


# Wheaton in Bhutan: The “Gross National Happiness” study-tour



Even before we had completed the 40-hour journey from Boston to Bhutan—the kingdom of the thunder dragon and the last remaining Buddhist kingdom in the Himalayas—I had inklings that this first visit would be no less than amazing. During our midnight layover at the cavernous Don Muang International Airport in Thailand, I read in the *Bangkok Post* that Thailand’s next five-year plan would focus on social development rather than pure economic growth, citing Bhutan King Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s development philosophy: “Gross national happiness is more important than gross national product.” It is interesting that a country of Thailand’s size would turn to a tiny nation like Bhutan (pop. 500,000) for economic philosophy, but not surprising. With Anthropology Professor Bruce Owens and six students enrolled in the Religion Department’s new course offering, “Buddhism and Development,” we had traveled halfway around the world to study this philosophy. In two days we would stand before the *sanctum sanctorum* of Bhutan’s sacred Taksang Monastery and in five days we would sip tea and discuss gross national happiness with Bhutan’s Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Wangchuck. 

—Religion Professor Jeffrey Timm

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