

Flags over Bhutan

Bhutan, the Land of the Thunder Dragon

Michel R. Lupant



Bhutan is a landlocked kingdom in the Himalayas. Bordered on the north by China (Tibet) and on the south, east, and west by India (*Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh*), it has 2,377,000 inhabitants (2008 estimate) and an area of 47,000 square kilometres (1). The Bhutanese call their country *Druk*, meaning “dragon”.



(1)¹

I traveled in Bhutan 3 to 13 October 2007. I first crossed the border at *Phuentsholling* where I met my tour operator Mrs. *Thinley Dem* (Director of *Bara Lynka Tours and Travel*), and my driver *Kinley*; there I collected my visa before leaving the city and setting out to explore this wonderful country.

¹ Tourist material, *Bara Lynka, Thimphu*.

THE HISTORY OF BHUTAN ²

Bhutan's early history is steeped in mythology and remains obscure. It may have been inhabited as early as 2000 B.C., but not much was known until the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism in the 9th century A.D., when turmoil in Tibet forced many monks to flee to Bhutan.

In the 12th century A.D., the *Drukpa Kagyupa* school was established and remains the dominant form of Buddhism in Bhutan today. The country's political history is intimately tied to its religious history and the relations among the various monastic schools and monasteries. The consolidation of Bhutan occurred in 1616 when *Ngawanag Namgyal*, a lama from Tibet, defeated three Tibetan invasions, subjugated rival religious schools, codified an intricate and comprehensive system of law, and established himself as ruler (*Shabdrung*) over a system of ecclesiastical and civil administrators. After his death, infighting and civil war eroded the power of the *shabdrung* until 1885 when *Ugyen Wangchuck* was able to consolidate power and cultivated closer ties with the British in India.

In 1907, *Ugyen Wangchuck* was elected as the hereditary ruler of Bhutan, crowned on 17 December 1907, and installed as the head of state *Druk Gyalpo* (Dragon King). In 1910, King *Ugyen* and the British signed the Treaty of *Punakha* which provided that British India would not interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan if the country accepted external advice in its external relations. When *Ugyen Wangchuck* died in 1926, his son *Jigme Wangchuck* became the next ruler, and when India gained independence in 1947, the new Indian government recognized Bhutan as an independent country. In 1949, India and Bhutan signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which provided that India would not interfere in Bhutan's internal affairs but would be guided by India in its foreign policy. After *Jigme Wangchuck* was succeeded in 1952 by his son, *Jigme Dorji Wangchuck*, Bhutan slowly began to emerge from its isolation and began a program of planned development. Bhutan became a member of the United Nations in 1971. A national assembly was established, as well as a new code of law, the Royal Bhutanese Army, and the high court.

In 1972, after the death of his father, *Jigme Singye Wanchuck* ascended to the throne at age 16. He emphasized modern education, decentralization of governance, the development of hydroelectricity and tourism, and improvements in rural developments. He was perhaps best known internationally for his overarching development philosophy of "Gross National Happiness". It recognizes that there are many dimensions to development and that economic goals alone are not sufficient. Satisfied with Bhutan's transitioning democratization process, he abdicated on 14 December 2006 rather than wait until the promulgation of the new constitution on 18 July 2008. His son, *Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck*, became king upon his abdication and was crowned on 6 November 2008.

² From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

EARLY FLAGS

Jong and Army Flags—1922

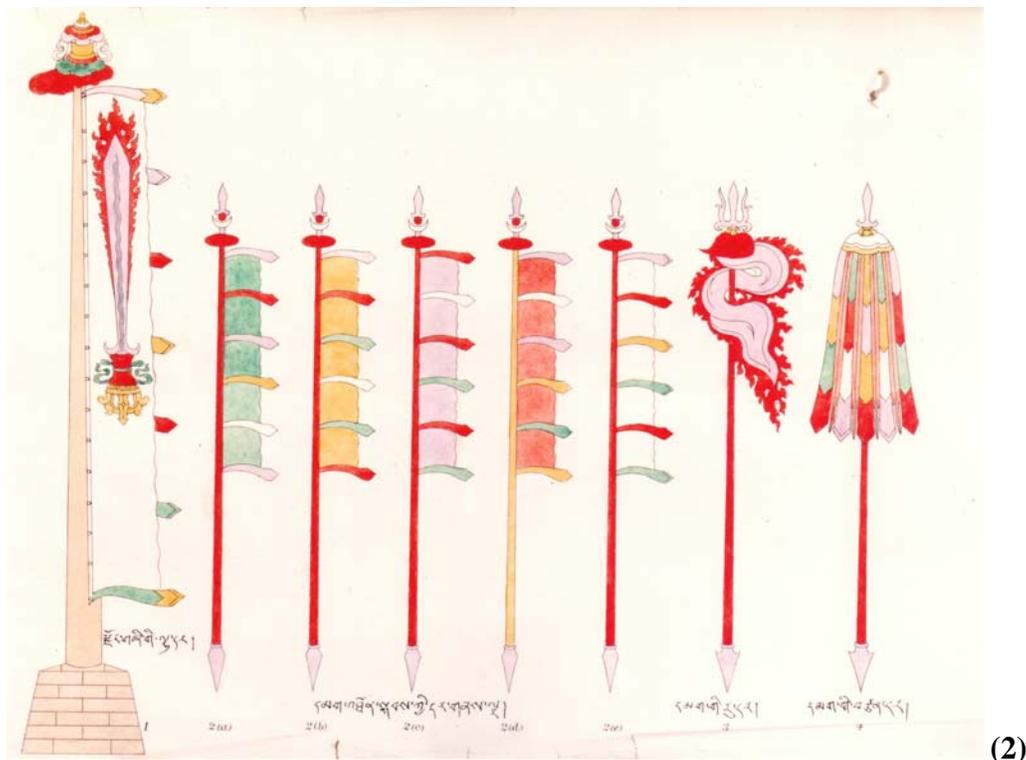
The first reference I have found to a flag in connection with Bhutan is a document in the Indian Library in London. It is a letter from Delhi dated 21 December 1922 in which Mr. (Sd.) Fraser Tytler, assistant secretary to the Government of India, answered the secretary, Political Department, India Office, London. A coloured document is attached to the letter (2). He described some flags of Bhutan as:

No. 1 this flag is hoisted permanently near a Jong or fort. It is a very large high flag and is dedicated to the tutelary deity of the Jong as well as the gods for the elements. The picture on the flag represents the "Irresistible Sword of Wisdom". On the empty space, a mantra or charm called Arya Dhwaja, which is believed to confer victory and prosperity, is printed.

Flags Nos. 2(a), 2(b), 2(c), 2(d), and 2(e) are of five different colours. These are carried in front of an army when going out to fight. The five different colours represent the five different elements. The blue stands for heaven, yellow for earth, green for air, white for clouds or water, and red for fire. These flags indicate that the army is invoking the elements to befriend it.

Flag No. 3 is called a Ru-dar or regimental colour.

Flag No. 4 is called a Tsan-dar. This is dedicated to a fierce spirit called Tsan, and is also carried before an army, thus invoking the help of this spirit also.



(1) (2a) (2b) (2c) (2d) (2e) (3) (4)

During my visit to Bhutan I saw some very large flags similar to No. 1 of (2) but with more elements. In front of *Wangdue Photrang Dzong* one can see the national flag (with a coloured dragon) and a prayer flag (3). In the courtyard outside the *Dzong* another prayer flag is flying (4). A tall prayer flag flies in front of the main entrance of *Paro Dzong* (5).³



(3)



(4)



(5)

The Flag of 1947

In 1947 Bhutan was invited to the First Asian Conference in New Delhi on 23 March 1947, among 28 Asian countries attending. *Mayuem Choing Wangmo Dorji* and Prime Minister *Lonchen Jigme Palden Dorji* represented Bhutan.

Bhutan needed a national flag for the conference. It was designed by *Mayuem Choing Wangmo Dorji* in *Kalimpong* (West Bengal, India). She was the mother of *Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck*, Her Majesty the Queen Mother of Bhutan.⁴ She chose the dragon as the symbol of the kingdom and the colours yellow and red as the colours of the Bhutanese religion, Buddhism. The flag was sewn at Dr. & Mrs Graham's Arts & Crafts School in *Kalimpong* in 1947.

³ Photographs taken by Michel R. Lupant in *Wangdue Photrang* on 10 October and in *Paro* on 12 October 2007. A *dzong* [Jong] is a distinctive type of fortress built particularly in Bhutan, often housing administrative and religious authorities.

⁴ In Her letter to the editor, the Centre of Bhutan Studies, 19 August 2002, Her Majesty wrote that the flag was yellow and orange (Communication from Jos Poels, Doetinchem, The Netherlands). In a recent contact with Mr. *Tshering Tashi*, She told him the flag was yellow and red but the red in the upper part of the flag (Letter received from Mr. *Tshering Tashi* dated 28 May 2009).

I have not found an image of the dragon which appeared on this first national flag. This reconstruction (6) is based on the dragon which appeared on the flag used in 1949.⁵



The Flag of 1949

Bhutan and British India were in constant contact since the war of *Cooch Behar* in 1772 and the first mission of George Bogle in 1774. India became an independent state in 1947. With the end of British rule over India, the British association with Bhutan came to an end. India succeeded Britain as *de facto* protector of Bhutan, which retained control over its internal government. It was two years, however, before a formal agreement recognized Bhutan's independence. In 1948 *Druk Gyalpo Jigme Wangchuck* sent a Bhutanese delegation to India to discuss the relationship between the two countries. The visit was successful and the Indo-Bhutanese treaty⁶ was signed on 8 August 1949 in *Darjeeling*. The treaty focussed on the promotion of friendship and peaceful relations between the two countries. India would not interfere in Bhutanese internal affairs but was to advise Bhutan on matters of external affairs.

On pictures showing the signature of the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of 1949 we can see a flag⁷ (7). The man signing (on the right) is *Yangbi Lopen, Paro Zimpon Tandin*, the man standing is *Dasho Jigme Dorji*, who became later Prime Minister of Bhutan.⁸ His Majesty *Jigme Wangchuck*, the second king, initiated the flag design—a square bicolour divided in two triangles, the division running from the lower hoist to the upper fly end. The yellow field extending from the hoist to the upper fly end (triangle along the flagpole!) and the red⁹ from the fly end to lower hoist. It had a green dragon at the centre of the flag, parallel to the fly, facing the fly end¹⁰(!). It was

⁵ Reconstruction by Hervé Calvarin, Le Perreux, 29 May 2009.

⁶ Drupal: visiting Bhutan 2008 commemorating 100 years Monarchy. Indo-Bhutanese Friendship Treaty of 1949.

⁷ Centenary Issue “Bhutan” A constitution to Strengthen the Nation Kingship and Wisdom-engineering, p. 11 and poster. Editor *Siok Sian Pek-Dorji*, a publication of the Tourism Council of Bhutan, Royal Government of Bhutan, *Thimphu*, 2008.

⁸ Letter from *Tshering Tashi*, 11 May 2009.

⁹ The red colour is used instead of the orange colour as depicted in the 1947 flag.

¹⁰ This description contradicts the flag shown at the treaty's signature.

embroidered by *Lharip Taw* from *Pesiling, Bumthang*, one of the very few *lharip* (painters) available in the court at that time.¹¹



(7)



(8)

The large flag displayed in the Assembly chamber in 1949 (8)¹² was in a photograph obtained by Whitney Smith from someone visiting the country.

In 1951 *Kosmos Sammenbilder*, a German cigarette-card book, published the earliest colour image of the flag of Bhutan I have found in any book (9).¹³ The flag matches the one displayed in (7) at the signing of the Bhutan-India Treaty (10).¹⁴ The dragon is white instead of green as depicted above. This flag appeared in many books until the end of the 1960s, sometimes with its lower triangle in crimson instead of red.



(9)



(10)

¹¹ Penjore, Dorji and Kinga, Sonam: "The Origin and Description of the National Flag and National Anthem of the Kingdom of Bhutan", The Centre for Bhutan Studies, first published July 2002.

¹² Picture received by Karl Fachinger, a German vexillologist. Communication from Whitney Smith on 3 March 2009.

¹³ Neubecker, Ottfried: "Kosmos Sammelbilder: Die Welt im bunten Flaggenbild, II Teil" B 37 Memmingen, Germany, 1951.

¹⁴ Drawing by Hervé Calvarin, Le Perreux, 29 May 2009.

The Flag of 1956¹⁵

According to *Dorji Penjore* and *Sonam Kinga*, the second version¹⁶ of the national flag was developed during the visit of the His Majesty *Jigme Dorji Wangchuck* to Eastern Bhutan in 1956. Officials working in the king's secretariat initiated the use of the flag during the journey.¹⁷ They designed the flag based on the photograph of the first flag used at the signing of the Bhutan-India Treaty (it was then that the colour of the dragon changed to white). The king's convoy comprised over a hundred riding and pack ponies. A small flag was fixed onto the saddle of every tenth horse of the convoy. The flag hoisted in the camp was larger, which reportedly measured about six square feet (0.56 m²).

*Dasho Shingkar Lam*¹⁸ recalls this incident: "on the first day of the journey, the entourage got only as far as *Simtokha* from *Dechenchholing*. As soon the camp was settled, the national flag was hoisted and a bugle sounded. This was done at every camp in the evening. The flag was square and the dragon, instead of being diagonally placed, was straight. It was later commanded to redesign the flag as it is today."¹⁹

The Description and Explanation of the 1956 Flag²⁰

Every country has a national flag as a symbol of its identity. Hence, the explanation of the Bhutan national flag is narrated comprehensively.

- 1. The National flag is half yellow and half red. The yellow spreads from the summit to the base while the red extends from the base and forms the fluttering end.*
- 2. His Majesty, the Dharma King, is the summit and root of the Drukpa Kagyud of Palden Drukpa. As he wears the yellow robe²¹, the yellow represents the being of His Majesty.*
- 3. The significance of red is that the Kingdom of Kagyud Palden Drukpa is governed from the foot of the Dharma King His Majesty consistent with dual monastic and civil systems, and therefore, the country's entire borders and centre is consistent with the teachings (Dharma).*
- 4. The red and yellow fields are adjoined. The dragon spreads equally over them. This signifies that the people are united in oneness of speech and mind in upholding the Kingdom's interest. The dragon symbolizes that in the eyes of Palden Drukpa, there is no discrimination against people of any disposition, and that they are being governed towards peace and prosperity.*

¹⁵ Penjore, Dorji and Kinga, Sonam: Op. cit.

¹⁶ The 1947 and 1949 flags are the same.

¹⁷ Dasho Shingkar Lam, interview by Dorji Penjore, 26 June 2002.

¹⁸ Former secretary to His Majesty, and the sixth speaker of the national assembly (1971-1974).

¹⁹ *Ura, Karma* (1996): *The Hero with Thousand Eyes, Thimphu: Karma Ura*, p. 232.

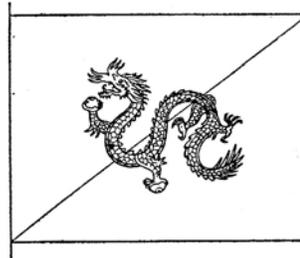
²⁰ This manuscript, in *Dzongkha*, was obtained by Dorji Penjore and Sonam Kinga from the archives of His Majesty's secretariat, who translated the document into English.

²¹ The robe refers to the yellow scarf worn by His Majesty.

Bhutan's Flag in Books

In 1956, the British book “Flags of the World” (11) first included a flag for Bhutan, in black and white.²² It was the second book (after Neubecker’s) to publish an image of the Bhutanese flag.

The state flag of BHUTAN has a field of the approximate proportions of five by four, divided diagonally from the top of the fly to the bottom of the hoist—orange-yellow over crimson. In the centre thereof, a dragon in white, of the type known heraldically as the “Chinese Dragon”; this is similar to the dragon of the West, except that it has no wings. It will be seen from the accompanying illustration that this particular one appears to be holding an egg in the claws of the right fore foot whilst trampling on the shell of another with the left fore foot.



BHUTAN: STATE FLAG

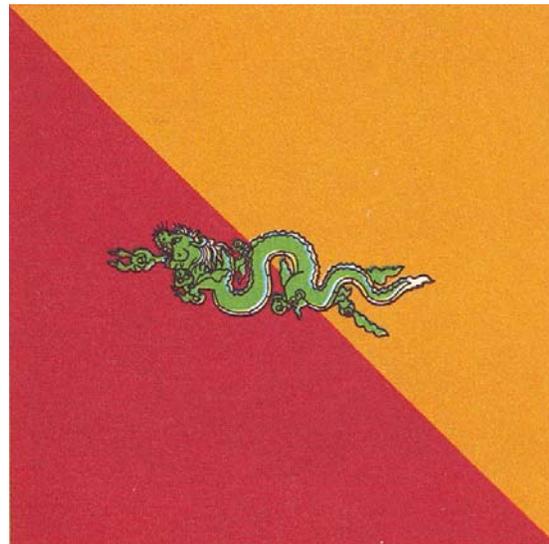
(11)

The PARO Flag

A photograph²³ published in 1960 shows His Majesty *Jigme Dorji Wangchuck* seated on the throne in the National Assembly Hall of *Paro Rinpung Dzong* in 1959 (12).



(12)



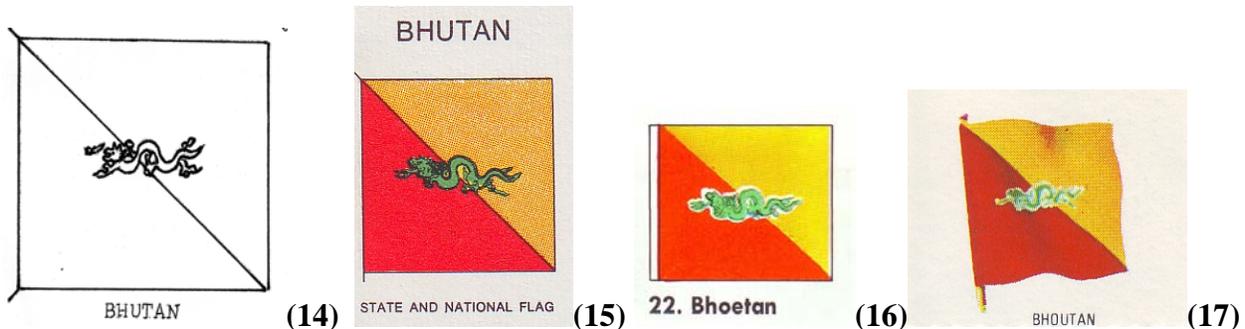
(13)

²² Carr, Gresham H., F.R.G.S.: “Flags of the World”. Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd., London and New York, 1956, p. 211; Revised edition 1961, page 236.

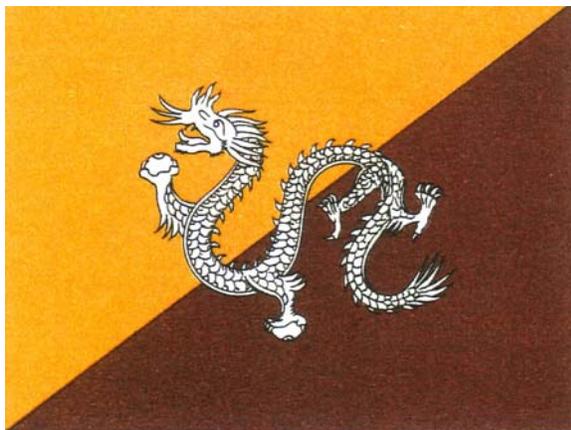
²³ “The Sphere” a British publication. Communication with Whitney Smith, 26 January 2009.

The photograph shows the dragon, perhaps in green, arranged horizontally and facing the left (from the standpoint of the viewer). The left triangle is red, the right triangle is yellow. The colours appear to be the reverse of the 1956 flag. I was unable to determine if the flag is simply shown in reverse, or if the photograph depicts a new flag. The dragon is different from the flag of 1949 (green or white dragon) and the flag of 1956 (white dragon).

Since the publication of the “*Paro* flag”, Bhutan was represented by a “new” flag in many books, likely an erroneous depiction of the reverse of the 1956 flag with the dragon in green (13),²⁴ (14),²⁵ (15),²⁶ (16),²⁷ and (17).²⁸



The Flag of 1962



In 1962, the British Admiralty issued a change to its book B.R.20 “Flags of all Nations”.²⁹ In it Bhutan’s flag is similar to the Indo-Bhutan Treaty flag of 1949 and Neubecker’s flag of 1951, but the yellow appears nearly orange and the red is very dark, almost maroon (18).

(18)

²⁴ Elting, Mary and Folsom, Franklin: “Flags of all Nations and the People who Live Under Them”. Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., New York, 1967, page 27.

²⁵ Smith, Whitney, Jr.: “Flags of the Himalayan States”. *The Flag Bulletin*, Vol. II, No 2, Winter 1962-1963, p. 18.

²⁶ “Flags of all Nations” (381 Illustrations compiled by the Flag Research Center, Lexington, Mass. 02173 USA.) Published by Brown, Son & Ferguson, Ltd. Glasgow, 1971 edition.

²⁷ “*Wereld Vlaggenkaart*”. *De Geïllustreerde Pers N.V.* Amsterdam. The Flag Research Center, New York/Winchester *en de* Foundation for Vexillology and Heraldry, Muiderberg. 1 februari 1965.

[“Flags of the World”. The Flag Research Center New York/Winchester and the Foundation for Vexillology and Heraldry, Muiderberg. *De Geïllustreerde Pers N.V.* Amsterdam. 1 February 1965.]

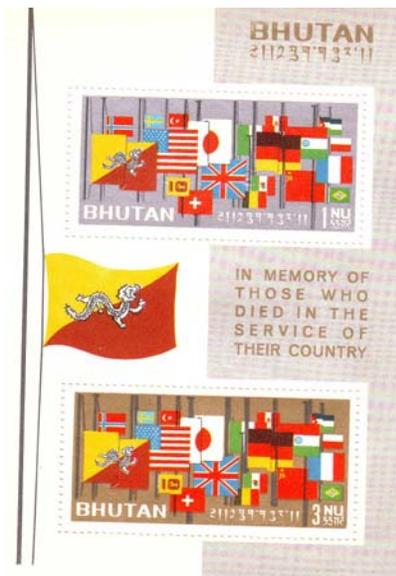
²⁸ “*Drapeaux du Monde*”. *Cercle philatélique Rencontre*. Poster with flags’ stamps, n.d. (1960s.?).

²⁹ Flags of all Nations, Volume I. Admiralty. B.R.20, Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, reprinted 1965 (Change N°1, 9 November 1962). 19D.

The Flag of 1964

In the late 1950s, during one of his visits to Bhutan, the *Gangtok*-based political officer of India noticed that a square flag did not flutter like the rectangular Indian national flag hoisted near *Dechenchholing* Palace. The national flag was then redesigned to match the flag of India, which was six by nine feet. Its current shape, dimensions, and design date from this time.³⁰

The first picture that I have found showing a rectangular flag appears on the first Bhutanese stamps bearing the national flag, issued in 1964 **(19)**.³¹ The flag is yellow and dark red (crimson), the dragon is white, and the drawing of the dragon is very simple **(20)**.



(19)



(20)

³⁰ Penjore, Dorji and Kinga, Sonam: Op. cit.

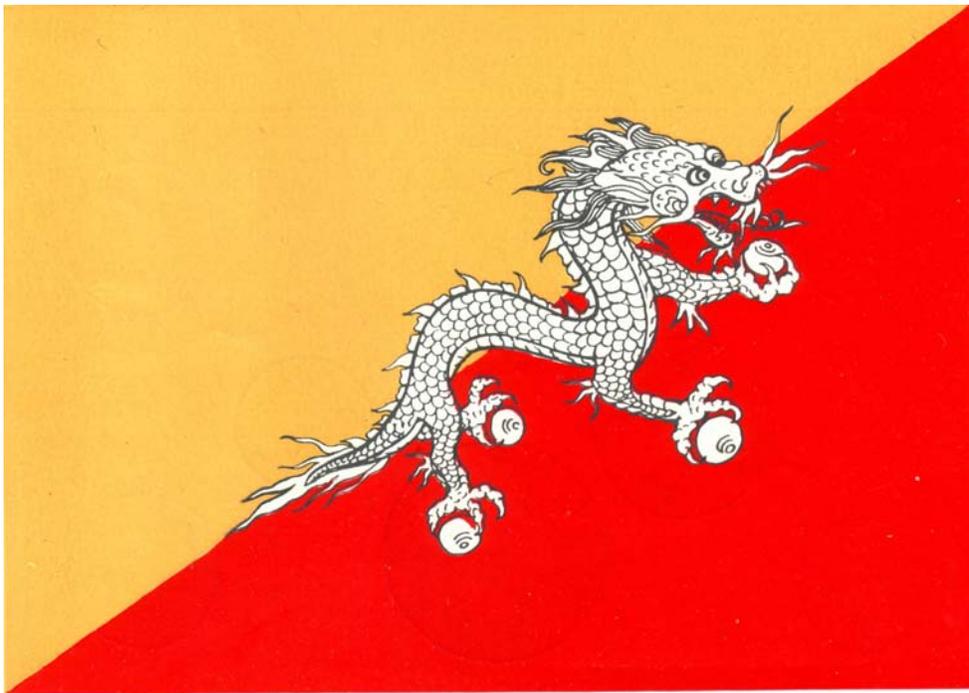
³¹ *Catalogue Yvert et Tellier* 38/40 and *blocs-feuillet* 2. Author's collection.

*The Current National Flag—1968*³²

Four significant changes were made in the design of the current flag. First, the colour of the dragon was changed to white.³³ Second, the dragon, which was formerly parallel to the fly, was embroidered diagonally along the division between the colors. This was because the dragon faced the earth when the flag slumped when hoisted.³⁴ Third, the lower half was changed to orange, upon the command of the king sometime in 1968. Fourth, the shape was changed to a rectangle measuring six by nine feet (1.82 by 2.88 m).

The tradition of hoisting the flag every day in front of government offices did not exist before then. It was regularized by the king after the secretariat moved for the second time, from *Taba* to *Tashichho Dzong* in 1968.³⁵

The national flag today is a bicolour standard, divided diagonally into equal yellow and orange fields. The yellow-orange division runs from the lower hoist to the upper fly. The yellow half stretches from the hoist to the upper fly end, and the orange half from the fly end to the lower hoist. It has a white dragon along the division, flying towards the upper fly end. The honour point of the flag is the division along which a dragon is located, stretching equally on the yellow and orange fields. The staff ornament or finial is a *norbu* (jewel).³⁶



(21)

³² Penjore, Dorji and Kinga, Sonam: Op. cit.

³³ This suggests that the flag depicted in (13) used a green dragon.

³⁴ The dragon on the new flag was first painted by *Kilkhon Lopen Jada* from *Lingmikha, Punakha*.

³⁵ The secretariat had previously moved from *Dechhencholing* Palace to *Taba*.

³⁶ Penjore, Dorji and Kinga, Sonam: Op. cit.

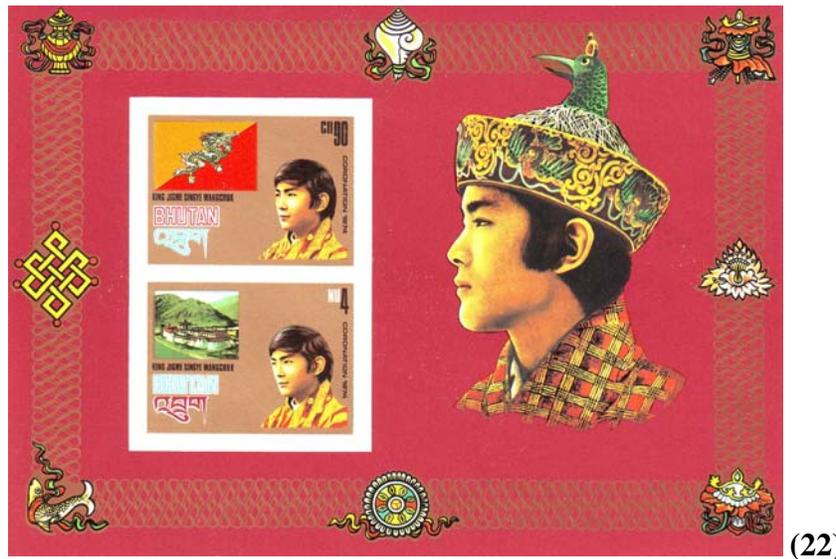
I found this picture of the flag (21) in a booklet I received in 1972.³⁷ The booklet was published during the reign of His Majesty King *Jigme Dorji Wangchuck*, who died 21 July 1972. I believe this picture is the first official image of the flag ever published by the royal government, in connection with the national flag rules adopted by the national assembly on 8 June 1972. This booklet describes the national flag:

Symbols of Nationhood: The National Flag

The upper yellow half of Bhutan's flag signifies the secular authority of the King. It is the colour of fruitful action, both in the affairs of religion and of the state.

The orange half of the flag denotes the religious practice and spiritual power of Buddhism as it is manifested in the Kagyupa and Nyingmapa sects, the historic springs of the Bhutanese faith.

The dragon honours the people's name for their country: Druk Yul, Land of the Thunder Dragon. Its colour, the white of purity, expresses the loyalty of the country's many racial and linguistic groups. The dragon's snarling mouth expresses the stern strength of the male and female deities protecting Bhutan; the jewels it clasps in its claws are symbols of the land's wealth and perfection.



A coronation stamp sheet³⁸ was issued in 1974 for the coronation of His Majesty King *Jigme Singye Wangchuck* on 2 June 1974 (22). It shows His Majesty, the new king, wearing the Raven Crown, the national flag, and eight lucky signs.

³⁷ “The Kingdom of Bhutan” published by His Majesty’s Government of Bhutan during the reign of His Majesty King *Jigme Dorji Wangchuck*, who died on 21 July 1972. Letter of *Navin C. Gurung*, assistant editor, Department of Information, Ministry of Development, Royal Government of Bhutan, *Thimphu*, 12 December 1972. Author’s library.

³⁸ Author’s collection.

The Code of Conduct of the National Flag—1972

The code of conduct was passed by the National Assembly on 8 June 1972. Resolution No. 28 of the session reads: “As the national flag is a symbol of the country’s independence, and in the absence of proper procedures for hoisting it, the Assembly approved for enforcement of the National Flag Rules drafted by Cabinet”.³⁹

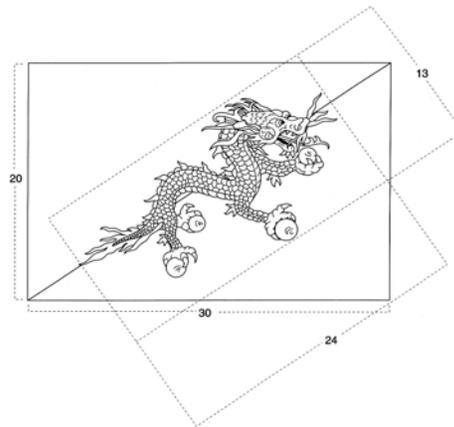
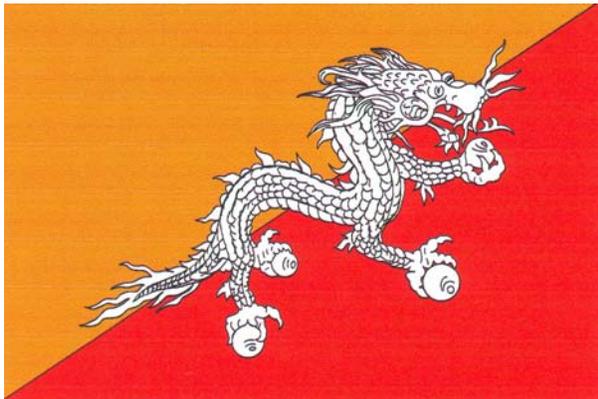
The code⁴⁰ has eight provisions, beginning with the description and explanation of the flag’s colour, field, and coat of arms. Other provisions pertain to the flag’s size and dimensions, and the rules for according respect and hoisting the flag. They also specify the places and occasions for hoisting the flag and delineate the entitlements of flags on cars.

The Size of the National Flag

The national assembly resolved that the dimension of the national flag should be measure 2:3. However, some accepted sizes of this ratio are 14 by 21 ft., 8 by 12 ft., 4 by 6 ft., 2 by 3 ft., and 6 by 9 inches.⁴¹ The smallest size is used for car flags.

The William Crampton Flag Institute Specification Sheet 007 issued on 1 August 1994 gave the following proportions and colours for the Bhutan national flag⁴² **(23)**:

*Proportion: 2:3. Colours Pantone Matching System: yellow 116, orange 165.
Four Colour Printing Specifications CMYK: Yellow 0 21 84 0 and for Orange:
0 59 84 0.*



(23)

³⁹ National Assembly Secretariat (1999), *Proceedings and Resolutions of the National Assembly* from 31st to 50th sessions, Vol. 2, *Thimphu*, National Assembly Secretariat, p. 97.

⁴⁰ The code (hand-written manuscript) in *Dzongkha* signed by the then-speaker of national assembly, *Dasho Shingkar Lam*, was found in the archives of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

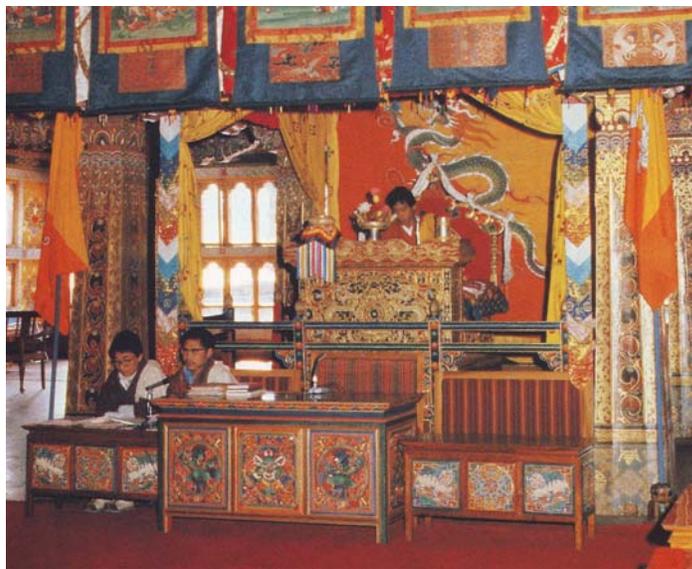
⁴¹ 4.27 by 6.4 m, 2.44 by 3.66 m, 1.22 by 1.83 m, 0.6 by 0.9 m and 0.15 by 0.23 m.

⁴² The disclaimer states: “The information given on this sheet is issued by the Flag Institute in good faith as an accurate depiction of the flag specified valid for the date of issue. The Institute cannot accept any liability for loss or damage resulting from the use of this information. The images are not intended for further reproduction but as a reference for the creation of art-work or the manufacture of the flag.”

The Thimphu Flag—1998

In (24), His Majesty the King, *Jigme Singye Wangchuck*, presides over the *Tshogdu* ceremony in the large room of the national assembly in *Thimphu*, decorated with wonderful *thankhas*.⁴³ A large “flag” appears to hang behind the throne. The dragon is painted green in accordance with the traditional and religious reference to the dragon as *yu druk ngonm gy/-’~ug-Åonm-* (turquoise dragon). The green dragon is embroidered along the diagonal, looking to the hoist and not parallel to the fly.⁴⁴ The colour orange is at the hoist rather than the fly.

If it is indeed a flag, it might be shown in reverse. However, two national flags, as described in 1968, are displayed in front of the throne. For this reason, I believe that the “flag” behind the throne is not a flag but some form of tapestry showing the most important symbol of the country, the dragon.



(24)

⁴³ *Acharya, Sanjay*: “Le Bhoutan. Royaume de l’Himalaya”. Editions MLP 1999. Lustre Press Pvt. Ltd., 1999; *Roli Books Pvt. Ltd.*, New Delhi.

⁴⁴ A similar national flag hung behind the throne in the national assembly hall of *Paro Rinpung Dzong* in 1959. Unlike the flag in the current hall, the dragon cuts across the yellow-red fields parallel to the fly.

The Flag in the New Constitution—2007-2008

The country's new constitution contained specifications for the flag. The draft of the constitution appears in the Parliamentary Entitlements Act as of 4th April 2007.⁴⁵ The Constitution was signed on 18 July 2008. References on the national symbols of Bhutan appear in Article 1.5:

The National Flag and the National Emblem of Bhutan shall be as specified in the Schedule of this Constitution

First Schedule—The National Flag and the National Emblem of Bhutan

The National Flag:

The upper yellow half that touches the base symbolizes the secular tradition. It personifies His Majesty the King, whose noble actions enhance the Kingdom. Hence, it symbolizes that His Majesty is the upholder of the spiritual and secular foundations of the Kingdom.

The lower orange half that extends to the top symbolizes the spiritual tradition. It also symbolizes the spiritual tradition. It also symbolizes the flourishing of the Buddhist teachings in general and that of the Kagyu and Nyingma tradition in particular.

The dragon that fully presses down the fimbriation [division] symbolizes the name of the Kingdom, which is endowed with the spiritual and secular traditions.

The white dragon symbolizes the undefiled thoughts of the people that express their loyalty, patriotism and great sense of belonging to the Kingdom although they have different ethnic and linguistic origins

⁴⁵ <http://www.constitution.bt>

A VARIETY OF NATIONAL FLAGS

While the colour of the dragon on Bhutan's flag has been white since 1956, during my trip I actually saw very few flags with a white dragon. The drawing of the dragon seems to differ from a flag to another. And the colour yellow is also sometimes lighter, sometimes darker (yellow-orange).

Flags with a White Dragon

This flag (25) was displayed in a traffic police station in *Thimphu*⁴⁶ but the flagpole is on the wrong side; the reverse of the flag is shown.



Changbangdro Primary school in *Thimphu*⁴⁷ uses this flag during demonstrations (26).



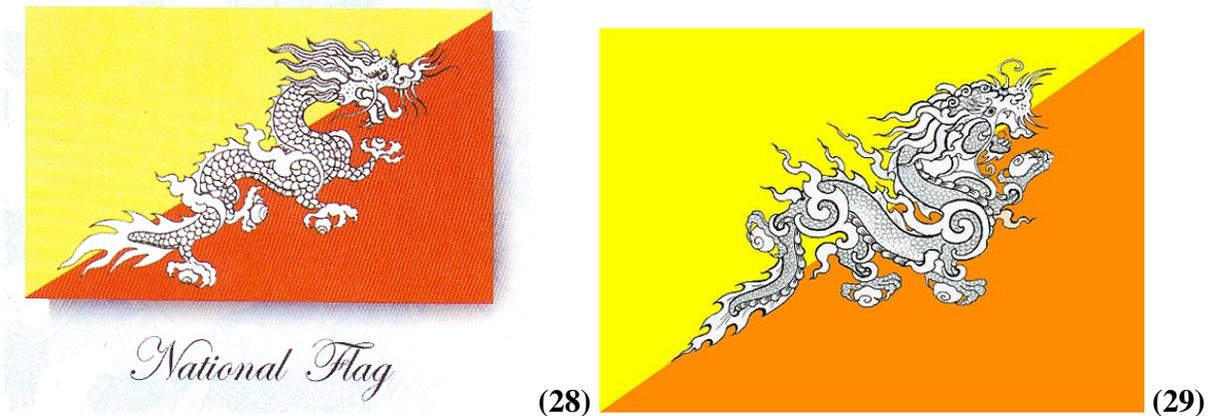
⁴⁶ Photograph taken by Michel R. Lupant, 5 October 2007.

⁴⁷ Photograph taken by Michel R. Lupant, 10 October 2007.

I ordered this flag (27) from a manufacturer because it was easier to buy flags of all sizes but with coloured dragon than a white dragon⁴⁸.



A stamp sheet showing the national symbols was issued on 17 December 2005 by the Royal Bhutan Post Office⁴⁹. Around the symbols appear the national flag (28) and the national crest.



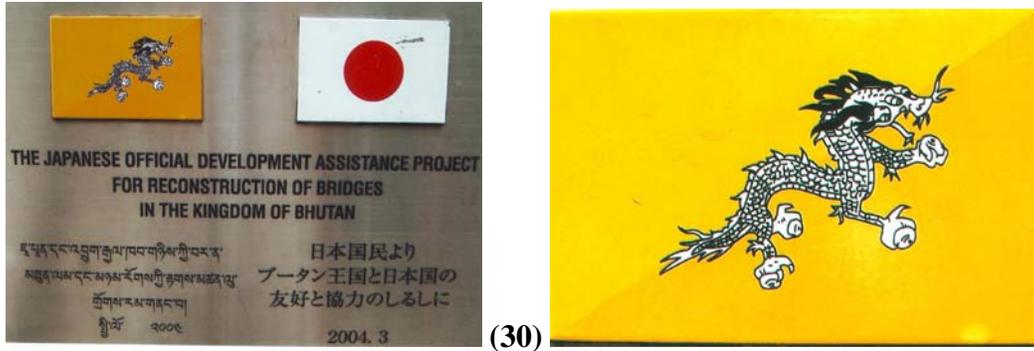
On an Internet site,⁵⁰ the national flag shows another dragon, more gray in color (29). However, most cards, stamps, United Nations charts and postcards, and books in many languages usually show the Bhutan national flag with the official white dragon.

⁴⁸ This flag is 1.26 by 1.78 m. I ordered it before leaving Bhutan because I was unable to buy it during my trip. The flag arrived at my home in Belgium in January 2008. Author's collection.

⁴⁹ Author's collection.

⁵⁰ RAOnline Bhutan: "Bhutan's Royal family frameset" <http://2008.bhutan-360.com/2007/12/18/1907-to-2007-bhutan-through-100-years/>

On the road between *Trongsa* and *Chendebji* I crossed the river *Mangde Chhu*. On the *Bjee Zam* bridge, reconstructed by the Japanese Development Assistance Project, a plate commemorates Japanese cooperation with Bhutan, showing the Bhutanese and Japanese flags⁵¹. Its inauguration took place in March 2004 (30).



(30)

Druk Air Corporation Limited – Royal Bhutan Airlines

The National Bhutan Airlines, based at *Paro* airport, was founded on 5 April 1981 and began operations on 11 February 1983. It takes its name from *Druk*, the country’s name. It started a decade after His Majesty King *Jigme Dorji Wangchuck* began to open up the kingdom from self-imposed isolation. *Drukair* is the only airline flying into Bhutan, linking the country to Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, and Thailand. The logo is the company’s name and the dragon (31) (32) (33); its airplanes’ tails are painted with the national flag.



(31)⁵²



(32)⁵³



(33)



⁵¹ Photograph taken by Michel R. Lupant, 9 October 2007.

⁵² *Wangdue Photrang* Hotel, photograph taken by Michel R. Lupant, 10 October 2007.

⁵³ *Paro* Airport. Photographs taken by Michel R. Lupant, 13 October 2007.

Coloured Dragons

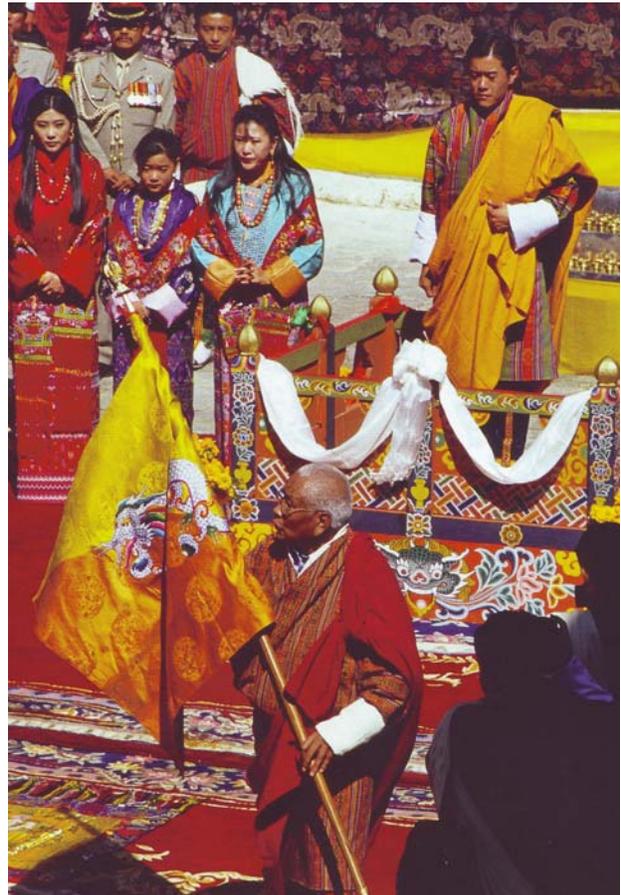
The first flag I found with a coloured dragon appeared in an official publication.⁵⁴ Here the dragon is embroidered on brocade (34).



(34)

On 21 October 2004, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince *Dasho Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck* officially assumed the title of *Chhoetse Penlop*.⁵⁵ The Crown Prince received the *Dhar*⁵⁶ and seal of the *Chhoetse Penlop* from His Majesty the *Druk Gyalpo* in the Throne Room of the *Tashichhodzong*. As *Chhoetse Penlop*, the Crown Prince was formally installed as the heir to the Throne.

A ceremony took place in the courtyard of *Tashichhodzong*. On 31 October the traditional investiture ceremony was conducted in the *Zimchung Nang*⁵⁷ of the *Trongsa Dzong*. A brocade standard (35) with an embroidered coloured dragon was displayed in front of him.⁵⁸



(35)

⁵⁴ “Bhutan Himalayan Kingdom”, published by the Royal Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan 1979, page 47.

⁵⁵ http://www.raonline.ch/pages/bt/pol/bt_polpenlop01a.html

⁵⁶ A saffron-yellow scarf that symbolizes His new rank.

⁵⁷ Inner sanctum.

⁵⁸ Nestroy, Harald N.: “Bhutan” page 101, Edition Panorama 2006, Germany.

On my way to Bhutan I paid a visit to the institution of Dr. and Mrs. Graham, *Kalimpong*, West Bengal, India. I received a warm welcome but nobody there remembered the display of the first national flag of Bhutan in 1947. However, its museum exhibits a flag (36)⁵⁹ with a coloured dragon, a gift of Bhutanese students to the institution.



(36)



During my trip I was fascinated by the national flag with coloured dragons embroidered on both sides. These coloured dragon flags fly in front of many *Dzongs* or in their courtyards. The colours used to embroider the dragon are not always the same. The national flag turns pink in the sunset light and is lowered at around 17:00. I waited until the flag in front of *Trongsa Dzong* was lowered to take a close-up photograph (37).⁶⁰



(37)



⁵⁹ Photograph taken by Michel R. Lupant, *Kalimpong*, India, 3 October 2007.

⁶⁰ Photograph taken by Michel R. Lupant, *Trongsa Dzong*, 7 October 2007.

In *Jakar*, a woman showed me her own flag (38). It was a different dragon, also in colour.⁶¹



(38)



Changbangdro Primary School in *Thimphu* flies this flag in front of the school (39).⁶²



(39)



⁶¹ Photograph taken by Michel R. Lupant, *Jakar*, 7 October 2007. In the photograph, the dragon's tongue seems pink; in fact it is dark red.

⁶² Photograph taken by Michel R. Lupant, *Thimphu*, 10 October 2007.

With the help of Mrs. *Thinley Dem*, I collected several different Bhutanese flags,⁶³ each with a different dragon. They were so beautiful that I didn't hesitate to buy them!

This flag **(40)** has many colours, its size is 82 by 120 cm; the flag in **(41)** is 75 by 98 cm.



(40)



(41)

The flag in **(42)** is 122 by 175 cm; the flag in **(43)** is 25.5 by 27 cm.



(42)



(43)

The flag in **(44)** is 17 by 23.5 cm.



(44)

⁶³ Author's collection.

MILITARY & DEFENCE—ARMED FORCES

There are five military branches in Bhutan: the Royal Bhutan Army, National Militia, Royal Bhutan Police, Royal Bodyguard, and Forest Guards (Paramilitary).

The Army

The **Royal Bhutan Army (RBA)** is responsible for maintaining the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty against security threats. The army's supreme commander is the *Druk Gyalpo*. The administrative functions are carried out by the chief operations officer with the rank of major general, currently *Goonglon Wagma* (Major General) *Batoo Tshering*. The army's headquarters are in *Thimphu* and the training centre is in *Tenchholing*.

The army's flag (45) is a tri-colour of white, black, and red with a dragon in the canton and the army badge in the centre. It is customary, but not obligatory, for one son from each Bhutanese family to serve in the army. In addition, the National Militia may be recruited during emergencies. The army may, from time to time, assist the Royal Bhutan Police in maintaining law and order.



The Royal Bodyguard

The **Royal Bodyguard** of Bhutan (RBG) is the most elite unit of the armed forces. The RBG is an independent part of the army under the personal command of the king of Bhutan, in charge of security for him and members of the royalty. The force comprises over a thousand soldiers and its commandant is Major General *Dhendup Tshering*. The soldiers are well equipped with the latest armaments and training in all fields such as counter-terrorism, etc. The RBG flag (46) is similar to the national flag but with the RBG badge in the centre replacing the dragon.



(46)



The Royal Bhutan Police

The **Royal Bhutan Police (RBP)** was formed 1 September 1965 with 555 personnel reassigned from the Royal Bhutan Army. It is commanded by a chief of police who is under the control of the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs. The headquarters of the RBP is in the capital city, *Thimphu*. The RBP flag⁶⁴ is a vertical tri-colour of white, dark blue (almost twice as wide the other stripes), and red (47). The national colours appear in a canton and the police badge, the sword of wisdom, appears in the centre. I observed the flag flying in front of the police office in the centre of *Thimphu* and atop a police building in *Paro*. The chief of police uses a car flag (48), 16 by 27 cm with a black heading of 2.5 cm. On the car flag the vertical stripes are nearly equal in width.



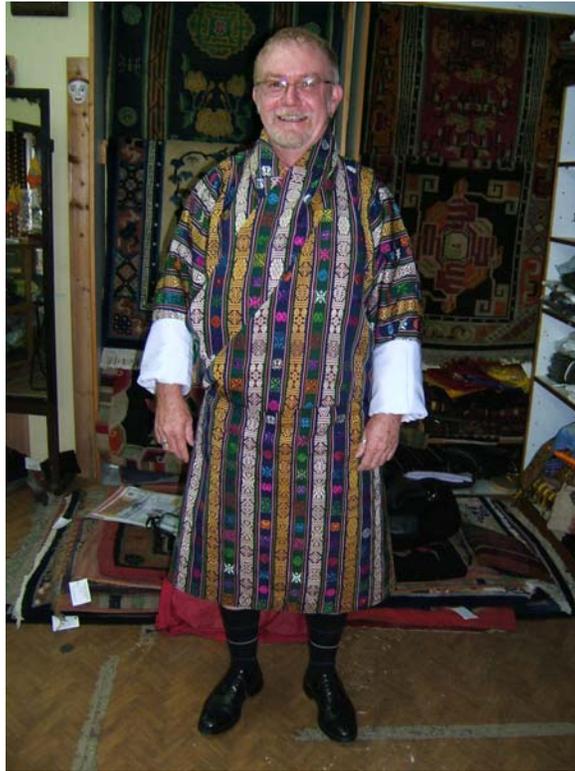
(47)



(48)

⁶⁴ Photograph taken by Michel R. Lupant at the Royal Bhutan Police Headquarters, *Thimphu*, 5 October 2007.

Before leaving Bhutan, I posed wearing the *ngo*, the national male dress (49).⁶⁵



(49)

Merci.

⁶⁵ Photograph taken by *Kinley*, my driver, *Thimphu*, 10 October 2007.