



# BHUTAN

Land of Spirituality and Modernization  
Role of Water in Daily Life

Dieter Zürcher and Kunzang Choden



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With a Foreword by Her Majesty, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck

Bhutan has a landscape of incredible beauty with stunning Himalayan glacier peaks, lavishly forested mountains and lush subtropical wetlands. The unique and vibrant culture of Bhutan is based on its main religion, Buddhism. Water has played an all-encompassing role in the lives of the Bhutanese, be it in religious rituals and ceremonies, in poetry and literature or in nutrition and hygiene. Water is a powerful aspect of the Bhutanese reality. The lives in the mountains are hinged on the duality of the waters – which can be tranquil and beneficial, and at the same time cause devastating floods and landslides.

This fascinating book, with excellent photographs, provides heretofore unknown and remarkable insights into the management of water resources in the Bhutanese society. The book introduces the reader to the Bhutanese perceptions and understandings of water in their abstract as well as their actual worlds. The reader is given a glimpse of the incredible wooden and chain bridges constructed centuries ago over torrential rivers, and ingenious traditional irrigation schemes on which the people of these mountains depended for their sustenance. Water was seen as an inexhaustible free gift of nature. But today, modern drinking water schemes and massive hydropower projects reveal the considerable economic and political value of water in Bhutan.

The book represents a colourful journey through the Kingdom of Bhutan and unravels fascinating aspects of its people and society. This Himalayan country has cautiously opened its doors to the outside world only a few decades ago. Through the role of water in the lives of the Bhutanese people, the book illustrates how a society in transition tries to cope in harmonising its religious and cultural heritage with the contemporary needs, regional politics and global influences.

There is an audio CD-ROM "Sounds of Water" which includes sounds, songs and a slide show that is displayed while using a CD-ROM drive in a PC.

*Dieter Zürcher worked for INFRAS, an environmental consultancy firm. In 1996, he joined Helvetas as a Desk Officer to Bhutan. Three years later, he changed from the Bhutan desk in Zürich to Thimphu, becoming Resident Co-ordinator of Helvetas and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation. His adoration and dedication was always with the mountains and its people, struggling for survival in harsh environments. His first photo book was published a few years back and depicted a portrait of a mountain area of Switzerland, the Goms.*

*Kunzang Choden was a teacher for many years and then worked for the United Nations Development Programme in Bhutan as a programme officer in charge of the projects in the social sector. She has published two books on Bhutanese folklore – Folktales from Bhutan and Bhutanese Tales of the Yeti. She is the first Bhutanese writer to chronicle Bhutan's oral tradition in English. Presently, she lives in Bumthang where she dedicates her time to writing. She also continues to research and document Bhutanese folklore and culture.*

Amazing Bridges



ISBN 1 932705 43 0  
2004

145 Colour Pics.  
Hardbound

160 pp + CD-ROM  
CHF 65.-/ US \$ 48/ €42+ shipping costs.

Water in Buddhism



The Dawn of Hydropower



Sacred Lakes and  
Ferocious Rivers



Water in Daily Life



Irrigation is the Backbone  
of Rural Livelihood



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