

**Tibet & Himalaya Lecture Series***Decolonising Himalayan Studies?*
- Putting Theory into Practice -**13.12.21**Ulrike Cökl
University College LondonMonday
6.15 CET*Thuenlam, Hospitality and the Neypo System:
Cultural Hospitality Practices,
Tourism and the Economy of Relationships in Bhutan*

This presentation introduces selected aspects of my ethnographic research in Central and Eastern Bhutan. I focus on the role of everyday hospitality practices for *thuenlam*, the local term for “maintaining harmonious relations”, from the perspective of villagers. For a significant number of Bhutanese *thuenlam* constitutes one of the most important prerequisites for successful coexistence and cooperation within society. A major aim of this doctoral research was to identify and bring about the conditions necessary to integrate paying guests, tourists, into existing local guest/host relations, building on local practices and indigenous categories. In doing this I have drawn on my more than 20 years connection and experience with Bhutan. I spent several years living in the Himalayan kingdom in various capacities. For my PhD research I stayed in Bhutan for four years (2012- 2015), during which time I was affiliated with the College for Natural Resources (CNR) at the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB). Informal *thuenlam* practices within the hospitality framework are engrained in everyday life in Bhutan. From the perspectives of ordinary Bhutanese in Central and Eastern Bhutan, I explore the informal etiquette and hosting traditions of day-to-day village life rather than the highly formalized, codified etiquette of *driglam namzhag*, the official Bhutanese code of conduct. Both nurture various types of *thuenlam* in society: the former, informal practices are rather organic and transmitted within the family; the latter, mandatory etiquette takes place in Dzongs (fortresses) and during official events as well as being taught at schools and in specialized courses.

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