

Taktse International School



September 9, 2014

Dear Alina Perez,

It is with great pleasure that I inform you that you have been accepted as a Resource Fellow for the Taktse International School in Sikkim, India. We are hoping that you will be able to come to Taktse at the end of May 2015 for approximately 6 weeks. Although there is no financial remuneration available for this placement, we will provide room and board once you arrive at Taktse.

Taktse International School was born in 2004. This Pre-K to 12th grade school blends Buddhist respect for life with Western educational theory. Our 220 students from Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand, India and many other points live and study together. This is a model school, not only for the Himalayas, but also for the entire world.

We frequently have Resource People visit to help teach students and give Professional Development classes to our teachers; however, we have not been able to have a School Psychologist come to work with our teachers and we are looking forward to your being able to do this for us.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Ms Rinzing at Taktse.

Sincerely,
Sherry Dickstein MD
Resource Person Liaison
336.337.2049



East, West, and Ten-Drel

BY BRENDAN PELSUE ON SEPTEMBER 4, 2013 8:56 AM

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/13/09/east-west-and-ten-drel>



Sikkim

On a cold day in February, 106 fifth- through 12th-grade students in dark wool blazers are huddled on the steps of the courtyard of the Taktse International School in Sikkim, India. They jostle and elbow each other and seem not to notice the view: a panorama of the high Himalayas, stretching from Tibet in the east to the great icy mass of Kanchenjunga, the world's third tallest peak, in the west.

It is the first day of classes. Christine Stodolski, an American volunteer visiting the school for a year, is reading aloud from the Taktse mission statement.

"The idea of the Taktse International School was conceived in the winter of 2004 when a group of concerned Sikkimese gathered to discuss the problems confronting our society," she says.

"The erosion of traditional values, the increasing number of alienated youth with little or no marketable skills, the growth of mass consumerism. ..."

She pauses. "Can any of you tell me what mass consumerism is?"

Students are slow to answer. It's when everybody buys things? When you want your neighbor's TV?

Yes, Stodolski says. It's when people place importance on possessions. When it is more common for people to buy than to make them.

She continues reading. "Rapid development and the failure of the greater society to wisely manage the forces of change have exacerbated these problems over the years. ... Therefore we wanted to create a model school and community capable of producing the compassionate and ethical leaders that developing societies so desperately need."

She pauses again. "Now, who can tell me what it means to be compassionate and ethical?"

This time, the students' ideas flow more easily. Compassion is when you have an emotional understanding of another person's situation. Being ethical means doing the right thing.

Stodolski breaks the students into groups and asks them to think about times they have seen ethical or compassionate behavior, or engaged in it themselves. Most responses have to do with life at school, being kind to new students or standing up for friends. But then one student comes up with something more personal.

When his father was young, the boy says, he expected to live his life as a subsistence farmer, like his family had for generations. But his brothers saw that he was bright and pooled their scant savings to send him to school. Their actions were part of *tham-tsig*, a traditional Sikkimese ideal of honest relationships based in sacrifice. As a result of this ancient code, the boy's father prospered in a growing Indian economy that the rest of his family does not fully understand.

The students are quiet after hearing this story. Many of them have similar family stories; some say the lifestyle gap between their grandparents and themselves feels more like centuries than years.

Taktse's principal, Peter "Pintso" Lauenstein-Denjongpa, Ed.M.'12, believes that moments like these, when students are made aware of their unique position at a threshold between worlds, is what the school is all about.

"We are in a constant state of translation," he says. "We are translating between East and West, city and village, old and new, indigenous and colonial, colonial and modern, feudal and democratic, North East (India) and Central, hills and plains."

His hope is that by fusing these disparate forces he can help the people of Sikkim retain agency over a land whose scenery and natural resources are fast becoming commodities in the global marketplace. Ed School students and alums are an increasingly important part of making this dream a reality, Lauenstein-Denjongpa says — a dream that, like the student's story of his uncles' *tham-tsig*, stretches across cultures and generations.

To know Lauenstein-Denjongpa is to know worlds colliding. On his office walls, diplomas from Harvard and the University of Chicago mix with traditional silk wall hangings and an old map of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. His conversation bounces from the Buddhist idea of *samsara* ("worldliness") to the burdens of colonialism in India to how the Protestant work ethic has shaped the West. Even his full name — Peter Phuntsok "Pintso" Ongdi Azubah Lauenstein-Denjongpa — reflects the many cultures he inhabits, the various and unlikely threads that brought Taktse into being.



[Taktse students on their way to plant bamboo.](#)

The son of a Sikkimese father and an American mother, Lauenstein-Denjongpa was born in Sikkim in 1980, a few years after the kingdom was annexed by India. His parents, Sonam and Maria, had met at Brown University years earlier, where his father received a scholarship arranged by an ethnomusicology professor with an interest in the Himalayas. The couple ran a school for poor children in the village of Pelling, but the region's proximity to Tibet made it politically sensitive, and the family returned to the United States in 1982 after Maria's visa wasn't renewed.

In the years that followed, Lauenstein-Denjongpa's parents started a successful catering business in Beverly, Mass., a small city north of Boston. Lauenstein-Denjongpa and his younger brother Aka grew up hearing their father's stories about Sikkim, a place where rocks could be deities and spiritual masters transformed themselves into rainbows when they died — events Westerners call "myths" but that Sonam insists were once commonplace.

But when the family returned to Sikkim for a visit in the late '90s, the land of Sonam's stories seemed to have disappeared. India was pouring in development money to shore up the border with Tibet, and that meant everything from tourist hotels to hydroelectric dams to Domino's Pizza franchises. Worse still, the old culture of *tham-tsig* was in trouble. Suicide rates and drug abuse were skyrocketing along with incomes. A once-grounded people seemed adrift.

Sonam says the "old, magical world" he grew up in is breathing its last. "It's the tail end. And ... it's so important to catch that tale." The question, for the whole family, was how?

Worries about Sikkim germinated for years before there was a moment of *ten-drel*, the Sikkimese word for "things coming together." On the last night of a visit to Gangtok in 2004, Lauenstein-Denjongpa gathered his parents and their friends around the fire pit of the Hotel Sonam Palgey to ask a question: What could they do to help their small country?

Almost immediately, the group landed on the idea of a school. They talked late into the night about how they could teach traditional ethics and new skills at the same time. Sonam says he had long been impressed by how the West transmitted its values through its educational institutions and didn't see why the same couldn't be true in Sikkim.

Sonam brought the idea to Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, one of Sikkim's great spiritual masters, who said the timing was auspicious. Shortly afterward, the country's former crown prince, Wangchuk Namgyal, donated 250 acres of pristine land for the campus, and an American student of Buddhism, Michael Baldwin, a Harvard College graduate, gave funds. By 2005, the main building was constructed and 27 students in K–6 were enrolled. Maria says it was as if the school came together by magic. Lok Babu, one of the school's founders, says it must have been good karma leftover from past lives.

Despite his role in formulating the initial vision for the school, Lauenstein-Denjongpa didn't imagine himself running Taktse. He was living what he calls the upper-middle class "post-college dream" in a loft in Brooklyn, N.Y., taking acting classes, making films — a life he loved. Maybe if he moved to Sikkim for a short time and took care of the fundraising, the rest of the school would take care of itself. "I thought I could do that in a year and a half with some Excel sheets and some to-do lists, and the school would be set up," he says. "It seems silly now."

It soon became clear that creating a truly hybrid school — one that combined new and old, East and West — wouldn't be easy. Misunderstandings abounded. Once, after encouraging teachers to incorporate games into their lessons, Lauenstein-Denjongpa fielded calls from parents concerned

that their children were too eager to get on the school bus in the morning. How could students learn if they weren't afraid of their teachers?

Sometimes, these misunderstandings could raise profound questions about the school's philosophy. One of the school's founders, who also served as principal during its first two years, felt that in order to be truly local, Taktse should rely only on resources within India. Lauenstein-Denjongpa, Maria, and Sonam thought real innovation could come from bringing local talent and wisdom into dialogue with global resources and curricula. The differences ran so deep that the headmaster eventually left to start another school, leaving Lauenstein-Denjongpa with a choice: move to Sikkim full time and build the school he dreamed could be, or return to the comfort of New York.

He stayed, plunging into every detail of life at the school, right down to what kind of dal should be served at lunch. The greatest challenge was teacher training, because Taktse asks its teachers to use open inquiry methods that are profoundly different than what most of them encountered in their own schooling.

"I knew I had to ask questions that would make kids think critically, but I didn't know how because I had never experienced that before in my life," says K–8 Headmistress Reshma Thapa. "It was like feeling your way in the dark."

She noticed a similar anxiety in her conversations with parents and began to wonder whether this sprang from a collective sense of inferiority left over from the British. "It is difficult for us to believe that locals can do as well as outsiders," she says.

"But I think we've managed to convince parents over the years that we can do an equally good job."

There were also questions of money and reputation. Sonam and Maria felt one flaw of the school they ran in the '70s was that it explicitly served poor children. This appealed to foreign donors but made it difficult to gain traction locally, where students could be pigeonholed as charity cases. As a result, Taktse has taken a middle path similar to independent schools in the West. The main focus is excellence.

Most students pay tuition, but a growing scholarship program keeps the doors open to all levels of society.

Often, the challenges of the early days have led to unique programs. When Maria grew frustrated with the Western bent in most available children's literature, she started writing books set in Sikkim. Her first, *Miss Lee and the Mosquito*, was published by Scholastic India in 2012. When students in religion class showed they were bored with the traditional emphasis on memorizing dharma texts — dharma is a Sanskrit term meaning ethics or "moral law" — the school created a

unique program that teaches Buddhist philosophy through discussion and real world examples. "Dharma without dogma," Lauenstein-Denjongpa calls it.

Everyone agrees this progress is the result of slow, hard work. "It's required everybody to really, really bend, open, and listen," Maria says. "And in a way that's the best of Western education and Eastern qualities. But it's hard. All these things sound so glorious, but it takes a lot of patience."

As the school grew, Lauenstein-Denjongpa became increasingly aware of his lack of formal training as an educator. He could inspire students, but that was not the same thing as running an

institution. He was tired. The daily miscommunications that defined life at Taktse were starting to feel like battles.

The school elders — Taktse's take on a board of trustees — suggested he take time away. In traditional thought, Sikkim was the spiritual center of the world, they said. But Taktse wasn't just a spiritual school, so maybe it would be good to draw water from other wells — the center of the academic world, maybe.

The idea resonated. In the fall of 2011, Lauenstein-Denjongpa packed his bags for Cambridge to enroll in the Ed School's Special Studies Program, which would allow him to take classes across the university.

Returning to the West was a shock. He felt like a Himalayan villager in the cities where he had once been so at ease. During a morning shower, he realized, "I'm showering in drinking water. [This] feels so decadent and terrible and lucky." He kept mentally returning to Sikkim during his classes, too. Often, a lecture that had nothing to do with international education would spark a revelation about the school.

In Professor Hirotaka Takeuchi's Knowledge-Based Strategy class at Harvard Business School, Lauenstein-Denjongpa saw a picture of Japanese auto pioneer Soichiro Honda crouching down to examine a passing motorcycle. Takeuchi said Honda's pose demonstrated his "tacit knowledge" of the machine — an expertise felt intuitively or learned through practice rather than by explicit explanation.

A light bulb went off: Sikkim was rich in this kind of knowing. "And just because someone can't explain it, or more importantly because they can't explain it in English, doesn't mean it's not valuable," Lauenstein-Denjongpa says. "There is knowledge and wisdom that is useful and beneficial but not necessarily articulate." Part of being a hybridized school meant finding ways to give this wisdom a place at the table.



[A student with a painted face at the annual Scholastic book fair.](#)

In Lecturer David Rose's Universal Design for Learning class at the Ed School, Lauenstein-Denjongpa encountered the idea that disability is contextual, meaning students may struggle because their academic environment is not adapted to their personal learning style. It struck Lauenstein-Denjongpa that the same was true when looking at education across cultures.

"Working in the remote Himalayas, there are so many seeming disadvantages," he thought. "It's hard to get supplies, there are no museums to go to on field trips ... [but] maybe it's only the way I am thinking about these things that makes them advantages or disadvantages." Maybe the school's challenges were also its strengths.

Since returning to Sikkim, Lauenstein-Denjongpa has found new energy for the conversations that were so exhausting in the months before he left. He now believes that "these conversations are the [school's] project," not impediments to some other, more distant goal.

This new ethos is permeating the school in multiple ways. Lauenstein-Denjongpa has changed the command structure at Taktse to give teachers more decisionmaking power. Students are meeting more often to discuss the big ideas in the school's mission statement. The conversation is extending to the wider Sikkim community, too. Current senior Tenzing Namgyal is working on an alphabet book of Sikkimese culture that she hopes could serve young children throughout the state. There are even plans to establish a teachers college that will spread Taktse's methods across Sikkim.

Lauenstein-Denjongpa is involving his Ed School connections every step of the way. Laila Goodman, Ed.M.'85, recently came to Taktse to lead conversations with faculty on how to

approach moral education in a society of diverse traditions. Jim Watras, Ed.M.'86, has come to the school three times to teach literature classes and direct plays.

Shua Marquis and Terryl Dozier, both Ed.M.'12, used Taktse to launch the very first workshop of Creative Capacities, an organization they founded that teaches learning and innovation skills in the developing world, with a series of poetry events that put students in touch with their core belief systems and natural surroundings. And when the three-student, all-female senior class — the school's first ever — visited the United States in the winter of 2013, Dozier arranged for them to continue discussing their nascent interest in poetry with his own mentor, Maya Angelou.

Hopefully, these local and global connections will help the school navigate its next phase of challenges. A new building is under construction. Lauenstein-Denjongpa is in the early stages of a fundraising drive to build the endowment and expand scholarships. Most pressingly, Taktse will hold its first graduation in March 2014. The three girls in the senior class have a high school experience that is different from almost any other student's in Sikkim or India, so how will they fare in the wider world they are about to enter? It will be a defining moment for the school, Lauenstein-Denjongpa says, a time to learn whether the rhetoric matches the reality.

No one can speak better to this transition, of course, than the graduating students themselves. They say they are nervous to leave Taktse's cocoon but committed to pursuing their interests. They believe the school has both opened their world and brought them closer to home. One student, Sagun Limbu, puts this idea in concrete terms. With Taktse, she says, "I have visited the U.S. and experienced the neverending choices of food [and] the bright lights in Times Square, but I have also stood outside the board room in my school, waiting patiently in the silence of respect, just to meet and be blessed by the Rinpoche, one of the most respected monks." If the school can get its student to hold midtown Manhattan and Himalayan mysticism in their minds at the same time, then perhaps it is doing its job.

— Brendan Pelsue is a writer, performer, and educator who has visited the Taktse International School three times. He is currently studying for an MFA in playwriting at the Yale School of Drama.

Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

Taktse International School
PO Box 90, Gangtok
Sikkim, India 737101
www.taktseeschool.org

June 2014
Taktse's First Graduation!

U.S. 501(c)(3) agent:
The Marion Institute, Inc.
202 Spring St, Marion, MA 02738
www.marioninstitute.org



Sagun Limbu is one of the three seniors in Taktse's first graduating class. She has won a scholarship to Endicott College in Beverly, MA where she plans to attend. This is one of her college essays.

Lessons from My Bajey by Sagun Limbu

When I was four months old, my parents sent me to live with my grandfather in Nepal. I have lived with him ever since.

Noisy and observant, I was my Bajey's shadow. When neighbors asked about my parents, it was my "Bajey" who came to my mind.

From my bedroom window, I watched him climbing trees to cut leaves for his goats, massaging the soil with his fingers and watering his orchids. He wore torn pullovers, patched track pants and rain boots.

For much of my childhood, I resented that he couldn't help me with my homework like other parents. Ashamed of his lack of education, he never attended any of my school functions. Fees were sent in white envelopes where his name would be written with my crooked handwriting. But living away at Taktse International School for seven years has shown me that my Bajey's qualities are what I want to possess myself.

My grandfather embodies unannounced empathy. He does things for people in his quiet way without expecting anything in return. There is an old lady in my village, for example, who walks up the steep mountain every day with a basket full of vegetables to sell. She is a scrawny widow who supports her three kids by what she sells. We have our own little farm where Bajey grows mustard greens, tomatoes and corn but every morning he still buys from her, and sometimes even brings her a cup of tea. "Why are you buying when we have our own?" I'd ask.

"It's not much but it will give her the courage to walk up the mountain tomorrow," Bajey replied.

As an eight year old, I didn't understand but now I can see that my grandfather was quietly buying her vegetables in a way that allowed her to keep her dignity. Although this may not sound flashy, it is the kind of generosity that reflects my Bajey's world.

In addition to being sensitive to others with less, my Bajey taught me determination and support. There were nights where I got stuck with homework and I couldn't ask my grandfather for help. My friends had their parents helping

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Taktse's First Graduates

This spring Taktse graduated its first class of seniors; Simrin Tamhane, Tenchung Namgyal, and Sagun Limbu. These three extraordinary young women embody the efforts and aspirations of founders, teachers, staff, resource people, and supporters from around the world.



Pema Namgyal is a founding member of Taktse's Board of Directors. His daughter Tenchung is one of the graduating seniors. Following are excerpts from his speech to the graduates.

It is my honor to address this august gathering on the occasion of the graduation of our first students: Sagun Limbu, Simrin Tamhane and Tenchung Namgyal. This is the result of dedicated hard work by the principal, teachers, staff, and students since Taktse came to exist in 2004. The Taktse team should be applauded.

When the founders met His Holiness Dodrupchen Rinpoche to take his blessings and advice, His Holiness stressed the importance of getting the human form. His advice was, if we are here just to eat and to do nothing meaningful in life, then what is the difference between a human form and a bird, which can also find food for itself and its fledglings. This profound advice has inspired the group to take on bigger challenges. We saw the need for a quality educational institution that would excel in both the secular and the spiritual, blending east and west, retaining our roots while nurturing the next generation to be good human beings. We felt this was the best way to make a difference, and the seed for a new kind of educational institution was sown.

Now let me bring you back to a very important fact. Sikkim, or Bayul Demajong as it is called by the Sikkimese, is said to be one of the most important hidden lands of Guru Padma Sambawa or Guru Rinpoche. He has compared Sikkim to the copper paradise or Sang tok Palri. It was his prediction that Tibet would be taken over and Buddhism would be destroyed. At that time, Buddhism would be revived in Sikkim. Therefore he blessed this land and hid treasures to be revealed at the appropriate time. It is mentioned in the religious texts that when one makes an offering here it would multiply many fold.



Lessons from My Bajey (continued from page 1)



them but Bajey couldn't read or write in English, so he couldn't explain anything. I cried and felt so enraged that I refused to speak. My grandfather wouldn't say anything. He would fumble through the drawer, take out four candles and place them

on the four corners of the table. Then he sat across from me and waited. I could never have developed independence and determination without him sitting silently with me all those nights.

At Taktse International School, I studied the causes of the World Wars, played basketball, wrote spoken-word poetry and went to dinners with intellectual people. Yet, every time I go back to my village, I see Bajey feeding his goats. Later, we sit together for dinner and eat rice with our hands. There was a silent acceptance of his world in my Bajey that infuriated me when I was small. I didn't understand why he couldn't try to learn, and thought that he didn't have the courage to step out from his comfort zone. Now I see that there is dignity in accepting who you are.

I live in two worlds. At school, I learn to use new technologies, read Markus Zusak, ask questions and write poetry. But there is also Bajey's world, which is grounded; his world of four candles, silent waiting, torn pullovers and scrawny widows; his world with a value of its own. He is the embodiment of my eroding culture, and he chooses to live in it. His quiet groundedness makes it possible for me to live in these two worlds and to see the value of each. This is what he has done for me and this is how I will be: with one foot on the rich soil and the other in the library; my mind brewing with starting lines of poems and my heart etched with my Bajey's calm roots.





Simrin Tamhane is one of the three seniors who graduated from Taktse this spring. She wrote this essay for her application to Ashoka University in New Delhi. She has been accepted at Endicott College in Beverly, MA, and plans to apply to colleges in Mumbai and Calcutta.

Bridges

by Simrin Tamhane

My story involves two continents, five languages, beef versus fish and two grandmothers who have never met. My father is half Maharastrian and half English while my mother is Sikkimese. Being a Hindu with a few Christian beliefs raised in Buddhist Sikkim, home was a festive wonderland year round. I stuffed myself with cold-cut pork during the Buddhist New Year, laddus and kaju-barfis in Diwali and mashed potatoes and onion gravy on Christmas, adapting to the three contrasting cultures. But blending the three hasn't always been easy. Sometimes, I hate the fact that I come from such a diverse family because the constant switching from a shy, polite Himalayan girl to a confident, out-going Mumbai girl is like peeling an orange and immediately putting the peels back on.

Physically, I'm fair-skinned, freckled, and tall with wild curly hair. "What are you? You don't look Sikkimese." "I thought you were a foreigner." I hear this in Sikkim all the time. In Mumbai people gawk at me like I am an outsider because I don't have the typical Indian accent or the olive-skinned, big-eyed, freckle-less features that society has stereotyped as being Indian.

In Sikkim, I'm too active and out-going, which has led to many long lectures from my Sikkimese

grandmother; no slouching or laughing too loud or looking into elders' eyes while talking. In fact, let's cut out talking completely. A young Sikkimese woman has to sit and nod politely. In Mumbai however, my British grandmother publicly chastises me to talk more instead of being the demure young woman my Sikkimese grandmother would have me become.



Excerpt from the graduation speech given by Andrew Knapp, PhD. Andy and his wife Debbie Hilbert are long-time volunteers and enthusiastic supporters of Taktse.

One thing I especially admire about Taktse is that there is always learning

going on – not only in the classroom, but in the library, in quiet corners of the courtyard, even the lunchroom with its big map of the world. And it is not just students who learn at Taktse – everyone learns, from the smallest pre-Ks to the founders.

You, the teachers, have worked as hard to learn as anyone here. As several of you have told me, you have had to learn how to teach in ways you yourselves were not taught. This has sometimes been a struggle. Your struggles and setbacks are a powerful inspiration to your students, and indeed to all of us. They illustrate in a very real way the effort required to accomplish something worthwhile.





Molly Siegel of Dartmouth College is a volunteer at Taktse. Excerpt from her blog, [Spring in Sikkim](#):

The few days leading up to graduation were a frenzy of activity as carpenters rapidly constructed a stage for the ceremony. It was a masterpiece of scenery

complete with pearly white Greek columns, and adorned with the eight lucky signs of Buddhism. A perfect fit for the day, which was a union of Western and Sikkimese tradition.

On the day of the event, many of the teachers rose at 5:00 am to finish last-minute preparations. I awoke to a delightful surprise out my window. Earlier that morning, several strings of prayer flags had been hung between the roof of the school and the trees, traversing the lower courtyard where the ceremony was to be held. The day was perfect, and the prayer flags soared in the breeze against a blue sky. An auspicious day indeed.



New Hampshire Readers

A group of volunteers from Exeter, NH recorded themselves reading from children's books. These recordings are being used to aid Taktse students learning to read in English.



Bridges (continued from page 3)

Despite the who-am-I struggle that gnaws at my mixed brain, being three people in one has its own power. I like to think of myself as a bridge. The Maharastran, the Sikkimese and the English live, laugh and co-exist within me. For example, when my momo-making, Sikkimese-speaking, Himalayan grandmother sends a 'Sikkimese' gift to my Yorkshire pudding-making, English-speaking British-grandmother, I'm there to explain that the 'spinning thing with the ball in the end' is actually a 'mani' that contains mantras that you spin while you pray. I'm bringing together my Sikkimese grandmother's humility, my English grandmother's fizzy confidence, and the quiet contentment that rests peacefully in my paternal grandfather's soul.



I've spent seventeen years being the bridge builder in my family and I want to go to Ashoka University to expand this bridge building skill. I want to not only bring my family together but I also want to build a bridge between the hot, crowded, bustling city of Delhi and the cool, quiet and peaceful mountains of Sikkim. I want to study Shakespeare and John Maynard Keynes in an interdisciplinary fashion. I want to know what the King of Sikkim was doing while Marie Antoinette was dressing up for parties.

I would like to study with professors who are building bridges themselves. For instance, when I read Professor Jonathan Gil Harris' bio on the Ashoka faculty page, I feel inspired by his interest and research into Indian identity. This area of inquiry is profoundly personal to me. Likewise, Professor Madhavi Menon's exploration of the 'politics of desire and identity' would allow me to expand my understanding of other people's experiences.

My Sikkimese grandmother would cringe at my bragging about myself. But for now I will pull out that Maharastran confidence that was left in cold-storage and tell you that I will bring to Ashoka a keen ability to observe, endless enthusiasm, seven years of rigorous education at Taktse, and an intense desire to become like the Sea Link Bridge in Mumbai: strong, helpful and capable of making it easier for people to connect.



Tenchung Namgyal is a member of Taktse's first graduating class. In June, she will begin her studies in psychology, English literature and journalism at Mt. Carmel College in Bangalore.

Rathongchuu Baby
by Tenchung Choden Namgyal

Rathongchuu Baby is one of my six names—the one with the story. In 1995 and 1996, the governments of Sikkim and

India planned to dam the sacred Rathong Chuu River. HH Dodrup Rinpoche, Sonam Sir, Mr. CL Denjongpa, Lok Babu Sir, late Auntie Chuki, my mother and father, and many other concerned citizens of Sikkim acted against this scheme. Amidst all the chaos and mayhem, my mother, Chumden, was often seen running around with an enormous, ill fitting black overcoat trying to hide a baby bump which was me eighteen years ago. When the dam project was stopped, and the cat was out of the bag about the surprise baby my mother was carrying, Sonam Sir thought of the name Rathongchuu Baby. The name stuck.

Sometimes I feel like my pre-natal pro-Sikkim, pro-religious exposure is what brews such strong emotions in me when I'm told snippets of Sikkimese history, folk tales and stories of the past. However, there are times when I'm torn between religious and mythical beliefs and what text books in school teach. For instance, am I supposed to believe that when people die, their body goes but their soul stays on for 49 days in the house? Or am I supposed to believe that after a living being dies, the body disintegrates along with the soul? Am I supposed to believe that when my great-great-grandfather was in meditation, a female yeti used to bring food for him in return of him saving her from the pain of a stuck splinter? Or do I believe that yetis don't exist—or they only do on Mt. Everest whenever Tin-Tin tries climbing it? All these conflicts within my own soul challenge me.

I feel that because I am my parents' daughter, I have to nurture the religious and Sikkimese side of me. I have to remind myself to be modest and not dress up while going to the Chorten (monastery). I have to remind myself to treat every elder with respect. I have to remind myself to carry myself as Pema Namgyal's daughter and not Tenchung. There are times when I act like the rebellious teenager my parents and especially my sister have come to know. I ask for material things like clothes and shoes and make up.

Rachel Schiffan and Jane Randolph (JR) Johnston of Greensboro, NC are volunteers at Taktse. Excerpt from their blog, www.jrandraydoindia.wordpress.com

Due to uncertain weather, most of the outdoor decorating was left until the morning of graduation. This meant waking up at 5:00 a.m. What was supposed to be a quick "finishing touches session" lasted until 8:00 a.m. After we finished, JR and I ran back and got ready. Luckily, we had both water and electricity. The teachers had to wear traditional or formal dress to graduation. Since we had neither, the Taktse teachers dressed us up in traditional Sikkimese bakus.



Graduation was a huge success—a beautiful mix of cultures from all around the world. Buddhist monks performed a spiritual prayer. We sang the Indian



National Anthem, observed Tibetan and Nepalese dances, listened to a commencement speech by an MIT alumnus, watched as the graduates threw their caps into the air, and feared

for our lives as actors dressed as crazy yaks barged into the audience.

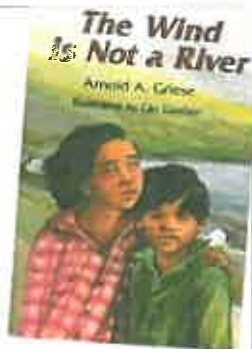
JR and I shed some tears as the three graduates spoke and gave parting words to their families, the board members, and Taktse teachers and students. This graduation was especially significant to the school because it was the first graduating class ever. One of the graduates spoke of the strong bond of trust that was built between the parents and the teachers when sending a child to a brand new school that is unlike any other school in Sikkim. The uncertainty of how a child's education might pan out is unnerving, yet each of these remarkable young women is an amazing example of the good that came of this trust.

The graduation song is still echoing in our heads:

*As we go on, we remember
All the times we had together.
And as our lives change, come whatever
We will still be friends forever.*

Taktse Wish List

Please support Taktse students by donating books and ebooks to stir their imaginations. See Taktse's book wish list at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Amazon gift cards help too!



Other valuable teaching aids:

- [Simple Touch Nooks](#)
- [V.readers](#)
- [Legos](#) (Taktse kids LOVE Legos!)
- [littleBits](#) (discount available)
- [Digital Microscopes](#)
- [iPads](#) (any version, new or used)
- Apple (Mac) computers (especially laptops)
- Apple Store gift cards for educational iPad apps, educational movies and TV shows
- [Engineering is Elementary curricula](#)
- Subscriptions to magazines such as National Geographic, National Geographic Kids, Scientific American, The Economist, Discover Magazine, Hopscotch for Girls, Boys Life, Odyssey, Faces, Science Focus, BBC Knowledge, Click, Make Magazine, and Parents Magazine.

Mail subscriptions to: Taktse International School
PO Box 90, Gangtok, Sikkim, India 737101

Donated items can be sent to:

Taktse International School
c/o Lonnie Friedman
4 Gavins Pond Road
Sharon, MA 02067

Are you acquainted with authors of children's books? Help us connect with them, so our students can write them letters! You can send their contact information to: lonnie.friedman@comcast.net

Vision for a Sustainable Future

Taktse is proud to partner with Sungevity to promote clean solar power for a more hopeful future. Sign up for Sungevity's solar energy lease program and they will donate **\$750** to Taktse. Plus, you'll receive a **\$750** credit! Click [HERE](#) to get a free quote!

Sungevity leases solar panels in the following states: AZ, CA, CO, DE, MA, MD, NJ, and NY. For a reference, contact Paul Lauenstein at 781-784-2986, or lauenstein@comcast.net.



Rathongchuu Baby (continued from page 5)

Sometimes I'd rather watch a documentary on the Buddha than implement his teachings. Then again, I'm a different Tenchung while doing the Chepo (daily offering to the gods), saving the lives of insects, pouring hot water over my grand father's millet beer, and feeling compassionate.

My parents have helped me feel at peace with the Sikkimese daughter Tenchung. They are my source of inspiration for being a compassionate human being. Between trying to fit apples in my mouth in the morning and driving me hurriedly to school whenever I miss the bus, they tell me to read prayer books and relate their own life mistakes to prevent me from making them. My sister and my friends help me keep alive the teenage girl in me with screen shots of shoes and clothes that we love, going on fruit diets and watching chick flicks. The school has nurtured the mixed Tenchung. Between going to America and trips to Yuksom and Tashiding, the school has taught me to embrace the roots of tradition growing through the soles of my feet, yet has given me the opportunity to fly to another world.

I do not know what I want to be in life yet. Perhaps I want to be something that lets all three Tenchungs grow. There are many Tenchungs in the world. But I've never come across another Rathongchuu Baby. Maybe with what my parents, sister, friends and the school have given me, I'll be able to do something as great as my father and his friends and truly be the Rathongchuu Baby.



Share Taktse with a Friend

Do you enjoy receiving the news from Taktse? Do you have a relative or friend who might also like to receive this newsletter? If so, please send their name and email address to Lonnie Friedman at: lonnie.friedman@comcast.net.



Are you a teacher? Make a difference at Taktse!

Taktse is seeking high school teachers in science, history, math, literature, economics, geography, writing, and A-level examinations for three to nine months. We need experienced educators and teacher trainers who are sensitive to cultural differences, who can teach and influence our community.

Taktse is in session from March to December. Food and lodging are provided. An honorarium is negotiable, depending on experience. For more information, see taktsefellowship.org, or email Sherry Dickstein at sadingso@gmail.com.



What is TAKTSE?

by Phuntsog Namgyal Bhutia
Dean of Academic Operations

Taktse is a learning place where old ideas are respected and new ideas are appreciated.

It is the early morning sound of the iron gong on a quiet hill bringing people together from all sections of the building.



It is a joint understanding between student and teacher as they read the morning message together.

It is the feeling of being heard every time an announcement is made during wrap up.

It is a captured moment of colourful dresses shining on campus during the Traditional dress day.

It is the roar of laughter in the library during every professional development on Saturday.

It is the intense brainstorming in the Board room and eating tonnes of sugar to ease our brains.

It is the joy of capturing photos of students speaking their mind during group discussions.

It is to experience the power of silence during a group meeting.

It is the hearing of students humming words during the reading assembly.

It is connecting with our traditional values as we flutter prayer flags, or educating students on how to use Google Drive to store and share information.

It is a feeling of achievement after having planted rice as a school and learning the value of hard work that goes into it, or learning how to create a robot with endless programming.

It is a place where travelling is an integral part of our learning experience, where students and teachers explore the ancient, (the Mughal Empire) and the modern (Google Corporate Offices).

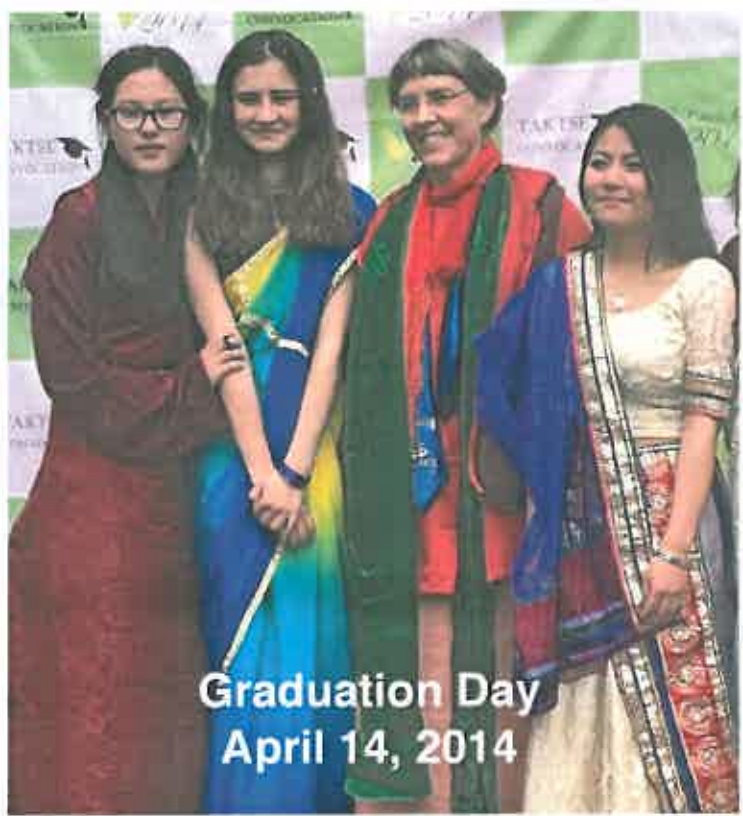
It is a culture based on enquiry and collaborative learning where teachers get an opportunity to become students every day.

It is learning how to chant an opening prayer during a Dharma class, or how to give a visa interview to travel to America.

It is a showcase of smiles during family math night, or tears of joy after having won a trophy during the interschool basketball tournament.

It is the little learnings that students and teachers accumulate throughout the years which help them reflect on who they are and what it is that they want to be.





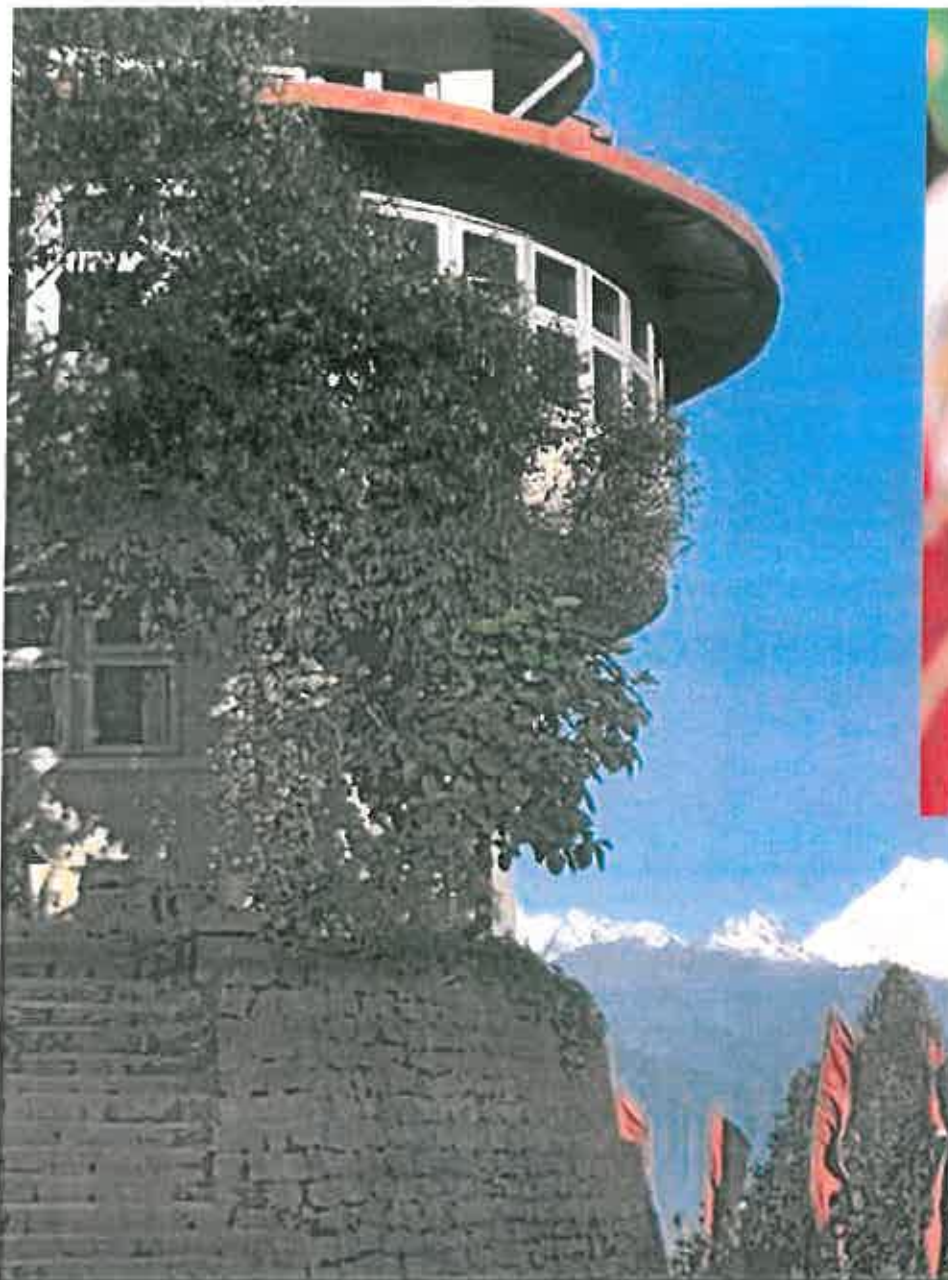
Graduation Day
April 14, 2014





Click [HERE](#) to see a magic moment!







**APPENDIX C
SPECIAL LEAVE APPLICATION FORM**

CAPE ELIZABETH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

REQUEST FORM TO BE USED FOR THE FOLLOWING LEAVES AS PER THE TEACHERS' CONTRACT:

ARTICLE XI SPECIAL LEAVE (includes personal)
ARTICLE XII LEAVES OF ABSENCE

NAME: ALINA PEREZ H.S. M.S. _____ Elem. _____

TYPE OF LEAVE:
Special (includes personal) Leave of Absence _____ Other _____

DATE(S) I WILL BE OUT OF MY CLASSROOM: APPROXIMATELY 5/22 - 6/17/2015

REASON FOR LEAVE (other than personal): SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY RESOLUBLE
FELLOWSHIP AT TAKTSE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Signature: 

____ Approved ____ Not Approved _____ Principal's/Director's Signature

FOR CENTRAL OFFICE USE

Personal days remaining prior to this request _____

Personal days requested on this form _____

Personal days left for this school year _____

____ Approved ____ Not approved _____ Superintendent's Signature

Date _____

PERSONAL LEAVE: (see Teachers' Contract-Article XI)

I certify that I will be taking special leave for personal business, which is not considered vacation and which cannot be conducted outside the regular school day.

LEAVES OF ABSENCE: (see Teachers' Contract-Article XII)

Teachers shall notify the Board within a reasonable length of time before the end of such leave whether or not they will return on schedule to active employment, provided that teachers whose leave is for a period in excess of seven (7) months and is scheduled to terminate on August 31 shall notify the School Board no later than the preceding February 1 whether or not s/he wishes to return to active employment. The contract of a teacher who fails to notify the Board as provided above, may be terminated or his/her contract may not be renewed. It being agreed by the parties to this Agreement that such failure alone shall constitute sufficient valid and just reason and cause for termination or non-renewal.