



HAPPY Newsletter



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Interview with dr. Kharma Phuntsho:
Inquiry of Knowledge in the Buddhist tradition

Interview with Lorraine Nencel:
QRM in research and teaching

Training of Teachers II:
Mini-Research Summaries

HAPPY Project Milestones

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ON THE COVER PHOTO: Participants of the Training of Teachers

PREFACE

When one searches for the definition of happy, you find: ***good fortune or good luck in life generally, or in a particular affair, success, prosperity, the state of pleasurable contentment of mind*** (Oxford dictionary). And many other similar definitions. But what all these definitions have in common is the fact that understanding each of them requires more than only quantifiable data. How do you measure good fortune? Or luck? Or success, pleasure, contentment?

I was HAPPY when I heard that we are going to work on a joint proposal with Bhutan. I was HAPPY when I heard that we won the proposal. I was HAPPY with the thought of visiting Bhutan. I was HAPPY to work with motivated colleagues in Bhutan and Slovenia. I was HAPPY that we could still collaborate at distance, despite of the insecurity that came with Covid-19. I was HAPPY to see the first newsletter. And now I'm HAPPY to know that I will meet (part of) the HAPPY team that will follow the summer school in VU Amsterdam.

What about you? What makes you happy? I hope reading this newsletter will be one of your moments of being HAPPY. :)

Mekky Zaidi, Junior Project Manager and Project Assistant for the HAPPY Project

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Inquiry of Knowledge in the Buddhist tradition

An interview with Dr. Karma Phuntsho, leading scholar on Bhutan and teacher of Buddhism and Bhutan Studies

A virtual talk on “inquiry of Knowledge in the Buddhist tradition” was delivered for HAPPY team members from both Bhutan and Europe on 7 February 2022 by Dr. Karma Phuntsho, a well-known Bhutanese scholar. Dr. Karma was asked to give an interactive lecture to the Happy team to explore whether Qualitative Research Methods (QRM) fit within the Buddhist tradition in Bhutan. In this article, Rinchen Dorji, Programme Leader at Sherubtse College, and Esther den Hartog, HAPPY coordinator, jointly reflect on what they learned from the thought-provoking talk which left participants with much to reflect on.

Reflecting on the talk, we could divide it into three parts:

1. Preparing the right attitude for research,
2. How Buddhist tradition would help us become good researchers, and
3. Useful tips for young researchers.

The talk began with Dr. Karma Phuntsho emphasizing the need to prepare the right attitude or qualities he called ‘internal resources’ to carry out meaningful research. These internal resources, according to him, are being passionate about research, the courage to carry out critical inquiry, and speaking truth to authority. He emphasized that if one did not possess these internal resources, research is not one’s cup of tea.

Next, Dr. Karma Phuntsho, touched upon two important Buddhist traditions that actually set provisions for us to become good researchers:

critical inquiry and quest for knowledge or learning. He said that Buddha has emphasized in his teachings the need to question and investigate for oneself instead of blindly accepting things as they are told. He also said that the quest for knowledge or learning in the Buddhist tradition is a fundamental element to enlightenment citing that in Mahayana Buddhism, without learning, even supreme beings cannot attain Buddhahood. He stressed that this kind of encouragement for critical inquiry and learning found in the Buddhist classical literature must help the young Bhutanese researchers to



Dr. Karma Phuntsho is a leading scholar on Bhutan and teaches Buddhism and Bhutan Studies in the country and abroad. He is perhaps, the only Bhutanese who has completed full monastic education before pursuing his doctorate. He completed his D.Phil. in Oriental Studies from Oxford University in 2003, the first Bhutanese to do so, and having worked as a research associate in the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University, he is also the first Bhutanese to become an Oxbridge Fellow. He has written several books and numerous articles on Bhutan's history, religion, and culture, of which the most well-known is The History of Bhutan which is the most comprehensive document on Bhutan history till date. In 1999, he founded the Loden Foundation, which aims to foster a happy and enlightened society through promotion of education, social entrepreneurship and Bhutan's culture and traditions. Dr. Karma Phuntsho is thus an academician and a social worker, making real impact in the Bhutanese society.

cultivate the right mindset and allow them to be open and critical thinkers to become good researchers. In the final part of his talk, Dr. Karma gave some very useful tips on research and publication. He urged the participants, especially the young Bhutanese researchers to cultivate good reading habits to develop great writing skills, be original and add value to what one does, keep and write proper notes and references, structure the research according to the needs of the particular journal one wishes to publish with, and exhibit utmost sensitivity in the choice of one's words. He also spoke on the importance of using academic hedging to soften the claims in research to avoid unnecessary criticisms. Speaking about criticism in research, he



Rinchen Dorji,
Programme
Leader (Lecturer),
English.

Sherubtse College,
Royal University of
Bhutan

stressed on the need to investigate and criticize the work of others. However, he cautioned that the criticism must be on the work and not on the person who has written it. The talk, overall, was interesting, insightful and thought-provoking with many takeaways for the participants. Although Rinchen is a Buddhist and Esther followed various Buddhist meditation classes and retreats, both of us had never realized that Buddhist thoughts and traditions actually allow us to be as critical and inquisitive as in modern research. The talk opened our eyes to see QRM based research from a whole new perspective.



Esther den Hartog
is a senior Project
Manager at Vrije
Universiteit Amsterdam
and the Coordinator of
the HAPPY project.

**Esther den Hartog
and Rinchen Dorji**

Lorraine Nencel:

**QRM in research
and teaching**



Dr. Lorraine Nencel is an associate professor at the department of Sociology of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam). She has been involved as a QRM expert in the facilitation of the Training of Teachers (ToT) on the application of Qualitative Research Methods (QRM) in teaching and research. The ToT consisted of three phases. In phase 1, teachers learned the basics and key principles of QRM. In phase 2, they conducted research practicing with the QRM knowledge learned in phase 1. In the last phase, they analysed and presented the results of their research. In this interview, Lorraine shares her experience of the training.

What are your views on the value of applying qualitative research methods (QRM) in research and teaching?

What is important about QRM is that it gives different types of knowledge, data, that can be complementary to quantitative research but it also stands on its own. QRM helps to understand the complexity of a phenomenon. Let's take the rise of Korean cosmetic products in Bhutan as an example, one of the research subjects from our participants. You can study this phenomenon in different ways. You can focus on the use of the products by using surveys. This would be more market-oriented research. But if you want to understand what the rise of the products means for the Bhutanese society, then you need QRM. Because QRM lets you study the subject relating to its cultural, social and economic significance, from the perspective of the people.

Can you share an example from your own research and teaching experience when applying QRM led to results that could not have been achieved without the application of QRM?

The type of information I looked for in my research was different than you do with quantitative research. In one of my research projects, I looked at secretaries who work in public administration in Peru to understand better their identity and the possibilities as a young woman in Peruvian society. I wanted to understand how the gender-sexual images in the Peruvian society relate to their work and their own identities, how it is to have a family and contribute economically to your family, how their job worked. So, there were many layers about identity

that I wanted to understand. I used various qualitative research methods, including ethnographic observations, following women at their work to understand how bureaucratic and time-consuming the system is. I used photo voice method and asked the women to take, for example, a picture of their favorite place in their house, and in the cities, after which I interviewed them to understand things from the perspective of the people that you're studying.

Recently, you facilitated the Training for Teachers (ToT): Part I for the Bhutanese HEIs faculty and staff on Qualitative Research Methodologies, which in line continued with two parts of ToTs after. Can you share the improvements or changes you observed amongst the participants before and after the training?

In the beginning, everyone was very insecure about QRM, and people didn't really understand what it was, which made it difficult for them to understand what they are learning. So, in the beginning there was confusion, I call it good confusion, but probably felt as bad confusion. In the second training we discussed the field work that the teachers had been working on, and that is when they started understanding a little bit where QRM was about. But after the last session, when they presented their research, they felt so much more confident, I was very happy to see the results. It was a challenge to do the training online. The only reason the training was successful was because of the remarkable collaboration that developed between our Bhutanese colleagues and ourselves. It was difficult to supervise, when giving lectures I couldn't see which

messages got across, and which didn't. But our partners were really on top of it. I think our bond have grown much stronger because of the challenges we had to overcome working during COVID. All in all, the training was quite successful. The next challenge is to bring the knowledge that the participants obtained to other teachers, and into their courses. These steps will be addressed in the next project activities.

It is difficult to give a vision for the whole higher education system in Bhutan. Because like any educational system, there are so many factors involved that can influence the developments. In the last meeting, we heard about certain developments, including reorganizations, that we have no control of. But I can only hope that there will be space to include qualitative research methods in the changes that will occur. I hope that

QRM THROUGH THE EYES OF ToT PARTICIPANT:

"I am very grateful to my institution for having trust in me and giving me the opportunity to associate myself as core team member of the Happy Project. What I especially like is that I'm not learning QRM just on professional level, but on a personal as well. I am learning so many other things as well, such as making use of Google Team and getting to know my in-country colleagues and the European partners."

"If we look into the South Asian context, especially Bhutan, we are a knowledge consuming country. As a lecturer myself, it is difficult to get access to articles written by Bhutanese on Bhutan. Usually our QRM materials come from a western perspective. Being part of this project and by developing the capacity of myself and my colleagues, I am pretty much sure that we can become a knowledge producing country in the coming years. Bhutan is unique in many ways; our culture, the concepts of Gross National Happiness, the natural environment, the mountain economic and the unique small state diplomacy between China and India. I look forward conducting research with my fellow Bhutanese to uncover our unique issues, share them with the outside world and also use our research findings for government policies."

- Mr. Kuenzang Dorji, participant of ToT



What were your views on the Mini-Research the participants presented in the final ToT?

It was such a pleasure to see the enthusiasm and progress among the participants and what came out of their research. I learnt so much about Bhutan through the participants' presentations. I want to stress that the results must be attributed to the fact that the training was a joint effort, between us and the Bhutanese partners. If our Bhutanese partners would not have cooperated so intensively, we could never have achieved this. This is also showing the limitations of working online.

What are your visions for the QRM development in the Bhutanese HEI's curricula after the project ends?

the government will look towards the Bhutanese QRM experts to seek advice if needed and that the reorganisations will potentially create more space for QRM in HEI in the future.

Mekky Zaidi



Mekky Zaidi
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in HAPPY Project.

Behind the scenes of ToT:

Mini-Research Summaries

As mentioned in the previous article, the teachers involved in Training of Teachers conducted their own Mini-Research and thus put gained QRM knowledge into practice. Now we will present some of the researches so that you can see what they have been up to.

The Reading Preference of Bhutanese Children of 10 Years and Below



Despite unprecedented developments in technology, reading is still regarded as the best source of knowledge, and a lot of research have been done in this area over the last century. And in the Bhutanese context, while a few studies have been carried out that focus on high school and university students, no research has been done on the reading habits and preferences of primary school aged children though this age group merits proper and extensive research as cultivation of reading habits early

in life is associated with development of lifelong reading habits.

This research is thus an attempt to present the thematic findings from interviews and observations to explore the reading habits and preferences of children below 10 years in Bhutan.

The answers were sought through the broad research question: **what factors shape the Bhutanese children's reading preference?** The broad question was supported by two sub-questions:

- What type of books do Bhutanese children of 10 years and below like to read?
- What is their language of preference?

Research methods included interviews with various stakeholders such as children (n=6), parents (n=6), librarians (n=3), and booksellers (n=2) in addition to extensive observations of homes (n=5), bookstores (n=2), and libraries (n=3).

Various themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews and the observations which were narrowed down to three:

1. Reading preference of children
2. Factors affecting children's reading preference, and
3. The reasons children read

Findings show that children preferred readings books written in English to ones written in Dzongkha citing reasons such as Dzongkha being difficult to read, and peer influence. It also showed that reading was strongly associated with academic endeavor and not for pleasure.

Sacred social interaction during Lochoe in Bhutan

Research methods

Interviews: Interviews were conducted with young member of the family and the head of the family.

Participant observation: the researcher also conducted the data from participating in the Lochoe itself.

Analysis: Thematic analysis and Phronetic Iterative Analysis were used to analyse the data

Research themes:

- **Perceived objectives:** The ritual is conducted to appease the Deities (Lha-gsol and Choe-rsung gsol) and seek spiritual blessing (lhab-bsang khrus-gsol, tshe-mchog-'bum-sdey). It is also conducted to ward off misfortune (gLud, mi-mkha, sri-'dul), and remember and gratify the parents and family members from past generation.
- **Sacred Space (temporal and spatial):** Auspiciousness of the day. The ritual is conducted by the Buddhist monks (including lay monk). Spiritual ethic/moral dictates. Cleansing of physical and spiritual pollution (gDrib), ban of meat, choice of songs and dances (but evolving), maintaining descent etiquette (bZa-bCa-'Dro gsum). Sacred space fosters positive interactions (rebounding)
- **Elements of Social interaction:** The lochoe is an agent of social engagement and interaction (pre- and post- ritual day, kiths and kins, host and guest, host and labour). There is exchange of niceties happening.
- **Traditional and conservative ritualization** with the stroke of creative engagement.

Outcome

The social interaction in the general scholarship is predominantly human-centric. However, in Bhutan the social interaction involves more than human entities.

Lochoe as an engagement, action, and idea permeates social and personal life worlds, and has a material and spiritual values of creating a sacred space, enhancing social interaction with human beings and the non-human entities, contributing to sustaining spiritual consciousness, becoming an agent to localized place-making.

However, the changes in conservative spiritual ethical/moral dictates, which can mean the waning power of lochoe over the behaviour of the people diminishing it's merit of sacredness, indicate the need to re-think process of ritualization in the engagement of Lochoe.

Experience

Team 2 had a great mix of experts from different HEIs. It was a great experience working with them. All the team members actively participated in all the ToTs and helped it to be a successful one.



Public housing: tenant's experience, attitude and utilization of public housing

The broad area on which we have done our study is on public housing in Bhutan. When we talk about public housing, it is rental system in which property is owned by government institutions which is usually used by civil servants. With growing population and urbanization, there are heavy pressure on housing that people are reluctant to share their view on public housing publicly. There are also concern with regard to mismanagement of public housing by tenants in recent year. Therefore, the paper explores the Bhutanese relationship with public housing by identifying **reasons of utilizing public houses, the tenants' experiences and attitudes towards public housing.** For methods, we have used qualitative research methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interview. We have carried out 11 semi-structured interviews and 6 observations in Thimphu, Trongsa and Paro respectively.



In our data analysis, we have come up with 5 themes which fits perfectly under the three parameter we have focused our study on:

- 1. Experience:** Experience of the tenants has been affected by factors such as the size of family, facilities available, number of years of their residence. Economic well-being- pay affordable rent, have their own kitchen garden, meet their end needs or wants and save money.
- 2. Attitude:** Through observation, tenants occupying public houses largely live in communities. From our interview the data reflects that tenants mostly have friendly and cooperative neighbours and they carry out the mass cleaning- building community vitality. However, some public houses are all clustered together, so they seem to have a negative outlook on community vitality as compared to tenants living aloof from the colony. Though some data shows the positive changes in the attitude of people but some are also with view that there is need of more sensitization/ advocacy on public houses.
- 3. Ownership and utilization:** Tenants have greater freedom and authority over the house they occupy. They assume the houses as their own since they have maintained the houses as per their liking. It was observed that they have nailed the wall and painted their wall as per their choice.

This study attempts to understand the perspective of the people residing in public housing from the point of view of three key areas; attitude, experience and utilization. The findings from the three areas suggested that there are diverging as well as converging data indicating the conditions under which people live in public houses. The hope is that the study will be able to bring to the surface untold stories from this field of study and be useful for decision making in the future.

Experience

With each team member coming from different background, it was not an easy task to work in a group. However, we did not let that hold back instead every member contributed tremendously in every possible way and was successful at accomplishing our team report. We are all grateful for this wonderful opportunity and getting to know each other.

A Comparative Study of Ema datshi Preparation and Consumption among Different Households in Bhutan and their Perceptions in its Significance

“Ema Datshi, the national dish of Bhutan is a deliciously spicy stew made of chili peppers, onions and locally produced yak cheese”.

Method	Description	Locations
Semi-structured interviews	12 interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Rural Sharchop families - Trongsa • 3 Urban middle-class Shachop families - Thimphu • 3 Urban middle-class Lhotsham families - Thimphu
Participant observation	12 Participant Observations: Video recordings, photographs and fieldnotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 single working persons - Paro

Research Themes

1. Cultural values and significances: It included the statements whereby the respondent's talk/perceive the significances of ema datshi in terms of cultural and traditional values attached to it.
2. Health Knowledge: Statements that suggested contradicting perceived knowledge of health issues associated with consuming chilies
3. Change in dietary behaviors: It included all statements that indicated how ema datshi preparation has evolved over time owing to the factors such as differences in the age group, preferences, and availability of ingredients.
4. Ema datshi preparation: This included the process/method of preparing ema datshi and the role of gender (husband/wife) in preparing it.
5. Socio-economic status: It included the statements and observation notes on the consumption pattern of middle-class families, different ethnicity and marital status

The recurrent opinion shared by the respondents was that the ema datshi has a significant contribution to strengthening Bhutanese identity and is one of the integral parts of Bhutanese culinary culture. Preparation of ema datshi has changed over time owing to the factors such as differences in the age group, preferences, and availability of ingredients. Despite the improvement in socioeconomic status and availability of other cuisines and ingredients, respondents feel that Bhutanese continue to consume ema datshi on a daily basis. Although all the respondents claimed that it is easy and quick to prepare ema datshi, through observation we found out that in most families only the females (wives) prepared ema datshi. However, during festivals and occasions males were observed preparing.



Experience

It was a good experience having the opportunity to work with academicians from other colleges. It gave all of us a way of knowing each other both professionally and personally. This also encouraged us for future collaborative projects. Needless to say, we learned a lot from each other during the mini-research project. It was a good experience with a mixture of both senior faculty and a few younger ones discussing and working together.

Code-Switching as Linguistic Resource in Social Interaction: Bhutanese Young Adults' Perception & Practice

This qualitative study explored how young adults of Bhutan perceive and practice code-switching (CS), a linguistic phenomenon where two or more languages are used within a single conversation. CS is known as a typical feature of any multilingual society. And, in Bhutan 19 indigenous languages are spoken alongside English and Hindi, two foreign languages widely used across the country. Accordingly, most Bhutanese are polyglots, and they usually employ multiple languages in their interactions. For example, it is almost natural for Bhutanese to employ English words or phrases or sentences in their conversation. Such linguistic practice has drawn discourses in educational context which influenced a few studies in Bhutan on whether using mixed languages is a facilitative linguistic tool for learning or a linguistic adultery that encumbers clarity. However, issues related to CS in the social context has been understudied in Bhutan. Hence this study which explored the young adults' perception on CS and their language usage provides deeper understanding into the implication of CS on the linguistic reality of Bhutan.

Methodology

For the data, researchers conducted seven semi-structured interviews, with at least two young adults who were undergraduate students from each district (Thimphu, Trongsa and Trashigang which represent western, center and eastern region of Bhutan respectively), and five participatory observations. And the data were analyzed employing Tracy's (2017) Phronetic Iterative Approach.

Findings

1. Code-switching is highly prevalent in Bhutan, and the young adults perceive it as a natural linguistic resource for effective communication.
2. The factors influencing Bhutanese young adults codeswitch show that CS is an interplay among the linguistic competence, cognitive agility and affective filtration in the context of social interaction.
3. CS provides higher mobility between the available linguistic resources in the interlocutors which enables them navigate communication more effectively.
4. The most embedded language in Bhutanese codeswitching is English language, and mostly the matrix language remains one of the local languages.
5. Most codeswitching occurs with use of conventionalized or 'nativized' English terms, phrases and sentences in the conversation. And finally,
6. The language use in social interaction among the participant young adults deviates from the construed societal norm.

Experience

While codeswitching is an interesting phenomenon in itself that will influence the change in the linguistic landscape of Bhutan, undertaking this study was uniquely enriching experience. Working remotely from each other and just being connected virtually took extra sense of individual responsibility to make the task completely collaborative. We learned to work as a team better from our common failure for couple of times to respond to the need of the team. We frowned to ourselves and smiled to each other because we had task laid before us. And to the end, we could gain a lot from the intentional effort to contribute our bit to the work's quality. In fact, it was a pleasant surprise that our difference in academic background was a boon on drawing sensible discussions around the topic through different lens which helped us learn to think a little further, a little deeper from what otherwise would be a disciplinary mundanity.

An Exploratory Study of Purchase Intentions Towards Korean Beauty Products Among Bhutanese Consumers

The study aimed to fill the knowledge gap by providing a better understanding of key factors that influence Bhutanese consumers' intention towards purchasing Korean beauty products. Even though lots of studies have been conducted to understand the buyer's intention of Korean cosmetics, those studies had limited focus. It remains unclear how Bhutanese make sense of Korean popular culture and why they are attracted to K-drama, K-pop and K-product despite little linguistic understanding, historical, and ethnic proximity to Korea. Moreover, unlike the mushrooming of the K-beauty in Bhutanese market, its influence on Bhutanese customers have received little to no attention by scholars. This research also aimed to contribute towards understanding how Korean wave affects the cultural change in Bhutan.

Methodology and data collection

Exploratory qualitative method and convenience sampling was used to conduct interview, store observation, online video observation and participant observation. The researchers interviewed seven Bhutanese Korean beauty product users, two small stores in Thimphu, three online Bhutanese bloggers and two female researchers from the team.

After collection of data, the team exchanged the transcripts and observation field notes to find common words, expressions and themes that emerged across the data. The team came up with four main themes and several sub-themes that represented the data and which answered the research question. The main themes that represented our study are beauty standards, societal pressure, consumer experience and product awareness.

Findings

In our interview and observations notes, we could find how Korean beauty standard have profoundly affected the beauty standard of Bhutanese consumers. Which connected to how societal pressure was also a key factor in deciding the products among different products in the market. Moreover, it also came to product awareness and its effectiveness and then connected back to Korean beauty standard of having clear, healthy and glowy skin which puts pressure on Bhutanese society to match up with Korean Beauty. To conclude, the factors that influenced the purchase intentions was also explained using Gerbner's cultivation analysis theory, which explores television's contributions to the viewers' perceptions of reality. Gerbner investigated the idea that television has the ability to influence or to shape the way one views life or social reality.

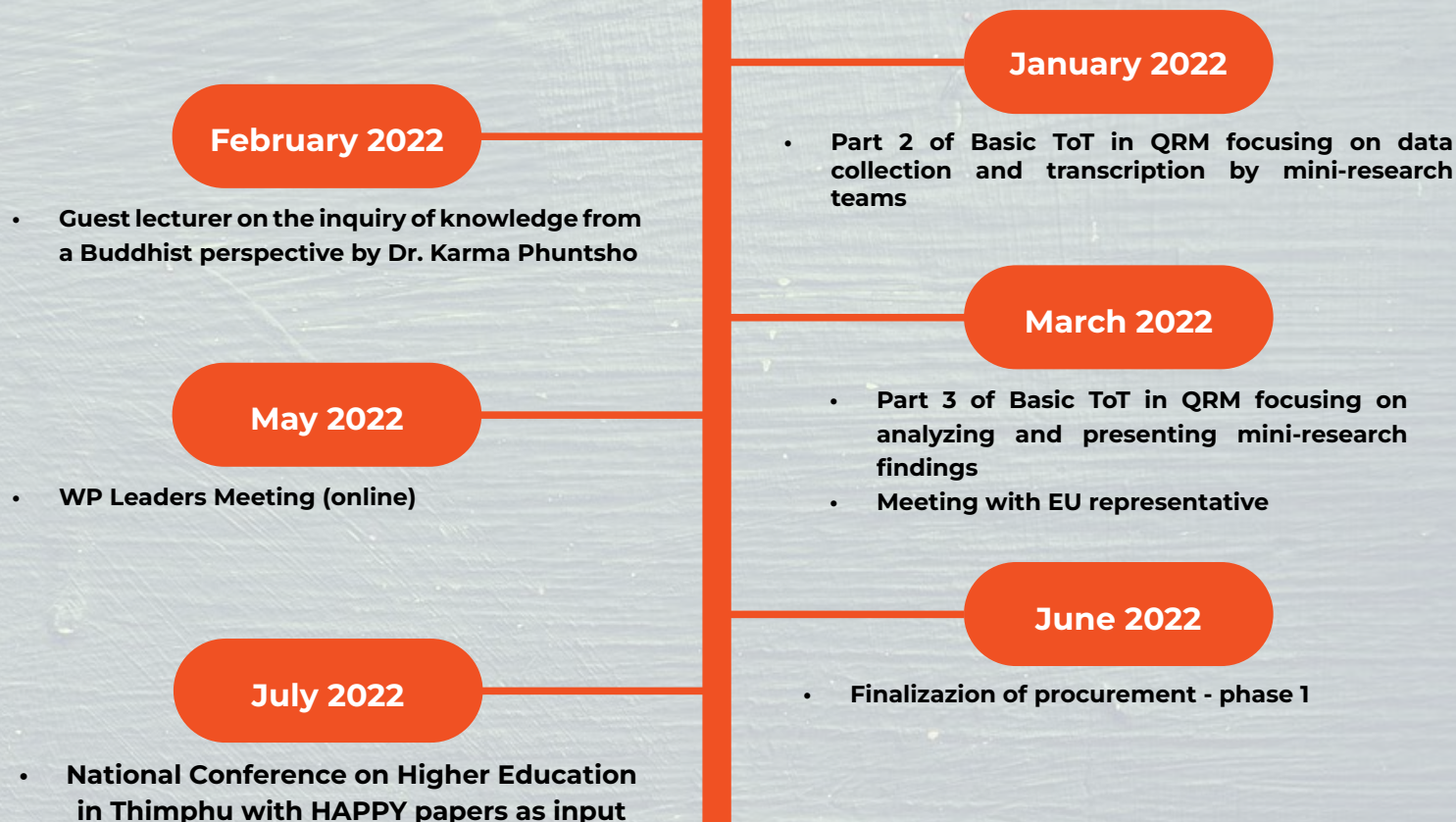
Owing to our research limitation which failed to include all the genders and age group, it is still early to pass a judgement of the influence and impact of K-wave on the Bhutanese cultural identity but it is undoubtedly a noteworthy trend that Bhutanese younger generations are picking up rapidly. What they don't realize is that Korean wave has now spread to become part of people's lives and economy. Korean wave has ultimately come to embody the Korean life style.

Experience

Tot I, II and III was a beautiful process of learning from the experts and from my own team mates. The team diversity made the discussion very lively and enriching for everyone in the team. Everyone had something to contribute and share ideas on how we could improve on the feedback received from the experts. Deciding themes was very challenging for us as all the team members had different views and insight on the same word and situations which we came across our field notes. It all started with deciding to choose our topic for the mini-research and why we wanted to actually put an effort to observe strangers at a Korean store and listen to someone's opinion on beauty. It started with curiosity and continued with lots of insight about our own environment which we fail to observe every day.

Milestones & what is still to come

Milestones



Still to come

Submission of 18-month report to EU

Joint coordinators meeting

Lecture recording for LMS

Joint curriculum review

collection of communication materials in Bhutan

HAPPY Project Partners:



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Institute for Innovation and
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