5.1.4. Calligraphy

Calligraphy or *yige*o literally means “beautiful writing.” Handwriting was one of the earliest arts used for communication and documentation in the country. Religious texts and official correspondences were written by hand who had the abilities to write so beautifully that it came to be regarded as an art called calligraphy. One is regarded as a true calligrapher, if, he or she possesses the six basic qualities such as, the ability to write in perfect shape, uniformity, legibility, speed, correct spellings and the execution of proportions of the scripts.
5.1.4.1. Origin and Development of Joyig

Bhutan’s formal script in printed form called tshuyig is adopted from the script first invented by Sambhota in the 7th Century in Tibet. It is also called uchen indicating that each alphabet has a bold base in the upper portion. The printed texts in the cannons and xylographic blocks are found in this form of writing.

King Songtsen Gampo, of Chogyal Dynasty in Tibet, wishing to spread Buddhism in Tibetan, sent a few selected boys to India to study the Devanagri script of the Gupta period. Upon his return, Thonmi Sambhota then devised and derived a script based on the Devanagri to Tibetan language. He introduced a set of 4 vowel signs and 30 consonants. This new alphabetic script was then used to translate Buddhist literature from Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese and other languages into Tibetan.

The introduction of the script into Bhutan is closely related to the spread of Buddhism. Guru Rinpoche visited Bumthang in 8th century, accompanied by Denma Tsemang, one of his twenty-five disciples. At that time, Denma Tsemang found that Bhutanese people had a different way of writing block letters which was flexible and could be written with speed. He is said to have written down the Guru’s teachings for the King of Bumthang. Being located to the south of Tibet, this form of writing came to be known as lhoyig at that time. Legends claim that Denma Tsemang could write innumerable texts in a moment. Many of the terma (concealed religious texts) recorded in the Bhutanese scripts are also said to be written by Denma Tsemang.

Uchen

Uchen (headed) script is mostly used for religious books and official print form. It is an upright, block form of alphabet marked by heavy horizontal lines and tapering vertically towards the bottom. Uchen’s fine clarity and elegance lends not only to wood block carving and printing but also to modern computer graphics, enabling the reproduction and preservation of the vast and rich resources of Buddhist teachings. Xylographic blocks were the main forms of prints available in this region for centuries to print religious books before the metal printing press was invented.

Traditionally, it was a basic requirement for every student to master the style of Uchen writing before moving on to learning other scripts.

Jogshum

When uchen scripts are written at a little faster speed, it gave a different style and came to be called jogshum. Upon mastering uchen, the learners then begin with the practice of Jogshugm scripts before proceeding to learn joyig writing.

Jo-yig

Joyig cursive writing is the form of cursive writing initially used for taking dictations, correspondences and personalized writings such as poems, verses and other forms of composition. Unlike uchen, joyig has greater flexibility for speed writing by using dutshig (abbreviated words). Though joyig has a standard style for writing, different styles can emerge depending upon one’s writing skills. People referred to joyig as jugyig or joyig. Joyig was also once known as lhoyig or monyig as this was only used in Bhutan.

Lentsha and Vartu

Based on the ancient Sanskrit script, decorative and ornamental scripts such as Lentsa and Vartu are also preserved and developed in Bhutan. Vartu is more or less a headless form of Lentsa (also known as Ranjana script), and is closely related to the Siddham script used in Japan. It is believed that Vartu is the scripts of the...
nagas, since the letters bend downwards like the tail of a snake, and that Lentsa is the script of the gods, since the letters of Lentsa bend upwards. These scripts are quite complex and occupies bigger spaces while printing and are not suitable for printing in small sizes. Therefore, these scripts are not used in everyday writing or for any reading texts, except for inscribing mantras and prayers on the walls, temple columns, prayer wheels, stones, slates, doorways, and trees, and also as a decorative script to engrave seals, and to inscribe book titles on the covers of traditional pecha. Khando Dayig (treasure scripts) is another ornamental script that can be only seen on terma (concealed religious texts), and it is found inscribed naturally on stones.

5.1.4.2. Ink

Gold is considered as the best material to prepare ink, followed by silver and stone. Important and precious religious texts are written with ink made from gold and silver dust. In the early days, when there was no pen or pencil, the writer would carry a nagkong (inkpot mostly made of brass or copper) filled with ink along with a nyugu (a pen made from a special bamboo called si). While inks and pen were made locally, inkpots had to be imported from either Tibet or India.

Experts fear that with the ever increasing use of computers, the art of calligraphy may be heading for oblivion in the coming years. The preservation of the art today is due mainly to the practice that had continued in our monasteries, which are increasingly making use of computers and computer graphics.

5.1.5. The Art of Papermaking

Daezo or shogzo or the art of papermaking originates from an age-old tradition whose history can be traced back to the eighth century during the first advent of Buddhism in Bhutan. It is said that Bumthang used to export daeso papers to the Tibetan King Thrisong Deutsen as a religious offering. Known for its durability, daeso papers were used in writing Buddhist cannons and commentaries at Samye monastery.

Daeso sheets were also bartered with goods from Tibet in the past. In the olden days, daeso was mainly used for writing religious scriptures, legal acts, and letters and for maintaining tax records. Teryig or treasure scripts were written on daeso parchment.

In Bhutan, two species of daphne plants are used for making traditional paper; Edgeworthia gardneri, called dae kar (white daphne) and Daphne spp., known as dae nag (black daphne) in Dzongkha. Sometimes, these papers were known as dug shog (poisonous paper). The bark of daphne contains a kind of insect-repellent toxin and is known to last for hundreds of years. In the past, paper was made to meet domestic needs except for supplying some to Tibet, but today daeso is sold in the market and even exported. A person who makes daeso is known as daezop.

5.1.5.1. Process of Papermaking

The art of papermaking is confined to the northern, central and eastern part of the country where the high