As a parasol offers protection from the scorching sun, the Precious Umbrella (duk) offers symbolic protection from illness and negative forces.

From the lowland tropical jungles along Bhutan’s southern border with India to the high, snowcapped peaks and glaciers along its northern border with China, Bhutan is home to virtually every climate zone and some of the highest points on Earth.

The remote northern frontier of Bhutan is populated by a handful of villages that have managed to thrive in the cold and harsh conditions. This is home to the Layap people, semi-nomadic yak herders who spend their time between the village of Laya and high-altitude yak-herding camps. The Layap are descended from Tibetans who moved to the area centuries ago, bringing with them their distinctive customs, language, and dress. Their tents are made of tightly woven yak wool and are completely waterproof, yet they allow natural light to enter and smoke to escape.

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(Right) Layap women often wear black woolen jackets and adorn themselves with silver jewelry and beads. Their conical hats are made out of bamboo strips topped with a sharp bamboo spike.

(Below) Layap herders camp at the base of Mt. Jomolhari.

Photo by Yeshi Dorji

Adapting to the Environment: The Layap