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Review of Paradigms & Public Sector Reform: Public Administration of Bhutan by Lhwang Ugyel

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***Paradigms & Public Sector Reform:
Public Administration of Bhutan.***

Lhwang Ugyel. Palgrave
Macmillan, 2016. 256 pages.
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Reviewed by Michael Givel

Modern public administration theories are heavily western in origin and orientation. But do these western-oriented theories hold up when tested with an eastern public administration model like in Bhutan? The validity and robustness of western-oriented public administration theories ought to be universal and global regardless of the society or the public administration delivery system. In Lhwang Ugyel's book *Paradigms & Public Sector Reform: Public Administration of Bhutan*, which is an important contribution to public administration theory, the Bhutanese civil service is examined to ascertain if it is congruent in whole or part with western theories of public administration.

The various western public administration theories covered in Ugyel's book include: traditional public administration, New Public Management, Public Value Management, whole-of-government, New Public Administration, New Public Service, and New Public Governance. Traditional Public Administration is defined in the book as the classical hierarchical and rule-oriented Weberian command and control approach. In this approach, civil servants are said to neutrally implement government policies. New Public Management (NPM) is defined as a neo-liberal and market-based delivery approach where government is run like a business with economy and efficiency. NPM focuses on evidence-based management and policy performance measures to reduce costs. The other modern public administration theories are policy actor and network-based, focused on democratic process, and citizen-oriented. This includes public administrators who engage in the democratic policy process with citizens who are impacted by public agency programs and policies.

In Ugyel's analysis of the Bhutanese civil service model, he provides a solid analysis of the early Bhutanese civil service model and how it relates to Bhutan's modern civil service model. In this regard, he demonstrates why it is important for scholars and analysts to understand the historical context of how a civil service system has evolved to understand how it currently operates.

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Michael Givel on *Paradigms & Public Sector Reform: Public Administration of Bhutan*

From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, Bhutanese government programs were administered under the Cho-sid patronage civil service system based on a Buddhist theocratic system of government. The head of state was a civilian leader with strong influence from high-level Buddhist religious leaders. Under this system, the civil service system was primarily centralized and based on a patronage job system to those loyal to the rulers of Bhutan.

Commencing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Cho-sid civil service system weakened due to a decline in the influence of the head monastic body, an inability to find in the early twentieth century a reincarnation of the original founder of Bhutan (Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal) to serve as a new civilian head of state, and ongoing internal conflicts. From the early twentieth century to 2008, the power of the head monastic body, regional officials, and elite continued to significantly decline. After 1950, the trends of political and administrative decentralization and democratization accelerated.

By the late 1980s, a new set of Bhutanese public sector reforms were initiated in response to capitalism and economic development creating an impetus to update the Bhutanese public administration system. This included the privatization of formerly state-owned enterprises from late 1980s, the administration of neoliberal market reforms, the

tightening of government budgetary constraints, and a reliance on foreign donors. In accomplishing this, Bhutan first adopted in 1972 the hierarchical and traditional public administration model. Later in 1982, the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) was established, predicated on a merit employment system, traditional command and control bureaucratic hierarchies, and professionalization of civil service jobs. Finally, in 2006 there was a partial shift from the RCSC traditional public administration model to a New Public Management model. This included incremental changes in the declining patronage public job system. Ugyel's final conclusion is that the civil service model in modern Bhutan is a hybrid of the old Cho-sid patronage system, traditional public administration, and New Public Management.

In other words, Bhutan's modern civil service is based on a mixture of western public administration theory and civil service practices based in the political and cultural context of Bhutanese society as it progressed from the seventeenth to early twenty-first centuries. This important and novel finding for public administration theorists, scholars, and practitioners indicates that the cultural context of how a public administration system has evolved cannot be ignored when assessing which theoretical civil service model currently predominates in a given society. Western and other scholars of public administration theory

should note this important finding when developing present and future public administration theories.

Michael Givel is professor of political science at The University of Oklahoma. He was the first US Fulbright in Bhutan in 2009, and is the Director of the Bhutanese digital rare and historical document collection in Bhutan and at The University of Oklahoma. His research and teaching specialization includes: comparative public policy, Himalayan area studies, policy theory, complexity theory, social movements, and health policy.