

Figure 1. The Royal Heritage Museum location



**Photo 1. The Royal Heritage Museum, Trongsa**



**Photo: Sangay Tashi**

### **1. The Royal Heritage Museum**

The Royal Heritage Museum was established in the year 2008 as the Art Museum which is the first museum in central Bhutan dedicated to the monarchs of Bhutan. The Museum was opened to the public on 10 December 2008, inaugurated by His Majesty the 5th King *Jigme Kheser Namgyal Wangchuck*. The Museum is housed in a seventeenth-century tower, Ta-dzong, meaning watch tower located on the upper side of the *Trongsa Choekhor Rabten Tse Dzong*. From the beginning it started with a minimum admission fee (see figure 1.5) to all types of curious visitors. Visitor numbers have grown from few hundreds in the initial year to nearly 10,000 today.

### **2. History of Tower of *Trongsa***

In the year 1652 upon the instructions of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (1594-1651), Choegyel Mingyur Tenpa (1613-1680) began to build the Ta Dzong “The Tower of Trongsa” which today stands guard over the main Choekhor Rabtentse Dzong (Trongsa fortress). The building shares much of Trongsa Dzong’s history as it was customary to erect watch towers and strategic defense as

it was customary to erect watch towers and strategic defense installations to protect the main dzong from exterior enemies. During those time it was Tibetan invasion to Bhutan and also from within warring factions.

After the unification of the country by Zhabdrung and peace prevailed in Bhutan and the tower has lost its military function. The peace prevailed for, but for very short period and after the death of Zhabdrung in year 1651, although his death was concealed for 54 years. There were lots of internal civil wars amongst the *penlops*, *dzongpons* and other local warring factions to capture the strategic *dzongs* for the power grasp.

Its military function was once again come into limelight and it served its purpose for more than 256 years till 1907 when the Sir Ugyen Wangchuck, the son of 48<sup>th</sup> Druk Desi Jigme Namyal was unanimously appointed as the First Hereditary King of Bhutan. Thereafter, the peace and harmony prevailed till today. For next 100 years, Ta dzong became home to the hermits who have vowed not to leave the Ta Dzong premise until they meet their end until it was turned into museum in year 2008.

It was the idea of the then Home Minister, His Excellency Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, Ministry of Home & Cultural Affairs to renovate the tower and turn into museum to dedicate to the monarch as the Trongsa is the birth place of Bhutanese hereditary monarchical system.

Upon the completed renovation of the main Dzong or fortress named *Trongsa Choekhor Rabten Tse Dzong* in 2005, the Government of Austria further committed to renovate the historic Trongsa Ta-Dzong "The Tower of Trongsa" on the condition that the tower will become the new Art Museum in the region to house the royal collection, and tell the history of Trongsa as the seat of the royal families. The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) committed 80% of the establishment and renovation fund and the Royal Government of Bhutan contributed 20% of the fund for renovating the Tower of Trongsa and converting it into a state of the art museum facility.

### **3. Collections**

The founding collections largely consisted of statues, manuscripts, royal belongings and some antiquities (including medals, swords and textiles) and ethnographic material. These objects were mainly brought from Trongsa dzongs and other lhakhangs. In 2008, Her Royal Highness Ashi Choki Wangmo Wangchuck and HRH Prince Namgyel Wangchuck donated the 'Old Royal Amours' of the sovereigns of Bhutan.

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The acquisitions of a majority of artifacts came from the main Trongsa Dzong and separate collections of royal objects were secured with funds from the Royal Government of Bhutan. The museum was completed in the latter half of 2008 and the new museum in Trongsa opened for the first time coinciding with the Royal Centenary Celebrations- 100 years of successful reign of monarchs. The administrative responsibility of overseeing the collections and the building remains with the Department of Culture, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs.

By establishing a museum and locating the great collections in Trongsa Dzong, helped the Tower of Trongsa to become known as one of the most important centers of Himalayan culture. With the exception of 11 galleries, the Museum has remained open ever since, gradually increasing its opening hours and moving from an attendance of few hundreds per year to today's 10,000.

The Ta-dzong, will continue to acquire privately owned artifacts in the years to come, spending hundreds of thousands of Ngultrums per year to develop its collections. The museum aspires to have autonomous administrators for museum operations, artifact-preservation, and to raise funds for further acquisitions and educational projects. The goal is to make this museum the foremost research and archival facility dedicated to the historical seat of the royal family in central Bhutan.

Since its establishment in 2008, this institution had become an independent entity with its own staff, including conservator and a Curator. Thus this museum had become the first of its kind with its own divisions and budget. The Royal Government of Bhutan will provide building maintenance, security, and adequate funds for standard operating expenses. Officially named the “The Royal Heritage Museum,” this facility would accordingly be the finest museum in Bhutan devoted exclusively to the history of Trongsa and Bhutanese royalty.

### **5.1 Galleries**

#### **5.1.1. Gallery 1**

In the north tower above the entrance room, clay statue of the Four Guardian Kings is displayed. Their image is often found at the entrances of the temples. Also called the “guardians of the four Quarters”, they ward off the evil influences from all the directions. As large prayer wheels are also traditionally found at the entrances of Dzongs and lhakhangs, a new prayer wheel was commissioned for this first gallery.

#### **5.1.2. Gallery 2**

On the North wing's second floor, is devoted to holy men and deities related to the foundation of Trongsa Dzong. Among the exhibits are statues and personal belongs of Ngagi Wangchuk, the 16th century sage who first built a small shrine on the spot where later impressive monastery fortress of the Dzong would rise. The deities who guided him to his site are shown next to him.

### **5.1.3 Gallery 3**

On the North tower's top level, used to be the former living quarter of Lama Chan chub Sondru (1817-1856), the personal guru of Jigme Namgyel (the first king's father). Lama Chan chub Sondru made the original raven crown for Jigme namgyel. Today the Raven crown of the second king is prominently displayed in a spectacular central showcase, in the form of a reverse wire suspended pyramid. Statues and thanks associated with Jigme Namgyel's religious devotion surround the crown.

### **5.1.4 Gallery4**

In the North wing presents objects belonging to the first four kings of Bhutan's Wangchuck dynasty. The royal dynasty descends in a direct line from Pema Lingpa whose bronze statue is displayed on the wooden pedestal. In the background hangs an embroidered throne cover. Framed on the right are two scrolls with oath of allegiance of King Jigme Wangchuck signed by the monk body and secular local rulers.

### **5.1..5 Gallery 5**

In the North wing displays masks, costumes and other objects that are used in the sacred dances performed regularly in the courtyards of Trongsa Dzong. Guru Rinpoche's birthday is marked by a major yearly dance festival or tshechu. The dance masks seen in this gallery represent eight manifestation of Guru Rinpoche. Dance can be interpreted as a means of activating the relationship between humankind and deities. It is also a way to attain liberation insights into the meaning of the Buddha's teachings. As dramatic ceremonies of public worship, there dance not only convey moral and historical content, but also purify the soul and drive away demons.

### **5.1.6 Gallery 6**

Upper floor of the North wing explores the meaning and ritual practice of Buddhism. An image of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni allows reflection on his wisdom and teachings, while other exhibits provide insight into particular that the duality of the Tower of Trongsa unfolds: for foreign visitors provides an explanation of a selected number of deities while affording Bhutanese visitors

the opportunity of worshipping them. The main ritual objects a monk required are displayed: diamond scepter, bell and magical dagger, also seen are miniature shrine, winged conch shell and a butter lamp made of solid gold.

#### **5.1.7. Gallery 7**

On top floor of the North wing is the living Temple of Ling Gesar. Visitors can either enter themselves or experience how local people come to worship the Dra Lha for their self-protection and victory.

#### **5.1.8 Gallery 8**

On the first floor of the central tower (utse) is dedicated to Guru Rinpoche, the 8<sup>th</sup> century Indian mystic who spread and established Buddhism across the Himalayan region. He also came to Bhutan in 747AD and was active in Trongsa. He subdued Muktsen, the original and divine protector of the province, whom he then integrated into the Buddhist realm of belief. Depending on the context of his religious activity Guru Rinpoche appears in eight manifestations, representations of which are displayed in this gallery.

#### **5.1.9 Gallery 9**

In second floor of the Utse is the living Temple of Maitreya Buddha and houses the secret image of Drang Song, which is enshrined in the altar. Visitors even though not allowed to enter without special permit can look at the temple through a specially designed window near entrance.

#### **5.1.10 Gallery 10**

In the third floor of the main building is devoted to the five Tathagata Buddhas who embody fundamental philosophical principles of Mahayana Buddhism. Since there were no figures of these five Buddhas in the temples of Trongsa Dzong, new ones were made using traditional Bhutanese techniques and the best available materials such as pure gold. All statues have been filled (with required sacred writing and objects) according to Buddhist traditions and consecrated. Bhutanese believers now have opportunity to worship these deities in Trongsa. Five Tathagata Buddhas are grouped according to the cardinal directions based on the schemes of mandala. The center is considered a cardinal direction of its own.

### **5.1.11 Gallery 11**

On the top of the utse is dedicated to the highest level of Buddhist philosophy: the absolute and conceptually inconceivable reality, which can be recognized only at the moment of enlightenment. Although the existence of the Buddha, like everything else is marked by formlessness, statues of Adhibuddha Vajradhara and the Buddha Samantabhadra, religious texts and a complete set of the Knajur containing the Buddha's words, together with a Chorten, symbolize the speech and mind of the Buddha. Central openings connect galleries 10 and 11 to the panoramic viewing gallery above. A ring of transparent panels in the roof allows daylight to descend to these galleries. A Chorten, made out of the sliver which is the embodiment of the Buddha's mind is suspended on wires from above, floating in the center, as if on the primordial Ocean.

## **6. Management and Governance**

The Tower of Trongsa Art Museum is an independent institution sponsored by the Royal Government of Bhutan under the Department of Culture, Ministry of Home & Cultural Affairs. Its aim is to hold for the benefit and education of humanity a collection representative of Bhutanese and Himalayan cultures and to ensure that the collection is housed in safety, conserved, curated, researched and exhibited.

Government appointed Chief Curator/ Head in accordance with the Royal Civil Service Commission's rules and regulations which govern the Museum. The Chief or Curator is responsible for the general management and control of the Museum through the adoption of its Annual Plan. The Chief curator/Head is the Accounting Officer for the purposes of reporting to Government and has delegated responsibility for the general administration of the Museum.

The Museum's Governance Policies and Principles regulate the proceedings of the Chief Curator/Head, and facilitate the exercise of its functions in pursuit of the Museum's planned objectives. A full range of policies covering every area of Museum activity would be adopted by the Department of Culture, Royal Government of Bhutan. These policies would be constantly updated in line with new legislation and developments in best practice.

The Tower of Trongsa Art Museum holds in trust for the nation a collection of art and antiquities from ancient and living Bhutanese cultures. Housed in one of Bhutan's architectural landmarks (Tadzong), the collection is one of the finest in existence, spanning centuries of human history in the kingdom. Access to the collection is free with minimal entrance fee. The Museum aims to reach a broader worldwide audience by extending engagement with locals and tourists. The Museum has

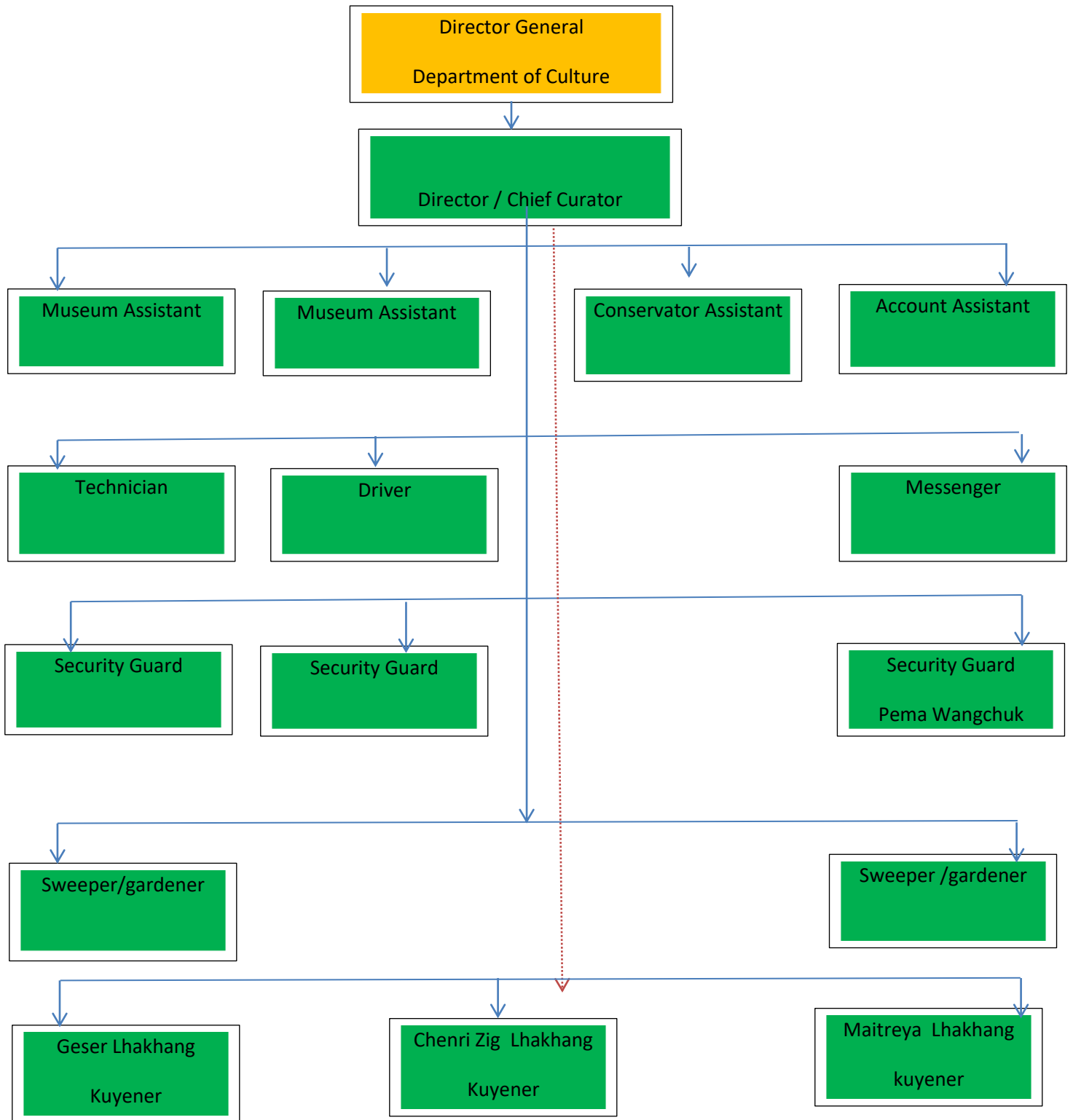
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continually sought to make its collections available to greater and more diverse audiences, first in Trongsa, subsequently the Bhutan and worldwide.

To do so, museum has its official webpage [www.toweroftrongsa.gov.bt](http://www.toweroftrongsa.gov.bt) and also social media such as face book page The Royal Heritage museum@toweroftrongsa. The websites is not merely a source of information about the collection and the Museum, but a natural extension of its core purpose to be a laboratory of comparative cultural investigation.



Figure 5, the governing structure of Royal Heritage Museum



## **7. Preserving Tangible Culture**

While tangible culture and tradition is easy to notice as it is being ignored by the individual or a community. Mostly it is abandoned because when a new culture is being introduced. However, some are deliberately discounted for the betterment of individual or a community. Whatever the reasons maybe, it is a great lost to a community and to the country. Culture is not static and it is always evolving and changing. However, due to information technology the cultures are evolving and changing faster than it used to and therein lays the problem of tangible heritage.

For developed country, preservation of culture – particularly the past is not is questionable as it was completely unheeded for economic development. For the developing country, one cannot afford to repeat like past. It is right time to preserve, conserve the past culture in the process of economic development without trading off with.

Preserving is done in various capacities by various agencies – NGOs and government agencies focusing on need and urgency abases. To take up such activity requires lots of resources both financial and human. In general, setting up of museum is the best solution for the developing countries to collect, conserve, store and display culture for continuity before it is lost in process of economic development.

Such effort is taken and should be taken by all the developing countries and avoid mistake of some developed countries during its heights of economic development had sacrificed its culture and traditions. Over and above, it helps history of a country to be alive.

## **8. Preserving Intangible Culture**

The concept of intangible culture heritage appeared later in 1990 in the UNESCO than the tangible culture. As per UNESCO define Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as the “ practices, representations, expressions, knowledge , skills- as well as the instruments , objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities , groups and , in some cases , individuals recognizes as part of their cultural heritage” (Arts, 2).

The intangible culture cannot be viewed separately and exclusively to tangible culture. Each supplements and complements. The agreed definition by the various states goes *“intangible culture is something that is inherited from ancestor that cannot be touched or grasped by the hand but by the mind”*. ICH can be viewed as

- a/ Oral traditions and expression including languages
- b/ Performing arts
- c/ Social practice, rituals and festival events
- d/ Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- e/ Traditional craftsmanship

A unique character of ICH is the identification and definition of ICHS rest with the communities, groups and where appropriate, individual, that's creates, maintain and transmit such heritage. In short, no outsider (researcher, statistician, government or NGOS) has power to define ICH of a community.

Whatsoever, preserving intangible culture is very difficult in the sense we don't notice till it is too late. Never feel the lost till we lose completely. On the other hand, it is easy to preserve because of modern technology. Digitalization of intangible culture has help to record the exactly and pass or continue as it done in the past by forefathers. However, its original purposes are lost as some are not so relevant in today's world. Irrelevance is the greatest draw back in its continuity.

## **9. Economic Driver**

In the world of capitalism, the health of economy is very important for a country to survive. Whatsoever, the economic power is the ultimate rank that set the order in the world. Survival of fittest theory of Darwin is convergence to economic strength of a country to survive in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, a healthy economic development for a country is essential to sustain. In doing so, there are many drivers; however, (cultural) tourism is one the main driver for developing countries. Unlike other drives, cultural tourism is more sustainable in globalized world.

For Bhutan, tourism industry has long been the economic lifeline. In 2015-2016, the tourism council of Bhutan has contributed 5.7 % of country's gross domestic revenue and it is the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest revenue contributing agency in Bhutan.

This particular driver has less collateral damages comparing to other drivers driving economy of country. In Bhutanese context, the policy of high value and low volume of tourist has added value to the sustainable development of country. Otherwise, the unprecedented numbers of tourist may have unwelcome consequences on many front, culture and tradition, environment, social setting, infrastructure and importantly security of country as visible in the London, France and other country.

As shown in figure 1.3, museum has earned so much revenue; however, proportionate fund had not been allocated for the museum for maintenance, purchases and development of human resources. The museum management has no authority to send staffs to training neither short term nor long term course. It was found that, all the museum staffs is civil servant and are bound by the civil service rules and regulations.

Tourism Council of Bhutan is the agency who is responsible to ensure that all the registered tour companies operating in Bhutan that they meet the requirements and provide guest with high quality services. It is responsible for implementation of rules and policy, also promotion of tourist for the country. It is quite paradoxical to see most of the tourist destination belongs to other organization like *Dratsbnag* or religious body, Department of Culture and local government.

If present trend (see figure 1.2) continues, there will be similar development in the sphere of cultural tourism and museums as vehicle for sustainable economic development and culture preservation as well. I would like to put forward the alternatives approach as shown in the figure 1.5 where related division and institution can be clubbed into one ministry, so that it will not only reduce the financial and human resources, but also reduce unnecessary bureaucratic process for any service provided by a division for an institution.

The figure 8 clearly shows the contribution made by the tourism sector to the government's annual revenue. It is the second leading contributor among four main contributors. Tourism sector share 37% of the total revenue for the government.

## 10. Conclusion

The form and the functions of museums have varied considerably over the years; Museum has played an important role in development of individual, community and the country. It has helped in preserving and promoting past culture, and tradition to the present generation and also for future generations. Today, museums not only fulfill its primary functions but also become a part of sustainable economic driver.

However, for Bhutan, there is no museum policy yet to guide establishment of new and functioning of existing ones to maintain international museum standards or national standards. Thus, there are visible challenges confronted at all levels by the government in approving museum establishments for private applicants. Therefore, this study will definitely serve as the basis for formulating policies by the government regarding museums in Bhutan.

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For developing countries, it has created a platform to encourage people to preserve and conserve its dynamic culture, tradition and heritage – which for most are in its original states. These efforts are complicated and taxing, but the rewards received are beneficial to the human race which in fact has become so callous even creator might be crying.

Today, we the human have become illusory or become almost like a robotic machine and lost all true human and constantly losing. We are in this state of helplessness. In this helplessness state of humankind, museums are the place where we can truly reflect the true form of human kind and get peace and happiness.

The Royal Heritage Museum also known as the Tower of Trongsa, Bhutan is striving towards becoming better museum in the world of museums. As stressed in the earlier discussion, this can be only achieved by collaborative effects within multiple stakeholders. Such efforts yield to better for the museums and to the visitors. Moreover, by doing so; this would eventually connect Asian culture trails. Otherwise, filling the missing gaps created by the distances or by the development. Thus, providing all Asian culture treat in a package physically as well as virtually.

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## Glossary

Ashi-	queen
Chorten -	stupa
Desi –	regent or Raja
Dra lha-	warrior god
Dzongda –	commissioner
Drang song-	Rahula/protective deity
Dzongkhag –	district
Dzongpon –	governor
Guru –	spiritual teacher or guide
Je Khenpo-	Sangkha Raja/ chief abbot
Kuu-	body/ statue
Khang zang-	house shaped
Knajur -	words of Buddha / Buddhist canon
Lhakhnag-	monastery
Ling Geser-	legendary king of Ling
Maitreya Buddha -	future Buddha
Mani Dang rim -	long stupa
mouseion -	seat of muses
mukshen -	Trongsa local protective deity
Neten –	abbot of district monastery
Ponlop-	governor (during zhabdrung time)
Paro Ponlop-	governor of Paro
Sung-	speech
Trongsa Ponlop-	governor of Trongsa
Trongsa Choekhor Rabten Tse -	name of Trongsa fortress
Thug -	mind
Tshechu-	festival
Utse-	central tower

## BIOGRAPHY

Mr. Sangay Tashi was born in 1980. He grew up in small remote village named Murbee, in eastern part of Bhutan. Most of his primary school was in Eastern Bhutan. He was sent to western part of the country to acquire his undergraduate, and he completed his undergraduate from Drukgyal Higher Secondary School in year 2001 in the field of Commerce.

He then moved back to Eastern Bhutan to complete his graduate from Sherubtse College, Kanglung, Trashigang, Bhutan affiliated to University of Delhi, India. He completed his BA. (honours) in Dzongkha ( Language and Buddhist Studies ) in year 2004 from Sherubtse College.

In 2013, he was granted Thai International Development Cooperation Agency (ITICA) scholarship to study at MAIDS (Master of Arts in International Development Studies) program Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

After graduation, he joined civil service under the Ministry Of Home and Cultural Affairs and till now, he has served in two Dzongkhag [District] for eight years as District Cultural Officer. From 2005- 2010, he served in Zhemgang Dzongkhang, which is in central part of Bhutan. Besides serving as Cultural officer, he was also the focal officer of National Language Promotion and secretary of Choethun Tshogpa [District Religious Committee].Currently; he serves in Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhag as Cultural Officer.

Mr. Tashi is interested in many fields of social and cultural anthropology, especially in hydropower project construction and its impacts on society- looking through the prism of water governance; how different actors and stakeholders can shape the fate of common pool resources like water, nature, environment and culture in neighboring countries of South Asia and South East Asia.