


12 The material poetics and politics of the *patag*

Bhutan's ceremonial sword as a heroic artefact

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Abstract This chapter examines the potency of the Bhutanese ceremonial sword or *patag* in the ongoing construction of the Bhutanese nation state. It does so through a study of the *patag*'s material, affective and symbolic qualities, and how these have been instrumentalized in Bhutan's national discourse and honours system since parliamentary democracy was introduced in 2008. I conceptualize the *patag* as a 'heroic artefact': a material object that, like a human hero, has the generative potential to foster in people the capacity to imagine themselves as capable of and willing to take heroic action. I argue that this potential is rooted in the *patag*'s material brilliance, which is inseparable from its culturally layered significance as a discursive object with fluid martial and religious meanings. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and a wide range of oral and written sources, this chapter foregrounds Bhutanese ways of conceptualizing and talking about the *patag* and its interrelated material and immaterial qualities. At the same time, it offers a new perspective on the understudied role of heroism in nation-building, shifting the focus away from narratives and images of human heroes to the affordances (and limitations) of potent material artefacts like the *patag* in fostering heroic imagination.

Keywords *Patag*, Bhutanese sword, heroic artefact, heroism, nation-building

The Bhutanese perception of authority, responsibility and honour is intrinsically linked to the material magnificence of the ceremonial parcel-gilt sword, known as the *patag* or *patang* (*dpa' rtags*; lit. heroic sidearm),¹ and the affective discourses associated with this object, whose bearers are reverentially stylized as *dasho* (*drag shos*; lit. the finest one; hero). Originally a martial weapon, the *patag* has particularly deep-rooted significance in certain areas of western Bhutan with historical martial traditions. However, as an honour conferred by the king, it is today a national symbol of authority. Since Bhutan introduced parliamentary democracy in 2008, the *patag* has been instrumentalized in ongoing nation-building through its invocation in national discourse and use in the national honours system. As this chapter will discuss, there has been a shift in its signification in line with ideals of democratic responsibility and public service. Recently, there have also been public debates about its continued relevance because of its association with the materialization of andocentric ideals. It nevertheless remains foremost among Bhutan's national symbols of heroism with its entangled material and other-than-material qualities to be emulated in service to the *tsawa sum* (*rtsa ba gsum*); the king, country and people.

This chapter examines the potency of the *patag* in the ongoing construction of the Bhutanese nation. In his influential work on nationalism, Anthony D. Smith (1991) emphasises the unifying potential of symbols, myths and traditions in the process of nation-building. More recently, attention has been given to the understudied role that heroism plays as an anchor in the construction of political communities (Kitchen and Mathers 2018a), including during periods of political transition such as democratization (Wawrzyński and Marszałek-Kawa 2018). We know that political institutions use narratives about and imagery of heroic individuals, groups and practices to encourage and

1 *Patag/patang* is a generic name for all heavy Bhutanese blades. The more specific name for a long sword is *ben*. While the parcel-gilt ceremonial sword is collectively referred to as *patag ben*, in common usage it is referred to simply as *patag*. Terms provided in italics in brackets are Dzongkha, Bhutan's national language. Since written Dzongkha uses the Tibetan script, Dzongkha terms are transliterated following the 'Wylie' system, in line with the convention followed in the rest of this volume. The phonetic transcription of Dzongkha proper nouns and terms follows their common Romanized spellings. In their first appearance, terms have been italicized.

inspire people to act in politically and morally desirable ways, constructing ‘heroification discourses’ (Danilova and Kolpinskaya 2020) that foster particular kinds of ‘heroic imagination’, broadly defined as the capacity to imagine oneself as capable of and willing to take heroic action (Zimbardo, Breckenridge and Moghaddam 2013). Heroification is also practised through commemorative events, as well as national honours systems that, in countries such as Britain, have been expanded to include ‘everyday’ heroes with whom a wider public can identify (Harper 2020).² However, we still know very little about the potency of material artefacts in fostering heroic imagination and how their generative material and discursive potentialities have been instrumentalized in nation-building.³

This chapter seeks to open a conversation that can address this gap and expand the conceptual and methodological repertoire of the field through its exploration of the *patag* as what I call a ‘heroic artefact’, that is, a material object that, like a human hero, has the generative potential to foster heroic imagination. As this chapter will demonstrate, the *patag* is an object imbued with intertwined secular and Buddhist meanings and significance. As such, it can be identified as a semiophore in the sense that it is ‘endowed with particular sense and value beyond [its] material and functional value or potentiality’ (Rambelli 2017: 7). However, its symbolic power and discursive potential is inextricably connected to its tangible material qualities. This is

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- 2 Scholars have, however, argued that there remains a significant gap between the male-centric national heroification discourse in Britain and popular heroism (Danilova and Kolpinskaya 2020).
 - 3 There has been a recent upsurge in research on heroism with the emergence of the normative field of heroism science, which takes as its starting point the principle that all societies need heroism and seeks to promote an inclusive and inherently democratic framework of heroism that includes the ‘everyday heroism of ordinary people’ (Zimbardo, Breckenridge and Moghaddam 2013). Core concerns of this field are what defines a hero and heroism, how heroes are constructed and their social function, and what makes people engage in heroic action. While a detailed review of this body of research is beyond the scope of this chapter, it has ‘tended not to address heroism’s relationship to politics’ (Kitchen and Mathers 2018b: 12) and, to my knowledge, has paid little attention to the potency of material artefacts in fostering heroic imagination. For overviews of heroism science, see Allison 2016; Franco et al. 2018; Trotsuk and Subbotina 2023.

summed up in the customary expression: ‘One gets but a single shot at glory in life. There is but one shot at achieving the desired temper (*ngar*) for a sword.’⁴ As I will show, this and other popular proverbs, along with songs, poems, texts and customary practices reinforce the centrality of the patag in constructing Bhutanese notions of national good, social distinction and a socially constructed national character defined by resilience and valour.

The sword has been ascribed other-than-material meaning and symbolic value in other cultures. In medieval Europe, for example, its political symbolism was of such importance that the relationship between papal and royal authority was contested through the biblical allegory of two swords, the ‘material sword’ (*gladius materialis*) and the ‘spiritual sword’ (*gladius spiritualis*) (Caspary 1979). As the shifting interpretations of this well-known Christian allegory exemplify, the ascription of meaning to objects is not predetermined or fixed. Similarly, the material composition of objects can also be diverse, complex and change across time and place. As this chapter will show, this fluidity in both material composition and discursive practice has helped the patag retain its place in contemporary Bhutan, despite significant sociopolitical changes.

Having grown up in a region of Bhutan where the patag holds deep cultural significance, I have been fascinated by them from a young age. However, my academic interest was sparked when I decided to commission one for myself in 2021. Commissioning a patag required me to engage (or in many cases, reengage) with the ironsmiths who make the blades, the silversmiths who fit the blades into ornamented scabbards, managers of the workshops charged with invigorating these ancient crafts, village elders who never tire of narrating the patag’s embodied lore, decorated individuals who have the privilege of bearing this insignia, local dealers whose entrepreneurship sustains the livelihood of the craftsmen, and international collectors who are meticulous in their assessment and appreciation of the patag. But I also met people who raised questions on the contemporary relevance of what they saw as an anachronistic and androcentric object. These engagements gave me both the motivation and resources to write this chapter as a

4 Original Dzongkha: *mi thengs gcig lu gtam thengs gcig/ gyi thengs gcig lu ngar thengs gcig/*. Another related and popular saying is: ‘Keep a dagger and bowl ready at hand. Wine and trouble are a constant presence’ (*gyi dang phorp glo lu bzhaq/ chang dang tham ga phyad med/*).

way of making sense of the *patag* as both a fine material artefact and discursive object in Bhutanese society.

The potency of the *patag* is rooted in its material magnificence. I therefore start by examining its forms and material characteristics as an assemblage of constituent materials and techniques. Since much of the related terminology has been transmitted through generations of sword makers and bearers but not systematically recorded, I have consciously chosen to include them here. I then examine the *patag*'s culturally layered significance by exploring its conceptualization and customary use in Bhutan, taking as my starting point the Bhutanese tradition of speaking about the *patag* known as *gishey* (*gyi bshad*). This brings attention to what we might call the material poetics of the *patag*, that is, the imagination that springs from contact with the sword as a material object, which is layered with fluid martial and religious idioms and imperatives. As Anita Lundberg puts it in her discussion of the material poetics of a Malay house, 'it is through the poetics of material, through things, places and environments that hold culture, that humans find a way of being-in-the-world. Artefacts are tools of and for the imagination, for our states of being' (2008: 13). I argue that this is essential to understanding the potency of the *patag* in nation-building. This brings us to the last part of the chapter, which considers the politics of heroism in contemporary Bhutan through the lens of the *patag*. It discusses the instrumentalization of the *patag* in Bhutan's national heroification discourse and honours system, along with accompanying debates and innovations connected to the process of democratization. I finish with some concluding reflections on what this study of the *patag* can tell us about the affordances (and limitations) of material objects in fostering heroic imagination.

The *patag* as an assemblage of brilliant materials and techniques

Even though the Dzongkha term for the Bhutanese sword is now commonly written as *dpa' rtags* and Romanized as *patag* or *patang*, the honorific term *dri* (*gri*) is dominant in the available literary sources, while in colloquial language, the honorific form *chagshen* (*phyag shan*) is alternatively used. Despite being celebrated as integral to Bhutan's cultural heritage, the existing scholarly literature on the *patag* is rather scarce. Phuntsho Raptan (2001) presents the most detailed typology of

patags based on their conspicuous features, origins and etymologies. As part of their documentation of Bhutan's intangible cultural heritage, Sonam Yangden and Jigme Choden (2015) list blacksmithing (*mgar bzo*) as one of the thirteen typologized traditional crafts (*bzo rig bcu gsum*) of Bhutan and provide similar (albeit briefer) notes on sword types. In these works, patags are generally classified according to the material composition of their scabbard (*shubs*), the material characteristics of their blade (*rdog ma*) and their length (*ring thung*).⁵ The sword makers and bearers who I interviewed used these same classification criteria.

These secondary sources and my interlocutors ascribed the origins of different kinds of sword to specific regions of the country. Historically, some patags seem to have been forged in southern and eastern Tibet specifically for the Bhutanese market.⁶ However, it is apparent that many of the origin stories associated with the patag rely on fanciful etymologies to supply lost material facts. The actual provenance of different patag specimens can no longer be attested to in the absence of systematic documentation. Moreover, it is not possible to accurately verify the historical existence of some of the blades listed in the existing typologies. This difficulty of creating a neat typology is a feature shared with the study of better documented European swords. While confirming that swords are generally categorized by their constituent materials, aesthetic design and combat characteristics, Deutscher, Kaiser and Wetzler (2019: xviii) explain that 'at a second level, any typology is an attempt to bring theoretical order into the chaos of a perceived reality'.

Despite the variation in the material characteristics of different patag blades (Figure 12.1),⁷ they are generally straight, single-edged and

5 There are three types of patags according to length (*ring thung*): the *giring* (*gyi ring*) or long sword has a ceremonial and martial function, the *beydum* (*rbad dum*) or short sword is primarily a functional tool and the *rinmen thunmen* (*rin min thung min*) or medium length sword is mostly decorative.

6 See, for example, the sword labelled as *kongdi maja* in the catalogue of London-based antiques dealer Michael Backman (n.d.), which is said to have been made in Kongpo, a region of Tibet close to Bhutan, known for the great skills of its sword makers.

7 Raptin (2001) lists nine types of blades, namely *pagsam tenzin* (*dpag bsam bstan 'dzin*), *chukhab tenzin* (*chu khap bstan 'dzin*), *bumthang tsendri* (*bum thang btsan gri*), *nagphala* (*nag ph la*), *dungsam thungma* (*gdung bsam thung ma*), *barshongpa* (?), *thum* (*thung ma*), *chu chenm* (*chu canm*) and *lungdri*



Figure 12.1 A private collection of patags showcasing different permutations of blades and mountings. Photograph by Brian Shaw and Felicity Shaw, 2009. Used with permission.

rounded to an oblique tip. They are traditionally made of forge-folded steel and exhibit a characteristic ‘hairpin’ pattern in the centre, named after the distinctive design created by layers of softer ‘female iron’ (*mo lcags*; also called *mnyen lcags*) and harder ‘male iron’ (*pho lcags*; also called *kha rdo*).⁸ The lighter-coloured steel, which has a higher carbon

(*rlung gri*). Tertön Pema Lingpa (1450–1521), who was skilled in blacksmithing before emerging as one of the most influential *tertöns* (*gter ston*; treasure discoverer), is the attributed maker of the bumthang tsendri. Rapten notes that: ‘It is believed that the first six swords were named according to the names of the blacksmiths and the locality where they were cast, and the rest, according to their appearances, designs and performances’ (2001: 95).

- 8 Unless otherwise referenced, the outline of the technical specifications of the forging and mounting of a patag that I provide over the next few paragraphs is based on a synthesis of relevant information from my fieldwork, the aforementioned secondary literature on the patag, text, images and videos posted by the Wochu Iron Craft Center on its Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/wochuironcraftcenter>).

content, is used to make the hard parts of the sword, including the edge, while the darker, softer steel adds resilience to the construction. While other cultures, including the Japanese, have devised similar ways to make swords by layering different steels, experts argue that the hairpin pattern is a distinguishing feature of blades forged at high altitudes in the Tibetan and Himalayan region. It is produced not only by the folding of different steel layers but also by the effects of the altitude, which results in minimal heat input during the forging (see LaRocca 2006). The blades are often burnished to a mirror-like finish with the different layers standing out in slight relief. Generally speaking, the forging technique, design and aesthetics of the Bhutanese sword are consistent with its Tibetan counterparts. The *dao* (sword) of the Naga people in the Indian states adjoining southeast Bhutan also shows a similar piled construction technique in its blade.

The hilt and scabbard are fitted to the blade in a mounting process called *gishub drani* (*gyi shubs sbrag ni*). As shown in Figure 12.2, the wooden hilt is secured to the blade with a metal collar ⑤. The hilt has eight shallow flutes tightly wrapped in braided silver wire forming the grip ③ and beaded quillons at both the top ② and bottom ④. The pommel ① is usually made of pierced silver. It is damascened in gold to accentuate a central Buddhist motif surrounded by floral designs on its front façade, and a honeycomb-like design created by interlocking Y shapes on its backside. The top of the pommel has similar designs to those adorning the front façade. There are also pommels made from pierced iron known as *gobur chatroel chenm* (*mgo 'bur lcags dkrol canm*), which are very rare and highly valued nowadays. It seems that the technique of making them has become endangered in Tibet, where they historically originated. John Clarke (2006: 29) corroborates the specialization of damascening pierced iron (*lcags dkrol*) in various regions of the historical kingdom of Degé in Kham, where the craft is still believed to exist in a place called Apishang.

The scabbard is made by assembling various constitutive materials that form different permutations of five customary designs, namely *churi chenm* (*chu ris canm*), *ben chang* (*ben rkyang*), *belpa chenm* (*sbal lpags canm*), *hoshu chenm* (*lho shubs canm*) and *zangshen chenm* (*zangs shan canm*). The wooden core of the scabbard is made from the East Himalayan fir, which is used because of its light weight, durability

com/RMCCWochu) and curatorial research and on-line collectors' data from museum and private collections of Tibetan and Bhutanese sword specimens.



Figure 12.2 The constituent parts of a *patag*: ① pommel (*mgo 'bur*); ② top quillon (*mgo 'bur gdan*); ③ eight-fluted hilt (*brgyad bzbur*) wrapped in silver wire (*dngrul skud*); ④ bottom quillon called *khaser*; ⑤ metal collar called *gonzho*; ⑥ blade (*rdog ma*); ⑦ upper section of scabbard (*kha shan*); ⑧ wave design (*chu ris*); ⑨ middle section of scabbard (*sbug shan*); ⑩ lower section of scabbard (*mjug shan*); ⑪ sword tassel (*khab shubs dar phod*); ⑫ sword belt (*thag leb*); ⑬ sash (*glo bsrel*). Illustration by the author, 2024.

and straight grain. The most elaborate scabbard assemblage is the *churi chenm*, which is mounted with a three-stage silver sheet that is engraved, chased and parcel-gilded on both sides. As illustrated in Figure 12.2, the upper ⑦ and lower ⑩ sections are plain. The obverse side of the middle section ⑨ is decorated with a parcel-gilt wave design or *churi* ⑧, after which the scabbard is named. The reverse side is decorated with parcel-gilt Himalayan scrollwork. The *ben chang*

is also fully encased in silver sheets but has no engravings. The *belpa chenm* is encased at either end by silver sheets, but the midsection is wrapped in ray skin that historically entered the country through trade with India according to my interlocutors. However, this sword type is referred to as *belpa chenm*, which means frog skin, since it was mistakenly believed that this exotic skin belonged to frogs (see e.g., Raptin 2001: 103). Snake and other exotic skins have been alternatively used with ray skin for such *patags*, but many such scabbards use readily available materials such as lacquered cattle skin. The *hoshu chenm* is two thirds encased with a combination of black and red lacquered skin. The bottom section is encased in silver sheet. The *zangshen chenm* is an inferior class of *patag* that was historically worn by the servant class of the courts and is fully encased in brass sheets. The historical existence of this class of *patag*, which is now obsolete, indicates that while the *patag* is today a symbol of service, it might also have been an object of hierarchy. Tied around the top of all scabbard types is a leather strap known colloquially as *lasha* secured with a gilt metal clasp called *yangchu*.

The *patag* is worn on the right waist. An embroidered, tie-like silk sash called *losel* (*glo bsrel*, Figure 12.2: ⑬) is worn on the left side and fastened to the waist by the *thagleb* (*thag leb*, Figure 12.2: ⑫), a custom leather belt with two brass rings that harness the *patag* and *losel* on the right and left side of the body, respectively. Today, Bhutanese male royalty, designated classes of public servants and decorated private individuals bear the *patag* as a formal ceremonial sidearm. As a formal insignia, the *patag* can only be worn by designated officials or decorated individuals who have a demonstrated record of service to the national good. However, it is also worn at village festivities and by court servants (*phyag sgar pa*) at state rituals according to customary norms. During such customary usages, the *patag* is usually worn concurrently with a sword tassel called *khashub darphoe* (*khab shubs dar phod*) on the right side (Figure 12.2: ⑪).⁹

9 There is also evidence in the historical record of Bhutanese officials wearing the *khashub darphoe* during photo opportunities, presumably because it augments the visual splendour of the *patag*. For example, Bhutanese envoy Gongzim Ugyen Dorji (1855–1916), who resided primarily in Kalimpong and oversaw commercial and diplomatic relations with the colonial British officials, can be seen bearing the *patag* with a *khashub darphoe* in a photograph taken at his request by an English woman and her husband who had travelled

Although makers and connoisseurs often take poetic license in furnishing fanciful explanations for the material characteristics and compositions of different kinds of patags, in practice these are multifaceted and fluid. Similarly, when we examine how different permutations of mounts are paired with the various blades, we can deduce that there are no fixed requirements in such assemblage practices. In practice, any type of blade can be paired with any of the scabbard compositions. For example, the pagsam tenzin, considered the finest of blade types (Rapten 2001: 96), can be mounted with a churi chenm scabbard, but also with a less elaborate hoshu chenm scabbard. The pairing depends primarily on the material means and predilection of the owner. Due to the rarity of heritage blades, it is usual for these highly regarded blades to be remounted with updated fittings.

Purchasing a patag is prohibitively expensive for many Bhutanese. I acquired around one kilogram of silver and more than half a *tola* (5.33 grams) of gold to make my churi chenm. Heritage hairpin blades are becoming harder to find, while reproductions with comparable specifications and quality also cost a small fortune. By way of example, the churi chenm that I commissioned in 2021 cost me 180,000 Bhutanese Ngultrum, which at that time was equivalent to approximately half of the net annual salary of a newly appointed government official. The patag's fine material qualities lend it generative potential as a heroic artefact. But to fully appreciate its potency, it is important to consider its culturally layered significance as an object of popular discourse and a living artefact in active use in customary practices. In the following section, I will examine how the patag's material brilliance has inspired poetic expressions of admiration that continue to influence and regulate its customary and formal usage and significations.

The material poetics of the patag

There is a Bhutanese tradition of speaking about the patag, known as *gishey*, which encompasses different oral forms of poetry and prose through which a narrator describes the qualities of his sword. *Gishey*

to Kalimpong in 1891 (Donaldson 1900: 44, 46). In footage of Bhutan's admission as a member state to the United Nations in 1971, the Bhutanese delegate can similarly be seen wearing the *khashub darphoe* (Permanent Mission 2021: 0:56–0:59).

is the medium through which knowledge and appreciation of the patag has circulated and been transmitted through generations of Bhutanese men. I have heard and learned gishey of several forms and lengths, but despite this variation they tend to follow a common two-part structure that underscores the interrelation of the patag's material and immaterial qualities. They start with a description of the sword's pedigree and the magnificence of its material qualities, and then unfold the other-than-material potency of the sword as a symbolic object imbued with religious as well as secular symbolism.

This section explores the culturally layered significance of the sword as expounded in gishey. This is central to understanding the heroic material forms that the patag takes and the heroic ideas and figures that it materializes in society, and thus its generative potential in nation-building. While I refer to various stories, songs, texts and customary practices, I frame the discussion around an archetypal gishey that is part of a popular nineteenth century ballad-like oral composition, or *lozey* (*blo ze*), attributed to a legendary warrior, Pemai Tshewang Tashi.¹⁰ While the tradition of gishey (and lozey more generally) is most popular in western Bhutan, and nowadays mostly recited by older people, the lozey of Pemai Tshewang Tashi is popular throughout the country and has even been adapted as feature and animated films.

The patag's heroic material qualities

The potency of the patag as a heroic artefact is rooted in the brilliance of its material construction. The considerable pride taken in the possession of such a materially fine and expensive object often leads to poetic expressions of admiration for the patag's material composition. This is exemplified in the first part of the gishey attributed to Pemai Tshewang Tashi, which narrates the sword's provenance and material finesse.

I need not narrate the gishey of my sword.
If I am obliged to narrate the gishey of my sword,
this sword that is like the crossed-diamond thunderbolt

10 It is important to note that such narrative ballad-like lozey are part of a much broader oral tradition of lozey, most of which take the form of allegorical or metaphorical discussions on a particular subject, chanted or sung as exchanges between opponents (Phuntsho n.d.)

is the noble sword of Lord Angdruk Nim.
 When the quillon of the sword is seen
 the quillon is like the sun's rays beaming from the mountains.
 When the pommel of the sword is seen,
 the pommel is like a crossed thunderbolt.
 When the scabbard of my sword is seen
 the ray skin is like the blossom of the hollyhock.¹¹

The description of the sword in this *gishey* is highly metaphorical. Its material qualities putatively reflect the brilliance of wondrous natural elements like rays of sunshine, precious stones and flowers, as well as the power of the thunderbolt, which bears a special symbolic significance in Vajrayana Buddhism (a point to which I will return). To a Bhutanese listener, the poetic description of the *patag*'s material brilliance materializes the comparable brilliance and heroic qualities (bravery, courage, loyalty, self-sacrifice) of the *patag*'s bearer.

Gishey was a particularly apt form of eulogizing and transmitting the embodied lore of the *patag*. However, less figurative and more informative accounts transmitted through generations of men have also reinforced the *patag*'s attraction. An illustrative example of the pride taken in the *patag*'s material qualities can be found in an article by Tshering Tashi (2011) published in Bhutan's national newspaper, *Kuensel*. Tashi tells a story recounted by Dasho Boto Karp, who at the age of 93 was one of the then oldest surviving court officials. The old courtier's master, the second King of Bhutan (Druk Gyalpo) Jigme Wangchuck (1905–1952), had two boxes of swords, each of which contained fourteen or fifteen heritage swords that had been bequeathed to the king by his father. According to Boto Karp, even though he was tasked with polishing his master's swords almost every day, the king would often inspect and fondly clean the swords himself.

It is clear that the excellent material qualities and affective discourses associated with the *patag* have contributed to its position as

11 This is my translation, based on the oral version of this *gishey* that I learnt growing up (for an alternative translation, see Ura 1966: 66): *mi nge gyi bshad rkyab mi dgo/ mi nge gi gyi bshad rkyab dgo zern/ gyi gnam lcags rdo rje pha lam 'di/ dpon am 'brug nyi ma'i phyag shan in/ nge'i gyi yi kha zer mthong ba'i tshe/ gyi yi kha zer gangs las nyi shar 'dra/ nge'i gyi yi mgo 'bur mthong ba'i tshe/ gyi yi mgo 'bur rdo rje rgya gram 'dra/ nge'i gyi yi gyi shubs mthong pa'i tshe/ shubs sbal pags ha lo'i mi tog 'dra/*

a Bhutanese object of admiration and prestige. These noble material qualities were—and are—seen as both reflecting and befitting of the noble virtues of figures who personify heroic ideals. Historically the patag was awarded to militia members or *pazaps* (*dpa' mdzangs pa*; lit. heroic men) and senior officials to recognise 'courage, valour and success' in battle (Karchung 2015: 117). Many prominent families, especially in the Wangdue Phodrang region, have inherited patags as family heirlooms. These can be used at festivals and state rituals according to customary rules (a point to which I will return). Nowadays connoisseurs can also commission their own patag depending on their resources and preferences. Some heirloom swords that have been previously granted as gifts by the Bhutanese government are also occasionally traded on the international antiques market. However, as already noted, it is only individuals of certain rank and distinction who are permitted to bear the patag as a formal insignia.

The honour of formally bearing the patag thus evokes heroic imagination and aspiration. This can be elucidated by considering the following passage from a popular Bhutanese song.

It is imperative to bear the noble sword, pagsam tenzin,
it is imperative to not just bear it, but to do so formally in public.
If I cannot bear it [formally] even once in public,
alas, the great sword!
It will be a pity to see it disintegrate on the hanger.¹²

This song, which references the finest type of blade (pagsam tenzin), conveys the desire to achieve social distinction so that an aspirant can formally bear his magnificent patag rather than see it disused and deteriorate as a household prop. But to achieve this distinction—to be entitled to bear the patag formally in public—one must emulate the heroic qualities that the patag embodies. This is key to understanding the potency of the patag as a heroic artefact.

As noted in the introduction, the literature on heroic imagination has focused on the use of narratives or images of exemplary persons. Here we see how a material object can similarly foster heroic imagination. To more fully explore the generative potential of the patag,

12 *phyag shan dpag bsam bstan 'dzin btags dgo pas/lan gcig mi khrom 'dzoms sar
btags dgo pas/lan gcig mi khrom 'dzoms sar ma btags na/ dba'i phyag shan 'di/
gzar shing khra mo'i gu lu rgas pa phangs/*

however, we must also consider its entangled secular and religious symbolism as expounded in *gishey*.

The *patag*'s symbolic potency

In the second part of the nineteenth-century *gishey* attributed to Pemai Tshewang Tashi, the narrator turns from the material brilliance of his sword to its sacred and spiritual potency:

When the sword is drawn across the sky
it pleases both Lha Tshangpa [Brahma] and Jain [Indra].
When the sword strikes against the earth
it pleases Lu Tshukna Rinchen [the king of the nagas].
When the sword is brandished through space
it pleases Lha Sin De Gye [the eight classes of deities and spirits].
(Trans. Ura 1966: 66; glosses added)¹³

As we have seen, the first part of the *gishey* associates the material qualities of the sword with the thunderbolt, a central motif in Vajrayana Buddhism that symbolises the irresistible power that cuts through ignorance. The poetic renditions of the *patag*'s power in the second part of the *gishey* reinforce the idea that the sword cannot be reduced to its mere martial functions. In Vajrayana Buddhism, the sword represents wisdom, which cuts through ignorance. When the narrator wields his sword, this pleases the protectors of the Buddhist teachings (Indra, Brahma) and worldly deities and spirits bound to the service of Buddhism because the *patag* is a weapon capable of cutting through various corporeal and affective impediments (e.g., ignorance) to spiritual awakening. As we will see, this symbolic meaning of the *patag* is invoked in the shifting Bhutanese configuration of heroism under the new constitutional polity.

The entanglement of Buddhist and martial idioms and imperatives in Bhutanese discourses on the *patag* corresponds closely to its Tibetan counterparts. The similarity between Bhutanese and Tibetan swords does not cease with the shared material characteristics of their hairpin

13 *gyi 'phyar 'phyar gnam lu 'phyar ba'i tshe/ lha tshangs pa brgya byin thugs rang mnyes/ gyi thug thug sa lu thug sa lu thug pa'i tshe/ klu gtsug na rin chen thugs rang mnyes/ gyi bar snang khams lu gyug pa'i tshe/ bar lha srin sde brgyad thugs rang mnyes/*

blades. In Tibet, the patag was alternatively called the *reldri* (*rel gri*) or *padam* (*dpa' dam*), correlating respectively to parallel clerical and lay discourses on what was originally a martial accessory. Both major collections of studies on Tibetan arms and armour (LaRocca 2006; Venturi and Travers 2021) show that the technical and secular exegeses on the craft and material characteristics of Tibetan arms have been heavily imbricated with religious discourse. Commenting on the spiritual gloss of swords in Tibetan literary sources, Amy Heller (2006) argues that the Tibetan display of armoury has been most prominent in artistic depictions of protector deities (*dgon po*), who are portrayed bearing arms and armour to protect and promote the Buddhist teachings. Therefore, it seems that most of the surviving Tibetan (and Bhutanese) sword specimens are those that were deposited in a *gonkhang* (*mgon khang*), the temple in a monastery specifically devoted to the guardian deities.

Since historical Bhutanese textual sources are predominantly focused on religious subjects, it is Buddhist idioms and interpretations that are privileged, while the martial and social functions of swords and other weapons as worldly artefacts are almost entirely sidelined. One exception is a written text used during the New Year festival of Drubchoe (*sgrubs chog*), held annually in the historical capital fortress (*rdzong*) of Punakha (Figure 12.3). Drubchoe is held to propitiate the protector deities and commemorate the heroic services of the pazaps who functioned as the militias of the alternative historical state capital regions of Thimphu and Punakha, collectively known as Zhung Dhensa Phensun Nyi (*gzhung gdan sa phan tshun gnyis*).¹⁴ The pazaps were Bhutan's original heroes for their devoted military and communal services in the country's often fraught state-making process.

During the festival, the supreme abbot of the state monastic body, the Je Khenpo, gives a commandment reading from a text called *tshog-tam* (*tshogs gtam*), which contains exhortations to the pazaps. A more elaborate version of this text, called a *chayig* (*bca' yig*) or guideline for militias,¹⁵ is also read to the assembly of pazaps by a monastic

14 Also known as Wang Tshogchen Gye (*wang tsho chen brgyad*; the eight regions of Wang).

15 Although chayig are usually associated with monastic guidelines (see Jansen 2018), they also exist for groups or communities of lay people. In this case, the guidelines are specifically for the militias.



Figure 12.3 Pazaps participating in the New Year martial festival of Punakha. Photograph by the author, 2023.

official.¹⁶ This liturgical exhortation contains a succinct description of arms and instructions on bearing them, a code of conduct for the militias, and the heroic principles that they must uphold (see Appendix 12.1). It makes it clear that the express purpose of a martial display is to command absolute mastery over enemies and obstructive forces by intimidating them into submission through mere sight of the splendidly armed militias. It also identifies visceral and affective qualities of the ideal heroic pazap through highly figurative and stylized expressions and conveys to the pazaps the material and discursive significance of their arms and armour. This textual discourse invokes the traditional archetype of heroic service, within which defeat of the enemies of the state is entangled with the vanquishing of the enemies

16 This monk official is called the Debi Sungkhorb (*sdeb pa'i srung 'khor pa*), an office that predates the establishment of the monarchy. Since 1907, the Wangchuck dynasty has rehabilitated and reinvigorated state institutions and ceremonies that were established in the seventeenth century but subsequently went into decline.

of the Buddhist teachings. Within this discourse, arms are both the instruments and symbols of heroic men who materialize ideals of national good in the form of military service.

Materializing heroism: Customary uses of the patag

Although the patag is no longer used as a weapon, its generative potential as a heroic artefact is reinforced by its customary use in traditional festivals and sports. During the aforementioned Punakha Drubchhoe festival, the pazaps perform ritual reenactments of battles, wearing full battle regalia including the patag. This customary use of the patag is also found during the martial festival called *lo-ju* (*blo 'gyur*), which is celebrated in villages of the Wangdue Phodrang district,¹⁷ which also has a vibrant pazap tradition (Figure 12.4). Lo-ju was probably established as a rural extension of the national Drubchhoe of Punakha (Chophel 2011: 84, 100). As previously discussed in my ethnographic study of lo-ju in Chungsekha village (Chophel 2011), performance of this martial ritual bearing the full Bhutanese battle regalia acts as a rite of passage for village boys and a form of heroism training. The boys are greeted upon their entrance to the village square by elaborately dressed young women bearing assorted food offerings in a reception ceremony called *shodrig* (*sho sgrig*). Brandishing heirloom swords, the boys recreate historical battle formations and invoke the village's warrior deity (*dgra lha*), fulfilling their ritual and societal services in the realm of the Palden Drukpa (the Bhutanese nation-state) as its veritable heroes (pazap). To borrow from Zimbardo, Breckenridge and Moghaddam's discussion on the fostering of heroic imagination, these martial festivals serve to make participating youths 'heroes-in-training' whose souls are stirred by invocation of heroic archetypes (2013: 231).

Similarly, every year, villages in the Wangdue Phodrang district stage a two-day archery competition called *chogda* (*phyogs mda'*) against neighbouring villages. The matches are a highly competitive demonstration of skill and strategy. Teams seek guidance from astrologers and earnestly calibrate match strategies such as taking hostile ritual recourse by casting magic spells on opposing team members. In

17 Also known as the Shar (East) region as it is located east of the Wang Tshogchen Gye region (see note 14).



Figure 12.4 A group of village pazaps in Chungsekha village. Photograph by Dawa Dukpa, 2023. Used with permission.

keeping with the competitive spirit, the archers bear heirloom swords accompanied by the *khashub darphoe*.

Like the oratorial tradition of *gishey*, these customary uses of the *patag* are found in villages in Wangdue Phodrang. However, today the cultural attraction of the *patag* extends beyond these communities where the material and symbolic significance of the *patag* has been historically ingrained through continuity of customary practice and oral lore across generations. *Patags* are now commonly purchased by connoisseurs even in areas where customary ownership and usage was uncommon. Even commercially organized archery competitions nowadays have participants bearing *patags*, replicating the customary practices of Wangdue Phodrang. As we will see in the next section, this wider appeal of the *patag* is reinforced by the national heroification discourse in which the *patag* is invoked as an embodiment of the heroic qualities of the Bhutanese people, as well as by its use as a marker of honour, prestige and service to the *tsawa sum*—the king, people and country, which are the three central foundations or roots (*rtsa wa*) of Bhutanese statehood.

The patag and the politics of heroism in contemporary Bhutan

The patag has historically been a symbol of authority worn by male royals, designated officials and decorated individuals. Bhutan introduced parliamentary democracy in 2008 with the adoption of a constitution. As part of this political change, the country's honours system has been redesigned, institutionalized and expanded. As this section discusses, the patag has retained its centrality within the country's new honours system and has been instrumentalized to foster heroic imagination among the Bhutanese people. At the same time, there has been a shift in its signification in line with ideals of democratic responsibility and public service, as well as debates about its continued relevance as a materialization and marker of patriarchal authority and androcentric heroic ideals. As discussed in the politics of heroism literature (Danilova and Kolpinskaya 2020), a democratizing society needs diversity in its conceptions of what constitutes heroism and how heroism is incorporated and recognized in state structures and symbols.

The patag as a heroic artefact

According to Article 2.16(a) of Bhutan's constitution, the prerogative of awarding the patag and other decorations rests with the King in 'accordance with tradition and custom' (RGOB 2008). The privilege of bearing the patag is accompanied by a corresponding entitlement to wear a distinctive design and colour of *kabney* (*bkab ne*), a formal scarf fashioned after a monk's robe, which drapes across the body from the left shoulder to the right hip. Bhutanese men wear a white, fringed *kabney* without a patag as part of their national dress, while the King and Je Khenpo wear the yellow *kabney*, which is reverentially referred to as *namza serp* (*na bza' gserp*). The design and colour of other *kabneys* mark their wearers as men of distinction or as belonging to a specific arm of the government (legislature, judiciary or executive) and rank.

Officials who receive their appointments and decorations directly from the king upon the recommendation of constitutionally designated nominating bodies are listed under Article 2.19 of the constitution. A red scarf (*'bu ras dmar po*) historically marked the wearer as belonging to the second-tier of officialdom (*gnyis skal ma*), but it is now an honour that can be awarded to any individual of distinction from

either the public or private sector for their outstanding contributions to the nation. This scarf is granted together with the *patag* and title of *dasho* by the king as a royal prerogative. Historically, only three common types of *kabneys* seem to have existed, namely white, red and yellow. However, as public service was professionalized and expanded to meet diversified needs, distinctive insignias, including differently coloured *kabneys*, were seen as a way of marking professional distinctions. Cabinet-ranked officials (*lhan rgyas*) wear an orange scarf, parliamentarians (*spyi tshogs* ‘*thus mi*’) wear a blue scarf (Figure 12.5), judges (*drang dpon*) wear a green scarf, government secretaries (*drung chen*) and other designated officials wear a white, fringeless scarf, and district governors (*rdzong bdag*) wear a red scarf with white stripes in the centre. All these officials, as well as other designated minor officials and staff members of the royal court, bear the *patag* as a formal insignia. Except for the red scarf *dasho*, they all revert to the common white scarf without a *patag* at the end of their terms.

Several interlocutors told me that the continued use of such decorations in Bhutan’s modernizing public service is deeply imbued with generative pragmatic and symbolic potential. In instituting the *patag* as a publicly visible marker of professional distinction, they argue,



Figure 12.5 Outgoing parliamentarians taking off their *kabneys* and *patags*. Photograph by the National Council of Bhutan, 9 May 2023. Used with permission.

the patag serves as a commemorative object that celebrates the dedication of the heroic forefathers who wielded the patag in troubled times to safeguard the sovereignty of the country, using it as both a walking stick through treacherous terrain and a martial weapon in wars.¹⁸ This idea is reinforced by continued widespread circulation of the national discourse on the heroics of the fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck (r.1972–2006). In 2003, he demonstrated the highest ideal of Bhutanese heroism when he personally spearheaded his small and under-resourced army in battles against highly armed and hardened Indian militants who were forcibly lodging in the country's territory undermining its sovereign interests. When rallying his small army, the King often referenced the aforementioned adage, inscribing the patag as a symbol of Bhutanese grit and determination in the national imagination.

This invocation of the patag as a metonym for the heroic qualities of the king and the people of Bhutan was echoed in 2021 in a famous National Day address made by the fifth and current King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (b.1980) in the courtyard of Tashi Chhodzong, the capital fortress. The king called for *ngar* in service of the nation. In Dzongkha, Bhutan's national language, *ngar* has the double meaning of the temper of a sword and heroic resilience of a person. Equating a sword's resilient material and affective qualities with a constructed national character embodying the highest ideal of heroism, he exhorted the people: 'The strength of our national character, courage, grit and fortitude must define every aspect of our national endeavour' ('Translation of His Majesty's Address', 18 December 2021). To bear the patag as a formal insignia is therefore to bear these heroic qualities in valiant and self-sacrificing service to the nation, whether that service be military, political, bureaucratic or in some other arena.

In Bhutan's national heroification discourse, as elsewhere, heroic individuals such as the fourth King are used as inspiring exemplars. However, the examples given here show how material culture is also instrumentalized to foster heroic imagination as part of contemporary nation-building. The patag is not only a weapon that was wielded by the heroes of the past and present, it is itself portrayed as an inspiring

18 This argument references the popular Bhutanese maxim 'use the sword as a walking staff, strive to protect the kingdom' (*dpa' rtags 'kharw btsugs/rgyal khab srung skyob 'bad/*).

heroic object, the qualities of which the people are called upon to emulate for the national good. At the same time, these qualities of the *patag* are framed as inherent in the Bhutanese as a people, rendering heroism accessible to all.

Democratizing heroism

The continued potency of the *patag* as a heroic artefact in Bhutan as a fledgling democracy has rested on the fluidity of its layered cultural meanings, allowing for shifts in its signification to reflect changing socio-political values, ideals and imperatives. Several of my interlocutors referred to the king's injunction that the 'patag should be perceived as a responsibility and not as an authority', indicating that heroism lies in public service, not entitlement. This marks a major reconfiguration of the discourse on the *patag* from one of traditional authority to that of constitutional responsibility. Reflecting the aforementioned entanglement of martial and Buddhist idioms and imperatives in the generative discursive potential of the *patag*, one of my interlocutors observed that in symbolic terms, the *patag* represents Jampelyang's *sherub reldri* (*shes rab ral gri*)—Manjushri's sword of wisdom. Bearing the *patag*, it is argued, therefore obligates public servants to exercise wisdom in skilfully undertaking their official functions.

This reconfiguration of the *patag* was reflected in remarks made by Dasho Ugyen Dorji, a former speaker of the parliament, who was conferred the red scarf and *patag* in 2011 along with the title of dasho:

In our spiritual nation, the *bura marp* [red scarf] signifies the robes of the Buddha. This means that those who wear it must serve the people with compassion, justice and integrity. The *patag* is a symbol of the will of the person wearing it to sacrifice his own life in the protection of the people and nation. (cited in Wangchuk, R. 2011).

These sentiments are reflective of the 'ethical self-actualization' that is a defining feature of heroism (Franco et al. 2018). They show how the *patag* as a material artefact continues to have a pull not only on connoisseurs of fine objects, but also on people motivated to serve the country through the generative power and politics of its entangled secular and religious symbolism and discourses.

Instrumentalization of the *patag* within the contemporary Bhutanese honours system and national heroification discourse needs to

be understood in the context of Bhutan as a resource-poor country, dependent on donor assistance for many of its developmental needs. The country has been facing an unprecedented loss of skilled personnel from its civil service and the private sector as they receive better remunerated positions from foreign employers, particularly in Australia where tens of thousands of Bhutanese now live (Ugyel 2023). Many of my interlocutors believe that material markers of distinction like the patag—and the moral responsibility and heroic imagination imbued in them—are one of the ways to retain high calibre citizens in the civil service and the country at large. This imperative also helps to explain why the contemporary honours system has been expanded and reconfigured through the creation of new insignia and medals oriented toward fostering heroic imagination among a wider range of citizens.

Bearing the patag has always been the privilege of distinguished men. Even though women have been rising through the ranks of the Bhutanese bureaucracy to senior positions, female officials were not entitled to a corresponding insignia to the patag (Dema 2013). Prior to 2008, two women had been awarded the red scarf and the title of dasho, the first in 1993 (Penjore 2006). Given the patag's symbolic association with androcentric heroic ideals, the possibility that women could also bear the patag does not seem to have been considered. However, after 2008, there was public debate about whether women should be awarded something equivalent in recognition of their status and contributions ('Patang' 2013).

On 7 July 2016, the fifth King instituted the insignia of *gyentag* ('*gan rtags*'; lit. badge of responsibility) and granted it to the six women members of parliament, including the first woman minister, Lyonpo Dorji Choden. Accorded a symbolic status equivalent to the patag, the *gyentag* is inspired by the design of the traditional brooch pin or *thingkhab* (*thing khab*) and bears 'the national emblem of Bhutan in gold, with colours of the national flag incorporated in the lower portion and is inlaid with stones of jade and coral' ('The Gyentag' 2016). It is affixed on the bearer's *rachu* (*rags cu*), the women's equivalent of the kabney. New *rachu* had already been introduced for women officials that corresponded with the men's kabney in their design and colouration. In addition, various orders or classes of national honours with corresponding decorations were redesigned and instituted in 2008. Notable among these is the National Order of Merit, which was created to recognize the notable contributions to the state and society of individuals from all walks of life including farmers, drivers, artists,



Figure 12.6 Gyentag, a new parallel insignia for decorated women. Photograph by the author, 2023.

doctors, athletes and scholars (see Zangmo 2015).¹⁹ In short, there are now parallel insignias for men and women and various decorations that recognize different forms and degrees of broadly defined heroic services to the nation (Figure 12.6).

19 Besides these formal decorations, there are various fora (including on social media) that highlight and encourage distinctive and dedicated service.

Such initiatives can be seen as affirmative political actions to democratize entitlement to insignias in a culturally sensitive manner. In an editorial in *Kuensel*, the introduction of the gyentag is described as ‘a masterstroke’ and ‘a sign of a progressive nation, where continuous efforts are being made to create [a] conducive environment for all Bhutanese to contribute and be recognised for their role in the national building’ (‘Gyentag is a Significant Achievement’ 2016). Read through the lens of the politics of heroism, we might also say that these initiatives are oriented toward fostering heroic imagination among citizens who have customarily not been entitled to bear the patag. As Danilova and Kolpinskava (2020) argue in relation to the British context, heroism can be more productively utilized as a political resource when it is inclusive. At the same time, the innovative and affirmative recalibration and institutionalization of customary decorations can also be read as an attempt among Bhutanese leaders to creatively diffuse social tensions and thereby rescue the patag from anachronism and androcentrism so that it can continue to materialize and incentivize nationally desirable ideals and actions.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has opened up a discussion on the potency of what I have called ‘heroic artefacts’ in processes of nation-building. As an assemblage of fine materials and affective discourses, layered with multi-faceted religious and political significance, I have suggested that we can think of the patag not only as a symbol but also as a materialization of heroic qualities. It has been instrumentalized in national discourse and the national honours system to encourage and inspire public servants and the Bhutanese public to act with courage, grit, fortitude and wisdom in self-sacrificing service to the king, country and people. Just as human heroes and their actions are used by political establishments to foster heroic imagination, the patag and its material, affective and symbolic qualities have been used to foster heroic imagination in Bhutan.

While this chapter has thus demonstrated the affordances of cultural artefacts in fostering heroic imagination, it has also pointed to some limitations. As Pål Kolstø points out, symbols, myths and traditions ‘rooted in a cultural past’ can be divisive depending on who they are associated with and how they are exploited in national discourses (2006: 679). Kolstø is primarily concerned with contestation

over culturally-rooted national symbols in new states, where ‘different ethnic and political groups often hark back to different pasts’ (ibid.). The Bhutanese case demonstrates how old and well-established nation states also have to negotiate potential contestation in their instrumentalization of potent cultural artefacts like the *patag* in contexts of ongoing sociopolitical change. As Veronica Kitchen (2018: 21) points out, heroism and heroic narratives can act as unifiers in the building of political community, but only if the community feels that those narratives reflect their values. The same can be said of heroic artefacts like the *patag* and the values and ideals that they materialize.

As a fledgling democracy, Bhutan is a newly reconfigured state engaged in an ongoing process of modern nation-building. Shifting discourse on the *patag* and debates prompted by its use in the honours system have been rooted in these sociopolitical changes, which have placed growing emphasis on constitutional responsibility and equality—principles enshrined in the 2008 constitution. The apparent contradiction between the continued use of the *patag* and democratic ideals has been negotiated through changes in the *patag*’s signification and the progressive introduction of new decorations and honours. But some questions still remain. Is it possible for newly invented insignia such as the *gyentag* to become heroic artefacts? What affirmative interventions will it take for the *gyentag* and other modern honours to have the same popular attraction as the *patag*, given the latter’s deep-rooted and culturally layered significance and material and discursive potentialities? What role do heroic artefacts play in the continued gendering of heroism and national values and ideals? These questions aside, the way in which the inherent brilliance and fluidity of the *patag* and its material poetics have been harnessed in contemporary Bhutanese politics might serve as inspiration for the leaders of other political communities, including nation states, who seek to preserve tradition while being receptive to new socio-political imperatives and ideals.

Appendix 12.1: Extract from the chayig of the pazaps in Punakha

The following translation and transliteration are based on the oral version of the chayig of the pazaps in Punakha as it was read during the Punakha festival on 28 February 2023.²⁰

For peace and happiness in the world, as well as timely rain [and congenial climate], votive and tithe offerings ... have been generously and wholeheartedly made for widespread harmony to manifest. Therefore, you, the favoured militias of the eight regions of Wang, should arm yourselves to overwhelm the enemies with your mere appearance, bearing befitting arms and armour such as battle boots, armoured jackets ... long swords, short swords, muskets ... and other such suitable articles that strike terror ... When you exit the dzong, the valiant exhortations of Lord Vishnu, warlord god of the pure realms, and the dexterity of Vajrakilaya, are your dual unfailing protectors, ferocious and fearsome ... So you should reprimand the enemies harshly and be compassionless and vicious, as if you can wipe out all beings of the three realms of existence. Moreover, you should demonstrate gruesome ingenuity and resourcefulness ... and eliminate the enemies of the Dharma, reducing them to dust without leaving even a speck. Once outside, do not lose composure or discipline ... As you march, you should relentlessly and thunderously let out war cries that rent the sky and earth to appease the war deity ... You should reverentially uphold your arms and armaments and never let them touch the bare earth, which would displease the war deity ... When re-entering the dzong having vanquished the evil forces, you should raise the victory banner of the pure deities up to the pinnacle of all the realms of existence ...

20 I would like to thank Khenpo Nima Shar for his assistance in transcribing the video recording of this chayig, and Lam Singye Wangchuk of Canberra for his assistance in translating the text. The fieldwork for my research on the Punakha festival was conducted with Miguel Alvarez Ortega, Kyoto University. The transcript of the oral recitation and its translation is preliminary and contains omissions, since it was not possible to accurately transcribe from the recorded video. See Aris 1976 for more details of this festival and an alternative translation of the chayig.

'jig rten bde zhing skyid pa dang/ char chu dus su bab pa'i gnyer dtad gyi ched du/ ... mchod 'bul rnams kyang bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i sgo gnas/ bgyis pa'i legs tshogs zab mo dang bstun/ khyed 'tsho chen brgyad pa'i dpa' mdzangs pa rnams rkyang/ dgra la ngom pa'i dpa' chas gos lham, stod gos ... gri ring gri thung me mda' ... la sogs pa'i dpal chas lha'i dmag dpon khyab 'jug chen po'i dka' bskul dang/ phur bu'i blo gros zung du 'brel ba'i sgo nas/ ... rnam shas rlangs pa mi sdug pa'i gzugs rjes su 'gro bas/ pha rol pa'i dgra la ngag mi snyan pa'i sgra khol ba/ sems snying rje med par gtum pas srid pa gsum po za bar chas pa lta bu/ dpa' rtsal sna tshogs pa'i sgo nas/ ... bstan pa'i dgra bgegs thams cad thal ba'i rdul phran bzhin du brlags pa'i sems dang ldan pa'i sgo nas 'gro dgos pa'i khar/ phyir 'thon nas kyang gzhan smod 'ur lang ma byed par/ ... skad gdang bar ma chad par/ dgra lha dgyes pa'i phywa dang hur gyis gnam sa gang ba lta bu'i tshul gyis 'gro dgos shing/ ... go mtshon phur gdan sa la bzhag pa sogs dgra lha nyams pa'i bya ba mi mdzes pa/ ... nang du 'dzul skabs kyang bdud kyi gyul las brgyal ba lha'i ba dan dkar po srid rtser bsgrengs te/ ...

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