

## **Chapter 6: Concluding Discussion**

This concluding chapter begins by discussing Bhutanese discourses and doxa in the wider context of globalisation. The indigenisation process of Western development discourse will also be examined. The chapter will also consider the extent to which Western discourse has influenced the formation of discourses in Bhutan. Finally it provides an overall conclusion to the book.

### **6.1 Globalisation**

#### **Bhutanese discourses and indigenisation**

We have seen earlier in this book that Bhutanese discourses on modernisation, culture and tradition are constructed upon the basis of a presumed dichotomy between modernisation on the one hand, and culture and tradition on the other. People in Bhutan generally think that modernisation is a force which destroys culture and tradition. This unilinear thinking resembles what modernisation theories argue, and this assumption is in doxa, the universe of the undiscussed.

However, the following part of what modernisation theorists argue is distinctively different from what is said in Bhutan. Modernisation theorists take a derogatory attitudes towards what is perceived as local culture and tradition. They would argue that traditional beliefs and local traditions are the forces which prevent society from modernising, and that it is therefore both natural and ideal that local culture and tradition should disappear in the end. The Bhutanese discourses produce various responses to this unilinear way of thinking, and none of them resemble what modernisation theorists say. Young people in Dzongkha medium education would say, “As modernisation progresses, culture and tradition declines, therefore we must stop, or retard the pace of modernisation.” Those in English medium education would say, “We need modernisation, but at the same time the decline of culture and tradition is to some extent inevitable.

We therefore must aim at striking a balance between modernisation and culture.” And, finally, the new traditionalists say, “As modernisation progresses, culture and tradition decline. Therefore, we must make a special effort to preserve culture and tradition, and culture and tradition have to be alive in our everyday life.” These variations have been produced within a local context in which each group produces their own opinion in order to enhance their position in society. Above all, state policy is enthusiastic about the preservation of culture and tradition. So although both modernisation theories and Bhutanese discourses start from a recognition of the dichotomy between the modern and the traditional, the arguments which follow from it are very different.

It seems that an indigenising process is taking place, whereby the unilinear thinking of modernisation theories is received and digested in the locality according to the differing context. However, it may be more correct to say that processes of homogenisation and heterogenisation are ongoing simultaneously. In this context, the acceptance of unilinear thinking represents a homogenisation and the existence of other various opinions represents heterogenisation. Homogenisation does not mean that everything discussed or done in the West is known about or accepted in Bhutan. Only some of the arguments that make up modernisation theories are reflected in Bhutanese discourses, and the rest are ignored. Moreover, the Marxist line of thinking is virtually unheard. The view of the new traditionalists is very similar to what anthropologists working on indigenous knowledge argue, but the new traditionalists are only one group of young people in Bhutan. In the local context in which “being culturally-aware” is a social norm, it is implausible that the derogatory attitudes of modernisation theorists toward local culture and tradition could become prevalent in Bhutan. Also it is in this local context in which arguments made by anthropologists which tend to praise local culture are exploited and adjusted to the Bhutanese situation by the new traditionalists. Usage of these arguments by new traditionalists has worked to enhance their position in the

society, especially because the arguments particularly fit the doxa of “being culturally-aware”, and also it helps them deflect criticisms from orthodoxy II (young people from monastic education) and heterodoxy II (young people from Dzongkha medium education) of being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition.

Secondly, the context of this particular way of seeing the world - that modernisation destroys local culture and tradition - is completely different in the West and in Bhutan. In the West, according to discursive analysts such as Escobar, this way of thinking is used to present the West as superior to the rest of the world. It has contributed to the idea of Western identity as modern and advanced against the rest of the world, which has been seen in turn as barbarian, backward and traditional. In Bhutan, on the other hand, this same way of thinking has been used as a warning against modernisation. Modernisation is considered to be a threat to Bhutanese culture and tradition. This way of thinking has come about as a result of Bhutan’s history in which cultural distinctiveness has been projected as being a prime safeguard of the country’s independence.

Thirdly, ideas and materials are introduced in the locality only when they relate to the local context. The unilinear thinking of modernisation theories seems to fit the local context: modernisation thus perceived as a threat in the society because in this particular locality being culturally-aware is doxa. In a situation in which everyone presents himself or herself as being culturally-aware, everyone has something to say about modernisation, culture and tradition and these subjects become a focal point of discussion.

Fourthly, a simultaneous heterogenising process has produced several different opinions which flow from the position of different agents in Bhutanese society. The unilinear way of thinking is digested and exploited to establish and enhance one’s own position in the society. In Bhutan, heterodoxy II tries to enhance the validity and usefulness of their knowledge and skills by asserting that

modernisation has to be stopped or slowed down. Heterodoxy I (young people from English medium education) emphasises the harmonisation of culture and modernisation, in which they can maintain the current level of appreciation of their knowledge and skills in the society, which they have acquired through modern English medium education. Orthodoxy I (the new traditionalists) have attained new heights in accumulating capital by incorporating the arguments for preserving and promoting culture and tradition into their pro-modernisation stance. The “indigenisation” of external influences is thus composed of several complex processes. Depending on the local context, ideas are filtered, digested, adjusted and exploited.

### **Hegemony of the West and development discourses in Bhutan**

The work of Jonathan Friedman provides some inspiration when examining Bhutanese discourses in the context of globalisation. He explores the formation and transformation of identity in relation to hegemonic shifts taking place around the globe, and his perspective can be applied in two ways to Bhutan’s case. One way is to look at the regional situation and then, to a lesser extent, the world political climate. We have already examined the regional circumstances, and the problems which follow from Bhutan being sandwiched between two giant nations in Asia. It is not hard to imagine that Bhutan’s cautious stance to the USA and Russia is because of the tremendous difficulties it has had in managing its own immediate neighbours. Furthermore, relations with either the US or Russia might have significant, maybe fatal, implications for Bhutan’s relationship with India and China, and hence hold the possibility that the very survival of the nation might be at stake. The reluctance to establish formal diplomatic relations with the US and Russia implies that a global hegemony shift in Friedman’s sense has not had much direct influence on Bhutan. However, regional circumstances, as we have seen, have worked to strengthen the expression of Bhutanese identity. Bhutan has witnessed two neighbouring counties, Tibet and Sikkim, which share a similar cultural

background based on Tibetan Buddhism, being swallowed by two big neighbours. These events threatened the survival of the nation's identity, and in turn lead to a stronger assertion of its particularity.

Turning to the hegemony of Western development discourse over Bhutanese official discourses, we have already seen that although the environment has certainly been conducive for Bhutan to press forward with its own development policy which emphasises not only socio-economic development but also the importance of preserving culture, tradition and the natural environment, it is also unlikely that donor countries have pressurised Bhutan to follow their development discourse. Firstly this is because the Bhutanese government started to pay attention to the preservation of culture and tradition even before Western development thinking turned its attention to aspects of human lives other than material progress. The Bhutanese government was already determined to preserve Bhutan's culture and tradition at the point of introduction of modernisation. Secondly it is because the government has carefully chosen donor countries and agencies whose policies fit Bhutan's development objectives. The Bhutanese government has therefore to some extent manipulated its environment for its own ends. Thirdly, a very important aspect of Bhutan's development policy is completely outside of Western development discourse: that is the idea of Gross National Happiness. Finally, throughout the formation of development policies the government has described these policies as unique and original. The case of Bhutan suggests that the real world is not as hegemonic as theories of discursive analysis of development would suggest. The path of development which Bhutan is trying to trace is mainly directed by political motivations, that is the survival of the country in difficult geopolitical circumstances, rather than by economic factors or by Western models of development.

It does not seem as though the Western discourse of development has achieved overwhelming power over the discourses of development in Bhutan to the extent that

Escobar and others<sup>1</sup> argue in their discursive analyses of development. Works on the discourse of development are concerned with the thought-patterns and particular ways of representation that have supported and legitimated Western intervention into non-Western societies. Escobar himself writes that there has been a growing will to transform drastically two-thirds of the world in the pursuit of the goal of material prosperity and economic progress. “By the early 1950s such a will had become hegemonic at the level of the circles of power.” (Escobar, 1995a: p. 4) Works such as Escobar’s lead us to imagine that people in the Third World are also brainwashed by this particular way of seeing the world. However, these works are largely about how the West has represented the rest of the world, and not about how these representations have been received among people in the Third World. Words such as “Western domination” and “authority” make us think that Western representations are accepted in the Third World without any resistance or alteration. However, people in Bhutan are not brainwashed by the discourse of development: in fact, as we have seen, in the formation of Bhutanese discourses of development, the local context seems to play a greater role than the supposed hegemony of Western development discourse.

The Western representation of the non-West does not always remain unchallenged. As is shown in the second chapter, people in Bhutan sometimes criticise the way the West represents them. They have their own knowledge of their society. Though Edward Said says that the West has defined the non-Western world, actually saying that Western knowledge has had this degree of authority itself may appear to be an exercise of discursive power. It is also a fact that the Bhutanese exploit Orientalist attitudes for their own benefit. Bhutan earns significant amount of foreign exchange by attracting tourists, and the brochures of Bhutanese tour operators are full of words and images of “the isolated Buddhist kingdom with rich and unique cultural heritage”,

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, Crush (ed.) (1995) and Sachs (ed.) (1992).

which appeal to the Orientalist imagination.<sup>2</sup> I am not trying to argue that the West has not had power over the non-Western world. However, I have come to think that the power of the West is not as strong as used to be thought among the post-structuralist scholars of the discourse analysis of development.<sup>3</sup>

## 6.2 Conclusion

### Local discourses

We have seen different views about modernisation, culture and tradition among young people in Bhutan. The views presented are classifiable into three categories, which in turn are largely related to young people's educational backgrounds. The features of the local discourses are threefold. Firstly, there is much competition and negotiation among young

---

<sup>2</sup> Advertisements by one of the biggest Bhutanese tour operators are filled with phrases such as, "Bhutan: A paradise in the heart of the Himalayas" and "Bhutan. The Last Shangrila". (*Tashi Delek*, Nov/Dec 1996). Moreover a brochure from the Tourism Authority of Bhutan, the regulatory body of tourism industry in Bhutan, reads:

The Kingdom of Bhutan...is today a unique and exotic tourist destination. When the rest of the world has mostly adopted the blue jeans or the western suit culture, Bhutanese have deliberately safeguarded their ancient way of life in all its aspects. Immediately on landing at the country's only airport by the national airline, the visitor is in the midst of people dressed in [G]hos and Kiras, a landscape with Dzongs, temples and houses with architecture found nowhere else in the world. (Tourism Authority of Bhutan)

The government takes a careful line on tourism. In order to gain maximum revenue with minimum damage to the natural environment and people's everyday life, it is a policy that each tourist has to pay US\$200 per night of which 35% goes into the national treasury and the rest is to provide food, accommodation, transportation and a tour guide. In 1995 tourism generated US\$6.55 million from a total of 5,415 tourists (UNDP, 1998: p. 33).

<sup>3</sup> A criticism of the discourse analysis of development also comes from Sivaramakrishnam and Agrawal (1999). They point out that "The idea that development is entirely a northern imposition on southern societies can only be sustained by holding at bay the immense evidence on the polyvocal, polylocal nature of development performance and appropriations".

people over access to economic, social and cultural capital. Under the circumstances in which there is a single ladder of success in society encompassing both Dzongkha medium education and English medium education, it is more or less obvious for everyone that young people in Dzongkha medium education are less advantaged than those in English medium education. In terms of cultural capital, people in Dzongkha medium education are regarded as having more than those in English medium education, and people in monastic education are perceived to have attained the highest levels. Those in Dzongkha medium education criticise people in English medium education for not knowing enough about Bhutanese religion and culture. On the other hand, people in English medium education perceive Dzongkha medium education as not very useful, and narrow in the options it presents. In this competition, the young people who I have called “new traditionalists” seem to have attained new heights in accumulating economic, social and cultural capital. They have climbed up to the top of the ladder of success, and at the same time have shown their enthusiasm for preserving culture and tradition.

Secondly, all the discourses should also be understood as expressions of the validity and usefulness of different types of knowledge and skills in a society in transition. Enthusiasm for preserving Bhutanese culture and tradition is stronger among young people in Dzongkha medium education than it is amongst those in English medium education. On the other hand, young people in English medium education are more likely to point out positive aspects of modernisation than those in Dzongkha medium education.

The third and very important feature of the Bhutanese local discourses is the doxa of cultural awareness. This doxa is obvious, as we have seen, in the ways in which young people defend and justify their own views against criticisms levelled against them by the older generations in society. They always try to present themselves as being culturally-aware. Being culturally-aware is also a moral issue in society to the extent that one Bhutanese told me, “If you are labelled as not being



cultural aware by your seniors and elder people, you are socially dead.” Young people are seen as a problem in society: they are one of the issues. This is primarily because they are seen to be alienated from Bhutanese culture, tradition and values. Even taking drugs, smoking and thefts are seen, besides being criminal activities or harmful to health, as a violation of traditional Bhutanese values. In this environment, a derogatory view of culture and tradition, such as that is found in modernisation theories, is identified with the socially unacceptable, and receives only severe criticism in society.

In Bhutan, culture and tradition is a much discussed issue. Culture and tradition provide an arena which discussions about modernisation, development, national identity, and nation’s independence start from and come back to. But what do culture and tradition mean in Bhutan? This is a question which I posed at the beginning of this book. Is it at all possible to obtain a definition of Bhutanese culture and tradition through analysing the different discourses? Some issues, such as architecture, language, national dress and *driglhon namzha* have drawn most attention. *Tshechu*, mask dances, are seen as somewhat symbolic of “authentic Bhutanese culture”. However, it appears that the definition of Bhutanese culture and tradition itself has not been an important issue in the society. Differences in the meaning of culture and tradition have not become a focus of discussion. As we have observed, what new traditionalists mean by Bhutanese culture and tradition is, though overlapping in some areas, different from what the older generations mean. Differences in meaning, however, do not draw much attention and hence do not cause controversy. The important point for society is that the new traditionalists are enthusiastic about preserving Bhutanese culture and tradition. Culture and tradition is perceived to be vulnerable in Bhutan, therefore it needs to be preserved - rather than discussions about its meaning, the *preservation* of culture is seen as much more important in Bhutan.

## **Government policy**

In a society in which being culturally-aware is doxa, even the government cannot escape. However, one feature which I have noted here is that the government initiated crisis, a fact which stands in opposition to Bourdieu's theory that crisis is caused by forces other than orthodoxy. In Bhutan's case, orthodoxy (the government) caused a crisis by introducing development activities in 1961. Although this significant change of policy has affected a whole constellation of the discourses, we can still observe some continuities from the past which signifies the role of orthodoxy, as described by Bourdieu, as the guardian of doxa. This is the policy of preservation of culture and tradition. This policy has been included in Five Year Plans since a very early stage in planned development, and from the Sixth Five Year Plan much more emphasis has been placed on it.

As modernisation progresses in society, the decline of Bhutanese culture and tradition has become a concern for many people, especially for the older generation and the authorities. But this does not mean that the policy of preservation of culture and tradition has not been successful. I would argue that because of the policy, preservation of culture and tradition has drawn much more attention in society, and made people more conscious about Bhutanese culture and tradition. Moreover, since Bhutanese culture and tradition is portrayed as if it is contradictory in nature to modernisation, it has produced a big arena of discourses. To put it more simply, people frequently talk about Bhutanese culture and tradition: they are terms which are not ignored. They are not fossils which can be found only in museums and historical dramas on television. They are very much issues of everyday life in Bhutan. Whether they feel comfortable in national dress or not, people talk about Bhutanese culture and tradition. One of the most important contributions of the policy of preservation of culture and tradition is in making Bhutanese culture and tradition a focal point for discussion in society.

The main factor which has maintained this doxa is the connection between Bhutanese culture and tradition, on the one hand, and the nation's independence and sovereignty, on the other. This connection has its origins in Bhutan's geopolitical position between two giant nations, China and India. I have introduced Bourdieu's concept of habitus in a modified form to explain Bhutanese doxa. Habitus is a (perceived) form of history produced by collective practices. Bhutan as a small country between two giants has been perceived to be in a vulnerable position by its inhabitants. History shows enough examples of how small neighbouring countries have vanished from the map as independent countries. The government has played a prime role in connecting Bhutanese culture and Bhutanese identity with the nation's independence and sovereignty, and this argument now has so much persuasiveness that no one will cross the line and express a lack of concern about cultural issues.

The government's initiatives in terms of planned development activities should also be seen in the same light. The desire to gain material prosperity and economic growth was a minor motivation behind the government's decision to launch development activities in the early 1960s. Rather than being pushed by an economic impetus, it was changes of political climate in the region and a change in judgement by the authorities of the time that lead the country to open up and start modernisation. In other words, the government launched development activities primarily to ensure the political survival of the nation.

If India and China are physical threats to the country, modernisation has been perceived as an ideological threat. The government has repeatedly asserted the "uniqueness" and "originality" of its development policies. These assertions, I would argue, should be seen as a maintenance of identity, and as a guarantor of the survival of the nation. Development policies must be different from other countries' development policies and they should not be identified with the "standard model of modernisation". There is always present a desire to be "original", and a political imperative to be "unique",

because, in the mind of the authorities it directly relates to the country's survival as an independent nation. Bhutan has to be "unique", "original" and "different", because it is the country's one *raison d'être*.

Since development activities in Bhutan were started due to political imperatives, the government appears to have retained a firm grip in formulating development policies. These policies do not make economic growth the first priority and the idea of Gross National Happiness as a competing concept to Gross National Product is prominent amongst these "unique" approaches. Discursive analyses of development, such as those produced by Escobar, argue that whole world has been engulfed by a single discourse of development, and they paint a picture in which the whole world blindly follows the Western model of development. However, examination of the case of Bhutan certainly shows us that the world is more complex and diversified than that. Western hegemony over non-Western society is not as solid or overwhelming as the discursive analyses of development would have us believe.

### **Feedback to development theories**

At the level of local discourses, as has been shown already, the doxa shares a common assumption with Western development discourse: that is the view that as modernisation progresses, culture and tradition decline. There are however complex indigenising processes in which social actors compete and negotiate, and in this process, different development discourses have been produced. One might argue that this is still "a variation" of Western development idea by emphasising a common part of development discourses between the West and Bhutan. However, I would like to point out some dangers in seeing the Bhutanese development path as "a variation". Firstly, this creates the impression that there is an authentic, orthodox, development concept. Moreover, it can imply that this authentic and orthodox development concept originated in the West. It suggests a one way flow of development ideas and gives the impression that the West is the producer of development

ideas, and the rest of the world can only follow it. Most importantly the variation thesis underestimates the dynamism of different societies, which will inevitably produce their own development discourses and development ideas. It downplays, to an unreasonable degree, the particular political, economic, social and historical conditions of a society and the development discourses and development ideas that are produced by it.

Throughout the book, I have shown the dynamism of Bhutanese society in producing its own discourses of modernisation, culture and tradition. I have argued that the influence of Western development discourse is not as overwhelming as is suggested by the post-structuralists' discursive analyses of development. This however does not mean that there is not a power imbalance between the West and the non-West. Power relations exist between the West and the non-West, but in a slightly different sense from how Edward Said outlines them in *Orientalism*. Said writes that Europe has defined non-Europe, and that the systematic Western representation of the non-West as inferior to the West is the source of Western domination over the non-West. However I would argue that the power relation is not primarily derived from the belief that the way in which the West has represented the world (in which the West is always superior to the non-West) is the sole representation of the world. Western representation of non-Western societies does not occur without being challenged. Rather, power relations between the West and non-West arise directly from how much attention has been drawn to the West in the non-West, and vice versa. For example, students in Class 10 in Bhutan can recite a play of Shakespeare and a poem of Wordsworth; many of them can sing the songs of the Beatles and Bryan Adams. But we do not expect seventeen year old students in England to name a Bhutanese singer or a Bhutanese author. In one sense this shows the relative ignorance of people in the West compared with their counterparts in the non-West. However, more importantly, it signifies the fact that in Bhutan more attention has been paid to the West, compared to the

attention which a non-Western society would receive in the West. This is where the power imbalance is derived from. The fact the negative images of the West are utilised in the development discourses in Bhutan does not necessarily mean that the power of the West is declining. The important point is that the West is one of the main points of reference in the discourses - it still draws the most attention.