

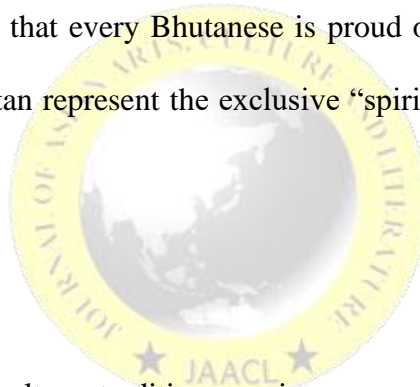
Traditional Arts and Crafts in the Land of Happiness

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Abstract

Bhutan- a divine place that breathes happiness attracts tourists from all over the world. The magnificent country of South-Central Asia is located on the eastern ridges of Himalayas landlocked between India and China. The magical place is brimming with peace and happiness. The mesmerizing rocky-mountains, snowcapped peaks, lush green valleys, pristine sparkling rivers, beautiful landscapes, holy monasteries, and temples hold much more than what meets the eyes. The rich cultural heritage predominantly visible throughout the country is something that every Bhutanese is proud of. Untouched by globalization, the art and crafts of Bhutan represent the exclusive “spirit and identity” of this Himalayan Kingdom.



Keywords

Buddhism, art and craft, culture, tradition, carvings

Introduction

Bhutanese culture is influenced by Buddhist values. The predominant religion in Bhutan is Buddhism followed by Hinduism. Bhutan is the only country in the world that still follows the Vajrayana form of Mahayana Buddhism as its national religion. Buddhist stupas can be seen throughout the country.

The unique culture and traditions developed over the ages have not been influenced by other cultures. It has remained true to its original form and has been well preserved. The

Preservation and promotion of culture are very vital for the functioning and progress of a harmonious society. The people of Bhutan are simple, God-fearing, spiritual, and peace-loving. Buddhism influences the daily life of people.

Bhutanese architecture is one of the most spectacular features of the country. All the buildings in Bhutan e.g. traditional houses, fort monasteries (massive dzongs), monasteries (remote goembas), temples and institutions are built and decorated in the traditional style – a wonderful attempt to preserve their culture.

History of Art and Craft

The development of Buddhist art and craft can be traced back to 15th-century tertön, Pema Lingpa an accomplished painter, sculptor, metal craftsman, and architect. The credit for establishing art in Bhutan goes to him. In 1680 the fourth secular ruler Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye opened the School of Bhutanese Arts and Crafts which gave a further impetus to the country's artistic traditions. The school in the later years evolved into the National Institute for Zorig Chusum. The traditional artistry in Bhutan gets boost and support by all levels of society. The royal family and clergy provide patronage to the traditional art and craft.

Bhutanese art and craft, dance, drama, music, and even architecture are all inspired by Buddhism. Music and dance form an integral part of every festival and celebration. The religious and spiritual bent of mind is reflected in their art.

Zorig Chusum - Thirteen Types of Bhutanese Arts and Crafts

Zorig Chusum refers to the 13 types of traditional art and craft forms Bhutan. The institute of Zorig Chusum was set up in Thimphu by the Government of Bhutan to promote and preserve the traditional art and craft of the country. During my visit to Bhutan in 2018, I visited this Institute and I was fascinated by the various types of traditional art training being imparted to the artists. Speaking to the artists creating these beautiful art pieces, I found one thing common in their replies - each one felt happy and enlightened spiritually after creating these masterpieces. The painting section had artists working on Buddha paintings.

1. DEZO- Papermaking

Hand-made paper making is a very important part of Bhutanese tradition and culture. The art of papermaking is called Dezo and master papermakers are called Dezop. The sacred and religious scriptures are written on these papers. The bark, fiber, and pulp of Daphne and Edgeworthia plants are used for making handmade paper.

2. DOZO - Dozo is an ancient craft of masonry where structures are made up of wood or stone. The master mason is called Zope in Bhutanese. The masons along with the carpenters use their expertise to build the dzongs, temples, walls, stupas, houses out of stones. They also make household utensils.

3. GARZO- Blacksmithing

The art of blacksmithing is called Garzo in Bhutan. It was introduced in the 14th century by Tibetan saint Thangtong Gyalpo who built the iconic suspension bridges

over Paro Chhu. Besides making agricultural tools, the blacksmiths showed their skill in making chains, knives, daggers, and swords.

4. JIMZO- Sculpting

Bhutanese craftsmen excel in creating delicate sculptures using clay. The clay sculptures ranging from small to large-sized usually portray deities like Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, and other imagery can be seen across the country. Clay sculpting is usually considered a male craft whereas pottery is more of female craft-making daily usage utensils.

5. LHAZO - Paintings

Lhazo or painting is perhaps the oldest form of art in Bhutan. There are three forms of traditional paintings: thangkas, wall paintings, and statues. The paintings often symbolize spirituality and are religious in nature depicting deity, a religious story, significance, and teachings of Buddhism. Bhutanese painters used organic material for painting. Natural soil pigments are used. Thangkas- One of the most unique and treasured forms A thangka is a sacred devotional painting usually depicting Buddhist deity, scene, or mandala, which is a symbolic painting of the universe. The interior walls of dzongs and Lhakhangs are usually covered with beautiful paintings.

The mystic circular pattern known as the mandala art adorns the walls and ceilings of the Buddhist temples. The art mainly depicts deities, sacred animals, temples, life, and teachings of Buddha and other imageries.

For centuries Bhutanese have decorated the outside of their houses with paintings of various images such as tigers, birds, dragons etc. The tradition of painting phallus on exterior wall of houses and shops has been followed for centuries and it is believed that it wards off evil and protects them.



Image 1: Lhazo painting

6. PARZO-- Carvings on the wall

Beautiful carvings on the walls can be seen throughout the country. Parzo- the art of carving is one of the most important art forms in Bhutan. This includes wood carving, slate carving, and stone carving. Intricate wood carving is also done on windows and

pillars. Wooden masks with carving out deities, mantras, and other imagery are made for the Tsechu festival. Carving on the phallus is also seen in rural Bhutanese houses.



Image 2: Carving and Painting on the Walls and Pillars

7. SHAGZO- Wood Turning

Woodturning is an ancient art passed down to generations. The master woodturners known as shagzopa make a variety of functional and decorative wooden items e.g. cups, plates, bowls of different shapes and sizes, and other souvenirs. Different types of wood are used but the most exquisite and expensive one being burl wood.

8. SHINGZO – Wood carving and Carpentry

The skilled carpenters are involved in creating unique art forms in Bhutan that gives Bhutan a distinct identity. Their skilled carving and designing can be seen in wooden structures throughout the country. Ranging from building dzongs, temples, houses, palaces, institutes, bridges pillars and household furniture the craftsmen create masterpieces. They also make tools and instruments used by people in their daily life.

9. THAGZO- Weaving

Textile weaving or thagzo is an essential part of Bhutan's cultural heritage. Using cotton, silk and wool yarns Bhutanese weave beautiful and unique textiles. The vibrant color combination, intricate designs, dyeing and weaving techniques, and traditional patterns have been passed down through generations. Bhutanese wear textile clothes every day. The traditional attire for Men and women is known as Gho and Kira.

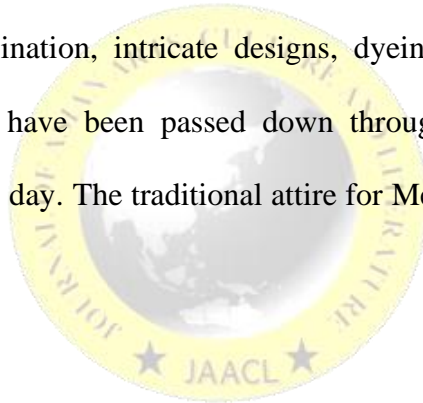




Image 3: Thagzo Textile Weaving

10. TSHARZO- Cane and bamboo weaving

The extensive availability of cane and bamboos in Bhutan makes this art form the most common and well developed. Cane weaving is used to make plates, baskets, mats, containers, etc. Cane and bamboo souvenirs, cultural artifacts, bows and arrows, drink containers, musical instruments are produced by the artisans.

11. TSHEMZO – Needlework

The Bhutanese art of embroidery and applique work is known as Tshemzo. Working with needles to make beautiful colorful clothes, boots, etc is an ancient art.

Embroidered thangkas and thongdrels are created which are mainly used for Tshechu festival.

12. TROKO – Metal ornaments

The Bhutanese art of making ornaments is known as Troko/Troeko. The skilled masters called Tro ko lopen to make beautiful intricate jewelry such as earrings, necklaces, amulets, rings, bracelets, etc. using corals, turquoise, stones, gold, and silver.

Acknowledgment

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