

Samten Yeshi

**SUMTRHANG MONASTIC LANDSCAPE: RUINS IN BHUTAN,  
THEIR SOCIO-CULTURAL VALUES AND SUSTAINING THEIR  
SIGNIFICANCE IN MODERN TIMES**

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Central European University

Budapest

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Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy,  
Management.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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External Reader

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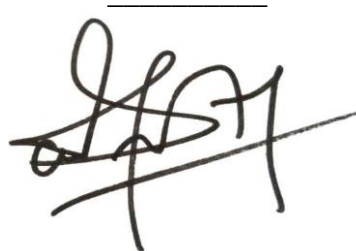
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External Supervisor

I, the undersigned, **Samten Yeshi**, candidate for the MA degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 27 May 2019

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Samten Yeshi', written over a horizontal line.

Signature

# Abstract

Bhutan has a rich cultural heritage, which has been well preserved due to its late opening to modernity. However, as socio-economic activities gain pace in Bhutan, cultural heritage is at a critical crossroad with cultural heritage management at a very early stage. Bhutan's readiness for cultural heritage protection and preservation is far behind the fast process of socio-economic development. It was only recently that some efforts of heritage conservation have begun, and much of it is fully dependent on external expertise for government projects, and without any expertise when private custodians undertake restoration and rebuilding of cultural heritage, especially the monastic heritage.

The precarious state of cultural heritage in Bhutan calls for a holistic understanding of cultural heritage and its preservation through sound academic study and insight. Therefore, this thesis explores the complex nature of heritage from the past, their socio-cultural values, and the best approaches and practices to sustain them. The thesis undertakes a synergistic/integrated analytical approach by combining the historical narratives and associated landscape seen in the masonry remains, particularly those found in the monumental ruins. By studying the cultural landscape of a monastery founded in 13<sup>th</sup> century, the historical narratives, and the local understanding of cultural landscapes, this thesis unravels the complexities of past heritage and the appropriate approaches to sustain them.

# Acknowledgements

In this extraordinary experience of my educational phase of life, I had a great opportunity to work with and learn from many great minds of teachers, family and friends. This work could not have been through without the selfless supervisory and guidance from Professor (Dr) Alice Choyke who put great efforts towards my excellence. It is also the result of wonderful academic tutoring received from Professors, (Dr) Jozsef Laszlovszky, Dr. Zsuzsanna Reed, and Dr. Gerhard Jaritz. I owe my sincere thanks also to a most accommodating person in the academic writing center, Mrs. Ezster Timer for rendering her time and energy in progressing my drafts at pace. Rest of the teachers and the department staff also have their hands in many ways in my two years of academic exercise. Also the organization I work for, The Loden Foundation in Thimphu, Bhutan has been generous and supportive in my endeavor to which I remain thankful. I owe each and every one a sincere gratitude beyond words.

This academic opportunity will not be possible without the support of my wife Tshojee Lhamo who endured for two years single handedly, taking care of our two little children. I dedicate this work to my family. Besides, my parents, siblings and in-laws have created a peaceful space for my academic pursuits for which I cannot express enough gratitude. I thank my brother Sonam Nyenda, and sisters Sonam Choden, Kunzang Pelzom, Dechen Choing Zangmo and Chimmi Pelzom for being by my side throughout. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my wonderful friends of CEU, especially the eight great minds of CHSP with whom I shared wonderful support and friendship. Thank you everyone.

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# Introduction

Given the paucity of work on mapping and understanding the historical and cultural narratives about the landscape of early masonry heritage of Bhutan, there is a clear need to develop heritage studies. To date, not even a list of historical ruins in Bhutan has been compiled. Very little is known about the monumental masonry ruins of Bhutan, their types, and cultural significance in the past and why it is important to preserve them in a sustainable way.

Bhutan has evolved from a polity comprised of dispersed regions into a single nation state in the past 500 years. Along with the political process, the Bhutanese landscape has evolved extensively, shaped by the traditional masonry monuments. Structural masonry, which served religious and political functions played important roles at various periods in the region's recorded history. As agents of history and cultural memory, their significance and place in their particular landscape remain important for the present and future as they embody what is known of the nation's history, culture and identity.

The landscape of monumental masonry ruins in particular potentially has great academic and socio-economic scope but today remains unaccounted for and largely ignored. These remains lie hidden in vegetation covering big areas of Bhutan. Remaining buried may help preserving them but, at the same time, they may also remain undiscovered only to be destroyed in the event of a natural disaster or development activities. With time, the remains of these monumental masonry structures will get further buried and the people who possess knowledge of the local histories of the landscape will also die out. Thus, there is an urgent need to identify and study these cultural sites.

Available historical narratives for Bhutan exist both in literary and oral forms but archeological study of the monumental masonry ruins is yet to begin in a significant way although the landscape of ruins may be the main material heritage embedded with historical values that can offer information on Bhutan's past. The archaeological study and topographic analysis of ruins in their unique landscapes appears to be the only significant factor, which can complement the existing written and oral sources.

However, academic ventures into archaeology and the study of early masonry ruins are now virtually non-existent or only in their early stage. Even the concept of cultural heritage and its management is new to Bhutan. In the face of fast developments and the economic growth, the entire cultural heritage of Bhutan is at a critical crossroad. It lies in a precarious situation calling for an unprecedented effort of care, conservation and study. Even the cultural heritage sites, which are in use remain exposed to the danger of alteration, destruction and appropriation. They need informed efforts of preservation, albeit different mechanisms of preservation.

For a sensible and careful approach to sustain the ruins and their significance, it is important that the concept of cultural heritage is understood in its completeness. Displayable ruins with no direct connection to present day living tradition need to be preserved and the tangible and intangible elements of living traditions require a different measure. Recognizing these two complementary types of heritage will ensure continued progress without compromising their unique values.

With economic growth, Bhutan is witnessing a gradual increase in the reconstruction of the ruins, mostly of the monastic establishments in the country. It has become crucial to cultivate proper methods and approaches to understand the significances through the narratives and its associated material remains to sustain and preserve significant heritage values in a complete manner.

The current knowledge and skill gap therefore, calls for a cautious sustainable plan to protect and preserve heritage elements until there is sufficient expertise in the country to manage the cultural heritage and their values through properly planned preservation. A cautious approach to reading the narratives, understanding the material remains and to preserve and sustain their socio-cultural values and significance is evidently critical.

It is then, important to explore the existing historical and local narratives to see where possible sites of monumental masonry remains can be expected with a goal to create an inventory of such sites. It is a critical first step to ensure the government of Bhutan knows what can be found in the country and where it is located.

This thesis takes into account the significances of the cultural heritage sites and the comprehensive understanding of the narratives to comprehend heritage sites and monuments for a sustainable preservation approach with focus on understanding the landscape of ruins and the dual nature of the cultural heritage that is the inter-relationship of the tangible and intangible culture.

To clarify the complexities of conservation of displayable material heritage and sustainable living heritage, this thesis presents the study of the history of masonry in Bhutan, comparison of the historical narrative and a case of a complex cultural landscape in a form of a monastic landscape. In an attempt to elucidate the deeper relation between the narratives, the heritage and its understanding, all crucial for an authentic, appropriate conservation methods, I present a complex case study of a monastic landscape, which I am intimately familiar with. The case study will show the importance of local knowledge and expertise beyond the technicalities of conservation and archaeological work. The Sumthang monastic landscape in Ura, Bumthang district is presented to illustrate how complex a landscape and its heritage can be in the Bhutanese context if it is properly read and understood within the local living cultures and

traditions. This site was chosen precisely because of my deep knowledge and awareness about the landscape in its entirety as a member of the custodian family of this monastery,

Highlighting the importance of the landscape of monumental ruins as a heritage of outstanding value, the history of masonry architecture in Bhutan and its development is put into a structured narrative for the first time through a comparative study of historical narrative and the religious topography of the landscape in brief. Considering the deep cultural roots of Buddhism in Bhutan, a complex analysis of this early monastic landscape is presented to explain why strategic sustaining of the significance of Bhutanese cultural heritage can only be propagated through the academic rudiments of clear knowledge on: the concept of cultural heritage, different conservation ideologies and the deep local knowledge of the heritage.



# Chapter 1 – Masonry heritage in Bhutan: the popular history and narrative

Understanding when and how the first masonry buildings appeared in the region and where these structures are located is an important indicator of history. It is essential to look back at the past to establish the development of such architecture and to justify the preservation of these monumental masonry remains as a heritage product reflecting continuous changes in sociopolitical and religious history. It puts the past into perspective to examine future prospects.

## A. The early history of masonry buildings in Bhutan

Scholarship in Bhutanese studies is a recent phenomenon and most of the historical literature written both by local and western scholars treat specific aspects of Bhutanese history that tend to lack overarching general details. Although there are several publications on Bhutanese history, the most comprehensive sociopolitical history of Bhutan appeared only in 2013, written by a Bhutanese historian and philosopher, Karma Phuntsho (Phd) titled ‘*The History of Bhutan.*’ However, the cultural history of Bhutan remains an area, which still requires further study to create a more structured historical perspective. Although brief, this part of the thesis will place the history of masonry heritage in Bhutan into its chronological perspective through careful reading of the available secondary literatures in order to compile and structure a historical narrative for built masonry heritage in Bhutan.

### 1. Chronology

The classification of historical periods of Bhutan is hypothetically offered based on Karma Phuntsho’s arrangement of time periods in his book *The History of Bhutan*. The prehistoric

time of Bhutan is a mystery without available sources or records and remains a scope for archaeological study.

However, based on this temporal division, the early historic period dates from the seventh century to the early seventeenth century. This period is divided into two phases: the early diffusion phase of Buddhism and the later diffusion phase of Buddhism. The early diffusion phase runs in time from the seventh to the late twelfth century, an over 400 year-long period marked by early Buddhist contacts in Bhutan. The later diffusion phase in Bhutanese Buddhism dates from the thirteenth century and lasts until 1616 C.E. when several Tibetan Buddhist masters discovered Bhutan and began to move into the region to establish their monastic centers. This is also the phase when Buddhism took root in Bhutan with the arrival of various Tibetan Buddhist schools in the territory.

For Phuntsho and several other Bhutanese scholars, the year 1616 marks the beginning of the so-called medieval period of Bhutan although I prefer to call this phase the unification period. In this year, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, a Buddhist master, fled from Tibet and arrived in Bhutan. He would later oversee the unification process of the disparate regions under one rule employing a dual system of spiritual and temporal governance established under his leadership. The unification period can be divided into two as Zhabdrung era from 1616 to 1651 and temporal era from 1651 to 1906. This phase ends when Bhutan initiated the rule of monarchy by installing their first monarch on the throne in 1907, marking the beginning of the pre-modern era for Bhutan. The modern period started when his grandson, the third king of Bhutan, began building roads into the interiors of Bhutan in 1960, leading to the gradual opening of Bhutan to the outside world and modernization.

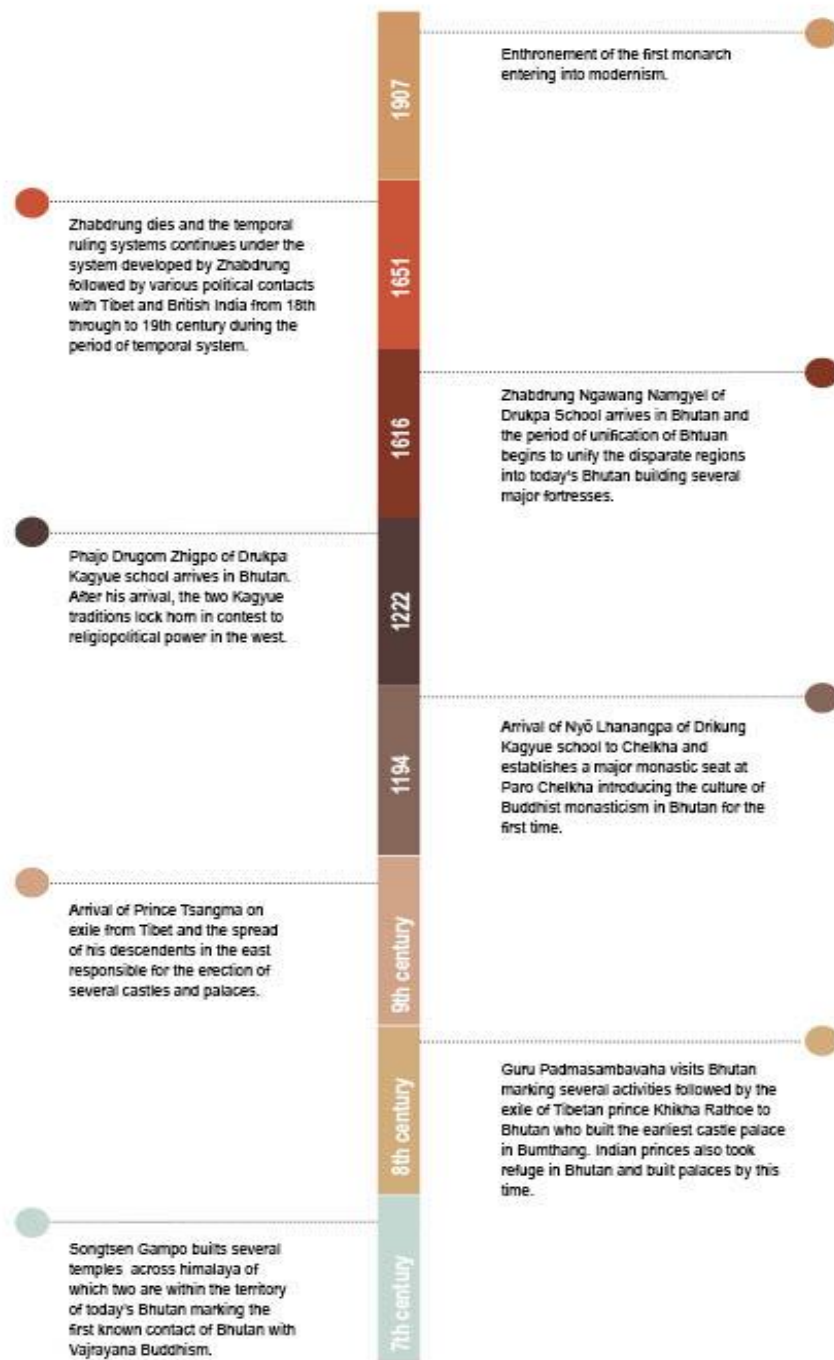


Figure 1: A timeline of major historical events in Bhutan of cultural importance.

## 2. Masonry traces from the prehistoric period of Bhutan

The ‘prehistoric period’ in Bhutan, that is the periods before the seventh century, lacks any source of information. Thus, archaeology remains a scope to build a narrative of any sort, even today. No built masonry structures or their remains have been identified yet from this period in Bhutanese history. Rigzin Dorji, a local historian who was also a senior civil servant speculates that Bhutan’s prehistoric period would roughly fall between 500 B.C and A.D 500, while he notes that there is neither ethnic, paleobotanic and geographical or physiographic records of the period.<sup>1</sup>

Although it is not yet understood in which period it was established, the only monumental masonry structural remains that may have been built before the beginning of the known early historic period, which is, before the seventh century, are the ruins found in the Shar Valley in Wangdue Phodrang district. Phuntsho cites Tenzin Chogyel, a monk historian from Zhabdrung’s era, who mentioned this ruin:

Indian settlements with kings, ministers and subjects were established in these southern regions (with reference to Tibet). The country was peaceful, prosperous and powerful. As evidenced even today, there are ruins of the palace of an Indian king lying next to a cypress in the forest of Tsachuphu as well as ruins of settlements established by certain Indian kings in Jazhag Gonpa. Ratsha Og in Shar is one of the many misspellings that have come down to us. The name should really be spelt *Raja Og* meaning ‘under the raja’.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rigzin Dorji, *A Brief Religious, Cultural and Secular History of Bhutan*, The Asia Society Galleries, New York (1989), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Karma Phuntsho, “History and Prehistory,” *The History of Bhutan*, Random House, India (2013), 63–75

Possibly the first masonry Buddhist stupa in the country was also built by an Indian prince in Shar in the same period. According to Dorji Penjore (2017), when the stupa was renovated in the nineteenth century, the workers found a document written in classical Indian script, which explained that an Indian prince, who came to this area with a tooth relic from the Buddha Kashyapa, had the stupa built<sup>3</sup>. The script and the tooth relics from the stupa are preserved among the relics of the central monastic body today<sup>4</sup>. An oral account from my father suggested that a stone pillar with an inscription in an ancient Indian language was said to have discovered near the site in the twentieth century. The inscription comprised an account of the stupa, a description of its interior relic and the builder, an Indian prince who took refuge in this area after he was exiled from his kingdom. Either way, both accounts confirm this site as marking the remains of possibly the earliest masonry architecture in Bhutan that date before the known historic period.

### 3. The early diffusion period of Buddhism: the earliest known masonry structures in Bhutan

Interestingly, the early historic period of Bhutan starts with the story of the masonry structure from two of the earliest well-known Buddhist temples in Bhutan built in the seventh century when Buddhism was beginning to flourish in the Himalayan region.

These two Buddhist temples, one in Paro district known as the *Kyerchu Lhakhang* and the other in Bumthang district known as *Jampa Lhakhang* (VIII & XIII in Figure 1) are the known earliest masonry structures built in the territory of Bhutan, both constructed by the 32<sup>nd</sup> Tibetan King of the Yarlung Dynasty known as Songtsen Gampo (c. 605-650 C.E.). These temples were among the twelve or sometimes the thirteen<sup>4</sup> temples mentioned as having been built by

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<sup>3</sup> Dorji Penjore, "Digging the Past: The State of Archaeological Study of Bhutan," *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, no. 36 (Spring 2017), 48.

<sup>4</sup> The number varies according to the counting of the temple at the heart of the demonic feature as zero and one.

the Tibetan king to subdue and pacify the landscape feature spread across this region of the Himalayas resembling a demon lying on her back. The landscape feature was recognized during a divination, discovered through a geometric coordination based on Chinese astrology calculated by the king's Chinese queen.<sup>5</sup>

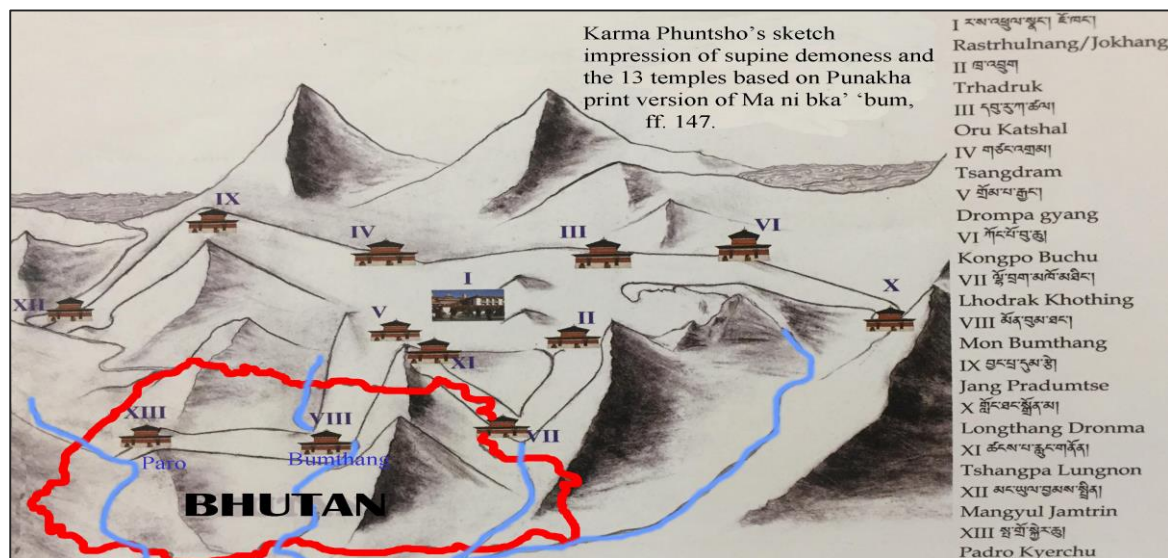


Figure 2: Sketch impression of the demon and temples by Karma Phuntsho showing the two temples in Bhutan. Curtsy: *The History of Bhutan* (2013).

Some other accounts embedded in oral tradition retain a popular narrative of ‘108’ - the Tibetan king who had 108 temples built across the Himalayan region including the two temples mentioned above in connection with landscape demon feature. Another five temples, *Anu Lhakhang*, *Namkhair Lhakhang* and *Gyene Lhakhang* in Bumthang district and the *Lhakhang Karpo* and *Nagpo* in Haa district of western Bhutan are also included among the 108 temples<sup>6</sup>. This narrative, however, is not given much credence in mainstream historical literature as it lacks factual evidence in any form to support and authenticate the attribution.

<sup>5</sup> For detail see Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan*, 77–84.

<sup>6</sup> As it is an oral account, there are no written sources that accounts and identifies the 108 temples, although there are scholarly works of geometric mapping and identification of the 12 or sometime the 13 temples as represented in Figure 2.

There are also several temples claimed in local oral tradition to have been built in the eighth century by yet another Tibetan King. One is the temple known as the *Tselung Lhakhang*, also known as *Kunchosum Lhakhang* in Bumthang. According to Michael Aris, the earliest western scholar writing on Bhutan, is undoubtedly an ancient temple built by the 37<sup>th</sup> Tibetan King, Trisong Detsen (742-797 C. E.) as noted by Guru Padmasambhava in the eighth century based on the ‘prophecy of Padmasambhava’, an ancient text discovered by Tertön Pemalingpa (1450-1521).<sup>7</sup> Although there are a few other temples, where claims are made to have been built in this early historic period by the same king, only the Tselung temple appears in scholarly works with historical textual sources.

All these temples still stand today and some, including the Kyerchu Lhakhang and Jampa Lhakhang temples, have undergone various expansion stages in the later periods with the original structure retained within the new complex. Aris, while discussing the two earliest temples, also notes that the dimensions of the original buildings were preserved throughout the later works of restoration and transformation as the principal shrine is still very small and subsidiary temples have been added to it.<sup>8</sup> These oldest standing built structures in Bhutan embody the beginning of not only the masonry architecture but also the first religious monuments erected in Bhutan during a time when not only Buddhism, but also the culture of monumental architecture entered the country.

#### 4. Castles and palaces in Bhutan from the early diffusion period of Buddhism

There is an account of an early masonry structure in the story of an Indian tantric master known as Guru Padmasambhava in the account of his visit to Bhutan in the eighth century. It speaks

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Aris, “The First Buddhist Temples,” *The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, (Aris & Phillips Ltd. England, 1979), 6–7.

<sup>8</sup> Aris, *The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 5.

of a castle known as Chakhar, built by an Indian prince named Sindha Raja who settled in the Bumthang district after having fled his own kingdom known as Sindha after he was exiled. Chakhar was described as an ‘Iron Castle’ with nine doors in local religious histories. These histories were written in later periods based on textual discoveries made by Tibetan Buddhist treasure discoverers. However, as Bumthang people call Indians as *Chakharpa*, another possible interpretation Phuntsho provides is that the name could have referred to the castle of an Indian or the Indian castle<sup>9</sup>. Nothing remains today of the original structure to show whether it was an ‘Iron Castle’ or not. A temple known as Chakhar Lhakhang stands on this spot. It was initially a residence built on the same site by Tertön Dorji Lingpa (1346-1405), a Buddhist master.

Most of the early monumental masonry structures in eastern Bhutan are connected to exiled princes from Tibet. The earliest narrative of a castle constructed by an exiled Tibetan prince is preserved in the etymology of a village in Bumthang district known as Jalikhar. Towards the end of the eighth century, one of the sons of the 37<sup>th</sup> Tibetan King, Trisong Detsen (742-797 C.E.) known as Khikha Rathoe as well as Murum Tsenpo, was banished to the region of Bhutan - apparently for murdering a senior minister. He eventually arrived in Bumthang district in today's Bhutan. He was said to have built a palace for himself and the place was then known as Gyalkhar, today pronounced as Jalikhar meaning the King's Palace. However, no visible remains can be seen on the surface today.

Later, in the first half of the ninth century, another Tibetan prince known as Lhasey Tsangma, an elder brother to Tibet's 39<sup>th</sup> king Tri Ralpachen (806-838 C.E.) was sent into exile after a plot by some anti-Buddhist ministers as they planned to overthrow the king and equally not wanting Tsangma to succeed to the throne. The castle of *Tsenkhar* and the castle of *Mizimpa*

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<sup>9</sup> Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan*, 98.



in eastern Bhutan lie in ruins today. These monumental structures are attributed to Lhasey Tsangmo who subsequently arrived in Bhutan on exile. After the elder brother was successfully sent into exile, the king was also murdered. Their younger brother Udum Tsenpo, also known as Lang Dharma, was installed on the throne, becoming the last king of this dynasty in Tibet.

The ruins of an underground palace known as *Bangtso Phodrang* meaning the palace of Bangtsho in Lhuentse district, is well-known among historians. This palace, as suggested by the name, was constructed by a ruler known as *Bangtsho* who was among the seventh generation of the descendants of Lhasey Tsangma according to the ancestral tree drawn by Aris<sup>10</sup>. It is not clear when it was established and its very existence has not yet been clarified.

At the same time, there were also several local chieftains and rulers known as *Dung*, *Khoche* and *Ponpo*<sup>11</sup> who ruled and controlled small villages in various areas mostly spread across central and eastern Bhutan. They were responsible for building several palaces, castles and bigger residential buildings, giving rise to certain masonry structures in the region. Some buildings still stand although several lie in ruins and there may be several more yet to be discovered.

Representative list of ruins/sites thought to be of castle/ palaces and manor house				
Sl no.	Ruins/Site	Location (District)	Year of est.	Person Responsible
1	Chuyur Dzong	Bumthang	–	–
2	Drapham Dzong	Bumthang	1550-1700	Choekhor Deb
3	Yuwazhing Dzong	Bumthang	–	–
4	Dung Nagpoi Khar	Bumthang	1600-1700	Dung Nagpo
5	Kelingzan Dzong	Bumthang	–	–
6	Bangtsho Phodrang	Lhuentse	–	Bangtsho ruler
7	Zhongar Dzong	Mongar		Dung Nagpo

<sup>10</sup> Aris, *The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 138.

<sup>11</sup> They are royal nobily, formerly territorial rulers with control over certain region or sometimes only a small village. See Aris, *The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 115–146 or Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan*, 120–132.

8	Sharlingkhar	Pemagatshel	–	–
9	Nangje Khoche Dzong	S/Jongkhar	–	–
10	Gurung Palace	Samtse	–	A Nepali royalty
11	Gongthung Tsemi Dzong	Tashigang	–	–
12	Jadrunge Dzong	Tashigang	–	–
13	Mizimkhar	Tashigang	–	–
14	Nyakhar Dzong	Tashi Yangtse	–	–
15	Tsenkhar	Tashi Yangtse	–	–
16	Jamkhar	Tashi Yangtse	–	–
17	House of Martag Gukel	Thimphu	–	A local rich man
18	Kuensel Phodrang	Thimphu	1697-1765	Desi Sherub Wangchuk
19	Zhongar Dzong	Mongar	–	Dung Nagpo
20	Razawog	Wangdue Phodrang	–	An Indian Prince

Figure 3: Table showing a representative list of ruins/sites thought to be of castle, palaces and manor house.

## 5. The earliest monastic structure from the later diffusion period of Buddhism in Bhutan

This period could roughly extend from tenth century to the sixteenth century, which is the period of the growth and spread of Buddhist institutions in Bhutan from Tibet as noted by John Ardussi.<sup>12</sup> This period saw the beginning of monastic establishments and their temples, an era that saw the spread of Tibetan Buddhist monasticism in Bhutan. While Tibetan Buddhist masters have begun to visit Bhutan in the tenth century, the earliest monastery to be established in the territory of Bhutan is known as the *Chelkha Dzong*. The monastery was founded around 1194 by Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa (1160-1224), a Buddhist monk belonging to the Drikung Kagyue school of Tibetan Buddhism and the founder of the Lhapa Kagyue Order in Bhutan. It is also the first monastic fortress in Bhutan, a monastic complex possibly surrounded by a

<sup>12</sup> John A. Ardussi, *Bhutan before the British: a historical study*, Australian National University (1977), 95.

community of hermits and monks located in northwest of the region within a valley known as Nubri at the border of Tibet in Tsento gewog (county) under Paro district . This is also possibly the earliest monastic ruin in the country.

The ruin, although is known to lie on the northwestern border of Bhutan in the territory of Paro district. Although the precise location has not yet been identified, few scholars have made an attempt to identify the location of the ruin. A possible site for this ancient ruin was located in 2008 during my brief visit to Nubri as a journalist with help of an accompanying local. The potential site of the remains of this earliest monastic ruin is located for the first time as a part of this thesis, based on my prior knowledge of the area helped by Chogyal Rinzin a forester to take pictures, who visited the site following my information helped by a local in 2017 (Figure 4).

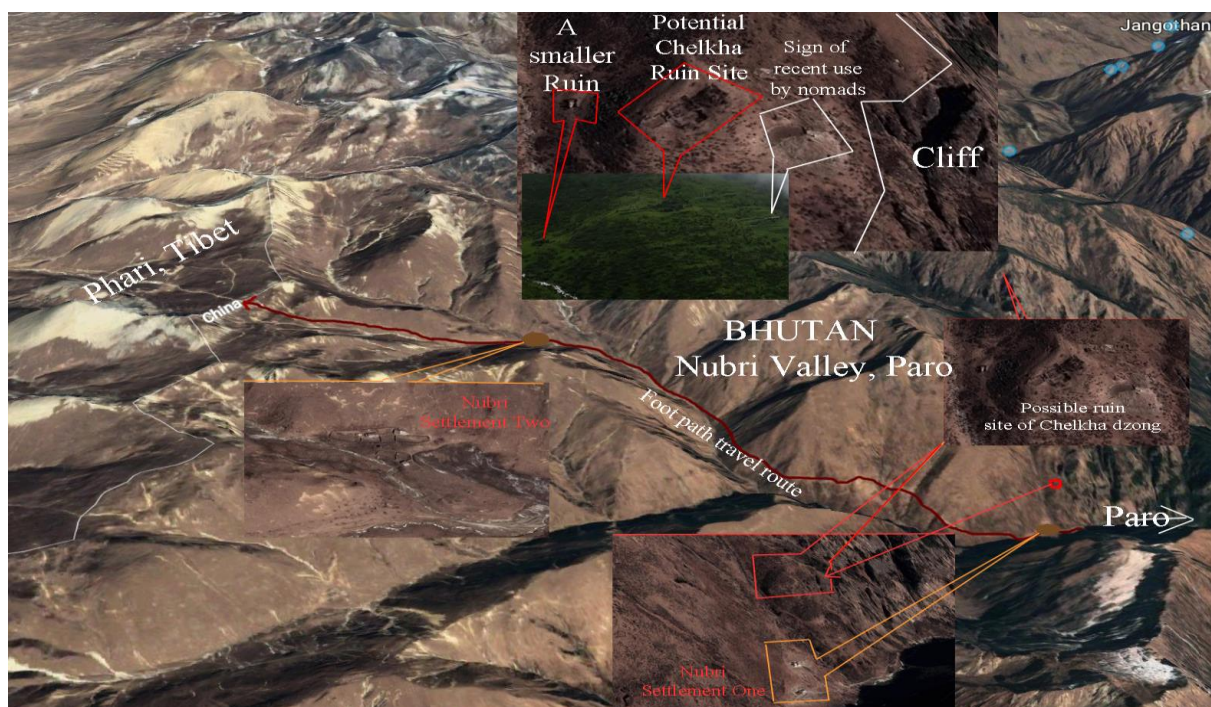


Figure 4: Google map showing the site of the Chelkha Dzong ruins located for the first time.

Lhapa Kgyue, on moving deeper into the western region of Bhutan, was responsible for building several other early monasteries and temples. A local scholar, Lama Sangnga, attributes *Jathel Dzong*, now lying in ruins, *Dho-ngoan Dzong* (the blue stone fortress) where Tashi Chodzung stands today and *Dechen Phorang*, which overlooks Tashi Chodzung in Thimphu to the efforts of Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa.<sup>13</sup> However, in contrast, historians generally recognize *Dechen Phodrang* as reconstructed version of the original *Dho-Ngoan Dzong*, which was taken over by Zhabdrung in 1641 to be used as the central administrative center and was destroyed by fire in 1772.

Another monumental masonry ruin of this school is located on a hillside above Royal Thimphu College, in the capital city in an area known as Ngagpi Phu, meaning the place of Tantric Practitioners. Not many historians and scholars know about this ruin. Although the place and its name is familiar among locals, even locals do not know about the ruins and very few local residents had some idea about the existence of this ruin in the area<sup>14</sup>. It was most probably a monastic complex for retreat and meditation of tantric practices or a monastic school for Buddhist laity that now lies in ruins. While the exact date of the establishment of this monastic school could not be established, there is an existing historical narrative that suggests it existed in the twelfth-thirteenth century. Based on this narrative, it is identified as a monastery of the Lhapa Kagyue Order<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Lam Sangnga, འབྲུག་གི་སྐྱེས་རབས་གསལ་བའི་མེ་ལོང་།, [‘brug gi smyos rabs gsal ba’I me long: *Mirror of Nyo Genealogy*], (Thimphu 1998), 92.

<sup>14</sup> In past years, my younger brother, also a researcher, and myself, knew about these ruins and asked the locals about it. Most had no idea about it although they anticipated finding an abandoned monastery in the area given the etymology of the place name. Later, a girl from among the supposed family decedents of the founder helped my brother to locate it.

<sup>15</sup> Changangkha Lhakhang founded by a son of Phajo Drugom (1184-1251) still practice an annual religious festive ritual and an exorcism in October which narrates a story of conflict and fight between the Ngagpi Phu monastic community. A member of the decedents of the founder of the Ngagpi Phu monastery also confirmed that a similar exorcism ritual on the same day is conducted supposedly to counter the exorcism by the other monastic community by the family in the past until it was discontinued some years ago. This narratives suggest that the monastery belonged to a Lhapa Kagyue master and existed in 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Establishment of monasteries and temples begun from the thirteenth century, as many other Tibetan Buddhist masters of various schools such as Drukpa Kagyue, Nyingma, Sakya and Gelug arrived in Bhutan, establishing their own temples and monastic communities. Many of these monasteries and temples continue to operate, while several also fell into ruins. The background narrative and history of how each was abandoned, however, needs individual study and is not within the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the ruins of monumental buildings in Bhutan are not much studied and would require further scholarship to understand them in a holistic and complex way.

Representative list of ruins/sites thought to be of monasteries and temples				
Sl no.	Ruin/Site	Location (District)	Est. Year	Built by
1	Lhendrup Choedhey	Bumthang	18th century	Lhawang Chojinzangpo
2	Goen Langdrang	Bumthang	14th century	Tenpi Nima
3	Gomba Pemaling	Bumthang	1400-1500	Pema Lingpa/his parents
4	Ruin Near Mani Gomba	Bumthang	–	Lam Choying
5	Wobtsho Dzong	Gasa		Goen Wobtsho Lama
6	Chelkha Dzong	Paro	1194-1224	Gyelwa Lhanangpa
7	Chujakha Dzong	Paro	1400-1500	Drung Drung
8	Dhonag Dzong	Paro	–	Lama Nyenyingpa
9	Jathel Dzong	Paro	–	A Lhapa Lama
10	Nyenying Dzong	Paro	–	Lama Nyenyingpa
11	Damchen Gongma	Paro	1300-1400	Kuenkchen Longchen
12	Tagongkha Dzong	Paro	–	–
13	Lungthung Goenpa	Tashigang	–	–
14	Barishong Dzong	Thimphu	–	–
15	Rangu Goenpa	Thimphu	–	Jamyang Kuenga Singye
16	Langkhar Goenpa	Thimphu	–	Khedrup Choki Gyatsho
17	Jangkhothang Lhakhang	Thimphu	1600-1700	Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel
18	Tokha Dzong	Thimphu	–	A Lhapa Lama
19	Ngagpi Phu	Thimphu	–	A Lhapa Lama

Figure 5: Table showing a representative list of ruins/sites thought to be of monasteries and temples.

Within this brief historical narrative, it is clear that the earliest known masonry architecture in Bhutan represents the tangible remains of the continued expanding religious domain of Tibetan Buddhist schools as well as of those apparent adversaries in the neighboring regions who exiled Tibetan and Indian ruling elites to Bhutanese lands, becoming part of the story of the masonry heritage in Bhutan.

## **B. Period of unification process and the landscape of masonry heritage**

The arrival of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, a Buddhist monk of the Drukpa Kagyue school of Tibetan Buddhism to Bhutan in 1616 C.E from Tibet brought dramatic addition to the architectural landscape of Bhutan. As he saw himself as the unifying force and probable ruler of this new place, he commissioned various monastic fortresses across the region with defensive features known as *Dzongs*, which he operated both as centers of secular administrative power and monastic schools to enforce and establish his rule of law under the order of his monastic school. This section looks into how this process of nation building shaped the cultural landscape of Bhutan, especially the, landscape of masonry heritage in Bhutan.

### **1. The process of unification under Zhabdrung and the Dzongs**

*Dzong* or fortified buildings in Bhutan first appeared in the late twelfth century, the first being the *Chelkha Dzong*, a monastic fortress built by Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa. However, the arrival of Zhabdrung Nagawang Namgyel in 1616 was to become a landmark era in the socio-political and cultural history of Bhutan bringing in a new system of fortified monasteries aimed at both religious and political domination. His arrival shaped the entire cultural landscape of Bhutan within this era in addition to various socio-political and cultural changes he engineered to mold the fragmented region into a unified sovereign state. His desire to become a spiritual and temporal ruler of the dispersed region by bringing them under his rule resulted in the creation

of a unique cultural landscape in Bhutan. The landscape of built masonry heritage saw a new face through construction of building complexes known as the *Dzongs* in various strategic regions to bring together the dispersed individual communities into the unified country now known as Bhutan.

Sl No	Dzongs	Foundation laid	Completed	Location (district)	Note
1	Simthokha Dzong	1629	1631	Thimphu	
2	Punakha Dzong	1637		Punakha	
3	Wangdue Phodrang	1638		Wangdue Phodrang	
4	Paro Rinpung Dzong	1646	1648	Paro	
5	Drukgyel Dzong	1649		Paro	Currently under restoration process. It was burned down in 1951
6	Daga Tashi Yangdzong	1651		Dagana	
7	Gasa Tashi Thogmoen Dzong			Gasa	Exact date is not known. Possibly between 1647-1655
8	Lingshi Dzong			Thimphu	Exact date is not known. Possibly between 1647-1656

Figure 6: Table showing the Dzongs (all standing and living) commissioned (built) by Zhabdrung.

The first masonry structure he commissioned was the Chari Monastery in 1620 in Thimphu district, which was also his first temple to be built in Bhutan to house the remains of his father. Today, the monastery is fully developed into a retreat center for the central monastic body of Bhutan. As there were already several monasteries and temples in the region established by various religious orders who had arrived before him, he probably did not see the need to build monasteries or temples. His monastic fortresses therefore were built to fulfill his mission of

establishing a dual system of spiritual and temporal rule around his authority rather than simply just places for spiritual quest.

Hence, his commissioning of several fortified monasteries known as the *Dzongs* built across the region to be used as monastic schools and administrative centers with defense features marked the evolution of the cultural landscape in this period. As he faced enemies both local and from the outside, Zhabdrung and his appointees also built several fortresses to secure the frontiers from Tibetan invasion and to administer and rule over the locals in the region, thus, shaping the architectural and masonry cultural landscape of Bhutan while building a sovereign cultural identity of the nation in the process of building.

*Semthokha Dzong* in Thimphu is the first such building he commissioned to house both spiritual and secular administrations of power and rule. The foundation was laid in 1629 and it was consecrated in 1631. Later, he commissioned several *Dzongs* at strategic locations across the region, spreading his claim of rulership administered from these structures, governed by his appointees known as the *Penlops* and *Dzongpons* (regional and sub-regional governors). As before, district administrations are housed in these buildings with monks of the separate district monastic body occupying parts of the buildings, thus, maintaining their original function that is part of both the spiritual and temporal systems embodied in these built structures even today.

Most of the *Dzongs* in western districts were commissioned by the direct command and under the supervision of Zhabdrung. These *Dzongs* were aimed at securing the western frontiers from Tibetan invasion and to administer control over the locals simultaneously. Later, several such *Dzongs* were also erected in central and eastern Bhutan, an initiative mainly undertaken by Choejé Migyur Tenpa who was one of Zhabdrung's trusted appointees, holding the most powerful post of *Trongsa Penlop* (Governor of Trongsa) who led the campaign in 1646 to bring



the central and eastern regions under the same rule. The *Dzongs*, including those in Trongsa, Bumthang, Lhuentse, Trashigang and Zhemgang districts, were constructed at his initiative in an effort to extend the unification process to the east and central regions as envisioned by Zhabdrung. All of these *Dzongs* underwent change and expansion at various times.

## 2. The opposing factions

As Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel campaigned across the Bhutanese region to unify the territories into one state under his spiritual and temporal system of rule, he faced opposition from established local chieftains and powers including other Buddhist schools in the region. Religious adversaries we know to have begun in the thirteenth century. The two Kagyue schools in Bhutan known as the Lhapa Kagyue and Drukpa Kagyue became chief adversaries, each vying to establish dominance over western patronage. Later in the seventeenth century, although Zhabdrung was not a sectarian mastermind, he had to deal with certain Buddhist schools that had formed joint factions to challenge his authority. Scholars called them the *Lam Kha Nga*, or the five Lama factions. Other opposing factions of lay ruling elites we know of include the Chokhor Deb and Ura Dung Nagpo from Bumthang district. The opposition escaped to Tibet after losing to the forces of the unification campaign led by Choejê Migyur Tenpa. Similarly, all other local rulers in the central and eastern Bhutan were brought under control through both civil and military campaigns led by Migyur Tenpa. According to modern historian Karma Phuntsho, this unification marked the first time Bhutan was integrated territorially, roughly as we know it today.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan* 235–36 & 251–54

### 3. The impact of the unification process on the landscape of masonry heritage

As the process of unification progressed in the region, it had to deal with a certain level of opposition from local powers. The unification campaign thus produced collateral damage affecting several earlier masonry structures resulting in their physical disintegration in the process. Although Zhabdrung respected religious diversity in the region, he had to put out the flames of opposition to achieve his mission. The opposing factions were dealt with accordingly. Those who surrendered and cooperated under his rule enjoyed freedom but those who continue to challenge his authority were either banished or over thrown. In the process, the built monuments taken by the forces of Zhabdrung either remained abandoned or were reused by Zhabdrung's administration. Some of these structures may have been destroyed in the same or other conflicts that followed under other rulers until all opposition ended at the end of the nineteenth century. However, Zhabdrung's respect and embrace of religious diversity can also be seen in the form of the many standing ancient structures, especially the monasteries and temples belonging to other monastic orders. Many of these ancient monasteries and temples have continued their existence, dotting the country with religious monuments.

## Chapter 2 – Monumental ruins: the landscape and scholarship

Scholarship on the monumental masonry ruins and its landscape is almost completely absent from Bhutanese studies. It hasn't yet made to a major topic of study in Bhutan and remained least interested among scholars even today. Therefore, to offer a preliminary understanding of the areas of scholarship on monumental ruins of early masonry and the landscape, this chapter shall present a basic analysis of the landscape of such ruins based on about 54 representative list of ruins (Combined of the list in tables in fig.3, 5 and 8) collected through literature survey and various other contacts. Besides this, the present status of scholarship and study of the monumental masonry ruins in Bhutan will also be explored briefly under this chapter.

### **A. Understanding a general pattern of ruins and its landscape**

The study of the ancient built heritage of Bhutan is not yet a prominent subject in Bhutan and remains a challenge faced by lack of available materials especially on the ancient ruins. The insufficient works on understanding the ancient built heritage of Bhutan calls for attention in this subject of heritage study for Bhutan. There is not even a proper list of historical ruins of Bhutan to begin with. Therefore, we do not even know how much Bhutan knows of the masonry ruins and other monumental built heritage in its territory. But it is important that the ruins hold immense historical information to read deeper into the socio political and cultural histories through archaeology and historical studies. Besides, these ancient ruins also possess great potential to develop monumental heritage of historical memories to add into the list of products for cultural tourism in Bhutan. Therefore, exploring the study of these monumental masonry ruins could potentially open scopes both for socio economic and academic developments. Yet,

faced by limitations and challenges, this section will present a basic analysis of the pattern of ruins based on the representative list collected for this thesis.

## 1. The monumental ruins

Existing traces of possibly the earliest ruins from among the known ruins in Bhutan are the ruin traces in a village called Ratsa Wog in Wangdue Phodrang District, as accounted earlier accounted by a monk historian. There is neither contemporary written information on this site nor any later literatures to date. However, according to an oral account,<sup>17</sup> visible traces must be still there if it is not disturbed by local agricultural and developmental activities around the site as the visible parts then were found sitting among the paddy fields. Apparently there are also no efforts of preservation or protection of the site, as information on this is completely absent. Besides, Bhutan does not yet have a legal protection mechanism unless government issues a standing order.

In terms of the ruins produced by religious adversaries that began in the thirteenth century, the Chelkha Dzong, which we know as the earliest monastic order to establish in 1194<sup>18</sup> in Bhutan is the earliest. It was the first monastic ruins after it was razed to ground in the fourteenth century. We do not know how but John Ardusi notes that Chelkha Dzong was burned down during the sectarian struggle.<sup>19</sup> Later as the religious adversaries grew to a political one after the arrival of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, other monasteries built by this school known as Jathel Dzong also gradually fell into ruins while Dho Ngoen Dzong was taken over by Zhabdrung in 1641 to convert into his administrative center. Dho Ngoen Dzong was destroyed

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<sup>17</sup> My father recounts of seeing traces of this ruins along with some stone pillars when travelling to west as the traditional footpath run across this valley to reach Thimphu until the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before roads became the main transport and travel route.

<sup>18</sup> I use 1194 as the founding date as the founder has arrived Bhutan in this year. John Ardusi, a scholar on Bhutan notes 1207 as the founding date. While he doesn't give the reason or the source, it is possible that 1207 may be the date of the completion of construction. See Ardusi, *Bhutanese Ruins and Cave* (2007).

<sup>19</sup> John Ardusi, "A Preliminary Investigation of Bhutanese Castle Ruins and Caves associated with Lha sras Gtsang ma," *Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the IATS 2003*, no. 5 (2007), 11.

by fire in 1772 and the reconstructed monastery on the site was named Dechen Phodrang.<sup>20</sup> Several other religious figures that joined the faction to oppose the unification forces of Zhabdrung were stripped off their power and their monasteries taken over. Many of these structures survived under Drukpa schools, but there are also high chances that several others must have fallen into ruins although this thesis do not have information yet to cover in detail to identify all such monastic ruins as a result of the religious or political adversaries related to unification process.

Of the castles and palaces, while there are other ruins of earlier periods, sources so far confirm only the ruins of Drapham Dzong, the castle of Chokhor Deb, and Zhongkhar Dzong in Mongar and Dung Nagpoi Khar in Ura, the castles belonging to Ura Dung Nagpo, captured by the forces of Zhabdrung during initial periods of unification process. But what we do not know is when and how it remained abandoned to become ruins. Several other ruins of castles and palaces in central and eastern Bhutan could also possibly be the result of the unification process as most of the occupants who were the local rulers then, must have tried to defend their privilege and authority against the forces of Zhabdrung.<sup>21</sup>

As unification process under the system of temporal rule continued until the end of nineteenth century after the death of Zhabdrung in 1651, several forts also seem to have been built at the frontiers. These forts from the unification period are potentially a major part of historical ruins in Bhutan. There are several forts accounted in the reports of British India's political missions to Bhutan in the nineteenth century used by Bhutanese administrations during the period. However, while most of these forts do not exist anymore in today's Bhutan, only a handful of them could be located with known remains while rest could not be known of its exact location

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<sup>20</sup> In other version, Dechen Phodrang is another monastery built by Lhapa and Dho Ngoen dzong was supposed to have stood in the location of present day Tashi Chodzung. See: Sangnga (1998), 92.

<sup>21</sup> See: Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan*, 207-254.

in today's Bhutan. Questions also remain on whether there are visible remains at all of these forts. This therefore calls for further study on the forts of this period. There are also chances of coming across several ruins, which may not have anything to do with any of the adversaries or the unification process, but because of other changes if a thorough survey and listing of monumental ruins in Bhutan is carried out.

## 2. Classification of monumental masonry heritage in Bhutan

The type of masonry heritage in Bhutan mainly constitutes of fortresses known as *Dzongs*, the monasteries, temples, castles and palaces. *Dzongs* are monastic fortresses, fortified with defense features used for religious and secular functions, built during the period of unification process and today function as the central district headquarters with both secular administrative offices and district monastic body housed within the building complex. Therefore, in the distinct monumental masonry typology of Bhutan, *Dzong* is fortress of this nature. Smaller forts also known as *Dzongs* are categorized separately as forts. But sometime, monasteries and temples often have *Dzong* in their names like the name of a temple in Bumthang, Ura, known as Samdrup Choe Dzong, which in this case refers to its size, as *Dzong* literally means a large building and should not be confused for a monastic fortresses as described above. In the brief description of the categories used in the list of ruins compiled in figures 3, 5 and 8, *Dzong* is categorically classified as a fortress built during the Zhabdrung era with dual function of religious and political administration as listed below:

1. *Monastery*: is a building or building complex where religious communities live studying and practicing. It includes retreat centers. Some of the monasteries are fortified.

2. *Temple*: A building for religious use without a permanent religious community living in it. These temples are built either by communities or individuals as religious monuments for community religious gatherings, rituals and ceremonies.
3. *Castle and Palaces*: Buildings of this category are residential structures of the ruling nobilities and territorial rulers in the past. Some of them are fortified.
4. *Dzongs*: Dzong is a fortified monastery with defense features built during the unification period. All of these Dzongs, which continue today as district centers are massive in size and have both religious and secular functions since the beginning.
5. *Forts*: The frontier forts also known as Dzongs are smaller fortresses used by junior administrative officers. They did not possibly have any religious functions.

Although it is not covered in this thesis, the ancient settlements and villages in Bhutan are also equally a part of Bhutanese masonry heritage, an area where scholarship is completely absent. While there are no known ruins of old village and settlements in any literature to date, it does not at all mean the country would not have such ruins. If at all a survey or a study is carried out, chances are high that prehistoric narrative may occur through the discovery of ancient settlements.

### 3. The pattern of monumental masonry ruins and its landscape

We do not know the in-depth individual historical details of many of these ruins and how they ended up in ruins. To establish a specific historical background of the ruins and how they fell into ruin will need a dedicated study with specific focus individually. Therefore, a general historical impression is drawn based on the available historical narratives we came across earlier to roughly speculate a general process of their transformation from a built standing and functional masonry heritage to ruin monuments as a foundational discourse to aid further discussion on the topic.

This presumptive speculation of historical narrative of the ruins as the impact of the unification process can be seen in the landscape when we look at the geographical distribution of the ruins to relate with the general historical narrative of Bhutan. Looking at the distribution of the representative list (Fig. 3, 5 and 8) of monumental masonry ruins in Bhutan, a basic visual of the historical narrative is pictured by the map in figure 7 below.

We see that the concentration of monastic ruins is in the western part of Bhutan compared to the east, which is obvious, because the Buddhist monastic culture in Bhutan began from west and so also the religious adversaries for power and dominance, which led to running some of the monastic establishments into ruin. On the other hand, we see the intensity of the ruins of castles and palaces in the central and eastern parts of Bhutan, which means unlike in the west where religious figures embodied the ruling power over the lay subjects in the past, lay elites known as *Dung*, *Khoche*, and *Ponpo* have been in power in the central and eastern Bhutan before Zhabdrung introduced the unification process, which later lost their local authority of kingship to the forces of Zhabdrung's unification initiative.

At the same time, the ruins of forts, as we can see are dotted along the western and southern frontier lines. This tells us of the frontier security and interactive gateway of the external affairs of Bhutan in the past. The mapping clearly depicts the border interaction of Bhutan with Tibet and India through these frontiers in the northwest, west and south with which Bhutan had traded, maintained external affairs, and also often had times of hostilities between then Tibet in the north, Sikkim in the west and British India in the south. Therefore, it is highly possible that there are more remains of the forts from the unification period than what could be listed in this thesis.



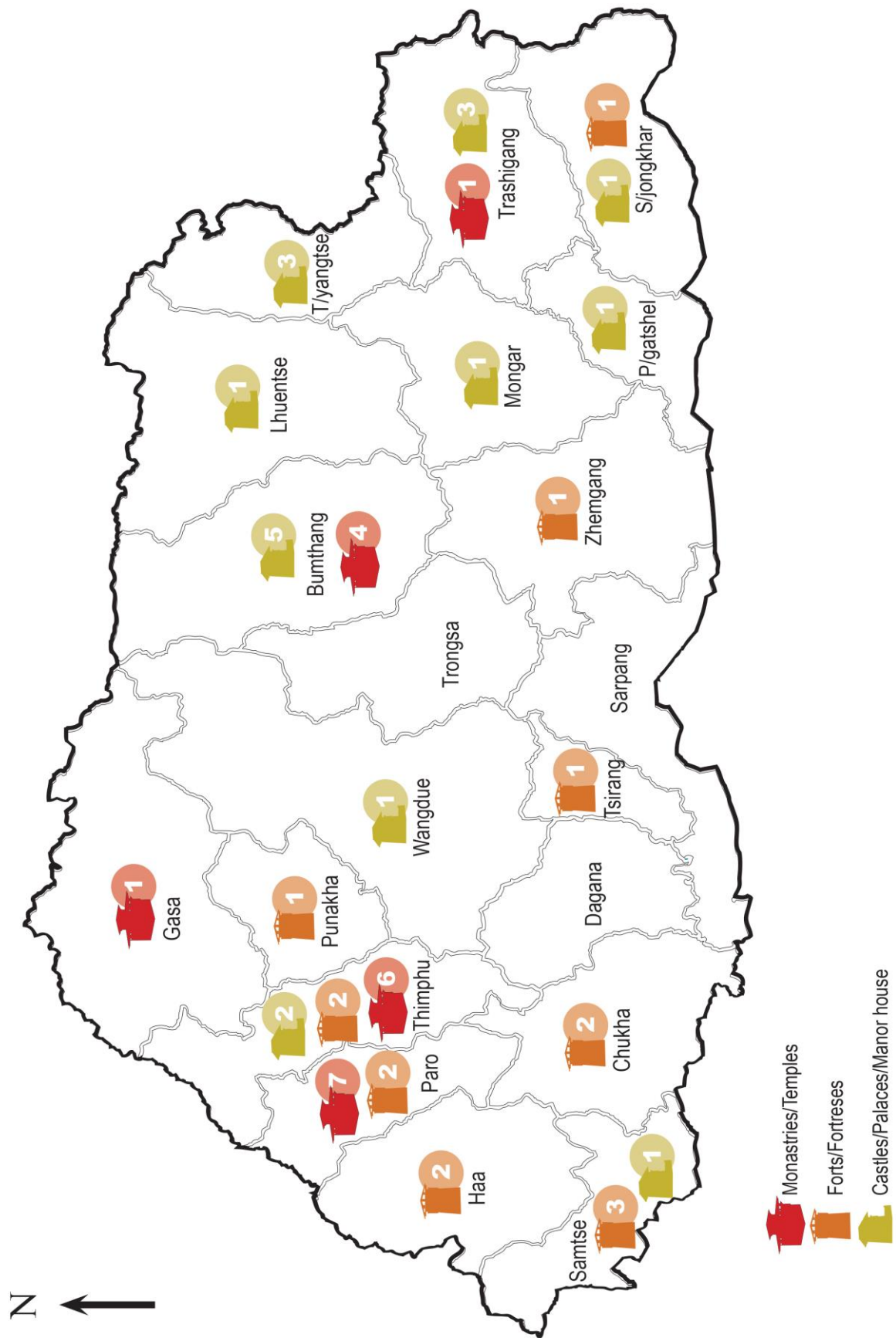


Figure 7: Map showing the distribution of 54 representative lists of ruins in fig. 3, 5 and 8.

## 4. The frontier forts

The list of forts in the table below are compiled from accounts and mentions made in several reports produced by British India's political missions to Bhutan from East India Company in the nineteenth century. While it is evident that the scholars of Bhutan have the knowledge and are aware of some of the forts in the list, the status of the ruins reflected in the table is based on the limited information from the literary sources used for this thesis without field survey or a geographical analysis of the locations.

The sources for the compilation of the list in the table are from the mentions made in the publications including: *Political Mission to Bhutan* (1865), where reports by Ashley Eden of his visit in 1864, Captain R. B Pemberton in 1837-38 with Dr. W Griffiths' journal and the account by Baboo Kishen Kant Bose on Bhutan were published. *Bhutan the story of Dooar War* (1886) by Surgeon Rennie and *Report on Bootan* (1838) by Captain R.B Pemberton.

Representative list of ruins/sites thought to be forts and fortresses			
Sl no.	Ruin/Site	Location (District)	References and comments
1	Chukha Dzong	Chukha	Remains pulled down in 1961. No visible remains exist today.
2	Paksakha dzong	Chukha	Ashley Eden 1865, p. 2
3	Sangbay dzong	Haa	Ashley Eden records of Sangabay Dzongpon, which indicates that it had a fort.
4	Dumchoe Dzong	Haa	Ashley Eden records this Dzong as Ha Tampien. Some suggest it is burnt down in 1920.
5	Fort of Phari	Paro	Pemberton, 1839, p.35. It is not clear whether this fort fall within or outside today's Bhutan. If it is within Bhutan, it should be in the territory of Paro district.
6	Drukgyel Dzong	Paro	Burned down in 1951. Reconstruction began in 2016.
7	Thinleygang Dzong	Punakha	Ashley Eden records of passing through Thinleygang Dzong before reaching Punakha, which is empty without any occupants.

8	Damsang Dzong	Samtse	Ashley Eden describes this fort very clearly.
9	Dalingkha Dzong	Samtse	The History of Bhutan, 2013, p.269 and Ashley Eden p. 2.
10	Fort of Tendung	Samtse	Mentioned by The History of Bhutan 2013, 268.
11	Dewangiri	S/Jongkhar	Dewangiri must have had a possible administrative head office of the southeastern frontier. It is mentioned as the residence of the officer in the mountains.
12	Jangkhothang Dzong	Thimphu	–
13	Gene Dzong	Thimphu	–
14	Tserang Toed Dzong	Tsirang	Site is incorporated into the area of heritage forest in 2017. Often mentioned as Cherung Jung in British reports.
15	Umpang Dzong	Zhemgang	Initially thought to be built in 17th century and rebuilt in 19th century.

Figure 8: A representative list of the ruins of forts and fortresses.

The British missions have taken note of everything they saw on their journey from vegetation to weather, farms and animals and so forth, keeping track of their journey and the activities. In the process of recording, the missions have overwhelmingly recorded accounts of fort governors known as *Dzongpons*, although less in terms of forts itself. While there are these accounts, the challenge however is, that as the English visitors pronounce the names differently, it offered difficulty to establish actual Bhutanese names of the places. While the missions account of fort governors, it do not explicitly mention of an actual fort that could also be a smaller frontier posts, which may or may not be a masonry built structure while the keepers of such smaller frontier post are also known as *Dzongpon* at times.

For example, Ashley Eden, a political missionary who visited Bhutan in 1863-64 accounts eighteen frontier passes along the southern belt, then known as the Dooars. This Dooar belt stretches between upper Assam in the east to the foothills of Darjeeling in the west with seven under Assam Dooars and eleven under Bengal Dooars. Eden reported:

“Entering into this tract from the hills are the eighteen passes; each pass is under the authority of a Jungpon (Governor of a Fort).”<sup>22</sup>

This suggests that either all or at least some of these passes at the southern borders then known as the eighteen Dooars possibly had a fort each where the Bhutanese officials known as *Dzongpons* (Jungpon by British) are based to deal with the frontier businesses. Today, while the major part of Dooar frontiers are under the territory of India, the frontier forts of Pasakha (Bansha/Banska by English) Tsirang Dzong (Cherung Jung by English) in Tsirang and Darling Dzong (Dalimcote fort by English) possibly in Samtse are in the Bhutanese territory from among the eighteen frontier forts reported by the mission. Of the rest, firstly we do not know whether there has been a fort each in all the passes as Eden’s report indicated. And then, if there were, the question is where, are the rest of the forts located? Will they be inside or outside today’s Bhutan as most of the plain areas of Dooar are under Indian territory of Assam and Bengal. However, it can at least be speculated that, if there were forts at each passes, those located on hillsides could be within Bhutan and those in the plains could mostly fall under India, in which case, the remains of forts falling in plains probably do not exist today.

In other cases, such as the mention of the fort of Paksakha,<sup>23</sup> we do not know where exactly its location today is or if there is any visible remains that can be preserved or studied, although we know the place called Pasakha is in the Southern border part of Chukha district in today’s Bhutan. Other forts such as the Chukha Dzong, although we know its location, do not have any visible remains as the ruin was brought down and cleared in 1961<sup>24</sup> when Chukha hydropower construction began. Today a magnificent Buddhist temple replaces the knoll on which the fort stood.

<sup>22</sup> Ashley Eden, “Report on the state of Bootan and on the progress of the Mission of 1863-64,” *Political Mission to Bootan*, Calcutta, India (1865), 7-9.

<sup>23</sup> Surgeon Rennie, *Bhutan and the Story of the Dooar War*, London (1866), 89.

<sup>24</sup> Account noted from a social media post by an elderly former minister Lyonpo Yeshey Jinpa.

All of these forts in the list could be examined for possible remains by identifying the places and surveying the locations to establish any visible traces for future scopes of study, preservation and development. The study and archaeology of these boarder frontier forts could possibly open a scope of new scholarship into Bhutan's external affairs, trade and politics in the past along these frontier lines.

## **B. Scholarship and contemporary corpus on the monumental masonry ruins in Bhutan**

Although scholarship on Bhutan is growing, with recent launching of the International Society for Bhutan Studies (ISBS)<sup>25</sup> establishing an independent society of scholars on Bhutan for the first time, the scholarship and study on masonry heritage, particularly on those in ruins have not yet found its place among the works of both foreign and local scholars and researchers of Bhutan. At the same time, only recently, some level of archaeological activities on such ruins has begun in Bhutan marking just the beginning of archaeological study of the centuries old ruins. On the other hand, protection and preservation of such ruins is not yet a state business but left to nature and restoration will need enough study and understanding to employ accurate and appropriate methods and approaches. This part of the chapter will briefly introduce the current status of scholarship and attention on the ruins of the monumental masonry heritage in Bhutan.

### **1. Scholarship and literature on masonry ruins in Bhutan**

Although the scholarship and research activities on general topic of architectural heritage in Bhutan are increasing, the scholarly works or any kind of writing and research activities on monumental masonry heritage in ruins remains noticeably vague. Very few recent essays with

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<sup>25</sup> The ISBS was launched with a conference on January 8-10, 2019 at Magdalen College, Oxford.

limited focus on masonry heritage in ruins can be found, which were a writing triggered by archaeological and historical interest rather than of the interest to study and understand the ruin itself.

While looking at the handful of recent literatures that cover few of such ruins, there are two interests that have triggered the currently available literatures putting some focus on ruins. One is the historical interest on the eastern ruling elites, which has led to the history of a Tibetan prince called Lhasey Tsangma, who came to Bhutan and started a family line to become an elite ruling class in the east. As interest in this historical figure was explored, the ruins of Mizimpa and Tsenkhar associated to this figure have come to a limelight getting certain level of coverage in some journals. John Ardusi was probably the only one who has gone to some length examining these ruins in eastern Bhutan and writing in his paper: “A Preliminary Investigation of Bhutanese Castle Ruins and Caves associated with *Lha sras Gtsang ma* presented in the tenth Seminar of the IATS in 2003 and published in 2007 in the proceeding of the seminar.

Activate of other literatures with ruins at its central focus was the archaeological interest which began by the end of the twentieth century. An unexpected discovery of a stonewall under the ground by an excavator digging for construction of an Renewal Natural Resources Regional Center (RNR-RC) in Bumthang in 1999 was the inaugural point for archaeology in Bhutan. Since then, besides engaging archaeologists for the first time in the country, researchers’ curiosity on ruins and remains of past in Bhutan was also sparked. The first article, a synoptic report on this site was written by Ugyen Palgen and Tandin Dorji, both Bhutanese researchers then, with an attempt to create awareness on the importance of archaeology titled: “Archaeological site of Bhutan: A Synoptic Report,” published in a fifth issue of a journal called *Sherub Doenme*, published by Sherubtse College in 2000. In 2003 Ugyen Palgen again writes a descriptive historical narrative with some level of field observation on Bangtso

Phodrang, a ruin site of an underground palace in eastern Bhutan with another researcher Tshering Gyeltshen published by the Center for Bhutan Studies (CBS) in a book titled *Spider and the Piglet* (2003). The most recent one was an unpublished self-report of Bhutan's only archaeologist Kuenga Wangmo who made a preliminary study of the remain traces of one of the most earliest masonry heritage, the palace of an exiled Tibetan prince Khekha Rathoe within the village settlement of Jalikhar in Bumthang district. Other than these few short articles, there are no literatures on ruins available to access. There may be few other articles on masonry heritage in ruins, which are not accounted in the bibliography of this thesis. Evidently there are not many, indicating the lack of interest and exploration of the masonry heritage in ruins and therefore the scholarship on ruins and ancient traces remain an area to go a long way for Bhutan.

## 2. Archaeological activity in Bhutan

Archaeology as explained earlier began in 1999 after an unexpected encounter of a stone-wall in Bumthang with the shovel of an excavator machine working for the construction of a structure for RNR-RC triggering the interest in archaeology for the first time. Ugyen Palgen and Tandin Dorji who compiled a first synoptic report on this archaeological activity note:

It all started in early 1999 when the mechanical shovel of a caterpillar went through layers of flat stones buried underground. The operator finding it an unfamiliar sight turned off the engine and got down for inspection along with the yard inspectors. To their surprise they discovered an underground hollow structure built of neatly laid stones.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ugyen Palgen and Tandin Dorji, "Archaeological site of Bhutan: A Synoptic Report," In *Sherub Doenme*, no 5, Sherubtse College (2000), 32.

Following investigations, the RNR-RC management had reported the matter to the district administration which reached the news to the Special Commission for Culture Affairs resulting into mutual agreement between the commission, the Agriculture Ministry and the Helvetas, which financed the project to conduct an archaeological survey. The project involved for the first time the Swiss Liechtenstein Foundation for Archaeological Research Abroad (SLSA) in Bhutan since Bhutan do not have any experts nor had any experience in this field of study. Preliminary excavation at the site begun in April 1999 inaugurating archaeological activity for the first time in the country as an emergency project, which lasted until the next year.

Having generated an interest among the government officials, it was also the wish of the then king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuk to initiate archaeological activities in Bhutan. Therefore, a cooperation to institutionalize archaeology in Bhutan was set up between Bhutan, Helvetas and the SLSA. In 2006, the Department of Culture (DoC) under the Ministry of Home and Culture Affairs (MoHCA) identified a castle ruin known as the Drapham Dzong from the seventeenth to eighteenth century located in a northern part of Bumthang district for the archaeological excavation, which was found feasible by SLSA. Since then, the archaeological excavation planned to also train officials of the Department of Culture in archaeological activities, which lasted until 2014. The field survey and preliminary works which begun towards the end of 2006 lasted until 2007 with archaeological excavation on site carried out from 2008 to 2010. From 2011 to 2013, before wrapping up the project in 2014, it had focused on capacity building of the officials working for the culture department.<sup>27</sup> However, the project apparently has ended without a next step of development and preservation mechanism for the ruin site although the cooperation continues with the initiative of institutionalizing archaeology in Bhutan. The excavated site remains abandoned yet again.

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<sup>27</sup> Fux Peter, Walser Christoph, Tshering Namgyel, Archaeology in the kingdom of Bhutan: Exploring the Country's prehistory, *SLSA Annual Report*, (2013), 31.



The next attention of this initiative has shifted to the remains associated with one of the most prominent figures of Bhutan known as Tertön Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), a Buddhist master and a treasure revealer from whose descendants the Bhutan's monarchs originated. In 2013, a field survey in another valley in Bumthang district known as Tang was conducted along with a field survey of monumental burial mounds in Phobjikha valley of Wangdue Phodrang district in western Bhutan. This survey is acclaimed as first archaeological survey in Bhutan and the report of the survey indicates that there are many such burial mounds and historical ruins to discover, because the survey team has come across other archaeological sites, besides the identified ones as they encountered local oral histories, which directed them to new findings. "The first archaeological survey in one of Bhutan's historical core regions clearly indicates that this extraordinarily rich cultural landscape actively lives on myths and oral history,"<sup>28</sup> reads a line in one of the conclusions in the report.

This survey has also observed many risk factors of such heritage sites including the manmade and natural, such as building new structures over the site, using parts of ruin walls for domestic construction and vegetation coverage to hide forever from sight with lack of protective frameworks in the country. The report stated: "The fact that the largest burial mound has already been partially destroyed does indeed emphasize the vital importance to protect Bhutan's archaeological cultural heritage sites immediately!"<sup>29</sup>

### 3. Restoration and renovation

Restoration and renovation has been a part of Bhutanese masonry heritage, although without monuments protection guidelines or any western ideology, theories and techniques of restoration and renovation. But it indeed had its own living culture that underlines the idea of

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<sup>28</sup> Peter, Christoph, Namgyel, *Archaeology in the kingdom of Bhutan* (2013), 35.

<sup>29</sup> Peter, Christoph, Namgyel, *Archaeology in the kingdom of Bhutan* (2013), 39.

preservation unlike the western veneration of ruins and monuments. Therefore, going by visible cases of restored or renovated masonry architectures in Bhutan, we can see both the combination of conservative and stylistic approach without foreign elements in the design, which is not again a case of western influence but of its own cultural process and progress.

Bhutanese dwelling culture has no tradition of architectural preservation like the way it emerged and developed in Western Europe as a movement from nineteenth century onwards. From the viewpoint of its religion and its history, there were no grounds to preserve Bhutan's state religious architecture, 'justified by the assertion that they are part of the national inheritance.'<sup>30</sup>

In this terms, while many monasteries, temples and *Dzongs* have undergone the process of transformation through a series of restoration, renovation and extension along the time triggered by destructions caused by fire, flood and earthquakes for most of them. The core architectural identity remains intact in all of them. For example, Punakha Dzong has a long history of restoration and renovation because of damages caused by fire, earthquake and also flood as it is located between two rivers.

The current architectural magnificence wears the makeover of the restorations carried out after it was damaged by flood in 1996, which was consecrated in 2004. Yet, if we look at its old photographic documentations of the structure, it still has the original architectural identity embedded in the new look without wearing any foreign elements or influence. It is the same also for the main temple of Dechen Phodrang monastery, which was a reconstructed structure of the thirteenth century Dho-ngoen Dzong at a later period, yet with its original structural scape inherited in the new one.

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<sup>30</sup> Marc Dujardin, From Living to Propelling Monument: the Monastery-Fortress (*dzong*) as Vehicle of Cultural Transfer in Contemporary Bhutan, *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, no 2:2, Center for Bhutan Studies (2000), 153.



Figure 9: A) Undated old version of Punakha Dzong. Picture accessed from facebook page of Sherub Gyeltshen, Home Minister of Bhutan on May 25, 2019. B) A new Punakha Dzong in 2015. Picture accessed from <http://bhutanjeweltravel.blogspot.com> on May 25, 2019.

State funding for renovation and restoration of heritage monuments mostly focus on state owned properties such as the *Dzongs*. Although without a legal framework or protective guidelines for the management of such heritage at the moment, the government often takes note of monuments destroyed by natural calamities and extends state support for restoration through the organizational framework under the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs (MocHA). In 2011, when an earthquake damaged various properties including culturally important monuments, the government mobilized Nu.536.956 million to restore 341 cultural monuments with minor and major damages caused by the earthquake to be implemented from 2011 to 2016.<sup>31</sup> Currently, the Wangdue Phodrang Dzong, which was completely consumed by a fire disaster in June 2012, is under the process of reconstruction with Nu 1000 million financial support offered by India.<sup>32</sup>

However, other than the immediate restoration or reconstruction of living monuments damaged by disasters, the reconstruction or restoration of the century old ruins of masonry monuments

<sup>31</sup> National Recovery and Re-Construction Plan, Department of Disaster Management, Ministry of Home and Culture Affairs, Government of Bhutan (2011) 13.

<sup>32</sup> Sonam Yangdon, Wangdue Phodrang Dzong Reconstruction Finishes 47 Percent of Total Work, *The Bhutanese*: <https://thebhutanese.bt/wangdue-phodrang-dzong-reconstruction-finishes-47-percent-of-total-work/>, Accessed on February 24, 2019.

has never been a case for Bhutan until recently. The reasons are presumably the lack of various crucial elements such as the finance and sustainable functional plan as restoration cannot happen without a functional plan for the restored or reconstructed ruin even with financial ability and expertise.

But the reconstruction of Drukgyel Dzong, originally built in 1649 and destroyed by fire in 1951, which began since 2006 to commemorate the birth of the crown prince, marked the first reconstruction of a long time ruin in the history of monument protection in the country. The reconstruction project is allocated a budget of Nu. 500 million. The Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites (DCHS), Department of Culture (DoC) under MoHCA implements the project, which began in 2016 and is scheduled to complete in 2022. The same agency has carried out a detailed architectural survey and documentation of the site in 2016-17, before the beginning of the actual structural construction with an objective to aid future conservation works and to maintain records of documentation.<sup>33</sup> A visual documentation of photography and videography has also been done by The Loden Foundation's cultural program in 2017 within its cultural documentation and research project where I am also a member of the documentation team.

However, while the objective of the reconstruction of the ruins according to a brief official document is to restore this *Dzong* to its former glory,<sup>34</sup> any information and documents explaining functional plan and other related future management plans for the reconstructed structure is yet to be understood as it is not mentioned in any accessible sources available in public domain. Yet the point is, this reconstruction of historic monument that remained for

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<sup>33</sup> Karma Tenzin, Ruins of Drukgyel Dzong, *ACCU Nara International Correspondent: The Eighteenth Regular Report*, no. 18, ACCU (2017), 1-5.

<sup>34</sup>Drugyel Dzong Reconstruction Project, Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites, Department of Culture, Ministry of Home and Culture Affairs: <http://www.departmentofculture.gov.bt/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Drugyel-report.pdf>, Accessed on February 24, 2019.

almost sixty-eight years in ruins marked the first reconstruction project of monumental ruins in contemporary Bhutan becoming the first oldest ruin to be restored in the history.



*Figure 10: A) Picture of the central tower of Drukgyel Dzong with some officials probably in the early 1900 by Jhon Claude White. B).The central tower after 1951 fire in 2014 with a protective roof. Picture (Samten Yeshi). C). The rebuilt central tower in 2016. Picture accessed on May 25 ,2019 from [www.bookmytour.bt](http://www.bookmytour.bt).*

## Chapter 3 – Sumtrhang monastery: case of a complex landscape of history and memory

It is important to understand the historical narrative behind historical sites as well as the background to that narrative. In this manner, a narrative based analysis of the landscape can be established, with all the history and associated local oral and textual narratives. Thus, a good grasp of the historical narrative(s) is also a crucial element in heritage planning and management as well as policy and development of research projects. Understanding and establishing the various historical narratives connected to sites and their setting in historical landscapes is fundamental in projects concerning heritage.

The historical background of the Sumtrhang monastery and the surrounding landscape of this monastery will be presented in this chapter as a case study of a complex heritage landscape. It is aimed at exhibiting how cultural landscape in Bhutan would need a deep local understanding to deal with for any actions towards its preservation.

### **A. Sumtrhang monastery: Emergence and history**

Sumtrhang monastery is undoubtedly among the earliest monastic centers in Bhutan and most probably the earliest in Bumthang District. The leadership of the monastery later founded several branch monastic temples in Lhuentse District in eastern Bhutan and Zhemgang District in central Bhutan. Today, all these establishments are cared for and managed by local communities as the religious and cultural centers of their lives. Besides the religious and cultural significance of Sumtrhang, its religious nobility known as the Sumtrhang Choejë (Dharma lord of Sumtrhang) continues the lineage of the founder, managing and maintaining Sumtrhang monastery as well as safe-guarding its culture and traditions. This hereditary



monastic lineage also formed the nucleus of the genealogical network in Bhutan making the monastic center both a center of culture and religion, and also the point of origin for many families in Bhutan. The exceptional historical and social value of Sumthang monastery and its religious and socio-cultural significance makes this monastery one of the key monastic establishments in Bhutan. Its history will be briefly reviewed in this chapter.

## 1. Monastery: general background

Called, Dechen Sumthang Samdrup Choedzong, but popularly known as the Sumthang monastery, the building complex is located in Sombrang village, in the Ura valley of Bumthang District. It is one of the earliest monastic establishments in Bhutan housing some of the country's most sacred relics and home to the oldest religious and cultural traditions in the region.



Figure 11: Map locating Sombrang village on the globe.

Manuscript sources suggest the *Vajrakīlaya*<sup>35</sup> practicing saint of a Nyö clan<sup>36</sup> known as Nyöton Dechog Thrulzhig Choejé<sup>37</sup> founded the Sumtrhang monastery in 1228 AD<sup>38</sup> following the wishes of his father, Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa. His father is also the earliest known Tibetan Buddhist master to visit Bhutan. He arrived in 1194 and established the first monastery in western Bhutan known as the Chelkha Dzong.

However, the oral history deeply embedded in the local oral narrative passed down from generation to generation has it that Nyö Gyelwa Lhanangpa himself founded the monastery. Among the general population, the monastery is known as the seat of Lhanangpa. The less well-known Nyöton Dechog is not a founding figure among the local people who follow the oral narrative without literary knowledge to access the written narratives. In this thesis, his son Nyöton Dechog is treated as the founder based on the narrative provided by the existing textual sources although it does not disqualify the oral narrative.

While his father belonged to the *Drikung Kagyue* monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism, Nyöton Dechog studied and practiced the *Vajrakīlaya* doctrine of the *Nyingma* monastic order, the oldest order of Tibetan *Vajrayana* Buddhism. According to one of the manuscripts<sup>39</sup> outlining the lineage history of Sumtrhang's *Vajrakīlaya* tradition, his root master, the pivotal teacher Ngagchang Nyeljor Tsemo, taught him the teachings of the *Vajrakīlaya* practice and

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<sup>35</sup> *Vajrakīlaya* is an esoteric Buddhist tantric doctrine practicing interactive visualization and meditation of the wrathful deity described as the embodiment of the activities of all the Buddhas. It refers to both the doctrine as well as the deity itself.

<sup>36</sup> Nyö is a clan with a legendary origin in Tibet. It was believed that the first Nyö, known as Nyö Jathuel Karpo, descended from a celestial body in a form of a white bird. As he was affected by human pollution, he was said to have become a kind of lunatic and was known as Nyö, meaning mad. His descendants later formed the Nyö clan.

<sup>37</sup> Chöje means Dharma Lord.

<sup>38</sup> Although the monastery was founded in the early part of the thirteenth century, this is an estimated date, requiring confirmation through absolute archaeological dating..

<sup>39</sup> བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས་དོན་རྒྱུ་ལྷན་འདས་བཤད་སྐུ་ལྷན་ལྷན་ཕྱེད། [a manuscript containing the historical account of Sumtrhang's *Vajrakīlaya* tradition], in རྩུང་པ་ཡང་གསར་བྱེད། [Cycle of supreme and sacred *Vajrakīlaya*], Manuscript of Sumtrhang, undated.



prophesized that he would go to a place called Bumthang in Bhutan, then known as the southern region of darkness.

## 2. Dechog's arrival in Bhutan and the founding of Sumtrhang

According to a short biography of Nyöton Dechog Thrulzhig Choejé by Sangnga<sup>40</sup> and based on the account provided in the manuscript outlining the lineage of his *Vajrakīlaya* tradition, Nyöton Dechog received the final directive to go to Bhutan from his root master, Ngagchang Nyelgor Tsemo. During his preparatory meditation retreat, he had a vision of the symbolic features of the place he would establish his monastery. It was a place bearing three paths,<sup>41</sup> which had a stone megalith at the center, now located on the ground floor of the re-constructed main building of the temple, its four sides symbolizing the four activities of the *Vajrakīlaya* doctrine. The place had a plant in the area, which flowered even in winter, a wall of cliff at the north resembling a stack of texts symbolizing the steady flow of his teaching and practice of the doctrine, a rocky terrain at the east in the shape of a swastika symbolizing the firm continuity of the lineage, a milky brook of pure water to the west symbolizing the flow of pure doctrine and lineage for the benefit of sentient beings, and finally a hillside to the south resembling a conch shell symbolizing the far reaching impact of the doctrine and the lineage. Also, nearby were two mountains, the copper mountain of red soil to its west and the metal mountain of black soil at its east.

Guided by this vision he commenced his journey to Bhutan, carrying with him the crucial support objects, texts and tools necessary for teaching and practice of his religious tradition. He carried with him the sixteen statues of *Vajrakīlaya* deities made of iron as supporting objects

<sup>40</sup> See: [Sangnga], (1998), 105-117.

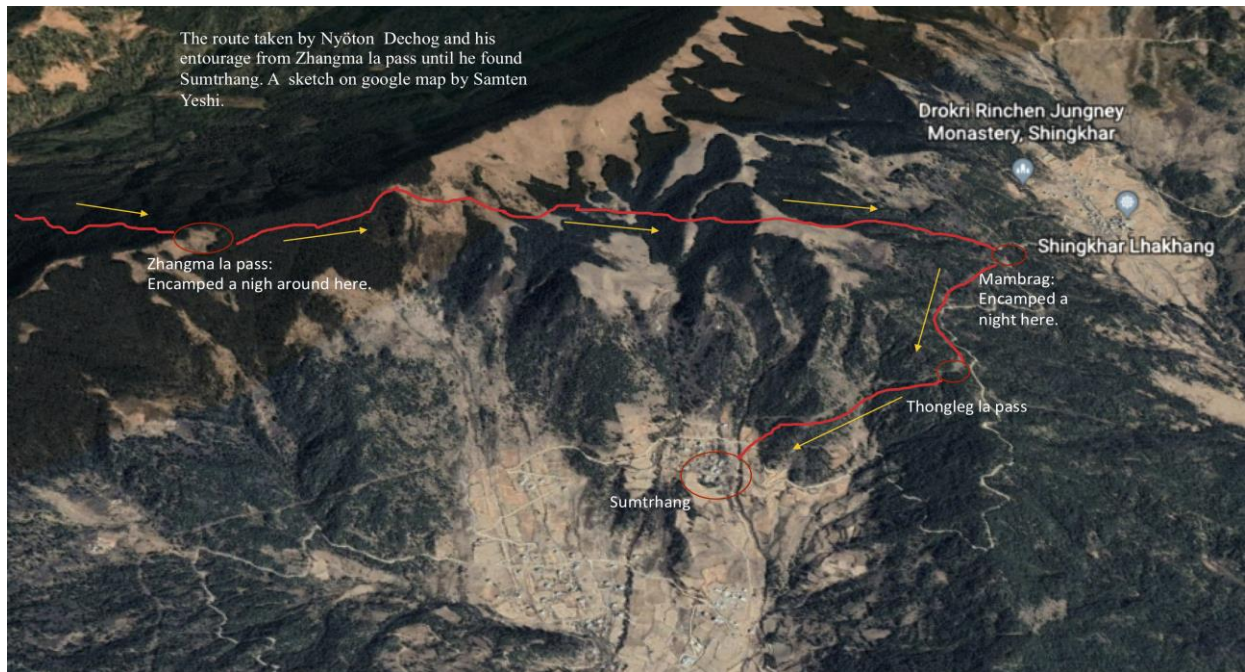
<sup>41</sup> Original line in Tibetan: འཕྲུག་སྐུ་དང་ལྷ་མོ་

of the body. A corpus of the manuscripts of *Vajrakīlaya* teaching and practice as the support of speech, a Buddhist stupa offered to his father by a non-human spirit as a support object of the mind, a sacred drum as the support object of the qualities among several other religious objects and instruments that formed an integral part of monastic necessities to practice and teach his doctrine of *Vajrakīlaya*.

His entourage passed through the Monlakarchung mountain at the border between Tibet and the Bumthang valley. As he descended to the valley, entering the territory of Bumthang Valley, he arrived at a village called Sumpa in today's Chokhortoe Valley in Bumthang. There, he noticed a cliff face to the north and a brook flowing in the west. Suspecting this must be the place of his vision; he erected a stupa and sat in meditation to contemplate and check if this was indeed the correct place. When no signs appeared to suggest the place was the right one, he left to continue his search, rejecting the wishes of local people who asked him to stay. He supposedly left behind a Vajra dagger, a symbolic, ritual object in the worship of the *Vajrakīlaya* deity with a hilt representing the top of the wrathful deity's head and the tri-edged dagger blade at the bottom.

On leaving Sumpa, he journeyed to the east passing through the Tang Valley and then began an arduous uphill climb to reach the pass at the top. Upon reaching the pass, he named it Zhangma La, meaning the 'stupid pass' as he joked that the pass is stupid to sit on an arduous uphill journey. Few meters down the pass, remains of the stone throne he was said to have sat on and two horse hitching posts are visible under a fir tree in the forest even today. From this point, he continued his journey eastwards, following a ridge above Sombrang village, arriving close to a village known as Shingkhar, about five kilometers away from Sombrang. Yet again, since the environment resembled the place he had seen in his vision, he camped below a cliff

but it was said that the evening darkness enveloped him too soon, which he took as a sign of disapproval for the place.



*Figure 12: The last stretch of Dechog's journey before locating the place of his vision marked on a Google map.*

Today, the site bears remains of the encampment and is known as Mumbrag, derived from the word ‘*mendra*’, which means ‘supposedly not’ in classical Tibetan. Confused and frustrated, Nyöton Dechog invoked help from his deities to find the place to establish his monastery. His small drum, known as Ngachung Sangwai Drukdhir, meaning the small drum of the sacred dragon roar, became the instrument that helped him locate the place to found the monastery. Upon reaching a ridge to the west of his encampment, he saw the landscape manifest in his vision, complete with all the correct signs and symbols. Because he was happy and considered it auspicious to finally see the place of his future monastery from this small pass on the ridge, the pass became known as Thongleg La, meaning the ‘pass of auspicious view.’ The pass bears this name down to the present day.

On arrival, Nyöton Dechog entered into a brief meditation and was given a vision of his tutelary deity *Vajrakīlaya* as a sign of confirmation. He also subjugated the local mountain deity, a non-human spirit, and named him Dorje Dradul. Dorje Dradul was to become the protector of his *Vajrakīlaya* doctrine and the lineage of Sumtrhang. He also noted a type of plant that bears flower even in winter without leaves seen in his vision confirming the place. The plant briefly flowers in frosty winter and still grows in the area around the village. It is also worth mentioning that the same plant does not bloom in winter in other places other than one other plant in a place called Shingnyer, about 12 kilometers to the west of Sumtrhang. The place was also seen in Nyöton Dechog’s vision as resembling a turtle on which he should build a smaller temple. There was also a similar flower bearing plant and he built a smaller temple there as required by his vision. The temple is today cared for by the local community and could possibly be the original thirteenth century, a small temple with some sections that have been recently renovated.

The local serpent spirit of Sumtrhang was also said to have appeared from a pond in the area in a form of a white lady to offer the land for his project. A stupa was built with the pond at its front and remains preserved even today near the monastic temple. Satisfied with the place, he built his monastery as his main monastic seat and finally settled down to commit to the practice and teaching of *Vajrakīlaya* doctrine in the valley.

After having accomplished his visionary project of establishing the monastic center, upon the request of his students, his consort bore him a son, Zhigpo Trashi Singge (1237–1322). Nyöton Dechog was said to have passed away in 1265 on the anniversary of Lord Buddha’s Descending day from *Tushita* Heaven<sup>42</sup>, which is one of the most auspicious days in the Buddhist calendar.

### 3. Etymology of the place

“From the sound of the drum, the place was known as Sordrang and because the place bears three paths it was also known as Sumtrhang,” writes Sangnga<sup>43</sup> in his genealogy of the Nyö lineage in Bhutan. We know from observing *Vajrakīlaya* ritual practices, a triangle vessel is often used in exorcism rituals to subjugate and suppress the evil spirits and atmosphere. Therefore, the idea of three paths must have been taken into such a consideration in choosing the place to build the monastery over a triangle formation. Hypothetically the line, which said “the place bearing three paths,” is interpreted as the intersecting point of three paths. This assumption will be dealt in the following parts.

The monastery was called Dechen Sumtrhang Samdrup Choedzong; *Dechen* because it is supposed to be a place of supreme bliss, *Sumtrhang* because it was built on a place where there

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<sup>42</sup> [Sangnga], འབྲུག་གི་གཞི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ [Clear Mirror of the Nyö Lineage of Bhutan], KMT publication, Thimphu (1983), p117.

<sup>43</sup> [Sangnga], Thimphu (1983), p115.

is three paths, *Samdrup* because the establishment of the monastery fulfilled a great ambition, and *Choedzong* meaning the palace of the doctrine of Buddha.

The name Sombrang, retained by the village community, must be a variant pronunciation of *Sordrang*. This name was derived from an event that unfolded during the founding of the place. It was said that the founder, Nyöton Dechog, finally resorted to invoking his deities to help him find the place and used his sacred drum to guide him. The narrative was that he followed his sacred drum that flew to this place. As the drum descended on the ground, its leather covering scratched over the branches of a tree which made the sound ‘*sor*’ and made the usual sound of a drum on landing on the ground, which sounded like ‘*drang*’ as it hit the ground to become the name of the place. A drum believed to be the one that flew and founded the place is still preserved in the monastery among the sacred relics and artifacts of the monastery.

Today, the village is known as Sombrang, derived from the sound made by the drum as it hit the ground, while the monastery retained the name Dechen Sumtrhang Samdrup Choedzong as given by its founder after the successful identification of the place and establishment of the monastery in the early thirteenth century.

#### 4. Birth of a village

Located at 3,100 meters above sea level, the place was initially an uninhabited area until the Sumtrhang monastery was established. Since its establishment, the monastic community gave rise to the small village locally known as Sombrang, probably a mispronunciation by the illiterate inhabitant of the original name, Sordrang, and its people the Sombrangpa. The Ura village, which was already an established settlement then is located to the south of Sombrang village.

The Sombrang community in the early past was most probably five households with different roles. The residence of the founder was called the *Nagtsang*. It lies in the monastic compound and the rest of the community was seemingly comprised of four households; *Konyeray*, the household in-charge of temple caretaking, *Gartsangba*, the household in-charge of blacksmithing possibly to provide tools, *Zargangba*, the household in-charge of water caretaking and *Taraiba*, the household in-charge of horse caretaking for ponies, probably because it was then an essential means for transport. This suggests that the community was an organized monastic settlement to deal with its needs and necessities. All ancestors of the occupants of these households came with the founder from Tibet as a part of the founder's entourage. In the past, the four units were seemingly made up of the lay households in charge of caring for the monastic property and the services helping the founder manage the monastery and its religious and cultural traditions and activities. Although the responsibilities of other lay communities ended most probably in the early twentieth century, the traditional temple caretaking responsibility of the lay community continued until the demise of Memey Tshering Dorji, who humbly took care of the temple in the old tradition until he died in July, 2015 marking a complete end of the old tradition.

Later, this lay community grew into a small village when the members of the households increased. The four households of Sombrang have grown to eighteen today, all of them extensions of the original four. As the members of the households increased, they built separate homes starting new families. By the mid-twentieth century, as Bhutan developed, the inter-dependency of the lay community and the monastic family also changed, moving towards independence of each other by the end of the twentieth century. The gradual separation of the lay community from the practical running of the monastery opened new challenges and opportunities in keeping its thirteenth century traditions and culture alive and to keep it relevant at present and future.

## 5. Monastic community

Traces of the ruins of the retreat centers and available narratives do not point to existence of a community of monks, but rather a community of ascetic practitioners who are not celibate monks, known as *Gomchens* and the hermits who gathered around the founding master to receive the teachings and guidance to the Buddhist practices taught by successive incumbents of the founding family known as the Choejë, Dharma lord. However, looking at the way successive incumbents became ordained monks by taking vows to be celibate monks in the latter half of their lives, also hints that the monastery probably also had a community of monks at times.

Hence, it is roughly assumed that the monastic center was a place where the students gathered to receive teachings and study the religious traditions taught by successive hereditary Dharma lords known as the Choejë, after which the students entered into a phase of retreat and meditation in the retreat centers nestled around the cliff to the north of the monastery. Thus, Sumtrhang monastery most probably accommodated \ students who were mostly the ascetic and meditational practitioners known as the *Gomchen* and *Ngagpa*. The last community of Sumtrhang's *Gomchens* numbered about ten men, mostly locals, who had their names registered as active members of the monastery. This community came to an end by the end of the twentieth century. In the past, they received certain privileges from the State as members of a monastery. For example, the State exempted the active members of a monastic community from having to join the military and exempted from having to work away from home to pay various labor taxes. When citizens were all completely relieved from these burdens in the 1990s, the *Gomchens*, as lay practitioners with family also began to focus on their personal lives as farmers rather than as members of a monastery. By the early twenty first century, the monastery had no registered active members although some of the members of the last



*Gomchens* living in the village still continue to participate in the annual monastic functions and ceremonies because of their past association to build a new relationship of association instead of membership.

## 6. The lineage of Dechog and his descendants in Sumtrhang

One of Sumtrhang's cultural aspects is its rich genealogy, which happens to be the origin of many aristocratic families in Bhutan. This aspect cannot be ignored to understand the monastery and its landscape. This is because the creation of the landscape has the hands of many generations of one family. Hence, a simple genealogical lineage of Sumtrhang is outlined.

As already mentioned, Dechog Nyöton Thrulzhig Choejé was the son of Nyö Gyalwa Lhanangpa, who was a student of Drigung Kyobpa Jigten Gonpo (1143–1217), the founder of the Drigung Kagyu order.<sup>44</sup> The lineage of the founder of Sumtrhang, from the earliest mythological origin until his father Nyö Gyalwa Lhanangpa, is traced based on Tibetan sources<sup>45</sup> and from there, beginning from Nyöton Dechog Thrulzhig Choejé himself to the incumbent of Sumtrhang monastery is based on Sangnga's Geneology of Nyö in Bhutan.<sup>46</sup> The genealogy was compiled from various manuscripts, hagiographic sources and scroll records from Sumtrhang.

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<sup>44</sup> Sub-sect of Kagyu order of Tibetan Buddhism.

<sup>45</sup> [Jangchub Gyeltshen], ཁ་རག་གཞིས་ཀྱི་གདུང་རབས་ལྟད་པར་འཕགས་པ། [The Genealogy of Kharag Nyö], in ཁ་རག་གཞིས་ཀྱི་གདུང་རབས་ལྟད་པར་འཕགས་པ་དང་རྒྱུད་པོ་ཀྱི་བསེ་རུ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ། [The History of the Nyö Lineage of Kha-rag and a Version of the Rlang's po ti Bse Ru Containing the Genealogy of the Rlang Lineage], reproduced by Dolanji, Mujeeb Press, Delhi (1978), 1-56.

<sup>46</sup> [Sangnga]. འབྲུག་གི་སྟོན་རབས་གསལ་བའི་མེ་ལོང་། [Mirror of Nyo Genealogy of Bhutan]. Thimphu, KMT Press, 1998.

Gyalwa Lhanangpa's lineage traces as far back as the Nyoe Je Jathul Karpo, a mythical figure believed to have descended from a celestial body in the form of a white Garuda bird. Below is the successive rosary of his paternal lineage, beginning with mystic origin of Nyoe Jathul Karpo down to the present Sumthrang Choejé Wangdra Jamtsho, who is from the 45<sup>th</sup> generation of the Nyö lineage and the 28<sup>th</sup> Sumthrang Choejé or Dharma Lord of Sumthrang. This list takes into account only the paternal line to which Sumthrang Choejé belonged.

The lineage of Nyö clan, which began in Tibet is as follow:

1. Nyö Je Jathul Karpo
2. Nyö Je Tsenpo
3. Sengge Shok
4. Takhar
5. Je Zhang De
6. Dring De
7. Dringchung
8. Palyon
9. Tshulyon
10. Guru
11. Lhaphen
12. Thubgyal also known as Pangla Meshor
13. Yonten Drakpa also known as Nyö Lotsawa Yontendrag (967–1072)
14. Tsangtsha Dorje Lama (1008–1086)
15. Pelgi Sengge (1054–1120)
16. Nyö Drakpa Pel (1106–1183)
17. Nyö Gyalwa Lhanangpa Sangay Rinhen also known as Zijid Pel (1164–1224)

The Nyö lineage in Bhutan, after the founding of Sumtrhang, starts with Nyöton Dechog Thrulzhig Choejë. He is the first Dharma Lord of Sumtrhang (Sumtrhang Choejë) while he belonged to the 18<sup>th</sup> generation of the Nyö lineage of Sumthrang line and was the only son to Nyö Gyalwa Lhanangpa.

The lineage of the successive Sumthrang's Dharma lords, which is also the lineage of Nyö clan in Bhutan is as follow:

18. Nyöton Dechog Thrulzhig Choejë (1179–1265)
19. Zhikpo Trashi Sengge (1237–1322)
20. Vajra Duepa also known as Phurpa Tshering (1262–1296)
21. Dewai Peljor (1291–1359)
22. Pelden Sengye (1332–1384)
23. Jamyang Drakpa Yoezer (1382–1442)
24. Namkhai Samdrub (1398–1459)
25. Jangsem Zhonnu (1422–1494)
26. Peldhen Zangpo also known as Tashi Gyalpo and Shri Badra (1458–1518)
27. Tshungmed Drakpa (1474–1523)
28. Zhonnu Tenpa (1489–1537)
29. Sang-ngag Tandrin (1506–1569)
30. Pema Tandrin (1539–1609)
31. Dungdzin Karma (1567–1631)
32. Ngodrub Gyatsho (1610–1666)
33. Pema Choerab (1627–1687)
34. Gelek Tendzin (1667–1746)

35. Wangchen Norbu (1701–1775)
36. Wangdrag Gyatsho (1730–1748)
37. Lhawang Choejin Zangpo (1748–1808)
38. Thrinley Jamtsho (1777–1825)
39. Damchoe Sengye (1792–1816)
40. Tshultrim Dorjee (1809–1872)
41. Norbu Wangyal (1841–1891)
42. Namgyal Khandro (1869–1888)
43. Kunzang Ngoedrub (1887–1953)
44. Tshewang Tandrin (1910–1973)
45. Wangdrag Jamtsho (b.1949)

## **B. Analysis of the monastic landscape and the associated ruin sites**

Understanding the complex monastic landscape within its historical and cultural contexts in particular is important to secure that any management plan that follows has cultural and historical integrity. The Sumthang monastery, although with rich history, its landscape was never studied to understand the spiritual and religious cultural significance. As cultural heritage takes into account all the associated values, a heritage with spiritual and religious significance will not have its value complete and integrity sustained in its preservation efforts without understanding the landscape in context to its spiritual religious significances. Therefore, in this section, having gathered enough historical information to establish a religion and belief centered narrative for the monastic landscape, I shall consider interpreting the existing narrative of the monastery in context to the landscape and its significance to highlight the complexity of a Himalayan Buddhist monastic cultural landscape.

# 1. Understanding the geomancy of the monastic site of Sumtrhang

From the historical background of the monastic foundation much detail can be surmised about the landscape chosen for the monastery. A geometric interpretation of the landscape as a whole has never been attempted. This brief preliminary attempt puts the symbolic feature into context.

There are at least seven major features to be taken into account, going by the supposed vision of the founder and actual physical presence of the features. These features include the four symbolic landscapes in the four cardinal directions, the stone megalith standing in the central area and the two mountains; the red copper mountain in the west and the black iron mountain in the east. Another crucial piece of information from the description of the founding of the monastery is the mention of the place bearing three paths as the place where the monastery should be established.

A simple coordination of the topographic points of these features produced an interesting and unexpected result. The outcome of the geometric coordination of the points as depicted in the figure below certainly suggests that the monastery was founded at the center of the intersecting points of the geometric coordinates drawn using the major, symbolic features of the landscape mentioned in the description of the search to locate the monastery used as the connecting points. These points formed a rough image of the mandala of *Vajrakīlaya* and the *Vajrakīlaya* deity itself, placing the monastery at the center of the mandala and at the heart of the deity.

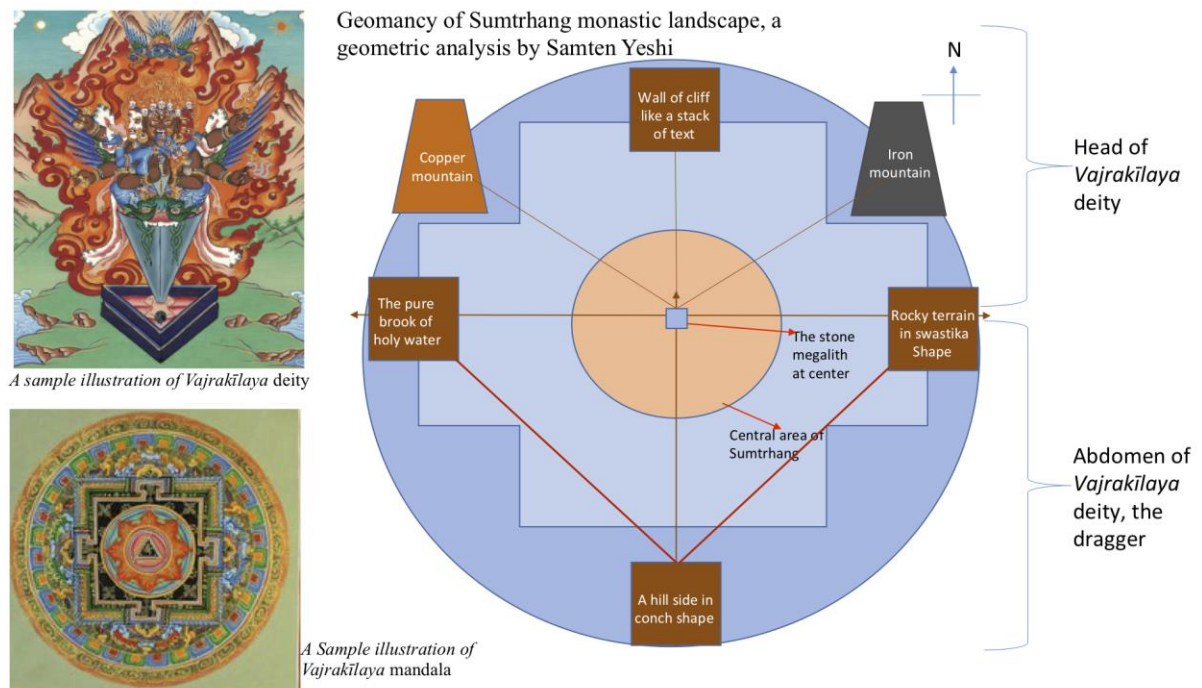


Figure 13: A geomancy of Sumtrhang monastic landscape based on the descriptions of the founder's vision in the textual sources.

The two aspects of geomancy discovered in the geometric coordination of the points of the landscape features; the mandala of *Vajrakīlaya*, which symbolizes the divine palace of the deity and its retinues and a feature of the *Vajrakīlaya* deity itself in its dagger form clearly exhibits the relationship between the landscape, the monastic center and the cult of the monastery in the context of the historical narrative.

The general outlay of the foundation was modeled on the mandala, formed from the simple interconnection of the five features, the cliff, rocky terrain, the hill, the brook and the megalith at the center. The monastery built at the center of this mandala most probably reflects the idea that the monastic temple forms the central palace of the deity within the mandala. When the two mountains, the red and black mountains, are placed into this geometric coordination; when the points of the landscape features in the upper part of the cross section are connected to the center, it forms a sort of stick-man figure with its hands raised upwards, presumably forming

the upper body of the deity itself. Then, when the features in the lower part of the center and the features at the east and west are connected to the center and to each other, it creates a triangle forming the lower part of the deity, completing the shape of the deity itself where lower part is the dagger abdomen placing the monastic temple at the heart of the deity figure produced by the coordinates.

The line in the description of the place, which stated; “the place bearing three paths,” which has never been explained can be partially understood through this geometric exercise. This hypothetical geomancy that echoes the textual narrative tells us that the place bearing three paths refers to the central area where the coordinates of the points from all other symbolic features intersected forming the kind of major three paths of intersection, that is the coordinate connecting the feature at east and west and the coordinate that runs from center to the south, which supposedly forms the central triangle as is there in the center of the *Vajrakīlaya* mandala. The alternative interpretation assumed by Choejē Wangdrag Jamtsho is that, it possibly refers to the traditional footpath that ran from east to west through this place, and from south until Sumtrhang. Although this is possible, we do not yet know if this foot paths existed then and it demands further study to fully understand this line and its reference to the landscape.

The four-sided stone megalith standing at the center of the geometric intersection of the symbolic landscape features was described as an object embodying the symbolism of the four activities of *Vajrakīlayasa*. This possibly symbolizes as well, the *Vajrakīlaya* deity himself, residing at the center of the mandala. It can also be interpreted as the dagger object of the *Vajrakīlaya* deity, which is held by his heart by two of his four hands in his iconography.

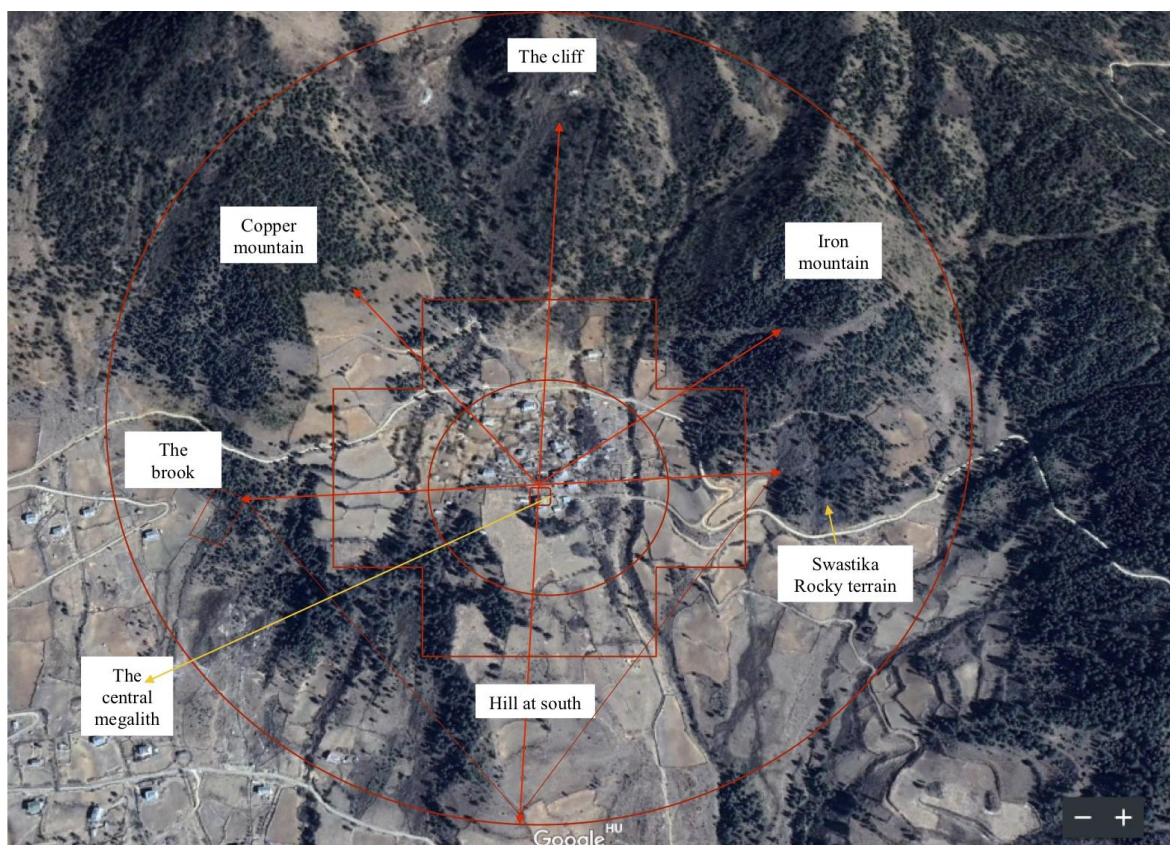


Figure 14: The geomancy put on the landscape in Google map.

The understanding of the mention of “a place bearing three paths,” may also have a possible alternative. There are three stone megaliths in the monastic complex, which were not, for the moment, figured into the interpretation of the geomancy. While the main central stone megalith standing on the ground floor of the temple remained in its original spot two other megaliths have been moved from their original spots in later times. Discovering its original spot may shed some light on its role and whether, if at all, it played its part in the geomancy, the assumption is that the coordination of the points from these three megaliths may form an inner triangle for the mandala, as reflected in the sample mandala featured in figure 13 explaining the “three paths.”



A brief analysis such as this marks a first attempt to understand the memory of the founder's idea of this landscape, the landscape where he chose to establish the monastery. There is yet further room to study the geomancy of this monastic landscape based on the cult of *Vajrakīlaya*, its philosophy, liturgy and iconography at length in future. Such geomancy can also be applied to study the landscape of other Bhutanese monastic foundations to understand the complex cultural and spiritual significances of the establishments and their narratives.

## 2. Architectural history of Sumdrup Choedzong

The architectural history of Sumtrhang monastery is not well recorded. There are no documents or descriptions of the original monastery built in the thirteenth century. However, a clue concerning the later transition can be understood from the record of activities maintained by the ninth Sumtrhang dharma lord Pelden Zangpo also known as Tashi Gyalpo and Shri Badra (1458–1518), written in a traditional Buddhist manuscript style.<sup>47</sup> In this manuscript, he records his activities grouped into three categories known as '[The white, black and the multicolored text]'. Although, the original manuscript has been lost, a copy of the manuscript with many leafs of the manuscript missing, has a part which mentions the construction of a monastic building in some detail, mostly mentioning the sponsors, the artists who did the mural paintings and the sculpture and statues he had erected in the temple.

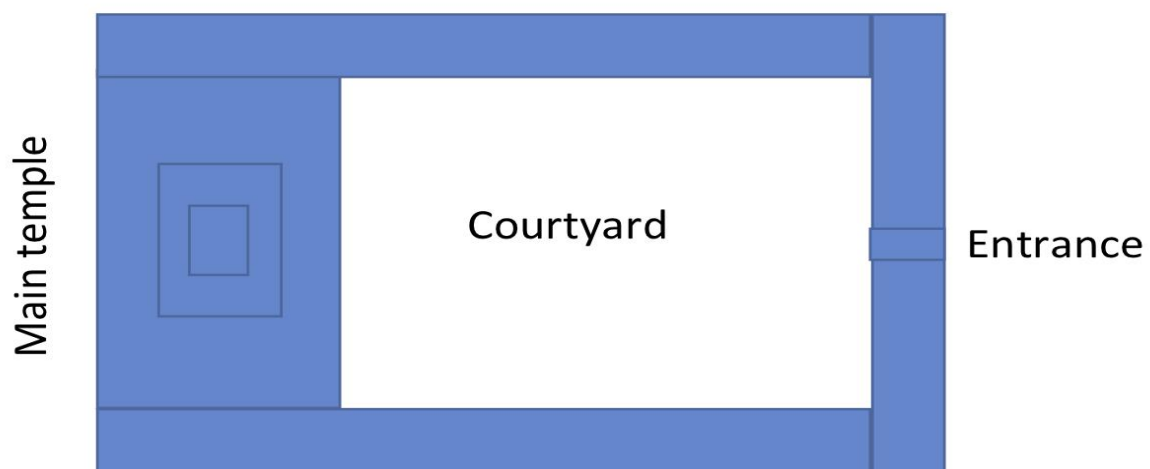
The record suggests that Palden Zangpo built a new monastic structure although it is not clear whether he built an additional structure around the existing old structure or a new one by demolishing the old during that period. The next account to follow this written record is oral information from the current Sumtrhang Choejē Wangdrag Jamtsho. According to his recollection of having seen the old monastic complex then as a child, the old monastery had an

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<sup>47</sup> [Palden Zangpo] དེབ་ཐེར་དཀར་ནག་ཁ་གསུམ། [*The white, black and mixed booked: (Journal of Palden Zangpo's activities)*], Sumtrhang Manuscript, (undated).

enclosed courtyard surrounded by structures on four sides with the main temple facing east. This monastic feature, described by Choejë Wangdrag reflects some of the clues in the records of Palden Zangpo's activities, suggesting that the monastic structure Choejë Wangdrag recollected is, most probably the one built by Palden Zangpo.

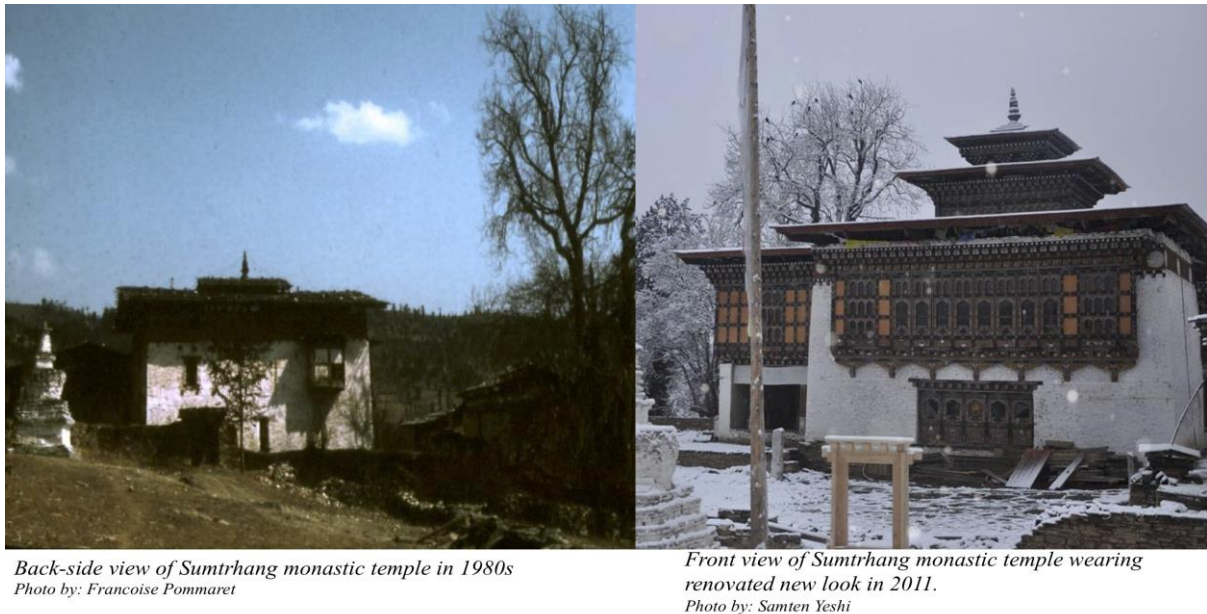
*A simple design reconstruction of the old monastery based on Choejë Wangdra Jamtsho's recollection*



*Figure 15: A simple reconstructed model of the older monastic complex, which was pulled down in the 20th century based on the oral information.*

In the later part of the twentieth century, the twenty sixth Sumtrhang Choejë Kunzang Ngoedrub (1887–1953) and his son Tshewang Tandrin (1910–1973) the grandfather and father of the current incumbent decided to pull down the old monastery to build a smaller one. The reason according to Wangdrag Jamtsho was that although the monastery was old and needed to be either renovated or reconstructed, the decision to pull down the large, old structure was meant to reduce the burden on the following generations of successive incumbents. The incumbents then feared future generations would face extreme difficulties in sustaining the monastery, its culture and its traditions in the face of changing times in Bhutan that had begun modernizing in their time under the leadership of the third king in the 1960s. The two he said,

had felt that the new, smaller monastic temple that can be seen today would be easier to take care of.



*Figure 16: A) The rare view of the main temple of Sumtrhang in 1980s. Picture by Francoise Pommaret. B) The front view of the renovated temple in 2011. Picture by Samten Yeshi.*

The main statue in the temple according Wangdrag was a huge two-storied statue of the lord Buddha, which rose from the ground floor until the second floor. Some of the smaller statues, which match the records of Palden Zangpo, are preserved in the current monastic temple, as it was shifted from the old monastery to the new one.

Later, in 2000, as the monastic temple was in bad shape and needed more renovation, the incumbent Wangdrag Jamtsho initiated renovation works which are still continuing after more than a decade since he started. During the renovation, some stylistic features were added by replacing wooden parts of the structure while also preserving the old structural design of the masonry. The mural paintings were completely renewed by taking off the old mural paintings

from the wall and replaced by new murals pasted on the walls. The old mural paintings are still preserved for future, although at the moment there is no specific plan on how they will be used.

### 3. Monastic landscape and its associated ruins

The Sumtrhang monastic landscape comprises several ruins in the immediate surroundings of the monastery. However, the exact location of the most important traces of the original thirteenth century monastery has not yet been established nor can they be traced at the moment. The earliest trace of the monastery will be of the fifteenth century structure that was most probably the one built by Palden Zangpo, which was pulled down in the later part of the twentieth century. Most parts of the building's structural remain beneath the raised courtyard of the current monastery and a kitchen built in 2001. Recently, in 2018, when foundations were dug in the lower level of the raised courtyard for a hostel project of the monastery, the workers mentioned observing what may have been the possible remains of the old monastery's foundation.



Figure 17: Ruin sites associated to Sumtrhang monastery marked on the landscape of Sombrang in Google map.

At the same time, there are at least four sites with visible structural remains clearly associated with the activities of the successive incumbents of Sumtrhang Samdrup Choedzong. These sites are described below and located on the Google map above:

1. Remains of the Lhendrup Choedey meditation retreat center, hidden in the mountains in the northern part of Sombrang Village was recently identified and located as a part of this thesis research. The 9th Sumtrhang Choejê, Lhawang Choejin Zangpo (1748–1808) established the meditation retreat center in secrecy for his students practicing *Dzongchen*, the highest spiritual practice of the *Nyingma* monastic tradition. Because at that time, the eighth Desi or the temporal ruler of

Bhutan, popularly known as Zhidar and also known as Sonam Lhendrup, was said to have put restrictions on the practice and teaching of religious traditions other than Drukpa Kagyue, the retreat supposedly could not operate openly.<sup>48</sup> Several internal rebellions in Bhutan from the 1770s-1790s were also attributed to Zhidar.<sup>49</sup>

2. At least three sites with visible ruins of meditation retreat centers around the cliff can be seen. While some of them were used by retiring dharma lords of the monastery, located north of the village towards the end of the jungle at the foot of the cliff (Site C in the map), several others were located atop the cliff and next to the west side of the cliff and were used in the past both by members of the founding family and their students.
3. A ruin on the knoll known as Goen Langdrang, a few minutes' walk to the west from the monastic temple was said to have been founded by the Tenpi Nyima, the twin brother of the sixth Sumtrhang Choejē called Jamyang Drakpa Yoezer (1382–1442) as his private monastic residence. The temple residence was destroyed by fire in a later, possibly in the later part of the seventeenth century, consuming many of the religious manuscripts of Sumtrhang that had been hidden from the authorities in the temple because the practice of other religious schools had been outlawed according to Sangnga. However, although this event sounds more like a “book burning narrative,” it is not. Bhutan has never experienced any sort of book burning events at any time in its history. Therefore, the restrictions were most probably circulated by word of mouth putting fear into those monasteries practicing the traditions of religious schools other than the one favored by the contemporary figures of authority. This may explain why the texts were hidden.

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<sup>48</sup> [Sangnga], *Clear Mirror of the Nyö Lineage of Bhutan*, p202.

<sup>49</sup> Saul Mullard, “Repaying A ‘Debt’ with land, grain and taxes; Yug Phyogs Thub and His Service to Bhutan During the Sino-Nepalese War,” in *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Sikkim (2009), pp16.

4. Visible parts of a ruin were also detected on top of the hill to the south of the monastery in the early 2000s when stonewall fencing of the area was carried out to protect the cultivated field from wild boars. The remains were preserved although not protected. While there are no written records that say anything about this site, an oral informant, Pekar Lama Tenzin Wangchuk, the elder brother of the current incumbent of Sumtrahng monastery, recalled oral information he had heard from his elders in the past. The oral history included an account of a monastic college (known as Shedra in Tibetan and Bhutanese), of Peling tradition<sup>50</sup> established by Palden Zangpo at that site in the fifteenth-sixteenth century. From Palden Zangpo's own records, we know that he received all the teachings of Pema Lingpa's religious traditions, and the bits and pieces of ritual objects and texts were found in the monastery during the renovation of the temple, which began in early 2000s. These items also suggest that the monastery once practiced the religious tradition of Pema Lingpa, although no other known information exists on whether he actually established such a college or not.

#### 4. Heritage value of the monastic landscape

As one of the earliest religious and cultural centers in Bhutan, the monastery houses some of the earliest Buddhist artifacts among its sacred relics. It is also the custodian of probably the earliest unique spiritual mask dance traditions in Bhutan, predating most of the mask dances performed across the country. Historically, it is the oldest monastery and is certainly the earliest and most probably the first monastic center to bring the tradition of *Vajrakīlaya* practice and teaching to the country. The integrity of the landscape remains preserved even today without disturbance. All the landscape features were recorded in the early written manuscript sources

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<sup>50</sup> Peling tradition comprise Buddhist teachings and practices revealed by a Buddhist master known as Terton Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) in the fifteenth century.



and other records maintained by later figures. In fact, the landscape has further developed in the later times as the result of later historical events and cultural activities. Almost all of the spiritual and historical sites and rock features found within the Sumthrang monastic landscape remain intact and preserved in their original form and place. They reflect the events, activities, and history of the place and people described by both written and oral narratives.

The monastic structure and the ruin sites, remain as an uninterrupted link to its past. While the main monastic temples was transformed at least twice in later times, the transformation embodies the historical journey of the establishment and the landscape from its beginnings in the thirteenth century to recent times. Its architectural aesthetics remain intact in terms of traditional integrity in all aspects of its workmanship, materials and design despite the modern addition of metallic sheets for roofing and electric wiring and poles for lighting. The monastery and the surrounding landscape certainly embody an artistic value of a unique creation, the historical testimony representing an extreme rarity for such a monastic space comprising the historical sites containing various tangible and intangible cultural features which exercised influence over the people in the valley and other regions in the past through the activities of this monastic center.

It is also distinctly important in terms of the cultural components for which the monastery is the custodian. The mask dances of Sumthrang may be the earliest Buddhist spiritual mask dances in the country. Besides, the lineage of the monastic nobility, the monastery is also the center of network for various noble families in the country, who trace their origins to the long line of descendant incumbents of the Sumthrang monastery.

## 5. Challenges

The general absence of any realization of the importance of understanding the deeper, historical aspects of heritage and, generally, how to protect it among the monastic communities in



Bhutan, is itself a challenge. The monastic landscape of Sumthrang, therefore also embodies these challenges.

Although no human disturbance has been recorded to date, not being able to document sites may pose a greater risk than remaining hidden under the vegetation. For instance, until the physical verification and identification of one of the sites connected to Sumthrang monastery, known as the Lhendrup Chodhey meditation retreat center mentioned in Sangnga's work, the site was almost on the edge of becoming part of the unknown remains of the past. The site was recognized and identified during this thesis research initiative following the place description provided by Sangnga and my own personal knowledge of the places since I was born and brought up in the same area.

Special challenges also lie ahead in studying and preserving the earliest remaining fifteenth century traces of the monastic structure, which probably lies under the lowest layers of the developments from later periods on the site. Some parts of the foundation are probably destroyed or buried under the most recent construction projects undertaken by the monastery. The monastery already faces a grave challenge in preserving its tradition and culture. For example, the well-known Sumthrang's mask dances among which is a mask dance known as the Sumthrang *Tacham*, the Sumthrang's dance of horses, are in danger of being forgotten and are threatened by the degeneration of the monastery. If the monastic school is not restored soon, the unique works of value from both an artistic and historic point of view deriving from this monastic tradition and culture faces complete loss. The monastery is compelled to initiate urgent restoration work needing new constructions in the surroundings. But, having not understood the importance of surveying and studying the remains of the foundations of the earliest monastic structure before any new physical development was carried out in the area, and now having to urgently reconstruct the monastery, the incumbents of this religious family

are faced with great logistical and financial challenges to preserve the monastic landscape and the historical remains within it. Besides all the challenges mentioned above, there is lack of financial support and academic and technical expertise needed to preserve the monastic landscape and the heritage sites scattered within it. There is a need to survey the landscape methodically, excavate key sites before attempting to preserve these monuments. Given the lack of facilities, general interest among key players, the political support it will require and the lack of manpower with heritage expertise required in the country, the task will be formidable.

## Chapter 4: Sustaining the heritage: an action plan for Sumtrhang monastic landscape

It is imperative to preserve the significance and socio-cultural values inherent in the Sumtrhang monastic landscape in a sustainable manner. Although the reality of speeding development blowing through Bhutan calls for immediate intervention, the topic requires careful, unrushed consideration of choices on how to approach heritage sites and monuments, balancing the ideal solutions with ones more realistic at this moment. This chapter will comprise an action plan to preserve and sustain this particular monastic landscape and its associated values including the intangible culture and traditions of the monastery as a project initiative for the Bhutan Nyö Foundation. The foundation is a religious organization founded under the auspices of the Sumtrhang monastery's current incumbent through my initiative in 2017 to undertake preservation of the monastic culture and traditions. This action plan will act as the principal guiding manual for the foundation as the members undertake heritage preservation in a sensible and appropriate manner.

### 1. Heritage conservation: Western theory and concepts

In sustaining the cultural heritage and its significance, it is important that we understand the existing academic theories and concept of heritage protection. In sustaining a cultural heritage, preservation efforts we undertake today shall be in conformation and in harmony with the original form and the past of the monument and the landscape it is part of. Thus, it becomes crucial, to understand both the historical narratives behind heritage and the best and most appropriate ideas, methods and tools necessary for sustainability and protection.

In Europe, since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the modern ideology of heritage protection emerged in the form of principles for restoration promoting two distinct traditions of “stylistic restoration,” touted by Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1897) and a conservative “anti-restoration,” approach primarily advocated by John Ruskin (1819-1900). The distinct difference in their approach is that the former considers maintaining the style in harmony with its traditional past, while the later demanded strict authenticity, maintaining originality without deception and destruction.

### **Stylistic Restoration**

French Architect, E. Viollet-Le-Duc is known as the father of stylistic restoration. His restoration approaches were combined with rebuilding the original architecture with creative modifications within and in harmony with traditional aesthetics. He is also considered the first theorist of modern architecture. Restoration according to Viollet-Le-Duc is not about preservation but should aim to re-establish a monument to a complete state through repair or rebuilding. In his words the restoration is:

To restore an edifice means neither to maintain it, nor to repair, nor to rebuild it; it means to re-establish it in a finished state, which many in fact never have actually existed at any given time.<sup>51</sup>

For Viollet-Le-Duc, both the word “restoration” and the concept of restoration, is modern. His approach calls for re-establishment and to revive anything lost into the finished state of a living heritage rather than leaving it to become an object of memory- that is to become a museum piece. Travis Kennedy, while studying the two proponents, describes this as Viollet-le-Duc’s

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<sup>51</sup> Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, ‘Restoration,’ *Dictionnaire raisonné de l’architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Bance et Morel, 1854), 269, translated by Kenneth D. Whitehead, in the *The Foundation of Architecture: Selections from the Dictionnaire Raisonne*, New York, George Braziller Inc. (1990).

call for rebirth and reincarnation, thus, stating that: “Viollet-le-Duc’s position presupposes that the “proper care” that Ruskin prescribes has not been taken, and rather than relegate the consequentially undermined building to the “funerary office of memory,” Viollet-le-Duc calls for its rebirth and reincarnation.”<sup>52</sup>

For Viollet-le-Duc, the heritage object needing restoration may act as an agent of memory from the past but any work of restoration or of protection concerns the present as it looks to the future, becoming part of the layers of its historical past in the process. In his approach, when a piece of heritage in the present is in need of an intervention, it then has to be restored, a process, which does not in any way concern the past but rather the present and future. His stylistic emphasis, however, does not mean the past traces of the heritage site or the building must be abandoned but rather takes into account the things about the heritage object that are good and bad, relevant and irrelevant to the present time with an eye on future needs. According to Viollet-le-Duc, the architect responsible for any work of restoration must be knowledgeable about the methods and procedures of the art of construction employed in different periods and by different schools. The architect is responsible for making key decisions during the restoration process. This requirement places emphasis on studying the site, its structure, the architecture and carefully preserving and documenting the available information and knowledge associated with the monument, and finally, to proceed with enough knowledge to make correct decisions. Viollet-le-Duc spent quite a long time on an archeological study and analysis of the mediaeval city of Carcassonne in France before starting any restoration work on it. The restoration of this historic city is generally regarded as a work of genius though it lacks strict authenticity. Although Viollet-le-Duc’s work does not disregard authenticity, he also does not emphasize it, leaving room for flexibility to adopt old structures to present needs

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<sup>52</sup> Travis Brock Kennedy, Here The Great Flow in The Man! *A Prolegomena to Ruskin’s Marginalia in Viollet-Le-Duc’s Dictionnaire Raisonné de l’architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle for Contemporary Historic Preservation*, Thesis Submitted to Columbia University, New York (2018), 18.

and situations. He promoted a progressive approach in works of heritage management and protection.

### **Anti-restoration**

Anti-Restoration, can also be termed the conservative approach to heritage protection is represented by John Ruskin (1819-1900). In his approach to monument protection, Ruskin, advocated conserving buildings in their original form as the only true and genuine form of heritage. In his view, restoration is tantamount to a lie, destructive and deceptive. In his attack on the stylistic approach and defining his own approach, Ruskin, wrote *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* in 1849. He wrote:

Do not talk of restoration. The thing is a Lie from beginning to end. [...] But it is said, there may come a necessity for restoration! Granted. Look the necessity full in the face, and understand it on its own terms. It is a necessity for destruction. Accept it as such, pull the building down, throw its stones into neglected corners, make ballast of them, or mortar, of you will; but do it honestly, and do not set up a Lie in their place.<sup>53</sup>

According to Jukka Jokiletho, a heritage expert and author, to restore a monumental building or a work of art for Ruskin, was mere reproduction in old forms and therefore meant the destruction of the unique, authentic work as created by the original artist, and weathered through time and history.<sup>54</sup> Ruskin specifically emphasizes architectural ornaments, as he distinguished between a building and its architecture. He writes:

Architecture is the art, which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them contribute to his mental health, power and

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<sup>53</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, London: George Allen (1903), 244.

<sup>54</sup> Jukka Jokiletho, 'A History of Architectural Conservation,' Butterworth-Heinemann (1999), 175.

pleasure. It is very necessary, in the outset of all inquiry, to distinguish carefully between Architecture and Building.<sup>55</sup>

He then categorizes architecture into five groups under the terms: devotional, memorial, military and domestic. His emphasis on the artistic architectural edifices for conservation is understood from the Lamp of Sacrifice, in his *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, he wrote:

[...] and among these I would place first that spirit which, having influence in all, has nevertheless such especial reference to devotional and memorial architectures - the spirit which offers such work precious things, simply because they are precious; not as being necessary to the building, [...]<sup>56</sup>

While he makes a distinction between the building and its architecture, he brings the building together as a whole, most probably because an edifice can be distinct, yet it is part of the building as concerns its protection. He considers various aspects of authenticity at different levels in the restoration; from spatial and compositional disposition down to the minute details and the choices of raw materials and at the final finish of the architectural ornamentation. He claimed that the heritage monument was lost forever during restoration.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, in what he calls the honest way, he advocates either preserving the monuments in their original form at all costs or to tear the monuments down, building anew without lies and falsehoods through deceptive idea of restoration.

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<sup>55</sup> *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, New York: John Wiley, 161 Broadway (1849), 7.

<sup>56</sup> *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, (1849), 8-9.

<sup>57</sup> See: *History of Architectural Conservation*, (1999), 176.

## 2. Ideology and sustainable approaches for Sumtrhang monastic landscape

Recently, western thoughts and ideologies concerning heritage and heritage protection have begun to take root in Bhutan. They are encouraged mainly because Bhutan is now a member of UNESCO world heritage convention. As the whole heritage concept is quite new to Bhutan, heritage efforts have only begun as part of the preparations since 2012 to enlist Bhutanese heritage sites onto the UNESCO world heritage list.

Western heritage ideas come with a lot of modern methods and tools to deal with issues of sustainable preservation of cultural heritage. But in many ways given the differences in cultural attitudes, traditions and the philosophy connected to material culture, life ways, and their potential socio-cultural functions, eastern methods and preservation approaches would substantially differ from those employed in the west. However, like many other countries, Bhutan has also joined the rest of the world to share in the benefit of western thoughts, which in turn are also influencing Bhutanese social and cultural values.

Thus, in thinking about heritage protection for Bhutan, cultural managers and experts alike must be extremely mindful and sensible of cultural differences. Bhutan, having only opened to modern development quite late in the 1960s, almost all of the cultural heritage sites and monuments are still living ones. Yet, as the country is at its peak of development, primary challenges of modernity and globalization arise in sustaining the integral identity of Bhutanese cultural heritage, especially the living heritage. Françoise Pommaret, a leading anthropologist and an ethnographer on Bhutan reflects on this challenge: “This challenge between



conservation and development is one of the most crucial for the future of Bhutan, not only in terms of cultural and environmental preservation but also in socio-economic terms.”<sup>58</sup>

Keeping this challenge in mind, for Bhutan, the classification of cultural elements into specific heritage categories is crucial, especially into living and non-living heritage. The living heritages, which represent outstanding heritage value, retain their socio-cultural functions in their traditional settings, including *Dzongs*.

Heritage features of outstanding value that no longer have socio-cultural functions or those functions cannot be restored or revived can be considered displayable heritage properties. Such heritage includes centuries old art pieces of outstanding value but without living socio-cultural functions. Thus, the application of the two methods of preservation championed by Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin can be distinctly categorized and applied in the best way.

An aspect that seems to lack general heritage protection is the ‘preservation of continuity of the heritage’ in its entirety from one generation to another. This concerns managing the progress of a heritage from one generation to the next without compromising its unique identity and its associated socio-cultural knowledge and values. Heritage in this sense refers not only to conservation of the material structures, but also the intangible culture associated with particular material objects and structures as well as and their socio-cultural functions. Placing living heritage under restrictive measures of protection could potentially destroy the living elements, gradually surrendering them to, what is known as ‘the funerary office of memory.’

Accounting for the tangled relationships between tangible and intangible culture in modern Bhutan is the most critical and crucial element of heritage management to deal with today. If

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<sup>58</sup> Françoise Pommaret, “Some considerations on Cultural Landscapes in Bhutan,” in *South Asia Cultural Landscape Initiatives; Experiences in Bhutan*, Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites, Department of Culture (2019), 36.

we forget about living relationships, what might be a protective measure could become destructive to present day tradition. For example, the structural heritage and its associated socio-cultural values are interdependent. Restrictive protections on the way material or structural heritages should be preserved according to western prescriptions could consign the associated living culture to the realm of stories and histories. Conversely, stoppage or degeneration of the associated cultural practices and functions of an object or a structure will consign the object or the structural heritage to the realm of displayable property. Becoming a decorative piece of property or an object to look at behind the glass of a museum case means their value comes from the past not the present.

### 3. Conceptual action plan to sustain Sumthang monastic landscape

An action plan to sustain Sumthang monastic landscape puts the interdependency between the physical and intangible living heritage elements at its core of planning. The key to this will be to understand and categorize general heritage components into categories of living heritage and the displayable property of heritage. The stylistic approaches of Viollet-le-Duc appears to fit well for the preservation of living heritages, while Ruskin's anti-restoration approaches stressing the importance of maintaining the authenticity of monuments of great heritage value from the past can be applied in the conservation efforts of the displayable properties, heritages where the socio-cultural functions have ceased to have relevance to the present.

**Vision:** The vision of this project of “Sustaining Sumthang Monastic Landscape” is to establish sustainable and appropriate conservation mechanisms to generally restore and sustain monastic heritages in Bhutan.

**Mission:** The mission of the project is to restore Sumthang monastic landscape in its entirety and to ensure its sustainable continuity as a living heritage, thereby developing best practices

of conservation methods and appropriate actions for restoring and sustaining monastic heritage in Bhutan by learning from experience.

## 4. Action outline to sustain the monastic landscape and its cultural significance

**1. Goal One: Revival of Sumtrhang Monastic Culture and Traditions:** Since the end of the twentieth century, Sumtrhang Monastery has faced the challenge of keeping up monastic traditions and cultural practices such as the annual ritual festivals, liturgies, teachings and practices, and preserving the centuries old mask dances of the monastery in its past glory. Therefore, to revive the lost traditional practices and cultures of the monastery it is imperative to sustain the monastery and its landscape as a living heritage. The revival initiative will include building new infrastructures; however, another crucial and challenging part of the preservation plan will be to keep in mind the probability that underground traces of the earliest structures and remains of the monastery still exist. The goal is to revive and restore the monastery and its traditional cultures to its past glory through a progressive approach that ensures continued development with sustainable preservation of the culture and heritage of the monastery:

- Recording and documenting all the intangible cultural elements at the monastery such as the steps of the mask dances.
- Digitizing all the textual archives available in the monastery.
- Developing a master plan for a monastic college for cultural heritage and Buddhist studies to redevelop the area around the existing monastic temple.
- Building new monastic infrastructures, such as hostel, classroom etc.
- Developing monastic curriculums and the college management plan.
- Developing a business plan for financial sustainability for the monastic college.

**2. Goal Two: Restoration and conservation of the ruin sites:** As we have already seen in an earlier chapter, the monastic landscape in the hinterland Sumtrhang Monastery contains several ruin sites, some possessing a historical narrative, and some lacking or having little information about them. While, it is known that most were retreat centers for meditational practices, all visible ruins cannot be considered for restoration. In addition, the natural vegetation growing in and around those ruins will also have to be dealt with in an appropriate manner within international standards of heritage conservation ideology. The ruin sites and parts will also have to be categorized carefully to determine which should be restored or simple conserved at the moment. This is aimed at ensuring appropriate restoration and conservation of the ruins sites. The plan demands:

- A guideline for restoration and conservation of the ruin sites.
- A detailed topographic survey to understand the existing ground plan and to identify any outstanding structural remains needing immediate protection.
- Identify and categorize ruin sites and parts for restoration, and conservation as historical, displayable monuments.
- Develop a restoration plan meeting the liturgical and cultural needs of the living monastery as well as conservation plans for the ruin parts or sites needing protection with developmental oversight to integrate them into the socio-economic sphere.

**3. Goal Three: Conservation of Displayable Properties:** From written sources it is already known that Sumtrhang monastery houses many sacred artifacts of religious and historical value. In addition, the monastery also houses several important historical texts in its possession. Therefore, the aim of this initiative is to ensure conservation of the artifacts in their authentic form and sustain the integrity, ensuring continuity of their existence together with their

associated traditional socio-cultural functions and practices. The conservation efforts will have to be undertaken through:

- Mapping and documenting heritage objects and sites associated with Sumtrhang Monastery to create an inventory of heritable assets of the monastery.
- Developing a guideline for the conservation of displayable cultural properties of the monastery including the textual heritage.
- Drawing a management plan for the displayable heritage property of the monastery in context with its present day socio-cultural functions.

## 5. Organizational mechanism for implementation

A religious organization known as the Bhutan Nyö Foundation, founded under the auspices of the current incumbent of Sumtrhang Monastery, will take ownership of the project and initiatives, from fund mobilization to management and coordination. The foundation is registered under the Religious Organizations Act 2007 with aims and objectives to:

- Restore Sumtrhang Monastery and its culture and tradition to sustain the continued promotion of Buddhist teachings in general and Sumtrhang's *Vajrakilaya* practice and research in particular.
- Preserve and promote value education among youth based on Buddhist studies through innovative monastic education with modern skills and knowledge.
- Preserve and protect other living monuments and heritage sites in Bhutan to sustain indigenous tradition and cultural values in Bhutan.

Promote cultural education in rural remote communities and support green and organic initiatives to foster an environmentally enlightened and agriculturally

progressive society through integration of Buddhist principles of co-existence of human with non-human spirits and nature.

## 6. The Action Plan

No	Goal	Objective	Action	Target	Status
1	<b>Revival of Sumtrhang monastic culture and tradition</b>	Preservation of intangible cultures of Sumtrhang	Record and document all the intangible cultures of the monastery such as the steps of the mask dance.	2020	0%
		Protect textual heritage of Sumtrhang	Digitize all the textual archives available in the monastery	2020	80%
		Ensure preservation of archaeological sites	Demarcate potential archaeological site to restrict further developmental activities	2020	0%
		Revive the monastic school	Develop a master plan for a monastic college	2021	0%
			Start implementation of the master plan	2021	0%
			Develop monastic college curriculum and management plan	2022	0%
		Ensure sustainable financial stability of the monastic college	Develop a business plan for financial sustainability of the monastic college	2019	50%
			Implement the business plan	2020	0%
2	<b>Restoration and conservation of the ruin sites</b>	Categorically ensure proper restoration and conservation of the ruin sites and parts	Develop a guideline for restoration and conservation of the ruin sites.	2020	0%
			Conduct a detailed topographic survey of the ruin sites	2021	0%
			Identify and categorize ruin sites and parts for conservation and restoration	2021	0%
			Develop restoration plan and schedule for conservation plan of the ruin sites	2021	0%
3	<b>Conservation of displayable properties of heritage</b>	Ensure accountable conservation, and proper utility of the sacred artifacts, sites and objects of the monastery	Develop guidelines for the conservation of such properties	2021	0%
			Create an inventory, by mapping and documenting heritage objects, sites and monuments associated to Sumtrhang monastery.	2021	0%
			Draw up a management plan of these properties in context with its socio-cultural functions and traditional norms	2022	10%

# Conclusion

What is vividly clear from this exercise on understanding the complex socio-cultural values of Bhutan is to comprehend an appropriate employment of methods and approaches to sustain its significance. While it is important that history and local narratives are studied, it is imperative that we understand them in a complex and complete manner.

However, it is an ugly truth for Bhutan that, cultural heritage beyond artifacts including the ruins and the remains of early masonry structures are not, properly accounted for, being largely ignored in the rush of modernization in the country. To find literature on early masonry ruins in Bhutan was like digging for diamonds. It reflects the lack of local academic interest in these ruins and also the lack of heritage experts to reflect critically on them. The absence of any effort on the government's side to consider the cultural value of such ruins evidently goes hand in hand with the government's inability to recognize their socio-cultural importance and the economic potential. There is a clear dearth of expertise and comprehensive understanding of cultural heritage among state actors at all level from bureaucrats to politicians. In general, although not covered, many historic monuments remain a neglected treasure today including the many monumental ruins, a reflection of gross negligence of the cultural heritage in general.

Through this thesis, focused on the landscape of ruins, its heritage values and the importance of sustaining the living heritage connected with ruins and objects from the past, I was able to produce a representative list of important ruins worthy of inventory and individually focused study in future. In the process of collecting the lists, although not highlighted in the thesis, it was found that there are many potentially highly valuable ruins getting lost in the vegetation together with the generation of people who might possess knowledge of them. These problems can be understood by looking at the site lists presented in the thesis chapters. In some cases,

the location of the ruin could not be established, therefore, the location of the sites are restricted to only district level.

The most exciting feeling in the process of looking at complex historical and local narratives through the masonry remains is the potential it holds to one day also open an area of study into prehistoric periods of Bhutan. There may well be potential prehistoric sites waiting to be discovered if academic attention shifts to the landscape of ruins and archaeology. The study of these cultural landscapes of ruins merits an urgency to at least prepare a comprehensive inventory of all archaeological sites in the country to begin planning proper ways to protect and preserve them for the future.

Through the study of the complex heritage of Sumtrhang monastic landscape, it was established how important combining primary resources concerning the monastic complex with the knowledge from local culture and tradition from a Buddhist philosophical perspective forms the core value to employ any western philosophy of heritage and its conservation. These elements were found to be the most crucial elements in contextualizing different concepts of heritage preservation and finding the most appropriate way to meet local needs, adding value in the process to the approach and concept of heritage conservation. Creating development plans or even conservation plans without local knowledge may potentially lead to damaging approaches in the preservation of the heritage, especially the living ones. If the complex geomancy that was revealed through the study of the landscape based on the textual narratives is skipped in the study of Sumtrhang monastic landscape, the most crucial elements of the landscape, its culture and tradition might have been missed to plan anything. A fundamental heritage value lying within the landscape might have been lost in conventional preservation efforts. This discovery and its conservation consequences show that any heritage action must



integrate local knowledge and local experts to avoid disregarding fundamental but less obvious heritage values.

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