

# Zorig Chusum

- Contributed by Dr. Karma Phuntsho

*Zorig Chusum* (བོད་རིག་བརྒྱ་གསུམ) is a classification of arts, crafts and technological skills into thirteen different domains, which is well known in Bhutan. The thirteen categories include (1) calligraphy or *yigzo*, (2) painting or *lhazo*, (3) carving or *parzo* (ཐར་བཟོ་), (4) clay sculpture or *jinzo* (འཛིན་བཟོ་), (5) metal casting or *lugzo* (ལུག་བཟོ་), (6) silver and gold smithery or *troezo* (རྒྱལ་བཟོ་), (7) needle work or *tshemzo* (ཚེས་བཟོ་), (8) wood work/ carpentry or *shingzo* (ཤིང་བཟོ་), (9) textile production or *thagzo* (ཐག་བཟོ་), (10) paper making or *delzo* (འདལ་བཟོ་), (11) bamboo craft or *tsharzo* (ཚར་བཟོ་), (12) black smithery or *garzo* (མག་བཟོ་), and (13) masonry or *dozo* (རྩ་བཟོ་). In this classification, carpentry and woodturning are put together under wood work whereas in another enumeration, black smithery and gold and silver smithery are treated as one art of smithery and woodturning (ཤིང་བཟོ་) and carpentry enumerated as different arts or crafts.

*Yigzo* (ཡིག་བཟོ་) or calligraphy includes the art of writing in different scripts. It is carried out mostly by monastic scribes and priests who create books for regular use or make ornamental books with artistic calligraphy. Associated with calligraphy are also other crafts such as ink making and pen making.

*Lhazo* (ལྷ་བཟོ་) or fine art is practised as high culture by artists who are trained in the field. Buddhist figures and themes dominate the content of fine art, thus giving it the name *lhazo* or art of divine beings. The painters learn iconographic mensuration and line drawings and gradually go on to create very complex images of deities and Buddhas. They also learn how to prepare and use the pigments, paint brushes and canvass.

*Parzo* (ཐར་བཟོ་) or carving comes in many forms. Bhutanese artists and craftsman carve on metals such as copper, bronze, silver and gold, and also on wood and stone. The carvings on the stone are mostly mantra spells in either the *Lantsha* (ལན་ཇ་) or *Uchen* (འུ་ཅན་) script while the carving on wood generally depict Buddhist icons and traditional motifs and symbols. It is common to find deity images carved on metal and sometimes on stone and placed on receptacles and monuments.

*Jinzo* (འཛིན་བཟོ་) or clay sculpture is one of the finest arts associated with Bhutan. Bhutanese clay sculptors excel in making clay figures, most of which is religious icons or symbols. A very special clay, collected from some specific areas of Bhutan, is used for the clay sculpting. Bhutanese temples are full of wonderful samples of clay sculpture. Like fine art, clay sculpture is taught in the schools for traditional arts and crafts.

Metal casting or *lugzo* (ལུག་བཟོ་) is also known in Bhutan. Using the ancient lost wax technology, many bronze sculpture are created through metal casting.

Silver and gold smithery or *troezo* (རྒྱལ་བཟོ་) is a very refined tradition. Silver and gold smiths create a wide range of intricate objects including religious figures, ritual artefacts, jewellerys and household items. Many religious and cultural motifs are used in the gold and silver works.



*Calligraphy (Yigzo)*



*Painting (Lhazo)*



*Sculpting (Jinzo)*



*Metal Casting (Lugzo)*



*Silver and Gold Smithery (Troezo)*



*Paper Making (Delzo)*



*Carving (Parzo)*



*Wood Work (Shingzo)*



*Bamboo Craft (Tsharzo)*



*Masonry (Dozo)*



*Needle Work (Tshemzo)*



*Black Smithery (Garzo)*



*Textile Production (Thagzo)*

Needle work or *tshemzo* (ཚེམ་བཟོ་) is practised by many Bhutanese but the more specialised art of embroidery and applique are undertaken only by people with skills. Needle includes the basic craft of tailoring to produce a diverse set of garments Bhutanese wear and the ornamental pieces which Bhutanese use heavily in both religious activities and ceremonies. Special pieces such as wall hangings such as *thongdrol* and *thangka* are created using the technique of embroidery and applique.

Wood work/carpentry known as *shingzo* (ཤིང་བཟོ་) is a very common craft. Most Bhutanese houses are built with intensive use of timber. The wooden part of Bhutanese built structure is filled with various designs and decorations, which a master carpenter or architect is familiar with. Wood work is also carried out to produce household utensils. Traditionally, the Bhutanese mostly produced their crockery from wood through woodturning.

Textile production or *thagzo* (ཐག་བཟོ་) is a very popular art and craft practised almost exclusively by women. From creating yarn, to dyeing to weaving the numerous patterns, Bhutan has a very rich and diverse tradition of textile production. Bhutan exported textiles created from wool, yakhair, silk, cotton and plant fibres to Tibet and textiles remains one of the main attractions for the tourist who visit Bhutan today.

Paper making or *delzo* (འདེལ་བཟོ་), (11) is an ancient craft which was perhaps passed from China via Tibet. As Bhutan abundantly grows *Daphne* and *Edgeworthia*, Bhutan had a vibrant tradition of paper production although this was a craft practised by selected people. Paper was sent as gift or merchandise to Tibet and the state also collected paper as tax from the people.

Bamboo craft or *tsharzo* (རྩ་བཟོ་) is widely practised by the common Bhutanese. Most cowherders practise craft to create ropes, baskets, strainers, mats and other household items. Thanks to Bhutan's environment with heavy vegetation, different species of bamboo and cane are grown across the country. Bamboo is also used to build houses in the southern parts of Bhutan.

Black smithery or *garzo* (མགར་བཟོ་) was practised by certain communities and families in the past. Black smiths produced a wide range of household items, farming tools and also religious artefacts. Bhutan had many areas where iron ore was prevalent and even Tibetan builders such as *Thangtong Gyalpo* used iron extracted and processed in Bhutan. The tradition is now in decline as a lot of the steel artefacts and implements are imported from India.

Masonry or *dozo* (རྩོ་བཟོ་) is a widespread in Bhutan. The houses in Central and Eastern Bhutan are generally built of stone and wood. Bhutanese masons used stone in skilful ways to built towering structures which lasted for many centuries. Most valleys also have quarries from where excellent stone is extracted for building houses. The stone is chiselled or broken to get the desired shape and then stacked using mud plaster to hold them together. Whole stone slabs are sometimes put over a river to make a bridge. Stones are also used for millstone, mortar and pestle, knife sharpener, and also as pans for pancake.

Although the thirteen arts and crafts are generally given as comprehensive list of artistic tradition and craftsmanship in Bhutan, this set of thirteen does not include all arts and crafts. Tannery, ink making and bone works are some examples which do not fall within the thirteen. Nonetheless, the thirteen arts and crafts today represent the artistic and craft based cultural heritage of Bhutan and is being actively promoted by the state.