

## Rural societies and state in Bhutan seen through local brewed alcohol, Ara

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In this presentation, I will attempt to focus on the customs of drinking and brewing alcohol in rural area of Bhutan. Since Bhutan has been hidden mysterious country for most of us so far because of her own policies to avoid outsider's influences, many local customs, cultures, and also subsistence have not been explored. Therefore, with using this opportunity, for my presentation, I would like to reconsider essential ethics of their culture and social life seen through a custom of brewing alcohol in rural area of Bhutan.

Bhutanese local brewed alcohol called Ara is playing an important and essential part in most Bhutanese society. It is recognized as indispensable offering for local deities and Gods during their rituals to guarantee the stability and prosperity of their community and respective families. And Ara is of course prepared to welcome guests during not only festival time but also everyday life. If we look at especially eastern Bhutan, Ara(distilled) and Ban-chan (raw) seems being consumed by residents for drinking almost every day. Therefore we can easily imagine how numerous amounts of grains have been used for brewing alcohol in this country besides eating as food.

On the one side, almost every Bhutanese citizen recognizes local brewed alcohol is indispensable for Bhutanese life, on the other it is also well know that the drinking custom is creating so many social diseases in this country, like domestic violence, murder case and liver disease etc.

Therefore, Royal Government of Bhutan has implemented certain regulations to decrease the total amount of alcohol consumption.

One of these regulations is creating Dry Day on every Tuesday to prohibit liquor shop owner from selling any kind of alcohol to customer all day long. But this doesn't cover Ara consumer because only products produced by Army Welfare Project can be sold in licensed liquor shop. And also Government is not so willing to prohibit shop owners from selling it because tax revenue from Army Welfare Project has accounted for bigger percentage in her annual revenue. So these days Government has started to focus on controlling people's Ara brewing and consuming customs. The suggestion which made by government is telling that if you use surplus grains for selling in the market instead of using it just for brewing alcohol, it must bring economical prosperity and better life to your community.

Thus, it seems that many different values and interests are crossing and connecting with one tiny agenda like local brewed alcohol. In this case, I think, to consider social structure and values of Bhutan through Ara is not a bad choice. Therefore, I would like to describe cultural politics which made Ara consumption as an issue to discuss and also to describe processes of making decision in rural area.

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