THE COMMUNITY OF NGANGLA TRONG

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Introduction

This project was conceived around three main ideas: the preservation of traditions is strengthened through the generation of employment and economic benefits from leveraging cultural heritage. Access to information on cultural diversity in Bhutan is widened along with the promotion of intercultural dialogue. Capacity-building in the local cultural/anthropological sector provides necessary skills for valorisation and preservation of Bhutanese cultural diversity.

Its specific objectives were to encourage local Bhutanese scholarship and generate a source of local literature in the fields of anthropology, sociology, history, folklore, indigenous knowledge and archaeology; to document distinct lifestyles, customs and traditions of the target communities; and finally to generate input for further research and documentation activities, which was very important in this case as lecturers from the Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS) were associated with the fieldtrip and the data collection.

Françoise Pommaret and an ILCS team1 were assigned to cover Ngangla Trong (Zhemgang district), one of the most remote and poorest gewog (county).

1 This article was initially written as a project report by Françoise Pommaret with additional input from Sonam Nyenda. Yannick Jooris was the videographer and Kinzang Dorji the sound specialist on the ILCS research team which carried out the field research that resulted in this article. The ILCS team would like to thank Kunzang Dorji and Kezang Choden of the Helvetas LCD office in Thimphu, for their assistance during this study. The team would also like to express their gratitude to the RNR staff and Kunzang Dorji in Goshing, to Kezang Gyeltshen, headmaster, and Prakash Gurung, teacher of the Kagtong Community School, and to the people of Ngangla Trong for their kindness and cooperation during the fieldtrip. In Ngangla Trong, a very special thanks and immense gratitude go to Gelong Kesang Choeki, assistant coordinator Sangay Koncho, and to Phurpa Wangchuk, coordinator of the Helvetas projects in Ngangla Trong and his wife Choeni Wangmo. Beside being wonderful hosts and looking after us so well in Ngangla Trong, they provided invaluable information with utmost kindness and patience and assisted the team in every way they could. This study is dedicated to all these people and the team apologizes for any mistake or misrepresentation which may appear in this study due to ignorance and misunderstanding.
of Bhutan but with a specific lifestyle and ecology which had not yet been documented. With the arrival of electricity and road, it was felt that this unique cultural entity would experience tremendous changes in the following years and had to be documented. Because of their training in cultural anthropology which is reflected in this article, the team followed the methodology used in this discipline.

- Materials and data including publications as well as relevant websites on the area were collected by the researchers ahead of the field trip.
- Participant observation played a great part in the data collection with a written diary being maintained, and audio-visual recording (photos & audio & video recording) on all activities which were classified by topics as reflected in the report below.
- Interviews with local leaders, religious figures, and villagers of all age groups and both sexes were conducted. Interviews were conducted with a semi-structured questionnaire, which is the norm in cultural anthropology.
- Languages used for the interviews were Khengkha, Dzongkha and English.
- All interviews were conducted with the approval of the concerned persons.
- A short reconnaissance trip was conducted in January 2012 in order to inform the villagers about the study and its purpose. We liaised through the Helvetas office in Thimphu for this.

For Ngangla Trong, this project achieved the following:

- The first study on the tangible and intangible culture of Ngangla Trong (history, lifestyle, customs and traditions, food, architecture and archaeology) and its unique social structure as well as it geographical set-up and its challenges.
- 28 video clips and 500 photos on different cultural and daily life aspects of Ngangla Trong.
- Sketch and topographical maps of the area with elevations.
- Suggestions for different studies and activities which could be undertaken to sustain the villagers and give them opportunities to earn income in order to alleviate poverty and prevent rural-urban migration.
- Description of possible eco-tourism trekking routes with timings.
- Awareness raising among the villagers on the importance of their tangible and intangible cultures and their eco-system.
- On-site training of two Bhutanese assistant lecturers of Institute of Languague and Cultural Studies, Royal University of Bhutan in interviewing, audio-video recording and documentation in order to improve their methodology and enhance the Bhutanese scholarship.
- Identification of further research areas in Ngangla Trong such as detailed documentation of festivals, history of migration and settlement, ethno-botany and children with special needs.
Ngangla Trong community

Geography and Demography
Ngangla gewog lies in the southernmost part of the Zhemgang dzongkhag or district covering an area of 312 sq. km. Both gewog and dungkhag (sub-district) headquarters are in Pangbang, the main commercial hub for Lower Kheng. The gewog is accessible by a feeder road from Assam in India, running through Manas to Panbang, and in 2012 when the research was conducted, most of the villages were accessible only by foot. The gewog has a lower secondary school, two community primary schools, an agricultural extension centre and a livestock extension centre. Over 63% of the population has access to potable water supply.

In 1997, the gewog was divided into two: Ngangla gewog and Goshing gewog. It seems that Goshing was largely populated by people originally from Ngangla Trong. Ngangla gewog consists of eight main villages, namely Sonamthang, Thinleygang, Rebati, Marangdut, Pongchaling, Ngangla Trong, Kagtong and Chutoe with 549 households in all.

Zhemgang district statistics with details taken from Census of Bhutan 2005

* Population below total poverty line: 52.9%
* Households below total poverty line: 44%
* Population below food poverty line: 18%
* Households below food poverty line: 13%
* Migration rate: 14.80% (one of the highest in Bhutan)
* Illiteracy: 43.70%
* Unemployment: 4.67%

Ngangla Gewog

* Female heads of households: 49; male heads of households: 319.
* Households: 334; households without land: 34.

Two routes to Ngangla Trong

Because of the remoteness of the place and the difficulties in obtaining accurate information on the routes, it was strongly felt that a description should be provided here.

1. From India and Manas

   Gelephu - Pangbang via Manas (India & Bhutan): 7 hour drive.
   Pangbang - Zero Point, the road head: 1 hour drive.

2 Un fortunately the National Statistics Bureau (NSB) 2010 figures for Zhemgang have not been updated, and give statistics dating from 2005.
2. From Bhutan

- Zhemgang - Tingtibi: 1 hour drive
- Tingtibi - Pangthang/Pangkhar (alt. 250m): 3-4 hour drive
- Pangthang - Goshing/Limapong (alt. 635m) via Budashi: 6 hour walk
- Overnight in Goshing/Limapong
- Goshing - Kagtong (alt. 580m): 6-7 hour walk
- Kagtong - Ngangla Trong (alt. 1190m): 1.5 hour walk.

Short Description

From Tingtibi, the feeder road goes through a dense tropical forest with an undergrowth of ferns, bamboos and orchids and passes through the small settlement of Dunmang Tshachu (hot spring) and Rindibi. It takes around two hours by car to reach Panthang/Pangkhar village in 2012 at the end of the newly constructed road on the right bank of the Pangkhar Chu (alt. 250m). The new road ends on the right bank of the Pangkhar Chu. (The Mangde Chu and the Moree Chu, which comes from Bumthang, join together at Dungmang to make the Pangkhar Chu).

The journey continues from here either by crossing the Pangkhar Zam on foot via the long suspension bridge, or by crossing the river by boat by the motorable bridge over the Pangkhar Chu, which was being built when this research was being conducted. On the other side of the river is Goshing gewog. After an hour or more of walking along the new road under construction on the left bank of the river, there is a short uphill climb of about 45 minutes to get to the Budashi community school. Then, one treks down the hill for a while to cross a small river in a narrow valley before climbing up again. After climbing up for over an hour, the small village of Lamtang appears, and from there it is a few minute walk to reach the Lamtang pass. From here, the trail is even until it reaches Goshing Lhakhang. From Goshing Lhakhang a half hour descent and then a half hour ascent brings one to Lingmapong (635m), where the Goshing gewog office and community school are located.

The next morning, the Dondula pass is reached after a steep climb up through two villages,
Samsheling and Lichibi and their orange orchards. The view from Dondula pass (1100m) allows a bird-eye view

of Lower Kheng and the daunting landscape covered with jungle. From the
Dondula pass, a very steep climb brings one down to Lamling and then a little
down from there the trail levels out. From Dondula it takes around two hours
to reach Jandapong Chorten and then one has to go through a pristine, dense
jungle to reach the small settlement of Amdar. The path down from Amdar leads
to a big stream known to the locals as Dairang Chu. From here it is a short
walk to Kagtong (585m) on an alluvial plateau where the community school is
located. From Kagtong a steep climb of one to one and half hour through dense
jungle takes one to the top of the mountain dominating Kagtong. Ngangla Trong
(1195m) is located here on the ridge.

People and Languages

Ngangla Trong proper has 70 households and is inhabited by Khengpas and
few Sharchopas from Bjoka who married into Ngangla Trong (see paragraph on
society). Even in the south of the gewog in Pangbang, there is no Lhotshampa
presence and it seems there was no Lhotshampa settler ever in this region

People speak Khengkha in Ngangla Trong and Tshangla (Sharchopikha) is spoken
in the gewog of Bjoka but most of the people speak both languages. Khengkha
is a language belonging to the large Bumthangkha family and Bumthangkha
and Khengkha are mutually intelligible. Khengkha therefore belongs to the East
Bodish branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family while Tshangla, whose
exact classification is still debated among linguists, belongs to the Bodish branch
of the Tibeto-Burman family. Khengkha and Tshangla are mutually unintelligible.
Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, and English are taught in the schools.
Located in south-central Bhutan, Ngangla Trong has a unique location as it is at
the border between the Central Bhutanese and the Eastern Bhutanese regions.

Architecture

Only the Khoche family has a house made of stone and wood in the Central
Bhutanese style. The Khoche house was built at the beginning of the 20th century
on the model of the houses of their relatives and allies, the Bjoka Khoche.
Villagers live in houses on stilts made from woven bamboo and thatched roofs
made out of banana leaves. Each house has a large porch/platform to carry out
daily activities. The roofs need to be changed every two to three years, and even
the whole house needs replacement within 15-20 years. It takes 15 days for 70-80
people to prepare the house structure and build it.

The leaves covering the roof are held at the top by split bamboo poles neatly
tied together and split into two. This very elegant roof has a purpose as it allows
the strong winds to pass through without exerting hard pressure on the roofing
Ngangla Trong community

material. Villagers say that this bamboo architecture is much more suited for the humid and windy climate as it allows air to go through the house without blowing it away. The spaces under the eaves of the roof are used for storage and a simple ladder made of notched wood leads up to the doorway of the house. Both tools and domestic animals are kept under the houses.

The kitchen hearth is made of three stones set into the bamboo floor and plastered with mud, on which cooking pots are placed. In some houses, gas stoves are also seen. Above the hearth, there is a large bamboo rack which serves as a drying rack and is also used for storage. There is no chimney and the smoke filters through the bamboo walls. It is said that the insects do not attack the part of the house which has been “smoked”.

All utensils in daily use are hung from the bamboo walls with bamboo twine and the shelves on the walls are nowadays laden with plastic containers in which all perishable items are stored. Partitions are made of woven bamboos and the floor is made of loosely joined trips of bamboo through which the lower ground can be seen. There is no furniture but only some trunks to keep clothes away from the rodents and insects. Everybody sits on the floor on bamboo mats. Most villagers have a small shelf serving as an altar in their main room. Only the Khoche has an altar room.

Ruins are located far below Ngangla Trong in the north-east. They are the ruins of Grepjam dzong not far from a place called Bangsikhar. The dzong belonged to the Bjoka Khoche but no dates are available. No historical documents alluding to this dzong have come to light so far. It is also not known why such a dzong was built on a flat land. Was this for easy access to water? The first school in Ngangla was built on the ridge of Ngangla Trong with the stones taken from these ruins. When the Ngangla Trong school was blown away by strong gale, just after its consecration, the stones were carried to Bjoka for the school to be built there. Stones from these ruins were also used in the construction of the Kagtong school.

Diet and Nutrition

The diet is largely vegetarian, dominated by starchy food with low protein intake, as milk, cheese and eggs are not easily available and thus expensive, and meat is rare. Soya, pulses and dry fish are eaten but not in great quantity. Formerly, maize and millet were the staple foods supplemented by tubers from the forest but now

Maize being hung from the ceiling to be dried
villagers buy Indian rice from Panbang and they frown upon those who don’t eat rice. Rice is a status marker and people in Ngangla Trong can eat up to a kilogram per person per day.

The health problem of such a carbohydrate based diet is mitigated to a certain extent by the fact that people do a lot of strenuous physical work and walking, but it is certainly an unbalanced diet and malnutrition is prevalent with the consequences. Moreover, maize and millet, which are grown in an organic manner, are largely transformed into alcohol (bangchang) and everybody, irrespective of age and sex, drinks from morning to evening. People say that if they do not drink they cannot work or walk. Bangchang is offered to guests, in buckets as part of their culture, but rarely tea.

Beer, especially Druk11000, is now widely sold and consumed (see paragraph on trade). The alcohol culture must take its toll on public health, nutrition, children’s growth, family income, and food security. Villagers forage for many wild foods available in this area. This also gives them a sense of food security as the forest is like a food bank for them. People do not chew much doma or areca nut and betel leaves. Smoking tobacco is very rare but chewing is not. Each time there is a guest in their community, bangchang, boiled eggs and wild potatoes are offered abundantly, no matter whether the visitor is a high level guest, such as a minister, a lama or just a new person in their village.

History, Myth and Society

As the history of remote areas in Bhutan are often not documented in written texts, we have to rely on oral narratives and myths as well as data from other regions to try to understand the history of a particular place. Ngangla Trong, which means the “Ngangla village” does not appear in available historical texts. However, a tentative historical outline of the area may be tempted with available data.

The Kheng region in Central Bhutan, which stretches from the south of Bumthang to the Assamese border and now forms the Zhemgang district (dzongkhag), was divided into three main regions which were ruled by petty rulers with titles such as Dung, Khoche and Ponpo. The regions are Outer Kheng (Chyikor) Inner Kheng (Nangkor) and Lower Kheng or Tama region (Matpala or Tamachog).

Due to its remoteness from the district headquarters in Zhemgang, Lower Kheng is a sub-district (dungkhag) with its headquarter in Panbang and comprises Bjoka, Ngangla, Goshing and Pangkhar gewogs. The daunting topography with steep slopes and deep gorges covered with jungle has certainly contributed to the isolation and fragmentation of Kheng leading to the rise of petty lords ruling over small territories. Kheng did not have a centralized political power until the mid-17th century conquest of Central and Eastern Bhutan by the 3rd Desi Minjur Tenpa (1613-1681). Even after the unification of Bhutan, Kheng retained a great deal of
autonomy, including during the monarchial period in the 20th century, although upper Kheng was more under the control of the Kings due to its socio-economic links with Bumthang.

In Lower Kheng, the most important traditional rulers were the Bjoka Khoche, the Ngangla Khoche, the Pangkhar, Tama, Gomphu and Goshing Dung, among whom the Bjoka Khoche seems to have had the most power. Khoche (commonly spelt mkho che) is the title given to a hereditary ruler in parts of Lower Kheng and also in the Dungsam area of Eastern Bhutan. Its etymology is not clear and it might mean “somebody important who is needed”. In this respect, we cannot study the history of Ngangla Trong without talking about Bjoka which is only two hour walk from Ngangla Trong and with whom its history is intertwined.

*Origin myths*

Although Ngangla Trong is mentioned only once in available historical records, the myths summarized here (see full version of myths below) indicate that the Brela were the first humans to reside at Ngangla. When they were threatened by a demon, two brothers, who were descendants of the gods, came with their sister from a place called Urbayling in Bumthang to save them. The descendants of these siblings are the Lhamenpa. However, the brothers disappeared leaving them without a ruler. So the Brela went east to steal a child who they made their ruler. His descendants are the Khoche ruling family. Then, relatives from the stolen child’s family in the east wanted to become Khoche too, but as this was not possible, they were allowed to settle with a high status and became the Bjarpa, which means “attached” [to the Khoche].

This is, in a nutshell, the origin of the three classes (rigs gsum), plus the rulers, which make up the people of Ngangla Trong: the Khoche, the Bjarpa, the Lhamenpa and the Brela. People say that only Ngangla Trong has this *rigsum* system in Kheng. Bjoka appears to have a similar system with different names but we had no time to investigate in Bjoka. As usual, myths are fragmented and not always logical, but we can deduce from these stories that there were at least two origins for the population of Ngangla Trong, one from the north in Bumthang, may be Ura (Urbayling), and one from the east.

The Khoche family confirms its eastern origin and attributes its ancestry to Prince Tsangma (Lhasey Tsangma), the brother of the Tibetan King Ralpachen, who is said to have come to Bhutan in the 9th century and is the origin of most of the nobilities of Eastern Bhutan. Historical sources, often themselves relying on myths, tend to support this. The only Bhutanese text for the early history of Bhutan, the *Gyalrig* (18th century) says that one lineage of descendants of Tsangma were called the Bjar and are at the origin of the ruling families, among

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3 Lham Dorji (2005), pp. 31-59.
others, of Ngangla and Bjoka (written Byog kang in classical text). Lham Dorji attempted to give a narrative of their history, mostly based on oral accounts, but the absence of reliable written sources prevented him from reaching any firm conclusion.\(^5\)

However, one can assume that the connection between the Khoche family and the Bjar, still acknowledged today, is historical one and it is likely that the person who became the Khoche of Ngangla was from the Bjar lineage which settled in many places of Eastern Bhutan. Moreover, the two elements of these myths: the stolen child and the “attached people” are found in myths of origin of Ura and Eastern Bhutan respectively. Lastly, to put the history of Ngangla Trong in a broader perspective, while the ruler of Ngangla Trong as well as that of Bjoka trace their ancestry to Prince Tsangma and Eastern Bhutan, the nearby Dung rulers of Goshing and Pangkhar are said to be descendants of Ura Dung Drakpa Wangchuk, himself a descendant of the Tibetan stolen child who became the ruler of Ura in Bumthang.\(^6\)

Ngangla Trong is at the nexus of the history of Eastern and Central Bhutan, and the myths only confirm this. It is a surviving testimony and the result of the turbulent events which took place in Central Tibet in the 9\(^{th}\) century with the assassination of the last Tibetan King and the flight into Bhutan of personalities linked to this event. Maybe what we today call “social classes” in Ngangla Trong for want of a better term, are surviving vestiges of the clans (rus/rigs) that were prevalent in Eastern Bhutan but disappeared after the Drukpa conquest in the 17\(^{th}\) century. The identification of the people to each class, which is still strong, the marriage patterns (see below) and the sense of shared responsibility, house and land at the community level would favour this hypothesis. If proven, this would add to the unique cultural features of Ngangla Trong.

The downfall of the Kheng nobility was, it seems, caused by the ambition of the Nyakhar Dung in upper Kheng which angered some of the lords. They called the Drukpa for help and this led to Kheng becoming part of the new Drukpa state and the nobilities to accept an overall power. However, most of the lords continued to enjoy a great autonomy due to the difficult terrain. At the same time, they collected taxes for the central government of Bhutan and acted as intermediaries between the central government and the people. This was confirmed by the people of Ngangla Trong who said they always paid taxes in kind and contributed labour to the central government and not to the Khoche. By being the middlemen, the Khoche still enjoyed prestige and probably found the arrangement to their own advantage. It is interesting to note that in the decades since the 1960s, the gup (local leader) of Ngangla gewog has always been from the Khoche family and only other officials of the village such as the chipon and the tshogpa were from

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5 See Lham Dorji (2005).
the other houses. It can be said that Ngangla Trong was the historical and social capital of the region called today Ngangla gewog.

Although we do not know much about the Ngangla Khoche, we know that his neighbour and ally the Bjoka Khoche was powerful and seemed to have had some authority over the Assamese plains such as Kokabari, Rangapani and Gohali as well as parts of Dungsam in Eastern Bhutan (the Chimung Khoche in Dungsam consider them as relatives). It is said that the Bjoka Khoche stone house/castle which is really huge by the regional standards was built partially by workers from Assam and Cooch Bihar, but no date is given for the construction although one can speculate it was built in the 19th century.

Given the raids that the Bhutanese used to carry out in the Assam Duars7 in order to get cattle and serfs (zapa/jaow), it is highly possible that the Bjoka Khoche had serfs and other loot from India. The history of Assam on medieval times of the kingdom of Kamrup speaks of Bhutanese raids as early as the 14th century but further research is needed to confirm this. Given the links between the Bjoka and Ngangla Khoche, it is highly plausible that the Ngangla Khoche also had some serfs from India.

Origin of Brela and Lhamenpa

The oral history recounts that the Brela were the first humans who resided at Ngangla. At that time, the king of demons, Rangwang Gyalpo, hunted there and did not allow the humans to live in peace. Sometimes he turned into a vulture and ate people. Other times he turned into an enormous snake and swallowed people. So people had a hard time living there. Two descendants of the gods, Khewa Dorji and Chagi Tempa, came with their sister Chingi Thagpa from a place called Urbayling in Bumthang to save them. The Brela hand them out grains, hence their name Bre, meaning “measure”.

These two brothers fought with the demon Rangwang Gyelpo while their sister Chingi Thagpa prepared three meals per day and wove two chubas or male dresses each day. As the two brothers’ dresses were torn each day in the fight with Rangwa Gyalpo, Chingi Thagpa would wake up early in the morning to weave and finish stitching in the evening. When Chagi Tempa subdued the vulture in the sky and returned, he could not see Khewa Dorji anywhere. When he called for his brother, Khewa Dorji replied from the belly of the snake. Chagi Tempa asked him to use his chewa (canine tooth) to rescue him. Khewa Dorji suddenly remembered the chewa he had and he tore the snake’s belly and got out. It has been nine days and nine nights of fights by this time. Chingi Thagpa said to her two brothers: “It’s done now, we got the land and food. I am so tired of this game. Tomorrow as the sun goes behind the hills, your sister won’t be here for you.” The next day when two brothers arrived home, they saw the meal prepared

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7 The term duar refers to the passes from the Indian plains into the Lesser Himalayas.
by their sister, which was ready but the fire she had made was dying out. This panicked the two brothers who went to look for her. When they reached Lachen Ama Ringlamed, they saw their sister, the lower half of her body changed into snake and the upper half still human, disappearing into the lake. So the sister Chingi Thagpa is believed to have disappeared into that lake.

The two brothers went southwards from Ngangla towards a place known today as Panbang. Chagi Tempa died while fighting a tiger. When the tiger jumped at him, a part of his flesh was ripped off and each time Chagi Tempa got on the tiger he broke one of the tiger’s ribs. At the end of the fight, Chagi Tempa and the tiger died next to each other. Khewa Dorji disappeared into the rock while building a stone bridge over one of the rivers. The Lhamenpa are believed to be the descendants of these figures. Lha literally means god and Menpa means lost.

From this myth, we can assume that the people who came to settle in Ngangla from the north, mainly from Bumthang, were the Lhamenpa. Because Chagi Tempa, Khewa Dorji and Chingi Thagpa came from Bumthang and ‘disappeared’ in the end, the original people who lived in Ngangla believed these siblings were their gods which they have lost.

Origin of Bjarpa and Khoche

The Brela were the Sazhigi Tenpa, the first humans of the soil. The Lhamenpa descended from the two brothers from Bumthang. The third class, the Bjarpa is related to the Khoche. It had been a long time that the people did not have any leaders to look up to and to maintain order in the community. So people decided among themselves to find a leader who is of a higher clan. A group of people went in search of a leader to the east towards Mongar. The group decided to steal a boy because they knew that nobody would be willing to give them one. When they reached the east, they found one young boy playing on the branch of a tree and another sitting under the tree. The search party abducted the boy under the tree and brought him to their village with his head covered.

Today they believe that the roots of the Khoche lineage stem from the Themnangbi Khoche in Mongar. When the boy grew up, they made him their leader as a Khoche. After a few years, the boy’s relatives knew that he had been made the Khoche in that community and his relatives followed him to become Khoche as well. When his relatives arrived there, people did not accept them as Khoche but allowed them to stay there if they wished. So the descendants of these people are called Bjarpa. The Bjarpa people came to be attached to or dependent on the Khoche as the name Bjarpa, which literally means ‘attached’, suggests.

Social structure and alliances pattern

On the top of the Ngangla Trong ridge, the temple dominates one big stone house, three large bamboo houses on stilts with roofs of banana leaves and a new white
cerement house and a smaller house just below the temple where the caretaker lives. The stone house belongs to the Khoche (Lord) of the village. The three large houses are closely linked to the social set-up and history of Ngangla Trong.

As shown earlier, Ngangla Trong has three social classes, with a minimum of 45 households each, which are spread all over the ridges and jungles of the gewog, until Goshing (which was made a separate gewog only in 1997). They are the Brela, Bjarpa and Lhamenpa. Beyond these three classes which are already a specificity of Ngangla Trong, the ownership and community set-up is also unique. The three houses near the Ngangla Trong temple and the adjoining fields do not belong to a private owner but are community houses for each class which has ownership over them.

A household amongst each class is nominated every three years to stay in the community houses near the temple. These representative households take care of the houses and fields for three years each, after which another household of the same class takes over and the previous ‘class-tenant’ goes back to his/her own house and land. These community houses have two kitchens so that two families can stay in the house but cook separately. This rotational residence in the class house does not take place through an abrupt transfer. As a mechanism for smooth transition, an incoming class tenant helps the current one for a year and half before taking over the class house as full tenant. The outgoing tenant moves out but continues to help the subsequent tenant for a year and half. When the former tenant ceases to help, the current tenant will receive help from the future tenant for a year and half. At the end of three years of full occupancy, the tenant will move out but help the incoming tenant for a year and half. The main responsibility of organising community events is born by the class tenant who occupies the class house but, throughout that period, the tenant receives help from the former and later tenants. In other words, the class tenant is supported by another household throughout the tenure. It means that each family nominated to be the ‘class house’ tenant lives in the house for three years and is actively engaged in the activities for six years. A three year tenure ends on the 30th day of the 12th Bhutanese month. The new tenant’s arrival is celebrated with a feast and a pig killed by the people of that class.

This is a unique and sophisticated social system. It allows everyone a chance to own this house and land temporarily and it must have been a prestige marker to live near the Khoche. The system also reinforced the social stability of the region, but it is a rigid system which entails huge problems and responsibilities. The condition of the house and land left vacant back in the area where the “community tenant” family is settled, can deteriorate and the fields have to be reclaimed from the jungle when the family finally returns. Often an elderly person is left in the house to take care of it, but rations have to be provided.

All the community class tenants are responsible for initiating activities in the
Ngangla Trong community

temple. They should also take care of renovating and changing of the roofs of the house and contribute financially or in-kind to the yearly festival of Choedpala. The three “class houses” are made and renovated by the people of the respective class. Recently, the Bjarpa house has been rebuilt with modern facilities by their Member of Parliament, who was the Minister of Labour, through the Constituency Development Grant, so that it won’t have to be renovated so often. There is a similar plan for the other two houses.

This unique custom of staying three years in the community class house and shouldering the responsibilities serves to bind the society together and reinforce the existing class system. It is not possible to know when this system came into existence but it is certainly legitimized by the myths and history relating the different origins of the people of Ngangla Trong. The class system at least in Ngangla Trong is very much alive, as people are routinely referred to by their class name. Although the historical class conscience in the general term was strong all over Bhutan, Ngangla Trong appears to have refined it and kept it in a unique way which is, to this day, translated into the settlement and socio-economic landscape of the community.

The rest of the villagers of the three classes who were not serving at the “class houses” were called Pampa and had to work and assist the “class houses” and the Khoche. They were paid in meals and bangchang. Again, each “class house” called these people by their own class. So they were the Bjarpa Pampa, the Lhamenpa Pampa and the Brela Pampa as well as the Khoche Pampa. Serfs (zapa) captured from Assam were not considered part of the society.

The taxation system touched everybody in the community, including the Khoche and irrespective of their particular circumstances. The level of taxations (buewa) was a real burden for most of the people, who were paying taxes in-kind and had to give woven cotton cloth, baskets and maize to the central government via Zhemgang dzong. Cotton was hardly produced in Ngangla Trong itself but this cotton tax which was imposed on cotton growing areas was redistributed by the central authority to all Kheng households. Sometimes, the cotton they produced was not enough for the textile tax and people had to look for additional cotton. Households had to pay as tax one piece of cotton cloth (penche) measuring about 75 cm x 15cm.

In addition Ngangla Trong households had to give 9 pieces of Agur (aloé wood), 9 sang of incense powder (1 sang = 330g), 9 sangs of Sang Ngoram (a kind of herb for incense), 9 sangs of Zhimtsi (perilla, a herb of mint family), and 18 pieces of ladles made of gourds (bangka). The quantity might have varied according to the times. As recounted by the people, around the time of the 2nd King, 50 households, the majority from the Bjarpa class, requested to become

8 Bangchang is an alcoholic drink prepared by mixing boiled water with fermented grain. It is served from a pot using a ladle and a strainer.
**Ngangla Trong Community**

*suma* of Wangduecholing Ashi. Being a *suma* allows payment of less tax, as one is paying tax directly to one royal person and enjoying her/his protection. It was also perceived as a way to climb the social ladder. These 50 households even today do not contribute much during community events and do not play an active role within the community.

By asking to become *suma*, these households (which are also called *zurpa* by the people of Ngangla Trong as they were going to live ‘on the side’) were in effect detaching themselves from the unique socio-economic set-up of Ngangla Trong. They were rejoining the social pattern in place in Bumthang and upper Kheng that comprised the nobility, the tax-payers (*trhelpa*) and the *suma* households paying taxes directly to members of the royal family. The information from the genealogical chart of the Khoche that we drew, shows that the preferred mode of alliances of the Khoche were with a cross-cousin from the Bjoka Khoche lineage. Bjoka appears to have been the “wife givers” to Ngangla Trong.

As in Bjoka, the mode of residence in Ngangla Trong is patrilocal and the property is inherited by the sons. It might have been a way for the Bjoka Khoche to give away non-essential members of the lineage while keeping the Ngangla Khoche pleased by this alliance with a powerful neighbour. The two Khoche families are very closely linked through this practice. The Khoche built their house at the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century on the model of the Bjoka house and according to the genealogical chart we drew, they have been marrying into the Bjoka Khoche family at least since the early 20\(^{th}\) century. We can assume that this practice goes back much further than a century and extends to the Kuthir Dung in Bardo Gewog, north of Bjokha and Ngangla, which is considered as a branch of the Bjoka Khoche.

Across the three other classes, the residence is also patrilocal and inheritance is passed down through the male heir. The three classes have had a pattern of alliances amongst themselves but this is fast disappearing due to migration: The Khoche do not marry Bjarpa, because they are considered to be relatives and the Bjarpa cannot marry the Lhamenpa for the same reason. However the Brela can marry both the Bjarpa and the Lhamenpa. This leads to a puzzle which would need an extended fieldwork of its own to solve, and once more conveys the inadequacy of the general terminology of western languages to describe this system.

In western Bhutan, relatives (*nyewa*) refers to any type of cousins and marriage between cousins is not common. In most parts of Bhutan, marriage with a ‘parallel cousin’ is considered incestuous while marriage with a ‘cross-cousin’ is often a preferred mode of marital alliance. The parallel cousins are the children of the father’s brother and of the mother’s sister. The cross-cousins are the children of the father’s sister and the children of the mother’s brother.
We know that the preferred mode of alliance in most of Central and Eastern Bhutan is with the cross-cousins, which is well-illustrated by the Khoche’s genealogical chart. Therefore, the alliance system as described to us in Ngangla Trong reflects strongly the mythical and historical origin of the classes, and maybe an old clan system. The Brela who are said to have been the first inhabitants but whose origin is unknown, were not considered of the same blood and therefore could marry both Bjarpa and Lhamenpa. It might also suggest that, like the Khoche, the Bjarpa and the Lhamenpa were endogamous as they married inside their own class with their cross-cousins, besides the Brela. However one may wonder why the Lhamenpa and the Bjarpa cannot intermarry as they seem to have come from two different migrations. This is one of the unanswered questions which would need more research but we see here a clear case of how the alliance pattern reflects the whole structure of the society.

Nowadays, people say that the younger generation which is studying and living outside the village will not continue the practice of cross-cousin marriage which they consider obsolete. However, the patrilocal residence and inheritance pattern may survive longer. Indeed, in strong contrast to upper and middle parts of Kheng where the marriage was matrilocal and inheritance through the women, this area of Lower Kheng is patrilocal and inheritance is through the male as we have already mentioned. Polygyny, that is a man having more than one wife, is practised but generally the wives are sisters or cousins. We have not heard of any case of polyandry.

The groom’s parents bear the cost of the matrimonial arrangement (nyenzung) which is done in five stages, over several years, and sometimes starts when a child is born (chungnyen). This custom has already been described in details by Lham Dorji, Tenzin Rigden and Ugyen Pelgen. The groom’s parents have to fatten pigs, stock grains for making bangchang and send their son to the house of the prospective bride to work for three years before the actual ceremony. It allows the bride’s family and the girl to evaluate the working ability and the character of the prospective husband as well as “pay themselves” for the loss of their daughter in terms of work force.

After this trial, the ceremony takes place and the bride leaves for the groom’s house. One year later, the bride’s family hosts a feast and gives the girl her share in form of jewellery, pots or a cow. Each stage involves feasting, drinking and the singing of codified and metaphorical songs in the form of praises and riddles, which also lay out strict responsibilities and commitments for both parties. The ceremony also involves exchange of gifts which are closely evaluated. As in the rest of Buddhist Bhutan, the marriage is not a sacrament and does not seem to involve any elaborate religious ritual. An astrologer (tsipa), who is a lay practitioner determines the auspicious time and day. Marriage is really a socio-

economic alliance. Although a matchmaker is required and appointed by the
 groom’s family, given the small pool of potential candidates, the unions are more
or less predictable. These cross cousin unions help to cement the agrarian society
and keep the properties in the same families’ holdings.

Divorces seemed to be relatively rare in that area of Lower Kheng, no doubt due
to the strong socio-family links and the consequences a divorce could have in
economic terms for both families. A song illustrates this:

We engaged you for three years,
Now take the hands of our daughter (bomey),
Be loving and kind to her.
Do not change your preferences,
Do not look for other flowers;
Let us not hear about quarrels,
Let us not hear about divorce.\textsuperscript{11}

Children out of wedlock are accepted although both mothers and children would
face more difficulties in Lower Kheng than in upper and middle Kheng because
of the importance of the male lineage. It is difficult to evaluate their numbers in
such a short survey period. If the father is known and acknowledges the child,
he would have to pay an allowance (sothu) to the woman. However if he is
an outsider to the community and just a visitor, both mother and child would
encounter a certain degree of social stigma and census problem. We do not want
to go here into the infamous but often misunderstood practice of “night hunting”
as our stay was too short to have any view on such a delicate and controversial
subject.\textsuperscript{12} \textit{The Journalist} reported on 12 April, 2012: “According to statistics,
Zhemgang dzongkhag has the highest number of illegitimate children. Zhemgang
has a total population of 18,000 and about 65\% are women. The dzongkhag
recorded over 207 children without known fathers in four gewogs.” However,
the paper neither quotes its source nor specify the gewogs.

\textbf{Religious and Cultural Life}

People in Ngangla Trong, as in the rest of Lower Kheng, follow the Pema
Lingpa tradition of the Nyingmapa religious school. Ngangla Trong had strong
religious affiliation with Bumthang. Until recently, the Choeje or religious lord
of Sumthrang in Ura, Bumthang visited Lower Kheng every other winter. He
would perform rituals, give teachings and people would offer him forest products
and bamboo weaving as well as host him. Because Khengkha and Bumthangkha
languages are close, there was no communication problem. This religious link
reinforces the historical/mythical connection of the Ngangla Trong community
to Bumthang.

\footnotesize{11} Lham Dorji (2003), p. 18.
\footnotesize{12} See Dorji Penjore (2009) for more on this.
There are no monks in Ngangla Trong and ordinary rituals are performed by lay practitioners known as *gomchen* and funerary rituals are performed by a *mishi lama*. In the past four years, the 9th Gangteng Tulku, who is one of the holders of the Pema Lingpa tradition and the reincarnation of Pema Lingpa’s grand son, Gyalser Pema Thinley, has been active in Panbang, Ngangla Trong and Bjoka. He has visited several times and contributed to the restoration of the temple in Bjoka which he consecrated and took over in March, 2012. He will probably establish a small *shedra* (monastic school) there. On his way from Panbang to Bjoka, he visited Ngangla Trong and blessed the people as well as the temple.

*The Temple*

Probably built at the end of the 17th century, the temple is a one-storied stone structure with an assembly hall and an inner shrine. The shrine has clay statues and the main image is of Guru Rinpoche. The temple has been restored recently by Dasho Dr Sonam Tenzin from Ura, Bumthang, who contributed for the roof and the golden pinnacle (*serthog*). Helvetas LCD project sponsored the whitewashing of the outer walls. New wall murals for the assembly hall are being made in Thimphu through the sponsorship of Lyonpo Dorji Wangdi, the Member of Parliament representing the constituency. The temple is looked after by a *gomchen* from one of the three classes. The caretaker (*konyer*) is married and when he goes away to perform rituals, his wife replaces him. They live just below the temple and every evening at 6pm the conch from the temple is blown, resonating all over the landscape.

*Other religious sites*

- Just below the south side of the temple, there are a series of rocks which are considered as sacred sites (*ney*). As in many places of Bhutan, they represent a conch, the saddle of the tiger which carried Guru Rinpoche, and the footprint of Guru Rinpoche.
- East of the ridge is a place called Labrang, where there is a *chorten* and next to it a Bonpo shrine made of bamboos and leaves. It is a major spot during the Choedpala celebrations.
- East of the ridge is a rock called Phechurtsen after the name of the deity which is residing there. It is said that the deity was travelling from India to Tibet when it hit that stone. Travellers offer some fresh leaves to the deity so that it will protect them during their journey.
- A beautiful forested area on the ridge going east is considered holy and was blessed by Tenzin, a lama of the Sumthrang Choeje lineage, in the 1990s. It was named after him as Tenzin Gatoenling.
- A pass, a river and the conch of the Ngangla Trong temple are associated with Zhabdrung who is believed to have passed through Ngangla Trong. However it is implausible that Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) visited the region as it is not documented in any of the historical
texts. This may be one of his reincarnations.

Religious figures: Mishi lama, Gomchens, Bonpo, Pawo

Because Ngangla follows the Nyingma school, the religious structure is not as rigid as in a Drukpa context. The mishi lama is the head of the lay practitioners and the highest religious authority in the village. It is a socio-religious title common in Central and Eastern Bhutan which is given to a religious figure who has the spiritual knowledge and authority to carry out funerary services. He is requested by the villagers to take this role and conduct the Buddhist rituals for the village.

Most of the religious practitioners, called gomchen, are married priests who till the land but also conduct rituals in the village adding to their income, in kind or in cash while providing spiritual and emotional support to the households. There are about ten gomchens in Ngangla Trong and one of them is the astrologer (tsipa) who decides the auspicious date for various events and activities. There are no monks in the village but Kesang Choeki, a son of the Khoche, is studying in Penor Rinpoche’s monastery in India and is a dedicated Buddhist practitioner.

The gomchens receive teachings from lamas who come to the village but most of the time travel in winter to larger places when there is a religious gathering. The Sumthrang Choeje who came every two winters from Bumthang, used to teach them but now, Gangteng Tulku might take them under his care as he has done in Bjoka. There are a few nuns living in a small structure in the forest south of Ngangla Trong but they do not seem to play any role in the community.

Two local practitioners are very important in the daily life of the villagers: the bonpo and the pawo priests. They have specialist knowledge of local deities and rituals of the non-Buddhist sphere of activity but they, themselves, are Buddhist in the typical Central and Eastern Bhutanese fashion of practising bon and choe (Buddhism) together. Bon is seen as dealing with life’s immediate concerns such as harvest, cattle, weather and so forth while choe deals with karmic results and after-life.

The bonpo in Ngangla Trong is a talkative 47 year old man called Tshewang who likes his bangchang. He lives in the hamlet of Dunchaling, to the south-east of
the ridge. He has been the *bonpo* for seven years. He took over when the previous *bonpo* Rinzin Gyeltshen who had left for resettlement passed away. His teacher is the present *pawo* Saling Norbu who lives in the hamlet of Punchaling to the north-east of the ridge. The *bonpo* is appointed by the community who looks at the capacity of a person and his willingness to take on the responsibility. It is not the duty of one family although *bonpos* are from the Lhamenpa class. When the lama, the *bonpo* and the *pawo* are together, the *bonpo* sits next to the lama and then the *pawo*. This makes the current *bonpo* Tshewang a little embarrassed as the present *pawo* is his teacher.

The *bonpo* plays an important role during the Choedpala festival and has a dedicated place of worship called the Labrang, a bamboo shrine in the open air. He does rituals to bring fortune (*g.yang*) and keep the people, the land and the cattle healthy and prosperous. He learned the rituals by memorisation and has no text but calls his practice *bon choe*. He has not heard of the main Bonpo protective deity called Sipey Gyalmo. He tells a story about the mixture of different elements. He says that *bonpo* have existed as long as the universe existed. When he performs, he wears a white headband like a turban, a white scarf and a long white robe. He has no musical instrument. A few days before the Choedpala, he goes on a fast and hardly eats. He sustains himself on *bangchang*. This is in order to be closer to the deities. He is married and has children settled in different parts of Bhutan.

The *pawo*’s name is Gyeltshen but everybody calls him Saling Norbu which is the name of the main deity which possesses him. He is now 84 years old, heavy and can barely walk. His house is in Ponchaling, a 20 minute steep climb down the ridge. At Choedpala time, people have to carry him to the temple. He cannot go to people’s houses but people come occasionally to see him. He does not go to houses where there is a dead person, and does not eat pork, chicken or eggs otherwise he falls sick.

He became possessed for the first time when he was 22 years old after running to the forest, where he climbed trees and acted like a crazy person. Before becoming the *pawo*, he used to be very frightened at the thought that a deity may want to possess him and he really did not want to be a *pawo*. After a few days in the forest, the villagers brought him back and showed him a number of things, asking him to identify which were personal possessions of the previous *pawo*. He chose the right ones and was declared *pawo*. The first deity to possess him was Gesar, the Tibetan war-god.

He says there is no *pawo* in his family. He gets possessed by three deities, the most frequent being Saling Norbu from which he got his name and which first possessed him when he was 44 years of age.

1. Saling Norbu is a deity from the region and speaks Khengkha. For this
deity, the *pawo* has a barrel drum and a long (3m) and heavy necklace made of bells, tortoise shell, teeth of wild boars and bears, and deer’s antlers.

2. *Aum Jomo*, the important deity of the east, speaks Tshangla or Sharchopkha language of eastern Bhutan and there is no special costume for her.

3. Gesar speaks Tibetan. The costume is a long robe and he wears the crown of five families of Buddha (*rignga*) on his head, he has a bell and a small drum (*damaru*) in his hands.

With a small metallic bowl called a *ting*, he predicts the fortune for the community at the Choedpala festival. He performs a dance with the bowl on his head and if the bowl stays on his head, it is an auspicious sign. People occasionally would come to him when they are sick or have troubles. His role is therefore the same as in the other areas of Bhutan but he is different from the eastern *pawos* in that several deities can possess him. In this, he is closer to the *terdag* of the Lhuntse region. He has no special books except some books for Buddhist rituals. His main lama is of the Sumthrang Choeje’s lineage.

It seems there is an alternation between *pawo* and *pamo*. When he dies, there will be no *pawo* but a female *pamo* who will be possessed by Sherab Zangmo, a local deity which is not related to the deity Saling Norbu.

*Local deities*

Besides all the deities which live in the landscape such as the *zhi bdag*, *neydag*, *lu*, *nyan* and *yul lha*, each class has its own protective deity which is a *tsen*. They are:

Talatsen for the Khoche and Bjarpa, Donglatsen for the Lhamepa and Rinlatsen for the Brela.

*Birth*

Childbirth takes place at home and is followed on the third day by a purification ceremony with a smoke offering or *lhasang*, performed by a lay practitioner. Relatives and well-wishers come to the house and bring *ara* or the distilled spirit and *bangchang* or drink from fermented grains and eggs for the mother as well as a present for the child, usually a piece of cloth, money or an amulet (*krungma*) to ward off evil spirits. The host family serves the visitors *changkoi*, a light alcoholic porridge made from rice and/or roasted flour and seeds of amaranth, fermented with yeast in airtight containers for two weeks. It is also supposed to strengthen the mother after delivery and is specially prepared for auspicious occasions.

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Death

Like in other parts of Bhutan, death in Ngangla Trong is the time when rituals are more elaborate and cremation at the specific cremation ground of durtrhoe in the village is performed. However, if people die of contagious diseases, they are buried so that the smoke does not pollute the deities. If an adult dies in summer, the body is buried until the harvest is over and then cremated because it is believed that the smell from the pyre will affect the crops. The bodies of young children below five years of age are disposed of in rivers. The lay practitioners (gomchen) headed by the mishi lama usually carry out all funerary rituals.

Festivals

The major festivals of the year are: Setam, Derchoed, Gyedpa Tschechu and Choedpala. All festivals are sponsored by the people as well as the Khoche who is involved in all the rituals, and sponsors the Umdze (precentor). Each of the three classes sponsors a ritual specialist: the mishi lama, the pawo and the bonpo and they all share the sponsorship of the local gomchen (lay practitioners). The pawo and the bonpo are invited to all festivals except the Gyeapa Tschechu which seems logical as this is a festival for Guru Rinpoche who subjugated the local deities propitiated by the pawo and bonpo.

Lay practitioners do all the rituals in the temple. Outside of the temple bonpo and pawo do the offerings according to their own traditions for all these rituals. For religious activities, the class household serving the three year tenure must take care of obtaining all the necessary items and food for the offerings. They must also take care of the people from their own class who come for the rituals. The Khoche does the same. All festivals except the Gyeapa Tschechu appear to be a syncretic blend of Bon and Buddhism.

Setam: 10th day of the 1st Bhutanese month

It is a ritual to appease the deities and keep away natural calamities such as the destruction caused by wild animals on the fields. In fact, the festival takes place just before the sowing starts and before the rainy season. In this ritual, the interesting practice of blowing a conch shell is believed to stop hailstorms throughout the year. The ritual probably got its name from this as ser means hail. People are served with karchu, a watery paste of buckwheat flour with fermented bangchang alcohol. The prayer (gsol debs or gsol kha) to appease the local deities and stop hailstorm is performed on rotation basis by the pawo and the bonpo. The conch shell is blown in six directions so that the deities know the offerings has been made.

Dechoed (dus mchod): 8th day of the 5th Bhutanese month

We are not sure if we understood the festival process correctly. It takes place every three years in a large scale. On the 8th day the local gomchen read the Domang, which is a common collection of Buddhist sūtras in 700 folios. Given the context, we do not think that this title refers to the Bon collection of canonical texts and dhārāṇī spells also called Domang, as we have never come across it in Bhutan. On the 9th day, they read the ‘Bum’ or the Perfection of Wisdom sūtra in 100,000 verses.

At the same time a big pot of karchu is prepared from bangchang and roasted flour. Nine measures of buckwheat are collected from each household to this end ahead of time and the karchu is served to everybody in the community on banana leaves. In the house of the Bjarpa, a ritual with a stag effigy is performed by a gomchen while outside the bonpo performs a ritual of propitiation called soelkha. It is known that the stag plays an important role in Bon rituals. Then the effigy is brought in a procession to a tall tree at a place called Dukulung Chorten. This is done to propitiate a demon called Owangdud who resides in a large rock near the river. In other years, the bonpo just does a soelkha supplication.

**Gyedpa Tshechu: 10th day of the 8th Bhutanese month**

It is a ritual performed in honour of Guru Rinpoche and neither the bonpo, nor the pawo are present.

**Choedpala: 14th - 17th day of the 10th Bhutanese month**

This festival has been video recorded by Kunzang Dorji and Kinley Penjor. The Choedpala festival won nation wide recognition in December 2011 when Karma Ura included the gadpo and gadmo in the newly established Dochula Festival and say that ‘they bring prosperity, longevity and happiness to the audience’. The Choedpala is the biggest festival of the year when all the people of Ngangla Trong and their relatives from other villages assemble after the orange season. The three ‘classes tenants’ and the Khoche play an important role which will reinforce the social structure, promote harmony and give them prestige but their economic contribution is heavy as they have to provide for everything during the four days.

On the 12th evening, the three houses (or perhaps only the Lhamenpa) go to a big tree near the stream and cook rice which is then mixed with yeast. It is kept on the branches of the tree to make nagpa, fermented porridge. A great number of small cakes made of flattened grilled maize or sip, yeast, and ginger are wrapped in banana leaves are also made. The drink and the cakes will be given as thai ngedrup or divine blessing to everybody coming to the three houses during the festival. Nobody can enter inside the houses unless he/she has received this cake. Two days before the festival, the pawo and the bonpo stop eating regular

meals. They just east puffed rice or zao, flattened grilled maize or sip and drink bangchang. This means they are close to the gods. We will try here to give a short description of the festival.

14th day evening: The three ‘classes tenants’ and the Khoche gather in the temple for a pledge or kadam by the mishi lama. They appoint two garpas or officers who will dance during the festival. After the ritual of gegtor, these garpas will perform three dances in the temple. Everybody is conscious of their roles and they pledge to hold the festival in harmony with only good things and no fight should take place. For the whole festival, the mishi lama is hosted by the Bjarpas’s house, the bonpo by the Lhamenpa and the pawa by the Brela. Each of them belongs to their particular class.

The festival is characterised by a complex ‘visiting process’ which starts that evening. The pawa from the Brela class goes to meet the bonpo in the Lhamenpa class house, then the two of them go back to the Brela house and from there together go to the Bjarpas and Khoche houses before retiring in their respective class house for the night, after much drinking in each house. People say that the bonpo is always from the Lhamenpa’s class and the pawa can be of any class but in fact the pawa is most of the times from the Brela class.

15th day: At 3am, the mishi lama and the gomchens start in the temple a ritual based on Nor bu rgya mtsho text of Pema Lingpa. At 7.30am, the Khoche offers libation or marchang. At least one representative of each household of the region falling under the Ngangla should be present. Two men playing the role of the ‘old man’ or gadpo and ‘old woman’ or ganmo arrive and start telling a story. The gadpo carries a phallus in his hand while the ganmo waves her white ceremonial scarf or rachu. These two characters are found in many festival of Central Bhutan. They depict the origin of human being and their journey from heaven to earth. They represent the ancestors. They use crude and foul language so that people who listen are ashamed in front of their relatives and neighbours and this action cleanses them of defilement. Then when everybody comes out of the temple, a serkyem is offered and a dance of wrathful deity or zab cham is performed.

The gadpo and ganmo led by priests playing cymbals, the pawa, the bonpo and the lay practitioners go to the Khoche house, the Bjarpas’s, the Brela’s and the Lhamenpa’s in succession before returning to the temple. In each house they receive cash offerings or nyenda and ample drinks. The official role of the gadpo and ganmo is now over. The bonpo goes to Labrang, a five minute walk to the east where he has his shrine, and is joined there by the pawa and his helpers called the ‘divine girls’ or lhai bum, who in fact are boys wearing kira. The pawa says that they should together perform a dance called Lungten Phabsang.

The bonpo is the host at Labrang and receives the gadpo and the ganmo, as well as the mishi lama and the gomchen who have arrived from the temple. He
Ngangla trong community

offers them drinks and then performs divination or *chala* for each of them using a banana leaf with a stick. The way the banana leaf falls on the ground indicates the individual outlook for the year. In the meantime, the *garpa* or officers representing the three classes go to the Khoche’s house where they perform a *marchang* and three dances and then they join the others at the Labrang.

In the evening, the *gomchens* return to the temple singing and get blessed with holy water by the *mishi lama*, then do the round of the houses, visiting the Lhamenpa, Brela, Bjarpa and finally the Khoche house where the auspicious song and dance of *tashi* are performed. The *pawo*, his helpers the *lhai bum* and the *bonpo* go to the temple where a dance is performed according to the *bonpo*’s song. This is the end of the *bonpo*’s role in the festival.

16th day: In the morning the *gomchens* perform a dance which enacts the journey of Pema Lingpa to Kheng and then visit the three houses and the Khoche house where they are given offerings representative of Kheng: maize, cotton textiles, *spos dkar* incense and agar or aloe wood. This part of the festival is a symbol and a remembrance of the conversion of Kheng to Buddhism by the great saint and his acceptance by the society. When the visit to the houses is finished, they go back to the temple and the *pawo* and the *lhai bum* perform a dance depicting the animals of the forest.

Donations are collected from civil servants and people with salaried jobs outside the village and divided amongst the participants. At the end of the day everybody assembles in the temple. The *gadpo* and *ganmo* come back to the temple in the late evening and their return marks the formal end of the festival. They congratulate the participants for the smooth arrangements and good atmosphere of the festival.

17th Day morning: This marks the formal departure of the *pawo*, *bonpo*, *mishi lama* and *gomchens*. Everybody goes back to their respective places. It is possible that some of the local features of Ngangla Trong religious life may disappear as they have done in other parts of Bhutan due to the influence of important lamas who have a “purist” view of Buddhism.

Games

Archery is played extensively by men and young boys. Bamboo bows and arrows made from a species called *yuley* (*Neomicrocalamus borinda*) collected from the jungle are still the norms. *Khuru* or darts is also practised although it seems less popular than archery. *Sho/parala* (a game of dices which is played all over Tibet and the Himalayas) is played by men only and as everywhere, it involves a certain amount of foul language. The Tiger and Cattle (*Tag dang nor*) game is also popular among children.

Songs & dances
Besides the classical songs found all over Bhutan, the most famous song of this area is Bumo Karma Wangzom. It does not refer to the popular figure Delog Karma Wangzom, the lady who came back from hell and whose biography is well-known. This song is about cultivation and use of cotton. Sung in Khengkha with a lot of words imitating natural sounds and dance performed by women, it describes the preparation of the land for cotton, sowing, spinning and weaving. Another typical song is Kawa Namning Ramo which evokes human desires.16

Ecology and Economy

Ngangla Trong is located at 26°56' latitude, 91°0' longitude and at an altitude of 1190m. It is perched on a ridge which dominates the whole landscape to the north and looks south towards the Indian plains. It is a spectacular location with an aerial view and except for the ridge where the main settlement is located, the whole landscape is made of very steep slopes covered by thick tropical forest. The settlement consists of scattered houses surrounded by fields and is spread out along the ridge with clusters of two to three houses on the slopes. Beside the ridge, there is no flat area. On the highest point of the ridge there is the temple surrounded by five houses including the Khoche house. The forest is a treasure trove and people extract products for food as well as to make objects of daily use through their amazing knowledge of the forest. The forest is also home to dangerous wild animals such as tigers, snakes, cats, wild boars, deers, monkeys and bears which are a threat to crops as well as humans. Birds and butterflies are in abundance, including the hornbill.

The Ngangla Trong climate is pleasant and dry in winter from October to March but is subject to very strong winds coming from north and south. In the rainy season, which start as early as April and lasts until September, the weather is terribly wet and life is difficult with rodents, snakes and leeches everywhere. The size of the rivers makes them impossible to cross.

Livelihood: Forest Products and Agriculture

Kunzang Choden writes:

This isolation impelled inhabitants to develop food security systems that relied on local resources17 ... the people of Kheng are sometimes referred to derogatorily as Pra kheng or ‘monkey-Kheng’ because they are alleged to have descended from monkeys, but the people of Kheng refute this saying ‘No. no. We are called so because we have vast knowledge of the forests and forest products and would be able to survive like monkeys without having to cultivate our food’.18

The forest products are truly still part of their way of life and give the people of

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18 Ibid., p. 194.
Ngangla Trong Community

Lower Kheng a unique material culture and body of knowledge which contributes to the cultural diversity of Bhutan but is also an important point of comparison for the biodiversity in Asia. Keiji Nishioka recognized this as early as the 1970s and wrote of the ‘shiny leaved forest culture complex’.

Bamboo and rattan are ubiquitous. People know the different species and use them for arrows, bows, mats, rat traps, building materials, containers, baskets, fences, pipes, ropes, poles. This versatile and renewable resource is really the marker of the Ngangla Trong material culture.

As in many other places of Lower Kheng, people in Ngangla Trong depend on subsistence farming (mostly done by slash and burn), forest products, and orange (citrus) as cash crop for their livelihood. According to a report by Ministry of Agriculture, the cultivated area in Ngangla gewog as a whole has declined between 2000 and 2009 but the orange plantation has increased.

Maize, buckwheat, foxtail millet (*Seteria italica*) and finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*) are the main crops. Wheat and potato are grown in very small quantity. Rice grows in Kagtong but not in Ngangla Trong, which has a very steep terrain, lacks arable land and has a scarcity of water. It does not even cover the needs of Kagtong village. Rice on dryland grows on a large patch in the mountain between Ngangla Trong and Bjoka but again it is not enough. Maize is used to prepare *kharang*, which is mixed with rice. Millet was used as staple food in the form of polenta or pancakes but nowadays people hardly eat it. Seeds are sown in the fields between February and March and crops are harvested from May to June. Maize and millet are today mostly used for brewing local alcohol, *bangchang*, while buckwheat is kept for brewing *ara* which is not very common.

Villagers practice slash and burn cultivation (*tsherili*), burning down large area of bushes or dry leaves to prepare the fields. This much criticized practice has its advantages. It helps reduce invasive plant species, reduce potential fire hazards from accumulated dead or dry grass, and recycles valuable nutrients back into the soil where they will be used by new vegetation. Some plant seeds only germinate after a hot fire, and fire-resistant roots allow them to sprout quickly, while using nutrients released during the fire. It is clear that the people of Ngangla Trong know these advantages. Burning was going on everywhere while we were in Ngangla Trong in March, which corresponded in 2012 to the end of the first and the beginning of the second Bhutanese month. One or two da after burning, on the auspicious day decided by the astrologer or *tsipa*, the landowner gets people to help plant maize or millet seeds in a large area on the slope, which took about a day to plant with 17-20 people, mostly women, planting in a row. A lay practitioner recites a prayer and makes offerings of rice, fish and *karchu* made with *bangchang* and roasted flour on banana leaves as well as alcohol to

the deities, spirits and gods to protect their crops from natural disasters and wild animals. Payment for the work is made with bangchang and a large meal.

Villagers will never know how much they can eventually harvest as crop loss to wild animals remains a major problem in the village. The main predators are wild boars, bears and deer. For want of any storage facility, farmers hang ears of corn from the ceiling. So they also lose harvested crops to pests like rodents and insects because of the lack of adequate storage facilities. The farmers estimate that they could be losing between 20% and 40% of what they manage to save from marauding wild animals to rodents and insects. This loss estimated by the farmers matches with the post-harvest loss of food crop estimated by the FAO, which is between 15-40%. This has to be added to the estimation that 60-70% of the grains are used to make alcohol.

People rely heavily on forest products such as garkyi, girang kyi, shabrang kyi and jyukpang which are ‘wild potatoes’ or yams (Dioscorea spp). These are boiled or cooked in hot ashes and eaten as such or with chilli paste, or made into curry with cheese and dried fish, or ground into flour and eaten as a soup or as a polenta, porridge, or mixed with rice. For garkyi, one has to dig down upto two metres. Its location is identified by a tree whose leaves turn yellow. It is harvested year round but mostly in April-May. Jyukpang is a round yam with yellow flesh which grows on the ground in March and April. If it is harvested after April, it is too watery. It first has to be peeled, then cut and placed into boiling water but never in cold water or otherwise it turns black.

Tormajug is a plant which grows in rocky places, the leaves of which look like doma (betel) leaves. It is slightly bitter. Bjo is a tuber and there are many types. It could be the cultivated taro (Colocasis escalenta) identified by Nishioka (1984: 116). The plant has large roundish leaves. The tuber is eaten boiled or prepared with bamboo shoots and dry fish. Khatkala Meto (Adhatoda vasica) a white flower from a bush flowering in March and April is abundantly used as well as the orchid (Cymbidium hookeranum). Banana shoots, cabbage of wild pandanus and rattan (Calamus spp.) buds as well as different kinds of bamboo shoots, stinging nettles, mushrooms and ferns are used as vegetables. All are harvested from the forest and many are dried and stored.

In comparison, vegetables from the garden are few: chilli, cabbage, radish, pumpkin. All of the vegetables are eaten fresh or dried and stored. Ginger is widely
available and used. Amaranth (*Amaranthus hypochondriacus*) is cultivated in between the maize and millet and the grains from the red spikes are widely used especially with chilli paste. Namnam (*Perilla frutescens*), also called *zhimtsi*, is very common. While the leaves are eaten as vegetable, the matured grains are used widely in salads mixed with garlic, cheese and chillies, or pounded to give an oily texture and added to tea.

Soya is grown in-between the crops and the beans are fermented from minimum of one month to a maximum of one year before it is eaten as a relish. Ram (of allium family), a plant with flat leaves, is used as vegetable. Orange is the main source of cash income in most of Ngangla. Oil was produced from different kinds of nut trees called in Khengka, Parchagpa, Shingmar (*Linderas pp. Lauraceae*), *durwang* and *kaiman* (*Madhuca spp. Sapotaceae*) but today everybody buys Indian oil from Panbang. The oil making process was long and time consuming.

Tea is now imported from India but tea made from tree leaves or bark called *shing ja* was available traditionally, mostly from *sorbus cuspidate*. Tea was buttered tea or tea with milk. However people prefer *bangchang* over tea.

*Animal husbandry*

Villagers do not keep many animals. Pigs are seen at most of the houses, where they are raised for personal consumption but not for sale. Many of the people raise hens for eggs and the village *tshogpa* official now has a small poultry farm and sells eggs among the villagers. Only some of the people have cattle and one family has a *mithun* or *bamen* (*bos indicum*) which is cross-bred with local cows. It is a prized possession for the quality of its offsprings. Dairy products are difficult to get and butter has to be ordered one week ahead. Cattle are never slaughtered for meat.

*Wild animals and hunting*

Due to religious prohibition, people are reluctant to talk about their hunting past but formerly they hunted with bows and arrows and set traps with pointed bamboos in the forest. Hunting supplemented their diet and protected their crops against wild boars, deer, bears and squirrels. Wolves or wild dogs existed but they have been poisoned in a campaign and now there are more wild boars. Today, one has to be careful at the harvest season while walking in the fields as people still set traps for the wild animals. Tigers are rare. Only old isolated tigers appear and they attack the cattle.

*Trade, crafts and income*

The traditional trade was carried out on a small scale and was based on barter. Ngangla Trong seemed to have traded with Assam (India) on a very small scale. This small scale trade might be due to the thick jungles of the Manas region
bordering them on the south, and the lack of surplus commodities. The main trading post in Assam was Mathanguri just south of Manas and the items were bamboo and forest products against salt and spices. It is difficult to believe there were surplus textiles coming from Ngangla Trong and in any case, the Assamese did not need textiles.

As for the trade within Bhutan, it appeared to have been almost non-existent. Their main ‘bartering partner’ seems to have been the village of Bjoka, a two-hour walk to the east. Nowadays, villagers sell oranges in Panbang for export to Assam and for local consumption. Orange cultivation is their main source of cash income and keep them very busy in October and November. The imported goods from Panbang consist mostly of bags of Indian rice, cooking oil, salt and beer, all carried on horse back.

The sale of arrows made from bamboo called yuley (Neomicrocalamus borinda) and some forest products such as mushrooms and ferns provide additional income. Every product is sold at Pangbang and dairy products are sold or bartered amongst the villagers. Most of the villagers have relatives employed in the civil service or in private companies but the level of their cash contribution is not possible to evaluate. People go to work as day workers in the development projects in the region or work as porters with their horses, through which they earn between Nu.300 and 500 per day. A few women have small shops attached to their houses on the path. They sell sweets, washing powder, soap, tea, biscuits, soft drinks, salt and oil but the main source of income seems to be home-brewed bangchang and Druk 11000 brand of beer. The quantity of empty beer bottles near the shops indicates the large consumption of beer. The Bjoka community school recycles the empty beer bottles by building retaining walls from them.

A handful of women weave simple kirases and belts on backstrap looms. However, the relatively rare ‘card weaving’ for belts is still practised. Weaving of simple utilitarian baskets from bamboo and cane is still done but these are rarely woven for commercial purpose. The famous bangchung (bamboo plates), palang (alcohol container) and belo (bamboo hat) are not woven in Ngangla Trong. This craft is specific to the Bjoka people from both sexes who use the yuley (Neomicrocalamus borinda) bamboo. The dyes and mordant are obtained from turmeric, madder and other forest plants with a few now imported from India. Bjoka people are organised in a cooperative and sell all their products to a man from Bjoka who runs a shop in Zhemgang set up with UNDP assistance, but as business is not sufficient there he takes the products to Thimphu. In Bjoka it is impossible to buy anything. Both men and women take at least two days to make a basket which is sold at Nu.200 to 250 to the co-operative. Some feel it is easier and more beneficial to work as a day labourer.
Modern Development

Ngangla Trong, like many villages of Lower Kheng, suffered from the Bodo problem of the 1990s and early 2000, which hampered all development activities for over 10 years. With very difficult communications to the north towards Zhemgang and their south (Panbang and Manas) as well as east to Nganglam, being infested with militants, Ngangla Trong was literally cut off from the rest of Bhutan and no development could take place.

Transport & communication

People rely completely on horses for the transportation of goods and most families have one or two horses. People also carry goods on their back and walk everywhere. The closest road when the research is carried out is Zero Point, which is two hour’s walk from Ngangla Trong through dense jungle. It is 40 minute car drive to Panbang from there if one has the luxury of a car; otherwise, villagers walk until Panbang from where they get their supplies. They go and come back in one day.

The road cutting from Zero Point towards Pangthang/Pangkhar in the north following the left bank of the Mangde/Pangkharchu, built with heavy machinery, was completed in 2013 connecting Ngangla Trong and Bjoka areas to Tingtingbi, Zhemgang and Trongsa. The areas are now connected to the main network of national roads by Nishioka Bridge, the longest bridge in the country, inaugurated in April 2014. The people are excited about the new motor road connection as it will certainly remove their isolation from the rest of Bhutan. Indeed, until the motor road and bridge was built, people here were cut off from the rest of Bhutan as the closest town was Mathanguri in India via Manas. It took at least two to three days of arduous walk through jungle to reach Tingtibi and the trail is not accessible from the end of April until October.

The telecommunication facilities are quite good: both Bhutan Telecom and Tashi Cell signals are fine and a cellular data card works well, provided one can charge the computer. Everybody has a mobile phone and a villager in Ngangla Trong with good contacts to a mobile shop in Thimphu, sells telephone vouchers mostly for Ngangla Trong and Kagtong.

Electricity, fuel and water supply

There is no electricity from the hydropower grid in Ngangla Trong but poles are being installed when the research was being conducted. In the meantime, they use solar panels for lighting and recharging cell phones. The Helvetas project which provided them with these solar facilities, batteries and inverters for the school and BHU is highly appreciated. People traditionally used oil from nut trees for lighting and wood for cooking. They still use wood to cook but if they do not have solar powered electricity for lighting, they use kerosene which they
Ngangla Trong community

buy in Panbang. Each household is allowed 10 litres every month through a coupon system. They do not have any heating device, except the fireplace.

Each house has a standing tap. However, water supply is a problem in winter months because Ngangla Trong and Bjoka share the same water source running from a mountain at the limit of the two gewogs. Bjoka being more populated with a big community school gets more water than Ngangla Trong. In Ngangla Trong the water comes, at the most, twice a day for 45 minutes. People stock water in buckets. In summer there is no water problem.

Health and education

The Basic Health Unit is in Kagtong and people in Ngangla Trong must walk down a steep cliff for 45 minutes and up again for at least one hour. The walk is through a dense jungle and the elevation difference between Ngangla Trong and Kagtong is 500m making the walk difficult for patients.

The community primary school for the area is situated in Kagtong. The children of Ngangla Trong and surrounding villages walk to this school every day. The walk is, by any standard, a 45 minutes tough hike down a steep cliff and then up again for at least an hour. The trail runs through dense jungle as mentioned before.

A school was established in Ngangla Trong in the 1970s but it was destroyed by the strong winds almost as soon as it was built. Children leave for school as early as 6am in the morning and come back around 5pm. The school is very well maintained and the children have prayers and meditation after classes have finished for the day. The nearest Community Primary School with boarding facilities is in Bjoka. The Lower Secondary School is in Panbang. There are two Non-formal Education centres in Ngangla Trong: one in Ngangla Trong proper and one in Choekor, about 30 minutes walk from Ngangla Trong. Both are well attended mostly by women. A third of the students are men.

Change, Prospects and Challenges

It is clear that the government is now trying its best to develop the infrastructure in the area and make up for the lost time but will this be enough to retain the people in the village? Moreover, resettlement in Gelephu and Marangdud near Panbang has been taking place since the late 1970s. People attribute the resettlement near Panbang to the influence of Dasho Nishioka who is still revered in this region. Most of the settlers were from Ngangla Trong, Goshing and Bjoka. Until the 1970s, the Panbang area was mostly jungle. Nishioka started 300 acres of paddy fields and 200 households resettled there.

After the community schooling, most of the villagers sent their children out to schools in areas where they have relatives. It is doubtful that the villages will see
rejuvenation and might even be deserted in 40 years. Alcohol seems to be one of the factors contributing to poverty and lack of food security in so far as much of the crops is transformed into local alcohol and people pay a high price for the Druk 11000 beer. It is difficult to suggest any easy way of curbing this because ‘alcohol culture’ is deeply rooted in the Ngangla Trong society and its rituals. It affects both sexes and is considered as a boost to physical work as is attested in Chencho Dorji’s 2005 conference paper on the myth of alcohol happiness.

In 2012, the government began drafting a national policy and strategic framework to reduce alcohol consumption. It recognizes that besides health consequences, the negative impact of ‘alcohol culture’ on socio-economic development has been ‘immeasurable’. In Ngangla Trong, it not only contributes to food insecurity and malnutrition but also to public health problems and birth of children with disabilities.

Children with Special Needs

Based on simple observation, we could see a number of children with disabilities which might be caused by unbalanced diet (of both pregnant mothers and children), alcohol and endogamous practices. It would be of great benefit to have a paediatrician/nutritionist survey the population and identify the problems. The Draft Two Stage Disability Survey Bhutan 2010-2011 done by the Ministry of Education and the National Statistical Bureau and published in April 2012, shows that 30% of children have a disability and this is more prevalent in regions where mothers are uneducated and where there is poverty.

Ethno-botanical Study

Given the incredible biodiversity of this semi-tropical area and the knowledge of their eco-system that the locals possess, we strongly recommend sending an ethno-botanical team to the area in order to document not only the plants, which might already have been done by relevant agencies, but to document which plant is used for which activity, craft, food, medicine. This wealth of local information may well be lost within one generation and should be recorded. We suggest to use Sangay Kencho as the main informant as he is active, willing to share and incredibly knowledgeable about the forest. This team can go to the area only from October to April because of the climatic conditions.

Agricultural Products

There is a potential to export to the urban markets dried products which come from the forest (mushrooms and wild flowers amongst others) and organic agricultural products (millet, soyabeans). These products may be supplied to a selective niche market as people will not be able to supply on a large scale. However several issues would have to be addressed before it is feasible:

- Establish whether this is viable investment and assess the competition
from other regions
- Raise awareness amongst the people and assess if there are sufficient human resources
- Assess the supply, especially for grains like millet because of their domestic transformation into alcohol
- Take into account the marketing and transport costs: packaging & hygiene according to BAFRA specifications.

Archaeology and History

As Grepjam dzong is totally undocumented, it would be interesting if the Zhemgang cultural officer and/or an archaeologist were sent there to at least document the ruins and the local history. If it is indeed a dzong, it would be the southern most dzong structure in Bhutan. This could be an added attraction to the eco-tourism trail (see below). More historical research, which would include Ngangla and Bjoka, is needed to really understand the migration settlement pattern. This would entail field trips in Dungsam (Eastern Bhutan) as well as to Ura in Bumthang. It would also necessitate a study of historical texts.

Eco-tourism

The 2004 Tourism Report (unpublished to our knowledge) of the potential of tourism in Bhutan which covered all gewogs interestingly has no report on Ngangla gewog attractions, except mentioning its potential for bird watching. In March 2012 the Royal Manas Park with the Ministry of Agriculture published a report on eco-tourism trails which have been identified. This report is very innovative but completely bypasses Ngangla Trong and Bjoka. Therefore we would like to give below some suggestions which would include these two villages for winter activities, either in proposed eco-trails or in new ones as well as a combination of activities.

While proposing tourism activities in Ngangla Trong, we have kept in mind different issues:

1. Tourism can take place only from October to mid-April because of the climate.
2. There is problem of water during these months
3. Electricity may reach this place only in the next two years

However, the above issues should not be a problem if tourists are warned in advance.

4. Need to identify houses for homestay and to build proper toilets or alternately to build a bamboo house in the typical Ngangla style with four partitions to make four rooms and build a common bathroom/toilet outside. Camping is almost impossible due to the terrain.
5. Need to shorten the walking time if coming from Goshing because of the tough walk.
6 Train local youngsters to be guides in the area.
7 The groups will have to be small in order to be accommodated properly and to not disturb the ecosystem.
8 The road from Gelephu to Panbang is bad and a long drive of seven hours. Foreigners are not allowed to enter Bhutan from the Manas border, therefore only Indian groups can travel to Panbang directly from India via Manas.
9 The Choedpala is a unique festival for an anthropologist but is not “visual” enough for tourists. It could be added in a tour but not a destination in itself.
10 The Dunmang hot springs on the way to Pangkhar/Pangthang cannot be considered an added value for the time being as they are not equipped to receive guests and also are known for falling stones.

Given all these requirements and caveats, here are our suggestions:

- The target market is a niche market: bird watchers, expats living in Bhutan, trekkers looking for another experience of winter treks and semi-tropical biodiversity.

- Routes: Any route could be combined with one or two days in Manas Park and rafting is an option.

  Day 1: Thimphu-Trongsa by road. Night in Trongsa
  Day 2: Trongsa-Tingtibi-Pankhar/Pangthang (250m) by road
  Day 3: Pangkhar/Pangthang-Goshing Limapong (635m). Trek via Budashi.
  Day 4: Goshing-Dendupla pass (1080m)-Darang chu river (580m)-Kagtong (680m). Forest, bird watching, butterflies.
  Day 5: Kagtong-Ngangla Trong (1100m) (1.30 to 2 hours walk), Forest; bird watching.
  Day 6: Ngangla Trong (1100m) Activities: forest, bird watching, local archery match, typical local food, ruined dzong.
  Day 7: Ngangla Trong- Bjoka (1200m)-Ngangla Trong Day trip (2 hours easy walk in the forest each way). Forest; bamboo basket weavers; temple and house of the Khoche in Bjoka.
  Day 8 Ngangla Trong-Pangbang (2 to 3 hours walk)-Manas. Rafting. Night at Manas lodge.
  Day 10 Manas-Gelephu (7 hours drive via India) or any other destination in India or return the same way to Trongsa on foot via Goshing. Suggestions for day 8, 9 and10 will depend on the nationality, permission and visa rules of the time.

We would suggest that a familiarization tour is organised for selected Bhutanese travel operators and see their interest as they know their market. Manas alone would be difficult to promote due to its remoteness, its lack of amenities of tourist standards and the relative scarceness of wild animals such as tigers. Bhutan has to compete with cheaper destinations where all these are available, such as parks
in India and Nepal. Ngangla Trong is a place where a unique culture and social structure still exist when it has been lost to development in many regions of Bhutan. Development is now at their doorstep and the uniqueness of Ngangla Trong will probably diminish. Most of the residents are elders and most of the youth will go out of the village for education and employment. Will the educated people return home with an interest to preserve their culture or will it come to an end in the near future?

The vitality of the unique culture and customs of Ngangla Trong will partly depend on how new developments shape change in Ngangla Trong. However even with employment opportunities and modern facilities, it is unlikely that the rigid social structure will remain in place. All societies continuously evolve and adapt to changes. Hence, we need to document these communities which make the cultural diversity of Bhutan.
A farmhouse and a vegetable garden in Ngangla Trong