

Reflecting on the Past to Forge the Future What Can Modern Bhutan Learn From Ling Gesar's Youthful Bodhisattva Warriors?

Sonam Chuki

Who Was Ling Gesar?

Ling Gesar was a Bodhisattva warrior King in the Kingdom of Ling in ancient eastern Tibet. Ling is an historical and idyllic place where Ling Gesar was born in 1038, an Earth Tiger Year. He is believed to be the “heart son” of Guru Rinpoche and the accumulative manifestation of Chenrezig, Jampelyang and Chagnadorji—or Rigsum Gonpo. He is also venerated as the reincarnation of the great Tibetan dharma King, Trisong Deutsen.¹

Ling Gesar is fondly revered in Tibet, Mongolia, parts of China, Turkey, Gilgit, the Baltistan region of Pakistan, Sikkim and Ladakh, parts of Nepal and Bhutan. His mission on earth was to vanquish the evil forces driven by *dued* (anger and hatred) and to build an enlightened civilisation.²

Ling Gesar's Youthful Bodhisattva Warriors

Based on Ling Gesar's vision and mission to build an enlightened society free of anger, greed and confusion, hundreds of thousands of Bodhisattva warrior men and women were raised. Seven exemplary warrior commanders, often referred to as the “Seven Men of Supreme Warriorhood” or *Pa Yang Dag Dan Pa Mi Dun* led these Ling warriors. They were supported by 30 diverse yet critical warrior ministers who were revered as Ling's 30 heroes or *Ling Gi Patrul Sumchu*. Among them were young, courageous, honest and self-sacrificing individuals who fought against evil and liberated the enemy's ignorant consciousness, leading them to the Buddhafield.

¹His Eminence Terton Namkha Drimed's Rinpoche's teachings on Ling Gesar at the Royal Institute of Management, Thimphu Bhutan, 28 May 2016. Rinpoche is regarded as the joint emanation of Ling Gesar and his elder GyatsaZhalkar, one of Ling's seven supreme warriors.

²Ibid.

Dralha Tsegyal, one of Ling's young heroes, was outstanding among seven victorious warriors.³ Youthful and selfless warriors like Dralha Tsegyal, Chalu Khay bu Drugyal and Yugyal Bume demonstrated infinite and selfless courage to face varied challenges in Ling's 18 major and numerous minor wars against the demonic forces. Thus, Ling Gesar's youthful Bodhisattva warriors offer an exemplary model of the qualities youth require to be selfless leaders.

In Ling's nine-year epic war with the northern kingdom of Jang Satham, modern-day China's Yunnan province⁴, Dralha Tsegyal took up the challenge to face the most ferocious warrior Tsel Mar Ponpo during Ling's last critical battle with Jang Satham. At the start of combat, Tsel Mar Ponpo was over-confident and underestimated Dralha Tsegyal's fighting skills because of his age. His youthful appearance made Tsel Mar think that Dralha Tsegyal was easy prey and he humiliated him, comparing him with a meek sheep ready to be slaughtered. However, to his shock, he discovered Dralha Tsegyal's inner strength and battle skills when the latter deflated his swift arrow. Despite his best shooting prowess, Tsel Mar Ponpo succumbed to young Dralha Tsegyal's sharp sword.⁵

Young warriors such as Pawo Ratna Bumthar and Agod Senge Drug, in their 20s, sacrificed their lives in the Lithri battle to liberate the deluded mind of the Prince of Song Lithri. Although any of Ling's supreme warriors could easily have slain the prince without losing their lives, none of them had the karmic connection to lead the dead prince's consciousness to the Buddhafield. Pawo Ratna Bumthar and Agod Senge Drug intentionally went to the battlefield and fought an honourable fight in which the Lithri prince killed them both and they killed the prince. In this way the youthful Ling warriors helped the prince's deluded mind to be transformed.⁶

Na ngo Yutag, Bumpai Nangay Karpo and Dense Yuyi Metog are also well known and much loved young warriors embodying the exemplary attributes of the four animals—tiger, lion, garuda and dragon. These powerful creatures are believed to be the sources of life force energy, or *lungta*, in the Tibetan Buddhist culture of the Himalayan regions of Tibet and Bhutan.⁷ The tiger is strong, agile and magnificent, the lion powerful and ferocious, and the garuda is known to possess immaculate

³Douglas J. Penick, 2013, "The Warrior Song of King Gesar", Accessed on 5 October 2016: <http://www.tulkuthondup.com/blog/introduction-the-warrior-song-of-king-gesar>.

⁴Epic of Gesar, retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_of_King_Gesar.

⁵Ling Lhamo, 2013, "The war between Jang and Ling heroes- part 2" You Tube, posted April 21, Accessed on 27 October 2016 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6y_tYfpw5Q.

⁶Douglas J. Penick, 2013, "The Warrior Song of King Gesar", Accessed on 5 October 2016 <http://www.tulkuthondup.com/blog/introduction-the-warrior-song-of-king-gesar>.

⁷Thinley, Kunzang, 2001, *Nay Khor Nam Shey Nang Wa Sar Pa Zhug*, KMT, Thimphu, pages 73-83.

inner and outer strength as the emanation of the Buddha's mind. The dragon exhibits a thunderous roar, allowing truth to prevail and preventing strife and hostility.

Cha Lu Kay bu Drukgyal was also numbered among the 30 great Ling warriors. His selflessness and fearlessness was exhibited in a challenging fight against an experienced enemy warrior, Dugri Ngo Yalang. Dugri Ngo Yalang mocked the youthful, handsome and fresh demeanor of Cha Lu Kay Bu Drukgyal, thinking the young warrior was no match for his experience and battle skills. Instead, Drukgyal not only withstood a poisonous and powerful enemy arrow but fought courageously even after losing control of his horse and falling onto the sandy battleground. With perseverance, he recovered and killed his seasoned enemy.⁸

Dense Yuyi Metog, one of Ling's other beloved young warriors led a difficult battle against the cannibalistic, demonic, black kingdom of Thoel. Despite his own perfect weapons, battle knowledge and skills, and supported by powerful Ling's protecting deities, Ling Gesar had no karmic connection to conquer the Thoel kingdom. Instead, Guru Rinpoche appeared to him and prophesied that Yuyi Metog would provide the leadership to guide Ling's young and old warriors and subdue the demonic forces of Thoel.⁹

Following his King's command and anticipating the enemy invasion, Dense Yuyi Metog led Ling's war team with commendable leadership, fighting many difficult battles and defeating the black magic powers of the evil enemy king. In the process he subdued Thoel and Ling's *Throthung*, Ling Gesar's uncle, a cowardly and jealous man with super-human, black magic powers who was ambitious to become the king of Ling himself.¹⁰

Three Ngo Lug sons of Ling—Mu Pai Dar Zom Ngo Lug, Tarong Sentsa Ngo Lug and Yanbu Tsangpa Ngo Lug—are also fondly remembered for serving their country and people. Ling Gesar's young Bodhisattva warriors all demonstrated fearlessness, selflessness, perseverance and deep compassion to build an enlightened society.

⁸Ling Lhamo, 2013, "Great war between Chang and Ling- part 1" You Tube, Accessed on 27 October 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jdl4jAn8pNU>.

Ling Lhamo, 2013, "Great war between Chang and Ling- part 4" You Tube, Accessed on 27 October 2016.

Ling Lhamo, 2012, "King Gesar's war with Thoel" You Tube, Accessed on 27 October 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdiFWptHy>.

⁹Ling Lhamo, 2012, "King Gesar's war with Thoel" You Tube, Accessed on 27 October 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qfn4ykclqT0>.

¹⁰Ibid.

The Situation of Bhutanese Youth

The Bhutanese population is young, with more than half under the age of 25.¹¹ This means that youth are extremely important participants in the social, political and economic arena. They face new challenges in a highly competitive globalised world with the most pressing issue being unemployment. Research shows that the rate of youth unemployment between the ages of 15 and 24 years is high.¹² Further, girls' unemployment is at 11.6 percent compared with boys' at 9.5 percent¹³.

Young people are exposed to unknown risks and difficulties leaving their rural homes for urban towns in search of meaningful employment opportunities. This is attributed to their poor decision-making skills and limited resources¹⁴, and has resulted in problems like alcohol and substance abuse, unprotected sex, prostitution, violence and even suicide.

Young people are struggling to meet these challenges because they lack leadership skills. Building youth leadership is vital to help them move forward. Existing school education attempts to build character and leadership qualities such as self-reliance, self-confidence, discipline and commitment.¹⁵ But this does not always translate into reality in terms of instilling these values in young people, especially with the growing rate of unemployment. Youth need strong inspiration to move forward during this difficult period.

What Can Bhutan's Potential Youth Leaders Learn From Ling's Young Bodhisattva Warriors?

Bhutan is the last independent Vajrayana Buddhist Kingdom in the world. Hence, it has a moral responsibility to nurture and promote the selfless values of Bodhisattvas. In an increasingly commercialised global world, youth need to learn and strive for the Bodhisattva way of leading themselves and others to build a caring, compassionate and peaceful world. Ling Gesar's dharma-based governance raised numerous selfless young leaders to fulfill his timeless vision of creating an enlightened society. Drawing on Ling Gesar's young Bodhisattva leader model, Buddhist Bhutan has the opportunity to introduce a youth leadership policy. It is imperative to tap the potential of this half of the Bhutanese population in its most productive stage.

¹¹Retrieved from <http://www.unicefbhutan.org.bt/about-us/adolescent-youth/> on 27 October 2016.

¹²Retrieved from <http://www.bt.undp.org/content/dam/bhutan/docs/MDGs/MAF%20-%20Youth%20Employment%20in%20Bhutan%2030%20Dec%202013.pdf> on 27 October 2016.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵The purpose of school education in Bhutan: A Curriculum Handbook for Schools by Curriculum and Professional Support Division (CAPSD), Ministry of Education, Royal Government of Bhutan, page 3,1996.

Article 9, Principles of State Policy, of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan states that:

The state shall strive to create conditions that will enable the true and sustainable development of a good and compassionate society rooted in Buddhist ethos and universal human values.

The state then has an explicit national mandate to formulate a focused youth leadership-building policy. Such a policy could be geared towards genuinely recognising young peoples' inner and outer qualities to contribute to a compassionate society. This is in keeping with the nation's Gross National Happiness (GNH) philosophy.

From Ling Gesar's young warriors, Dralha Tsegyal and Cha Lu Kay bu Drukgyal, our youth can see the value of perseverance, selflessness and fearlessness for attaining personal and national goals. This will equip young Bhutanese with the inherent capacity to endure and continue their personal battle against a range of ill-intended actions from petty burglary to rape, group fights to substance abuse, and killing one another. Through their own war against their inner enemy, they can help meet the collective and national goals of being a compassionate citizen and building a GNH nation. Warriors like Pawo Ratna Bumthar and Agod Senge Drug teach the power of compassionate courage and self-sacrifice in the interest of larger goals to build an enlightened world order.

These youthful warriors demonstrate youth's innate ability to live the Bodhisattva values to benefit others, even if it means losing one's precious life. This incredible example shows that young Bhutanese can be inspired and taught to translate Bodhisattva values in their daily conduct and defeat the *dued* of ignorance and anger. Dense Yuyi Metog, entrusted by his King to lead the war against Thoel, offers a model of committed and determined leadership. His example shows the infinite positive energy of youth to conquer negative obstacles and can inspire our young people to fight negative thoughts and actions.

The comparison of Ling's young warriors to the tiger, lion, garuda and dragon symbolises the complete strength, magnificence, truthfulness, natural ability to prevent strife and hostility and above all the Buddhamind.¹⁶ Bhutan's youth too have the potential to draw on their positive strength and awaken their Buddhamind. After all, they have the Ling youth's equivalent of precious human life. The young

¹⁶Thinley, Kunzang, 2001, *Nay Khor Nam Shey Nang Wa Sar Pa Zhug*, KMT, Thimphu, pages 73-83.

Ling warriors are not fondly remembered just for their own special traits but also for their total dedication and self-sacrifice to live Ling Gesar's vision of constructing an enlightened world. Our Kings have placed much hope in youth as the future leaders of our country. Young Bhutanese must strive to live up to their national vision to create a happy, secure, prosperous and compassionate society.

Conclusion

Ling Gesar's youthful Bodhisattva warrior model was created during the 11th century in Tibet to defeat evil and build an enlightened civilisation. In an uncertain and highly globalised 21st century Bhutan, where youth are challenged by many negative forces, Ling's Bodhisattva model has relevance and currency. Bhutan, the last independent Vajrayana Buddhist Kingdom, has the duty to raise young boys and girls based on a Bodhisattva model of compassionate society. This is enshrined in our Constitution and in our national vision of GNH.

Our youth constitute a significant segment of our population and it is important to realise their full human potential. The values of compassionate courage and selflessness are universal and timeless. They can be taught through a well-crafted youth development policy and school education. If the Kingdom of Ling could deeply instill selflessness in its young warriors in the past, the Kingdom of Bhutan can work towards genuinely inculcating values of self-reliance and selflessness in its youth today. This will bring benefit well beyond Bhutan's borders helping spread much-needed peace and harmony in the world.