Up until 1999 neither television nor internet was established in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan and therefore no film making scene existed. Films were mainly imported from abroad like India (e.g. Bollywood blockbusters). This changed after the introduction of TV and the internet. Bhutanese films became fashionable and a film making industry slowly emerged. Today 6 cinemas in Thimphu and 3 in other districts screen movies. Some 500 Bhutanese are engaged in film making which includes pre- and post-production work.

Khyentse Norbu represents an internationally renowned film director of Bhutan and his most recent film „Hema Hema“ was shown as World Premiere at the Locarno Film Festival in 2016. Apart from him, several young and independent film makers, like Dechen Roder, who has just won a price at the International Film Festival in Fribourg 2017, made their successful appearances at international film festivals. These films have in common a strong bond to the Bhutanese culture and traditions, with particular reference to Buddhism and its rituals and symbols. Khyentse Norbu very aptly said: “For centuries Buddhism has adopted the method of statues and artistic representation in order to express messages of compassion, love and wisdom. Film could be seen as a modern-day thangka (a traditional Buddhist painting) as it is one of the most powerful mediums that we have today.” Most Bhutanese documentaries, short and feature films have a strong Bhutanese narrative structure that makes them distinct form western-style movies and they make intensive use of religious and spiritual metaphors.

The main motivation for the Society Switzerland-Bhutan (SSB) in collaboration with the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich to organise the first Bhutan Film Days in Zurich (27.1.-29.1.2017) was to provide a glimpse of the contemporary film making in Bhutan, focusing on independent and innovative feature movies. Four prominent Bhutanese film makers were invited and shared their experiences with the audience: Lhaki Dolma, Karma Tshering, Jamyang Jamtsho Wangchuk and Loday Chophel. The short and feature films were screened and all screenings were sold out already in advance. The Bhutanese film makers offered interesting insights and background information about the film making conditions in Bhutan. Despite the boom and professionalisation of the industry, also as a result of the national film awards, the funding and post-production facilities for local film makers are still very challenging and not well developed owing to a relatively small market. One of the visiting film makers confessed that film making in...
Bhutan is rather a very expensive hobby than big business. I would like to take this opportunity to again thank all Bhutanese visitors, Corine Mauch, the Mayor of the city of Zurich, for her opening speech and the numerous spectators, sponsors as well as helpers in making the Bhutan Film days such a great success.

In 2016, the SSB has decided to dedicate each of the half-yearly newsletters to a specific thematic topic and therefore it was felt that the revealing experiences of the Bhutan Film Days in Zurich provide an interesting subject to illustrate the emerging Bhutanese film industry. We are glad to present a few articles that demonstrate the progress and challenges of the Bhutan film makers. Enjoy reading this first thematic newsletter!

At the weekend of January 27 to January 29 2017 the Society Switzerland-Bhutan and the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich invited the interested public to the first “Bhutan Film Days in Zurich”. The three-day programme included 14 recently produced films – feature films, documentaries, short and animation films. Most of the films were produced by a younger generation of Bhutanese film makers, four of which were here. It was a great pleasure and an honour to welcome Loday Chophel, Jamyang Jamthso Wangchuk, Karma Tshering and Lhaki Dolma as guests to our museum.

All of the selected films showed evidence of an independent Bhutanese film making scene which has been developing since 1999 – not following the Bollywood style. They deal with various familiar topics like love or religion, while at the same time connecting them with another main theme: the drive of modernisation with its ongoing influence on
Bhutanese society. But to think that the films only aim at complaining about these developments and criticizing them as a mere threat to traditional life would run completely contrary to the intention of the directors and producers. In fact, while taking advantage of the possibilities given by technical progress, they use the medium of film for storytelling. In an interview given in February 2015, Khyentse Norbu put this essential characteristic shared by all of the films shown into the following words: „We cannot avoid technology – it’s already at the doorstep, if not already inside our house. So instead of allowing these things to influence us, the wise thing to do is make use of their power and speed—to be the influence rather than the influenced [...]. Every culture has a different way of telling a story. In its 2,500-year history, we can see that Buddhism has adopted many methods of expressing the dharma—through painting, sculpture, architecture, performing arts. Thus there is an old tradition in Buddhism of using images, and film can do that, too. Why not? For me, film can be modern day thangka."

The stories, either real or invented, centre round human and social life, harmony and tension in a changing society, and they critically reflect the lights and shadows of modernity. But, at the same time, they are also created with the intention of „bringing positive change“, as Loday Chophel articulates his personal stimulus for making films. This might be another common feature shared by all films screened, whether they were short or long, rather simple or complex, serious, humorous, or melancholic. They have given insights into current issues and challenges of a quickly changing society, and they have demonstrated how young filmmakers use the media of film to critically deal with and reflect old and new topics. Seen in this way, a love story like „Karma the destiny“ is not only a love story, and a mask film like „Hema Hema“ is much more than just a – nota bene – imagined ritual. They are also, and above all, stories of memory, break-up, and identity, to mention only three aspects. And they are vivid expressions of searching and finding one’s one role and position as an integral part in this process of change. It was encouraging to see that the auditorium with its 120 seats was sold out for all six blocks. Many spectators opted for the festival pass indicating their strong cultural bonds with Bhutan.

It was a great enrichment and a privilege of having had the opportunity to become immersed in the thought and emotional world of young Bhutanese filmmakers for three full days. On behalf of the Ethnographic Museum and the audience I would like to thank you dear Lhaki Dolma, Jamyang Jamtsho Wangchuk, Loday Chophel and Karma Tshering for coming and for your engagement. I wish all of you courage, patience, and the power of imagination and inspiration to carry on with your important and innovative work.

Dr. Martina Wernsdörfer, Curator South-, Central-, and East Asia, Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zurich
Movie making in the isolated kingdom is strenuous business. Not only do you have to teach yourself the filmmaking basics, but you must lug a makeshift cinema from village to village to reach Bhutan’s movie-loving population. Despite the lack of infrastructure, Bhutan’s 25-year-old industry is thriving, with audiences in one of the most remote countries on earth flocking to homegrown movies that blend Bollywood with traditional Buddhist teachings.

“Currently, it takes us a year to cover the country for screenings. I used to do it myself all the time, now I send my staff,” Wangyel told AFP in the capital Thimphu. “Last year, my boys took a car, a screen, a tent, a projector, tickets - they went from district to district, setting up a makeshift cinema in each venue or using school auditoriums.”

Many of the industry’s directors and actors also have to juggle their passion for cinema with day jobs as soldiers, monks, even politicians. Wangyel began his career in government, but the avid Bollywood fan, who grew up in a country where Indian musicals were a staple, always had movies on his mind. “I was living this mundane 9-to-5 life when I decided to make my first film: a love triangle about two college kids falling for the same girl,” Wangyel said. Three of his friends acted in the 1999 production and contributed $5,000 each towards the shoestring budget. Wangyel, then an official in the ministry of agriculture, wrote the screenplay and handled the camera, sound and lighting. He also made Bhutan’s first musical number, lifting the melody from a popular Indian film and convincing his cousins to serve as backup dancers.

He released the flick, “Rawa” (Hope), in Thimphu’s only cinema, the crumbling, rat-infested Lugar, currently under renovation. By the time he made his second, he realised that while production was a challenge, distribution was an ordeal, requiring filmmakers to carry generators, fuel and screening equipment from village to village. Forty movies later, he says distribution continues to be a slog, handicapping the industry’s growth. The long wait for screenings has also fuelled a thriving piracy industry, with impatient audiences eager to watch illegal copies of the Dzongkha-language films.

Despite these challenges, however, the industry has expanded substantially, with annual output jumping from three films a decade ago to 15 films this year.
Bollywood influence

Each year, it attracts new entrants like aspiring director Killey Tshering, who turned a friend’s bungalow into a film set and secured funds from a cousin, all to make his debut venture, „Nga Dha Choe“ (You and Me). „Filmmaking in Bhutan is a community enterprise -- friends lend their houses, relatives give you money, everyone helps out on set,“ Tshering, 27, told AFP on the sidelines of his shoot. The popularity of local films has seen fans give the boot to Bollywood productions, which are rarely shown these days in Bhutan’s handful of cinemas after dominating screens for decades. However, the influence of the Mumbai-based industry on its Bhutanese counterpart is unmistakable. Although a small number of Bhutanese films, including 1999’s „The Cup“, directed by a Tibetan Buddhist lama, have found critical and commercial success overseas, viewers at home prefer movies with a dose of song and dance. „If a film is too artistic or realistic, it won’t work. Our audiences like a formula - it must include songs, dances, humour and tears,“ Wangyel said. Critics blame Bhutan’s isolation, which only allowed access to television in 1999, and its limited exposure to world cinema for the formulaic but commercially successful productions.

„The sad part is we say we are so proud of our culture but then you look at our films, it’s like we have picked up a broken piece of mirror from Bollywood’s vanity case,“ said independent filmmaker Tashi Gyeltshen. But with movies based on Buddhist legends and actors usually dressed in traditional clothing -- the wrap-around „gho“ for men and fitted ankle-length „kira“ for women -- Bhutanese cultural identity lies at their heart. Plotlines often portray a clash between tradition and modernity, with conservatism getting the last word as characters hold forth on the importance of prayer and background chants urge viewers to be good Buddhists. Gyeltshen, whose short film „The Red Door“ screened at the Rotterdam film festival this year, told AFP the relentless push to promote tradition while imitating Bollywood formula risked creating „a cultural desert“ for future generations. „We are wallowing in past glory ... we are not creating anything in terms of leaving a legacy,“ Gyeltshen said. „Everyone in Bhutan talks about the preservation of culture - but if you don’t create, what will you preserve?“
BHUTANESE FILM INDUSTRY - A PLOT OF PASSION AND PERSEVERANCE

Lhaki Dolma and Dorji Wangchuk

The Birth

Bhutan’s most sacred relic is Rangjung Kharsapani – a self-emanated image of the Buddha of Compassion out of a bone relic of the great yogi, Tsangpa Gyare. The relic is believed to bestow upon the holder and the place the miracle of Buddha dharma and culture to flourish.

To a far lesser extent, the Bhutanese film industry shares that similarity. It emanated on its own without the conventional approach followed in Bhutan, whereby the government initiates or supports almost everything. Out of genuine passion and stubborn motivations, in 1988, two filmmakers - Chimi Dorji and Ugyen Wangdi, had a story, an idea, a shoe-string budget and a rudimentary VHS camera and Gasa Lamai Singye (Gasa Lam’s Singye) was made. The casts were mostly friends and acquaintances, whom the two director-producers could bully into the roles. Few had acted in prior stage productions while the female lead was a police officer in real life, who happened to be voted Miss Thimphu in the first and only beauty pageant. Still, the film is a classic among Bhutanese film makers and provided that can-do mentality to Bhutanese people that they could have their own cinema.

That’s the main plot of the so-called Bhutanese film industry. “So-called” because it is still waiting for the industry status from the government. Meanwhile, 30 years on, this self-emanated film industry not only went on to win a couple of international recognitions, it churns out on average 25 films a year and has successfully managed to kick out both Hollywood and Bollywood from the local market – a feat that would make any nation green with envy.

The Context and Background

Bhutan lies sandwiched between India and China. Weary of hundreds of centuries of foreign invasions by the Tibetans, Mongols and the British - between the 17th and the 19th century, the country remained in a self-imposed isolation. The geopolitical situation in the mid-twentieth century, however, forced the country to open and adopt the modernisation process. It found a formidable ally in India that supported the development plans and programmes. Together with the interactions between these two countries came the influence and popularity of the Indian cinema nicknamed as Bollywood.

For much of the last decades of the twentieth century the Bhutanese audience were not only glued to Hindi cinema, they also grew up with its songs, its dances and melodies. Little wonder that the Bhutanese films have songs and cassettes flooded Thimphu’s main street of Norzin Lam.

Bollywood reigned supreme in all the six cinema halls across the country and occasionally some Hollywood titles would be screened in Thimphu and in Phuntsholing, Bhutan’s second biggest town.

Enter the Dragon

Although it was Gasai Lami Singye that pioneered commercial-feature filmmaking in Bhutan, the Bhutanese audience had to wait for the second movie, Phama (Parents) in 1995 by Pelden Dorji. Two years later, the third film, Jigdrel by Norling Productions, became what can be termed as, in cinema jargon, a blockbuster. While the earlier two films were either folktales or socially driven stories, Jigdrel was fiction following the western storytelling structure of the journey of a hero. The film captivated the Bhutanese audience and could be considered as the film that established the Bhutanese film industry. Twenty years on, in 2017, over 300 films have been produced by this self-emanated industry: a true miracle in its own rights.Jigdrel also inspired a generation to take up filmmaking.
An association was formed. Its first goal was to have film awards, which came to fruition in 2001, when by then it was averaging six films a year. Chepai Bhu (Beloved Son) by Karma Tshering swept almost all the awards.

By the turn of the century, the Bhutanese films had not only entered the market but had also successfully dislodged the foreign cinema that had been playing for decades since the first cinema hall was built in 1969. Producers, however, faced numerous challenges. Financing through credits facilities from the banks was not, and still is not available. Over and above the business tax (around 30%) an entertainment tax is levied on each ticket sold. The association has filed several proposals and appeals, most of which go to deaf ears.

The Royal Gesture
Still, while the policy makers either scramble or live in total deference, His Majesty the King conferred the National Order of Merit to the film industry in 2009. Further, proper development plans are to be charted out. Two studies to assess the status of the industry were commissioned by the Royal Office for Media in 2009 and 2010. The reports of the assessment studies recommended, among others, the formulation of a national film policy, a national film institute and national film development fund. A plot of land was also allocated for the film association to develop its headquarters in the heart of the capital city of Thimphu. The royal gesture was further complimented by the technological developments in the industry itself. The digital revolution meant that with a small home camera and a laptop you have the technical means to start a production. That was a huge blessing compared to the million-dollar investment one had to make in the early days of cinema. By the early 2000s, many Bhutanese filmmakers bought affordable digital video equipment from Singapore or Thailand and production houses mushroomed in the capital city. To be fair to the government bureaucrats, a one-time waiver on import taxes was granted to each production house.

Looking Ahead
The current government, recognising the “socio-cultural value of the film that can engage the society in meaningful debates and discussion, forge national identity, and brand Bhutan internationally” has formulated and passed the national film policy. This policy also appreciates the industry as vital for Bhutan, a nation in pursuit of Gross National Happiness. The policy also mentions that “a strong film industry can be enormous on all the four pillars of Gross National Happiness: sustainable economic development, preservation and promotion of culture, conservation of environment, and good governance.

Furthermore, in 2017 thanks to a bid to improve the quality of Bhutanese films through financial incentives, the film association instituted the Prime Ministers Award, that consisted of a cash prize of one million Ngultrums (CHF 16,000) for each of the three best films.

The construction that will house the headquarters and production studios will start soon and new cinema halls in all the twenty district centres are in the pipeline. Above all, the film fraternity continues to receive the goodwill and public engagements from His Majesty the King.
No national celebration goes without the performances and items from the industry. Besides, artists and actors, who are now household names, are engaged in social and solidarity concerts in times of disasters and tragedies. Both in times of celebration and in times of sorrow, the members of the film industry are present.

Meanwhile, this home-grown and self-emancipated industry continues to provide the miracles and magic by bringing untold stories into the cinematic narratives. It won’t be long when this magic will be shared with cine goers and enthusiasts from all over the world.

The movie “Hema Hema: Sing me a song while I wait”, is directed by the most known and award winning Bhutanese film maker, Khyentse Norbu (Rinpoche). He directed famous movies such as “The Cup” (1999), “Travellers and Magicians” (2003), “Hema Hema” (2016) being his fourth film. His latest film had its world Premiere at the Locarno Film Festival in August 2016 and was subsequently screened in other international festivals such as Busan, London, Toronto, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong to only mention a few. This film won several awards and special mentions. The plot enrols somewhere deep in a Bhutanese forest. There is a secret gathering every twelve years to celebrate anonymity. Masked, the men and women participate in ancient rituals and dances from the full moon to the new moon. The large group has been specifically chosen by an old leader “Agay”, but his reasons remain mysterious. Having given up their identities, the chosen persons are playful and lascivious in the lush mountain nature. But not all here is fun. There is harsh punishment for those who break the rules, those who succumb to the temptation of letting others know who they are or those who are too curious about others. Cliques form and invite deception, seduction and jealousy. “Expressionless” attends this festival for the first time. Like a new born, he stumbles clumsily through his first few days, but quickly adapts. When he spots “Red Wrathful”, he becomes intoxicated with desire for her: a desire that will lead him down a dangerous path. It is a courageous movie linking modern day social media reality with Buddhist rituals and which believes in the transition phases after death, referred to as bardo. The colourful, exotic and mysterious movie unfolds in a

THE “HEMA HEMA” CASE

Dieter Zürcher

The movie „Hema Hema: Sing me a song while I wait“, is directed by the most known and award winning Bhutanese film maker, Khyentse Norbu (Rinpoche). He directed famous movies such as “The Cup” (1999), “Travellers and Magicians” (2003), “Hema Hema” (2016) being his fourth film. His latest film had its world Premiere at the Locarno Film Festival in August 2016 and was subsequently screened in other international festivals such as Busan, London, Toronto, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong to only mention a few. This film won several awards and special mentions. The plot enrols somewhere deep in a Bhutanese forest. There is a secret gathering every twelve years to celebrate anonymity. Masked, the men and women participate in ancient rituals and dances from the full moon to the new moon. The large group has been specifically chosen by an old leader “Agay”, but his reasons remain mysterious. Having given up their identities, the chosen persons are playful and lascivious in the lush mountain nature. But not all here is fun. There is harsh punishment for those who break the rules, those who succumb to the temptation of letting others know who they are or those who are too curious about others. Cliques form and invite deception, seduction and jealousy. „Expressionless“ attends this festival for the first time. Like a new born, he stumbles clumsily through his first few days, but quickly adapts. When he spots „Red Wrathful“, he becomes intoxicated with desire for her: a desire that will lead him down a dangerous path. It is a courageous movie linking modern day social media reality with Buddhist rituals and which believes in the transition phases after death, referred to as bardo. The colourful, exotic and mysterious movie unfolds in a
spectacular scenery, which was cast with a pure Bhutanese crew of several hundred people that had no prior film making background or experience. The play around issues of identity and anonymity unfolds while the actors wear traditional and artistic masks. Actually, most of the masks were made especially for the film but for the bardo dances original masks were used. The storyline of the movie is straightforward but complex at the same time because it has no major dialogues among actors, it contains many metaphors that are very symbolic for Buddhism and because it plays in a transition of time as the past has been gone and the future has not yet arrived. This creates a status of complete illusion. This persistent reference to past experience and future planning creates hope and fear, which in turn generate unfounded assumptions, grasping, clinging, aggression, and paranoia. All these aspects we suffer in the bardo phases, as the film tries to show. Khyentse Norbu, being a Rinpoche (reincarnation) himself, has a western movie education as background and also supervises a monastery in Eastern Bhutan. He published books about being a (non) Buddhist. He is certainly the ideal director for such a delicate movie and he wanted to provide young Bhutanese with an artistic platform. It is not easy for Westerners to understand the plot and possibly it has to be considered rather as a piece of Bhutanese art than a traditional movie. It is this unfamiliar approach and perspective that makes it intriguing and challenging to understand. Yet it is considered a real Bhutanese narrative and as such an innovative contribution to world cinema, which is reflected in its wide screenings at international film festivals in the past months.

In December 2016 the movie was supposed to be shown at the cinemas in Thimphu. The screening was, however, barred and it was declared, that the movie “is not keeping with the Bhutanese culture and tradition” (especially the use of the masks was seen as problematic). Later, the Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA) declared that the issue of masks was not the main issue but that the movie did not follow the required procedures (e.g. getting a clearance on the use of masks). The agency also filed a case against the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) because they aired a story about the barred film on television. The issue started to get really complex and involved Parliament as well as the Prime Minister. BBS refused to pay the fine for informing about “Hema Hema” and has accused BICMA of obstructing the BBS mandate to inform the public. The mutual accusations now occupy various committees and courts and as a result, the film remains barred from screening in Bhutan. Thus, the discussions about cultural identity, press freedom and where the bottom line lies for an optimal functioning of oversight institutions and censorship needs to be discussed and sorted out in a society that is rapidly transforming from a previous Buddhist kingdom to a modern democracy. Hopefully, the freedom of expression, especially for such artistic work, will become accepted.

Dieter Zürcher, member of the SSB Board and coordinator of the working group that organised the Bhutan Film Days

Still photograph from the movie “Hema Hema”
Almost similar in size and landscape, Bhutan and Switzerland’s relationship dates back to the early 1950s. Both countries are landlocked situated between big powerful neighbours. I have learnt that Switzerland is one of the most important bilateral development partners for Bhutan through programmes of the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation as well as Helvetas. The Bhutanese film industry is at its early stage and it is growing fast. As we venture into new ways of story-telling through films, it is very important for a story teller to understand the views and ideas of different cultures and lifestyles. The Bhutan Film Days in Zurich were held at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich. The event highlighted the bond and friendship the two countries have shared over the years and also promoted Bhutanese films and artists globally. The Bhutan Film Days in Zurich was a very important event, rather a platform, for upcoming Bhutanese film-makers and our film-industry. It gives us opportunities to showcase our work of art to a wide range of viewers. The event was attended by many people from Switzerland and other countries. All the films were well received at the event, and audiences showed keen interest in getting to know more about Bhutan, its film-makers and its people. We interacted with the audience during question and answer sessions, also discussed important topics and learned more about social issues in different societies. We shared views and ideas with the audience and managed to understand more about their culture and lifestyle. Through these sessions after the screening we were also able to give the viewers a better understanding of our films. Such events are very important for Bhutanese film makers in order to understand the art of story-telling and to meet international standards. Films have become a very powerful medium for mass communication. The artists have an important role to play in society. A film has powerful influence on its viewers, and therefore, it is the film-maker’s responsibility to make films that not only entertain but also show social needs and values. During our stay in Switzerland we visited the film institute at the University of Zurich, where we got the opportunity to see their standard of film-making. We also visited historical places and learned more about Swiss culture and lifestyle. All in all, it was a wonderful experience, the warmth and sweet nature of Swiss people made us feel like home. I take this opportunity to thank the Society Switzerland Bhutan, the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich and every individual I have met at the event, thank you all very much. I wish the Society Switzerland Bhutan a very glorious and successful journey ahead. I pray that the Bhutan Film Days in Zurich continue into the future and will grow.

Tashidelek Phuntsumtshog!

Still photograph from the movie “The Prophecy”
ACTIVE

NEWS FROM SSB

Marianne Frei, President

SSB General Assembly and SDC Panel Discussion

On March 11, 2017, SSB conducted its General Assembly at the Generationen Haus in Berne. Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji (President BSS Thimphu), Dasho Neten Zangmo (former chairperson of the Anti-corruption Commission), OL Dr. Pema Gyamtsho and several Bhutanese citizens living or studying in Switzerland honoured the Society with their presence and with their contributions. Jigme Drukpa, the famous Bhutanese musician, created a special atmosphere at the event with his performance. At the formal meeting, the SSB members elected Franz Gähwiler (Programme Coordinator Himalaya at HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation) as a new board member to replace E. Werner Külling, who earlier had submitted his resignation. The audience gave Mr. Külling a long and warm applause appreciating his active support to the development of the Society during the last seven years. In the afternoon, SDC invited to a panel discussion. A large audience joined the public event commemorating the end of SDCs involvement in Bhutan by December 2016. H.E. Ambassador Kinga Singye, Dasho Neten Zangmo, Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji, Rudolf Dannecker and Matthias Meier discussed the topic “Deepening Democracy in Bhutan – The Contribution of SDC”. The day closed with a reception, giving time for meeting and sharing.

SSB School Programme

SSB will continue with the School Children’s Programme in 2017 in six primary schools in remote areas:

Primary-Schools in Tradjjong (since 2011), Barpong (since 2012) and Kagtong (since 2013) in Zhemgang
Primary-Schools in Yaragla (since 2013), Tashibi (since 2013) an (since 2016) in Mongar

Bhutan Switzerland Society Thimphu (BSS) is implementing the programme. This year, an impact evaluation will be carried out in three of the schools by BSS with officials of the Ministry of Education and the Dzongkhag Administration. The Pilot Bakery Project in Bjoka (Zhemgang) will be evaluated as well.

New SSB Members

A very warm welcome to our news members!

Lisa Bounoure and Nicolas Perony, Zurich
Sylvia Egli von Matt and Hans Kaspar von Matt, Lucerne
Emanuel Flückiger, Locarno
Marie-Louise Gachnang, Freienwil
Hildegard Lucia and Hans Gygax, Fribourg
Denise Lüthi Crisan, Berne

EVENTS IN SWITZERLAND IN 2017

Fittes Bhutan? Sportförderung

On Friday, June 9, SSB member Alain Dössegger presented the topic “Fittes Bhutan? Sportförderung im Land des Donnerdrachens” at the Songtsen House in Zurich. Alain Dössegger talked about his experiences and observations after spending a few months in Bhutan with his family on invitation of the Bhutan Olympic Committee BOC to support the further development and organisation of the sports sector. The interesting presentation was followed by a lively discussion.

Gross National Happiness GNH

Wednesday, September 6, Dr. Tho Ha Vinh (Programme Director GNH Centre) in Berne: “Die inneren und äusseren Bedingungen des Glücks: was wir von Bhutan lernen können” The presentation and discussion on Gross National Happiness GNH and its relevance for other countries besides Bhutan, e.g. for countries like Switzerland, will be held in German. Dr. Tho will discuss the question: Could it be that our society needs a reorientation towards happiness and well-being for all people and for all forms of life and not only on economic growth, profit and consumption? The presentation will be also open to the general public. Further details: www.bhutan-switzerland.org.
BHUTAN RED CROSS SOCIETY (BRCS) LAUNCH EVENT

Dragyel Tenzin Dorjee, Acting Secretary General BRCS

After a journey of almost 10 years, the Bhutan Red Cross Society (BRCS) was launched on World Red Cross Red Crescent Day on May 8 in Thimphu with the blessings from Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen, President of BRCS. The date is a significant day for the Red Cross because it is the birth anniversary of Henry Dunant who was born on 8 May, 1828.

BRCS strives to establish a network of volunteers and members in communities throughout Bhutan to provide services in the areas of social services, health, and disaster risk management that are complimentary to those of the Royal Government and other organizations. Everyone will have the opportunity to join either as a volunteer, or a member, or a sponsor, or all of them.

BRCS is an autonomous and not-for-profit organization established under the Bhutan Red Cross Society Act 2016. It is a voluntary aid society with the following mandates: save lives, protect livelihoods, strengthen recovery from disasters; enable healthy and safe living; and to promote social inclusion and culture of care and protection. As a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, BRCS is part of a network with 190 countries.

OBITUARY: BHUTAN HAS LOST A LONGSTANDING TRUE FRIEND

E. Werner Külling

On March 11, 2017, Prof. Dr. med. Franz Hubert Rhomberg passed away peacefully in his residence in Zurich at the age of 90 after a very interesting, outstanding and challenging life. He was a true friend of Bhutan. Important citizens from Bhutan came to consult Dr. Rhomberg for medical and psychological help. His most important and dearest patient was the 3rd Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan, His Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who died in 1972 at the early age of 43. Franz Hubert Rhomberg was born in Austria in 1927. There he grew up and also completed his medical studies. During the Second World War, he was forced as a young man to serve as a soldier in the German army. He was lucky to survive these difficult times. After the war, he came to Zurich as a medical doctor, where he specialized in cardiology and eventually acquired Swiss citizenship. He worked together with Prof. Dr. Robert Hegglin at the university hospital in Zurich, where he first met the Royal Family of Bhutan. Prof. Dr. Rhomberg visited Bhutan many times and became a close friend and highly committed supporter of the country. The Ambassador of Bhutan, H. E. Kinga Singye, attended the ceremony in memory of Franz Hubert Rhomberg in Zurich to honour him and to express Bhutan’s gratitude towards him. Donations by the family, friends and colleagues in memory of Prof. Dr. Rhomberg will go the Bhutan Kidney Foundation. The most generous „Schurle“ Rhomberg will be fondly remembered for his warmth, his humour and his kindness.

Dr. Annemarie Huber-Hotz (Vice President of the International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent), Lyonchhen Dasho Tshering Tobgay, Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen (President of BRCS), Draygel Tenzin Dorjee (Acting Secretary General of BRCS)
FEEDBACK

We look forward to your feedbacks to the first focus theme about film making in Bhutan. The debate is launched, the forum is yours.

NEXT

Architecture in the Bhutanese Himalayas and the Swiss Alps

The next Newsletter (2/17) will focus on architecture. The topic includes a research about vernacular architectural principles in the Bhutanese Himalayas and the Swiss Alps. What are the similarities, what the differences in the geographical and cultural context? The essays approach today’s challenges in architecture, show best practice and discuss perspectives for a sustainable architecture in sensitive mountain areas.

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Zurich, January 2017, see you again! Photo Dieter Zürcher