

A FILM BY PAWO CHOYNING DORJI
WRITER & DIRECTOR OF ACADEMY AWARD NOMINEE
LUNANA: A YAK IN THE CLASSROOM

THE MONK AND THE GUN



DANESHU DINGPHU... 3 PIGS PRODUCTION AND JOURNEY TO THE EAST FILMS LTD. WITH PRODUCTION FROM TOMSON FILMS CO., LTD. FILMS BOUTIQUE IN ASSOCIATION WITH CLOSER MEDIA ANIMANDALA NS WOODEN TRAILER PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS A PAWO CHOYNING DORJI FILM
TANDON WANGCHUK DEKI LEHAMO PEKA ZANGMO SHERPA TANDON PHUBZ TANDON SONAM HARRY ENHORN CHOEVING JATSHO KEZSANG CHOEJAY "THE MONK AND THE GUN"
PRODUCED BY JIGME TENZING EDITOR KU YISAO YUN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS XU LIU CHIA & CHIANG YI CHEN DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ZHANG XIN WILLIAM HOBBERG LISA HENSON JANEE PENNINGTON KRIS EWANS KULRAT CHAYAMPORN TAGRATAMACHAI
COSTUME DESIGNER HSU FENG STEPHANIE LAI JEAN CHRISTOPHE SIMON PAWO CHOYNING DORJI DIRECTOR OF MUSIC PAWO CHOYNING DORJI

ONCE UPON A TIME IN BHUTAN...



THE MONK AND THE GUN

A FILM BY PAWO CHOYNING DORJI

2023 / 107 minutes / Dzongkha, English



PRESS

CHARLIE OLSKY
charlie@cineticmedia.com
Cinetic Marketing 917-545-7260

SALES

JULIEN RAZAFINDRANALY
julien@filmsboutique.com
Films Boutique
(International Sales)

RENA RONSON
RonsonR@unitedtalent.com
UTA
(US Sales)



SYNOPSIS

Kingdom of Bhutan, 2006. Modernization has finally arrived. Bhutan becomes the last country in the world to connect to the internet and television, and now the biggest change of all: democracy. To teach the people how to vote, the authorities organize a mock election, but the locals seem unconvinced. Traveling to rural Bhutan where religion is more popular than politics, the election supervisor discovers that a monk is planning a mysterious ceremony for the election day.



Q&A WITH WRITER – DIRECTOR PAWO CHOYNING DORJI

LUNANA: A YAK IN THE CLASSROOM was famously made with a very small crew and available light on a completely remote mountain in Bhutan. Outside of a few scenes in the city, was **THE MONK AND THE GUN** filmed with similar technology and crew size?

For the production of ‘Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom,’ I took a creative decision to shoot the film in the actual village of Lunana, one of the most remote human settlements in the world. I did this because the theme of ‘remoteness’ was essential for the story, and I wanted it to come through as authentic as possible. With the decision to shoot the film in Lunana, we faced incredible production challenges. We had a small crew because the principal location was an arduous 2-week trek over the highest Himalayan peaks, and we had the very basic equipment and gear not by choice but because having expensive modern gear was impractical as the location did not even have electric connections.

For the production of ‘The Monk and the Gun,’ there was no need for the story to take place in an extremely isolated location as ‘remoteness’ wasn’t an important theme in the story. Ura, which is the principal location of ‘The Monk and the Gun’ is a rural village, but with access to modern amenities like electricity and motorable roads. So, I took advantage of that to have a bigger crew and more modern filmmaking equipment on set. However, I think in terms of international film making standards, this production was still quite basic. We have no camera and lighting equipment in Bhutan, so our rented gear had to come all the way from New Delhi, India, and it took a week of driving for it to reach our principal location.



How many of your cast members are professional actors, and how many are non-professionals that lived in the region in which you filmed. Had any of your cast members heard of the success of LUNANA on the international film circuit?

There aren't any professionally trained actors in Bhutan, and by that, I mean actors who have been professionally trained in fields of acting. We do have a very small local film industry, that makes films that cater to the local audience. With 'The Monk and the Gun', casting was substantially larger than 'Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom', as it was an ensemble of characters. Since there were many characters, I tried working with local Bhutanese actors. Tandin Sonam and Deki Lhamo, who play the characters of Benji and Tshomo in the movie, are actors from the local Bhutanese film industry. It was a very good experience working with them, and I was very impressed by their commitment and work ethic.

For both my films productions, I have tried to take what might be seen as a challenge and turn it into an asset. Since there aren't any professional actors, I try and cast my actors very early in pre-production so that I may have time to rehearse the scenes with them, but also so that I can learn of the different nuances and characteristics of the cast and then implement them into the characters of the script, so that they are being more themselves than acting in the film. This helps with the performance and is something that worked wonderfully for instance with the casting of Pem Zam in 'Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom'.

Even with 'The Monk and the Gun', I did cast people in the actual village for key roles in the film. Most of the extras in the village are local villagers in Ura, and the Lama (Buddhist teacher) in the movie is the actual and only Lama of the village.



Both of your films start out with an internal difference between the city of Thimphu and the more rural, mountainous parts of Bhutan outside of the city. Is there any tension or cultural misunderstanding between urban and rural people in Bhutan?

Both my films have this internal and external difference between urban and rural Bhutan, because both my films in very differing themes are touching upon the story of a country and a people that is in a state of change and transition. This theme of transition is most captured in the contrast between the traditional, cultural, and spiritual values of rural Bhutan, that contrasts against the modern, developing, and western-centric inclination of urban Bhutan.

With both films I have tried to touch upon the value and uniqueness of the Bhutanese culture and traditions. Bhutan, as with any other country, is on a relentless quest to become modern, educated and western. Many times, in this quest, we shed away our own culture and traditions which make us so very unique. These values are more or less disappearing in urban Bhutan, and for this I have to go into rural Bhutan to highlight it.

With Lunana it was this theme of 'home' but with The Monk and the Gun, it is the value of 'innocence'. Innocence is a such an important value and theme of being Bhutanese, sadly as we change and transition into a more modern and more educated country, this beautiful value is getting lost and shed away because it seems the modern mind cannot differentiate between 'innocence' and 'ignorance'.

With The Monk and the Gun, the audience will see that many of the rural characters in the story, who are driven and motivated by innocence, something that is highlighted even more when we contrast the story between the rural and urban.



Monks are of central importance to this film. What is their role in Bhutanese society – and is it different in urban and rural areas? Would most people be shocked to see a monk with a gun?

Buddhism in Bhutan is not just a spiritual path, but a way of life. The teachings of the Buddha influences every aspect of Bhutanese culture and traditions. Keeping that in mind, the monks, who are seen as the physical representations of the Buddha's teachings are objects of immense respect, veneration, and devotion in Bhutan. It would be true to say that this veneration and respect is stronger and more evident in rural parts of Bhutan, where the reach of urbanization and westernization hasn't quite reached yet.

I wanted the Lama and the monk characters in the movie to personify the Bhutanese veneration to the culture and traditions of Buddhism. A personification where there is so much respect for the ordained that the rural people don't even seem to question or flinch at the audacity of a monk with a gun, because there is so much trust that stems from the Buddha's teachings that the '**motivation behind an act is much more important than the act itself**'. It is also important to highlight the value of symbolism in Bhutanese culture, how the symbolic power of items can at times be even more important than the item itself.



This film takes place at the beginning of the slow introduction of democracy in Bhutan. In many other societies, democracy has taken hold after some sort of revolution from a different order. How did it happen in Bhutan?

One of the main reasons why I wanted to tell this story is because I wanted to share with the world, and remind my fellow Bhutanese, of the unique circumstances that led to the opening up and modernization of Bhutan.

Throughout modern history, the existence of the tiny Bhutan depended on its ability to stay irrelevant. The policy of Self Isolation helped Bhutan survive and withstand colonialism and foreign influence, while its neighbors Tibet and Sikkim lost their independence. As the rest of the world embraced the trends of globalization, such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's, MTV and democracy, Bhutan stubbornly clung on to the safety nets of the past, with the King as the sole power of authority, and the 2,500-year-old teachings of the Buddha as a guide to how to live one's life. As the world entered the digital age, the Bhutanese chose to shun away the internet, cell phones and cable TV, to safeguard our own unique way of life.

However, around the mid 2000s, when the film takes place, Bhutan found its own existence under threat as it found itself left behind in a digital politicized world. I thought this would be such a colorful backdrop to tell the story of *The Monk and the Gun*, a time when Bhutan became the very last country in the world to connect to the TV, allow televisions and probably one of the only countries where a system of democracy was introduced without any demand or revolution of the masses calling for it, introduced by a King who voluntarily abdicated so that his country and people could find their own unique place in the world.



Now that it has been more than 15 years since the first introduction, how do you believe democracy is going in Bhutan? Have there been any tensions as a result of having a choice and disagreements?

I think 15 years is just too short of a time period to make a judgement on how the democratic process of Bhutan has been. The last 15 years has seen 3 rounds of elections, and 3 democratically elected political parties lead Bhutan. Take for instance the democracy of the U.S, it took the U.S 72 years, and 18 rounds of elections for the US system to develop into the political parties of the conservative republicans and the liberal democrats.

Bhutan's democracy is still in its infancy, and we are still getting accustomed to it. Naturally, there are still many instances of people learning to disagree with one another, something that is very alien to our culture.

In the film, most people seem suspicious of democracy and uncertain that this will actually bring prosperity and joy to their country. Have those feelings changed and do you believe it is contributing?

In a culture where the sense of community is deeply rooted, the advent of individualism and individualistic ideologies has been and can continue to cause unease. The gift of democracy has been thoughtfully planned and implemented with the far-sighted vision of His Majesty King and learned members of our society, with the best interest of the Nation in mind. Now it is up to us, the people, to honor this vision and motivation and live up to our duties as a democratic country.



What does it mean for the king of Bhutan to have a Gross National Happiness index? Was democracy part of that plan?

Concepts such as Gross National Happiness and the veneration of qualities such as ‘innocence’ are the reasons why I am trying to share Bhutanese stories with the world. Bhutan, maybe small, but there is much we can share.

The pursuit of ‘happiness’ may be seen by some as something that is abstract and wishful thinking. But for us Bhutanese, it isn’t some marketing gimmick but a guiding principal that is embedded in our culture and spirituality. In 1729 when the Bhutanese government drafted it’s first ever legal code, the opening statement proclaimed that ‘the purpose of a government was to provide happiness for its people, and if a government could not provide happiness, the government had no reason to exist’. Gross National Happiness is the guiding principle of our development activities and the vision we as a people and nation aspire to. Birthed in a time when Bhutan’s status as an independent nation was in volatile state and we were just joining the global world as part of the United Nations, the notion of Gross National Happiness embodied what Bhutan stood for and aspired for her people. It is the ability to adapt to changing situations using wisdom and skillful means that has enabled our Kings to lead the country through situations that endangered the sovereignty of the nation. It is also with the same wisdom and skillful means that we are gently guided into embracing and eventually thriving as a democracy.

BIOS



Pawo Choyning Dorji (Director & Writer) started his film making career under the guidance of film Director and renowned Buddhist Lama, *Khyentse Norbu*. Pawo worked as Norbu's assistant for Norbu's films *Vara: A Blessing* (2013) and *Hema Hema: Sing me a Song While I Wait* (2016). Pawo made his directorial debut in 2019 with *Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom*. The film was shot in one of the remotest human settlements in the world, so remote that the production relied on solar batteries and local yak herders to be the main cast of the film. The film went on to become a festival favorite, winning numerous awards, before making history by becoming the first ever Bhutanese film to secure an Oscar nomination when it was nominated for *Best International Feature Film at the 94th Academy Awards*. *The Monk and the Gun* is Pawo's second feature film as Writer, Director, and Producer.

Pawo is the youngest recipient of the *Royal Order of Bhutan, The Druk Thuksey (The Heart Son of the Thunder Dragon)*, an award bestowed upon him by King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck on 17th December, 2022. The award recognises individual for distinguished service to the Bhutanese nation and people.



Stephanie Lai (Producer) is producer and actress based in Taiwan. She has acted on theatre productions of *A Dream like a Dream* and *Secret Love in the Peach Blossom land*. She was also one the main cast for Taiwanese Director *Edward Yang's* 1991 masterpiece *A Brighter Summer Day*. Stephanie studied acting and theatre performance at *the London Academy of Drama and Music*.

Pawo's wife and has worked with Pawo on both his films as acting coach, Casting Director and Producer.

BIOS



Jigme Tenzing (cinematographer) is a cinematographer based in Thimphu, Bhutan. He studied film making in the New York Film Academy. He has lensed many award-winning films **Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom** (Oscar Nomination 2022), **Hema Hema: Sing me a Song while I Wait** (Special Mention, TIFF Platform 2016), **Red Phallus** (FIPRESCI, Busan International Film Festival 2018).

Jean-Christophe Simon (producer) is the CEO and founder of **Films Boutique**, a sales and production company with offices in Berlin and Lyon. His productions include films such as **Mia Madre** by Nanni Moretti (Cannes Competition), **Birds of Passage** by Ciro Guerra and Cristina Gallego (Cannes Directors' Fortnight / Oscar Shortlist), **Farewell to the Night** by André Téchiné starring Catherine Deneuve (Berlin Competition), **Verdict** by Raymund Ribay Gutierrez (Jury Special Award - Venice Orizzonti), **Subtraction** by Mani Haghighi (TIFF Platform) or **When the Waves are Gone** by Lav Diaz (Venice out of competition).

Hsu Feng (producer) has acted in over 50 films through her career. Her screen debut was **A Touch of Zen** (1975), was the first ever Chinese film to be selected for Competition at the *Cannes Film Festival*. The film won the *Technical Grade Prize* at Cannes. She shifted into production of films and established the **Tomson Films Co., Ltd** in 1984. She was the producer of **Farewell my Concubine**, which won the *Cannes Palm d'Or* in 1993.

Lisa Henson (executive producer) has produced a dozen films for the Jim Henson Company, of which she is the CEO, including the Oscar-winning **Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio**. She is currently in production on **Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Road Trip** for Disney+, starring Eva Longoria, Jesse Garcia, and Cheech Marin.

Prior to joining the Jim Henson Company, Lisa was partnered with **Janet Yang** in the Manifest Film Company, producing films including *Zero Effect*. She has served as President of Columbia Pictures, and as a senior production executive at Warner Brothers. Through **her Animandala fund**, Lisa has supported independent filmmakers such as Bernard Rose and Pawo Choyning Dorji.

CAST:



Tandin Wangchuk (actor) is the lead singer of Misty Terrace, an alternative Bhutanese rock band. The band is the first modern Bhutanese bands to break through beyond Bhutan, with a fan following stretching across the Himalayan communities of Northern India, Nepal and Sikkim. Tandin has performed with Misty Terrace in over 19 countries. **The Monk and the Gun** is Tandin's debut as an actor.



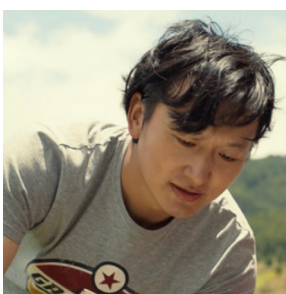
Kelsang Choejey (actor) is the Lama of the Ura village in Bumthang. He has spent most of his life as a monk of the Central Monastic Body of Bhutan. Since his ordination he has risen up the ranks of the monastic order and served as the Lama Neten (district abbot) of the Dagana Dratshang. He left his monastic duties in 2015 to devote his life to mediate in a cave above Ura, village. **The Monk and the Gun** is his debut as an actor.



Deki Lhamo (actor) is an award-winning local Bhutanese actress having acted in 18 local films. She won Best Newcomer in the 2016 and Best Actress in a Leading Role in 2018 at the annual Bhutan Film Awards. **The Monk and the Gun** is her international debut.



Pema Zangpo Sherpa (actor) discovered music in 2014 and has since become one of the most sought-after singers in Bhutan. While not singing she runs a shoe business in Thimphu. **The Monk and the Gun** is her debut as an actress.



Tandin Sonam (actor) is a real estate agent and practicing lawyer by profession. He obtained his law degree from ILS Law School in Pune University. He has appeared in numerous local Bhutanese films, and **The Monk and the Gun** is his international debut.

CAST:



Harry Einhorn (actor) is an artist born in New York City and is currently based in Taiwan where he lectures in the Buddhist Art Department of Huafan University. His works include Buddhist inspired music, books, theatre, and education. **The Monk and the Gun** is his debut as an actor.



Choeying Jatsho (actor) is the proprietor and music producer at M-Studios, a multimedia firm in Thimphu. He is known to have mentored many young Bhutanese musicians and is credited for having started the B-Pop music movement in Bhutan. **The Monk and the Gun** is his screen debut as an actor.



Tandin Phubz (actor) is a Bhutanese photographer. He started the social media page known as Humans of Thimphu to document real human stories of a country and people caught in a moment of change and transition. **The Monk and the Gun** is his screen debut.



Ugyen Dorji (actor) is known by his visual artist name 'homebasedillustrator'. He is a visual artist and storyteller based in Bhutan, specializing in art, design, and animation. With over 7 years of experience, he's worked on various animation projects and children's books. **The Monk and the Gun** is his debut as an actor.



Yuphel Lhendup Selden (actor) is a primary school student at the Rinchen Kuenphel Primary School in Thimphu, Bhutan. **The Monk and the Gun** is her debut as an actress.

PRODUCTION COMPANIES:



Dangphu Dingphu: a 3 pigs Production is a Bhutan based film production started by Pawo Choyning Dorji in 2018. The production company has worked on the production of Pawo's 2019 Oscar nominated **Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom** and the upcoming **The Monk and the Gun**.



Journey to the East Films Ltd. is a Taiwan based film production founded by **Stephanie Lai** in 2022. The company has worked on the production of Pawo's films as there are no film postproduction services in Bhutan. Journey to the East Films Ltd. has produced **The Monk and the Gun** and worked as a co-producer for **Tales of Taipei** (2022).

FILMS *Boutique*

Films Boutique sales line up also includes award-winning films such as Pawo Choyning Dorji's **Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom** (Oscar Nomination 2022), **Pacification** by Albert Serra (Cannes Competition 2022), **Border** by Ali Abbasi (Oscar Nomination 2019), **On Body and Soul** by Ildiko Enyedi (Berlin Golden Bear / Oscar Nomination 2018), **There is no Evil** by Mohammad Rasoulof (Berlin Golden bear 2020), **Embrace of the Serpent** by Ciro Guerra (Oscar Nomination 2016), **Divines** by Houda Benyamina (Cannes Caméra d'Or 2016), **The Woman Who Left** by Lav Diaz (Venice Golden Lion 2016), **The Turin Horse** by Bela Tarr (Berlin Silver Bear 2011) or **Faust** by Alexander Sokurov (Venice Golden Lion 2011) among others.

PRODUCTION COMPANIES:



Closer Media is a New York-based production company and financier whose mission is to create meaningful stories that bring people closer together. Founded by **Zhang Xin** in 2022 and under the leadership of Emmy-award winning veteran producer **William Horberg**, **Closer Media** is developing and producing scripted and unscripted films and series, with a diverse group of domestic and international filmmakers, for a global audience. Upcoming projects include **Alex Gibney's** highly anticipated documentaries **Musk** which HBO acquired, and the definitive documentary of legendary musician Paul Simon, **In Restless Dreams: The Music of Paul Simon**. Also upcoming is **Raoul Peck's** documentary **Orwell** acquired by Neon and **Closer Media's** first narrative feature, **Tony Goldwyn's EZRA** starring **Bobby Cannavale**, **Robert De Niro**, **Rose Byrne** and newcomer **William Fitzgerald**.



Tomson Films Co., Ltd. was established in 1984 by the esteemed actress **Hsu Feng**, Tomson Films Co., Ltd. commands a prominent stature in the cinematic realm. With an illustrious career spanning nearly 50 films, **Hsu Feng's** pivotal debut as the lead in 1975's "A Touch of Zen" marked a watershed moment.

Tomson Films boasts a portfolio of 26 remarkable creations, among them the iconic **Farewell My Concubine** clinching the prestigious *Palme d'Or* at Cannes Film Festival in 1993—an unparalleled feat for Chinese cinema. Beyond borders, this masterpiece garnered international acclaim, including a nomination for the *Oscar's Best International Film*, the esteemed *Best Foreign Language Film* title from the *US National Board of Review* in 1993, and the *Golden Globe* accolade in 1994.

The legacy continues with **Shanghai Story**, a film that has secured the *Best Actress award* at the *7th Shanghai International Film Festival* and an impressive four *Golden Rooster Awards* in the same year. **Tomson Films'** resolute commitment to cinematic excellence and global engagement underscores its role in embracing a diverse worldwide audience.

PRODUCTION COMPANIES:



Wooden Trailer Productions is a Production company located in Seattle, Washington run by Janee Pennington who has been involved with many award winning films. The company partners with creatives who motivate, encourage and educate audiences to think about the world they live in and give hope through creating content in feature films, documentaries and shorts. They currently have three films on the festival circuit – **The Monk and The Gun** (Feature Film Directed and Written by Oscar Nominee Pawo Choyning-Dorji), **Stewart Udall and The Politics of Beauty** (John de Graaf Director and Writer) and **How to Ruin The Holidays** (Feature Film Written by Kevin Gillese and Directed by Arlen Konopaki).



N8 Studios is a film production and distribution company headquartered in Bangkok, with offices in New York City and Los Angeles. Founded in 2022 by **Kris Eiamsakulrat** and **Rachel Wu**, **N8 Studios** looks to tell authentic and powerful Asian stories that transcend cultural boundaries. The studios' projects include hit Thai horror **Home For Rent** by veteran **Shutter** director **Sophon Sakdaphisit**; which saw its world wide release in April 2023 and on Netflix thereafter. **N8 Studios** is currently producing **Heals** by *Emmy-Award-winning* Thai director **Pailin Wedel**. The documentary is about Pangina Heals, Asia's most famous drag queen and her transformative journey set against the backdrop of Thailand's LGBTQI+ community.



CREDITS

DIRECTOR

Pawo Choyning Dorji

SCREENPLAY

Pawo Choyning Dorji

CINEMATOGRAPHER

Jigme Tenzing

EDITOR

Hsiao-Yun Ku

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Chungdra Gyeltshen

SOUND

Tu Duu-Chih, Chiang Yi-Chen

ORIGINAL SCORE

Frédéric Alvarez

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Zhang Xin, William Horberg, Lisa Henson, Kris Eiamsakulrat,
Chayamporn Taeratanachai, Jane Pennington

PRODUCERS

Jean-Christophe Simon, Hsu Feng, Stephanie Lai, Pawo Choyning Dorji

PRINCIPAL CAST

Tandin Wangchuk, Deki Lhamo, Pema Zangmo Sherpa, Tandin Sonam,
Harry Einhorn, Choeying Jatsho, Tandin Phubz,
Yuphel Lhendup Selden, Kelsang Choejay

US SALES AGENT

United Talent Agency (UTA)

INTERNATIONAL SALES

Films Boutique

PRODUCTION COMPANY

Dangphu Dingphu: A 3 Pigs Production, Films Boutique,
Journey to the East Films, Tomson Films,
Closer Media, Animandala,
N8 Studios, Wooden Trailer Productions

