

Pochu (dpa'o chung): the little pawo (dpa'bo)

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In western Bhutan, several intercessors gather to conduct the Bala bongko (*bala bon skor*), a festival in honour of Radrap (Rwa brag pa), the local deity of Wangdue Phodrang (dBang 'dus pho brang). The *pawo* (*dpa'bo*) conducts the festival, assisted by one or two female mediums, *neljorma* (*rnal'byor ma*), depending on their availability and a *pochu* (*dpa'bo chung*) – a little *pawo*. I will, in this paper, try to define the social and religious background as well as the status of the *pochu*, besides his role in this festival. Is it compulsory to become a *pochu* before taking up the role of a *pawo*? How does one become a *pochu*? Is he an apprentice to the *pawo* and is he related to him? Does he conduct rituals independently even in the areas where there are *pawo* or is he just his substitute in rituals? This will lead to assess the role of the *pochu* vis-à-vis the other intercessors of the area and the Buddhist monks. Does the *pochu* have a ritual space of his own and is his function still relevant in the society?