

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another student emphasises the importance of religion in society:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Contexts of fieldwork**

### *English medium education*

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

some were hesitant to express themselves in English; others helped me by interpreting, but interviews tended to concentrate on those who could speak in English fluently.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Have you ever tasted *kharang*? *Kharang* is made of maize and rice. It’s very difficult to digest. You may have to do a lot of exercise.”

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

A day in Simtokha starts quite early, at about half past five. Students get up, use the bathroom and wash their clothes. Morning prayer and breakfast follow. They come back to their dormitory, change into school uniform (which is an orange checked *kira* and *gho*) and go to morning assembly with their text books. Morning assembly starts with the singing of the national anthem and is followed by talks by the Principal and a student. Classes finish at about three o’clock. Girls come back to the dormitory, change into their own *kira* from school uniform and enjoy the free time until evening prayer by chatting with friends and drinking tea from the school mess. Most of the boys get tea on their way back to their dormitory. I used this time to talk with boys, because being in a girls’ hostel made it a little difficult to visit the boys’ hostel after dark. The path going down to the boys’ hostel is a series of steps and even though it is lit, the narrow footpath in the



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Fieldwork Vignettes**

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

#### *English medium education*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### *Dzongkha medium and monastic education*

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

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

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

“Modernisation is good, as long as economy develops **and** it does not hamper our culture and tradition. We should not wear pants and shirts, which can be worn

only inside house, because the dress is **the** way to represent culture, the way of securing our country's independence and country's identity."

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

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

"I hate modernisation. It destroys Bhutanese culture."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Deconstruction of Modernisation**

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

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

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

### *English medium education*

As shown already, young people in English medium education view modernisation in a positive light. They nevertheless recognise that modernisation has both positive and negative implications. The main meaning attached to “modernisation” is straightforward: it is seen as referring to improvements in facilities and infrastructure. A student in Class 12 in Drukgyel High School presents a generally held viewpoint when he states, “People think that development means infrastructure, communication facilities such as roads, sanitation facilities and schools and so on.” A girl in Class 12 of the Science stream says, “The word development makes me imagine roads, medical facilities, lots of shops, entertainment facilities such as a swimming pool and basketball courts.” Many students simply take it for granted that modernisation means improvements in infrastructure. A student in Class 12 from southern Bhutan, for instance, assumes that by modernisation I mean the development of new facilities, and jumps ahead to emphasise the importance of improving education and medical facilities and the road network. In Sherubtse College as well the same assumption is strong. When I presented myself as being interested in modernisation in Bhutan, students in English Department talked about “high-tech transportation” such as an underground railway and aeroplanes and insisted that Bhutan needed them too.

Improvement in facilities is seen as one of the most positive results of modernisation among young people, both students and professionals alike. A young teacher in Drukgyel High School told me that, “Development helps to make life easier



with machines, roads network and vehicles.” A young gentleman in his mid-twenties who is running a business made a similar point:

When my parents were young there was not a good road network like today. They had to walk or to ride on a horse most of their journey. From Thimphu to Bumthang it took more than a week. Now there are good roads, and a journey to Bumthang is just one day’s drive. We are lucky.

At the personal level, students’ attention is focused on the material aspects of life. The tendency is that the younger a person is, the stronger the emphasis on the importance of money. Boys in Class 12 in the Commerce stream in Drukgyel High School insisted that

Money is very important. Probably 4.5 out of 5. With money one can get everything, even a sweet and beautiful wife, because nowadays girls want to marry a rich man. My vision of a good life is to have a good comfortable house with three bedrooms with attached bathrooms, TV and video, a refrigerator, and a new car from Japan, and a sweet wife.

This statement betrays the longing for a life which is materially better than that of most people, but which is actually attainable only for the top rank of the urban elite. Having a TV,<sup>41</sup> a video recorder and a refrigerator is getting more common in Thimphu these days. Buying a new Japanese car,<sup>42</sup> however, would be very difficult on an

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<sup>41</sup> TV broadcasting started in June 1999 within the Thimphu area. At the time of my fieldwork in Bhutan, however, a TV was used exclusively to watch videos. There were many video rental shops in Thimphu. Hollywood movies and Hong Kong action movies as well as Hindi “Bollywood” movies were easily obtainable and popular.

<sup>42</sup> The specification of a “Japanese car” should be seen in the context that in Bhutan almost all vehicles are from either from India or Japan. Compared to Indian vehicles, Japanese vehicles are seen to be of higher quality, more comfortable, and more expensive, and therefore more desired.

ordinary civil servants' salary, though for people engaged in business it may be easier. As regards a house, Bhutanese dwellings are renowned for their relatively large size. It would not be very difficult to find a house with more than three spacious rooms in an ordinary village. But a bedroom with a bathroom is a different story. The older generation condemn these young people's ambitious attitudes as "materialistic".

Another aspect of modernisation which is much talked about among young people is exposure to the outside world. A young lady in her mid-twenties working in a tour company compares village life with town life in terms of degree of exposure:

In a village people are traditional and they are not exposed to other ideas. There are people who haven't even seen vehicles. Women wear *kira* shorter and make their pockets bigger. And they fill up the pockets with lots of things.

She puts the words traditional and unexposed side by side. Villagers are not exposed to technology such as vehicles. They do not know the smart way to wear *kira*: because it is just a rectangular cloth, it is largely in the wearer's hands whether it is worn smartly or messily. In town, fashion conscious young ladies wear their *kira* so long that they almost touch the ground, sometimes inviting a joke from male colleagues that their *kira* is "sweeping the floor". "A pocket" is made at the front of the upper body by folding the *kira* and tying it with a belt. Unlike men's version of the pocket, *hemchu*, the capacity of which is almost unlimited, the women's pocket provides less space. The ladies may keep some money and keys in it, but smart, fashion conscious young ladies would not put things in the pocket as it would swell too much.

The young lady went on to explain that having greater exposure to the outside world is desirable and necessary for herself as well.

If I could improve my life, I would want more exposure to the outside world. Seeing different people and knowing different views. It's very good. In this sense working in a tour company is an advantage. I can see lots of different people. Most of them are very nice in my experience.

Hence, we are presented here with a dichotomy between those who know only one way of thinking, villagers, and those who know different ideas. Needless to say, the latter group of people are seen in a positive light. Her view is common in Bhutan - virtually everyone is passionate about going abroad. When I asked the question, "Why do you want to visit foreign countries?", one of the most popular and almost pre-set answers is "to get exposure."<sup>43</sup>

Also in Sherubtse College, exposure to the outside world is strongly connected to modernisation. A student in the second year comments, "Bhutan in the next thirty years? More exposure is needed. This is a conservative society." The logic we can observe being applied in these answers is "traditional" and "conservative" means "unexposed", on the one hand versus, "exposed" equals "modernised", on the other.

The passion for getting exposure among young people in English medium education is hinted at in these students' positive impressions of the West. What can be gained through "exposure" is both knowledge and modern behaviour. To be westernised is seen as something positive. A student in Drukgyel High School put it this way:

Compared to my parents, maybe I am more westernised. Parents think Bhutan is the world. We study about lots of things in school and know a lot. For instance, this stone. For my parents this is just a stone, but we think about minerals in the stone. We have got a wider horizon on the world.

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<sup>43</sup> This however does not usually mean settling down in a foreign country permanently, but taking a trip to have a glance at the outside world.

Another student in Class 11 in Drukgyel High School imagines westernised people as follows:

When we, the younger generation, talk about a westernised person, it is in a positive sense. It means a gentleman, with wide knowledge, civilised, frank, open, intelligent, capacity to talk in better ways, exposed to the world, ambitious, adventurous, and competitive, although they probably always go after money and material comfort. The people in the Western countries are frank, intelligent, good in expressing themselves and ambitious, aren't they?

Furthermore, certain Western cultural symbols have been incorporated into youth culture in Bhutan. In Drukgyel High School, English films and music tend to be seen as “cool” among students. Students in the high school often sing Western pop songs. One female student in Class 12 remarked that Western dresses, such as jeans and T-shirts are more fashionable than *kira*. When I suggested to her that Bhutanese *kira* are beautiful with many designs, she replied that *kira* which have many designs on them are for special occasions, not for everyday use. Although the younger generation does not have a derogatory attitude towards the Bhutanese national dress, as everyday-wear Western casual clothes are popular among young people.

Comments from those who have graduated from English medium education are similar. A young teacher in Drukgyel High School explains:

When you say westernised positively, it refers to the people who are educated in the West and influenced by Western ideas. These people are seen in a positive light. A typical person of this kind does not care what people gossip about him or her, does not join in gossiping, is open to others and listens to others, does

whatever he or she thinks right without caring what people talk about him or her.

She exemplified her arguments by referring to two persons both of whom have a degree from a university in the West and now work in government offices. Both of them are seen to have a drive to get things done, rather than to spend much time in negotiating and contemplating. The positive image of the West and the westernised appears to drive young people in English medium education further towards exposure to the outside world.

Modernisation also connotes “freedom” and “openness” among young people in English medium education. A student in Sherubtse College says:

If we compare ourselves with the older generation, they are traditional. But I wonder if I will be like them when I get to their age. The only difference would be that we are a little more open minded because we know Western freedom, like going to parties and so on.

In his statement it appears that “Western freedom” is made equivalent to “going to a party”, and this student is not the only one for whom these two phrases are synonyms. A lady working for a tour company tells me:

My parents object to my going to a party. They say that if I go to a party, I will have a bad influence from those naughty people. I am going just to have fun... But if it was in America, their parents would say, ‘Go on and have fun.’...

While this person was educated in India, she has not, to my knowledge, been to the United States. Thus she is probably talking based on images she has got from films and magazines and so on. Freedom in this context is not meant to be political freedom, namely freedom of expression and democracy: rather it is talked about in the sense of escaping

from the watchful and supervising eyes of parents and teachers.

In Thimphu, discos are becoming a fashionable spot for young people, though there are less than a handful. It was often indicated to me that I ought to go there as part of my research on young people in Thimphu. Most discos open only at weekends, although some hotels offer them on special occasions such as Christmas<sup>44</sup> and New Year. Clubs were absolutely unprecedented in Bhutan until recently. Western pop and rock music are now loudly played, and young people enjoy dancing and drinking in cool, fashionable clothes - jeans and a leather jacket maybe.

Modernisation however does not only mean positive things for young people in English medium education. The negative effects of modernisation are also recognised even among those young people who are thought to be most pro-modernisation in the society. A student in Class 12 in Drukgyel High School points out:

People's attitudes are also changing. For instance crime and drug problems etc..., although these are still micro in magnitude. Also fashion is changing. People have started to copy the Western way of dressing.

A young teacher in Drukgyel High School also points out that in town areas, young people make gangs, and use drugs, and he insists that these kind of things did not happen before. These days "youth issues" are of concern to the whole society.<sup>45</sup> Especially in Thimphu, people are worried that

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<sup>44</sup> For almost all Bhutanese people in Thimphu Christmas does not mean much. Offices and shops are open as usual. These days however it is becoming "a party time" amongst young people.

<sup>45</sup> One feature of juvenile delinquency in Bhutan is that many young people who are engaged in it are from well-to-do families. People told me that their parents are busy in their business or socialising themselves, and that they do not pay much attention to their children. They give money to their children, but are not very keen on knowing what they spend it on.

groups of young people occasionally fight each other, and that young people are using drugs, alcohol and cigarettes. Stories of students sniffing correction fluid often used to appear in the newspaper and some of the users were even caught by the police.<sup>46</sup> Recently shopkeepers in one town agreed to stop selling tobacco because students are “picking up the habit of smoking” (*Kuensel*, 8th May 1999). As the newspaper features youth issues and because the subject is often talked about in government publications, workshops and meetings, youth problems are highlighted. The young people I interviewed talked about certain “youth issues” as a negative effect of modernisation in the same tones as government officials and newspapers, because they do not identify themselves with the young people who are accused of improper behaviour.

It is not only youth issues that concern people, but also robberies from *chorten* and even murders. These problems are perceived in society as signs which show that the society is becoming less moral and more violent. Robberies from *chorten* are especially symbolic because they are religious monuments. People insist that these problems are increasing as modernisation progress, and that problems are more serious in the places where there is “a touch of modernisation”, namely town areas.

As regards dressing, as I have already pointed out, Western dress such as jeans, shirts and leather jackets are seen as cool among young people. It should however be also noted that the position of Western dress is always casual in the spectrum of formality of attire. This is because in Bhutan people wear national dress on formal occasions, and so Western dresses sometimes also connotes a tatty style. Moreover when people say that someone “copies” Western fashion, it usually has a derogatory meaning. It sounds as if a person is confused about their identity, and that they are also failing to pay due respect towards Bhutanese national dress. One of the young teachers in Drukgyel High School remarked:

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<sup>46</sup> Various issues of *Kuensel*. For example, 26th April 1997 and 24th May 1997.

‘A westernised person’ can be also used in a negative sense. Those people who copy the actor’s way of behaviour in English films, way of dressing in the films, wearing tone jeans, using drugs, and roaming around town are also seen as westernised. They do not know who they are. They are just copying.

Pollution and environmental degradation are also talked about as negative effects of modernisation. Students in Classes 10 and 11 in Drukgyel High School point out that people cut down trees in order to import goods from other countries, and that there is increasing air pollution because of the growing number of vehicles. They refer to air pollution and traffic jams in Calcutta and Bangkok, and say that they do not want Bhutan to become like those polluted places. When people talk about dirty streets with litter scattered everywhere, air pollution caused by emission from trucks, or traffic jams, they say “Oh, Bhutan is becoming like India.” - even though a traffic jam in the Bhutanese context means a line of ten cars. The environment is another area which is highlighted, especially on Social Forestry Day when schools organise tree plantations. Forestry is strictly protected in Bhutan, thus no one can cut down a tree without permission from the authority. In recent years the government has restricted the cutting of hard wood for *bukhari*<sup>47</sup> in the winter in the Thimphu area because of a scarcity of resources.

Another negative effect of modernisation remarked upon by students is increasing competition in society which has meant that life is becoming tough. For instance as the number of students increases, one requires better qualifications to get a job compared to before. According to trainees in the Wood Craft Centre:

The society as a whole is becoming competitive, because there are more educated people than before. In the past even students who have passed Class 6

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<sup>47</sup> A wood-burning stove.



could get a decent job, but now Class 6 is nothing. In the near future it is going to be more difficult to have a training opportunity in the Wood Craft Centre.

A student in Sherubtse College commented:

As modernisation goes on, people's attitudes have been changing, probably because of influence from the Indians. The Bhutanese have started to copy the Indian business attitudes which are very selfish and dishonest. Also competition is increasing in the society, therefore people think, 'I have to do better than others.' As a result of that people have started not to help others.

According to him, modernisation is a force which has led to people becoming more selfish. In Bhutan people see mutual help and reciprocity as traditional customs with significant value, and so selfish attitudes are very much looked down upon. It is a violation of Bhutanese values. Attribution of selfishness and dishonesty to the Indians reflect a Bhutanese image of India and the Indians which is not always positive.

A trainee in the Wood Craft Centre also remarked that people were more kind five years ago, and it is probably true that increasing competition is felt on an everyday basis. The kind of job which can be gained by students who have passed Class 6 ten years ago is probably only accessible for students who have passed Class 10 today. The increasing number of students simply means more competition. One educationist told me that when he was in Class 12 about fifteen years ago a score of sixty percent marked the boundary between first and second divisions in examinations, but that now such a score is only the minimum requirement to go on to the college.

However it appears also to be the case that there is a rigid image deeply embedded in people's minds that the society becomes competitive, and people becomes less kind, as modernisation progresses. This seems to be largely influenced

by their negative image and experiences of the West and the Westerners. Those people who have been abroad told me about their impressions of developed countries. While the higher material standards of life in developed countries are seen in a positive light, Bhutan is much praised for its “human touches”. A lady in her early twenties, for example, stayed in the USA for about seven months. She complained about her busy life there which lacked safety and friends. She was tired out by the culture of “dry human relations”. “People do not have time to talk with you in America. They are too busy. Here, life is more relaxed and people are more helpful and kind. People here have lots of time to share with family, friends and colleagues.”

A young lady who lived in Austria for eight months for her training told me about her experiences:

The biggest difference between life in Austria and here is that people here have much more time. In Austria, I had to make an appointment in advance even to visit my friends. Here I can visit my friends whenever I want. And I can stay for lunch, tea, supper, and on and on. People do not mind at all if I stay there for long. I met a very rich couple in Germany. But they do not have their own children, so they adopted two Indonesian children. I felt very sorry for them. Money may be important. But even if you have money I do not think it is a happy life, if you do not have your own children. There are lots of things which you cannot buy with money.

“Dry human relations” are also experienced in Thimphu by those who have expatriate friends. Many people complain that they have to ring expatriate friends before they visit. Even those who experienced life in the West complain, “Why do I have to call beforehand to visit him? We are friends! It is not like making a formal visit to an office.” In Bhutan it is expected that friends should show warm intimacy to each other. Even if you visit a friend without prior warning, you are sure that you will be always welcome. Making a phone call

beforehand is something too formal to happen between friends. People ask, “Why do *pchillip* distance themselves from each other so much?” Compared to life in developed countries, people say that life in Bhutan is very relaxed, and that people have lots of time to talk and to share with family, friends and colleagues.

We have seen that young people in English medium education recognise that there are both positive and negative aspects to modernisation. They feel that improvements in the material aspects of life, more exposure to the outside world and “freedom” are positive. But crimes, juvenile delinquency, environmental degradation and increasing competition in the society are seen as negative. Consequently, modernisation is not something to be pursued without reservation, and therefore their future vision of Bhutan is not entirely one of increasing modernisation. Their images of the West and the Westerners are linked with what modernisation means to them. While positive images of the West are presented, at the same time negative images are used as a counterforce to modernisation.

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

At the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies in Simtokha, new Class 11 students and old Class 10 students pointed out the effects of modernisation:

Modernisation has both good and bad effects. Good effects are in the area of education, transportation, communication and agriculture. There are better facilities in school. People started to use fertiliser and machines in their fields. There is better transportation, so we can trade with other countries.

This is a similar response to that made by young people in English medium education. First and foremost they point to improvement in facilities and material aspects of life as an aspect of modernisation. “Facilities” have become such an

important aspect of development for society that “better facilities”, rather than the quality of teaching and students’ academic performance, are one of the main ways of distinguishing better schools from the rest.<sup>48</sup>

The students moved on to explain the negative aspects of modernisation:

But modernisation can also be an enemy of culture and tradition. People started to copy foreigners’ behaviour, like wearing torn jeans, pants, mini-skirts.... Foreign films have influenced a lot. Girls are putting cosmetics on. People sometimes hug and kiss in public. English songs are very popular. People speak in English more. In this way Bhutanese culture is fading. Also because the importance of money has increased, thefts of *chorten* have also gone up. This is against our culture and tradition.

A sharp dichotomy between modernisation, on the one hand, and culture and tradition on the other, is presented here.

“Exposure” to the outside world is also linked to modernisation among young people in Dzongkha medium education, as it is in English medium education. The link between exposure and modernisation can be seen for example in the following answer.

Modernisation? It is good to know another country’s lifestyle, to have good relations with other countries and to know other languages. But we should not be

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<sup>48</sup> I recall a conversation with a Japanese volunteer teacher I met during my first visit to Bhutan in 1996. He told me that since the school in which he was working was seen as “a good school”, pupils were coming from all over the country to it. I assumed that description of “a good school” was determined by the quality of teaching and students’ academic performance, and wondered if there was a scale which measures these aspects. He answered “‘a good school’ is measured in terms of the facilities it offers. People think that this school has better facilities.”

overwhelmed by these. Important aspects of Bhutanese culture must be preserved.

This connection is also observed among young people in English medium education. There is however a subtle difference in the way in which getting exposure is presented. In Simtokha, “not-exposed” has a less derogatory meaning than when it is presented by the people in, or who have grown up in, English medium education. A student in Simtokha uses the word “innocent”, meaning not knowing what is happening outside the country, instead of not-exposed. Furthermore, students in Simtokha emphasise the importance of preserving Bhutanese culture. In opposition to this, as we have seen, young people in English medium education often use the phrase “less exposed” in a negative. It connotes a narrow view, backwardness and unsophisticatedness. As presented earlier, among young people in English medium education, a stronger word - “westernised” - holds a more positive meaning.

A monk in the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs emphasises the negative aspects of modernisation. Although he acknowledges positive sides by saying that life became more convenient through being able to use vehicles, for example, he also emphasises the negative effects of modernisation thus:

These days children do not know culture and religion at all. Their parents do not tell them either. So young people are becoming less and less religious, and less and less appreciate culture. They are more interested in movies. The people are increasingly materialistic. They are always talking about buying a nice landcruiser, and going abroad on holiday. I feel a big difference between me and my friends who were my classmates in the high school. For me material objects are a secondary thing. Mental and spiritual things are far more important. But they do not talk about religion, and mental and spiritual things.

Respect towards monks is declining. People think that monks are less productive. They feel that the government wastes money by spending huge amount on the monk body. They compare monks in Bhutan with Mother Teresa and Father Mackey<sup>49</sup> who have done social welfare work for the poor people, and think that the monks in Bhutan should also contribute to the society through social services and so on. And we, young monks, also think so.

The society is becoming more and more competitive. Small school children are also subject of competition. My small niece cannot sleep if she is not the top of the class in an exam. Everyone thinks that he or she wants to be better than others. Parents also force their children to study to get better position in exams, because people think that a better position and a better grade means a more secure future and more income. Children should not suffer from such mental pressure.

For him, modernisation means isolation from Bhutanese culture and religion, materialism, increasing competition in the society, and more mental pressure derived from competition. Materialism has an especially negative meaning in Bhutan, because it is part of Buddhist teaching to detach oneself from material desire. He observes that people judge one's significance from the viewpoint of productivity, and that they do not think only performing *choku* and giving *wang*<sup>50</sup> is enough. In these changing social circumstances, he also agrees to the idea that monks should take up some social welfare work. It is in fact not new that monks take part in development activities: *Je Khenpo* for instance supports programmes to eradicate iodine deficiency disorders in those

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<sup>49</sup> Father Mackey is a Canadian Jesuit. He worked in Bhutan since 1960s. He established and ran three high schools in Trashigang district, among which is Sherubtse College, laying the foundation of modern education in Bhutan. For an account of his life, see Solverson (1995).

<sup>50</sup> A blessing.

rural areas where this presents a serious problem (*Kuensel*, 6th September 1997).

A young monk in a *shaydra* in Thimphu expressed a similar view: he had not been to an English medium school. Instead, he started his life as a monk in the *dzong* in Lhuntse, and studied in the *shaydra* for five years. He, my friend and I talked in a *lhakhang*<sup>51</sup> of the *shaydra* sitting on well-scrubbed floor. My friend translated. The monk was not at all shy towards strangers. The view that people become less religious as modernisation progresses is resonant with modernisation theories. But the monk saw this prognosis as totally undesirable.

During the past five years, Thimphu has been changed quite a lot. Main changes are more vehicles, more houses, and more people. People's attitudes toward monks are also changing. This can be observed from their way of talking and behaviour towards monks. This may be because the people do not have to depend on monks in matters of sickness and so on. In the past monks used to be relied upon. In the rural areas respect towards monks is the same as before, and monks are treated decently. Older people express more respect than younger people.

Here I would like to make several points about these different discourses. Firstly, one of the important differences is that for young people in Dzongkha medium education, the benefits of modernisation are perceived to lie only with improvements in material life, and modernisation is generally seen as a force which will destroy Bhutanese culture and tradition. In their descriptions the word "westernised", is mostly used in a negative sense. Material progress and improvement of facilities are not seen as "westernisation". "Westernisation" or "westernised" is usually used when describing "problems", such as the use of drugs among young people, "copying

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<sup>51</sup> A temple.

Western film actors' fashion", "people becoming unkind" and so on. On the other hand, for young people from an English medium education background, "westernised", is sometimes used in a positive sense. Some young people in English medium education make positive remarks about the westerners being ambitious and exposed to the world. The word "westernised" is a stronger word in Bhutan than modernisation. It connotes changes in the cultural sphere, such as shifts in people's attitudes and values rather than simply meaning technological changes and material progress. It is a stronger word in a place like Bhutan where culture and tradition have been perceived as declining, and where this decline is regarded as one of the biggest social problems. In this context, the use of the word "westernised" in a positive sense clearly distinguishes students in English medium education from those in Dzongkha medium education.

Nevertheless, both groups agree on the negative aspects of modernisation. Increasing crime in general, and specifically juvenile delinquency, is said to be an effect of modernisation. Young people explained that those problems are seen more in the town areas where there is "a touch of modernisation." Copying Westerners' behaviour and fashion is derogated as "westernised" when it is not seen as good and polite behaviour in Bhutanese eyes. Increasing competition makes life more stressful, and increasing materialism makes people unkind and less generous. Negative aspects of modernisation come under close scrutiny in society, through the tendency to attribute socially undesirable situations to modernisation. Furthermore, terms which describe positive aspects of modernisation are carefully neutralised. They are described as "improvement in facilities", "exposure" and so on and thereby escape from being identified with either the West or Bhutan.

These positive and negative aspects of modernisation appear to reflect Bhutanese images of the West and the Westerners. These images are often conflicting, but at the same time stylised. Young people, regardless of their education sector, would agree that while Western countries are seen as places where there has been technological and material progress,



they are also places where people are unkind and materialistic, and managing a busy, stressful life. At the same time, some other young people in English medium education think that in a big city like London air is polluted by emissions from vehicles and factories. Images of a colourful and fashionable life in the West (especially as seen in films) is prominent in the minds of young people in English medium education, but they also think that Westerners are individualistic and do not care for their family and friends as much as people do in Bhutan. This stylised image of the West is a counterpart to Orientalism.

The positive and negative descriptions of modernisation are actually two sides of the same coin. For instance, exposure is necessary to know the outside world better. But too much exposure or the “wrong kind” of exposure could lead to a person being branded as “westernised” in a negative sense. The standard of what extent of exposure is described as “exposure” and how different kinds of exposure are classified as either right or wrong, is the subject of everyday negotiation and manipulation. Different agents can manipulate these terms in order to bolster their own position. For example a monk accused those who have grown up in English medium education of only talking about the material aspects of life, such as cars and going abroad on holiday, and of not being interested in the spiritual aspects of life. In this monk’s view these people are materialistic and westernised. However, those who have grown up in English medium education would say that they are much more exposed to the outside world. Some college students compare themselves with an even younger generation and present themselves as “traditional”. But they themselves are among those who are accused by the older generation of being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. We will examine these manipulations and construction of identity in detail later. Here I would point out that the deconstruction of modernisation tells us that the same phenomenon can be interpreted in opposite ways. The way it is interpreted and described in turn signifies how each agent perceives their position in society. However, the college students described above know that they cannot present

themselves as “traditional” compared to the older generation. It appears that there is somehow an objectified spectrum in existence in their minds along which different groups in the society are located and classified according to whether they are “traditional”, “exposed” or “westernised”. Therefore the manipulation of these terms is not entirely at the discretion of each agent. Rather manipulation takes place within the boundaries imposed by the scale.

For students in Dzongkha medium education and monastic education modernisation is also seen in both a positive and negative light. However, the negative aspects are much more focused upon than the positive ones. It appears that students in Simtokha assume that as modernisation progresses, culture and tradition will decline in Bhutanese society. A dichotomy thus arises between modernisation on the one hand and culture and tradition on the other. Furthermore, the way of thinking among young people in English medium education also seems to be based on this assumption.

## **Deconstruction of culture and tradition**

### *English medium education*

In this section I will examine the meanings attached to Bhutanese culture and tradition by deconstructing them. The deconstruction will show that there are complex negotiations going on between the ideal and the practical. I will start this investigation in the area of national dress, where this gap between ideal and real is most apparent.

At the present time, national dress is in the process of becoming a symbol of Bhutanese culture and tradition. This is not only because it is a very obvious signifier of culture but also because the government itself is promoting the national dress as one of the most important means of expressing Bhutanese identity. Especially amongst young people,

national dress has become a focal point of discussion. A student in Class 12 at Drukgyel High School told me:

Cultural preservation is dependant on the people's attitudes. Farmers do not know the Western lifestyle and have kept to their traditional way of life, so they are OK. The problem is the kind of people who are not well educated and live in the town area. They do not know the value of unique Bhutanese culture, so they rush to copy Western lifestyle, dressing and cosmetics. Everyone has to know the importance of cultural preservation. But actually jeans and shirts are better than *gho* and *kira* because it is easier to move.

It is a common response for young people to say that it is important to keep national dress as a symbol of national identity and as an important aspect of Bhutanese tradition, however practically-speaking it is not convenient to wear national dress all the time. They think it is too much to have to wear national dress just to go to a video rental shop that is five minutes walk away. In general, practicality is presented by young people as the main reason that they try to minimise the number of occasion when they are wearing national dress. "Less easy to move", "uncomfortable", and "too warm in low altitude areas" are the excuses often heard. A typical comment would be similar to the one made by a young lady working in a tour company, who has been educated in India from primary school level. She told me, "Although I respect *kira*, I feel uncomfortable wearing it." Moreover, Western casual dress tends to be seen as fashionable among young people. This does not mean that they hate to wear national dress. To translate the social position of Bhutanese national dress into a Western context, it is somehow equivalent to how people in some Western countries regard formal suits these days. When people go to offices, schools, *dzong*, temples and monasteries, and other formal occasions, there is no argument about whether they wear national dress or Western dress. They wear national dress. Just as we relax when we take off suits on coming back home from office, they take off

their national dress at home and wear something relaxing, maybe jeans and a sweatshirt. Consequently Western dress in Bhutan has become an item of clothing suitable for casual situations, and formal Western dress can seldom be seen in Bhutan. This in turn helps lower the position of Western dress by creating the image of Western dress as being casual, and improper for formal occasions.

Not only does the preservation of culture and tradition tend to be reduced to an issue of national dress among young people, but clothing is also an issue on which much negotiation is taking place on a daily basis. The inventions of the half-*kira*<sup>52</sup> and half-*gho*<sup>53</sup> are products of these negotiations. With the half-*kira* and half-*gho* people can be free from wearing a tight belt while still maintaining a pretence that they “respect” Bhutanese culture and tradition. A boy who wears jeans under his *gho* is also taking part in these same cultural negotiations, though he will be sneered at by his parents’ generation. The older generation say that wearing jeans under *gho* is simply “funny”, but at the same time it is seen as a sign that young people are becoming alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. Although one government official argued that Bhutanese culture and tradition means far more than just the material aspects of life, let alone your style of dressing, for most young people national dress comes

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<sup>52</sup> The half-*kira* resembles the lower part of a (full-)*kira*. The garment has the same length as a *kira*, but its width is about two thirds of it. It is therefore wrapped in the same way as a *kira*, but only around the lower part of the body and fastened at the waist, resembling a tight long skirt. With half-*kira*, a woman wears, as she does with a *kira*, an *onju* (blouse) and a *toego* (jacket), pinned closed at the front. As Myers (1994: p. 106) points out, a half-*kira* looks like a normal full-*kira*, but at the same time it frees wearers from using a tight belt, and also from a brooch at the shoulders, whose sharp pin sometimes pricks one’s back. During fieldwork, many women were seen in half-*kira* while shopping, however, it was not considered to be suitable attire for visiting *dzong* and offices, and for other formal occasions.

<sup>53</sup> Similar to the half-*kira*, the half-*gho* is only the lower part of the *gho*. Men can wear a sweater or a jacket instead of the upper part. It seems to free the wearer from having to wear a tight belt. The half-*gho* however hardly resembles a *gho*. Thus it is much less seen than the half-*kira*.

top of the list when asked what Bhutanese culture and tradition means.

In Sherubtse College as well, discussion about culture and tradition centres on government rules regarding national dress and architecture. Some students say that making the wearing of national dress compulsory is not a good idea, because it spoils the joy of dressing up. Here again this is not a complaint about national dress itself. They wear national dress without being told by anyone, “when the situation demands”. Nobody would dream of visiting a monastery or *dzong* in jeans and a T-shirt. However the regulations make them feel suffocated. They feel they are forced to wear national dress. The then Director of Education summarised the situation: “Youth problems’ are not problems for youth. For young people authority is the problem.” The regulations about national dress have led to disputes within Bhutanese society. The result is that so much attention is focused on national dress that among young people the meaning of Bhutanese culture and tradition is reduced to national dress together with only a few other issues, such as religion. Therefore even when government officials argue against Bhutanese culture and tradition being limited to its material aspects,<sup>54</sup> and emphasise that there are many more non-material aspects with a long history which should be respected, these sentiments do not resonate with young people very readily.

Another aspect of Bhutanese culture on which the attention of young people is concentrated is religion. In Sherubtse College, on the day after I arrived, a special *wang* was held at the *zangdopelri* outside the campus. The principal and vice principal invited me along, since in this particular *wang* people can get a blessing from religious objects which are rarely shown to the public. There were many people present

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<sup>54</sup> According to Dasho Karma Gayleg, *gho* and *kira* are worn not merely for appearance, but also as a manifestation of Bhutanese social protocol and etiquette. The length of the *gho* and the width of the white cuffs, for instance, signifies the wearer’s social status.

both in and outside the *zangdopelri*, including students and staff of the college and people from nearby villages. The aroma of incense sticks was in the air. We walked around the *zangdopelri* clockwise, then entered; inside, monks were reciting religious texts. One of the students commented,

Religion has mobilising power in Bhutan. If it is something religious, everyone, from young to old, from uneducated to well-educated, comes together without being asked by anyone. They sit on hard cold floor for long hours, yet there is no complaint heard.

Unlike the issue of national dress I heard few conflicting views on the importance of religion among young people. Not only the principal and the vice-principal of the college, but also students indicated that I should come to the *wang*, because it was a valuable opportunity. They did not even ask me if I was a Buddhist or not. It appears that for them it is quite natural to go to the *wang*. Moreover, as we will see later, there are many occasions on which young people attend *puja* and *wang*, and visit temples.

At the same time, however, young people feel that the older generation have a different attitude towards religion. A young dentist, in his late twenties, tells me that religion is the most obvious way in which he feels the generation gap. He says:

My parents always count the beads, and hold *puja* often. They also care auspicious days and inauspicious days. But I do not believe in that as much as they do. It might be waste of money to hold *puja* too many times. But when I become my parents age, I will probably also pray a lot, hold many *puja* and care about auspicious and inauspicious days.

A young lady running one of the few beauty salons in Thimphu made similar remarks. She added that her parents are more religious than herself but also that she thought that she was religious for her own generation. Another lady

working in a tour company says that she cannot live without religion. According to her:

Even for young people *puja* is necessary. Whether rich or poor, people have to hold *puja* at least once a year. Otherwise bad things will happen. We were born in this religious environment and believe in it.

I remembered seeing a small altar at the side of a bed in a hostel at Drukgyel High School. For young people temples and monasteries are the main destinations for their weekend picnics.

Nevertheless the older generation perceive that religion is declining among young people. One senior educationist suggests that young people go to temples to pray for their own success, for instance for good exam results, whereas the older generation pray for peace in the world and the happiness of all beings on the earth. He says that this indicates that young people are becoming more and more selfish. This is, he insists, surely a sign of declining religious belief among young people. It should be noted that there is a difference in what “religious” means for younger and older generations. By “religious” the older generation tends to mean ethical and moral acts or behaviour in general. This is not at all surprising, because Buddhism teaches people to do good deeds, and being “religious” is meant to mean being ethically and morally pure. One of my friends, in his late thirties, told me whilst pointing to another friend of mine, “He is always very religious.” I asked him what he meant and he replied, “he never thinks that a person he is dealing with is ill intentioned. And he himself is never ill intentioned.” This is what he meant by “religious”. However even this interpretation is different from what the word “religious” generally means amongst young people. For most it refers to a certain action, such as counting beads, chanting prayers, visiting temples and holding *puja*. A dentist says, for example, “My parents are very religious. They always count beads and have lots of *puja*.”

I do not do this as much as they do now. But when I get to my parents age, I may be like them.”

The issue of languages is another area which is widely discussed in society. The government has tried to promote the use of Dzongkha. The Dzongkha Development Commission holds a Dzongkha Drama Competition once a year, and the Education Division launched a curricula in Environmental Studies in Dzongkha in the lower classes of English medium school. However for high school students, Dzongkha is still seen as an easy subject. In Drukgyel High School, a student in Class 12 in Science stream explains the situation:

The subject I spend most time on is maths, and the least time on English and Dzongkha. It does not mean that I discount Dzongkha, but Dzongkha is my mother tongue, so it is easy. But other people may think that to be a doctor one does not need Dzongkha, so just a pass mark is enough.

Another student in Class 10 remarked:

Dzongkha is an easy subject. Above Class 9 it is easy to get pass mark. The reason that English is important is that it related to all other subjects, maths, science, history and geography.... If one is not good in English one cannot get a good mark in these subjects either.

It appears that the same attitudes are being applied to language as to national dress amongst students that is “It is ideal to keep Dzongkha and to promote Dzongkhanisation, but in reality there are many inconveniences and difficulties in using Dzongkha.” The followings are illustrative. A boy in Class 11 objected to the use of Dzongkha by saying, “It is hard to translate scientific terms and we learned all in English in anyway, so it is not convenient for us.” A girl in Class 10 says that she uses Dzongkha when she talks. But when she writes, it is in English. She explains: “Dzongkha spelling is difficult and it is very slow to write in it.” Apart from these personal inconveniences, there is also concern



about Bhutan's situation as a developing country which introduces both materials and knowledge from outside. A boy in Class 11 in the Commerce stream says;

Of course it is good to know both Dzongkha and English well, but for education we should keep English as the medium of education, because Bhutan is at this moment dependent on other countries. Japan is independent, so education can be done in Japanese. But if the Bhutanese know only Dzongkha, it would be difficult, because the things from outside are all in English.

A discussion with young teachers in Drukgyel High School got very heated one evening. One of them knew about my research interests, and she started the conversation by asking which is easier for them to use, Dzongkha or English. One teacher answered, "It's difficult to say, but when I talk with friends or family I use both." "Both" means that he sometimes uses Dzongkha, and sometimes English. But foreigners would notice in early stages of their stay that in many conversations, especially in Thimphu, many English words are inserted into Dzongkha conversation. Sometimes this happens to such an extent a non-Dzongkha speaker can guess the main thrust of a conversation. The discussion with the teachers continued:

'Well, let's think about the situation when you are thinking about something. Not very serious or difficult things. Suppose you are walking along the road, and wondering about something. In which language are we thinking?'

'Maybe in English.'

'Yeah, these days we, young people speak in English even when we talk with friends. This is a direct result of English medium education. It is a tremendous amount of work to translate all the English terms into Dzongkha. And it is easy to use English words. In order to change this trend education has to be in Dzongkha. But I don't think it will happen. In the

future, Dzongkha will be used but English will stay as dominant.’

‘No, I don’t think so. The situation is changing. The government encourages the use of Dzongkha in official letters and documents and so on. From now on we will need a solid command of both Dzongkha and English. This probably means that more Dzongkha ability will be needed than in the present situation.’

I did not perceive that the teacher who insisted that more Dzongkha ability is needed was particularly inclined to use Dzongkha herself. Although Dzongkha was her mother tongue, English is now such a big part of her life that she once joked when writing in her native tongue, “Oh, I didn’t realise that I could write a letter in Dzongkha!!” However this does not undermine her views: it is simply the way she feels things should be.

Another young teacher explained the changing position of Dzongkha in society over the years.

In an uneducated family Dzongkha is seen as more important than English. In the past a monastery was the only educational institution, so reading and writing in Dzongkha meant education. Also in the past circulars from the government were all written in Dzongkha. So if one could read it in the village, people respected that person. Also a person educated in a monastery was respected because he could perform *puja*. On the other hand people from educated family put much more importance on English, and this tendency is apparent especially in town area in these days. When I was in primary school, Dzongkha had more importance than English, but now English is more important.

He describes the situation within the dichotomy of educated - uneducated, and town - village. In the trend which he describes as a change from Dzongkha to English,

Dzongkhanisation is implausible. He says, “I do not think that the process of Dzongkhanisation would get very far, because high officials have spent so much time, energy and money on English.”

### *Dzongkha medium education*

At the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies some students say that important aspects of Bhutanese culture must be preserved - a statement which implies that there are more important and less important aspects of Bhutanese culture and tradition. This in fact was the question with which I started my investigation of the meaning of Bhutanese culture and tradition during fieldwork in Dzongkha medium school. I asked students what the important aspects of Bhutanese culture are. One student told me:

Important aspects of Bhutanese culture are the national dress and *driglam namzha*. *Kira* and *gho* have to be worn in offices, *dzong* and school, and when visiting high officials, holy places and *tshechu*.<sup>55</sup>

*Driglam namzha*,<sup>56</sup> usually explained as a code of etiquette, is often referred to when people talk about “Bhutanese culture”

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<sup>55</sup> A festival which normally begins on the tenth of the Bhutanese month. This religious festival is held to honour Guru Rimpoche, the Tantric saint who converted Bhutan to Buddhism in the eighth century.

<sup>56</sup> According to an official publication, *driglam namzha* was created by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal in order to carve out a distinct Bhutanese identity. It further explains:

In addition to promoting a national dress..., *driglam namzha* is built upon a strict observance of vows (*tha-damtshig*) that emphasise strong kinship loyalty, community-oriented behaviour, hospitality to guests, respect for one’s parents, elders and superiors, and mutual cooperation between rulers and ruled, parents and children, and teachers and students. (National Environment Commission, 1998: p. 75)

and Bhutanese identity. When asked about this, the student explained further gesturing as he did so:

*Driglam namzha* is about a way of talking, way of dressing, way of eating, way of walking and so on. For example for a way of talking, it's about showing respect when you speak to elders and superiors, using honorific terms etc... When we address other people, we have to call them by their title. Strangers have to be called something like, 'Apa,' or 'Ama,'<sup>57</sup> but foreigners call people by name, like 'John!', without title. It's more polite to address as 'Apa' or 'Ama'. The special way of eating is mainly reserved for ceremonies. You have to use a white cloth and *phop*,<sup>58</sup> and say a prayer before eating. Way of walking... you should walk quietly. You should not walk with noise, tramp, tramp.

On another occasion, I sat with Class 12 students and talked. One student expressed a similar view to the one above.

Bhutanese culture should be preserved, because it is unique and good. Bhutanese culture means wearing *kira* and *gho*, and, in a *dzong*, *kabne*<sup>59</sup> as well, eating manners for special occasions, respect for older people, and a way of walking and talking. All these traditions should coexist with modernisation.

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<sup>57</sup> *Apa* and *Ama* are terms of address for a man and a married woman, respectively.

<sup>58</sup> A *phop* is a wooden cup produced mainly in the area of Trashiyangtse in eastern Bhutan. Apart from ceremonial occasions, *phop* are also in everyday use, especially in eastern Bhutan. People carry their own *phop* to accept an offer of tea or alcohol called *ara* or *chang* from a host.

<sup>59</sup> *Kabne* is a big scarf to be worn in *dzong* and other formal occasions by men. The female version of it is called *rachu*, which is much smaller than men's *kabne*. The different designs and colours of *kabne* signify the status of a wearer, for instance red is for the high officials in the government called *dasho*, orange is for ministers, and white is for ordinary people.

The national dress and *driglam namzha* come at the top of the list of “important aspects of Bhutanese culture and tradition” which must be preserved.

My own observations told me that there is less conflict between the ideal and the real with regard to the issue of national dress among students in Dzongkha medium education. The difference is that while students in Drukgyel High School and Sherubtse College were seen wearing casual Western dress after classes, those in the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies could seldom be seen in Western dress. They too changed after classes. But they changed from the *gho* and *kira* of school uniform into their own *gho* and *kira*.

One student pointed out some aspects of Bhutanese culture which can tend to be dismissed:

I do not like a traditional Bhutanese house which keeps animals on the ground floor. It is dirty. Cleanliness is important. In the traditional house there is less light coming in because of small windows. I like a house with big windows.

And another said:

Something like cleaning hands with rice before eating,<sup>60</sup> for example, is minor part of our culture. So we do not pay much attention to whether it is preserved or not.

Their attitudes toward the issue of language can also be contrasted with those of young people in English medium schools. On one occasion, when I was sitting with students in their room in a hostel, one student said, “Both English and Dzongkha are important.” A discussion proceeded to take place:

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<sup>60</sup> Before start eating, the Bhutanese take a small amount of rice in hand, make a rice ball by pressing and rubbing it together, and thereby clean their hands.

‘Yeah, but it is important that once inside the country everything should be in Dzongkha. And people can learn English in case they go abroad.’

‘Dzongkhanisation is good to preserve the culture, but bad for making connections with the outside world.’

‘Yes, and it will take hundred of years to translate everything into Dzongkha.’

‘English is the international language and it is important to learn it.’

The tendency for students in Dzongkha medium education to see English as an important language and want to learn more, was also observed in another Dzongkha medium school. But when I asked them whether this meant that they wanted the ability to speak English even if this meant them sacrificing their ability to use Dzongkha, they denied it. They do not seem to think that English was more important than Dzongkha, but as Dzongkha experts they wanted to have the option to use another language as well. On another occasion a student told me that once Bhutan becomes a developed country, everything will be in Dzongkha. He sees Dzongkhanisation as a vision of Bhutan’s future. Although students in Dzongkha medium education understand the usefulness of English in the current social situation, they hope, as Dzongkha experts, that Dzongkha will increase in its utility and importance in the future.

Discourses on culture and tradition tend to concentrate on the areas of national dress, religion, *driglam namzha* and language. These are the areas in which in people’s eyes there is a clear dividing line between what is Bhutanese and what is non-Bhutanese. This line has been consolidated and sharpened during the discussions about culture and tradition. Accusations about young people being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition in the society also seem to have been intensified by the creation of this dividing-line between the Bhutanese and the non-Bhutanese. However, as we have seen in the dialogue with young people in Dzongkha

medium education, there are some areas of Bhutanese culture and tradition which have been less emphasised or even dismissed. What is taking place is very much a process of redefinition of culture.

Furthermore, this redefinition is even taking place within the most prominent areas of culture and tradition. For instance, with respect to the half-*kira*, Myers (1994) remarks that this is not regarded as suitable attire for “even running errands in town.” During my fieldwork from 1997 to 1998, however, there were many women shopping in the market in half-*kira* with *onju* and *toego*. It looked as though the half-*kira* was accepted as a dress to be worn in town, though one would not be allowed to enter a *dzong* in half-*kira*. I would speculate that a cultural negotiation was taking place in society about how proper half-*kira* was. During that process the half-*kira* must have started to be perceived as more fitting; and so the garment which was once only regarded as proper within the confinement of the home (Myers, 1994: p. 106) has now begun to be seen as acceptable for casual outings.

It appears that a discomfort with the gap between the ideal and the practical has produced this negotiation, which has then led to a redefinition of Bhutanese culture and tradition: young people’s complaints about the practicality of certain styles of dressing appears to have led to the adoption of the half-*kira* and half-*gho*. During the subsequent process of negotiation these inventions have come to be seen as more appropriate modes of attire. In the case of the language, whilst the government has promoted Dzongkhanisation through widening the scope of Dzongkha medium subjects in English medium schools, in everyday life people increasingly use “mixed” Dzongkha, inserting English terms into Dzongkha conversation. In writing, young people tend to write in English, but I sometimes encountered Dzongkha sentences written with the Roman alphabet.

Thus the redefinition of Bhutanese culture and tradition as a whole is a continuous and multi-layered processes. The next

group of young people, the new traditionalists, adds another layer to the redefinition process.

### *New Traditionalists*

We have already noticed the tendency for students in English medium education to be less inclined towards the preservation of Bhutan's culture and tradition than those in Dzongkha medium education. There is however a counter tendency emerging in which some college graduates are becoming more vocal in calling for the preservation of culture and tradition. At the same time, however, they provide a different definition of culture and tradition. They are an extremely well-educated group of people who have climbed up "the ladder of success", having graduated from a college and begun working in a government office. They are still a small number of people, literally a handful probably. But they express their views frequently in the newspaper, and some of them have already published books, such as a collection of Bhutanese folktales.

They deplore the fact that culture and tradition is declining amongst the younger generation, just as the older generation do. One of the then trainee officers writes in the newspaper:

Our schools have become the killing fields for our culture, tradition, religion and everything that is Bhutanese. We over-educate and over-school them beyond social needs. Their knowledge of Hollywood and Bollywood is encyclopaedic but some of them cannot recall the names of their grandparents. A sixth standard student can write a love letter in verse but cannot write a correct sentence in prose in examination papers.... Christmas interests them more than *loser*.<sup>61</sup> Traditional parent-children after-dinner chats have been replaced by late-night home videos. Is

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<sup>61</sup> Bhutanese new year. This usually takes place in February of the Gregorian calendar.



something wrong with the curriculum? We all must be guilty of what they are and what is false within us. (Kuensel, 14th March 1998)

Not only does he deplore the values of the younger generation, but he also accepts that this type of criticism is relevant to himself and his friends. Reflecting on the orientation programme, which is held once a year to brief graduates from both home and abroad about government policy in general, the employment situation and Bhutan's culture and tradition, he notes:

As usual this year's graduates orientation programmes saw two weeks of cultural orientation by the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, followed by the various ministerial orientations ... and the *Driglam Namzha* test on its last day. Now that all is over I can't but reflect the days when three *Driglam Namzha* lopens<sup>62</sup> lectured, demonstrated and taught us our culture and tradition, especially the etiquette of body, speech and mind while interacting with one's superiors, inferiors and equals. No wonder for most of the graduates (for what the RCSC secretary called as the 'cream' of our education system) the culture is not only new to be imbibed but a source of raw material to play over and create laughter amongst ourselves.... The point which all of us must ponder here is, is something wrong with our much talked about but least cared about education system and its finest products? The majority of the 'cream' did sweat, blush, bunk [off] and sleep in the process of training and practising to perfect the technical details of our culture and many of us providing that practice does not always make a man perfect. In fact we did learn only to forget the next day. (Kuensel, 25th October 1997)

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<sup>62</sup> A Dzongkha word meaning a teacher. It is also spelled *lopon*.

He points out that students are alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition which is represented by *driglam namzha*. But at the same time he implies that the “technical details of our culture” have been given too much emphasis.

To every citizen the culture of his or her nation must evolve from within. During the orientation the etiquette of body was given greater stress than that of speech, and much lesser to the [etiquette of] mind. (*Kuensel*, 25th October 1997)

The etiquette of the body includes meticulous rules about the movements of a body through which social relations are portrayed. His own definition of culture and tradition moves towards a more everyday understanding.

Culture, besides being the badge of our national identity, exists with us to meet our life’s necessities and to forward and advance the purpose of life.... Our culture has its root in people dwelling in remote villages and not in gaily sophisticated urban Thimphu inhabitants or in the schools where students learn more about less only to be saturated with information so as to forget their own culture. Bhutanese culture evolved from within. ... It is seated deep in our subconscious minds that we are not aware of it. It is our way of life. (*Kuensel*, 25th October 1997)

He identifies Bhutanese culture with rural life. And he further argues that young people are alienated from rural life, “the root of Bhutanese culture and tradition”. He writes that “years of modern education in our temples of learning have shaken our rural roots and borne bitter-sweet urban fruits. We have strayed too long from our foundations to worlds far divorced from our own” (*Kuensel*, 2nd May 1998). He calls for establishing the Bhutanese identity firmly amidst globalisation by going back to “the roots”.

When the cultural winds blow ever stronger to alter our cultural topography, it is everybody's and especially the students' responsibilities to return to our roots.... Our unique and rich cultural roots can only help us stand the wind of change. Perhaps it is high time that we look with a much clearer vision, think a much loftier thought and take a renewed interest in our neglected culture that hangs daily on our backs. Time will come when we all mourn the death of our culture, when we yearn for the culture that is no more with us and when we start from the scratch to bring about a renaissance in our culture which we now neglect, dilute and erode with foreign imports. (*Kuensel*, 25th October 1997)

He asks, "Does not globalisation symbolise the American Dream?" Continuing:

Universalisation dissociates people from their cultural roots and traditional solidarity. It alienates and atomises individuals from one another. It associates the concept of modernity with the consumption of media-hyped goods. As the old family and community bond loosen, the gold chain of corporate power and commercial markets tighten. ... We have before us a choice: do we live in someone else's dream or in our own reality? (*Kuensel*, 2nd May 1998)

His interest is directed towards what we call in the West an indigenous way of living, and he describes his impression of village life, which he experienced when he was in a village on the Rural Development Course for trainee officers.

A 78 year old man had this to say about the relative values of the urban fast lane and the rural slow track. 'Urban money flows; it comes and goes but the land is still and will forever feed.' ... This old man,...his ancient wisdom often clashed with our quasi-knowledge information-based intelligence. He

represented a repository of thoughts and experiences accumulated over years. His use of words, phrases, idioms and proverbs, unprescribed in our syllabi, were way beyond my comprehension. His empirical wisdom shone beside our garish graduate knowledge. When he dies, he will take with him a priceless and irretrievable treasure. (*Kuensel*, 2nd May 1998)

It is not only this commentator who is diverting his attention to rural life and folklore and away from issues such as religion, national dress and languages as sources of Bhutanese culture and tradition. Two collections of folktales compiled by a young lady have also recently been published, the first book written in Dzongkha and the second in English.<sup>63</sup> She visited many villages, and collected folktales which have been passed down from generation to generation. She recounts her fieldwork experience.

I went to villages at first as a field assistant of a lady from abroad who was interested in folktales of Bhutan. The schedule was tight, and we were literally running around to collect folktales from as many as possible within the limited time. But that was the first time that I took an interest in Bhutanese folktales. About one and half year later I went back to the villages this time to write my own book about folktales. There are always one or two excellent story tellers in a village, usually old people. I met one of those story tellers again, but sadly I found that his memory was almost gone with his age. It was so sad to hear him stop in the middle of the story and try to remember the rest, or go back to a scene before correcting the story.

Her attitude is not that dying folktales are saved by her book. She just talks about her experiences and impressions of how things are. She is proud of the fact that she pursued her own

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<sup>63</sup> Wangmo, Kinley (1997) *Tales from Rural Bhutan* (Thimphu: Kinley Wangmo). For those who are interested in folktales in Bhutan, there are also two collections by Kunzang Choden. See Choden (1994, 1997).

interest in folktales, although she does not identify herself as being in the front line of a struggle to defend the fort of tradition against modernisation.

Interest in indigenous culture is also gradually rising among students. One day I encountered a student from Sherubtse College who was training in one of the ministries. He showed his interest in indigenous knowledge and told me that he was about to do some research in a village near the college, and would contribute to a journal.<sup>64</sup> Recently, moreover, a graduate, now an officer in the Centre for Bhutan Studies, published a book of Bhutanese *lo-zey*, or ballads.<sup>65</sup>

This interest in indigenous culture marks a contrast in the definition of culture between different generations. There was a particular case in which these different definitions clashed which was during the Dzongkha Drama Competition organised by the Dzongkha Development Commission as an activity to promote the national language. A dozen organisations participated, mostly schools. I went to the swimming pool complex in Thimphu (the venue of the competition) for several evenings to witness the dramas. The event brought in a large audience, both young and old, educated and uneducated. Many of the dramas presented were based upon religious stories or the life stories of religious figures. A traditional wedding ceremony was shown on the stage, making the most of limited space. Amongst them all however, the most outstanding was the one produced by the graduates of Sherubtse College. It received an overwhelming response from the audience, in fact such a response that they had to act it out again even after the competition finished. It was outstanding also because it was an adapted version of *A Pot of Gold*, a Roman comedy. The scriptwriter injected some scenes and characters that do not appear in the original, included some Bhutanese sayings, and also scrapped some

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<sup>64</sup> Bhutanese Indigenous Knowledge (BIK) Newsletter has been published since 1994.

<sup>65</sup> Kinga, S. (1998) *Gaylong Sumdar Tashi: Songs of Sorrow* (Thimphu: Sonam Kinga)

original scenes and characters in order to make it relevant and appealing to the Bhutanese setting and audience. However, much to the disappointment of the audience and the performers as well, the Bhutanese version of *A Pot of Gold* ended up with the second prize. The first prize went to a play adapted from the biography of a renowned Buddhist teacher, and which included beautifully performed *driglam namzha*. What was at stake here were different perceptions of Bhutanese culture. The scriptwriter of the Bhutanese *A Pot of Gold* wrote a review of the competition later. In it he asks:

For the Dzongkha Development Commission, the festival was an opportunity to experiment with a powerful medium in promoting indigenous art, language, and culture.... [But] Can we actually promote our culture and tradition by reproducing something like a 'Zhugdrel' ceremony on stage? (Kuensel, 24th January 1998)

He also noted, "Criteria were minus the audience reaction. On the other hand we had to pay more attention to how we [wore] our *kabney*<sup>66</sup> lest we lose points." He is thus clearly frustrated that the formal aspects of the culture is too much emphasised by the judges and other performing groups as well, and that his own cultural sensitivity was not appreciated. For him the audience reaction itself is an embodiment of Bhutanese culture. He made many "cultural adjustments" to the original Roman comedy and transformed it for the Bhutanese audience based upon his own real-life experiences. An audience's responses are an intimate expression of people's everyday life, sense and taste.

Here we see a significant redefinition of Bhutanese culture taking place. The direction of the new traditionalists' quest to find Bhutanese culture points inward. Firstly, inward towards the country: the indigenous knowledge of farmers, and folktales passed down through many generations, are alive in

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<sup>66</sup> Same as *kabne*.

a village in the interior of Bhutan, probably three day's walk from the nearest road. Inward also in the sense of the inside of the Bhutanese spirit. The process of transforming a Roman comedy is in fact a quest to find a Bhutanese mentality, a journey deep into the popular subconsciousness. For the new traditionalists national dress and *driglam namzha* are only badges of national identity. Perhaps "old traditionalists", namely the culture conscious older generation and those who have studied in Dzongkha medium education and monastic education would object to this by saying that national dress and *driglam namzha* are also important embodiments of the Bhutanese mentality and history. They would insist perhaps that behind the particular length of a *gho*, for instance, there lies a sense of social hierarchy, social protocol and also an aesthetic sense which have developed over the hundreds of years in Bhutan. Nevertheless, the new traditionalists argue that even if young people wear national dress, they are gradually being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. They say that younger people's knowledge of Hollywood and Bollywood is encyclopaedic but some of them cannot recall the names of their grandparents. They appear to insist that Bhutanese culture and tradition has to be sought beyond the outer shells of national dress and the visually obvious etiquette of the body. They ring alarm bells when they insist that if culture does not evolve from within the Bhutanese themselves, it will only find itself in a museum showcase.

Perhaps I could speculate on how these different perceptions of Bhutanese culture emerged. The much talked about aspects of Bhutanese culture and tradition, namely national dress, language and *driglam namzha*, are very apparent from the outsider's point of view. These aspects were emphasised by the authority at first probably in order to give a distinctiveness to the Bhutanese. It was and still is very important to maintain a distinctive identity which is obvious to outsiders. On the other hand, the generation of new traditionalists have grown up in modern English medium education. Exposure to foreign influences seems to have had

two different effects. One is to shake their identity as a Bhutanese and another is to sharpen it. The new traditionalists have experienced the latter phenomenon. Learning English sayings and Shakespeare might well have interested the new traditionalists in their own sayings and folktales, and the publication of works about life in olden days in Bhutan, such as *The Hero with a Thousand Eyes* and *The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi* both by Karma Ura, might have encouraged the new traditionalists further.

The new traditionalists' perspective is however also criticised by modernisers. One day I was talking with a young man who had just got a degree abroad and was going to join a ministry. After four years of living abroad, he complained, "In Thimphu people are not appreciative of what they have. And they have started to go for foreign goods and ideas. It was not like this four years ago." Several days later, in another office I was talking with a young officer, to whom I made casual visits from time to time. When I told him about the conversation with the young man, he said to me:

Well, I don't think that people in Thimphu would appreciate the clean air of Bhutan until they breathed in the polluted air in Calcutta. They would not appreciate the fact that Thimphu does not have traffic jam, until they are caught up in a traffic jam for hours in Bangkok. It seems to me that those people who insist that the Bhutanese people should appreciate what they have are even more westernised themselves. It is an outsider's perspective. For those people who live in this environment throughout their lives, good things should be introduced, and bad things should be declined, whether they are from abroad or made in Bhutan.

I will not examine here whether new traditionalists are westernised. But it seems to be relevant to note that their perspective was born when they managed to detach themselves from their own society and take a slightly distant



view of their culture. Their position is perhaps a reflection of their own search for identity.

The views of the new traditionalists overlap with those of post-modern anthropologists, such as Escobar (1995a). A similarity is that both of them take a distance from the culture they are referring to. However, for Bhutanese new traditionalists, it is also a matter of their own identity. A new traditionalist writes, "Our unique and rich cultural roots can ... help us stand the wind of change." What drives them is a sense of crisis and urgency that their culture and identity might be going to be flattened by the forces of globalisation.

Before we move on to analysing these diverse discourses in relation to Bourdieu's framework, let us summarise the various perceptions of modernisation, culture and tradition which exist among young people. Except for some students in Dzongkha medium education who argue that all modernisation has to be stopped, young people generally want both modernisation and the preservation of culture and tradition. The difference in opinion occurs when they have to choose which should be emphasised more than the other. Most students in Dzongkha medium education tend to be less enthusiastic about modernisation and more in favour of the preservation of culture and tradition. In English medium education the trend is in the opposite direction. Young people in English medium education are more enthusiastic about modernisation and less keen on the preservation of culture and tradition. New traditionalists are a group who have been educated in English medium education and have climbed up the ladder of success. They are active on cultural issues, and often express their views on cultural preservation in books and newspapers. They take an enthusiastic stance towards the preservation of Bhutanese culture and tradition. Analytically, however, they suggest a new definition for it: this redefinition does not deny that religion and *driglam namzha* are a part of Bhutanese culture and tradition. Rather it is as an attempt to broaden Bhutanese culture and tradition, by focusing more on indigenous culture. Among the different

social actors in Bhutan, however, the new traditionalists' commitment to culture and tradition is perceived as more important than their redefinition of it.

### **Discussion across education sectors: Bourdieu's capital and background of discourses**

The different positions and points of conflicts in the discourses on modernisation, culture and tradition among young people become clearer when we examine the ways in which they represent and criticise those in other sectors of education. One evening in the girls' hostel at the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, I was talking with students when one of them said, "People here [in Bhutan] believe that if one becomes a Christian, he or she will go mad, because once one stops being a Buddhist the Gods of Buddhism will not bless him or her any more." I asked them about accumulating religious merits. In Bhutan, where Buddhism teaches that the consequences of actions in previous lives force all beings to reincarnate, people believe that they can have a better next life by accumulating religious merit mainly through religious activities.<sup>67</sup> I asked her whether she thought that students in her Institute accumulated much more merit than students in the English medium school. She did not answer this question directly, but told me, "In this Institute we learn lots about religion and Bhutanese culture. In the English medium school the students do not know much about it. It is very important to know more about religion and culture, and the students in English medium school should know more." Some students in Simtokha criticised students from English medium education by saying that they cannot pronounce religious prayer correctly.

Most of the students in the old curriculum in the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies have literally grown up in the Institute. When students in Classes 10, 11, and 12 were

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<sup>67</sup> In Tibetan Buddhism, the world is considered to be a miserable place and the ultimate aim is to get out of the cycle of death and re-birth. Those who have not attained Enlightenment have to be re-born into this world.

small, the Institute used to have lower classes than Class 5. However those who moved from English medium education had to start from two classes lower than the one they had reached, because of the higher level of Dzongkha and Choekey in the Institute. Now they are experts in Dzongkha and Choekey. I talked with students from Classes 10, 11 and 12, during the time for wood carving, in a small room in the *dzong* while other students were chanting evening prayers. Most of the students in the room said that they were going to be Dzongkha teachers, except two students one of whom wanted to be a *gup*, and another a clerk. The student who wants to be a *gup* said that he would like to bring changes to his village, such as piped water and electricity. My field assistant was surprised to hear their future visions, and later told me, “They are much less ambitious than those in English medium schools. Wanting to be a *gup* or a clerk after Class 10 and 11!?!? Unbelievable.” The students in Class 10 or 11 in English medium school wanted to continue their education up until degree level in a college, and dream about being a government officer in the future. Students in Simtokha, however, looked at the situation from their own perspective and have their own vision. They said,

There is no place in the government service for Simtokha students. In the government service one does not have to be a Dzongkha expert except for Dzongkha Development Commission and Kuensel,<sup>68</sup> because all the circulars and documents in government are written in English. Once Bhutan becomes a developed country, all will be in Dzongkha.

A monk who joined in the monk body after finishing Class 9 of an English medium school says about his former classmates:

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<sup>68</sup> To be precise, Kuensel Corporation has been separated from the government since 1993, when it was established as an autonomous organisation. It publishes the only newspaper in Bhutan providing, on a weekly basis, national and international news in three languages, Dzongkha, Nepali and English.

They do not talk about religion, and mental and spiritual issues. They talk only about material things, like buying a new vehicle or going abroad for holiday. For me material things are secondary. Mental and spiritual things are far more important.

On the other hand, a student in English medium education remarks of students in Dzongkha medium education:

Students in Dzongkha medium education are backward. They are less exposed. They are conservative, pessimistic and not ambitious. Their English is not very good. Their way of talking and dressing and other behaviours are less polished and less smart. I can make out instantly whether a person is from English medium education or Dzongkha medium. For instance when a person from Dzongkha medium education talks with you, he does not look at you straight, but look at you with upturned eyes.

I would argue that the whole discourse on modernisation, culture and tradition can be explained by the fact that every agent tries to get greater recognition from society for the validity of their own knowledge and skills. Young people in Dzongkha medium education and monastic education are less enthusiastic about further modernisation, and keen on preserving Bhutan's culture and tradition. This can be understood as an attempt to claw back the validity and usefulness of the knowledge they have acquired. The insistence on more modernisation by students in English medium education can be similarly understood: it is their attempt to maintain the current level of validity of their knowledge and qualifications. New traditionalists are a group of people who have climbed up the ladder of success. However, having experienced criticism in English medium education from the older generation for being "westernised", and "isolated from Bhutanese values and tradition", new traditionalists try to show their cultural awareness by using a slightly different definition of Bhutanese culture and

tradition. Through these efforts their own position in society is reinforced and defined. They can thus lay claim to a combination of high educational qualifications and success in Bhutan, and back it up with a strong commitment to preserving Bhutanese culture and tradition. This is a powerful combination as it encapsulates the modernist and traditionalist positions at the same time, insulating them from criticism from either side.

English medium education is more conducive to a decent office job than Dzongkha medium education, and so people can accumulate more economic and social capital. In terms of cultural capital, on the other hand, English medium education holds out the possibility of being exposed to foreign culture. Excessive exposure to and being too much influenced by foreign cultures is not appreciated in society and the person lays themselves open to being accused of being alienated from Bhutanese culture or of losing one's own identity as a Bhutanese. Thus young people in English medium education gain less cultural capital. On the other hand, Dzongkha medium education is perceived as holding out the prospect of a narrower range of employment options. However, being experts in Dzongkha and Choekey people from Dzongkha medium education are seen as existing on a higher plane, religiously and morally. Hence they possess more cultural capital. The new traditionalists present themselves as possessing all capitals - economic, social and cultural - through having acquired the highest educational qualifications and also by being culturally aware.

This explanation of the distribution of different capitals helps to explain the background against which these social actors engage in a specific narration about modernisation, culture and tradition. Their assertion of the validity and usefulness of the knowledge and skills they have acquired in their respective education sectors can be seen as an attempt to improve the conversion rate from cultural capital to economic and social capital - or, to put it another way, from an educational qualification to employment opportunities.

In analysing these discourses in relation to Bourdieu's concepts of orthodoxy, heterodoxy and his mechanism of the transformation of the universe of discourse, I would like to go back to my arguments, which were presented in Chapter 2, that the point of crisis was the time when development activities were started. Here Bourdieu's thesis – that heterodoxy triggers crisis by questioning doxa – is not applicable to Bhutan's case. In Bhutan, the state, the dominant class, created the crisis, whereas in Bourdieu's framework, crisis is initiated by heterodoxy, the dominated class. One possible reason of this mismatch between theory and reality is that the launch of development activities was not in fact a point of crisis. However, there is ample evidence that as a consequence of the start of development activities questions began to be raised about many aspects of Bhutanese life, from the way in which sick people were treated to agricultural practices. Furthermore, we have observed a significant change in the composition of the dominant class in terms of educational background in the period before and after the launch of development programmes. At the same time, as we have already seen in Chapter 4, regional circumstances played an important role in convincing the king and the country's elite to launch development activities. The launch of development activities thus can be seen as a response of the government to the changing regional environment rather than a purely spontaneous move. The government needed to start development programmes in order to ensure the nation's independence and sovereignty.

An analytical problem derived from this mismatch is relating local discourses to Bourdieu's framework of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and examining and conceptualising the transformation of Bhutanese development discourses. In order to solve this analytical problem, we need to look again at how Bourdieu views the relationship between capital, orthodoxy and heterodoxy. In Bourdieu's framework, orthodoxy and heterodoxy can be defined according to the amount of capital which is accumulated by agents. Bourdieu writes:

The structure of the field is a *state* of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle, or, to put it another way, a state of the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies.... The struggles which take place within the field are about the monopoly of the legitimate violence (specific authority) which is characteristic of the field in question, which means, ultimately, the conservation or subversion of the distribution of the specific capital.... Those who ... more or less completely monopolise the specific capital ... are inclined to conservation strategies - those which ... tend to defend *orthodoxy* - whereas those least endowed with capital ... are inclined towards subversion strategies, the strategies of *heresy*.<sup>69</sup> (Bourdieu, 1993: p. 73)

According to this explanation, heterodoxy has less capital attached to it than orthodoxy. As we have seen, it is obvious that English medium education is the way to climb up the ladder of success in Bhutan. Consequently Dzongkha medium education has become a less useful way to climb up the ladder of success. Nevertheless, students in English medium education have recently been criticised by the older generation for being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. So although they can attain a higher position in the ladder of success, namely they can accumulate more economic capital and social capital than those in Dzongkha medium education, they are still seen as lacking cultural capital. Hence, both groups are not fully successful in accumulating capital. This is hardly surprising as, in fact, most members of both these groups will not succeed in gaining access to the most coveted and influential elite jobs - only a minority will. Both those in English medium education (except the new traditionalists) and those in Dzongkha

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<sup>69</sup> Emphasises in original.

medium education may therefore be placed in heterodoxy, a position reflecting their, at best, partial success in joining the Bhutanese elite. I will call the view of the majority of young people in English medium education as heterodoxy I, and the view of young people in Dzongkha medium education as heterodoxy II.

In this situation new traditionalists are the group of people who attain the greatest height in the competition to accumulate economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. Therefore, this group should be seen as orthodoxy, and I will call them orthodoxy I. Through asserting the importance of preserving culture and tradition, they escape criticism from the older generation. They are not necessarily against modernisation, but they argue that more attention has to be paid to culture and tradition, if modernisation is to be pursued further. They provide a new definition of Bhutanese culture and tradition, which, in this observer's eyes, sometimes conflicts with conventional definitions. However, in society this difference draws little attention: being culturally-aware is more important than the specifics of what culture and tradition actually mean, therefore in society they are seen as culture-enthusiasts, rather than reformers of Bhutanese culture and tradition.

A difficult case is the position of the view of people from monastic education. This is primarily because monks do not acquire economic capital in the same way as those in English medium education or in Dzongkha medium education. They are outside the state's objectifying process, thus their ladder of success is, if such a thing exists, very different and obviously not comparable with those in other education sectors. Nevertheless, I would see them as holding orthodoxy, and name this orthodoxy II. The first reason for this is the fact that they are outside state's objectification means that they are outside of the state's domination. Secondly, the monk body is actually part of the state institutions. To put it more precisely, in relation to the first point, the monk body has escaped from the secular state's domination, but they are still part of authority. As has been noted already, historically



and politically, the monk body has enjoyed a special status in Bhutan: the secular state and the monk body are in principle independent, and do not interfere with each other. The third reason is that in terms of cultural capital they possess the greatest amount of all groups of young people. Although people often say that respect for monks is declining *compared with the past*, in the present social situation the amount of cultural capital acquired by them is unquestionably the highest. The fourth reason for seeing monks as holding orthodoxy is the fact that they represent continuity from the past and, as we will see shortly, because of their role as a guardian of the doxa of religion. The monk body has always been a part of authority in Bhutanese history, at least since the time when Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal established the dual system of governance consisting of *Desi* and *Je Khenpo*; and they are the guardians of the doxa of religion.

One might point out that those in Dzongkha medium education and those in monastic education share similar views on modernisation, culture and tradition. There are however important differences in their position in society. The kind of skills and knowledge acquired in Dzongkha medium school are tested by their validity and usefulness in the secular world, in which the objectifying mechanism of the (secular) state operates, although their skills and knowledge have a connection with religion. As a result of the application of the objectifying mechanism, they are relatively marginalised in terms of accumulating economic capital and social capital. On the other hand, monks are exclusively concerned with religious matters. The validity and usefulness of their skills and knowledge are not measured by the same government grading system used to assess qualification from Dzongkha medium education and English medium education. Therefore, even if they share similar views on modernisation, culture and tradition, the implications of these views will be different. Those coming out of Dzongkha medium education may be seen as employing what Bourdieu calls “subversion strategies” in the struggle to change the structure of the distribution of capitals. More concretely, in this context, they

should be seen as attempts to widen their career choices and obtain more advantageous grades.<sup>70</sup> As for monks, on the other hand, the foremost result of their view would be the maintenance of doxa.

It is however also true that in Bhutan's case, the relation between orthodoxy and heterodoxy is not as antagonistic as portrayed in Bourdieu's framework. This is partly because this field is largely concerned with educated groups in the society – and perhaps is thus not as diverse as it would have been if uneducated young people in rural area had been included.

### **5.3 Discussions across generations: in search of the universe of the undiscussed**

While so far we have examined the area which Bourdieu calls the universe of discourse, this section will focus on what he calls universe of the undiscussed, *doxa*. Firstly, through examining various statements from young people, especially from those who are in English medium education, we will investigate the existence of underlying agreements in the society. This means an understanding which everyone takes for granted, and which therefore nobody has to express or talk about. Doxa is examined by looking at the ways in which young people defend themselves against criticism from those in different sectors of education and elder generations. It is also investigated by looking at the behaviour and activities of young people. Secondly, the section explores how doxa has been successfully maintained in the society.

#### **In search of doxa**

Both the older generation and officials alike deplore the fact that traditional Bhutanese values are declining amongst

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<sup>70</sup> One of the most common complaints from students in Dzongkha medium education is that they have a narrow range of career choices. Most of them opt to become a Dzongkha teacher in English medium schools, primarily because it gives them a better grade than other options, such as secretarial work in government offices.

young people. Shaking their heads they told me that young people do not pay respect to their parents, and that they wear national dress in improper way. These grown-ups knit their eyebrows and say that young people are selfish, materialistic, westernised and unrealistically ambitious. They worry that young people in English medium education are increasingly alienated from village life, which is regarded as the home of Bhutanese traditional lifestyle and values. A man in his mid-thirties tells me,

A generation born after 1970 are really disconnected from Bhutanese tradition and rural life. They might have encyclopaedic knowledge about Western films and actors. But as they are in school in town, they are detached from village life. I met a high school student in a village in Wangdue Phodrang. She goes to a school in Thimphu and stays with her relatives. At that time when I visited the village, it was winter holiday and she was in her parents place. But she cannot even tell me the name of neighbouring villages.

This type of accusation from the older generation appears to be derived from an anxiety that too much exposure might make younger generations inclined towards Western culture and thereby erode Bhutanese culture and tradition.

In fact the representation, always accompanied by a tone of warning and regret, that society as a whole is becoming materialistic than before is often seen in the newspaper and government publications. The younger generation are seen as at the forefront of this trend. Furthermore, one of the main reasons that materialism is despised in society is because of the edicts of Buddhism, which teaches people to detach themselves from different desires, including material desires. There is even a ritual in which people have to abandon valuables in order to desert their attachment to materials. Influenced by Buddhist teaching, a generous person who has less material desire but who is still contented, is praised by society. Phrase such as, “he is very simple”, are complements in Bhutanese society. “A simple person” in this context is

someone who has a plain living style and does not behave as if he or she is a big person, even if he or she is a respected high official.

One of the features of this whole discourse of declining values and deterioration of manners is that modernisation is identified as the prime cause. One educationist explains:

As the modernisation process goes on, the society becomes more competitive. For instance, it is becoming more difficult to get a decent job and to get a place in higher education. Consequently, people become more individualistic and selfish. At the same time people become more materialistic.<sup>71</sup>

Dasho Sangay Dorji argues that the material comfort brought by modernisation is a reason why people have started to leave behind the pursuit of mental happiness, which can be attained through the Buddhist path.<sup>72</sup> Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup explains the psychological condition which drives people towards material gain in a selfish manner.

When a person sees that someone has what he does not have, he also wants those things. If someone is richer than a person, he wants to be rich also. If someone is successful in business, one would think, 'I can also be successful', and comes from a village to a town. When annual *puja* is held, people in Thimphu go back to their village with various materials, like a rice cooker or a pair of fashionable track shoes, then neighbours are envious and they also want the same things.<sup>73</sup>

A man working in a government office presents his explanation of how people become more selfish and forgetful

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with an official in Education Division on 9th February 1998.

<sup>72</sup> Interview on 17th February 1998.

<sup>73</sup> Interview on 4th March 1998.

of the Bhutanese value of reciprocity as socio-economic changes proceed.

You know, a good example is a place like Trashiyangtse, where a quiet village is now in the very process of being transformed into a town. As small shops and bars appear here and there, perhaps a weekend market is there, then people start to think of many things in terms of money. For example, a neighbour comes to the door step and ask for a handful of coriander. Before people used to give without hesitation. It's reciprocity. Bhutanese human relations have always been based on the reciprocity. Now people would think, 'Well, if I sell this coriander in a market, it is three ngultrum for a bunch...' Then, he or she might become a bit reluctant to give it to the neighbour.

These views suggest that socio-economic changes have affected the whole population, but perhaps more in the towns than in the villages. The younger generation however is widely seen as the most affected group. A monk told me:

society becomes more and more competitive. Small school children are no exception. Everyone wants to be better than others. Also parents force their children to study to get a better mark in exams. Better academic performance means better chance to be employed in the government offices in a higher grade. That means a secure future and material prosperity.

Dasho Karma Gayleg, a former royal councillor complains that whereas parents used to give ethical advice before, nowadays they instruct their children on how to be successful.<sup>74</sup>

A second sets of views emphasises the influence of the media, especially videos. An educationist regards videos and films

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<sup>74</sup> Interview on 2nd February, 1998.

from India, the West, and Hong Kong as influencing youth in the wrong way. She says:

These videos have introduced Western culture and are one of the causes of social problems such as gang fights. Young people who are influenced by the videos are more attracted by Western ways of dressing and try to imitate actors' fashion, and look down on Bhutanese culture, for example, national dress. You see the boys hanging around the town. They wear jeans under their *gho*. It looks very funny to us, but they think that is cool. Among youth Bhutanese values, morals and ethics are declining.<sup>75</sup>

Dasho Karma Gayleg points to the way that young people speak. Even after the introduction of English as a medium of education, people used to speak English in a very polite manner. But since the 1970s young people have started to use dirty words. This is, he concludes, because of the influence of videos.<sup>76</sup> Since I heard from many people the same kind of comments about the influence of media, I was tempted to challenge it during my fieldwork. I asked a friend of mine in his mid-thirties, who works in a government office and has two children, "those Hollywood movies and Hong Kong action movies have been seen all over the world, but I do not think that young people around the world are more badly behaved than before." He responded, "The Hong Kong movies and Hollywood movies are non-Buddhistic with stories of revenge, killing and violence. These lead to young people's gangs, drinking and drugs. The model of such behaviours come from outside. We, the Bhutanese, have not had such a culture."

Finally modern education itself, being very much a part of modernisation, becomes a target. The minister of health and education, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, asked in his uniquely enthusiastic and convincing way:

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<sup>75</sup> Interview on 9th February, 1998.

<sup>76</sup> Interview on 2nd February, 1998.

If parents are uneducated and children are educated, the children start to look down on their parents, and they do not respect their parents any more. It is same for the people who have been respected in the society and regarded as having authority, such as *gup*. In this way, traditional hierarchy is collapsing. Value of respect toward elders and authority, which is very important part of Bhutanese values, is declining. How can we regain the traditional Bhutanese value? This is the reason that the value education started. But is it too late already?<sup>77</sup>

Dasho Karma Gayleg takes another example.

I think interest in Bhutanese culture is increasing among the young people these two or three years. Some students came to me to learn Bhutan's history, religion and so on. But I can see things are different from the way it used to be in the past. Before, the red robe of a monk itself signified something and deserved respect from the people. No question about it. Nowadays young people are not very convinced by what monks say, because of modern education and scientific knowledge.

According to him, because of the different knowledge modern education provides, respect for monks is declining. A similar point was put forward by an educationist. She said:

it is important to teach about traditional beliefs in local deity or spirits. The Bhutanese have believed in those for long time. For instance, people say that this tree should not be cut because local deity lives in it, or that this stone should not be disturbed because a spirit lives underneath. Some of the beliefs are also useful for environmental preservation. But teachers increasingly feel it difficult to teach these things,

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<sup>77</sup> Interview on 4th March, 1998.

because they cannot be proved scientifically. In the classes they have to tell children about what can be proved scientifically.

Another aspect of modern education which is pointed to as a cause of declining traditional Bhutanese values is boarding schools. A former education officer told me:

People started to become more aware of declining Bhutanese values, such as respect for elders, and ways to talk to elders, seniors and juniors, and so on around mid-1980s. Bhutanese values started to decline largely because of schooling. Since Bhutan started modern education, most of the schools have been boarding schools, in which it became difficult to transmit traditional values from parents to children. Also most of the teachers, especially in the initial period of modern education in Bhutan, were foreign expatriates from India or developed countries, who did not know about Bhutanese values at all.

However there is also disagreement about the effects of boarding schools. A man probably in his early thirties contested this view:

I have grown up in boarding school. But I do not think that boarding school has alienated students from Bhutanese tradition. At least in my case it did not work in that way. I spent vacations in my parents place or my relative's, both of which were in remote villages. And I could experience ordinary village life a lot, where Bhutanese tradition is literally alive.

It is not the aim of this book to examine either whether modernisation is actually the cause of declining Bhutanese values among young people, or which of these three factors - economic change, the media or the education system - is most responsible for this happening. This study does not ask whether or not it is true that Bhutanese values are declining. What we are concerned about is which social issues attract



people's attention. A lot of attention is paid to the decline in traditional Bhutanese values among young people, and it is an issue for officials and non-officials alike. The resulting discussion emphasises certain aspects of Bhutanese values, and excludes others. It might be much more relevant to say that the discussion defines what Bhutanese values are and what they are not through focusing people's attention on particular points.

Examining the different discourses can give us a sense of the values which are felt to be declining among young people. From the statement that people are becoming more selfish and individualistic, we can observe the presence of values of altruism, community spirit and reciprocity, which the Bhutanese people consider to be the main components of their value system. The decline in politeness, paying respect to elders and parents, and in interests in traditional beliefs are another concern. Using dirty words, imitating Western film stars, and the strange ways of wearing national dress are also regarded as disgraceful by the authorities and elder people. The gang fighting, students' smoking and drinking alcohol are social problems which are also perceived to be a sign of the decline in Bhutanese values. Most of these phenomena are attributed to the modernisation process, and thus the negative connotation attached to the modernisation process has been socially created.

Furthermore, a stereotype of young people has also been created. In the stereotype, young people are more interested in Western music, films and fashion rather than Bhutanese folk songs and indigenous beliefs; they are ambitious, individualistic and materialistic, and want to be rich in one day; they like to speak in English rather than their mother tongue. The list goes on. The typical character of a young person portrayed in the stereotype is someone who is alienated from Bhutanese culture. Young people themselves admit to being like the stereotype in some ways, but not in all. Young people identify their own place in the spectrum between modern and traditional, and give responses to this socially created image of young people.

### *Being culturally-aware*

When the grown-ups condemn the actions or behaviour of young people, they almost always mean young people in English medium education. These young people however know that they are target of criticism, and how they are talked about, and they in turn defend their views. In Drukgyel High School, two students in Class 12 insisted that more development was needed, especially in the areas of industry, roads and agriculture. They said that more technology had to be introduced in agriculture.

Modernisation and westernisation are different. Modernisation refers to the area of technology, whereas westernisation is copying fashion and Western behaviour. So modernisation and Bhutanese culture can go along side by side, but westernisation and Bhutanese culture cannot coexist.

“Copying fashion and Western behaviour” generally has negative implications in society, and it also does for young people. So they try and justify their view by connecting development with technology and arguing that technological progress does not harm Bhutanese culture and tradition. I encountered similar comments in Sherubtse College. Students in the first year said:

But development should coexist with culture and tradition. Modernisation and westernisation are different things. Modernisation means introducing things from the West with the Bhutanese identity. We have to select only what is good for us and to dismiss what is bad. But westernisation is introducing Western things blindly. Introducing whatever from the West without proper judgements. Therefore, modernisation is good, but westernisation is not good.

This is another justification of their pro-modernisation stance: modernisation is in fact consistent with Bhutanese culture

and Bhutanese identity. But who are they making this justification for? And for what end? It is not the case that someone, such as their teachers, parents or the government, told them that they have to present themselves in this way. This representation on the part of young people is confirmation of the presence of a social norm that Bhutanese culture and tradition must be kept alive. The fact that copying Western fashion and behaviour has negative implications seems to suggest this. Even if they are modernisers, it does not mean that their attitude is derogative towards Bhutanese culture and tradition. The modernisers do not think that Bhutanese culture and tradition have to be conquered by modernisation - in fact this is something they are also worried about.

Modernisers also present themselves as “traditional” by comparing themselves with even younger generations. Another group of first year students in Sherubtse College said:

We think that we have been brought up in a traditional family. So Bhutanese traditional values are still alive with us. But younger people are really westernised these days. You know, those in junior high school?

Similar kinds of points of view are heard from those who have already started to work. A lady, who has just graduated from a university in India, and who works as an engineer in a ministry says,

People in our age group know about village life. Our parents are from the village and often keep their house there, even after they moved to town. We often go back to the village with parents for *pūja* or other occasions. But children these days do not know about the village at all.

“Younger people are really westernised” - this is a phrase I have heard so often in other settings, I thought. It has probably always been the case in Bhutan, at least since development activities started, that people have presented themselves as “traditional” and “cultured” compared to younger generations. A man in his mid-thirties, who always criticises young people as being alienated from the traditional Bhutanese way of life and values, one day told me a story from his youth. He said that he was a fan of a football player who was famous then.

At that time long hair was fashionable, so we youngsters tried to grow our hair long, like a star football player. And I also fancied blue jeans and a denim jacket. I went all the way to Kathmandu to get a pair of jeans and a denim jacket.

Then I asked him, teasingly, “You always say that young people these days are much too westernised, copying Western fashion and behaviour. But I think your parents would probably have thought about you in the same way as you see the youngsters today.” He laughed and said, “You made me blush.”, but no more than that. By comparing themselves with an even younger generation, people present themselves as traditional. It appears that in Bhutanese society it is almost moral to present oneself as being culturally-aware.

Another example which shows this social norm, or “ethic”, are the reasons that they give for only wearing national dress when the situation demands. These are mostly confined to practical points: “It is much easier to move in jeans and shirts.” “It is too warm in summer especially in areas at low altitudes.” There is nothing here which is derogatory about national dress itself. National dress has firmly secured its position in society as dress for schools, offices, temples, *dzong*, and formal occasions. Furthermore young people say that national dress has to be preserved, but at the same time they try to minimise the amount of time they spend wearing it. The reason that there is a gap between what they say and

what they actually practice, I would argue, is because to have an idea that Bhutanese culture and tradition have to be preserved is a sort of social ethic in Bhutan. Added to that, it might also be a factor that they were talking to a foreigner. The Bhutanese people tend to become more defensive when they present their culture and tradition to foreigners.<sup>78</sup>

Being culturally-aware also appears to mean being aware of your origin, and therefore your identity, as Bhutanese. A young high school teacher says:

If you say 'a westernised person', one example is the kind of people who are educated in the West and influenced by Western ideas. These people are seen in a positive light. A typical person of this kind does not care what people gossip about him, does not join in gossiping, is open to others and listens to them, and does whatever he thinks right without caring what people say about him. Another example of a westernised person would refer to people who copy the actors' behaviour and way of dressing in English films, wear tone jeans, use drugs, and roam around town. They do not know who they are, they just copy. In this sense westernised is used in a negative sense.

She is saying that being westernised is not in itself an accusation. It could work both ways, positively and negatively. But if one is losing one's own identity as a Bhutanese, he or she is condemned severely by the society. It is a sign that a person is not proud of who he or she is and represents a denial of one's own culture and tradition. A student in Drukgyel High School says, "A westernised person... wears tone jeans, and uses drugs. Some do not believe in Buddhism. They are not Christian either. They do

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<sup>78</sup> The same sort of attitudes were observed also in other areas among students in English medium education. One high school student became slightly defensive when he said, "Liking English films and music does not mean that we do not like Bhutanese ones. But English music is pleasant to listen to." He presented himself as not having derogative attitudes to something Bhutanese, even if he likes English films and music.

not believe in any religion.” It is a sign a person is losing his or her identity and becoming a nobody, and this is what is condemned by society.

Another example which shows the Bhutanese ethic of maintaining identity is found in some “advice” I was given by a Bhutanese. A young man working in a government office asked me one day if I was going back to Japan when I finished the thesis. I told him that I did not know. Then he suggested, “you have been abroad for quite some time, haven’t you? Seven years? That’s a long time. It is better if you go back to Japan once after Ph.D. If you have been away from your own country for a long time, you will forget your roots.” He presumes that it is always important to keep a sense of one’s own roots, and that being abroad for a long time makes a person confused about their own identity. He appears to suggest that it is something one has to consider more than anything else associated with a job, salary and one’s own interests and lifestyle. He believes in it as much as he suggested it to me, a foreigner.

### *Dichotomy of modernisation and culture*

It can be observed that the whole discourse about modernisation, culture and tradition sits on the dichotomy of modernisation on the one hand, and culture and tradition on the other. In fact it is astonishing that almost all of the people interviewed, whether young or old, regardless of mode of education, appear to speak about modernisation and culture based upon the assumption that as modernisation progresses, culture and tradition naturally decline. In the area of language, it is an often heard argument that Dzongkha is fighting a losing battle against English. One article in the newspaper argued that

Something close to what might be regarded as a cultural identity crisis is ... seen taking place in recent times. There is already an interesting class of educated Bhutanese fast emerging,... Some of them do not

... speak a syllable of the national language and can make pretence to fluency in hackneyed English styled in phony American accents and mannerisms. The folk dances, songs, music and art traditions are for this class fossilised stuff to be kept in their 'rightful' place - the museum. (*Kuensel*, 10th October 1998)

From a different perspective, a man who was studying in the US writes about the danger of losing "Bhutanese-ness" during the modernisation process.

For the three long years I've been away from home in pursuit of higher education in the United States. I've been thinking a lot lately, pondering such questions as what it means for Bhutan to be categorized as a 'developing' country. Will Bhutan be fully 'developed' when she becomes like the U.S. in terms of technological complexity? Will we be considered developed when every person in Bhutan - from the poorest *minap*<sup>79</sup> to the wealthiest *Dasho* - has a car, a house with air conditioning, videos, refrigerators, telephones, etc? If so what is the price we pay for such luxuries? Do we compromise our Buddhist values of non-attachment? More importantly do we adjust our cultural values from family and community oriented to being individualistic...? Do we then not lose our 'Bhutanese-ness'?

Foreigners who visit Bhutan ... are of the view that we in Bhutan have found the true meaning of life. How ironic then it is when we who have achieved this happiness wish to sacrifice it and instead desire to be like those who have lost it.

I am not implying that people in the U.S. lead thoroughly rotten lives. Material benefits indeed allow a high degree of physical comfort. But emotionally and

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<sup>79</sup> *Minap* literally means a black man and is used to mean a villager or a farmer.

spiritually, many people here are decidedly at a lower level relative to the average Bhutanese. (*Kuensel*, 29th May 1993)

The underlying assumption of this article is that technological advancement always means a trade-off with local culture and tradition. Observing life in a developed country, he assumes that technological and material advancement means becoming emotionally and spiritually poor. He does not ask whether the Americans were individualistic, before that country achieved today's level of technological advancement.

Globalisation is widely interpreted as homogenisation, and more specifically westernisation and Americanisation. A leading Bhutanese intellectual, Karma Ura, writes:

The impact of the West on Bhutan's material conditions and 'philosophy of life' is gradually being felt, even in the remote mountains and among the migratory cattle-herders in the deep forest. Its general influence is quite relentless and strong along the highways and in towns, and a traveller may already notice some signs of homogenization and blurred cultural identities. Import of both artifacts and ideologies of Western origin are on the rise.

Globally, lifestyles may be imploding or converging rather than diversifying. The Bhutanese too are becoming oriented to western culture, which by and large represents global culture. Traditional values and cultures get ... submerged under the weight of global culture. The diffusion of transnational culture set in motion forces of silent dissolution of local language, knowledge, beliefs, customs, skills, trades, institutions and communities.... If left to themselves, these changes will subdue rather than enhance the cultural distinctiveness of Bhutan. (Ura, 1997: p. 239, p. 247)



Modernisation and globalisation are seen as enemies of Bhutanese culture and tradition - a threat to Bhutanese-ness.

### *Religion*

Religion is another area which the older generation say that young people are increasingly alienated from. One of ex-councillors of the Royal Advisory Council, for instance, told me, "Declining Bhutanese values among youth is found in the increasing incidence of theft, and taking drug and so on. All of them are against religion." One of the educationists pointed out, "These days young people go to a temple to pray for their own interest and success, such as good exam results. We, the older generation, pray for well-being and happiness of all the creatures on the earth. Young people think only about themselves."

On the other hand, young people present themselves as religious in their own terms, and my own observations show that religion does in fact have a place in young people's everyday lives. A lady in her early twenties, for instance, one day asked me to go to Phajoding Monastery with her. She had just come back from the US, which used to be her dream place. But after staying for over six months, her busy life in America disappointed her so much that she quit her studies there. Her mother said she had become more religious since she came back. She recited religious texts and counted beads very frequently. Sometimes she would throw money as an offering towards a temple, when she was driving by in a car. This is something rare to see in Bhutan. In the end our plan to go to the monastery did not materialise for some reason. But I witnessed her making offerings to temples whenever I was in her car. She said that she was religious because her parents were.

My parents, especially my mother is very religious. She holds lots of *puja*, and she explains lots of things about religion to me. My sister and younger brother are also religious. But my elder brother is not. He goes

on hunting. Killing animals is very bad. But what can we do? We can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. Isn't it?

She was also taking private lessons in Dzongkha. She said that since most of her education was in India, her Dzongkha ability was weak, and she therefore wanted to spend more time strengthening her grasp of the language. Nevertheless, at the same time, she was also a young lady who always looked out for the latest fashions. She would never be found outside without make up on. She cares about the colour combination of her *kira*, *onju* and *toego*. She of course wears *kira* as long as it touches floor. And she is often found in a party at one of the few discos in Thimphu, where she sometime appears in a skirt which is radically short. Yet, she says she came back to Bhutan because "this is the place my heart belongs to."

Temples and monasteries seem to be a major picnic destination. In the course of fieldwork, I became friends with a group of several well-educated young ladies. They all had a job (most of them in government offices) but none of them had married. They had studied in the same school since they were in junior high school. Most of them had got a degree from a university outside Bhutan. I spent lots of time together with them. One sunny day in autumn, we went on a picnic to Sangaygang area, which is where "the telecom tower" stands, and where a great view of Thimphu is promised. We got out of the car there, and started to walk towards a small temple further up the hill, passing through the numerous prayer flags offered by people as we climbed up. When my heart was pumping at its limit, a small temple suddenly came into sight. A caretaker opened an altar room for us to pray. We prostrated ourselves and made a little offering of incense sticks, butter for the butter lamps and a small amount of money. Then the caretaker showed us the old tooth of a high monk and we lowered our heads to receive a blessing from it. The caretaker told us that the tooth was growing little by little as the years passed. Having visited the temple and received a blessing from the sacred tooth, we felt satisfied. We walked on

a little further to find a good place to sit down and have lunch, and laughed and screamed while we played some silly card games, looking down on the view of Thimphu.

About a month after this picnic, we set off to Phobjikha which is one of the places in Bhutan where rare and endangered black-necked cranes come from Tibet to stay during winter.<sup>80</sup> Having heard the cranes had arrived, we were tempted to go and see them. It is more than five hours drive from Thimphu, including short stops for lunch and tea and so we stayed in a guesthouse there overnight. Next morning, when we got up, the sun was about to rise. We hastened to walk to a marsh. There, in the morning light, were the cranes, quacking. We spent a few hours watching and admiring their beauty. Back in the guesthouse, we had breakfast and packed up. Loading luggage into the car, my friends talked about going to Gantey Gompa, the biggest Nyingmapa<sup>81</sup> monastery in Bhutan, which is on the top of a small hill that rises from the valley floor. It is such a famous monastery in Bhutan that people use the word, “Gantey”, when referring to the Phobjikha valley. However, I was totally unprepared for this visit: I was not told that we were visiting the monastery, although it was taken for granted by the others. Coming to the Phobjikha valley all the way from Thimphu, more than five hours of drive, nobody goes back without visiting the monastery. The girls took out *kira* from their rucksack and changed quickly. Inside the monastery a monk lead us to several very fine and beautiful altar rooms. We prostrated and made a small offering in each room. It was a magnificent monastery. One of the group had a cousin studying in it as a young monk, and we met him and gave him a box of pastries from Thimphu. It is not uncommon in Bhutan for one of the family or relatives to be a monk.

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<sup>80</sup> According to the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature, about five hundred and fifty black-necked cranes came to Bhutan to roost for the winter in 1996 (*Kuensel*, 8th November 1997).

<sup>81</sup> Nyingmapa is a religious school of Tibetan Buddhism popular in central and eastern parts of Bhutan. It was founded by Guru Rimpoche in the eighth century (Pommaret, 1994: p. 265).

One of this group of friends asked me to come to her sister's place one day, because there was *puja*. In *puja* many people are invited and enjoy a feast while monks chant prayers. All five of us headed for her sister's place near Khasadrapchu, about half an hour's drive from Thimphu. All the people from the village were also invited. We enjoyed the occasion, and came back with several pieces of dried pork. Village pork is much tastier than the kind we buy in the shop, my friends said.

As these examples show, religion has a place in everyday routines even among young people. It is still deeply embedded in their lives. Nobody among my friends asked why we were visiting the monastery. Nobody asked how the tooth of a high monk had grown: it is simply a precious item from which everyone gets blessing. For Bhutanese people *puja* is a special occasion, in which not only almost everyone in a village but even a relative's friends are invited. Nobody asked why we had to go all the way to Khasadrapchu to the *puja* taking a box of pastries as a gift for the host. No questions were raised. For them it is a way of life.

There is an obvious stereotyping of young people taking place in the society. The stereotype is that Bhutanese culture and tradition are declining among young people, especially in the area of religion. The older generation shake their heads and say that they are too much westernised, and that they do not observe religious teachings any more. Youngsters are ambitious and therefore selfish, they say. However, when we listen to what young people say, in actual fact they try to present themselves as traditional and religious. In order to do that, they compare themselves with even younger generations. In order to present themselves as thinking that culture and tradition is important in the process of modernisation, they make a distinction between westernisation and modernisation, and argue that modernisation at the same time as keeping a Bhutanese identity is vital. Furthermore the reasons that they do not like national dress are all practical. The statement from a young

lady, who was educated mostly in India and who works in a travel company, expresses the stance well: “I do respect *kira*. It is just a little uncomfortable because of the thick material and tight belt.” The line they do not cross over is respect for Bhutanese culture and tradition. Preservation of culture and tradition is almost a moral value in Bhutan, and is expressed as such by every young person I met. Therefore they need a defence against the popular stereotype of themselves and for their position as modernisers in the society. Some students in Drukgyel High School told me, as we have seen already, that the pace of modernisation has been retarded because of the need to preserve culture and tradition. This however does not mean that culture and tradition are preventing the country from modernisation, the sort of argument we often find in modernisation theories. They meant, as I understood it, that resources (both human and financial) have been diverted to preserving culture and tradition, and that therefore modernisation programmes do not have as many resources allocated to them as they would have received otherwise. They did not mean that old and traditional beliefs, for example, are something which inherently prevent modernisation. This is an argument we find in modernisation theories, but not in Bhutan.

### **Maintaining doxa**

Although the new orthodoxy appears to have been strengthened through using objectification, and by making this objectifying scale favour those who are educated in the modern education sector, the state still observes the doxa of being culturally-aware. Even if the state is dominated by the people with qualification from modern education, it observes this doxa. The policy of preservation of culture and tradition can be seen as a manifestation of doxa. The state has reiterated the link between cultural preservation and the nation’s independence, in the same way as it was emphasised at the time of the unification of the country in the seventeenth century. According to Dasho Rigzin Dorji, then Secretary of the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (the founding father of Bhutan

as a nation) found it necessary to promote a distinct cultural identity for Bhutan in order to preserve its sovereignty in the face of the then hostile and hegemonic attitude of the rulers of Tibet. He, therefore

developed distinct Bhutanese characteristics in religious ceremonies and rituals as well as in the dress and customs of the people. He also introduced a code of conduct and etiquette known as *Driglam Namzha* to further project a distinct identity for the Bhutanese people and to instill in them an abiding sense of love and pride in their customs and way of life. (*Kuensel*, 26th February 1994)

Dasho Rigzin Dorji writes that as a result of the distinct identity inculcated by Shabdrung, Bhutan was able to maintain sovereignty in the face of overwhelming odds in the years that followed, withstanding challenges both from the Tibetans in the north and the British in the south.

The policy of preservation of culture and tradition is a necessity in order to carry out modernisation in a society in which being culturally-aware is almost an ethic, or doxa. In this way the new dominant class reproduces the doxa. Since it is connected to the nation's sovereignty and independence, no one can show a derogatory attitude to culture and tradition in this small landlocked country sandwiched between two giant neighbours, China and India. This situation has continuously reproduced the doxa.

At the same time the symbolic value of Shabdrung has been very effective in making the link between the nation's independence and preserving Bhutan's culture and tradition. Shabdrung, as the founding father of Bhutan, is a revered figure in Bhutan. His statue sits on many altars of temples and monasteries along with statues of Buddha, Guru

Rimpoche<sup>82</sup> and other Buddhist saints.<sup>83</sup> Through using the symbolic value of Shabdrung, the whole argument that Bhutanese culture and tradition has to be preserved in order to safeguard the nation's independence and sovereignty has become so persuasive that there is little room left in society for doubt or questions.

Apart from the symbolic value of Shabdrung, the doxa of being culturally-aware appears to have been maintained by the perception that Bhutan exists in a delicate geo-political environment. As has been described in detail earlier in the book, the country has been a target for invaders for centuries. This small country sandwiched between two giant nations has seen neighbouring countries, which share similar cultural backgrounds, absorbed into India and China. More recently the problems caused by ULFA and Bodo militants have been perceived to be serious security threats.

Another threat comes in a very different form. This is the force of globalisation. In Bhutan modernisation on the one hand, and culture and tradition on the other are seen as opposites. They are not naturally reconcilable. Modernisation is perceived by the Bhutanese as a threat to Bhutanese culture and Bhutanese identity. The "youth" have been a social problem in Bhutan not only because some of them commit crimes such as theft and drug abuse, but also because they are seen in the society as the group who are most alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition. A harsher interpretation perceives them as being influenced by the Western media and armed with English and Western scientific knowledge, the very forces which undermine Bhutanese tradition. In the older generation's eyes, they look less and less Bhutanese and increasingly influenced by Western culture. Modernisation and globalisation are seen as

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<sup>82</sup> A Tantrist from present-day Pakistan. He introduced Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan and Tibet in the eighth century (Pommaret, 1994: p. 53). He is revered as the second Buddha in Tibetan Buddhism (Imaeda, 1994: p. 32).

<sup>83</sup> Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal himself was a high monk of the Drukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism.

synonyms. In the newspapers and in literature, as we have seen in the previous chapter, globalisation is described as a fundamental force which is destroying Bhutanese culture, tradition and identity. In an article which appeared in *Kuensel* (29th May 1993) a student who studied in the USA seems to assume that becoming a developed country means losing Bhutanese-ness, and that a materially abundant life would inevitably ruin the country's mental and spiritual richness. In his view modernisation and the Bhutanese way of life are incompatible. Karma Ura argues that globalisation means homogenisation, and that it more or less means westernisation. I would once again quote part of one of his writings:

Globally, lifestyles may be imploding or converging rather than diversifying. The Bhutanese too are becoming oriented to western culture, which by and large represents global culture. Traditional values and cultures get ... submerged under the weight of global culture. The diffusion of transnational culture set in motion forces of silent dissolution of local language, knowledge, beliefs, customs, skills, trades, institutions and communities.... If left to themselves, these changes will subdue rather than enhance the cultural distinctiveness of Bhutan. (Ura, 1997: p. 239, p. 247)

He argues that, overwhelmed by the "relentless and strong" wave of globalisation, a distinct cultural identity is fading. Therefore globalisation is perceived to be an enemy of efforts to maintain Bhutanese identity, and as a threat to the country's cultural distinctiveness. In the arena of language for example, it is often heard that Dzongkha is losing a battle against English. People are afraid that Bhutan might be swallowed by this homogenising force, and in a context where culture and tradition is promoted as a means of safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, globalisation represents a serious threat.



The government repeatedly emphasises that national identity, derived from Bhutanese culture and tradition, is the most powerful way of safeguarding the independence and sovereignty of Bhutan. Having experienced external and internal threats for centuries, maintaining the nation's independence appears to be a powerful rallying cry. Being intimately connected to the nation's independence, the preservation of culture and tradition, whatever that means, is a line which no one can even dream of crossing. Through the link between nation's sovereignty and preservation of culture and tradition, this doxa of being culturally-aware has been successfully maintained.