

The Pursuit of Perfection: Bhutan-Druk Yul Land of the Thunder Dragon

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Geography

Bhutan is a tiny landlocked country that has its earliest roots in mythology, religion, and isolationism. It is about the size and shape of Switzerland and measures 200 miles from east to west and 100 miles from north to south and has about 650,000 people. This mountainous kingdom is wedged between the vast territories of Tibet (China) to the north and India to the south and east.

Geographically and ethnically, Bhutan can be divided into three separate zones: northern, central, and southern. The northern and central section inhabitants are mostly Buddhists. The Himalayan Mountains run lengthwise across Bhutan and are highest in the northern section, which borders Tibet. The mountain ranges and steep valleys influence all aspects of the culture, economy, and living conditions. The northern region has altitudes of over 9,000 feet and is very sparsely populated. Most of the people are nomadic yak herders who live on meager diets of milk, butter, cheese and yak meat with the addition of some barley, winter wheat, and a few root vegetables. These people tend their herds and live in black tents woven from yak hair in the summer and move to their permanent stone homes built lower in the valleys during the winter. They have a very rugged, difficult lifestyle. The extremely high peaks of the Himalayans bordering Tibet permit little to grow in this region, although there are some coniferous forests of pine and fir sprinkled on the landscape. **ROCKS ON ROOF PHOTO**

The majority of the population lives in central Bhutan where the capital, since the early 1950's, Thimphu, is located. This area lies at the foot of the majestic northern mountains and is marked with a few fertile valleys where the altitude ranges from 1,000 to 3,000 meters. This region is the home of the Drukpa people, who are of Mongoloid origin. Generally, the people are farmers and breed cattle or cultivate the land. Numerous crops of rice, wheat, maize, all the seven grains, and fruits are grown and lush forests abound. The valleys typically have extreme cold during the winter. Temperatures may drop to a minus ten Celsius or lower while strong winds intensify the cold. Only 18 percent of the country is arable, and over 70 percent of the country is forest, Bhutan is an "environmental hot-spot" where many endangered plants and animals thrive. **PHOTO OF CONTOUR FARMING**

The southern section, next to India, has low foothills covered with dense tropical forests. The climate is subtropical monsoonal and is marked with hot and humid days. Southern Bhutan is inhabited mainly by Nepalese farmers, who arrived in the country at the end of the 19th century. They brought the Hindu religion and Nepalese language, which is still predominant there even today. The rest of the country is basically Buddhist.

Although this small isolated country has somewhat different topography in different sections, forty-four percent of the total population are sustenance farmers. Their days often consist of hard labor in the fields or tending animals without the help of what we call mechanical progress. Agricultural equipment is very simple, and electricity and running water are still unknown in most villages. Much of the travel is done by foot, horse, or with few vehicles that transverse the sparse road system. PHOTO MAN_STIX

Though known as Bhutan to the outside world, to the Bhutanese the country is known as Druk Yul, 'land of the thunder dragon'. Often in the mountainous areas there are severe thunder storms, hence the name 'land of the thunder dragon'. The people are known as the Drukpas, and the national language as Dzongkha. Although there are many different dialects and languages spoken in Bhutan, English is universally taught in their schools. Adding to the mystery of this unusual country are the numerous and varied animals found in different parts of the country. There are elephants, rhinos, tigers, musk deer, snow leopards, brown bears, red pandas, takins and blue sheep.

History

This is a deeply spiritual land and is home to a unique identity derived essentially from its cultural and religious roots. The first recorded history of Bhutan dates back to the sixth century B.C. Buddhism was introduced in the seventh century and impacted the total culture. It is believed that Guru Rimpochey or Padmasambhava, the great Indian mystic and high lama, flew from Tibet on the back of a tiger and landed in Taktsang, Paro, where he built the Taktsang monastery, which remains until today. Guru Rimpoche brought Buddhism to Bhutan; and Taktsang, Paro, is one of the most sacred religious and historical sites of their culture. TAKTSANG PHOTO

This little country had both geographical and self-imposed isolation from the western world. The location and topography of the land contributed greatly to this remoteness, and they still do. Even today, there are only two roads into the country, which come up from India. The north is too mountainous for roads. And there are very few airplanes that can negotiate the narrow, high mountain airport in Paro, Bhutan. There were few who left Bhutan, and fewer outsiders were allowed in. As early as 1585, Portuguese missionaries noted this strange country. From the 1600's to the early 20th century, only 13 European expeditions were known to have reached Bhutan. The Bhutanese were suspicious and did not want intruders or travelers. They kept their ancient culture pure and untainted by foreign influence. They had good reason to do so. Their neighbors to the north, the Tibetans, continuously invaded Bhutan for over 400 years, until the end of the 19th century when the Bhutanese finally turned them back at the Battle of Drukyl Dzong. To the south, the British in India fought the Bhutanese and took the Duars Plains (which were a part of Bhutan) in the Duar Wars in the late 19th century—about the time of the American Civil War.

Bhutan opened to tourists during the coronation of the 4th King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in 1976; however, fearing the fragile ecosystem and culture would be destroyed, the government imposed a \$200 a day tax on all visitors. Today arrangements for tourist travel must be made in advance; the itinerary

set; all taxes, costs and fees of the trip paid; and Bhutanese guides accompany all travelers. Travel is restricted and very expensive.

In the 17th century Bhutan was unified by the great Shabdrung, and this event marked a significant era in Bhutan's history. Prior to this time, Bhutan was divided into small independent principalities. Shabdrung was the great leader of the Drukpa school of Mahayana Buddhism and developed a dual system of government. He established a temporal leader known as the Desi and a theocratic leader known as Je Khenpo (chief abbot).

Shabdrung was a spiritual leader, statesman, and great architect, choreographer and builder. He constructed numerous Dzongs, monasteries, and religious institutions. Through his strong leadership he firmly established Drukpa Kagyu as the state religion. His dual form of government lasted from 1627 until 1907 when the Wangchuck dynasty, a hereditary monarchy, was begun. This monarchy reunited the struggling country once again. **DZONG PHOTO**

Presently, the fifth Wangchuck king reigns in Bhutan. He is probably the only king of his type remaining in our modern world. He is a working monarch and not a figurehead. He has the love, loyalty, and reverence of his people. In 1999 the fourth king asked the legislature to pass a law that stated that any monarch of Bhutan could be "voted" out or asked to step down. Therefore, as of 1999 the monarchs do not have absolute power. Last year, the fourth king decreed that in 2008 the country will become a constitutional democracy; and his son, the new king, is delegating the governing responsibilities to elected officials. The Wangchucks have started to open the country to others and are trying to help modernize this undeveloped country. Currently, the Bhutanese have food, homes, work, and a highly developed culture, but they do not have adequate healthcare, roads, and modern means of communication in the remote villages. This country is much different from many struggling countries because it does not have the poverty, hunger, and homelessness of others. There is free healthcare and free education for all in Bhutan. There is no other country in the world that has this. The king is trying to maintain the better qualities of his people such as honesty and peacefulness while bringing some modernization to his country. He has stated that the Gross National Happiness is more important than the Gross National Product. Instead of looking only at economic indicators when making decisions about the country, the government considers cultural preservation, good governance, ecology and equitable economic development.

Religion

Life in the kingdom of Bhutan is dominated by religion. The Buddhist faith has impacted and molded all aspects of the country's development including the culture, ethics, and society. It is interwoven in all sectors of daily life and causes the people to have a reverence for the land and its well being. Every major event in their lives is marked by a religious ceremony in their home or at the temple. Most homes have some type of temple room called a choesham. **PHOTO CHOESHAM**

The countryside is dotted with prayer flags on long poles so that the petitions and prayers are lifted up to heaven. The sound of prayer wheels turned by the hands of the devout can be heard. Monasteries, temples,

and fortresses cover many hillsides. The monks can be heard in the monasteries as they teach their novices their chants and read their sacred texts. Bells can be heard as offerings are made on the altar, and the flames of the butter lamps flicker. Traditional dances and religious festivals honoring holy men or holy days are common. One son from each family normally attends the monastic school to insure that Buddhism will continue from generation to generation. Currently, there are 5,000 monks who are supported in state monasteries. **PHOTO FLAGS FLYING**

Buddhism includes folklore, superstitions, fantasy, legend, astrology, icons and symbols, deities that intervene to help people, and worship of natural phenomena. All of these elements are mixed in with their theology. Buddhism teaches that every person has to seek his own way to knowledge and enlightenment, and one should help but not hurt all sentient beings. A person is reincarnated again and again until he or she reaches perfection.

Bhutan is the only country in the world where the tantric form of the Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion. This type of religion began in northern India in the sixth century. Buddhism has evolved through time, and the tantric form is considered the highest level of Buddhism by the Bhutanese. The Buddha taught that if we live we will suffer, suffering comes from wanting material goods, suffering stops when desire stops, and desire can be done away with if we follow the Noble Eightfold Path. This includes right understanding, right thinking, right speech, temperate action, right work, right effort, and meditation. The followers are not to kill anything and are never to take something that is not offered to them.

These Buddhist make up about 65% of the Bhutanese population, while the remainder are the Lhotsampas, who are from Nepal, and are predominantly Hindu. They came in the 19th and 20th centuries to live in the southern foothills and were mostly farmers. Their lives are governed by the caste system.

In reality Buddhism came from Hinduism. The Bhutanese Buddhists have no conflicts with Hinduism—the conflict is political. It is like the immigration problems in the United States. Only the United States is a huge, diverse country; and even though illegal immigration is a problem, the country can accommodate or absorb lots of people. Bhutan cannot assimilate many different cultures because the country is tiny and very fragile. In addition, it is in a very volatile part of the world.

There have been conflicts between the Bhutanese Drukpas and the Bhutanese of Nepalese origin. Because of the dismal political and economic situation in neighboring Nepal, every year over one million Nepalese must leave Nepal in order to survive. Currently, there are over 50 million Nepalese refugees living in northern India, Bangladesh, and in Bhutan. Since Bhutan is so small and cannot accommodate a large number of refugees, the influx of Nepalese has caused political problems.

Bhutan's national flag reflects the importance of its religion, loyalty to the king, and love for their country. The background of the flag is divided diagonally and one part is golden yellow and the other reddish orange. The yellow stands for the secular power of the king while the orange stands for the Buddhist religion. On the front of the flag there is a white dragon with jewels held in its claws. The white signifies purity, and the jewels stand for the wealth and perfection of the country.

People

PHOTO FRIENDLY BOYS

The Bhutanese traditionally are dedicated to nonviolent life styles and peace. They have an openness of spirit and self respect that comes from surviving in such a rugged country. They are very individualistic, self-reliant, and gain stability and strength from their supportive communities. The people are trustworthy and have a good sense of humor. Because of their walking so much, they have well developed leg muscles and are generally well built and healthy. They are proud and capable survivors of an ancient civilization. In many ways some may be scholastically brilliant. They have considerable social achievement and uncommon consideration for others. These people are proud of their traditions and religion, but they are not arrogant. Their society has a complex hierarchy that is governed by specific rules. Generally, they have a formal and respectful attitude towards their superiors. Although, when people of the same rank are together, they tend to joke and have a great time. They like to eat and drink together, dance, sing, play darts, play stone pitching, or participate in archery, the national sport. PHOTO 2 ARCHERS

The people like to give gifts, and most often they give the doma, which is an areca nut coated in lime and wrapped in a betel leaf. To give this gift is a sign of courtesy or hospitality. When chewed, doma produces a red juice, which often runs down the corners of the mouth. Today, many villagers in Bhutan chew doma, and the red juice can be seen on the walk ways and passage ways. Educated people do not usually chew. It's nasty!

Men and women both work. The women are learning to make traditional crafts and art work to supplement the family income. It is not unusual to see the father baby sit his children. Divorce and remarriage are fairly common, and legal disputes over the division of wealth often occur. Bhutan is matrilineal, which means that women inherit the family property.

As Bhutan is becoming more open to western influence, such as better highways and communication systems, crime and disease have stayed relatively low. There were only five murders in the country last year. Television came to Bhutan in 1999, and the people are learning a great deal from it. Some things are very good and some are not so good. AIDS is now in Bhutan, and the government reports 102 cases as of this year. There is an effort by the people to maintain the morals and good qualities of Buddhism in Bhutan while modernizing certain aspects.

The Art of Bhutan

In Bhutan the relationship between religion and the arts is extremely close. No artistic expression can be separated from its religious significance. Bhutanese art has its roots in Buddhism and may be traced back to the 15th century. In 1680, the school of Bhutanese Arts and Crafts was opened to teach the thirteen types of Bhutanese arts and crafts, and that school still exists today as the National Institute for Zorig Chusum. In the Bhutanese language *zo* means "ability to make", *rig* means "science or craft", and *chusum* means

“thirteen”. The promotion of traditional Bhutanese art has been preserved through the centuries with support from all levels of society from royalty to the common man.

There are three main interrelated characteristics of Bhutanese art:

- **It is religious** – Many of the most important religious figures through Bhutanese history were also renowned artists. The commission of a work of art is seen as a pious act, and paintings and sculptures are consecrated in a special ceremony. The role of the Bhutanese artist is to transmit religious teaching through his art, not to produce a piece of art. Almost all representations in the arts portray the prevailing theme of the struggle between good and evil.
- **It is anonymous** – The Bhutanese artist is trying to transmit through symbols, shapes, or signs the values associated with a spiritual experience, and the resulting art is only an outwardly visible sign of that religious experience. This spiritual journey is the most important consideration or purpose of creating the art. Bhutanese art is never “signed;” in fact, the name of the artist is seldom mentioned.
- **It is strictly uniform in style** – Each Buddhist deity that is portrayed in the artwork has particularly special attributes that cannot be changed in its image without changing the deity’s religious meaning and function. The conventions to be followed in Bhutanese art are very strict, so individual artistic freedom can only be expressed by the artist in minor background details.

The following provides a brief overview of the Bhutanese thirteen arts and crafts of *Zorig Chusum*:

- **DEZO – Paper art**

Paper has been made in the Himalayas for over twelve hundred years, traditionally to supply the Buddhist monasteries with paper for woodblock and manuscript books. Resho, meaning cotton paper; and Tsasho, meaning bamboo paper, are the more traditional Bhutanese papers. The paper is often made from the inner bark of two shrubs, Daphne (gampi), and Edgeworthia (koso). The word *de* refers to the daphne plant from which the traditional paper is made. Also the gum from the creeper root is used in making paper. Bhutanese paper is noted for its striking appearance and high quality. It is an extremely durable paper that is fairly resistant to insects. Traditional paper-making continues as an additional activity on the farm to earn some extra income for the paper makers. A few paper factories have been established in various districts, and some of them are now producing ornamental art paper with the inclusion of flower petals, and leaves, and other materials. Vegetable-dyed paper is also being made for special occasions.
- **DOZO – Masonry**

The task in Bhutanese stone art and masonry is to work a block out of a rock, which fits next to and on top of another stone. The mortar for the blocks is made of clay, which is ground by hand and has needles of blue pine added. This mixture is much stronger than

modern cement. The senior master-mason makes the plans and supervises the angles in building a wall. Stone arts are used in the construction of stone pools and the outer walls of Dzongs, monasteries, stupas and homes. Dzongs, which are surrounded by massive stone walls, are fortresses and treasure houses located in each valley in Bhutan.

Monasteries house the Buddhist monks and also serve a gathering place for all cultural events of a village. Stupas or chortens are stone Buddhist monuments, which often house important religious relics. Chortens are often linked by long thick stone walls that are inscribed with religious paintings and prayers. In southern Bhutan, houses are ridged roofed and rectangular with outer walls of stones and rammed mud finished with plaster. Houses in central Bhutan are made of stone rather than rammed earth. Yak herders and semi nomads build dry stone walled houses in northern Bhutan. In eastern Bhutan, many houses are made of bamboo and built on stilts. An amazing characteristic of Bhutanese architecture is that buildings are constructed without blueprints or nails. **STUPA**

PHOTO

- **GARZO – Blacksmithing**

Many iron goods such as farm tools, knives, chains, darts, and household utensils are manufactured by the blacksmiths. The art of sword making falls under the tradition of garzo. Today, ceremonial swords are now a highly specialized craft. They are still being made for the gentry or senior officials who have been ceremoniously honored.

Ceremonial swords are worn on all special occasions while almost every Bhutanese male, even children, wear a traditional short knife called the dudzom. **SWORD PHOTO**

- **JINZO – Sculpture**

Bhutanese sculptors are well known in the Himalayan region. Many famous sculptors have been, and still are, making clay statues of Buddhist figures for important monasteries in the region. Clay is the traditional material for local sculpture. The art is expressed in statues and ritual objects, and they always represent some religious subject. Many of Bhutan's monasteries boast of exceedingly fine central statues that sometimes rise up as high as three floors. The statues are often modeled on a wooden filler. Larger pieces are made in several parts, and certain details and decorations are cast in a mold and attached to the main body of the statue. After the statues have been completed, they are painted. In addition to statues, pottery for household use is made by sculptors. Sculptors are grouped together in a workshop under the direction of a master.

- **LHAZO – Painting**

Bhutanese tradition defines three forms of painting: thangkas, wall paintings, and statues. A painting may depict a deity, a legend or religious story, a meditational object, or an array of symbols; but it is always religious in nature.

Thangkas are painted on canvas that is stretched and lashed to a wooden frame. When the work is completed, it is removed from the frame and surrounded by a frame of colorful fabric with wooden sticks at the top and bottom used for hanging. Although some thangkas are mounted permanently, most are rolled up and stored until they are exhibited at special events. Most every home in Bhutan has a temple room, and so a thanka would be placed there. Thangkas are tools for meditation; and as one gazes at the images as he or she meditates, then the attributes and “message” of the painting will be more easily grasped. The more the image is viewed, the more “power” it gains. The inner walls of dzongs and temples are usually covered with paintings. In Bhutan most wall murals are painted on a thin layer of cloth applied to the wall with a special paste. A very popular kind of mural painting is the *mandala*. Some mandalas are merely geometric drawings, while others are masterpieces of painting with countless details brought out with vivid colors and intricate designs. A mandala is basically a representation of the universe in a mystical pattern used for the purpose of initiations and meditation. The object of meditating on a mandala is to bring the image inside oneself so that the viewer and the image become one.

Most statues in Bhutan are finely painted to sharply define the facial features. In addition to the face, the entire surface of the large statues are painted, often in a gold color, giving them a bronze appearance. On smaller statues, only the faces are painted.

Paints are traditionally made from earth, minerals, and vegetables though in recent times, chemical colors are used. The material is first reduced to a powder and then mixed with water, glue, and chalk. The brushes are made from twigs and animal hair. The colors are applied in a painting in a particular order according to its symbolic meaning.

PAINTING PHOTO

- LUGZO – Casting

The Bhutanese excel in casting and use this technique for the production of bronze roof-crests, statues of deities, bells and ritual instruments, jewelry, and household items. There are two methods used - sand casting and the lost wax method.

The images of gods and goddesses and the bells used in the temples are cast with bronze. The composition of metal for casting bells contains a good deal of silver. Articles for the decoration of altars, such as trumpets and candlesticks are made of copper and brass. Even musical instruments are transformed into pieces of art, each with a symbolic meaning. It is believed that the sound from the long trumpets called radong is the purest form of music. METAL PHOTO

- PARZO – Carving

Common to every structure in Bhutan are the intricate decorations - woodcarvings and brightly colored patterns. The interiors of dzongs, monasteries, houses and other buildings are decorated with the most beautifully carved and painted wall panels, pillars, and ceilings. These intricate hand carvings are further accented by painting them in vibrant colors to make them look even more attractive.

Carved panels are also found on Bhutanese tables and other items of furniture such as cabinets, low divans, partition screens, mirror-frames and jewelry boxes. Most beautiful wood carving is found on small folding tables called choddrums that are nearly always painted. **BLDG_DETAIL**

Wooden sculptures are usually made of blue pine or walnut, as the wood of these trees is soft and therefore very good for carving. The products could be decorative items like dragons, masks, eight lucky signs, etc. The Bhutanese make masks in wood, papier-mâché, or clay to represent mythological characters, and the masks represent both real and mythical animals. They are available in different sizes, painted or unpainted. These masks are used in the sacred, religious, masked dances in which large numbers of human characters, animals or gods, or mythological figures are depicted with the help of masks.

PROFILE_MASK

The text of religious books is either written by a calligrapher or printed by xylography. Xylography entails carving the text in reverse on a wooden board, coating the plank with ink, and then pressing a sheet of paper on to it with a roller; the printed text appears on the page the right way around. Like the blocks used in xylography, traditionally the carver used to make the blocks to print the prayer flags. The blocks for prayer flags are also carved in reverse so that when printed with ink they are correctly printed.

Slate carving, an ancient Chinese art, was once done extensively in Bhutan to represent religious figures and deities. The carving used to be done on slate panels and consisted of images of deities and inscriptions of mantras. These carved slate panels formerly adorned the exterior of temples and monasteries and were also set into walls of *chortens*.

- SHAGZO – Woodturning

The Bhutanese produce a variety of highly prized utilitarian turned wooden bowls, cups, plates, dishes and containers; all of which they use in their daily life. These bowls and

containers come in different shapes, sizes, and colors, which distinguish the different uses that each is put to - a monk's bowl, a serving bowl, a rice bowl, or a soup bowl being common examples. Made from wood with the help of slow-revolving, pedal-operated lathes, these bowls remain unaffected by heat or liquid and are lacquered with indigenous materials. Often, the smaller tea or soup bowls may be inlaid with silver, which makes them even more attractive and also enhances their lasting ability.

- **SHINGZO – Woodwork**

The techniques used by the craftspeople have remained relatively unchanged, and even today the basic constructional elements for the building of a house are made by hand with the help of only a few tools. Buildings are not constructed according to a set floor plan but at the same time follow measurements dictated by the sacred scriptures. The carpenters plan and prepare the necessary building elements based on an understanding of the sacred texts and supervise the work when the construction begins.

The upper stories of a building boast remarkable woodwork with paintings seen frequently on the frames of the three lobed windows and on the ends of beams. Elaborately painted timber cornices are usually placed around the upper edges of the structure, just below the roof and above doors and windows. Timber is used for flooring, doors, windows, beams, and ceilings in houses. Roofs are made of wooden shingles kept in place with small stones. Large open breezy spaces under the high, shingled roofs create the unique 'flying roof' characteristic, which is peculiar to indigenous Bhutanese houses. A single log of wood with ledges cut on one side serves as a staircase. Almost every house has a wooden altar with statues of the Buddha and the great gurus.

- **THAGZO – Weaving and dyeing**

In Bhutan textiles are considered the highest form of art and spiritual expression. By using a simple backstrap loom, the Thunder Dragon people have crafted one of the most advanced and sophisticated weaving cultures in the history of civilization. The knowledge and skills to create these textiles have been passed down for countless generations. Bhutanese weaving baffles experts because the textiles display methods believed to be impossible to create with a simple backstrap loom.

In the high western mountain villages women are seen weaving in the open-air with their simple looms, singing gently, and rocking back and forth. Since crops grown are usually just enough to feed the village in a good year, these hand-loomed textiles become a good way for the village to get money for supplies. Woven products are sold all over Bhutan. Lengths of material hang from the rafters and from almost every home making colorful displays.

Material is woven into the traditional and mandatory clothing worn by the Bhutanese – the Gho, worn by the men and the Kira, worn by the women. The gho and the kira were declared as the national dress in 1989, and it was made compulsory for everyone to wear them. A complete kira is made from three pieces of material sewn together to form a large, rectangular piece, which is draped around a woman's body and cinched with a belt. The kira is fastened at the shoulders with elaborate silver pins. The entire weaving process to make a kira takes between six months and a year. The *gho* is a knee-length robe held in place with a woven cloth belt. A large pouch is formed above the belt, and this pouch is used to carry a bowl, money, or other personal items. The Bhutanese prize these woven garments so highly that they are considered part of the family's wealth and are used as currency.

The fibers used are cotton, wool, silk (raw and refined), yak hair, and nettle fiber (which produces a coarse fabric that is used for utilitarian purposes like strong bags). Yak hair is used to weave heavy textiles for tents, blankets, and rugs. Good colors were valued so much among the Bhutanese that strong taboos guided the dyeing process. Dyeing of yarn was done in the secrecy of the early morning behind closed doors and shutters - as strangers should not witness it, and pregnant women should not come near it lest unborn babies steal the colors and spoil the dye baths. Secrecy was crucial not only safe guarding the dyeing recipes that were passed from one generation of women to another, and not shared with strangers, but also against the malevolent spirits that are lurking around. During the first half of this century, specialists did the dyeing in the noble households of Central Bhutan. In the last ten years, because of the increased imports of machine-made yarn, few women are dyeing yarn at all and, of these, even fewer are using vegetable dyes preferring the brightness obtained with synthetic dyes. Many are using a blend of natural and synthetic dyes.

Bhutanese designs represent the most intricate patterning of any textile in the world; and their textiles still play a critical role in all official, social, and religious events. Textiles in Bhutan possess great spiritual significance, and Buddhist scholars believe that the symbols and design elements manifest ancient wisdom. To teachers and students of Buddhism, these fabrics represent a profound source of knowledge. PHOTO

WEAVER

- TROKO – Ornament-making

Bhutanese artisans work in gold, silver and copper to make jewelry, ritual objects, and practical household items. Women's brooches are used by Bhutanese women to fasten

their dress at the shoulders. Ornamental chains are used to hold together the two shoulder brooches and make an attractive necklace-like ornament. Large silver pins were used in former times to fasten a woman's dress at the shoulders, and they could also be used as a weapon if the need arose. Today, the pins are no longer in use and have been replaced by ornamented silver brooches. Men's ceremonial belts are traditionally made of thick felt, and the belt is ornamented by six fine buckles made of silver with gold overlay. Betal leaf boxes are rectangular, personal boxes used by both men and women to carry betel leaves and areca nuts, which are chewed by the people of Bhutan. Another betal leaf box is a large round box used solely by nobility and high clergy for traditional offerings of betel leaves and areca nuts during special occasions and ceremonies. Handcrafted on silver with gold finish, these boxes are elaborately decorated with the eight auspicious signs, lotus, dragons, and other designs. Other ornaments are necklaces, bracelets and earrings.

PHOTO SILVER

- TSHAZO – Cane and bamboo working

Throughout Bhutan, cane and bamboo products have always complemented wood as the most commonly used material to produce items of everyday use. Cane and bamboo have been made into storage containers, baskets for carrying food, utensils, musical instruments, bows and arrows, walls for houses, fences, ropes, and floor mats. The abundant and lush forests in the Himalayan foothills provide the raw material. Over a hundred varieties of cane and bamboo plants thrive in the rain fed forests and are often combined with hard and soft wood from the oak, cedar, maple walnut, and other varieties of wood.

The bamboo or rattan is cut into thin strips, braided, and colored to form geometric designs; sometimes the natural coloring is left as is. The colors used include yellow, green, natural brown-green, blue-purple, and maroon.

- TSHEMZO – Embroidery and stitching

Religious embroidery consists of appliqué work on huge banners and dance costumes, ornaments and decorations for the altar, profusely embroidered garments for sculptures, and other objects used in rituals such as Cushion for the bell, Umbrella, Victory Banner, and Flag. Traditional knee length boots are made of cloth with leather soles and embroidery - colors and decorations depend upon the rank of the civil servant. Tailoring is done by both men and women; whereas, the appliqué and embroidery are done by the men.

Embroidery is done on silks, brocades, woolen, and plain cloth. The thread used is usually made of silk; and the subject, depending on the purpose, could consist of flower decorations, the dragon, the eight lucky signs or huge religious embroidered and appliqué representations of the religious deities.