

This paper is not intended to judge or give answers to the challenges that development and exposure to outside influences have brought to the traditional values of Bhutan. It is more intended to present some of the questions that exist in areas that touch the daily life of the people.

## **The Ethnic and Cultural Diversity of Bhutan**

GEORGE VAN DRIEM

Himalayan Languages Project, University of Leiden

**I** will talk about ethnic and particularly linguistic diversity in Bhutan, because language is a very strong determinant of ethnic identity, but it is not the sole determinant and sometimes it has very little to do with ethnic identity at all.

I would ask you to keep one thing in mind: language and culture and race are three totally independent quantities in principle. Of course there is a relation between the three, and it is very easy to understand why: The only means of transmission of genetic material in our species is from mother and father on to son and daughter, and that is what determines race. This also happens to be the most common means of transmission of language and of culture. Yet very often this is not the way that language and culture are transmitted, and there are many attested cases in history and prehistory where there is a discrepancy. For example, if we take allele frequencies at polymorphic loci on the human genome and parameters like protein polymorphism, and we then take a look at the people who live in southern China, then we find that the Cantonese makes no genetic sense in terms of the language which they speak and no linguistic sense in terms of the racial characteristics which they have. The same applies to the Hungarians. Geneticists who look at their genome find that they essentially appear to be a Slavic people, most closely related to the Poles, Czechs and Kashubians. We know as linguists that Hungarians show no affinity with these Slavic peoples at all, but that they speak a Uralic language, and Uralic is quite a distinct language family from Indo-European, to which family the Slavic languages belong. We also happen to know the historical reasons for these discrepancies, and history tells us what happened in southern China and in Hungary. We know that the Magyars came to Pannonia at the beginning of the ninth century and imposed their language on the native Slavic peoples of the country. We also know how during the Qín dynasty the Chinese came from the

north and, in the second half of the 1st millennium BC, first colonised or 'sinified' the south of China, where the population predominantly spoke Kadai languages. Kadai is an independent language family from the Tibeto-Burman language family to which Chinese belongs. The best known Kadai languages are probably Thai or 'Siamese', Shan and Lao.

Culture too is in principle independent of language. Obviously, at the beginning the first half of the 1st millennium AD, the people who spoke Tibetan or who spoke Old Tibetan and, for that matter, all of the population groups which spoke Bodish languages in general had had no exposure to Mahāyāna Buddhism, even though many other parts of the world at this time had been converted to Buddhism already, such as China and what is now Pakistan. So, the cultural and the linguistic lineages of the Tibetan and Bhutanese peoples are, in fact, quite different.

In short, language, race and culture are three independent quantities which are only probabilistically related to some extent, and, as a linguist, I shall focus now without any apologies on language.

All of the languages in Bhutan, with the single exception of Nepali, belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Nepali belongs to the Indo-European language family, to which English, German, Spanish and Russian also belong. All of the other languages of Bhutan belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family. The language family has been going by that name for over 150 years.

From 1924 until about 1995, however, the language family also went by the name of 'Sino-Tibetan' in some circles. There were two big problems with 'Sino-Tibetan'. The first was that it meant two totally different things depending on what you thought about the position of the Kadai and Hmong-Mien languages. In reality, the Kadai language family is an independent linguistic stock comprising languages like Thai, Lao, Shan and many lesser Kadai languages in South-east Asia and southern China, including the indigenous Lí languages on the island of Hainan in the South China Sea. Likewise, the Hmong-Mien languages – also known as the Miáo-Yáo languages – are the flotsam and jetsam of a distinct, ancient Asian linguistic stock, which has only left remnants in the form of tiny language communities scattered throughout southern China and South-east Asia, where they nowhere form a majority. Some

scholars mistakenly included Kadai and Hmong-Mien within 'Sino-Tibetan'. Some people even did so – and continue to do so – for political reasons. Better informed scholars recognized that there is no sound linguistic evidence for a genetic linguistic relationship between Kadai and Hmong-Mien, on one hand, and Tibeto-Burman languages like Chinese, Gurung, Burmese, Dzongkha, Bumthang and Lepcha, on the other hand. The similarities between Kadai, Hmong-Mien and Chinese are no more than well-documented borrowings.

The second problem with 'Sino-Tibetan' was that it was largely based on ignorance about the linguistic position of Chinese, not exactly a minor detail! We have now come to know that Chinese is a member of the Sino-Bodic branch of the Tibeto-Burman family, and that Old Chinese in fact very closely resembles a number of archaic Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in the Himalayan region. The Sino-Bodic branch is a very large trunk of the Tibeto-Burman family, and most of the languages in Bhutan belong to this very extensive Sino-Bodic branch. The reason I have told you so much about the term 'Sino-Tibetan' is because you are still likely to run into the name. Today I sometimes even still encounter the term 'Indo-Chinese', although knowledgeable scholars had already abandoned 'Indo-Chinese' by the beginning of the 20th century. For whatever reason, you might still hear someone say 'Sino-Tibetan', but scholars who are in the know speak of the Tibeto-Burman family, and Sino-Bodic (including Dzongkha and Chinese) is one of its larger branches. This is not to say that Dzongkha is very much like Chinese. Welsh and Spanish both belong to the same Italo-Celtic branch of Indo-European, but you will appreciate that Welsh and Spanish are very different languages indeed. The same goes for Dzongkha and Chinese. Sino-Bodic is a large and heterogeneous group containing many languages.

Today we know much more about Chinese historical phonology, and all of the formerly conflicting models of reconstruction of Old Chinese have harmonized. Sometimes using very different epistemological criteria, scholars have arrived at a coherent model of Old Chinese which is basically the same, whether you talk to an American like William Baxter, a Russian like Sergei Starostin or a Chinese scholar like Zhèngzhāng Shàngfāng. Nowadays scholars of Old Chinese argue about very minor details because we have a very good consensus about what Old Chinese looked like.

We also know much more about Himalayan languages, and there are more analytical descriptions, both grammars and lexicons, being made available of Tibeto-Burman languages, particularly by scholars working in the Himalayan region.

The Tibeto-Burman language family is the second largest language family in the world in terms of number of speakers, mainly because Chinese is included. There are over a billion speakers of Chinese languages like Mandarin, Cantonese, Min or 'Fukienese' languages, Wu and so forth. Indo-European is probably the largest language family, in part because of the global popularity of English in the wake of the age of European colonial expansion. The time depth that we ascribe to the Tibeto-Burman language family is comparable to the time depth that we ascribe to the Indo-European language family. That means that the proto-language from which all Tibeto-Burman languages derive is estimated to have been spoken somewhere at the crossroads of Mesolithic and Neolithic times, in the early Neolithic, somewhere between 10,000 and 8,000 years ago.

The first split in the Tibeto-Burman language family is between Western and Eastern. However, a good many of the Eastern Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken to the west of the Western Tibeto-Burman languages, because there have been many *Völkerwanderungen* – a favourite 'English' word of the British historian Arnold Toynbee – or migrations of people in pre-historic times. The homeland of these Tibeto-Burman peoples is generally believed to be in the provinces of Sichuan and Yúnnán in what today is China. The ancient Tibeto-Burmans are identified with the Sichuan Neolithic, which is one of the oldest Neolithic cultures in the all of East and Central Asia. It is also one of the few Neolithic cultures in this part of the world which shows unbroken continuity from its local Mesolithic antecedents. Although this identification is speculative, informed opinion has it that the Sichuan Neolithic corresponds to the *Urheimat* of the language family. Subsequently, dispersals of cultural assemblages or 'technocomplexes' are documented in the archaeological record. These dispersals are not controversial. Any up-to-date scholar in East Asian archaeology will corroborate at least the archaeological part of the story which I am telling you here today. The Sichuan Neolithic culture soon spread into north-eastern India, particularly Assam, and it then slowly petered out in Orissa. This dispersal yielded what we call the North-eastern Indian Neolithic. This culture is associated generally with the spread of ancient Western Tibeto-

Burmans into the areas which are known today as Assam, Tripura, the Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Speakers of languages like Bodo, Garo, Dhimal and Toto are the direct linguistic descendants of the bearers of the North-eastern Indian Neolithic culture into north-eastern India. Toto is spoken right on the Bhutanese border near Phüntsho'ling, but officially their village is located in Jalpaigudi district, which is now administered by West Bengal, although it is part of Bhutan historically, being one of the Bhutanese duars. That is Western Tibeto-Burman. If you want a date, there are no calibrated radiocarbon datings for the North-eastern Indian Neolithic. But archaeologists estimate that it had begun before the beginning of the 6th millennium BC. Western was the very first to split off.

At approximately the same time, or shortly thereafter, everything which was left in Sichuan and Yúnnán, which we can collectively call Eastern Tibeto-Burman, split up also into Northern and Southern. The Southern Tibeto-Burmans were the people who stayed behind in the south, i.e. in Sichuan and Yúnnán, whereas the ancient Northern Tibeto-Burmans were the people who moved to the north, to Gansù and the North China Plain along the upper and middle course of the Yellow River. Here the Northern Tibeto-Burmans established – essentially *ex nihilo* because in this area there were hitherto only microlithic cultures which cannot be seen as the archaeological antecedents of the full-blown, highly developed early Neolithic cultures which emerged here – the Dàdiwan culture in Gansù and the Péilígang-Císhan Neolithic on the North China Plain in the 6th to the beginning of the 4th millennium BC. These then are the archaeological correlates for the ancient Northern Tibeto-Burmans, and this is the branch of the language family which we call Sino-Bodic.

Sino-Bodic or 'Northern' splits again, and this too is a very old split estimated to date from the 3rd millennium BC. Sino-Bodic splits into North-eastern – which is Sinitic and ultimately gave rise to the modern Chinese languages such as Min, Xiang, Wú, Gà, Mandarin Chinese (spoken in Peking or 'Beijing') and Cantonese (spoken in Hong Kong and Canton) – and North-western. To the east, along the middle course of the Yellow River, the Late Neolithic culture of the ancient Sinitic people or North-eastern Tibeto-Burmans is known to us today as the Yangsháo Neolithic. The people behind this culture stayed up in the North China Plain for a few thousand years – in fact, they are still there now.

In the west, along the upper course of the Yellow River, however, the North-western Tibeto-Burman people in Gansù had developed a late Neolithic culture known as the Majiayáo Neolithic. There were climatological changes in the middle of the 3rd millennium BC, and in areas surrounding the Majiayáo culture we see Neolithic grain silos and agricultural sites that dry up and are now located in desiccated areas where the water is too saline to drink or use for cultivation. In Gansù the core of the Majiayáo culture itself shrank to less than half of its former size. At the same time that this happened, the very specific archaeological complex of the Majiayáo Neolithic – with its semi-lunar double perforated harvesters and all of the various attributes which are associated very specifically with, and are seen as diagnostic for, this entire cultural assemblage – suddenly manifested itself in two places: in Kashmir and in Sikkim. These are considered to be colonial exponents of the Majiayáo Neolithic culture.

The Majiayáo Neolithic moves across the Himalayas, and this is the period to which we date the arrival of Bodic groups in the Himalayan region, i.e. the middle of the 3rd millennium BC. The much later spread of Bodic groups or 'North-western Tibeto-Burmans' across the Himalayas from the west and from the east is documented by the exciting and splendid archaeological investigations of Angela Simons, Dieter Schuh and their colleagues who have worked on Neolithic sites in northern Nepal, and by the work of Indian archaeologists like Sharma in Sikkim. The German group has also conducted DNA testing. The correlation of the spread of Neolithic archaeological complexes in the area with the branching of the language family matches very closely. It matches far more precisely, is much neater and far less controversial than in the case of the Indo-European language family, where there are several competing models. I cannot begin to present the picture here in all its marvellous and intriguing detail. The tale is told in my book, entitled *Languages of the Himalayas*.

There is one language in Bhutan that belongs to the western branch. This is Toto. All of the others belong to the Bodic or north-western branch of Tibeto-Burman. This Bodic branch has a very great time depth, much greater than, say, Romance. The Romance languages all arose after the Roman Empire. These are the modern Latin dialects, viz. French, Romanian, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian, which differentiated themselves in the course of the past two thousand years. Bodic is much older than Romance, for Bodic dates from the time of the

Kashmir and Sikkim Neolithic in the middle of the 3rd millennium BC. In addition to the archaeological evidence, the linguistic diversity within the vast Bodic branch necessitates that we assume such a large time depth on the grounds of internal historical reconstructions of morphology and phonology, i.e. *historische Formenlehre und Lautlehre*. The picture we get is of two groups, one moving east from Kashmir and primarily skirting the northern flank of the Himalayas, and one moving west from Sikkim and skirting the southern flank of the Himalayas. The ancient Bodic groups that went west along the southern flank and the ones which migrated eastward along the northern flank are very different groups indeed.

Bodic is one branch of Tibeto-Burman, but it has very many sub-branches, such as Tamangic, Magaric, Kiranti, the Newar nucleus (which includes Barâm and Thangmi), rGya-rong, Bodish and a number of other sub-groups. Bodic is a very large linguistic entity. The entire Tibeto-Burman language family has more than 350 languages, and a great many of these are Bodic. One of the sub-branches of Bodic – to make things terminologically confusing for linguists and non-linguists alike – is called Bodish, which is from *Bod*, the Tibetan name for Tibet. Not surprisingly, Bodish is the sub-branch of Bodic that includes Tibetan. So, we have the Bodic languages which are Bodish, and the many Bodic languages which are not Bodish but which belong to any of the groups which I just mentioned, viz. Tamangic, Magaric, Kiranti, the Newar nucleus, rGya-rong and several other subgroups. Now the Bodic languages that are not Bodish are probably the oldest inhabitants of Bhutan because the Bodish languages came from the west ultimately and migrated gradually along the whole length of the Tibetan plateau before they got to Bhutan. The non-Bodish Bodic languages came from the east, after migrating south from Gansù via colonial Majiayáo Neolithic sites near the modern Tibetan city of Chab-mdo, and crossing the Himalayas in the east. In fact, there is a nice trail of Neolithic radiocarbon-dated and stratigraphically dated complexes as you go south from Gansù via eastern Tibet into the Himalayan region. For one thing, the non-Bodish Bodic languages did not have quite as far to go before they got to Bhutan, once they had crossed the Himalayas in the east.

Nowadays we devote a lot of attention to *bedrohte Völker*, to endangered peoples. These are often really interesting groups, and some of them are genuinely threatened in terms of their linguistic and cultural identity and

heritage. One of these is the Gongduk, a probably Bodic group all by itself in an enclave in Kheng. Like most language communities in Bhutan, these people are already culturally assimilated to the mainstream Drukpa culture, and they are most certainly Bhutanese in terms of their national identity, but they are still distinct in terms of language. Another such group are the Lhokpu, who do happen to be culturally distinct from mainstream Bhutanese culture. They bury their dead in circular stone sepulchres above ground, have their own religion, and have their own native dress similar to that of the Lepchas of Sikkim, although their language does not resemble Lepcha. The Lepcha dress and that of the Lhokpu was ultimately, of course, inspired by the southern Tibetan peasant dress which also gave rise to the Bhutanese national dress long ago. The Lhokpu language is Bodic, and these people definitely represent a very old Bodic group. The Lhokpu are called Doya in Nepali. The Lepchas too are a small Bodic group in Bhutan, although I am not sure whether they have been here for very long, nor are they quite sure of this themselves. The Lepcha homeland lies in neighbouring Sikkim, where the Lepcha are really the aboriginal population. The few Lepcha who live in south-western Bhutan might be the result of a small *Auswanderung* from Sikkim, or south-western Bhutan may just always have been part of the original range of the Lepcha. Another Bodic but not Bodish group are the Tshangla or Shâchop of eastern Bhutan. The language of this relatively numerous group is also spoken in neighbouring districts of Tibet. In summary, therefore, the Gongduk, the Lhokpu, the Lepcha and the Shâchop are very old indigenous groups of Bhutan. They are speakers of non-Bodish Bodic languages.

The linguistic ancestors of modern Bodish language communities only came later, probably by the 1st millennium BC, after a long trek across the Tibetan plateau from the west. The Bodish groups are subdivided again into West, Central and East. The East Bodish groups were the first Bodish groups to enter and settle in Bhutan at the beginning of the 1st millennium BC. Their descendants are the speakers of the Bumthang language and the closely related Kurtöp and Kheng languages. Also related is the Chali language, the Dzala tongue of north-eastern Bhutan, Dakpa, and the language variously known as 'Nyenkha or Mangdebi-kha. The most interesting language of the whole East Bodish group is the Black Mountain language, also known as 'Olekha. Black Mountain is the most archaic representative of the East Bodish branch. It is also the most threatened language, and there are only a few speakers remaining.

Realizing that the Black Mountain language was threatened with imminent extinction, the Royal Government of Bhutan sent me to the area to record whatever could still be documented of this portion of the linguistic heritage of the country for scholarship and for posterity.

The West and Central Bodish groups came to Bhutan much later. I once met a Nepali student in Kathmandu who was a political activist and who told me that the Dzongkha language had only come to Bhutan very recently. Well, I agreed with him and said that Dzongkha was indeed a recent arrival, for it probably got to Bhutan at about the same time as English came to Great Britain from the continent. The Anglo-Saxons first brought the English language to Great Britain in the 5th century AD, and this is also about the time that Dzongkha entered Bhutan. This is quite recent in terms of the time depths which we have been dealing with thus far. Dzongkha exhibits some grammatical characteristics which make it quite different from other Central Bodish languages like Tibetan, different enough to make the late Robert Shafer want to classify the Dränjoke language of Sikkim, which is closely related to Dzongkha, as a separate 'Southern Bodish' group. Actually, the differences are real enough, but they are attributable to what linguists call substrate influence. These features do not warrant putting Dzongkha in another subgroup than Tibetan. The peculiar grammatical features just show that there were already people living in western Bhutan before the linguistic forebears of the Dzongkha speaking people came to Bhutan, and that these people probably spoke a language very much like that which is spoken by the Lhokpu or Doya of south-western Bhutan today.

At the same time that Dzongkha entered Bhutan, its sister language Chocangacakha came to Bhutan also and its speakers settled in the upper Kurichu valley. The language Lakha is also very closely related to Dzongkha, and the Lakha speaking area is in fact contiguous with the Dzongkha speaking area of western Bhutan. Much later, Tibetan nomadic dialects like Brokpa and Brokkat enter Bhutan from Tibet, speaking an archaic dialect of Tibetan, even though they are later arrivals. Last of all, the Nepalis arrived in the south, and many of these Nepalis came from the east of Nepal and were not originally native speakers of Nepali at all. These people had not begun to move east until some time after the Gorkha conquest of the Kathmandu Valley in 1768, only when Prithvi Narayan Shah's military successors set out to conquer what is now eastern Nepal at the end of the 18th century. In the 19th century, Nepalis, many

of whom were of Tibeto-Burman ethno-linguistic stock, moved eastward and were gradually linguistically and culturally Indo-Aryanized in the process. They began to settle in Sikkim and later in Bhutan and places like the Meghalaya and other parts east. On several occasions, the Nepalis whom I met in southern Bhutan were not speaking Nepali to each other when I ran into them, but Limbu. Of course, these people were perfectly capable of speaking Nepali, but it shows that the Nepalis in southern Bhutan are an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous group.

That in a nutshell is the linguistic composition of Bhutan and the ethnolinguistic chronology of the nation.

### More detailed information on the topics raised

- van Driem, George. 1991a. 'Taal en identiteit: Indo-Arisch expansionisme in oostelijk Nepal', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 147 (1), 61-73.
- van Driem, George. 1998. *Dzongkha*. Leiden: E.J. Brill [language textbook, xvi + 489 pages, with three audio compact disks in a multibox].
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## Gross National Happiness – Bhutan's Unique Approach to Development

STEFAN PRIESNER<sup>\*)</sup>

Programme Officer at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),  
Thimphu, Bhutan

Proceeding from an impressionistic comparison of Bhutanese development in the late 1950s and in the late 1990s, this paper explores the missing link, the question of why development has taken the shape it did and why certain policy priorities were adopted, while others were neglected. As such, this essay is concerned with the vision of Bhutanese development and its determining factors rather than with the technicalities of the actual development process. It will be argued that the Bhutanese development concept evolved from the country's unique socio-economic, historic and political circumstances, thus being one of the last truly indigenous development approaches. Concluding that this vision *sui generis* has led to an astonishingly smooth and undistorted process of change, three imminent challenges will be outlined, which can be expected to put increasing pressure on the concept and call for an early adjustment of development priorities.

### 1. Forty Years of History – A World Apart

For the visitor to Bhutan at the end of the 1990s it is hard to imagine how different a place Bhutan was as recently as four decades ago. In fact, forty years back "except for a minute proportion of the elite, the social structure, value system and life style of the Bhutanese did not differ very much from that of their ancestors around 1500"<sup>1</sup>. The vast majority of the population spent their lives as subsistence farmers, almost totally dependent on the yield of some acres

<sup>\*)</sup> The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNDP.

<sup>1</sup> Rose, Leo E. *Politics in Bhutan*, p. 211