the parliament, I was thrilled to experience it for the first time, particularly during a live session. Witnessing the proceedings in person provided a vastly different experience compared to watching on television. I was captivated by the building's design and architecture, which beautifully represents Bhutanese identity. The interior was adorned in a traditional style and maintained with remarkable cleanliness and strict security. It was evident that within the house, strict rules and procedures were in place, ensuring that everyone adhered to the spirit of the institution and upheld its discipline.

From this visit, I was able to learn more about the power relations and laws that are made through such sessions. Further, how they operate in the state and articulated through politicians representing the interests of their respective constituencies. These were consistent with what I learned in the classroom from political anthropology. Mathou (1999), states that most Bhutanese were surprised by the thought of voting ministers since they were unfamiliar with the concept<sup>16</sup>. Ministers were chosen by the King, who could fire them at any moment before the reform. The National Assembly might call for their resignation by a two-thirds vote of no confidence or ratify their appointment with a simple majority vote based on the King's proposal. However, the majority of these abilities were theoretical. The Tshogdu has never contested the King's decision or compelled the resignation of a minister. Ministers reported to the National Assembly, although the King was ultimately in charge. Mathou (1999) asserts that the King's reform appears to permit the integration of foreign ideas considered suitable and helpful for securing the Bhutanese political system with traditional practices.<sup>17</sup>

In conclusion, the Bhutanese Parliament presents an interesting and unique form of government firmly based on the concepts of citizenship, legitimacy, and authority. Bhutan's attitude to these issues demonstrates its dedication to safeguarding the happiness and well-

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<sup>16</sup> All minister appointments should "be decided by the National Assembly, which would also decide their number and portfolios," according to a 1968 proposal by the third Druk Gyalpo.

<sup>17</sup> The King says that "he studied the political frameworks of other countries" in his kasho. While bringing in foreign political systems is not a common practice in Bhutanese politics, the third and fourth Druk Gyalpo have been quick to adopt foreign ideas to Bhutan. This appears to be the case with the rotating appointment of the Head of Government, which takes its cues from Swiss politics. With assistance from UNDP-provided international specialists, Bhutan's court has recently standardised the process of creating rules and regulations.

being of its people as well as to maintaining its unique cultural legacy. It offers a distinctive viewpoint on government, placing a high value on culture and the well-being of its people while maintaining an equitable allocation of authority. Those looking for creative and comprehensive answers to the problems of contemporary government might find inspiration from Bhutan's Parliament and its unique approach.

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# Constructing Meaning through the Experience of Tuberculosis



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The air hung heavy with the scent of different undistinguishable smells as I stepped into the small teahouse<sup>18</sup> in Royal Thimphu College (RTC). I had contacted Sonam<sup>19</sup>, a student at RTC and a friend of mine seeking to understand the multifaceted impact of tuberculosis beyond the clinical lens. His story I hoped, would offer a glimpse into the social, emotional and cultural dimensions of the illness, elements often overlooked in conventional medical narratives. Sonam's voice is soft yet firm as he recounted his experience with tuberculosis. As an anthropology student, I am interested in delving into the social and cultural aspects woven around his illness narrative. He agreed to give an interview, and I found out his willingness was a testament surrounding his resilience. We settled into a quiet corner, the bustling activity of the teahouse fading into the background. As I explained the purpose of the interview emphasising confidentiality and his right to withdraw, I observed a quiet strength in Sonam's demeanor.

Sonam, a third-year RTC student, was just 21 when his relentless cough began. Initially, it was dismissed as a common cold. His symptoms included weakness, body aches and significant weight loss that soon raised suspicion that the issue was more than what it was perceived initially. It was only after a visit to the National Referral Hospital in Thimphu that the diagnosis of tuberculosis (TB) was confirmed. His reaction was of fear and uncertainty surrounding TB, a disease often shrouded in stigma and misconceptions. From an anthropological perspective, his anxieties highlighted the profound influence of illness on an individual's sense of self and future aspirations. For Sonam, the diagnosis threatened not just his physical health but also his academic ambitions and social standing. However, Sonam's

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<sup>18</sup> A cafeteria run by students in Royal Thimphu College

<sup>19</sup> Pseudonym; the interviewee did not consent to reveal his real identity

story was not just about his struggle, it was a testament to the power of family support in navigating health crisis. While fear initially gripped his family, their response quickly shifted to unwavering support. They became his pillars of strength, facilitating his treatment, ensuring medication adherence and providing much-needed emotional support.

Sonam: “My family played a huge role. My mother took care of me every day... My father and siblings were also very encouraging.”

Sonam's family became his bedrock in a society where familial bonds remain strong. His mother was a pillar of strength, nurturing him back to health with traditional Bhutanese meals and her care. His father and siblings were encouraging him to take his medication and meals on time, reminding him that his well-being was paramount. His words underscored the centrality of family in Bhutanese society particularly in times of illness. As I listened, I was reminded of anthropological studies that highlight the role of family dynamics in shaping health-seeking behaviours and influencing treatment outcomes. In Sonam's case, his family's involvement goes beyond practical care, becoming a source of resilience reinforcing his sense of belonging and bolstering his will to recover.

The impact of his illness extended far beyond the confines of Sonam's family home. His forced withdrawal from RTC, a vibrant hub of academic and social life brought forth a new set of challenges such as social isolation and the pervasive stigma associated with tuberculosis. The forced isolation brought its own set of challenges. The stigma deeply ingrained in societal perceptions of contagious diseases led to fear and avoidance further isolating Sonam battling the illness (Spicker, 2011).

Sonam: “Socially, it was even harder, there's a lot of misunderstanding about TB. Some of my friends were scared to come near me, even though I explained that I was getting treatment... There was a lot of stigmas, and I felt really alone at times.”

His experience reflects the findings of countless medical anthropology studies; the social isolation experienced by individuals with stigmatised illnesses can be as debilitating as the physical symptoms themselves. The fear and misinformation surrounding TB particularly in close-knit communities created an invisible barrier isolating Sonam from his peers and jeopardising his sense of belonging. Yet, amidst these challenges, Sonam displayed remarkable resilience. He found solace in the unwavering support of his family and the few close friends who looked beyond the illness. The healthcare workers at the hospital provided

not just medical care but also crucial counseling acknowledging the emotional toll of the disease.

Interestingly, Sonam's journey was not solely reliant on modern medicine. While he diligently adhered to the Directly Observed Treatment, Short-course (DOTS) program, a cornerstone of tuberculosis treatment worldwide, he did not stop there. He embarked on a parallel journey of mental and emotional healing, embracing mindfulness and meditation practices deeply rooted in Bhutanese Buddhist traditions. This highlights the convergence of traditional beliefs and biomedical practices, a phenomenon often observed in societies where cultural beliefs heavily influence health-seeking behaviours. This integration of traditional practices alongside biomedical treatment illustrated a crucial aspect of medical anthropology, such as understanding illness and healing as multifaceted experiences shaped by cultural beliefs, social norms and individual agency (Osío, 2023). For Sonam, the spiritual rituals and traditional remedies provided a sense of hope, comfort, and cultural grounding, directly complementing his medical treatment and contributing to his overall well-being. Sonam's story went beyond personal healing. His experience became a catalyst for awareness and a testament to the human spirit's ability to find strength in adversity.

Sonam's story was not merely a narrative of illness. It was a powerful illustration of resilience, compassion, and a holistic understanding of illness. His story conveys the threads of resilience, cultural beliefs and the transformative power of social support, transcending the boundaries of a single illness narrative. It serves as a poignant reminder that healing is not solely a medical endeavour but a multifaceted journey encompassing the physical, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of human experience. As I left the teahouse that day, Sonam's story lingered in my mind, a plaintive reminder of the importance of empathy, awareness and the enduring strength of the human spirit.

Sonam: "It's definitely changed me. I appreciate my health more than I ever did before. I have learned to care for myself better, especially with how demanding college life can be."

His words resonated with a universal truth. Illness, in its stark reality, does often serve as a wake-up call, prompting us to re-evaluate our priorities and embrace life with renewed appreciation.

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# Daily Life at the *Dzong*



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*Dzongs* (fortresses) have been the centre of administration of Bhutan since the 17th century. Chubjakha Dzong at Paro was built around the 13th - 14th century before Zhabdrung arrived in Bhutan. According to common Bhutanese belief, the remains of a *dzong* are still said to be remaining due to spiritual strength and prowess. *Dzongs* have always been the main focus of attraction of a certain region and mostly, all activities, political, cultural or religious have been taking place there like the present times. *Dzongs* are an area of vibrant life and Chubjakha Dzong specifically, served as a monastery where remains of human activities and craftsmanship still exist. Hence, it is safe to say that the daily life at the *dzong* was vibrant and dynamic.

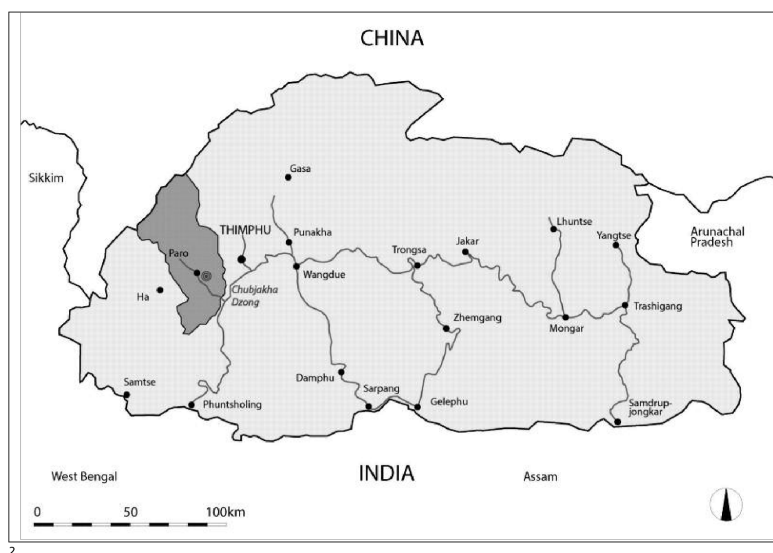


Figure 1 Chubjakha Dzong, Paro Dzongkhag (Della Casa et al., 2013)

Chubjakha, an area enclosing an area of around 1.5 ha was originally referred to as Chewekha, meaning ‘an expanse beneath a vast open sky’, a name given due to the area's natural landscape served as the spiritual centre for *Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam* (1308 - 1364), a renowned Buddhist master who is widely accepted as the builder. Afterwards, in the 15th

century, *Drung-Drung Rinpoche Gyalchok*, a religious master took on this position. As the spiritual centre, it served as a monastery for the disciples who resided there and is home to various remains of human activities and craftsmanship demonstrating a vibrant and fulfilling life. The entire area has many defensive walls called baileys surrounding it and for a *dzong* the size of Chubjakha, it can be safely assumed that it would require a notable number of workers who lived nearby to keep the *dzong* in good condition. As speculated by Bader, Tobgay, Kinga & Tenzin (2013), the possibility of the fortress garrison (defenders) living in the vicinity of the *dzong* with their families as well as monks is highly sensible. The floorings were also made well with sand pounded into mud with gravel sprinkled on top and the craftsmanship of the structures show the existence of skilled labourers. Hence, daily life at the *dzong* would have realistically included religious rituals like praying and meditation, monastic education, ceremonies and festivals, and manual work being done by the lay people regarding the maintenance and interaction among society as a whole.

The ruins are in an enlarged traditional landscape consisting of terraces of arable lands and woodland, and strong agricultural potential is demonstrated through its managed woodlands and agricultural fields as well as including hamlets, houses and farmhouse ruins (Casa, Fux, Diggelmann & Walser, 2012). The *dzong* includes extensive agricultural areas, which are very efficient and reliable to have a constant food supply and can provide more area for agriculture if need be. The vast field will create a constant supply chain in case of times of emergencies. The woodlands present there would have made wood gathering easier for the locals for firewood, for cooking and for keeping themselves warm during the cold seasons considering the altitude of the *dzong* and provided plenty of material to make arrows for warfare. It can be noted that a workforce large enough to work in the vast agricultural lands was present.

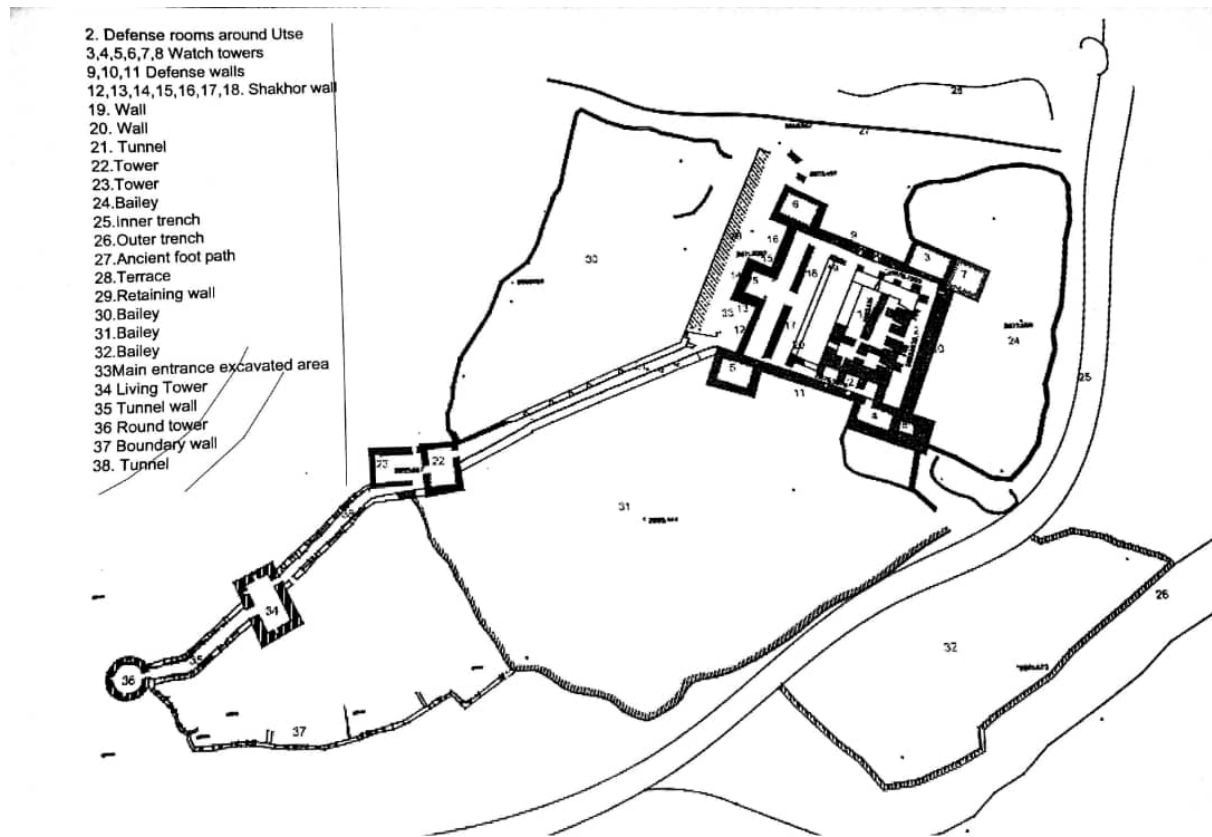
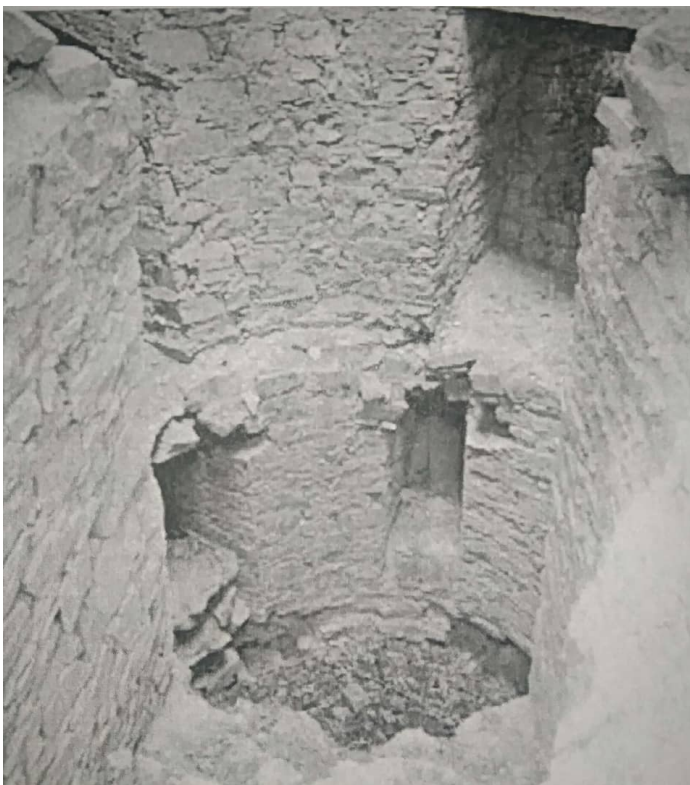


Figure 2 Layout plan of the Chubjakha Dzong ruin (Della Casa et al., 2013)

Concluding from the *dzong's* vast size and its structure, it is sensible that there was a sizable amount of military personnel present. There are two ditches surrounding the *dzong*, an outer one and an inner one. These were used to slow down incoming hostile soldiers which made them vulnerable to the defender's projectiles (Eg: arrows and stones) which is a great defence strategy. There is a central tower (*Utse*) present which was used as the symbol of authority, spirituality, and governance. The *utse* had walls around it which had arrow slits which are small openings used to fire arrows from within while being protected from external projectiles. The soldiers present there were probably archers and could have made their bows from the nearby woodlands. There are six watch towers surrounding the *utse*, which were used to watch for defence and offence. Their daily lives would have consisted of patrolling the nearby areas and walls, maintaining equipment, and being prepared for attacks. The Chu Dzong (Cistern tower) is used to keep a constant supply of water in times of siege and to have water for their daily lives. The *dzong* was not only a fortress but a seat of power for local rulers which meant the people there had some knowledge regarding politics and were knowledgeable.



*Figure 3 Inner Ditch (Della Casa et al., 2013)*



*Figure 5 Utse/Central tower (Della Casa et al., 2013)*



*Figure 4 Cistern tower (Della Casa et al., 2013)*

Based on the evidence and discussion of factors, it can be concluded that daily life was indeed vibrant and fulfilling due to various aspects of life like spirituality and religion, agriculture, social interaction, sustenance and participating in warfare. Further recommendations for

fruitful investigations would be the protection of the site from degradation from manmade and natural agents like proper maintenance and security against looters and thieves, creating public awareness and education about archaeology and its importance to preserve the cultural heritage along with training archaeology personnel so they can be skilled enough to find out the full purposes of all the structures and the area surrounding them.

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# Applied Anthropology: Snippets of applied project work from the years 2023 and 2024

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The Applied Anthropology module is taught during the final semester as part of the anthropology programme at Royal Thimphu College (RTC), Thimphu, Bhutan. This module enables students to think beyond academia and imagine how they will use what they have learned from the anthropology programme in real-life settings. The purpose of this module is to help students identify their skills and make use of their knowledge to contribute to real-life scenarios. The skills include, but are not limited to, research skills, teamwork, statistics, analytical skills, public speaking, presentation, writing, etc. Regarding knowledge, students draw from what they learn within and outside the classroom as part of coursework, such as visual projects, research projects, field visits, lecture series, or conferences. Students get to choose an organisation of their choice, which is finalised by the anthropology programme, where they will be engaged in project work for almost one and a half months. This is crucial for the students as this exposure and experience prepares them to take on professional life at the interstices between their time at college and life outside the college.

In this report, we would like to present the milestones achieved in the semesters of Spring 2023 and Spring 2024 for the applied anthropology module. In the spring of 2023, anthropology students worked with various organisations, including the World Food Programme (WFP), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Bhutan Ecological Society (BES), Druk

Journal, and the Royal Academy of Performing Arts (RAPA). For the year 2024, anthropology students worked with Queer Voices of Bhutan (QVoB), Cottage and Small Industry (CSI), SAMUH, VAST, and the Bhutan Oral Literature Project.

## **Spring 2023, Applied anthropology projects**

### **World Food Programme, Tshering Choden**

A group of anthropology students collaborated with the World Food Programme (WFP) for one and a half months during the spring semester of 2023 at RTC. Their project was connected to the WFP campaign to promote healthy and nutritious food, where the eight students did video documentation and a report on the traditional cuisines of Bhutan. Their research project also aimed to examine the potential for promoting traditional regional dishes from Bhutan. To achieve this goal, each member researched one traditional recipe from their village and collected cultural stories about the recipe to provide context. This project aimed to promote traditional dishes from different regions in Bhutan, supporting, enhancing, and facilitating the WFP's Social Behavioral Change (SBC) campaign. The campaign is also aimed at primary and secondary educational institutions.

### **World Wildlife Fund, Kinley Dorji**

The applied project centred around a Young Bhutanese Birder (YBB) club under the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The club was launched in 2016. Currently, 27 clubs across the schools in Bhutan aim to conserve rich biodiversity and connect the youth with nature to develop a genuine appreciation and knowledge about nature and wildlife. Currently, the club provides various activities for students, such as venturing into the forest, birdwatching using binoculars, and identifying birds in line with the bird guidebook provided by WWF.

In collaboration with WWF, the applied project work involved collecting data on the YBB club from 27 schools in Bhutan. Anthropology students gathered data on the YBB club by applying anthropological methods, including structured interviews with the coordinator and members of 27 schools. This project included interviewing 27 schools in Bhutan running the YBB club organised by the WWF. This project aimed to determine the impacts of the YBB club on the members in enhancing relationships with the environment and provide an analytical report to WWF.

### **Bhutan Ecological Society, Rigyel Phuntsho**

The Bhutan Ecological Society (BES) is a nonprofit organisation dedicated to environmental preservation and sustainable development. One of BES's significant projects is the "Building Carbon Banks" initiative, which involves planting trees throughout Bhutan. Following this objective, students in their applied project work participated in "Building carbon banks," which involves planting various fruit trees throughout Bhutan. This project is formulated with the aim of benefitting the farmers and contributing to the environment.

### **Druk Journal, Pema Wangchuk**

The Druk Journal engages the Bhutanese society in discourse through regular publications, an interactive website, and open debates following each edition so that all citizens can express frank and open opinions on national policies and matters pertinent to Bhutan. The journal has served as an accessible source to the community on various themes not limited to culture, nation, environment, and religion. The applied project of anthropology students with the Druk Journal took place for one and a half months. Their project aimed to assess the reach and readership of the Druk journal. They conducted interviews with people from various backgrounds, including youths, civil servants, college students, librarians and faculty, in finalising a research report for the Druk Journal. The report found that the Druk Journal is used widely in academic and public institutions.

### **Royal Academy of Performing Arts, Passang Om**

The Royal Academy of Performing Arts (RAPA) was founded in 1954 under the command and supervision of His Majesty the Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck to preserve and promote the traditional culture. During their applied project with RAPA, students highlighted the importance of cultural preservation and how anthropological methods can be employed to address such issues. They did collaborative work with RAPA using applied anthropology principles. In their project work, they were assigned to translate the documents in Dzongkha into English, covering folk songs, mask dances and music. Through their project work, students were certain that their contribution to this project work would help preserve Bhutanese intangible culture for future generations.

### **Spring 2024, Applied anthropology projects**

## **Queer Voices of Bhutan, Chimi Zangmo**

Queer Voices of Bhutan (QVoB) was established in 2018 with an aim to increase public awareness and advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community. As part of their applied project work, a group of anthropology students collaborated with QVoB to raise awareness about the lives of the LGBTQ+ community. They participated in the IDAHOT (International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia) event observed by QVoB on May 17, 2024, to raise awareness of the violence and discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

Adhering to the objective of project work, the student group also produced a short film for QVoB. The documentary covered the perspectives of the older and younger generations residing in Thimphu towards the LGBTQ+ community. They made use of visual ethnography and semi-structured interviews in the production of this short film. Through this film, they provided insights into attitudes towards the Queer community in Bhutan.

## **CSI, Pema Lhazom Namgay**

The Cottage & Small industry market, popularly known as CSI, is dedicated to fair trade, and ethical sourcing is one of its unique selling points. The organisation works closely with the local communities by endorsing goods representing Bhutan's customs and culture. A group of anthropology students conducted fieldwork at CSI for research and ethnographic observation. This project intended to delve into the motivations behind customers' decisions to buy local products, their understanding of pricing and quality, and the factors influencing their purchasing decisions. On consumer preferences, they considered factors such as support for the local economy, environmental concerns, and perceptions of product quality.

Additionally, the project aims to assess whether a perceived value is associated with local products, particularly regarding fair pricing and superior quality. The project work for the CSI was to provide comprehensive insights into the market's functioning at CSI, its impact on the local economy, and its relationship with the community, ultimately informing recommendations for its sustainable development.

## **SAMUH, Tenzin Rabyang**

SAMUH is Bhutan's first-ever OTT (Over the Top) platform, providing a large selection of licensed, curated, and original Bhutanese content over internet. It was founded in 2020 but

was officially launched in July 2022. SAMUH's OTT platform is doing well so far, and now they are taking a big step by making it an 'On-Demand Channel' on television. The SAMUH channels, including SAMUH Entertainment and Vajra TV, will be available for purchase, allowing viewers to watch shows, music videos, and movies on television at their convenience. For the Applied Anthropology project, a group of students collaborated with the SAMUH organisation to help SAMUH fulfil their objectives by applying anthropological methods like semi-structured interviews and survey. Their contribution was an effort to making their data useful to SAMUH for launching their 'On-Demand Channel'. Their focus was to know how actively people watch TV, their knowledge of the 'On-Demand Channel', and the contents and features they wish to avail and watch on SAMUH channels.

### **VAST, Sangay Tenzin**

VAST Bhutan is a non-profit organisation, and it stands for Voluntary Artists' Studio Thimphu. It was established in 1998 to create and foster a platform for artistic expression and creativity in Bhutan. VAST Bhutan also organises various events such as workshops, exhibitions, and community projects. They celebrate and nurture modern art by honouring Bhutan's rich cultural heritage. They contribute to the cultural, social, and artistic landscape of Bhutan.

For the applied project, anthropology students engaged with VAST for almost two months by working closely with the supervisor at VAST. They were tasked to interview a list of artists who have worked with Vast Bhutan before and those who still work with them to gain their perceptions of VAST. They used semi-structured interview questions for this purpose as part of using anthropological methods. This task was also for their silver jubilee event in 2024. Through this project work with VAST, the students also volunteered for the Tarayana fundraising event from 3rd May to 5th May 2024 by taking part in face painting for kids and adults.

### **The Bhutan Oral Literature Project: Culture, Language, Environment, Dorji Lhadon**

As part of the applied anthropology module, a group of anthropology students engaged in project work with the Bhutan Oral Literature Society that involved the application of anthropological methods and theories in the Bhutanese context. The Bhutan Oral and

Literature Society is dedicated to documenting and revitalising the vanishing languages, cultures and traditional ecological knowledge. Of the 19 languages in Bhutan, most are not widely used, and some are on the verge of vanishing. With a focus on the objectives of the organisation, students contributed by working on two projects: community mapping and genealogy. These two projects gave them a deeper understanding of their communities and families. On genealogy, the project examined family history and lineage. For the community mapping project, students did their work by identifying, marking and documenting all cultural, historical, and spiritual significance spots in their respective villages.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, student project work in spring 2023 and spring 2024 exemplifies the collaborative work of various organisations from different backgrounds. The successful completion of project work demonstrates the applicability of anthropological knowledge and skills and how they contributed immensely to respective project work. Moreover, the relevance of anthropology is pronounced in each of these projects, indicating that an anthropology degree holder can diversify their knowledge and skill in any field. Students also got an opportunity to prepare themselves for professional life, making this applied project a valuable experience.



2022 anthropology cohort