

The Monk and the Gun

The Monk and the Gun is a 2023 drama film directed, written and co-produced by Pawo Choyning Dorji.^[6] Starring Tandin Wangchuk, Deki Lhamo, Pema Zangmo Sherpa, Tandin Sonam, Harry Einhorn, Choeying Jatsho, Tandin Phubz, Yuphel Lhendup Selden and Kelsang Choejay.^[7] It is a co-production between Bhutan, Taiwan, France, the United States, and Hong Kong.^[8]

It was selected as the Bhutanese entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 96th Academy Awards,^[9] and was one of the 15 finalist films in the December shortlist.^[10]

Synopsis

Set in 2006, the Kingdom of Bhutan is looking to become a democracy, so looking to hold an election, government officials organize a mock election as a training exercise. In the town of Ura, an old lama orders a monk to get a pair of weapons to face the imminent change in the kingdom. Meanwhile, an American antique weapons collector lands in Bhutan in search of a valuable rifle that falls into the monk's hands.^{[11][12]}

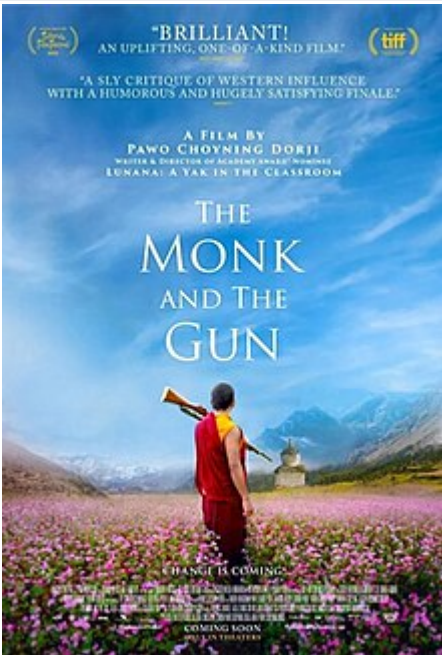
Plot

The film follows the story of Tashi, a young monk in Bhutan, and Ron Coleman, an American visitor. Tashi's lama asks for guns, an odd request considering the rarity of guns in Bhutanese society. Meanwhile, Ron is in Bhutan to acquire an antique rifle for a collector. The film explores Bhutan's movement towards democracy, while satirizing the fascination for guns and violence suggested as endemic in democratic society. The villagers humorously attempt to understand elections, while tension builds as Ron's and Tashi's stories intertwine. In the end, the movie leaves the audience to consider the true nature of modern democracy and the allure of firearms.

Cast

- Harry Einhorn as Ron Coleman
- Tandin Wangchuk as Tashi
- Deki Lhamo as Tshomo
- Pema Zangmo Sherpa as Tshering Yangden

The Monk and the Gun



Theatrical release poster

Directed by Pawo Choyning Dorji

Written by Pawo Choyning Dorji

Produced by Pawo Choyning Dorji
Feng Hsu
Stephanie Lai
Jean-Christophe Simon
Janee Pennington

Starring Tandin Wangchuk
Deki Lhamo
Pema Zangmo Sherpa
Tandin Sonam
Harry Einhorn
Choeying Jatsho
Tandin Phubz
Yuphel Lhendup Selden

- Tandin Sonam as Benji
- Choeying Jatsho as Choephel
- Tandin Phubz as Phurba
- Yuphel Lhendup Selden
- Kelsang Choejay

Release

The Monk and the Gun had its world premiere on September 1, 2023, at the 50th Telluride Film Festival,^[13] and then screened on September 9 in the Centerpiece section of the 48th Toronto International Film Festival.^{[14][15]} It was also invited at the 28th Busan International Film Festival in the 'A Window on Asian Cinema' section and was screened in October 2023.^[16] In October 2023, Roadside Attractions acquired the North American distribution rights to the film,^[17] and a U.S. release is scheduled for February 2, 2024.^[18]

Reception

The film has received numerous positive reviews. On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 92% of 38 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 8.1/10. The website's consensus reads: "Surrounding its poignant insights with a gentle layer of crowd-pleasing comedy, *The Monk and the Gun* is a timely political satire that underscores the fragility of democracy."^[19] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average, assigned the film a score of 74 out of 100, based on 13 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews.^[20]

Deadline Hollywood's chief film critic Pete Hammond called it one of the best films in the 50th Telluride Film Festival, writing that there was "no sophomore jinx here, this one is even better than Pawo Choyning Dorji's first, and that is saying something", and that the director "presents a gentle satirical jab at American democracy, but shows the difficulties of changing a society whose pure and lovely innocence stands in the way of a political revolution, even as they are also just discovering James Bond and The Spice Girls".^[21]

The Monk and the Gun won the Showcase Audience Choice Award for the 2023 Vancouver International Film Festival.^[22] The film was also awarded the Special Jury Prize at the 2023 Rome Film Festival.^[23]

	Kelsang Choejay
Cinematography	Jigme Tenzing
Edited by	Hsiao Yun-Ku
Music by	Frederic Alvarez
Production companies	Films Boutique Dangphu Dingphu a 3 Pigs Production Journey to the East Films, Ltd. Tomson Films Co., Ltd. Closer N8 Wooden Trailer Productions, LLC
Distributed by	Films Boutique (International) ^[1] Impact Films ^[2] (Indian subcontinent) Edko Films (China) Pyramide Distribution (France) ^[2] <u>Roadside Attractions</u> (North America) ^[3]
Release dates	September 1, 2023 (Telluride) October 17, 2023 (Bhutan) February 9, 2024 (United States) August 7, 2024 (France)
Running time	107 minutes
Countries	Bhutan Taiwan,China France United States

Alex Billington of the First Showing described the film as "a fascinating philosophical look at life in Bhutan, which was told with confidence and filmed absolutely perfectly", hailing it as "a brilliant satirical commentary on America's stubborn ways, as opposed to the more sensible Bhutan society based in Buddhism. Not only is watching *The Monk and the Gun* such a pleasant and uplifting experience, it's the kind of film that will leave you profoundly affected by the story." Billington further added that the film was "one-of-a-kind", and that it "[provided] a profoundly distinct perspective on Buddhist philosophy and Himalayan culture that many are entirely unfamiliar with and can't quite make sense of".^[24]

	Hong Kong,China
Languages	English Dzongkha
Box office	\$248,179 ^[4] ^[5]

Stephen Farber from *The Hollywood Reporter* positively highlights the film's sense of humor along with its lively and piquant narration, although unnecessary complications arise in the development of the story. He also praised the persuasive performances of the entire cast.^[25]

See also

- List of submissions to the 96th Academy Awards for Best International Feature Film
- List of Bhutanese submissions for the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film

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