

Legacies of Neyphug

<p>Author</p> <p>Thinley Namgay, Assistant Lecturer, Norbuling Rigter College.</p> <p>Key words:</p> <p>Gyalpo, Riba Chum, Neyphug Trulku</p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p><i>Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen (rgyal po dgung sngon mthon)</i> and <i>Za Rāhula</i> has influence on <i>Neyphug (gnas phug)</i> monastery and the lineages of <i>Neytruls (gnas sprul)</i>. These deities were also instrumental in the construction of communal traditions, most of which continues to prevail. These deities also had influence on <i>Riba Chum (ri ba chum)</i> and pattern of devotion of the community. Thus, this paper will study the affiliation among the deities, lineages of <i>Neytrul</i> and the local community and the legacies of <i>Neyphug</i>.</p>
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Background

There are no studies on *Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen* and *Za Rāhula* of *Neyphug*. Worse still, there is no one in the local community who has knowledge on the advent of the two deities at *Neyphug* monastery. However, since the first *Neytrul Yondgzin Ngawang Drakpa*¹ was a *Tertön (gter ston)*, treasure discoverer, a conclusion can be drawn that the first *Neytrul Trulku* could have invited *Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen* to protect the treasures and help him in propagating Dharma and consequently, the monastery becoming his abode.

The identity of *Gyalpo Gu-nyen Thaen* is also grey. The description² made by the owner³ of the *Ney khang (gnas khang)* and content of *Ser kyem (gser skyem)*, Golden drink offering reveal that *Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen* is *Gyalpo Pehar (rgyal po dpe har)*. This conclusion is grounded in the content of the *Serkyem* text where *Pehar* and his four manifestations are invoked.⁴

¹*Yondgzin Ngawang Drakpa* (1525-1599), the first *Neytrul* was the reincarnation of *Acharya Yeshe Yang* who was one of the main disciples of *Guru Rinpoche (Neyphug Monastery Website, 10 February 2022)*.

² The similarities are that of *Gyajin*, the mind manifestation riding elephant as *Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen* is also said to be riding an elephant and the source also added that he is the King of all the *Gyalpo* spirits that originated from *Samye of Tibet*. The dark skin color of *Mönbuputra*, the body form and wearing circular hat by all also resembles the description (Bell, 2013). The difference is specifically of what they hold in their hands, *Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen* is said to be holding a *Reldri* (a razor or sword) in the right and a human heart in the left which is different from all the five forms of *Pehar*.

³*Sangay Dorji*, 87 years old man from *Heyphug* under *Shaba Gewog*, *Paro* is the current owner of the *Neykhang*. He is the main source of information of this paper.

⁴The *Serkyem* starts by invoking the *Gyalchen (rgyal chen)*, King of *Gyalpo Ku Nga (sku nga)*, five forms.

Za Rāhula or *Rishi Rāhula* is also one of the main deities of *Neyphug*. Similar to *Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen*, there are no documents or oral information on how *Za Rāhula* became one of the main deities of *Neyphug* monastery. The only reliable oral source is the *Neyphug* website. According to this source, the Fourth *Neytrul Sangdag Nueden Dorji*, whose deed shaped the prominence of *Neyphug* today, is said to have accomplished control over *Za Rāhula* and obliged him to support *Neytrul* with his Dharma activities which eventually led to the rise in the fame of *Neytrul* (*Neyphug* website, 2022). This is one of the reasons why the *Za khang* (abode of *Za*) is in the main temple of *Neyphug* monastery unlike that of *Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaem*. The main temple also houses *Ma mo Ekajati (e ka dza ti)* who is mostly seen alongside *Damchen Dorji Legpa* and *Za Rāhula* forming the trio Dharma Protectors known as *Maza Damsum*⁵ (Nebesky Wojkowitz, 1975).

***Riba Chum* and *Neyphug* Affiliation**

The Fourth *Neytrul Sangdag Nueden Dorje* was a revered master who had the power to transform *Za Rāhula* and *Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen* into human form to work as his *Jow*⁶ (*rgyo va*). They were engaged by *Trulku (sprul sku)* to do house chores such as fetching water, cutting firewood and tanning of hides. The wrathful incident took place on one of those days when the two deities were made to tan hides by the *Trulku*.

Riba Chum has been one of the main patrons since the time of the first *Neytrul Yongdzin Ngawang Drakpa*. Therefore, the spiritual master patron bond continued for generations till now. It was during the time of the fourth *Neytrul Sangdag Nueden Dorje* that *Aum Riba Chum*, the rich lady of *Ribana (ri ba na)* village visited *Trulku* seeking *Tshe Wang* (blessing of longevity) for her fifteen year old daughter who was ill. During this occasion, *Aum* observed two dark men with muscular limbs, each carrying five cattle hides which were perfectly tanned. It is said that the *Gyalpo* and *Za* cannot be seen by ordinary people and would disappear no sooner human touches the handle of the door but that day, they did not disappear. It was a premonition of what would happen soon. *Aum Riba Chum* was amazed to see the quantity of many well tanned hides. In a normal situation, it would be difficult for an ordinary person to even tan a hide in a day. With excitement, *Aum Riba Chum* complimented the two *Jow* and requested *Trulku* to send them to her place since she had fifteen or sixteen cattle hides in the attic of her house to be tanned. *Trulku* did not tell *Aum* that the *Jow* were the deities *Za Rāhula* and *Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen*. He hesitantly told *Aum* that they would do anything but were quite particular over their meals as it had to be prepared clean and fresh and served following the etiquettes of serving honorable guests. *Trulku* further humorously commented that they were conceited in contrary to their hideous appearances. *Aum* assured that she will adhere to all the conditions as long as the work could be done. *Trulku* could not refuse his *Jinda*'s request so he agreed to send them and asked her keep the hides soaked in water. The two *Jow* reached the house of *Riba Chum* early on time and started tanning the hides. As instructed, *Aum Riba Chum* prepared clean and fresh food for breakfast and lunch. They completed tanning before sunset. When the two *Jow* were about to leave, *Aum* insisted them to have tea and food. She prepared fresh tea and prepared porridge from left over rice and curry. *Aum* thought that it might be acceptable to serve them porridge made from left over lunch since it was from the pot and not from anyone's plate. However, this infuriated the two as the food was not prepared fresh. So, when they left the house of

⁵ *ma gza' dam sum*

⁶ Male slave or servant of aristocratic family especially in western part of Bhutan.

Aum Riba Chum, they took along with them the *namshey (mam shes)*, vital principle of the fifteen year old daughter who died soon after they left. As promised, *Trulku* was on his way to *Aum Riba Chum's* house to bless the ill daughter. However, when he reached at a place called *Lang ta sa* he saw the two deities playfully juggling a human heart. *Trulku* understood that the ill girl had died and returned to the monastery. *Trulku* was so furious and he reprimanded the two on the way to the monastery for bringing shame to him. After reaching the monastery, *Trulku* threw everything out of the temple of the two deities including the *Katharp (bka' khrab)* and the statues and told them to leave the place. Whilst *Za Rahula* in tears went back inside his *Za Khang* of the monastery, *Gyalpo* who are generally ill-tempered, stayed outside near the *zar (gzar)*⁷ below the temple. On inquiry by the *Nyip* (store manager) of the *Trulku*, by the name *Nyip Gyeltshen*,⁸ the *Gyalpo* shared how their master condemned the two. *Nyip Gyeltshen* who was also not ordinary had the power to see spirits and ghosts and with just a glance understood that the devastated person near the *za* was the *Gyalpo Gu nyen Thaen* so he ushered the *Gyalpo* to his house, located just above the main temple known as *Goen Goma (mgon gong ma)*. Ever since, the *Gyalpo* resided at *Goen Goma* and to this day, on the 15th Day of third month of lunar calendar, hundreds of people from Punakha, Dagala, Haa, Thimphu and Paro come to offer annual offering *Soelkha (gsol kha)*. Those who were once patrons of *Trulku* continue to come to make their offer annually. There is a belief that if one goes to seek help from the *Gyalpo* or at *Neykhang* and offers *Nyendar (snyan dar)*, one must go there annually for offering otherwise the *Gyalpo* will bring harm. Though, there is still *Gyalpo khang* in the main temple of *Neyphug*, people consider the main adobe of *Gyalpo* as *Goen Goma*.

The story has another version⁹ which also is said to have occurred during the time of fourth *Neytrul*. This version claims that the child of *Aum Riba Chum* was rather an infant son and not a fifteen year old girl. When *Aum Riba Chum* went to the monastery to make her annual offering to the deities, she witnessed the extraordinary strength the two deities displayed while tanning the hides when they were in their human form. Hereafter, the story is same as the former version till the two exasperated deities took the vital principle of the infant boy. In this version, on being pleaded by *Aum Riba Chum*, the *Trulku* took back the soul from the deities and restored the vital principle of the infant son. As a mark of gratitude, the family of *Riba Chum* promised to offer the morning tea to the monks when they start to chant the prayers of longevity on the last day of *Heyphug Mani (he phug ma ni)*, annual festival of *Hyephug*. Since then, this tradition continues.

Dho-shep (zlog bshad pa)*¹⁰ of *Heyphug (he phug)

The *Dho-shep* of *Heyphug* were once the most renowned and most awaited by the people of *Paro*. The history of *Dho shep* of *Neyphug* dates back to the time of the Fourth *Neytrul Sangdag Nueden Dorje* who played a significant role during the last

⁷Traditional water pipe

⁸*Nyip Gyeltshen* is from the house of second *Neytrul Sangag Gyaltshen* (1600-1661). The second *Neytrul* is said to have a son from *Nyip Gyaltshen's* house and so the lineage thereafter continued and the one who looks after (usually man) the *Neykhang* is addressed as 'lama' (spiritual master) even if not an accomplished Buddhist master. The current lineage holder is *Sangay Dorji*, 87, who is mentioned as the main source of this study.

⁹ This part is narrated by *Sangay Dorji*, 80, from *Riba Chum's house*.

¹⁰ *Dho -shey* or sometimes *Dho tse drup* is a culture of four monks or lay monks going around the houses and chanting prayers to protect from misfortune.

Tibetan invasion of 1730-32. During this period, Bhutan was in deep political chaos so the combined forces of the Tibetans and the Mongolians took advantage of the situation and led an invasion (Phuntsho, 2013, 321-323). The 10th *Desi Mipham Wangpo*, the then reigning political leader consulted the astrologers for solution. The astrologers advised to seek help from *Neyphug Trulku* as there was already a history of former *Neyphug Trulku* helping the country in overcoming Tibetan invasions by performing rituals. On invitation of the government, *Trulku* went to Punakha and performed a national level wrathful ritual of *Za Rāhula* at Punakha that exhibited petrifying invocations of power and deterred all Tibetan attacks.¹¹ This invasion was the last Tibetan attempt to invade Bhutan. Thereafter, *Trulku* earned huge respect from the government and people, especially from the people of *Paro* region. Karma Phuntsho (2013) also mentions that a national ritual was performed at *Punakha Dzong* during the 1730-32 invasions of the combined forces of the Tibetans and the Mongolians. The Bhutanese were victorious.

Thereafter, the people of *Paro*, including the nomadic people residing in the high altitude, flocked to *Neyphug* monastery to offer *sa-phue* (*gsar phul*).¹² In due time, *Trulku* realized the plight of those who had to walk from faraway places. Therefore, the *Trulku* told his faithful subjects that he will send his disciples along with his prayers every year to each household of *Paro* to do *Dho tse dup* (*zlog tshe sgrub*) and told them that they can give his disciples whatever they wished to offer. As promised, *Trulku* sent three to four groups of four disciples in each group every year around *Paro* performing *Dho tse dup* in every household. *Do shey* takes around 10-12 days depending on the number of *Do shep*. It is performed from the 18th day to the 29th day of the 10th month of the Bhutanese calendar, just before *Lomba* (*lo 'bag*), New Year festival of *Paro* and *Haa*. There were other groups of *Do shep* from *Paga Gewog* under *Chukha Dzongkhag*, *Haa* and Tibet but *Do shep* from *Neyphug* were the most wished for by the people mainly because of *Trulku's* reputation¹³.

Oral sources also recount that the disciples of *Trulku* had to go to perform *Do shey* because they could not cultivate paddy around *Neyphug* monastery due to high altitude. This was a wise approach initiated by *Trulku* to ensure the sustainability of his disciples and their families¹⁴.

Unfortunately, this rich and once much cherished culture of *Do shey* instituted during the time of Fourth *Neytrul Sangdag Neuden Dorji* has now vanished as a result of economic development. After hereditary monarchy was established in 1907, the culture of *Dho shey* gradually vanished resulting from the abolishment of harsh taxes including *Ongyi thoja*¹⁵ (*gyul kyi thog rgyau*). Thus, with the abolishment of *Ongyi thoja*, the burden on the disciples was reduced and they were not compelled to go for *Do shey*. The other reason for its decline is the emergence of more *Dho shep* from different parts of the country leading to less regard for the tradition by the people, the clients. The last reason for the decline of this rich tradition is the social stigmatisation

¹¹ Sangay Dorji, 87, interviewed on 23 January 2022

¹² 'sa' means new and 'phue' means offering. *Saphue* is a tradition, popular in western and central part of Bhutan, where people after harvesting season would go to temples and aristocratic families for offering.

¹³ Sangay Dorji, 87, interviewed on 23 January 2022.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ A local term used for cereal taxes that was imposed on farmers before establishment of hereditary monarchy in 1907 (Ura & Kinga, 2004, pp. 6-8).

of *Dho shey* as a way of livelihood which discouraged the younger generation to continue¹⁶.

Heyphug Mani (he phug ma ni)

The annual festival of *Heyphug* Monastery also known as *Heyphug Mani* takes place from 6th to 15th Day of the 3rd Month of Bhutanese calendar. The festival starts with rituals dedicated to the Seventh *Neyphug Trulku Namdrol Dorji* as it coincides with his death anniversary on the 6th Day. This is followed by a day of making sacrificial cakes for the Bumdey, annually ritual which includes half day ritual of *Chenrezig* (*Avalokitesvara*) and half day of ritual for *Lama Gongdu* (*blama' dgongs 'dus*) and *Choe sung Damchay Jamtsho* (*chos srung dam can rgya mtsho*) from the 8th till 14th day. The 13th and 14th day also has in-house dance where the monks perform without masks. The last day is eventful as many people flock at *Neyphug*, particularly from *Paro*, *Haa*, *Thimphu*, *Dagala* and *Punakha*. The mask dances known as *Mong cham* (*mong 'cham*) are considered the most sacred which include mask dances of *Ngak sum* (*sngags srungm*),¹⁷ *Dang so* (*Za*) and *Gyalpo*. Other mask dances such as *Zhana* (*zhava nag*), *Dur dha* (*dur bdag*), *Shin jay* (*gshin rge*), and *Pholay Molay* (*pho legs mo legs*) which are considered to be introduced only later are performed along with traditional dances of *Zhung dra* (*gzhung Sgra*) and *Boe dra* (*bod sgra*) by the men and women of *Heyphug*. Each household of *Heyphug* serves as *Tsow* (*tsho bo*), the organisers of the festival on rotational basis. The *Tsow* manages the whole event including collection of mandatory contribution for the festival.¹⁸

Gyan-daoe (rgyal mdos) and Den cho (gdon mchod)¹⁹

*Gyan dao*e is conducted by most of the households in *Paro* and *Haa* dedicating to the *Gyalpo* that their parents have once taken refuge in. The *Gyan dao*e made in honor of *Neyphug Gyalpo* should be sacrificed facing *Neyphug* monastery. If the *Gyan dao*e is not conducted, people and domestic animals will suffer from misfortune and sickness.²⁰

When people or their animals fall ill, there is also a culture of performing *Den cho* which is propitiating the spirits including the *Gyalpo*. It is prepared by making effigies of *Gyalpo* with a wheat dough, offering of fresh food and are sacrificed facing *Heyphug* monastery with prayers for protection. A promise to come for annual offering is also made to the *Gyalpo*. The culture of *Gyan dao*e and *Den cho* still continues.

Conclusion

Gyalpo Gung nyen Thaen and *Za Rāhula* as deities of *Neyphug* monastery has not only contributed in safeguarding sovereignty of the nation during the darkest of time but also influenced in establishing traditions in the community which reminds the younger generation about the importance of culture and tradition. Through these legacies such as *Neyphug mani* and *dho shep*, the younger generation are also connected to the fabric of the local traditions and that of the Bhutanese culture. Documenting oral history has become vital as stories such as that of *Riba Chum* and

¹⁶Sangay Dorji, 87, interviewed on 23 January 2022.

¹⁷ synonym of *Ekajati*.

¹⁸Lhaba, 60, farmer of *Zhelngo* Village, *Shaba Gewog, Paro*, interviewed on 19 March 2022.

¹⁹ Propitiating the spirit.

²⁰Lhaba, 60, farmer of *Zhelngo* Village, *Shaba Gewog, Paro*, interviewed on 19 March 2022.

Za and Gyalpo of Neyphug carries with them the fundamental values which are an essential part of life and the Bhutanese identity.

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