Culture and Modernisation: From the Perspectives of Young People in Bhutan

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Abstract

This book is an investigation of discourses of modernisation, culture and tradition and how these interact with and shape the state development policies of Bhutan and the attitudes of young Bhutanese people. A fundamental aim of Bhutanese development policy is to maintain a balance between modernisation on one side and culture and tradition on the other. Young people in society are generally accused of being alienated from Bhutanese culture and tradition and of being influenced by Western media and culture. This book examines the dynamic interactions between state policy and local discourses among young people.

The book argues, firstly, that the Bhutanese development policy of preservation of culture and tradition and the prevalent social norm that one must be culturally aware is derived from Bhutan’s position as a small country sandwiched between two giants, China and India. The state defines Bhutanese culture and tradition as guardians of the nation’s independence. Secondly, and following the same logic, the Bhutanese government constantly presents its development policy as being original and unique, and insists on its distinctiveness from Western development discourse. Thirdly, the book finds that the state’s development discourse influences but is by no means hegemonic among young people.

Using educational differences as a way of investigating competing discourses among young people, the book establishes the existence of important differences pertaining to discourses of modernisation, culture and tradition between three groups of young people; those in English medium education, Dzongkha (the national language) medium education and monastic education. Furthermore, it examines the social background of these differences applying Pierre Bourdieu’s framework. The book argues that young people’s identification of their position is not only in terms of their career (economic capital) but also in terms of how they