

CENTRE FOR  
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# The Report

# PHILOSOPHERS' RETREAT

6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2024  
ZHIWA LING ASCENT, THIMPHU, BHUTAN

# 2024

NAVIGATING HUMAN CONNECTION AND  
DEVELOPMENT IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
DAY ONE: 6 DECEMBER 2024	2
SETTING THE STAGE	2
THE AGE WE ARE IN: CONNECTED, INFORMATION OVERLOAD, NEW TECHNOLOGIES. ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR HUMAN EMOTION AND PERCEPTION	4
TECHNOLOGY AND LEARNING	7
AI, PERCEPTION & LEARNING	10
TECHNOLOGY AND INTELLIGENCE, CREATIVITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS	12
RIGSS LECTURE	14
DAY TWO: 7 DECEMBER 2024	16
WELCOME REMARKS AND HISTORY OF DGI	16
THE JOURNEY OF DGI AND BB	17
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION	17
TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND ADMISSION PROCESS	18
PUBLIC RECOGNITION AND EXPANSION	18
ADAPTATION DURING COVID-19	18
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER ENGAGEMENT	18
FUTURE OUTLOOK	19
ABOUT THE DRUK GYALPO'S INSTITUTE AND BHUTAN BACCALAUREATE	20
DAY THREE: 8 DECEMBER 2024	25
STAYING HUMAN: HUMAN VALUES IN A TIME OF INFO & TECHNOLOGY	25
LEARNING IN A TIME OF INFORMATION AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES	27
CLOSING	28
KEY TAKEAWAYS TO ENRICH THE BHUTAN BACCALAUREATE LEARNING PROCESS	31

## INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Philosophers' Retreat, organised by the Centre for Escalation of Peace (CEP) from 6-8 December, focused on "Navigating Human Connection and Development in the Age of Technology." This year's retreat explored how technology and digital innovation are reshaping human perception, emotional resilience, and our ability to form meaningful connections. Participants examined how the rapid flow of information affects intellect and focus, while also addressing the challenge of balancing technological engagement with authentic personal development. The discussion highlighted the importance of maintaining essential human qualities—such as empathy, creativity, and analytical thinking—in a world increasingly shaped by digital tools.

Additionally, the retreat focused on how artificial intelligence and advanced technologies can be integrated into education without diminishing core human traits. It explored the potential co-evolution between humans and machines, considering how advancements like AI and genetic engineering may redefine intelligence, creativity, and consciousness. The retreat sought to identify the key skills and traits needed to thrive in this transformed landscape, emphasising adaptability, ethical reasoning, and personal growth.

The insights from these discussions aim to influence emerging technologies, challenge existing ideas, and reshape educational approaches, particularly within the Bhutan Baccalaureate (BB) Learning Process. The outcomes of the retreat will eventually help not only the youth but also adults in their efforts to develop and actualise their true potential.

The discussions took place in the scenic and serene settings of Thimphu and Paro. Beyond the formal sessions, there was ample time set aside for individuals to contemplate the themes in private or during informal conversations with others from the group.

Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, a renowned diplomat and scholar who has previously served as National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India, led the discussions during the retreat. Ambassador Menon is also an esteemed Member of the CEP's Board of Governors.

## DAY ONE: 6 DECEMBER 2024

### **SETTING THE STAGE**

Shivshankar Menon commenced the session by highlighting the purpose of the gathering: to bring together a diverse group of individuals from various disciplines and backgrounds to examine the implications of technology on education and society. He emphasised the importance of exploring ways to nurture compassionate individuals, contribute to the Bhutan Baccalaureate learning process, and understand how technology shapes human perception and connections. Key topics outlined included the intersection of artificial intelligence and humanity, the preservation of meaningful relationships in a digital age, and the broader ethical, educational, and developmental impacts of technological advancements. The opening remarks were followed by a round of participant introductions.

During their introduction, participants expressed a keen interest in exploring the following topics during the retreat:

- Understanding the ethical implications and responsible use of AI.
- Addressing ethical concerns, especially in educational contexts, in creating good humans
- Exploring how AI influences the socio-emotional development of children.
- Considering the joint evolutionary process where humans and AI collaborate, integrating the best of both worlds.
- Finding ways to enhance human-AI collaboration while maintaining human agency and creativity.
- Fostering visual literacy, such as interpreting and analyzing images created by AI.
- Using technology to serve humanity while avoiding a "robotic" approach to life.
- Leveraging human impulsivity and creativity to capitalise on AI tools effectively.
- Overcoming skepticism and building confidence in using technology effectively.

Participants of the Philosophers' Retreat 2024 engaged in discussion at Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu



## **THE AGE WE ARE IN: CONNECTED, INFORMATION OVERLOAD, NEW TECHNOLOGIES. ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR HUMAN EMOTION AND PERCEPTION**

Shivshankar Menon opened the discussion on the topic and invited participants to reflect deeply on the current era, where technology permeates every facet of our lives, shaping how we work, learn, and connect. He encouraged the group to consider the profound implications of living in an age of constant connectivity and information saturation, urging them to think critically about how these dynamics influence human emotions, perceptions, and relationships. Mr. Menon also posed a challenge to the participants: to examine what technology truly means to them both professionally and personally.

The dialogue revolved around several interconnected themes:

### ***AI as a Double-Edged Sword***

AI was widely recognised as a transformative tool with the potential to amplify human effort, bridge divides, and solve complex problems. Participants noted its ability to revolutionise fields such as medicine, education, and creative industries. However, they also highlighted significant challenges, including the ethical dilemmas of bias, fairness, and cultural hegemony. Most AI systems today are built on Western-centric data, which risks marginalizing diverse perspectives and perpetuating inequality. The group called for the development of localised and culturally nuanced AI systems, emphasising the importance of diverse and inclusive datasets. This would require close collaboration among educators, technologists, and policymakers to ensure AI development is equitable and serves the broader good.

### ***Transforming Education for a Digital Age***

The participants stressed the need to reimagine education to prepare students for a future defined by AI and rapid technological advancements. They argued that traditional education systems, which prioritise rote learning, must evolve to foster critical thinking, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. Participants highlighted the importance of teaching students foundational skills, such as literacy and ethical reasoning, alongside digital literacy and AI competency. It was noted that while AI can automate many tasks, it cannot replace human qualities such as creativity, empathy, and ethical judgment. Education systems must strike a

balance between leveraging technology and preserving these intrinsic human attributes. Moreover, integrating digital literacy into curricula was seen as essential to equip students with the skills needed to navigate and thrive in a tech-driven world.

### ***Humanism in a Tech-Saturated World***

A recurring concern was the over-reliance on AI and its impact on human relationships and emotional well-being. Participants discussed how the convenience offered by AI could lead to the erosion of critical thinking and analytical skills. They also raised concerns about the psychological toll of living in an era of constant connectivity, where individuals are bombarded with information and exposed to global crises in real time. To address these challenges, the group advocated for fostering resilience and teaching students to approach overwhelming problems pragmatically. There was a consensus that education systems must prioritise nurturing human connection, emotional health, and compassion to counterbalance the isolating effects of technology.

### ***Creativity and Innovation in the AI Era***

While AI has democratised access to creative tools and processes, participants expressed concerns about its impact on human ingenuity. AI can assist in generating ideas or automating repetitive tasks, but it lacks the depth of human intention and judgment. The group emphasised that human control and oversight remain essential in creative fields. They advocated for leveraging AI as a tool to enhance and complement human creativity rather than replace it. In the context of education, fostering a spirit of innovation and encouraging students to explore AI's potential responsibly was deemed crucial.

### ***Cultural and Societal Impact of AI***

Participants explored the broader cultural and societal shifts driven by AI, noting its ability to shape social norms, influence behaviours, and amplify cultural biases. AI was seen as both a disruptor and an enabler, with the potential to challenge traditional hierarchies and democratise access to knowledge. However, concerns were raised about its role in creating homogeneous cultural narratives, particularly when data-driven systems lack diversity. The group stressed the need for AI systems that reflect a wide range of cultural perspectives, ensuring they enhance

human connections rather than diminish them. They also discussed the importance of ethical considerations in AI development, highlighting the risks of unintended consequences and the need for robust governance



*Reflections and Connections:  
Moments during lunch at Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu*



## **TECHNOLOGY AND LEARNING**

For the next session, participants took time to reflect on the topic of “Technology and Learning.” They considered the various ways in which technology has influenced and transformed the landscape of education. This reflection involved thinking about both the positive and negative impacts of technological advancements on teaching methods, student engagement, and the learning process as a whole. Participants were encouraged to explore how technology can enhance learning outcomes, create new opportunities for educators and learners, and address challenges in traditional education systems.

The main discussion points included:

### ***Benefits of Technology in Education***

Participants highlighted that technology has transformed education by making learning more interactive, personalised, and engaging. Digital platforms were seen to encourage critical thinking, adaptability, and resilience, especially in fields where students had to adjust to new technologies quickly. Additionally, technology empowered educators by automating administrative tasks, allowing them to focus more on meaningful interactions with students and personalised learning experiences. It was also emphasised that technology democratised education by offering flexible, diverse resources that catered to different learning styles, particularly in underserved areas.

### ***Challenges and Concerns***

Despite its potential, participants raised concerns about the integration of technology into education. One major issue was its impact on critical thinking and emotional well-being. The increasing use of AI and digital tools created an illusion of understanding, where students relied on technology for answers without developing true comprehension or cognitive skills. Furthermore, AI-driven learning lacked the social and emotional aspects of human interaction, which were crucial for students' overall development. Participants also observed that the vast amounts of information available online overwhelmed students, making it difficult for them to filter and prioritise valuable content, leading to a loss of focus on deeper learning. The influence of easily consumable, short-form content on platforms like TikTok contributed to shorter

attention spans and a focus on instant gratification, detracting from sustained intellectual engagement.

### ***Information Overload and the Role of Teachers***

Participants discussed how the rise of information overload, amplified by digital platforms, required students to develop skills in critical evaluation and filtering. Teachers were increasingly tasked with guiding students through this complex digital landscape to help them focus on what truly mattered. Without this guidance, participants observed that students struggled to prioritise meaningful content and develop the necessary skills for deep, critical thinking.

### ***Balancing Technology and Traditional Learning Methods***

While technology provided access to a wide range of learning resources, participants stressed the importance of balancing it with traditional educational methods. For example, students tend to become distracted by platforms like YouTube if given too much autonomy in their use of technology. It was considered essential to ensure that technology served as an effective tool for learning and did not become a source of distraction or disengagement. Furthermore, before fully embracing technology, participants pointed out that fundamental educational needs such as attendance, affordability, and structural support had to be addressed.

### ***The Need for a Wholistic Approach to Learning***

Participants emphasised that true learning extended beyond simply obtaining information. It involved the development of critical thinking, comprehension, and the ability to engage with complex ideas. Knowledge was viewed as fluid and generative, with each moment offering new opportunities for discovery. Education encouraged an interdisciplinary approach that fostered intellectual rigor, reflection, and inquiry, while also addressing the broader social and emotional needs of students. This included considering issues such as appropriation, ownership, and authenticity in knowledge production, as well as promoting mental health and well-being.

### ***Emotional and Social Impacts of Technology***

While technology offered numerous benefits, participants pointed out that it also distorted

emotional and social experiences, especially through issues like cyberbullying and FOMO (fear of missing out). The overreliance on digital tools for learning prevented students from developing essential emotional intelligence and social skills, which were often cultivated through face-to-face interactions. Additionally, participants observed that the fast-paced, instant gratification nature of technology undermined the development of patience, persistence, and deeper emotional connections.



*In the Spotlight: Key moments from the retreat at Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu*

## AI, PERCEPTION & LEARNING

The third session focused on the theme of “AI, Perception & Learning,” with participants exploring the intersection of artificial intelligence and human cognition.

Key points discussed included:

### ***Generational Perceptions of AI***

The group delved into the different ways AI is perceived across generations, emphasizing that younger people, who are more familiar with technology, tend to view AI as a natural extension of their lives. In contrast, older generations often struggle to understand and integrate AI into their worldview, raising important questions about how different age groups engage with technological advancements.

*Engaged in Dialogue: Captured during the retreat at Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu*



### ***Ethical and Societal Implications***

Ethical concerns were raised about the role of AI in education and society. Participants debated whether AI's ability to automate tasks could erode critical thinking skills and reduce the need for human creativity. There was a shared view that while AI can enhance certain aspects of learning, it should not replace the need for human judgment, reflection, and independent thought. The importance of ensuring AI complements rather than undermines human intelligence was emphasised.

### ***AI in Education and Motivation***

The group also explored how AI influences motivation and learning, with a focus on how technology can both augment and challenge traditional methods of education. Questions were raised about how AI impacts students' engagement and whether it can foster intrinsic motivation or create dependency. Participants also discussed the role of AI in enhancing personalised learning experiences, but cautioned against becoming too reliant on technology, potentially stifling curiosity and self-directed learning.

### ***Cultural Differences and Technology***

There was a discussion on the cultural implications of AI, particularly how different cultures perceive and respond to technological change. For example, some cultures may view AI as an opportunity for advancement, while others may approach it with skepticism. The need to understand these cultural nuances was recognised as crucial when integrating AI into global educational systems.

### ***The Future of AI in Learning***

The session concluded with reflections on the future of AI in education. While there was optimism about the potential of AI to enhance learning experiences, there was also a call for caution. Participants stressed the need for a balanced approach, where AI is used thoughtfully to support learning, without compromising the development of essential human skills such as empathy, creativity, and critical thinking.

## TECHNOLOGY AND INTELLIGENCE, CREATIVITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

In the session focused on “Technology and Intelligence, Creativity and Consciousness,” the conversation explored the complex relationship between artificial intelligence and ethical considerations. The discussion centred on how AI intersects with various moral and philosophical dilemmas, emphasising the challenges in defining ethical boundaries in technology.

The key themes that emerged included:

### ***Subjectivity of Ethics***

A central theme in the conversation was the subjectivity of ethics, influenced by cultural, social, and personal factors. Speakers emphasised that ethical definitions and principles, such as "Do no harm," are context-dependent, varying across countries, cultures, and situations. There was a shared recognition that while ethical debates may not lead to universally accepted solutions, the ongoing discussion is essential for societal growth.

*Engaged in Dialogue: Captured during the retreat at Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu*



### ***Responsible AI vs. Ethical AI***

Several speakers argued for a shift from "Ethical AI" to "Responsible AI." The term "Responsible AI" was favoured because ethical judgments are often subjective and vary across cultural and regulatory contexts. It was highlighted that AI developers should focus on accountability, transparency, privacy, and security rather than attempting to define AI through abstract ethical concepts that may not be universally applicable.

### ***The Challenge of Coding Ethics***

Participants questioned whether ethics can be codified into AI systems, particularly when ethical decisions often involve complex, non-binary judgments. The idea that ethics cannot always be reduced to computational binaries was explored, with concerns about whether AI systems could ever truly reflect human moral complexities.

### ***AI and Consciousness***

The possibility of AI achieving consciousness or emotions was debated. While some believed that AI may never experience true consciousness or emotions, others suggested that AI could potentially mimic human behaviours or emotions. However, it was largely agreed that AI does not possess a will of its own and operates within human-designed parameters.

### ***Cultural and Contextual Differences***

A recurring point was the importance of considering cultural and contextual differences when discussing AI ethics. What is deemed ethical in one country or culture may not align with values in another, which complicates the creation of universal ethical guidelines for AI.

### ***Pragmatic Approaches to AI Governance***

A pragmatic, solutions-focused approach to AI governance was emphasised. Some speakers challenged the focus on philosophical dilemmas like the \*Trolley Problem, advocating for more practical considerations like privacy, accountability, and security. There was also a call for real-world solutions rather than hypothetical debates.

\* The trolley problem is a thought experiment that explores the ethics of making a choice between two negative outcomes. The classic scenario involves a runaway trolley that's about to kill five people, but the driver or a bystander can divert the trolley to kill one person on a different track. The problem is intended to explore whether it's ethical to harm one person to save more people.

### ***The Role of AI in Society and the Future***

Finally, the future of AI in society was discussed, with concerns raised about how AI might affect creativity and employment. There was a general consensus that while AI could automate tasks, it would not eliminate entire job sectors. The discussion emphasised the need for responsible development to ensure AI benefits humanity without undermining creativity or critical thinking.

### **RIGSS LECTURE**

The first day concluded with a Public Forum hosted by the Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) as part of their lecture series. Ambassador Shivshankar Menon spoke on the topic "Sino-Indian Relations: Fundamentals, Dynamics, and Trajectories," with Dasho Sonam Kinga serving as the moderator.

Mr. Menon outlined the complex and evolving relationship between India and China, shaped by history, domestic priorities, and global dynamics. He described two narratives: one of cultural and historical exchanges, and another of geopolitical tensions, especially post-1950 when boundary disputes emerged as China became India's immediate neighbour. Key milestones included the 1962 war, its aftermath of strained ties, and attempts at dialogue from the late 1970s onward. Economic growth in the 1990s brought stability, but differences resurfaced with increasing power disparities and contested interests in areas like the South and East China Seas. By 2020, boundary issues and military tensions escalated despite deepening economic ties, with China becoming India's largest trading partner in 2021.

Mr. Menon emphasised the duality in India-China relations, where security and political tensions coexist with growing economic interdependence. He highlighted that recent developments, such as China's aggressive policies towards neighbours and increased military assertiveness, signal challenges to existing agreements. Meanwhile, India's alignment with the United States contrasts with China's declining ties with the West, adding complexity to the bilateral dynamic. Despite the mistrust and unresolved boundaries, both countries remain intricately linked, influencing regional stability and international frameworks.



Concluding his talk, Mr. Menon urged a realistic approach to Sino-Indian ties, advocating for predictable behaviour over trust as a goal. He acknowledged that while fundamental differences persist, India and China often react similarly to global crises. Managing this intricate balance is crucial, particularly in maintaining continental security and navigating shared regional and global responsibilities.



*Ambassador Shivshankar Menon delivering a lecture at RIGSS' Friday Forum in Thimphu*

## DAY TWO: 7 DECEMBER 2024

The second day of the retreat focused on a visit to the Druk Gyalpo's Institute (DGI), providing participants with an opportunity to delve deeper into the Bhutan Bacca-laureate (BB) Learning Process. This visit aimed to give a comprehensive understanding of how the BB framework is being designed and to give firsthand exposure to the innovative curriculum and learning approaches being employed at DGI.

### **WELCOME REMARKS AND HISTORY OF DGI**

The visit commenced with a presentation by Tenzin Jamtsho, who shared a slideshow documenting the six-month construction of DGI's temporary campus and the transition to the new main campus. Photos from the groundbreaking ceremony and the move from the original office in Thimphu to Pangbisa highlighted the early milestones of the Royal Academy, now known as the Druk Gyalpo's Institute.

Pema Chhomo then provided an overview of the journey of the institute. The salient points discussed included:

*An Overview of the Journey of the Druk Gyalpo's Institute by Pema Chhomo*



## THE JOURNEY OF DGI AND BB

Pema discussed how the Bhutan Baccalaureate Learning Process (BBLP) originated from a key question posed by Mr. Kapur as he travelled across Bhutan: "What do you want your children to learn?" The responses helped shape the BBLP, which incorporates Five Areas of Development (5AoDs), Aesthetics, Community, and Cross-pollination.

## CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION

The development of the curriculum was influenced by diverse philosophies, including those from Bhutan, India, and Japan, as well as insights from Mr. Kapur's research across Bhutan. Contextualisation was a key aspect, with a focus on designing a curriculum that was deeply rooted in Bhutanese culture while also being relevant to global contexts. The team emphasised that ownership of teaching content was critical for teachers, an idea that differed from traditional approaches where teachers usually don't have ownership over their material.

It was noted that the BB system, while tailored for Bhutan, is also designed to be adaptable and applicable to other regions beyond Bhutan. The curriculum has evolved continuously since its inception, with a focus on reflecting Bhutanese values while integrating global perspectives.

*Jamyang Thinley leading the presentation about the Druk Gyalpo's Institute and the Bhutan Baccalaureate*



## **TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND ADMISSION PROCESS**

A significant milestone in the development of DGI was the Teacher Development Programme (TDP), which started in 2014 as a 15-month programme. This programme marked the beginning of a collaboration with Oxford University's Department of Education. It produced 12 teachers who graduated and became part of the faculty at the institute, allowing it to transition into a fully functioning school in 2016.

Representation from all 20 Dzongkhags in Bhutan has been a core element of the admissions process. Welfare officers from each district identified children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. A winter camp for children in 2016, organised in YHSS Thimphu due to the lack of infrastructure in Pangbisa, became a foundational experience. His Majesty the King personally interviewed the students for the selection process. In 2021, His Majesty shared that the students selected were those most at risk of falling through the cracks without this opportunity.

## **PUBLIC RECOGNITION AND EXPANSION**

The first batch of students took the Grade 10 national exams in 2020, which garnered significant public attention as they performed exceptionally well. By 2020, DGI began engaging with the public more openly about the BB, culminating in the first summer retreat for teachers from various Dzongkhags.

In 2021, the Ministry of Education approached DGI to implement the BB in schools across the country. The first two schools selected were Dechenchholing and Wangbama. An MoU was signed in August 2021 to extend the BB to 20 additional schools, one in each Dzongkhag.

## **ADAPTATION DURING COVID-19**

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, DGI swiftly adapted by transitioning to online learning for the 23 (now 24) schools. This shift also created a need for immersion programmes, and a series of activities were organised for Ministry officials, college students, and teachers. By 2021, DGI had 66 graduating teachers involved in a diploma programme designed to help them better understand the BB process.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER ENGAGEMENT

The professional development of BB faculty has been a priority, with a variety of enrichment programmes such as English and Mathematics enrichment, special education training, and reflective writing workshops. Additionally, learning showcases, literary activities, and other engagement opportunities were introduced to foster collaboration and the sharing of ideas among the 24 schools involved in the BB programme.

## FUTURE OUTLOOK

Looking ahead, DGI plans to expand its professional development initiatives and continue fostering collaboration across the 24 schools. In 2024, the institute aims to hold more workshops and offer further opportunities for schools to take on leadership roles in carrying out BB engagements. The support and guidance of His Majesty the King and the mentorship of Mr. Kapur has been instrumental in the success of this initiative, ensuring that the vision for the BB and DGI remains strong and clear.

Through these ongoing efforts, DGI is striving to create a robust and sustainable education ecosystem, ensuring that the Bhutan Baccalaureate reaches its full potential both within Bhutan and beyond.



*Lunch with the Students of the Druk Gyalpo's Institute*

## **ABOUT THE DRUK GYALPO'S INSTITUTE AND BHUTAN BACCALAUREATE**

DGI hosted a detailed presentation for the visiting team, showcasing both the old campus and Dunkar Dzong. Sonam Jattu, Executive Assistant to the DGI Director, and Jamyang, the cerebral coordinator of the school, led the presentations. In 2021, DGI received a mandate through the Royal Charter to support educational reform in Bhutan, aiming to advance learning, foster research, and cultivate teacher development. The presentation outlined DGI's objectives, methodologies, and principles, highlighting the Bhutan Bacculaureate (BB) as the flagship educational programme. The BB emphasises 'wholistic' development rooted in Bhutanese values, while integrating global best practices to nurture well-rounded individuals. The Learning Process in BB focuses on three key components: Skills, Processes, and Watermarks.

The themes discussed included:

### ***Objectives of DGI under the Royal Charter***

DGI's mission, outlined in the Royal Charter, includes several key objectives:

- Develop and promote educational programmes, including the Bhutan Bacculaureate.
- License and patent educational materials developed by DGI.
- Offer diverse programmes in both technical and academic fields.
- Facilitate teacher development through specialised training and workshops.
- Provide opportunities for research and innovation across various disciplines.
- Collaborate with global organisations to enhance educational methodologies.
- Grant academic credentials, such as degrees, diplomas, and certifications.

### ***Bhutan Bacculaureate Learning Process***

The Bhutan Bacculaureate follows a 'wholistic' approach to education, focusing on five key areas: spiritual, cerebral, emotional, physical, and social development. This approach encourages the creation of personalised learning journeys for each student. Key components of the BB Learning Process include:

- Learner's Roadmap: Each student develops a unique roadmap with personalised goals, action plans, and success indicators that are reviewed every term.
- Learning Experiences: Lessons are viewed as experiences aimed at developing specific skills and processes through domain-specific concepts.
- Assessments and Reporting: Dynamic assessments empower self-directed learning and foster continuous improvement.
- Mentor-Mentee System: Students are paired with mentors who guide them in goal-setting and track their growth. The BB Learning Process emphasises ownership and encourages students to become lifelong learners through cross-pollination and contextualised learning.



*Tour of DGI led by the students of DGI*



### ***The Five Areas of Development***

Sonam Pelden, a faculty member from the first cohort of the 15-month teacher training programme, shared her insights on the Five Areas of Development, which form the core of the BB approach. These areas—spiritual, cerebral, emotional, physical, and social development—are interconnected, leading to greater self-awareness and enabling learners to set goals and track their progress. Pelden emphasised how these areas contribute to a well-rounded and balanced educational experience, supporting the ‘wholistic’ development of students.

### ***Motherboard 2.0***

The Motherboard is central to the Bhutan Baccalaureate Learning Process, serving as both an engine for learning and assessment. Sonam Ugay provided a detailed demonstration of the Motherboard 1.0 and its latest developments in the new Motherboard 2.0. The Motherboard is a dynamic assessment platform used by each student to create their personalised Roadmaps based on the five areas of development. It tracks progress and supports individual learning journeys. Recent improvements include:

- **Chatbot Integration:** A new feature that provides real-time support linked to resources within the Motherboard.
- **AI Integration:** Suggestions to integrate AI tools for a more seamless and personalised learning experience, including multimodal assessments, tools for visualising data, and generating comprehensive learner reports.

### ***Challenges and Opportunities with Motherboard 2.0***

While the Motherboard 2.0 offers exciting potential, there are challenges regarding its usability, with some users reporting difficulties in data storage and interaction. There are also opportunities to refine the platform, particularly with the integration of AI. The AI-native prototype, currently being tested in India with 100 students, is expected to enhance the platform’s functionality. The Motherboard’s current use spans 24 schools, with 912 teachers and 13,078 students. There is potential to expand its outreach and improve engagement with the broader BB community. As the development of Motherboard 2.0 progresses, several key questions remain:



- Where else can the Motherboard be effectively applied?
- What additional features or improvements are needed to expand its functionality and adoption?

These questions will guide future discussions and developments as the BB educational model continues to evolve and expand.

## **PRESENTATION BY THE STUDENTS ON BHUTAN BACCALAUREATE**

Six students from DGI gave a presentation reflecting on their personal learning journeys and their experiences with the Bhutan Baccalaureate. Each student shared unique insights into how the BB framework has shaped their educational path, focusing on the 'wholistic' development approach that the programme emphasises.

Yeshey Dolma Tshering, a grade 11 learner, reflected on her growth at the Royal Academy, from feeling overwhelmed by SPWS in grade 7 to finding alignment with her development. She highlighted the 'wholistic' education at TRA, with experiences like a moot court, the Space Settlement Design competition, and astrophotography, which helped her develop skills such as consistency, discipline, and self-learning. For her, growth and resilience were more important than winning.

Jigme Chogyel, also in grade 11, shared insights from the "Learning Through Nature" retreat, which enhanced his understanding of the Bhutan Baccalaureate and the interconnectedness of nature. He learned valuable life skills like making fire and cooking while gaining a deeper appreciation for environmental preservation.

Yangtshel Wangyal, a grade 9 learner, described his tough experience in the Fab Academy course, emphasising the importance of continuous learning and balancing technology with the preservation of identity and values.

Ugyen Tenzin Norbu, a grade 9 learner, reflected on his role in the National Drama Competition, learning lessons in adaptability, teamwork, and the interconnectedness of life, where success is a result of individual and collective effort.

Tshering Choden, also in grade 9, shared how textile work, football, and leadership roles, such as managing the dorms, helped her grow personally and develop essential life skills. She valued self-learning and the importance of a supportive social circle.

Dawa Nangsel Seldon, a grade 9 learner, reflected on her journey, including participation in the Youth Leadership Programme and acting. These experiences shaped her worldview, helping her regulate emotions, reflect on actions, and grow through teamwork, communication, and academics.

Day Two concluded with a dinner hosted by His Excellency Ambassador Sudhakar Dalela at the Indian Embassy in Thimphu. The evening featured performances by students of the Druk Gyalpo's Institute and a troupe from the Nehru Cultural Centre, celebrating cultural heritage and fostering connections among attendees.



*Presentation by Students of DGI*

## DAY THREE: 8 DECEMBER 2024

### **STAYING HUMAN: HUMAN VALUES IN A TIME OF INFO & TECHNOLOGY**

The session delved into the intersection of technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence, and its societal impact, highlighting key themes of balance, education, and human values. Participants shared personal insights into how technology has shaped their lives, stressing the need to maintain human connections and values amidst growing technological reliance.

The key themes included:

#### ***Technology and Human Values***

Participants emphasised that technology, particularly AI, amplifies both positive and negative human efforts. While it can evoke emotions in humans, AI itself does not have the capacity to feel. It is crucial for technology to enhance human life, but humans must remain responsible for the outcomes of their interactions with it. The focus should be on ensuring technology complements human values and relationships, rather than replacing them.

#### ***Education and Life Skills***

Participants highlighted the importance of education extending beyond academics to teach life skills, cultural grounding, empathy, critical thinking, and resilience. A strong sense of identity, based on one's values and culture, is essential for navigating global challenges. It is also important to foster a mindset of questioning, self-awareness, and adaptability, which allows individuals to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

#### ***Human Connection and Technology***

In an increasingly digital world, building and nurturing human connections remains vital. Technology should be used mindfully, particularly in the context of social media, where algorithms can shape interactions. Developing digital literacy, especially in regions with a digital

divide, is essential to ensure the responsible use of technology and to address the challenges of information overload.

### ***Balancing Competitiveness and Compassion***

Participants stressed the importance of striking a balance between competitiveness and compassion. While societies need to remain competitive, this should not come at the expense of kindness, cultural respect, and empathy. In places like Bhutan, the emphasis should be on fostering a skeptical and resilient mindset, ensuring that individuals can compete effectively without losing sight of their humanity. At the same time, participants discussed the need to find a middle ground between competitiveness and overt complacency.

### ***Resilience and Adaptability***

Participants highlighted resilience as crucial for maintaining our humanity in a rapidly changing world. Embracing uncertainty and recognizing that not everything needs to be understood is part of navigating technological advancements. The ability to adapt and build empathy will be key to thriving in an age of technological transformation.



*A view captured at Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu*

## **LEARNING IN A TIME OF INFORMATION AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

The session on "Learning in a Time of Information and New Technologies" explored the evolving landscape of education in the digital age. Participants shared diverse insights on the integration of technology in learning, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking, hands-on learning, and personal motivation.

Key themes included:

### ***Varied Role of Technology***

Participants explored the role of technology in education, highlighting both its advantages and limitations. Some participants discussed how technology, including AI, complements traditional classroom learning by fostering individualised education, while others emphasised the importance of balancing online and in-person learning experiences. Technology, such as generative AI, was acknowledged for its potential in addressing large-scale challenges but was also seen as a tool that needs to be used responsibly, especially in educational contexts.

### ***Critical Thinking and Inquiry***

A central theme was the importance of critical thinking and inquiry in learning. Several participants stressed the need for students to ask the right questions, exercise free will in their intellectual journeys, and break cognitive "bubbles" to foster deeper understanding. Teachers were encouraged to not just impart facts but to help students critically evaluate and question information, ensuring they can navigate the complexities of the modern world.

### ***Human Memory and Cognitive Development***

Participants reflected on how human memory and cognitive development interact with technology. Some explored the impact of AI on creativity and productivity, noting that while AI handles mundane tasks, it frees up mental space for deeper thinking. Others discussed the need to be mindful of when and how technology is introduced, especially in early childhood education, to prevent potential negative impacts on cognitive and physical growth.

### ***Personal Motivation and Purpose***

Many participants emphasised the importance of introspection and finding a deeper sense of purpose in both teaching and learning. Whether through exploring personal motivations or reflecting on the purpose of education, there was a shared belief that learning should be connected to meaningful, real-world applications. Educators were encouraged to tailor their approaches to individual needs, fostering motivation in every student.

### ***Cultural and Social Contexts in Learning***

Several reflections pointed to the importance of understanding cultural and societal contexts in education. Participants discussed how education should be adaptable to individual and cultural differences, emphasising the value of respecting diversity and ensuring that technology aligns with human well-being. There was a call for education to prepare students for both the physical and digital worlds, fostering a blend of the two for future generations.

### ***The Future of Education***

The session concluded with visions for the future of education, focusing on creating environments that encourage both technological literacy and critical thinking. Participants emphasised the need for educators to evolve alongside technological advancements, ensuring that the next generation is prepared not just to use technology but to shape it in ways that enhance human creativity and social well-being.

### **Closing**

In the closing session, participants were asked to reflect on the discussions and insights gathered over the past three days and consider the critical question, "What do I want my children to learn?" This question prompted deep introspection, as the participants, representing a range of perspectives and experiences, shared their thoughts on the qualities, skills, and values they would prioritise for future generations in an increasingly complex and technologically driven world.

The recurring themes included:

### ***Resilience and Adaptability***

Many participants stressed the importance of teaching children resilience, the ability to adapt to change and remain open-minded in the face of new challenges. This was reflected in responses that emphasised the need to cultivate individuals who are not only prepared to tackle the complexities of the world but who also possess the mental fortitude to handle failure, discomfort, and uncertainty. The idea of fostering an open-minded learner was also mentioned frequently, with a focus on making children resilient enough to embrace difficulties and change.

### ***Emphasis on Empathy, Kindness, and Human Connection***

Several responses highlighted the need for education to foster qualities like empathy, kindness, and cooperation. These are seen as foundational human attributes that need to be instilled in children to prepare them for a world that is increasingly interconnected yet divided. Kindness was not framed as an exceptional act, but as a natural, everyday expectation within a community.

### ***Critical Thinking and Independent Inquiry***

The ability to think critically, ask the right questions, and evaluate information became another key focus. Many participants noted that teaching children not only to absorb information but to question and analyse it deeply is vital in an age of information overload and digital influence. The importance of instilling a love for inquiry and an understanding of the significance of self-directed learning was frequently emphasised.

*Engaged in Dialogue: Captured during the retreat at Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu*



### ***Balancing Technology with Human Values***

There was a recurrent concern about the dual nature of technology, particularly AI, as both a tool for progress and a potential source of disruption. Many participants acknowledged the necessity of integrating technology into education but emphasised the need for balance, ensuring that technology complements rather than diminishes human qualities such as creativity, empathy, and intuition. The discussions pointed to the importance of teaching children not only technical skills but also the wisdom to navigate the ethical and moral implications of these advancements.

### ***Celebrating Curiosity and Joy of Learning***

Many participants emphasised the importance of reigniting curiosity and the joy of learning in children. In a time when the educational system can sometimes suppress creativity and exploration, the responses suggested that a renewed focus on intrinsic motivation and the natural joy of discovery is essential. The idea that learning should be enjoyable and driven by curiosity rather than external pressures was a recurring theme.

### ***Preparing for a Complex Future***

Many reflections pointed toward the need for children to be prepared for a complex, rapidly changing world. This preparation goes beyond academic knowledge and includes the development of life skills that will help children navigate challenges, make ethical choices, and contribute to society in positive ways. Several participants emphasised that the key to this preparation is a continuous process of learning, both for children and adults, suggesting that education should be an evolving journey that never truly ends.

As participants considered the future of education, there was a strong consensus on the need to nurture well-rounded individuals who are not only equipped with knowledge but also possess the emotional and intellectual tools to thrive in an ever-changing world. The reflections also underscored the importance of continuous learning, for both children and educators, and the role of education in shaping a more compassionate, thoughtful, and adaptive society.

Day Three concluded with the closing dinner hosted by the Centre for the Escalation of Peace.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS TO ENRICH THE BHUTAN BACCALAUREATE LEARNING PROCESS

The following suggestions draw from the key themes and insights of the discussion, with a focus on integrating technological advancements, fostering humanistic values, and promoting cultural sensitivity. These ideas aim to help the Bhutan Baccalaureate prepare students for a rapidly evolving world while preserving its commitment to 'wholistic' education:

### ***Encourage Critical Thinking and Self-Awareness***

Traditional learning methods might be complemented by learning approaches that emphasise critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and emotional intelligence. This could involve designing activities and assessments that challenge students to question assumptions, analyse complex issues, and make thoughtful decisions. Fostering emotional intelligence through group discussions, empathy-building exercises, and reflective practices may help students develop strong interpersonal skills and self-awareness.

### ***Balance Technology with Human-Centric Education***

While integrating technology into education can enhance learning experiences, it is equally important to ensure that it does not replace human interaction or traditional learning methods. Educators might consider using technology as a tool to enrich lessons, while maintaining opportunities for face-to-face collaboration, hands-on activities, and relationship-building. This balance can ensure that students remain connected to their peers and teachers in meaningful ways.

### ***Promote Digital Literacy and Responsible Use of AI***

Preparing students for a technology-driven future could involve integrating digital literacy and AI education into the curriculum. This might include teaching students how to use digital tools effectively, critically evaluate online information, and understand the ethical implications of AI. Educators could also encourage students to explore AI's potential responsibly, using it to enhance creativity and critical thinking rather than as a substitute for independent thought.

### ***Cultivate Resilience and Emotional Well-Being***

Given the challenges of living in an age of constant connectivity, the Bhutan Baccalaureate might emphasise strategies for building resilience and maintaining emotional well-being. This could involve teaching students stress-management techniques, fostering a growth mindset, and creating a supportive learning environment. Activities that encourage mindfulness and balance in the use of technology may help students navigate the pressures of a fast-paced, information-saturated world.

### ***Incorporate Cross-Pollination and Wholistic Approaches***

A focus on interdisciplinary learning and cross-pollination might help students connect knowledge across different subjects and appreciate the interconnectedness of various fields. For example, integrating science, technology, arts, and humanities could spark creativity and innovation. The Bhutan Baccalaureate might also design its curriculum to address the broader social and emotional needs of students, encouraging them to think critically about their role in society and the environment.

### ***Highlight Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity***

In an increasingly globalised world, education could benefit from fostering cultural awareness and inclusivity. The Bhutan Baccalaureate might incorporate culturally relevant content, ensuring that students engage with diverse perspectives while staying grounded in Bhutanese traditions and values. This approach can help students appreciate their cultural heritage and navigate global challenges with sensitivity and confidence.

### ***Nurture Lifelong Learning and Creativity***

By viewing education as an ongoing journey, the Bhutan Baccalaureate might inspire students to remain curious and open to learning throughout their lives. This could involve encouraging students to explore their passions, take risks, and embrace failure as a part of the creative process. Opportunities to experiment with innovative ideas and collaborate on projects may help students develop the skills needed for success in an ever-changing world.

### ***Foster Intrinsic Motivation and Joy of Learning***

Prioritising learning experiences that reignite curiosity and the joy of discovery is important to moving away from rote memorisation and external pressures. Incorporating project-based learning and real-world applications can make education meaningful and engaging for students.

### ***Focus on Ethical and Pragmatic Technology Integration***

Educators might guide students in understanding the ethical considerations of using technology, such as privacy, accountability, and cultural implications. A pragmatic approach to technology use, where tools are carefully chosen to enhance learning outcomes, could help avoid distractions and misuse. Teachers could also play a critical role in helping students navigate the overwhelming amount of information available online, encouraging them to prioritise meaningful content and think critically.

### ***Foster Global Awareness and Local Relevance***

The Bhutan Baccalaureate might consider blending global trends with local needs, ensuring that students are well-prepared to engage with international developments while remaining rooted in Bhutanese values. For example, AI and digital technologies could be taught in ways that reflect the unique cultural and social context of Bhutan, promoting localised innovation and sustainable development.

### ***Equip Students for a Complex Future***

It is essential to blend academic knowledge with emotional and social skills, ensuring that students are prepared for the complexities of an interconnected world. Developing programmes that evolve alongside technological advancements will ensure that education remains relevant and future-oriented.



*Group Photos (from top):  
Participants of the Philosophers' Retreat 2024 at Zhiwa Ling Ascent, Thimphu  
Dinner hosted by the Ambassador of India at India House, Thimphu  
With performers at India House, Thimphu*



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