The Tangsas are a small ethnic group, related to the Nagas, living in north-east India. In recent years, rapid changes have occurred to their lifestyles as a result of migration down from the hills and conversion to Christianity. The newly converted Christian Tangsas had initially believed that religion could suffice as culture, but many have realised now that it cannot help them secure their (ethnic) identity. The past two decades have seen efforts to recover or reinvent their own traditions, and to re-package their ‘imagined’ traditional culture as a component of their new modern Christian image.

Annual village festivals are very good sites to witness these processes at first hand. I wish to take a closer look at one village festival organized by the Hakhun Tangsas which I attended last year in order to substantiate my claim that the Hakhuns use their ethnicity to bolster their social and political position, and that their principal aim is not so much to preserve and present their traditional culture as it is to project a new multi-faceted identity which draws from both their traditional ethnic past and their modern Christian present.

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