Global Knowledge, Memory and Communi

What's past is prologue: History, current status and future prospects of library development in Bhutan

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Introduction

The nation of Bhutan holds a place in the global imagination as an obscure, exotic realm in the mist-shrouded Himalaya (Phuntsho, 2013). Its history is notable for the absence of colonial occupation that highly influenced many of its South Asian neighbors (Denman and Namgyel, 2008). Bhutan is a mountainous kingdom, traversed by a small number of winding roads frequently at risk of being rendered impassable by landslide. Many villages are located beyond the reach of the road network, attainable only on foot. The terrain makes for sharp divisions between regions and renders movement and transportation challenging. The rugged landscape poses barriers to the provision of educational and social services and, for much of its history, to its territorial unity. Bhutan made its first connection to the Internet in 1999. Internet access in Bhutan has grown slowly, also challenged by the nation's formidable geography.

The founder of the nation, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (1594-c.1651) unified the disparate regions of Bhutan into a single nation state in the seventeenth century. He served as both a political and spiritual ruler--"the King and at the same time the chief lama" (Aris, 1979, p. 217)--until his death in 1651. His death was kept secret for 54 years to forestall returning to warlordism by different religion sects within the country and external invasion by Tibetans and British Indians. With the gradual disclose of his death, the government plunged into a state of anarchy and civil strife for about two centuries.

Since 1907, Bhutan has been ruled by a secular monarchy, the five Druk Gyalpo (Dragon Kings). The Third and Fourth Kings (Jigme Dorji Wangchuk [reigned 1952-1972] and Jigme Singye Wangchuk [reigned 1972-2006] oversaw years of progress in Bhutan. In perhaps his ultimate act of transformation, the Fourth King offered democracy to his kingdom. The first Constitution named the King as the titular head of state and put control of the government squarely in the hands of democratically elected officials (Phuntsho, 2013). The First Parliament of Bhutan was elected in 2008.

The most pressing challenges facing Bhutan are well outlined in the *Eleventh Five-Year Plan* (Gross National Happiness Commission, 2013). The Plan articulates priorities and goals for the short term and a national vision for development for the long term. Among the challenges noted in the Plan is the dire need to build human and institutional capacity, spelled out in the

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Plan's recommendation for improvements in the delivery of education and the dissemination of information and knowledge (Gross National Happiness Commission, 2013).

National development requires "access to knowledge, primarily in agriculture, medicine, and technology, [that] can help to create stronger social, economic, and technical infrastructures" (Chan and Costa, 2005, p. 141). Developing nations, in particular, need high-quality and current information for scientists, researchers, scholars, academics, practitioners, and entrepreneurs. Bhutan is no exception and must respond to the demands of national development by creating and supporting an environment for generating new knowledge, fostering innovation, and developing the professional competencies of the modern knowledge-based economy (Ministry of Education, 2010). Resources and services offered by libraries play a critical role in education and in the creation and effective use of knowledge. Ensuring the existence of effective libraries will help Bhutan to achieve its national development goals.

If access to knowledge is required to meet its goals, it is worth investigating whether conditions for success exist in Bhutan. The experience of Bhutan can depict the challenges that still face the Global South with regard to information access, human capacity, and national development.

There is a growing body of knowledge about library services and their impact and an evolving landscape of digital information and open access. The authors hope to add Bhutan to the discussion and contribute to a greater understanding of libraries and literacy in the Global South.

The goals of this paper are to document the development of libraries in Bhutan, describe their current status, and offer strategies to improve libraries and their services. Libraries have both material and human components. This paper will focus in particular on the professionals who provide library services. The authors specifically wish to examine the extent to which Bhutan's library systems can deliver information and its library professionals can support research and literacy.

Literature Review

The Virtues of the Library

Much has been written about the value of libraries to human and national development and the role libraries play in the creation of sustainable societies (Aabø, 2005a, 2005b). The role of the library in reducing poverty and enhancing social justice has been examined in the Global South, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Abubakar, 2013; Mnkeni-Saurombe and Zimu, 2013). De Lemos (1981) documents the history of the obstacles to the development of print culture, literacy, libraries and a publishing industry across the Global South; many of those obstacles have not yet been overcome.

The value of education, its power as a tool to change the world, is widely understood. Libraries make strong contributions to this change by fostering literacy skills and disseminating knowledge (Chan and Costa, 2005).

Development of Libraries in Bhutan

Much of the literature documenting the history and status of libraries in Bhutan is derived from the methodical work of two researchers. Shaw (2005a; 2005b; 2005c) paid multiple visits to Bhutan from 1984 to 2005, during which she collected data that let her track the progress of certain schools over time. Her close examination of the development of school libraries over 20 years recounts many changes to policy and curriculum and the impact of those changes on library practices. Shaw also reports the growing role of international organizations and actors to help improve library collections, facilities, and services in Bhutan (2005b; 2005c).

Shaw's (2005a; 2005b; 2005c) research provides a tool for comparing policy and practice over time. She documents haphazard development of school libraries and the general unpreparedness of those assigned to work in libraries.

A second researcher provides a portrait of academic libraries in Bhutan. Ransom (2011a; 2011b) was invited to spend half of 2010 at Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) to conduct an assessment of their libraries. She found that RUB's libraries did not meet the university's aspirations. Among the factors contributing to the problems in RUB's libraries are low

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funding and a lack of expertise among library staff. Innovative and knowledgeable library staff can add value to even a rudimentary library collection.

Ransom's (2011a; 2011b) observations provide a rare record of library service and practice in Bhutan's academic sector. She identified numerous challenges, many of which are unique to the Global South, where standard commercial solutions and timesaving practices like copy cataloging are neither easy nor available. Many of the challenges she documented in 2011 have not disappeared.

Part of Ransom's (2011a) contract with RUB was to recommend a programme for offering a library qualification in Bhutan to address the lack of human capacity. Among her conclusions was that such a programme is sorely needed but might be unsustainable.

These two researchers draw similar conclusions about one of the most pressing problems Bhutan libraries continue to face: the need for skilled library staff to exploit library resources, teach information literacy, and build interest in reading.

Print and Non-print Culture in Bhutan

Bhutan has a rich cultural heritage, visible in its natural and built environments. In Bhutan, as in many countries in the Global South, much of the cultural heritage is oral rather than written. Such heritages can lead to misconceptions. Countries and communities with less-literary cultures are often, as de Lemos (1981) pointed out, viewed as primitive or uncivilized. "Civilization and development as they are understood in a technological society are … closely linked with reading and writing skills" (de Lemos, 1981, p. 10).

Bhutan has robust oral traditions of storytelling (Evans, 2006) and of folklore and folk knowledge, particularly with regard to nature, herbal medicine, and agriculture (Phuntsho, 2013). Buddhist iconography, ritual and performance--such as cham, the ritual dances performed at public festivals--convey messages of religious and historical significance in non-literary ways (Samuel and David, 2016).

The topography of Bhutan creates natural geographic divisions that resulted in isolated regions with unique subcultures and diverse languages that only exist in spoken forms. Modern communication and transportation conveniences have reached parts of the kingdom,

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yet many remain isolated and nomadic, and there is a genuine linguistic divide between citizens (Phuntsho, 2013).

Dzongkha, the dialect from Western Bhutan, was used as the language of governance and administration as early as the country's unification in the seventeenth century (Nado, 1982). Dzongkha was adopted as the national language in the 1960s, at which time a standard grammar and orthography was implemented. Until that time, the classical Tibetan script of Buddhist scripture was the medium for written communication. Dzongkha is the only vernacular language in Bhutan with a written form. The Dzongkha Development Commission continues the work to support use of the language, publishing standards and adding new vocabulary to the lexicon. Despite such efforts, many Bhutanese can neither read nor write Dzongkha with much fluency (Phuntsho, 2013).

Historically, education in Bhutan was monastic, limiting the overall literacy of the non-monastic population. Secular school education for the general population was introduced in the 1960s. The same geographic challenges influence easy and universal access to schools (Denman and Namgyel, 2008). Instruction in secular schools is conducted in English, which accounts for the rapid increase in the presence and use of English throughout the country, especially among those Bhutanese of an age to have attended a modern school (Phuntsho, 2013).

Further evidence of literary and print culture can be gleaned from the high profile of Bhutan's thirteen traditional arts and crafts, the zorig chusum, which include Parzo, the carving of wood or stone--including woodblocks for printing religious texts (Bucher, Choki and Lämmli, 2017)--and Dezo, the making of paper from fibers native to the Himalaya (Boesi, 2016).

In his thorough treatise on the history of book production in Bhutan, Gyaltsen (2016) reports that print culture is linked to the long legacy of Buddhism in the country. Buddhism was introduced in Bhutan as early as the seventh century by the Tibetan emperor Songtsen Gampo. The emperor built the oldest temples (lhakhang) in Bhutan: Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang and Kichu Lhakhang in Paro (Dukpa, 2016). Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) traveled throughout the Himalayan region and Buddhism flourished in his wake. Aris (1987) points out that the voice of Buddhist clerics and the "complex edifice of Buddhist theory and

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practice" (p. 131) dominate the literary landscape in Bhutan. Secular history and the lives of non-elite figures are underrepresented in the print record.

Shaw's (2005c) assertion that "Bhutan is not traditionally a reading society" (p. 119) is a reasonable conclusion to draw from this cultural history of the kingdom. Shaw (2005c) posits that the activity of reading in Bhutan is associated with study and school rather than with pleasure or recreation. "A major problem is that reading is associated with textbooks and passing examinations" (p. 122) in the perception of students and teachers.

Evolution of Libraries in Bhutan

Monastic and Scriptural Libraries

The monasteries and temples that emerged as Buddhism spread were the homes of Buddhist teaching and of documents and treasure texts related to Buddhist doctrine. The oldest institutions of higher Buddhist studies were created in the seventeenth century: Chagri Dorjeden, founded by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel in 1629, and Tango Goemba, founded in 1688 (Schuelka and Maxwell, 2016).

Gyaltsen's (2016) examination of the evidence of print culture in Bhutan describes accounts of precious manuscripts. Texts from the early history of Bhutan include historical and biographical accounts of Buddhist figures and spiritual leaders (Phuntsho, 2013). By the end of the fifteenth century, carved wood print blocks were used to create print books (Gyaltsen, 2016) and existing collections of carved woodblocks document a variety of biographical and scriptural works.

Libraries, in their most rudimentary forms, are designated locations where books and documents are stored and organized. Most temples and monasteries include a large assembly hall that serves many functions. In addition to serving as a library of Buddhist scripture, these halls are also locations for praying, teaching and learning, and performing rituals.

Private houses also house library collections of Buddhist scriptures that can be borrowed by neighboring communities for resounding[1] during special occasions. Even today, evidence of

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[1] Resounding is a communal reading aloud of Buddhist scripture.

book culture can be seen even in remote Bhutanese residences with their own small collections of Buddhist texts beside an altar.

School libraries

In their comprehensive work on "schooling" in Bhutan, Schuelka and Maxwell (2016) trace the trajectories of religious, secular, and higher education and their impact on the development of the kingdom and the outlook of its citizens. Ugyen Wangchuck, the First King, set up the first school in Haa in 1913 or 1914 (Dorji, 2002, 2016). Hirayama (2011) points out that the first schools of the modern type were intended for the elite rather than the general public.

The first *National Education Policy* of Bhutan, issued in 1947, included a one-paragraph statement acknowledging the benefit of school libraries and the work that the national educational system would have to do to meet its aspiration that the "most important room in every school should be the library" (as cited by Shaw, 2005b). Shaw's (2005b) thorough account of the history of school libraries in the kingdom points out that it would not be until many years after the publication of that first policy document that schools would receive funding to provide for library resources, a dedicated library space, or for dedicated library staff. Many school libraries took the form of a collection of books, likely donated from abroad and not always appropriate for the school to which it was sent, housed in a locked cupboard or box, secure but inaccessible. These conditions made it challenging to implement engaging library collections that stimulated interest in lifelong reading.

By the mid-1980s, in recognition of the need to improve the education system, budgets for schools increased as did support for school library spaces, resources and staff. Dorji (2016) recounts the international nature of that support, from India in particular. International agencies and NGOs from many countries helped provide "human, financial, and materials resources" (p. 120) to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools throughout Bhutan.

Higher education libraries

The first school teachers in Bhutan's public education system arrived from abroad, many from India, Bhutan's close neighbor (Shaw, 2005b). The need for trained local teachers led to the opening of Samtse College of Education (1968), previously the Teacher Training Institute

(TTI); Sherubtse College (1968); and Paro College of Education (1975), formerly the Teacher Training Centre (TTC). Sherubtse College began its life as a secondary school before expanding and evolving into a college, first affiliated with the University of Delhi. It is now part of the RUB, which was officially established in 2003 (Shaw, 2005b). Each of these institutions has a building or, at least, a designated room, serving as a library, collecting appropriate subject-specific resources to facilitate teaching and learning. Small, focused collections of legal resources are housed in the libraries of the Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law, established in 2015, and the Bhutan National Legal Institute.

Public Libraries

In 1978, the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck Public Library (JDWPL) was formally established in Thimphu and named in honor of the Third King. The library focuses its collection on material for young readers and added a mobile bus library in 2013 to serve locations around the city (Cheki, 2018). The JDWPL began operating a second branch at RUB in 2015.

Outside of Thimphu, books and information resources are provided by the nine community-based libraries established by READ Bhutan (Rural Education and Development Bhutan). READ Bhutan was launched in 2008 with the mission of supporting literacy, education, and reading in the kingdom's rural communities.

Special Libraries

As Bhutan worked toward its development goals, special libraries emerged with specific goals or in conjunction with specific agencies. Two special libraries support the kingdom's environmental conservation goals: the Jigme Khesar Environmental Resource Centre of Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN), located in Thimphu, and the library at the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environmental Research (UWICER), located in Bumthang. The library at the Election Commission of Bhutan supports the new electoral system and each house of the Parliament of Bhutan, the National Council and the National Assembly, has a library to support legislative work. The Royal Bhutan Police library collects resources to inform practices in law enforcement.

The National Library

The National Library of Bhutan (NLB) was established in 1967 with the mission of preserving the cultural heritage of the kingdom. Among its first goals was to collect and

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preserve historical Buddhist text (Shaw, 2007, p. 255). The collection was peripatetic at first, moving between multiple shared spaces before international donations helped fund a purpose-built home for the National Library, opened in 1984, and for the National Archives, opened in 2005.

The library's partnership with DANIDA, the Danish international aid agency, helped it expand its collections from its original core, build systems and programmes, and train staff to manage its materials (Shaw, 2007).

The NLB is looked to as the leader amongst libraries in the country and other libraries rely on it to offer training that will improve library services and practices and to collaborate on mechanisms to share resources across the country.

Methodology

The authors reviewed literature on libraries in Bhutan and the history of educational policy and systems in search of evidence regarding library development. There is very little published research specific to libraries in Bhutan. The authors searched a variety of academic databases using the search term "Bhutan," in combination with the key words: library, libraries, librarians, education, school, teaching, and reading.

The fieldwork of Ransom (2011a, 2011b) and Shaw (2005a, 2005b, 2005c) offer the only published accounts of the history of libraries in the kingdom and the only documentation of the then-current status of libraries and library workers. In reading the retrieved literature, the works of those two researchers in particular, the authors looked for historical trends, themes, challenges, and recommendations that provided insight into the authors' own experience as working librarians in Bhutan. The authors framed their own understanding of library development in Bhutan in the modern information environment by drawing comparisons between their real-life experiences and Ransom (2011a, 2011b) and Shaw's (2005a, 2005b, 2005c) portraits of libraries. The authors used the perspectives gleaned from the literature to inform their own conclusions about impediments to the development of effective libraries.

The authors are all professional librarians: three Bhutanese nationals and one U.S. citizen who spent several years working in the country. All have served as the head librarian at an

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institutional library and founded a national library consortium to address shortcomings they had experienced first hand. All have organized and conducted conferences and workshops for library workers, giving them unique understanding of the state of library professional development. Two of the authors taught in a locally developed Diploma course for Library and Information Management. One of the authors serves as the national expert for an open-source library system, a role that allows him rich perspective on the technological capacity of institutions and individuals.

Some of the data this paper shares is derived from the authors' personal experiences, synthesized into a narrative. This paper is the first documentation of the authors' first-hand knowledge of library practice in Bhutan and their collaborative efforts to make improvements. This unique experience and knowledge informs the authors' analysis of the existing literature and their recommendations for library development in the future.

Findings and Discussion

Current Status of Libraries

Libraries in Bhutan are not well provisioned. Many libraries have limited collections and only recently implemented online catalogs to provide access to those collections (Ransom, 2011a). Libraries have few opportunities to add to their collections, owing to low funding and to real the challenge of acquiring materials from abroad.

The early focus of the first libraries in the kingdom was to safeguard collections and prevent loss or damage. This goal makes sense in an environment where it is difficult to replace library materials. An unintended consequence of this goal can be that it creates barriers to use. Readers cannot enjoy or learn from a book held under lock and key or to which access is restricted.

Building good library collections requires long-term investment of funds. Most public expenditure in Bhutan is focused on other vital areas such as health, poverty reduction, and economic development. Shaw (2005b) points out that, with regard to school libraries in Bhutan, many school budgets made no provision for the library and collections were built from discard and donations from abroad.

Movement in Bhutan to build effective library collections, technologies, and capabilities has been slow, resulting in libraries with limited resources and few users. Many libraries are run by staff members who lack library qualifications and experience (Ransom, 2011a). As a result, many library staff members do not have the capacity to add value to their collections through appropriate cataloging and classification, programming, end-user training, or reference assistance.

Modern developments in library services and systems are slow to reach Bhutan. Libraries are distributed unevenly throughout the country, with most located in the capital city of Thimphu. Library expertise is also unevenly distributed. Most of the librarians with professional credentials and expertise work at the NLB or RUB. In Bhutan, as in many locations in the Global South, "the limited supply of professional skills … places considerable strain on the efficiency and effectiveness of library services" (Jalloh, 1999, p. 160).

Modern library technologies help libraries to better serve their users and to better manage and share their resources. But these technologies also require technical expertise not readily available in Bhutan. One example of the tension between the promise of new technology and the realities of available expertise is the challenge of bringing automated library management systems (LMS) to Bhutan. Many libraries in Bhutan were interested in implementing Koha, a free, open-source LMS, but few had the human capacity to accomplish such a technology change. Proprietary LMS include support and troubleshooting as part of the purchase or subscription price. Free, open-source systems like Koha generally require more support from library staff. A library with low funding or in the Global South may not have the competency in house to manage an open-source system.

RUB began the implementation of Koha in its colleges in 2012, after a fitful start and after appointing a member of the technology staff to train librarians on its management and customization. The experience and expertise at RUB encouraged other libraries in Bhutan to follow their lead, the appeal of a no-cost system outweighing the fear of (and occasional reality of) server crashes and technical glitches.

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Room for Improvement

School Libraries

In light of the history of school libraries that she documents, Shaw (2005c) points out that among the other challenges of library development in Bhutan is the creation of interest in reading in what is not traditionally a "reading society" that has also had limited opportunity to experience a high-quality library or perhaps even to borrow a book not discarded from abroad. Shaw (2005c) issues the important reminder that "positive reading experiences are crucial for developing a reading culture." Choice and quality of reading matter are important in building reading motivation. Students are more motivated to read when they can choose titles that interest them from a variety of good books (Ivey and Broaddus, 2001).

Shaw (2005c) describes what was, up to 2004, a slowly growing movement to offer programmes to promote reading and to ensure effective book selection, to develop library collections that are appropriate to the interest and reading ability of students.

Public Libraries

Around the world, public libraries offer resources and services that foster life-long learning and that develop skills essential to modern life. Public libraries enhance educational outcomes and can offer youth programmes to improve "school readiness, educational attainment, and success" (Milam, 2008, p. 11). Public libraries can help communities address employment issues, offering programmes that enhance the technological skills of the workforce and help job seekers to find and apply for jobs. Public libraries play key roles in the support of civil society and democratic systems of governance (Calanag, 2003). Bhutan has a young democracy and a crucial need to support democratic movements with appropriate information and literacy skills.

The Jigme Dorji Wangchuck Public Library, the only public library in Bhutan, operating for four decades in the heart of Thimphu city and administered by the Thimphu municipality, has changed little since its inception. The library is housed in a small traditional cottage with limited space, facilities, and services.

While it stands in a perfect location for public access and has a dedicated staff, the library's impact is small. Tshering Phuntsho, the Officiating Librarian at JDWPL, shares that the library's membership to date is approximately 4000, almost 70% of whom are children (T.

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Phuntsho, personal communication, May 2019). The public library serves the Thimphu

Dzongkhag--population 138,736 (National Statistics Bureau of Bhutan, 2018). Membership

figures indicate that approximately 3% of the Thimphu population uses the public library and

its resources. JDWPL receives approximately 30 visitors per day (T. Phuntsho, personal

communication, May 2019).

Higher education libraries

The *Tertiary Education Policy of the Kingdom of Bhutan* (*The Policy*) recognizes that

"[a]cademic libraries have a prominent position in activities of teaching, learning, and

research" (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 93). The library should be "the centre of

educational experience for students…As a storehouse of knowledge and forum for academic

interaction, the library is a world of higher learning by itself" (p. 48).

The Policy encourages the use of technology. Technology can give the library enhanced

access to its collection (via an online catalogue); a means to easily track resources shared

with its patrons (via a circulation system); access to scholarly material (via academic

databases); and a means to procure otherwise unavailable content (via inter-library loan and

document delivery).

The Policy also acknowledges that libraries are more than just a collection of resources;

libraries are service centers and need people with the capacity to provide high-quality library

services. To that end, *the Policy* encourages academic libraries to have a "provision for

training of library staff at all levels" (p. 94).

The *Policy* recognizes specific challenges faced by academic libraries in Bhutan, challenges

that need to be addressed to improve national educational outcomes. Among those

challenges are inadequate physical and technological infrastructures, financial resources, and

human resources.

Digital libraries

There are ongoing efforts to harness modern information technology to overcome the

physical challenges of supplying information and provisioning libraries throughout the

geographically disparate kingdom. One attempt, launched in 2016, is the Indo-Bhutan E-

library, an online portal containing a wide collection of resources, either digitized or born

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digital. The project's initial phase focused on textbooks for elementary and secondary students. Its hope is to eventually build a collection of 2 million digital resources and to reach multiple schools and colleges. The digital library is a tribute to the close relationship between Bhutan and India, who provided assistance for its initiation.

To date, additions to the digital library's collection have slowed, though optimism for its possibilities remain. The long-term success of the project will likely depend on the support it receives from the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGB). The authors recommend that the Ministry of Education and RUB, the institutions with the most interest in the project and the human capacity to sustain it, assume and share responsibility for monitoring progress and providing financial and manpower support.

Reading Campaigns

In alignment with its goals of improving educational outcomes and building a stronger reading culture in the kingdom, the RGB declared 2015 the National Reading Year. Schools recorded the number of books students read each month, with the expectation that every student would read at least one book beside a required textbook (Pokhral, 2015). During the National Reading Year, students read 2,511,512 books, with the average student reading two books per month (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2016). Those results were pleasing to the government, who encouraged students to continue the practice of reading. It is not clear whether this successful campaign had long-term impact, whether it created lifelong reading enthusiasts, and whether the momentum created can be sustained in the absence of the explicit mandate of the government.

To further support reading, the government also, as of 2015, waived taxes on books in the hope that lower prices would increase book sales and ownership as well as entrepreneurial efforts to start bookshops (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2016).

The Development of Library Professionals

Shaw (2005b) reports that many of the earliest school librarians in Bhutan were teachers with no library experience and few, if any, guidelines to follow. Many invented their own practices, which led to a wide variety of arrangements and administrative routines. The earliest library training programmes focused on sharing uniform standards and best practices.

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Training for school librarians began in earnest after 1995, with the launch of the School Library Development Project (SLDP). The SLDP assured funding for library facilities and resources as well as training for teacher-librarians, who can bring to their schools the necessary expertise in instruction, library management and, crucial in a resource-challenged environment, getting the most out of a small collection. Participants included both library staff and school principals.

The first training session was facilitated by the librarian of Samtse College of Education and his team. The session covered the theory of classification and cataloging, to help create standardized practices of collection management, and book binding and repair, useful in an environment where replacing books is a challenge.

Later training sessions focused on even more practical matters of the most immediate use to participants (Shaw, 2005b). The SLDP training was conducted during the winter holidays for five years or so, ceasing around 2000.

Demand for teacher-librarians grew quickly and inspired the creation, in 1999, of the post of Library Assistant (LA) for middle and higher secondary schools (Shaw, 2005b) and other organizations. Many of those recruited for the LA position are young and from humbler backgrounds; many do not qualify for government scholarship to continue higher education and lack the resources to pursue higher education unsupported.

Institutions of higher education that felt the need for a professional librarian often funded a candidate to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies abroad, often in the UK, Australia or the USA.

The end of Bhutan's isolation opened the kingdom to many relationships with international agencies and NGOs. These institutions offer funding for furnishing and equipping libraries and for building library collections. There is less attention offered to developing human capacity in libraries. Libraries continue to struggle to develop experienced library staff who play an essential role in deriving maximum benefit from those hard-won resources and facilities. Opportunities for professional development such as training workshops and conferences are rare in Bhutan.

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The authors recognized the dire need for the development of professional library staff and of mechanisms for sharing resources and best practices. In collaboration with librarians from organizations across Bhutan, the authors spearheaded the launch of the Bhutan Library Consortium (BLC) in December 2012. Among the first goals of the BLC was to organize the first Conference of Librarians of Bhutan that same year, sponsored by UWICER. The BLC declared a mission as comprehensive as the needs it recognized: to promote and facilitate excellent library services in the country by helping member libraries to share resources and expertise; encouraging collaboration and cooperation; and providing training. The number of participants at the second Conference of Librarians doubled the attendance at the first, reflecting recognition of the need for professional development for library staff. BLC member libraries sustained an annual conference through participant registration fees until 2016, when the role of BLC was handed over to the NLB.

The government made another attempt at professional development in 2018. The Ministry of Education sent over 170 library assistants to a 10-day training facilitated by the chief librarian of Samtse College of Education and his team. Training included hands-on workshops covering information literacy, cataloguing and classification, and, of particular value, the installation and customization of Koha.

Many library assistants come to libraries with no prior training or knowledge of the field and are sometimes recruited directly after completion of Class X (secondary) or XII (higher secondary). Ransom's (2011a) conclusions agree that regular training for library workers, to improve their knowledge and competence, would be a valuable step toward developing more effective libraries in Bhutan.

Library Education

Until recently, no institution of higher education in Bhutan offered an academic programme for librarians. Anyone wishing to obtain a professional qualification had to study abroad. Short-term educational opportunities were offered by assistance programmes in India such as the SAARC Documentation Centre and the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC).

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In 2015, RUB's Samtse College of Education launched the Diploma in Library and Information Management (DLIM). The three-year programme of part-time study was the first of its kind and was the work of many stakeholders.

The programme's goal was to address the shortage of trained librarians in the country by building the competencies of the cadre of library assistants. The programme was designed to balance the provision of skill and knowledge requirements unique to the Bhutanese context with the benchmark of an international library qualification (Ransom, 2011a).

The first 25 candidates included eight from RUB colleges and 17 from Ministry of Education schools. This cohort graduated in 2018. The second cohort was smaller, 15 candidates, all from the colleges. By 2016, the Royal Civil Service Commission, who regulate employment in government institutions, had withdrawn support for school library assistants to pursue the programme, eliminating this large section of the cadre from participation (Y. Dorji, personal communication, March 2019). Owing to the consequent low enrolment, the programme was suspended. The second and likely final cohort graduated at the end of 2019.

The authors view this suspension as a missed opportunity for creating positive long-term educational outcomes. The withdrawal of support for school library assistants is disappointing. Investing in strengthening the capacity and competency of library workers has many potential benefits to teaching, learning and, ultimately, nation-building. With the expected closure of the DLIM programme at Samtse, library workers will once again have to pursue library education from abroad, surely a less cost-effective solution.

The Future of Bhutanese libraries

With the arrival of the Internet and the progress toward a modern infrastructure in Bhutan, the kingdom gains the possibility of using information and communication technology (ICT) to develop new ways to deliver services. ICT offers the potential to overcome the geographic barriers and uneven distribution of resources that have long challenged the nation.

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National Digital Repository

Access to the Internet provides libraries in Bhutan with the opportunity to digitize and share often irreplaceable resources, some practically unreachable or otherwise gathering dust on the shelves of a remote library or monastery. Valuable research is published in Bhutan by its government agencies, academic institutions and NGOs. Some of these resources exist only in limited numbers of print copies. Bhutan is also the birthplace of precious manuscripts and other cultural artefacts. Digitizing those resources and hosting them in a centralized repository would increase their their reach and their life expectancy. Other resources were born digital but are scattered across the country, hosted on various websites and databases. Creating a single portal repository for all of these resources would enhance their discoverability and create a more vibrant research environment in the country.

Research4Life as a Lifeline to Scholarly Access

National development requires access to knowledge, especially in agriculture, medicine, and technology, fields that can help to create stronger societies. Developing nations, in particular, need high-quality and current information to make informed decisions, to impart quality education and to generate creativity and innovation. However, the challenges of permission and price limit what information seekers in Bhutan can access.

Research4Life (R4L), a programme that provides to the Global South free or low-cost access to high-quality sources, offers a solution to the problem of access. Bhutan as a nation is eligible (Group A) to enroll in the R4L programme at no cost.

Access, however, is not automatic and even a free programme like R4L requires that an institution has heard of the programme and knows to enroll; that someone on the institution's staff has the skill to exploit and support the available resources; and that an institution has technological capacity and bandwidth sufficient to the task. For reasons such as these, only a few academic and research institutions in Bhutan had registered.

In 2018, the Technology Bank of the United Nations selected the kingdom as one of the 12 participants in the Digital Access to Research (DAR) programme, which organized workshops on access to and optimal use of the R4L resources. These workshops were made available to staff at ministries, institutions of higher education, and higher secondary schools.

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One of the authors served as a Country Focal Point for the programme and managed the list of participants. Post-workshop registration statistics demonstrate success. Before the DAR workshops, 57 institutions in Bhutan were registered for the R4L databases. After the workshop, the total had climbed to 156. This leap forward in registration suggests that "no cost" is not enough. Human capacity to actively promote resources is essential.

The sort of public-private partnership defined by R4L, a collaboration between international NGOs and international publishers, can help countries like Bhutan bridge the gap in the digital divide--if there is sufficient capacity and competency to do so. Building a stronger network of libraries and a more skilled cadre of library workers would help ensure that Bhutan can take advantage of such programmes.

Collaboration as Catalyst for Improvement

Libraries around the world participate in collaborative arrangements in order to pool their intellectual, technical and financial resources to the benefit of the entire community. Collaborative arrangements provide libraries with mechanisms to more easily share their own unique resources, and to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of their colleagues. The *Tertiary Education Policy* (Ministry of Education, 2010) recommends the creation of such arrangements between the various college libraries as well as the national library.

The authors participated in the creation of the Bhutan Library Consortium with these goals in mind. A consortium model gives libraries a tool for sharing costs of and access to resources. Each library in the consortium gains access to more material that it can afford to purchase exclusively for its own use. Each library gets more resources for less money, a clear financial advantage.

Conclusion

Funding of library facilities and collections and of development of library professionals is a low priority. In the Global South, public expenditure focuses on the most clearly vital areas such as health, poverty reduction, economic development, and education. The important role that libraries and library workers can play in education is acknowledged in policy statements but not supported by funding. Funding a library facility and a collection is a partial endeavor; it still needs a library professional to add value to the collection and to offer meaningful and

innovative services. Investment in facilities--collections, systems, resources, devices--must be accompanied by investment in human capacity--library workers, teacher-librarians, library leaders.

Bhutan's gradual progress toward a modern infrastructure will allow the kingdom to take advantage of innovations in digital libraries and databases. Continued investment in electrification and ICT installation will help libraries and institutions to better navigate and exploit the fast-changing landscape of the digital world.

Research for this paper made clear the gaps in knowledge and documentation about reading habits, library services, attitudes toward libraries, and other useful data that can inform scholarship as well as decision-making. There is a widely held assumption in Bhutan that "Bhutanese people read less now than they used to." There is no data to support this assumption and surely a population like Bhutan, with multiple dialects with no written form and no modern education until recently, cannot be expected to have been a reading society in the past.

Another widely held assumption is that low use of the library, as indicated by low membership numbers at the public library or by low circulation statistics at an academic library, is the direct result of poor perception of libraries. This assumption is certainly possible but, again, there is no evidence to support it.

International agencies track ICT penetration, Internet access, and device usage. The authors recommend further study on reading habits, information-seeking behavior, book ownership, and library membership, and on attitudes towards reading, print books, libraries, and library workers. Bhutan is on the precipice of modernization, with a young democracy, a growing media, and a development philosophy (Gross National Happiness, aka GNH) of interest to the world. Critical to these realms is information, and the libraries and library professionals who trade in it.

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