

DISCOURSE ON THREATS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: NATIONAL PARK MANAGEMENT IN BHUTAN

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This paper assesses environmental degradation and destruction through various frameworks. In recent years, researchers have begun to realize that existing paradigms of conservation may actually limit understanding of complex situations involving multiple players. However, these paradigms are still influential in conservation policy making and practices. The government of Bhutan has largely based its environmental conservation planning on concepts developed by international environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The conservation process has attracted global players espousing a framework of conservation threats that may not in fact hold true for Bhutan. Outside influences and interests have particularly focused on livestock grazing and transhumance practices in forests. Although available quantitative observations do not support the assertion that moderate livestock grazing is harmful to forest communities, environmentalists and foresters routinely view cattle grazing as a serious threat and as a major constraint on successful forest management. However, many Bhutanese do not view grazing as an environmental threat. Villagers have reduced their cattle herds in recent decades, and have found that nearby forests are more densely vegetated; they consider the decrease in animal numbers to reflect not a previous shortage of forest fodder, but herd thinning due to disease, wild animal attacks, and labor shortages. However, forest-based grazing and transhumance continue to be presented as active threats in the conservation discourse, serving as imaginary enemies, because neither the government nor NGOs have identified new replacement threats. By accepting the global discourse on certain threats, the government can gain international support for environmental conservation; such support is a valuable resource for the nation and its people. Local people benefit from conservation-related resource distribution in a system that revolves around the threat discourse.

Keywords: Bhutan, Discourse, Environmental conservation, National park management, Threat