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# Immaterial Traditions: Evolving Values in the Practice & Preservation of Bhutanese Calligraphy

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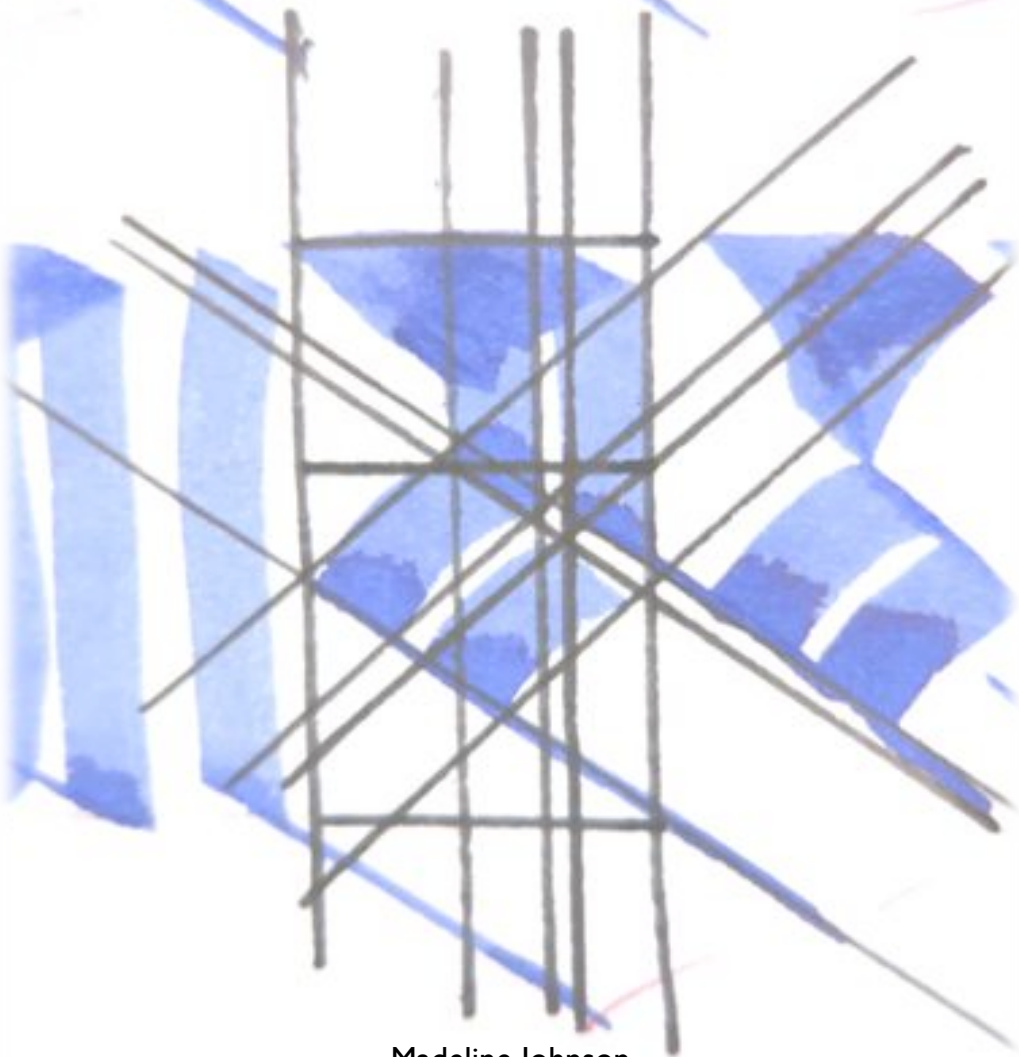
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**IMMATERIAL TRADITIONS:  
EVOLVING VALUES IN THE  
PRACTICE & PRESERVATION OF  
BHUTANESE CALLIGRAPHY**



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Spring 2014

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## ABSTRACT

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Lying somewhere between art, craft and document, the place of calligraphy in Bhutanese culture is difficult to singularly define: individual practice and motivation conform to the predetermined aesthetic of alphabets, and creativity serves the pragmatic end of documentation. In Bhutan's ancient history, the art of handwriting developed out of necessity, used for religious records and correspondences amongst nobility. Predictably, calligraphy is no longer vital or viable in contemporary Bhutanese society, given the convenience of digital text. While cultural preservation has been a political imperative in Bhutan since the 1960s, the preservation of traditional crafts is mostly limited to those that appeal to an increasing tourist market. While the active preservation of Bhutan's unique cursive script is evident in recent efforts to program masterful handwriting into computer fonts, this method of preservation neglects the other elements of calligraphic art in its traditional form. The entire cycle of production, once in the control of the individual artist, has become standardized, and thereby incongruous with both traditional and modern intentions. Through discussion with calligraphers involved in the preservation of Bhutan's cultural heritage, this study examines the question: what exactly should be preserved? This study also provides detailed documentations of traditional material manufacture, in an attempt to illuminate the inexorable nature of calligraphic form and content. Can one isolate the product from the material, the material from the practice, the practice from the individual? What in this cycle is culturally extraneous, and what is worth preserving?

## INTRODUCTION

### HISTORY OF BHUTANESE CALLIGRAPHY

#### ANCIENT *CHÖKE* SCRIPTS IN BHUTAN

When Buddhism first flourished in Bhutan, so did the written language of the *dharma* flourish. The predominant script in the dharma texts is *uchen* (*dbu-can* in *chöke* and *soyig* in Dzongkha) an upright, block style of the Tibetan alphabet containing 30 consonants and 4 vowels. It is commonly thought that around the time of Guru Rinpoche's first famed visit to Bhutan in 737 CE that *uchen* was first introduced in the Bumthang and Paro valleys, whether through Rinpoche's legendary dissemination of the dharma or by way of Buddhist merchants traveling between Tibet and Bhutan.

*Uchen* is thought to be originally derived from the *lentsa* and *wartu* scripts, which are still used to pen mantras and names of enlightened beings on prayer wheels and on the walls of *lhakangs* (Buddhist temples). As the written form of mantras, these scripts are much more closely related to the Sanskrit alphabet, containing 30 consonants and 16 vowels. It is commonly believed by the people of Bumthang Mon that *lentsa* and *wartu* ultimately originated in heaven realms, and hence predate written history. This belief came from the pervasiveness of the Mani mantra imprinted on rocks and trees in *lentsa* throughout the region. It is said by Bumthang Monpa that Thumi Khenpo Samboda, a manifestation of the wisdom deity Manjushri, first brought these scripts from the realm of the gods, to aid in the dispersal of the dharma among worldly beings.



Lopen Dung Dorji displays his poster of the four major scripts.

Top to bottom:  
*lentsa*, *wartu*,  
*soyig* and *joyig*

According to Bhutanese calligrapher Lopen Dung Dorji, *lentsa* and *wartu* both originated in India during the emperor Ashoka's time, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE. Dorji believes the original letters may still be observed in the inscriptions of the surviving Ashokan pillars, spelling out the moral, religious and proselytizing edicts of the emperor.<sup>1</sup> However, the script he is referring to is the original Brahmi from which a family of related written languages evolved. The *lentsa* of Ladakh, Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal is commonly thought to have fully developed during the 11<sup>th</sup> c. CE.<sup>2</sup>

While *uchen* developed in Tibet in tandem with Tibetan language, its development did not halt upon introduction to Bumthang Mon. The most common iteration of *uchen* was known as *uchen tshugma*; the same form which has become standardized in digitally printed Tibetan texts. Many manuscripts of the teachings of Guru Rinpoche were written in *uchen jogtsham*, known today simply as *jogtshum*. *Jogtshum* script falls somewhere between *uchen* and *joyig*, often described as “*uchen* written faster.”

*Umed* (*dbu-med*) is a Tibetan cursive form translating literally to “without head”, distinctive from *uchen* (meaning “with head”) in its lack of a horizontal line on top of the letters. While used for correspondences and daily life in Tibet, it was never widely used in Bhutan. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, all correspondences between Bhutan and Tibet were written in *umed*; however, *joyig* and *jogtshum* were used for Bhutanese documents of internal affairs. Today, practically no Bhutanese can read or write in *umed*.

#### BHUTAN'S CURSIVE SCRIPT: *JOYIG*

The widely accepted origin story of the *joyig* script in Bhutan dates back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, during the third visit of Guru Rinpoche to Bhutan. One of his 25 disciples, Denma Tsemang, accompanied him on this visit as a learned scholar and calligrapher. His mastery in writing was the Tibetan king's gift to Bhutan, as a gesture of gratitude for the loads of *deyshog* (handmade paper) imported to Tibet from Bhutan. It was prized in Tibet for its smoothness and durability, and used for the printing of dharma texts.



*A thangka of Denma Tsemang writing a manuscript, hung in the office of the Dzongkha Development Commission.*

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<sup>1</sup> Dung Dorji, interview.

<sup>2</sup> Tashi, interview.

Denma Tsemang was renowned for the speed of his handwriting, a skill that aided him in recording the teachings of Guru Rinpoche as they were dictated. Some of these written teachings were hidden as treasure texts, others gifted to the monarchy of the time.<sup>3</sup> The longhand that Denma Tsemang used was adapted from the local Bhutanese cursive, referred to as *lhoyig* by Tibetans, literally translating to “script of the South”. It is contested whether or not Denma Tsemang is actually the originator of this script. In either case, his distinctive longhand became the standard for handwriting in Bhutan thereafter.

It is likely that *joyig* developed in Bhutan when *uchen* was introduced simply through the poor imitation of *uchen* style, or through the adaptation of *uchen* to a cursive longhand, which could be written faster. The form of *joyig* that predated Guru Rinpoche’s visits to Bhutan was known as *monyig*, named after the region in which it developed. (Bhutan also underwent many changes of name, and was referred to as Mon Yul in ancient manuscripts.) One theory is that Denma Tsemang, out of the 64 scripts he had mastered, chose to write the treasure texts in *joyig* for the convenience of the Mon Yul people already familiar with this cursive. The term *lhoyig* was in popular use only after Tibetan influence. Today this cursive is referred to only as *joyig*; neither *lhoyig* nor *monyig* are used to describe the unique cursive script of Bhutan.<sup>4</sup>

## JOYIG TODAY

While *joyig* was almost exclusively used in monasteries and governmental records before and throughout the hereditary monarchy, fluency in *joyig* increased exponentially during Bhutan’s modernization movement in the 1960s, during the reign of the third king, HM Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. Educational systems were established, and spoken Dzongkha was given written form for the first time (previously correspondences, though penned in *joyig*, were in the Tibetan language of the dharma, or *chöke*). Thousands of books were written in *joyig* and distributed to schools, and all Dzongkha classes utilized the script.<sup>5</sup> Standardizations of spelling and grammar were established by the 1980s, as the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC) developed policies to improve the functionality of the language.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1960s, during the initial push for cultural preservation in Bhutan, dozens of calligraphers were commissioned in numerous projects. Among them was Khenpo Phuntsho Tashi, the current director of the National Museum of Bhutan, who worked on the replication of the entirety of the dharma scripture (the teachings of the Buddha, as well as the canonical commentaries on the teachings). With 80 calligraphers working full days, the project took two years to complete. Their handwriting was reproduced through photo offset printing, and the texts were

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<sup>3</sup> Tashi 2003: 196

<sup>4</sup> Tashi 2003: 197

<sup>5</sup> Tashi 2003: 202

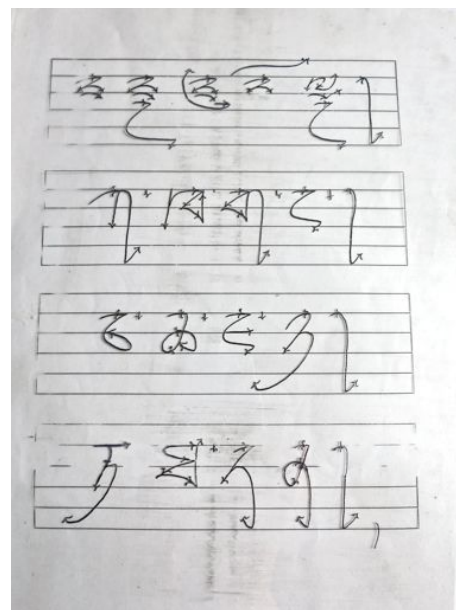
<sup>6</sup> Gyeltshen, interview.



distributed across the world. Up until this time, reproduction did not involve standardized fonts, as photo offset and xylographic printing methods were still based upon an individual's handwriting.

In 1970, this reproduction style changed permanently as one hundred typewriters equipped for typing *uchen* were provided to the government of Bhutan by the Japanese government. This was the beginning of a decline in handwriting competency, as practical focuses shifted from fluency in longhand *joyig* to typing skills. In 1989, the first *uchen* computer font was programmed, based on the calligraphy of the masterful Lopen Pema Tshewang. When Bhutan's national newspaper, Kuensel, adopted this digital script, other publications quickly followed suit, for its convenience, neatness and efficiency.<sup>7</sup>

When Bhutan joined the United Nations in 1971, it declared Dzongkha as the national language, and *joyig* as the national script. In 1991, the DDC introduced a Romanized Dzongkha, which was adopted by the Royal Government as the official standard, used in scholarly works and dictionaries, and ultimately intended for general use.<sup>8</sup> In 1997, after standardized Uchen fonts and Romanized Dzongkha were in wide use, and the quality of Bhutanese cursive was fast declining, the National Library organized a nation-wide competition for handwritten *joyig*, in an attempt to reclaim the script that once contributed to the cultural identity of Bhutan. The winner of this competition would collaborate with a German consultant in the development of a *joyig* computer font. The handwriting of the national astrologer, Lopen Gelong Rinchen, was chosen by a special council, and is now widely used in many governmental and private correspondences and records. The DDC is currently working on the development of alternate Joyig fonts, so that a variety of aesthetic options are available for the Bhutanese people.



*Joyig proportions of the first 12 letters of the alphabet, as sketched by Lopen Duna Dorji.*

Today, hundreds of old manuscripts dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the reign of the third king, all written in *joyig*, are preserved in the National Museum of Bhutan, as well as the National Library and Archives. *Joyig* continues to be the script of instruction in Dzongkha classes of primary, secondary and graduate levels across Bhutan.

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<sup>7</sup> Tashi, interview.

<sup>8</sup> Van Driem 1994



## METHODS AND MATERIALS

The history of written language in Bhutan is inexorable from the resources from which it is derived. The following accounts are methods of making traditional materials, selected documentations through which the reader may imagine the entire cycle of calligraphic production. Though rigid rules of proportion guide the execution of letters, in studying the variations in tradition one begins to realize the flexibility of technique and the significance of material which enrich and enliven this ancient practice.

The account of ink making will primarily focus on the making of ordinary black ink, as knowledge of the pigmented inks is rare and difficult to describe without demonstration. The traditional tools and materials are all nearly impossible to come by today, outside of the glass cubes of museums. Therefore, photo documentation of this process is inadequate in this account.

Many surfaces have traditionally been used for writing calligraphy, including parchment (a common material of treasure texts), metal, leaves, wood, slate and cloth<sup>1</sup>. However, the predominant surface used in manuscripts and religious texts is the traditional *deyshog*, or handmade paper. Therefore, the process of papermaking is the decided scope of this material investigation. The account of papermaking will describe only those methods used in the Jungshi Paper Factory of Thimphu. Few individuals in Bhutan still engage in traditional papermaking, given the difficulty of harvesting the materials and the extensive time frame of production. However, certain villages in Eastern Bhutan still produce paper<sup>2</sup>, and the methods they use may well differ from the methods described in this account.



*Traditional calligraphic materials on display at the National Library and Archives of Bhutan.*

The account of pen making will cover only *si nyug* and *chag nyug* pens, or those calligraphy pens that are derived from bamboo. While other materials such as peacock and raven feathers and alternative woods have been used<sup>3</sup>, the traditional bamboo pen is by far the predominant and most versatile tool.

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<sup>1</sup> Dorji, interview.

<sup>2</sup> Tshering, interview.

<sup>3</sup> Dorji, interview.

## INK<sup>1</sup>

*There is no fire without residue. Red sap of blue pines, butter, kerosene, blessed medicine, brains of departed masters, trash or that which must burn, caught on granite, on slate, on dulled metal sheets, soot indiscernible from soot, pine boughs indiscernible from brains, gathered in pots of stone, of wood, of copper, pulverized for hours, for days, destroyed matter mixing with residue of meat, boiled skin, a property of fat being viscosity, eggwhite for shine, strong alcohol, the product of months, residue of time, bitterness, which repels the insects who are the servants of time, of change, of death, blind to colors, blind to ideas, eyeless mouths that cannot produce words, only consume them.*

## MATERIALS

### Black Ink

The foundational instruction for the manufacture of traditional ink in Bhutan is the Tibetan text known as *Bzo gnas nyer mkho'i za ma tog*, or *Craftmanship: A Basket of Necessities*, which describes materials and processes of many different crafts.<sup>2</sup> The material make-up of traditional Bhutanese inks varies greatly depending on available resources and the intended application of the ink. For black inks, ash is required; what is burned to ash will change the quality and significance of the ink.

Blue pine resin is perhaps the most generally agreed-upon ingredient, as the ash it produces is both fine in texture and dark in color. The resin is readily available throughout Bhutan and burns easily. However, some use the smoke produced by kerosene or mustard oil lamps, others the cinders of butterlamp wicks. Any soot will functionally work, and in fact, is often collected from cooking or trash fires. In rare cases, even the remains of a human body would be converted into ink pigment. When producing ink to pen sacred texts, it is sometimes tradition to use the ash of the burned brains of a deceased enlightened master.

Additionally to soot, burned maize or wheat grains are sometimes added to further saturate the ink color. The grains are prepared by roasting them dry (without oil or water) and allowing them to burn. In addition to providing a strong black color, the grains are also inherently glutinous, which contributes to the texture of the ink.

In the making of precious inks, intended for holy scriptures, other precious materials are often added, such as powdered pills blessed by lamas ("lama pills"), medicinal plants, and powdered precious stones. For precious inks, what is excluded in the mixture is equally important: all materials must be well filtered and free of impurity.

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<sup>1</sup> Methods of ink making are assembled with much overlap from interviews with S. Dorji, D. Dorji, J. Dorji, Tshering, Wangchuk, Lhendup and Chhoeophel.

<sup>2</sup> Cuppers 1989

The above materials provide the black color of the ink; the following materials give the ink form. Commonly agreed upon is the use of animal hide glue as a binding agent. The hide glue is prepared by boiling the skin of an animal (usually cow skin) two or three times, until it becomes a gelatinous, sticky texture. Some calligraphers add water in addition to the hide glue, while others prefer the locally brewed alcohol (*tsin chang*) for thinning the ink mixture. The *tsin chang*, derived from maize or wheat, is thought to extend the longevity of the ink. Some add egg white for its viscosity and sheen. A small amount of added sugar is thought to improve the quality and durability of the ink.

Finally, some add the juice of bitter flavored leaves, to deter insects attracted to the daphne bark paper on which texts are usually inked.

### Gold and Silver Inks

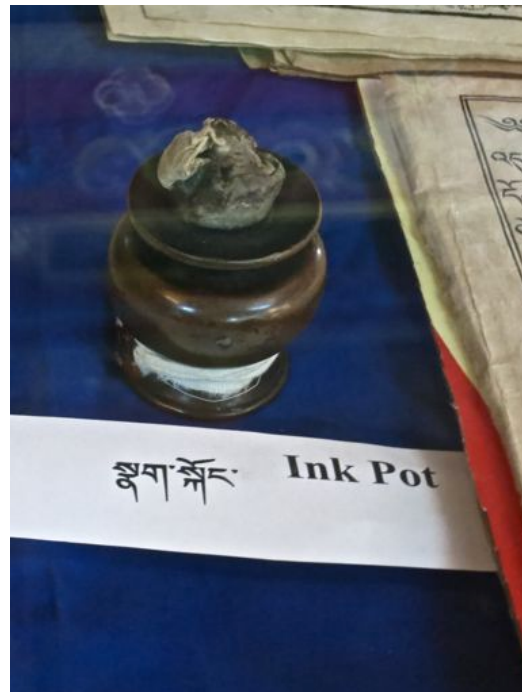
For gold and silver inks, often the same binding agents are used as in the ordinary black ink; the ash is simply replaced by fine gold or silver powder. These inks are quite labor-intensive to make, as the gold and silver are acquired in solid forms and must be reduced to fine dust. Because these inks are usually intended for precious texts, some of the aforementioned precious materials are often added.

### TOOLS

The tools required in the process of making ink vary depending on the chosen materials. One might make a fire on a piece of slate, and catch the rising smoke on another piece of slate. One might catch the smoke on a metal plate. One might use a kerosene lamp, and allow the residue to accumulate on a cloth placed above the flame.

Once collected, the residue must be kept in one container. According to one source, the best vessel for grinding and mixing the ingredients is made of stone; the second best, ceramic; the third best, wooden. According to another source, the preferable containers are cups made of brass or copper. A pestle is required for long hours of grinding, and should match the material of the container.

The completed ink is often stored in small inkpots made of copper.



*Traditional Bhutanese ink pot on display in the National Library and Archives.*

## METHOD



Depending on the amount of ink to be made, a corresponding amount of material must be burned, and its residue collected. Regardless of material, the rough set-up of this process involves a burning source, and a surface that collects the smoke residue placed 4-6 cm above the flame. Also dependent on the material is the duration of burning; a kerosene lamp must be burned for an entire day, while blue pine wood may require only 1-2 hours.

Next, the residue must be collected and placed into a container. The ash, even if already smooth and fine in texture, must be ground anywhere from 4-5 hours to 2-3 days. Some sources say to add the animal hide glue and *tsin chang* at this point; others say to

first grind the ash until it becomes shiny and reduced to half its initial volume.

A separate base of roasted wheat or maize should be prepared at this time, should a very dark and saturated ink be desired. The grains are dry roasted until burned black. A little water is added, and the mixture is left to sit for 24 hours in a closed container, to be added to the soot mixture later.

According to some sources, it is after the grinding is completed that one should add the *tsin chang* (or optionally, water) and the animal hide glue. Other ingredients, such as precious materials or other textural materials, can also be added at this time. Once all the ingredients have been added together, the mixture should be the consistency of mud, and again must be ground for a long time (up to 5 hours) in order to achieve the smooth, watery texture of ink. While the duration of mixing may seem excessive, according to all sources, the quality of the ink is dependent upon this thorough procedure.



There is no recipe or ratio that spells out measurements of the ingredients; the texture of the ink must be continually tested with pen and paper to determine whether or not the ink is ready for use. The ink should distribute evenly onto the paper, and neither soak through nor sit on top of the surface. This is, of course, dependent also on the quality of the pen and paper. Ink made with traditional materials is long lasting, and should resist water damage and fading.



*A woodblock pecha  
ready for inking and  
printing at the  
National Library &  
Archives. Calligraphic  
ink is also used in  
xylographic printing.*

## HANDMADE PAPER

*The weight of paper. Trees transferred across invisible borders, south to north. Trees sundered into two dimensions; as commodity, sheaves become reams, and regain mass. The dry frozen air isolates objects in time, and fibers defy the fugitive days. Oblatory vessels weaved of Daphne, empty and awaiting the offering of consciousness. Passage through space requires muscle; passage through time is weightless.*

*In return for paper: a formless treasure, carried south from Tibet in the heart and hand of Denma Tsemang, master of the 64 scripts. Text, borne through time, unborn and endless. Words that have form outside the speech, body and mind are in the world of Objects. Worthy of concealment, and revealing at the proper time: minds connect across eons. Conceive of language as you will - words are spades, systems, grids - tools to an end, the scaffolding of perception.*

*The Buddha did not write, only uttered. The Dharma is the work of disciple and devotee, bled into paper, wrapped in dyed cloth, left in cold libraries, to be weightlessly acquired by a mind, or just to remain.*

## MATERIALS

Traditionally, Bhutanese handmade paper, or *deyshog*, is made from the bark of two indigenous trees: the *Daphne Papyri Thymalae-ceae*, and the *Edgeworthia Papyri* (considered another species of *Daphne*, and known in Japanese papermaking traditions as *Misumata*). Commonly, the former is referred to as “black daphne” and the latter as “white daphne”.

Either material has its respective benefits and disadvantages. The white daphne tree grows at elevations of 1500-2200 m, while black daphne may only be found above 3000 m. This increases the rarity and expense of the black daphne, as well as the distance traveled between the places of harvest and places of production. The white daphne used in the Jungshi Handmade Paper Factory in Thimphu is harvested primarily at a community plantation in Gedup, a small village on the way to Phuntsoling. Nearly the



entire village makes a living off of this harvest. Black daphne must be imported to Thimphu from the far east of Bhutan.

Harvesting the bark of white daphne, if done properly, is a sustainable practice; removing the bark does not harm the tree, and regrowth occurs within a few days. Black daphne harvesting is less “eco-friendly”; the bark will regrow, but takes significantly longer and is sometimes harvested before the regrowth is complete.

However, the longevity of the black daphne paper is considerably longer than that of the white daphne, and therefore it is the preferred material for sacred texts and important manuscripts. While white daphne, in ideal conditions, has a shelf life of 200-300 years, the black daphne endures for 1000 years or more.

Given its stiff, rough texture, the surface preparation of the black daphne paper is also more labor intensive than that of the soft white daphne paper. However, the superior quality of the black daphne merits the difficulty of harvesting, transportation, and preparation.

Another ingredient required in the papermaking process is starch, usually derived from the Hibiscus plant root. This serves as a binding and stiffening agent.

The Jungshi Handmade Paper Factory produces several colored papers, for which various organic dyes are used. Many of these dyes are imported from India, though some are soil pigments from Eastern Bhutan. The bark of the local blue pine is also used, which produces a light pink color. However, the dyed paper is produced for the tourist and export market; traditionally, dyed paper was not used for manuscripts.

Many religious texts are inked with gold onto black daphne paper. This black color comes from Lapis lazuli, a semi-precious stone with a deep blue color. While most of the organic dyes are added during the pulping process, the lapis color is applied to finished paper and allowed to dry before writing.

It is common to treat completed paper with wheat-based glue, to reduce the absorbance of the fiber and create a smooth surface for writing. Sometimes the same glue is used to paste sheaves of thin paper together, to create a thicker, sturdier, more durable writing surface.

## TOOLS

At the Jungshi Handmade Paper Factory, 1200 sheets of paper are produced every day. Using entirely traditional methods, which operate on a smaller scale, only 20-30 sheets can be produced in a single day. However, the methods used by Jungshi are still considered traditional and “handmade” because of the lack of chemical additives, and the use of traditional screen filters.





*A sarsho filter sits atop a pile of wet paper at the Jungshi Handmade Paper Factory. Behind, a worker agitates a mixture of pulp, water and starch to keep the materials from settling.*

There are two types of screen filters, which determine the two main types of paper available in Bhutan. *Reysho* filters are made of wooden frames with stretched cloth. These require a manual application of pulp, as the pulp will not naturally settle evenly on the cloth surface. The paper produced through this method will have an uneven texture, and the fibers will be very absorbent.

The alternate filter, made of a wooden frame and bamboo screen, is preferred in producing papers intended for manuscripts. *Sarsho* is considered the best quality paper for calligraphy, as the texture is even and resistant to ink absorption.

Variation in paper qualities, thickness and color are possible; *sarsho* or *reysho* methods, white or black daphne bark, thick or thin applications of pulp, all can be combined in different ways to different effects.

## METHOD

First, the daphne bark must be soaked in water, for an entire day. The Daphne bark must then be boiled; this is done at Jungshi in a large vat over a wood fire. After boiling, the barks must be washed thoroughly by hand, and the fine fibers sorted from the poor quality fibers.



*Soaking*



*Boiling*

The next stage is the crushing of the bark into pulp. At Jungshi, there is a machine that can pulverize the bark thoroughly without manual effort. The pulp is dispensed into a large bin, and from there is transferred to sink basins.



*Pulping machine*



*Sifting pulp with sarsho filters.*

The pulp is then mixed with water and vegetable starch. Using either the bamboo or cloth filter, the pulp is filtered out and shook into an even layer. This layer is then transferred to a stack of wet paper, by laying it on top and swiftly peeling back the bamboo filter.

The final process is drying the paper. The pile of wet paper must first be compressed to remove excess water. Traditionally, layers would then be placed on a smooth surface and left to dry in the sun. At Jungshi, hot plates are used to dry the sheets faster and more smoothly.



*The deyshog is transferred to heated plates and brushed dry.*

The paper is complete; however, for writing, the surface requires further preparation. Thick sheets are considered the best for their sturdiness, and are made by attaching six or seven sheets of paper together with wheat paste and pressure. Either wheat paste or animal hide glue is used to prime the paper surface, smoothing and stiffening it, as well as reducing its absorbance. Finally, the surface must be polished. In locations near rivers, the water-worn stones are rubbed on the surface until it is smooth to the touch. In some places, they use the shells of snails.



## THE BAMBOO PEN<sup>1</sup>

*A concentric logic governs the aesthetic of a world which knows no recipes, no industry, but abides only in its shifting relations, recognizing at times harmony, at times discordance, no more urgent or unwelcome than the ebb and regrowth of tides. Only one measurement is ever taken: that of the catalyst. The width of the nib determines every length, every angle, every breadth. The last cut of the pen knife forms a point from which an invisible grid emerges; a two-dimensional crystal grows. The black, truncated symmetry of lines drawn left to right, ink pulled top to bottom; edged faces describe the invisible lattice, harmoniously suspended between axes. The space that emerges between two marks becomes the standard size of emptiness. The rules do not guide the hand; the hand must embody them over time. Mistakes are undefined, and evident. The correct form is inexplicable as a human body.*



### MATERIALS

*Dried si bamboo. A piece this size can be cut into 5 or 6 pens.*

Of the 46 species of bamboo in Bhutan (and of the 360 species in Asia), only one is considered the ideal material for calligraphic pens. Known as *si*, it is rare and difficult to come by, found within Bhutan only in one forested valley just north of Punakha. *Si* is not a widely harvested or commodified material; being only minimally sought after, it is impossible to purchase in the capital city, or indeed anywhere outside of Punakha. One

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<sup>1</sup> All information in this section is derived from interviews with Lopen Pema and Lopen Dung Dorji.

piece of the bamboo measuring three inches in diameter and one foot in length can be crafted into six or so pens.

While *si* bamboo is preferred because of its hardness and durability, its rarity forces calligraphers to seek an alternate material. Today most pens are crafted out of the more common bamboo plant, known in Dzongkha as *spag shing*.



*A piece of dried spag shing bamboo, cut to pen size (10-20 cm in length)*

When harvesting, the round piece of bamboo should be severed just above a sectional joint in the branch, which will become a decorative protrusion on the pen shaft. Once harvested, the bamboo must be allowed to dry for some weeks, until all trace of green coloration is gone. Only then can the shaft be split into pen-sized sticks. In the case of *si* bamboo, the wood must be saturated in mustard oil, and then heated over a fire until the oil is completely dry. This will harden the wood, preventing the absorption of ink and ensuring a smooth ink flow.<sup>2</sup>

The only other material required is any sort of strong thread or twine, cotton or otherwise, at least 20 cm in length, to secure the nib after the pen is carved.

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<sup>2</sup> Chhoephel, interview.

## TOOLS



*Pen knife of Lopen Palden Wangchuk, depicted with animal hide sheath.*

The only tool required after splitting the bamboo into shafts is a pen knife. The blade is made of hard metal, preferably carbon steel. The length of the blade should be 10-15 cm, and sharp. The end of the knife is not curved or angular, but rather square. The length of the knife is used for smoothing and for large cuts, while the square end is used for gauging out material from the ink cavity and shaving the nib to a thin point. The carver must always be mindful of the direction of cuts, working with the grain and directing force away from the body as much as possible for efficiency and safety.

## METHOD



Firstly, the outer roughness of the bamboo twig is stripped away and smoothed with the pen knife. The smoothing is achieved with light, quick repetitive strokes along the grain of the wood.

*Knot of si bamboo pen, the two notches clearly visible on the right.*

Two cuts on the top with the length of the pen knife bring the end of the pen to a neat point. A third cut on the back of the pen completes the form, which ornaments the shaft and represents the sword of Manjushri.

The sectional knot of the bamboo should be anywhere from the middle to two thirds up

the length of the shaft. This must be smoothed as much as possible, and will serve as a support when resting the pen on a surface. The knot naturally creates a small notch on the top of the pen (if the pen is made with *si* bamboo, there will indicatively be two notches).



*Lopen Palden Wangchuk wedging the nib apart.*

Next, the pen must be placed upside down (notches facing down, knot protrusion facing up) and the slit of the nib made by slicing through the center of the shaft. The slit can be extended by using the knife as a wedge, encouraging the natural grain of the wood to tease apart. The slit should extend roughly 4 cm.

The short edge of the pen knife is then used to shave material from the middle of the slit, leaving a considerable gap in the middle of the pen.

Removing all of the wood material from the gap without snapping one of the nib halves requires some practice and skill. It is necessary that all wood material be removed, as any remaining debris will obstruct the joining of the nib point.

When the gap is complete, the length of the knife is used to make curved cuts on the sides of the nib, creating an elegant taper and determining the ultimate size of the nib. Some sources also describe this nib shape as representative of Manjushri's sword.<sup>3</sup>

The square end of the knife is used to shave layers of bamboo off the underside of the nib, until the diameter gracefully diminishes into the tip of the nib, which is shaved as thin as possible.

At this point, the two halves of the nib will be splayed apart. A small length of thread is used to bind the halves together. The thread should loop the pen twice and be tied tightly. This can be slightly tricky to achieve; a third hand or teeth are handy for maintaining tension while fastening. The loose ends should be cut short. Should the nib ever begin to splay during use, the writer need only push the thread further up the pen



*Completed pen nib, viewed from the side.*

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<sup>3</sup> Tashi 2003



shaft, increasing tension (the thread will become stickier and stronger once imbued with ink).

The pen is now prepared for the final cut, which creates the angle of the nib. The pen must be placed on a flat, very hard surface. The length of the knife is placed on the tip of the nib. The knife should be at a 45° angle to the length of the pen. The knife should also be angled roughly 35° from the surface of the table; the cut is cannot be perpendicular, as it is intended to create the sharpest point possible.

Should the cut be made left-to-right [ \ ], the pen will be for writing the *lentsa* script. The mirror image of this cut [ / ] will result in a pen for writing the *soyig* (*uchen*) script.

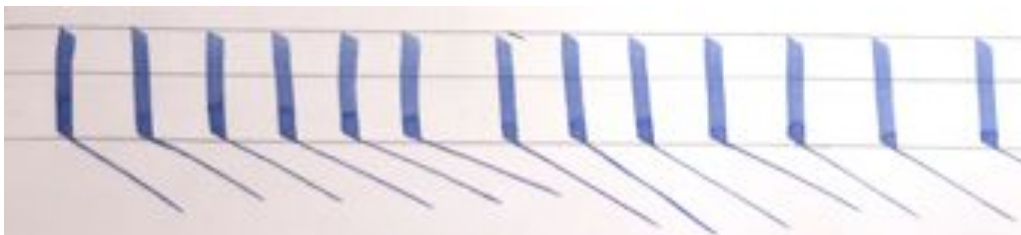


*Left: A completed si bamboo lentsa pen, or si nyug.*

*Right: A completed spag shig bamboo lentsa pen, or chag nyug.*

*Though the carving styles are apparently slightly different, both pens are acceptably functional.*

The completed pen should create sharp, crisp lines. Even when saturated with ink, the flow from the nib will be thin, even and smooth. One should be able to write five or six letters before returning to the inkpot. However, a freshly made pen might not produce these results; the pens improve with use. Other conditions, such as the quality of the ink and paper, may affect the quality of lines. To maintain the nib's sharpness, the pen should be kept in a container, or wrapped in paper. After each use, the pen should be cleaned with cloth or tissue, and occasionally rinsed.



## CALLIGRAPHIC METHOD

### LINING THE PAPER

After a student is taught the preparation of pen and ink, the next lesson is the preparation of paper. The size of lines and letters is not standardized or predetermined by lined paper; rather, the size of the pen's nib provides the foundational measure, from which rules of proportion determine sizing. For both *lentsa* and *soyig* scripts, the lines are drawn according to the same proportion: two widths of a nib, placed perpendicular to the unwritten horizontal line, measure the top section of the line. Three widths of a nib create the bottom section. These measurements should be drawn on either side of the paper, and a line traced between them using a straight-edge. The first stroke of most letters in the *lentsa* alphabet begins at the middle line, while most strokes of the *soik* alphabet begin with the horizontal head, drawn on the top line. If the paper is thin, it should be placed on a stack of papers rather than directly on a hard surface, as the softness of the surface changes the pen pressure and ink flow.

### HOLDING THE PEN

The pen is held between the forefinger and thumb, supported by the middle finger. The pen should be grasped about 3 cm from the nib – not too close or too far. The pen shaft should slant back about 40° from the writing surface. The nib should be placed on the paper at a 45° angle to the horizontal line. In *soyig* calligraphy, thin lines are achieved by twisting the nib with the fingers. In *lentsa*, thin lines are achieved by moving the entire hand along the unchanging 45° angle of the nib. The other hand must hold the paper steady.

### PROPORTIONS

To the novice eye, there are only three horizontal lines on the paper. However, a grid of invisible diagonal and vertical lines regulate the proportions of letters. Lines created by the faces of the letter figure must be imagined extending into space, defining the position of the next figure.



*Lopen Palden Wangchuk measures guidelines.*

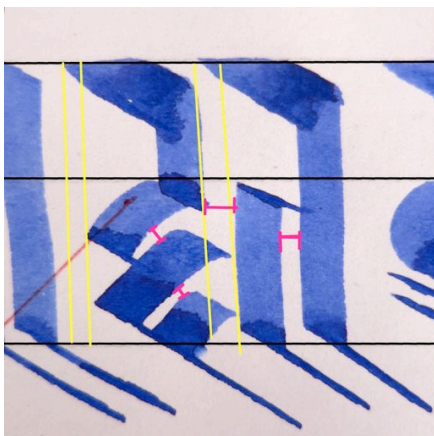
For example, let's examine the author's amateur execution of the *lentsa* head letter, or "go gen" – the letter that marks the beginning of a formal text. This is the first letter one learns in the *lentsa* alphabet.



On first look, the letter appears harmonious – lines run vertical, and spaces between marks are somewhat uniform.



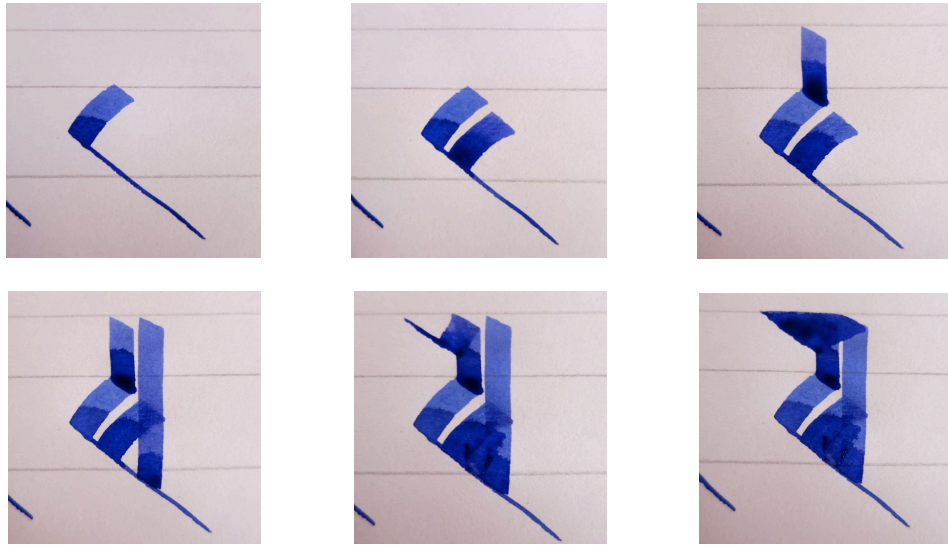
Diagonals also appear parallel. Notice how the diagonal from the first head of the first figure runs straight through to the head of the second figure. Such implied lines are ways of standardizing letters in relation to one another.



It is in the last test, that of the vertical lines, that this letter fails to conform. Each empty space marked by a pink line should be of equal measure. Also, the points of the letter should create a perfect, implied vertical line. The fact that the points of the first figure extend beyond the yellow margin, almost touching the middle figure, exposes its incorrect form.

When the alphabet is taken in as a whole, the form of letters appear mysterious; the uniformity of master handwriting is almost unbelievable. However, when the forms are broken into steps, one begins to understand a formula which ensures the repeated angles and total harmony of each letter.

As example, the formation of *pa*:



## CHANGING INTENTIONS

### CALLIGRAPHY AS MEDITATION

“The completion of a single letter is the birth of an enlightened being.”

- Khenpo Phuntso Tashi, Director of the National Museum of Bhutan

In monastic settings, calligraphy is taught as both a practical and spiritual practice. Meaning lies not only in the product of the practice (usually the copy of a religious text) but also the attitude and attention of the student while they are performing the task. Mindfulness practice can be applied to almost any mundane task; however, the practice of calligraphy has special significance and merit attached to it, as its goal is the communication and preservation of the *dharma*. In Buddhist belief, karmic merit is not accumulated through action alone, but through carrying out actions with the right motivation. Therefore, from the monastic perspective, the mindset of the calligrapher is of the utmost importance.<sup>1</sup>

This contemplative approach is not necessarily the norm for most Bhutanese. Though *joyig* is taught in schools, and often Buddhist prayers are utilised in repetition to improve handwriting, meditative practice is not emphasized as the end goal.<sup>2</sup> Lopen Dung Dorji, a widely respected calligrapher who has represented Bhutanese calligraphy internationally, was born in 1956 and grew up in a noble family. Nobility of the time were required to keep up correspondences and maintain financial records. Therefore, part of the family's privilege was the knowledge of handwriting long before this was universally available in Bhutan, as well as knowledge of relevant processes, such as the manufacture of ink. Lopen's motivation for practicing calligraphy was therefore much more concerned with its reflection of social status than its reflection of the mind.<sup>3</sup>

At one point, calligraphy was valuable to learn as an employable skill, which created an entirely different incentive for mastering *joyig* and *soyig* scripts. The ability to read and write in *joyig* was essential for secretaries, accountants, clerks, teachers, tax collectors, governmental officials, and monks.<sup>4</sup> The more efficient and beautiful their longhand, the more respected and promoted they were in their respective fields. Lopen Palden Wangchuk, the Dzongkha teacher at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum, was taught the *lentsa* script in only two weeks at the Zhem Gang monastery in central Bhutan, from Tenzin Dundrup, who was in turn the student of the 68<sup>th</sup> Je Khenpo, Ugyen Tenzin. It was during this brief time that Lopen also learned how to make ink and carve a bamboo pen. While he learned the scripts out

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<sup>1</sup> Tashi, interview.

<sup>2</sup> Wangchuk, interview.

<sup>3</sup> Dung Dorji, interview.

<sup>4</sup> Tashi 2003

of belief in the intrinsic karmic benefit of doing so, he was also able to apply these rapidly acquired skills in his job as a teacher of Dzongkha language.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, monasteries in Bhutan are pursuing modernizing projects. One project of the Shejun Agency, an organization working on cultural documentation based in Thimphu, is the digitization of the entire Buddhist canon, through transcription and photographic documentation. The slow, meditative process of copying dharma is no longer a skill which efficiently benefits the monastic institutions or the world at large; while the right motivation may persist, the action no longer fulfils the intention. Therefore, calligraphic instruction is rapidly declining in monastic settings, and where calligraphic practice continues, the intention is usually tied to Bhutan's cultural identity moreso than Buddhist doctrine.

## STANDARDIZATION

Though practiced for centuries, the essential proportions of the *lentsa* and *uchen* scripts have remained the same, undergoing only minor variations.<sup>6</sup> The aesthetic of the letters is treated as holy, without an ordinary, traceable origin.<sup>7</sup> The outsider might interpret this rigidity as the individual not being *allowed* to deviate from an established system; on the other hand, the monk or student might perceive a system which transcends individual preference, and does not *necessitate* deviation. Though every master calligrapher has a distinct style from the next (some letters slanting one way, some the other), the relational harmony is never altered.<sup>8</sup>

One may reasonably ask then whether calligraphy is an artform at all – or rather, a craft? Practice? Occupation? Where, then, does individual creativity come into play?

If creativity may be perceived at all within calligraphic practice, it is in the subtle variations of form, material and style, all of which may be altered and combined in infinite ways. It is the creativity inherent in an offering: *what* is offered, the personal intent behind the content, the individual's understanding of beauty that creates meaning in the act of offering. Calligraphy essentially operates in this way. Precious and nonprecious materials alike create a vessel for teachings, or for documentations of human experience, as offerings to deities, lamas, or simply to progeny.

As Bhutan becomes an increasingly industrial country, importing and manufacturing standardized products, the practice of traditional crafts benefit from the increased efficiency and availability of readymade materials and tools. However, often unconsidered is the effect of this change in material on the quality of

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<sup>5</sup> Wangchuk, interview.

<sup>6</sup> Tashi 2003

<sup>7</sup> Jigme Dorji, interview.

<sup>8</sup> Dung Dorji, interview.

the craft, as well as on the attitude of the artist. Does the effort of the artist contribute to the value of the product? Does the source of the materials change the meaning or emotional content? Or, if these changes are superficially imperceptible in the final product, do the means of production matter at all?

Lopen Palden Wangchuk, the Dzongkha and *lentsa* teacher at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum, has had a pet project for some time: the development of a prototype bamboo fountain pen. While convinced that the traditional bamboo is the superior material for pens, his view is that a standardized and readily available calligraphic pen would increase interest in calligraphy practice. To him, the methods of the pre-industrial world, dependent on proportion and requiring extra work with every new sheet of paper, are simply less efficient.<sup>9</sup>

Lopen Dung Dorji, a master calligrapher, stands by the superior quality of traditional materials, noting how many ancient manuscripts have resisted decay and remain in flawless condition. He believes the traditional materials are more durable than modern materials, though obviously not as widely available or cheap. While these days he usually goes for Chinese carbon-based ink because of its convenience, he conceded that this new availability of readymade materials does affect the attitude of the artist. Distracted by the notion of saving time and money, the artist will neglect to consider quality; monetary values are placed over inherent values.<sup>10</sup> The longevity of a piece was historically an element of the artist's motivation; the text necessarily entailed generations of endurance. Today this foresight is ignored, rendered irrelevant by the advent of digital documentation. As Lopen concluded, the readymade materials in ways increased the freedom of artists by saving them time and money, while the confusion of monetary and intrinsic values in a sense removed artists from sincerely creative attitudes.

Lam Kezang Chhoeplhel, executive director of the Agency for the Promotion of Indigenous Crafts, does not perceive an inherent Bhutanese identity in traditional materials, nor indeed an inherent superiority. "Ink is made according to the same text used by the Tibetans and Chinese. The difference is, Bhutanese go into the process blindly," Chhoeplhel summarized. "The Chinese use the text as a foundational instruction, and then conduct thorough research. Therefore their ink is superior in quality." Chhoeplhel's pragmatic view is that the introduction of readymade materials, machinery and standardized tools will only improve the quality of traditional crafts, as well as the quality of life for craftspeople.<sup>11</sup>

Lopen Sangay Dorji, the *thangka* teacher at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum, has mastered many of the traditional arts and crafts in addition to painting, including woodcarving, sculpture, smithing and calligraphy. When asked about recent changes in the quality of artwork, he was careful to draw a distinction

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<sup>9</sup> Wangchuk, interview.

<sup>10</sup> Dung Dorji, interview.

<sup>11</sup> Chhoeplhel, interview.



between two elements of quality. The first is the quality of the materials, which partially determines the longevity and beauty of a piece; the second is dependent upon the artist's skill. Ink properly made and applied will have longer longevity; at the same time, regardless of ink quality, beautifully executed letters will have more aesthetic value than poorly written letters.<sup>12</sup>

While this distinction rings true, the systematic separation of form and content into two sets of values is impossible; it is a rather Buddhist exercise to investigate where the essential value or substance of calligraphy lies. One finds, as with everything, a congruous assembly of phenomena, some essential and some expendable. But how to determine the difference? What does it mean to preserve the content of a craft, but not the form, or vice versa? What is the product without the practice? Where does the value lie? The meaning? The benefit?

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<sup>12</sup> Sangay Dorji, interview.

## THE FUTURE OF CALLIGRAPHY: PRACTICE & PRESERVATION

### DEAD OR ALIVE?

“Today, do we ever use horses as transportation? No, we have no money or space to keep horses. We drive cars.”

- Khenpo Phuntso Tashi<sup>1</sup>

With this analogy, the director of the National Museum of Bhutan (NMB) equates calligraphy with a particular pragmatic function, and in the same breath dismisses this function as obsolete in the modern world. From this view, the practice of handwriting is indeed laughably inefficient compared with the modern alternatives of textual documentation. Choosing longhand over typing methods is, in one sense, as absurd as choosing a horse over a car for transportation. Though Khenpo once studied calligraphy in a monastery as a contemplative practice, and was once himself a calligrapher by profession, commissioned to pen the entire Buddhist canon, he expressed little attachment to the continuation of the practice; merely, a responsibility to document its history. His scholarly work has included the only account of the history of the *joyig* script, and an extensive study of the thirteen crafts as they are practiced all over Bhutan. “People who know these things will die in the next two decades, and their knowledge will die with them,” Tashi says. “That is, after all, what museums do – preserve dead objects.”<sup>2</sup>

This introduces a perspective that considers calligraphy as an object that bears a subject, rather than calligraphy itself being considered the subject of preservation. The secretary of the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC), Sherab Gyeltshen, expressed a similar view, saying, “The written thing is just a device – what is written is human consciousness.”<sup>3</sup>

The DDC, founded in 1986, is an organization that aims to improve the functionality of the national language through developing policies and strategies that are implemented in schools and governmental agencies. At the time of its founding, the DDC was responsible for the codification and modernization of the national language, officially differentiating it from classical *chöke*, systematizing its unique syntax and proliferating grammar through the production of dictionaries, textbooks, and other learning materials.<sup>4</sup>

However, today the promotion of Dzongkha remains an upward battle. “Our language is going to die if we are not careful,” says Gyeltshen, “and when a language dies, a belief system dies. The thought of a people dies.” Impassioned about the

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<sup>1</sup> Tashi, interview.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Gyeltshen, interview.

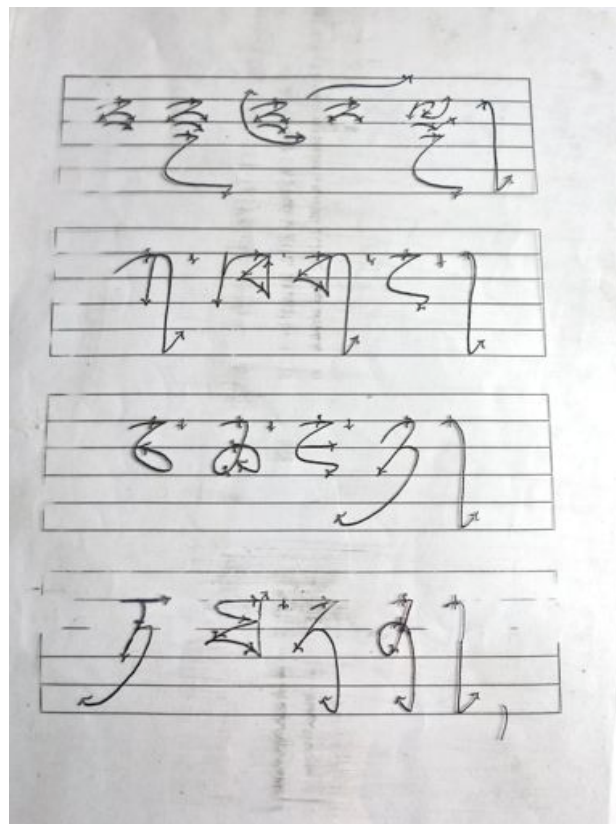
<sup>4</sup> van Driem 1994: 97

importance of language and cultural identity, Gyeltshen's concern is what is lost in translation - not transcription.<sup>5</sup>

The DDC is currently developing alternate *joyig* fonts, as well as programming a translation system for spoken Dzongkha, for international diplomatic use. With an attitude born from the national ideology of Gross National Happiness, Gyeltshen continued, "What we must always ask of any endeavor is, what is the benefit?" Even today, a majority of Bhutanese students are unable to even spell their own name in Dzongkha. While the quality and extent of handwriting is sure to decrease as a result, the hope is that with the introduction of computer technology, students will gain greater fluency in their national language.<sup>6</sup>

#### APPLIED VALUES: CALLIGRAPHY & THE FREE MARKET

In 2008, Lopen Dung Dorji was elected the winner of a national calligraphy competition, and thereby was chosen to represent Bhutanese calligraphy traditions at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington D.C. This is only one instance of Lopen's brilliance as a calligrapher, having studied his entire life and mastered dozens of scripts. Despite Lopen's extensive knowledge, experience and mastery, the majority of his life energy has been spent teaching at a secondary school in Paro. When asked if he has passed on his calligraphy skills to students over the years, he replied that with his teaching position, he never had the time. In his retirement, no students have come forth with any interest in learning from him.<sup>7</sup> "Lopen Dung Dorji has unfathomable knowledge and skill," Khenpo Phuntso Tashi reflected on his old friend, "and yet, no one will pay him for this. As a teacher, he was paid the same as all



*One of Lopen Dung Dorji's demonstrations of joyig writing methods for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2008.*

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<sup>5</sup> Gyeltshen, interview.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Dung Dorji, interview.

teachers – no more or less for what he knows.”<sup>8</sup> The lack of interest on the part of Bhutanese youth is understandable: calligraphy is simply not an art that produces a marketable commodity, nor an employable skill.

While from the traveler’s perspective the Institute for Zorig Chusum (Thirteen Traditional Crafts) appears to be an institute for fine arts, it in fact functions as a vocational college. *Thangka* painters are still from time to time commissioned to paint the walls of *lhakangs* or paint a specific *thangka* to suit a family’s needs. However, a *thangka* painter’s income is dependent on Bhutan’s growing tourist industry. Lopen Sangay Dorji, the only painting teacher at Zorig Chusum, identified at least six of the traditional handicraft stores in Thimphu city as enterprises of his former students. Many of the Institute’s students are studying traditional art as a means of alternative employment, having had either no interest or prospects in governmental or teaching positions.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear then that the preservation of art practices is at least partially decided by recent consumerism, rather than motivated by a collective nationalist desire to perpetuate the cultural heritage of Bhutan for future generations.

## DOCUMENTATION

A vast amount of traditional art methods exist merely as knowledge in the minds of aging masters. Recently, multiple organizations involved in cultural preservation are treating the documentation of this knowledge with increased urgency.



*Shelves of pecha at the National Library and Archives. Painted on the wall is a sacred name in lentsa script.*

The National Library was established as part of a larger governmental program to preserve and promote Bhutan’s cultural and religious heritage in 1967. It was at this time of external financial support and modernization that the preservation of traditional culture became a national imperative.<sup>10</sup> The Library’s largest project has been the preservation of thousands of xylographic

pecha. Since its inception, the Library has grown and

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<sup>8</sup> Tashi, interview.

<sup>9</sup> Sangay Dorji, interview.

<sup>10</sup> Shaw 2013

modernized in parallel with the city of Thimphu. However, in its various restoration projects the Library's archival team has demonstrated remarkable sensitivity to the importance of original material, as evidenced in the preservation of thousands of original woodblocks. A project currently underway is the re-carving of the original biography of the Bhutanese saint Pema Lingpa, as the old woodblocks are in a state of unprintable decay. Transfers from the original carvings are exactly replicated, thereby preserving the religious content, script and medium of the original artifact, as well as creating the opportunity for a working woodblock carver to apply his talent.<sup>11</sup>

While an expert in Bhutanese handwriting used to be in the employ of the Library, no authority on calligraphy is currently contributing to the direction of Library preservation projects. Due to the religious nature of old manuscripts, countless records of different scripts are preserved and displayed for the public to see at the National Library. The digitization of these archives is also currently underway. What remains to be done is the documentation of the traditional processes of calligraphy as a *practice*.

Dr. Yonten Dargye, the chief researcher at the National Library, is in the early planning stages of the library's next big endeavor: the documentation of traditional material manufacture for all of the thirteen traditional crafts. Funded by a private donor, the scope of the project will be all encompassing: from documentation of raw materials to oral accounts of production; from interviews with experts across Bhutan to the translation of ancient instructional texts. While this is an enormous acknowledgement of the cultural importance of production, it is at the same time a condemnation of these practices to history.<sup>12</sup>

It would seem that preservation carried out on institutional levels can never be designed with the intent of maintaining a living tradition. However, the main agenda of the Agency for the Promotion of Indigenous Crafts (APIC) is the support of craftspeople all over Bhutan, through providing them with training, improved equipment, and venues for selling their products. The executive director of APIC, Lam Kezang Chhoephel, prioritizes the quality of life of craftspeople over the "authentic" preservation of traditional methods. One of his projects is the introduction of machines that can strip, plane and slice bamboo, significantly decreasing the time and manual effort of raw material preparation in rural villages that produce bamboo crafts. In Chhoephel's opinion, improvements like these only ensure the continuation and increased efficiency of traditional handicraft manufacture.

Chhoephel is himself an accomplished calligrapher, with a personal hobby of collecting and crafting traditional bamboo pens. The decline in the quality of *joyig* handwriting has been a source of frustration for him in recent years – as he

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<sup>11</sup> Lhendup, interview

<sup>12</sup> Dargye, interview

observes, “Students in schools are actually writing *joyig* letters from right to left, in totally backwards form.”

While the scope of the Agency is mostly limited to those crafts that may be sold at craft bazaar frequented by tourists, Chhoeophel has taken it upon himself to also promote Bhutan’s calligraphic heritage. Currently Chhoeophel is preparing for a calligraphy demonstration, which will function like an open fair and take place in downtown Thimphu. He imagines bringing in calligraphy masters from all over Bhutan, who will provide demonstrations throughout the daylong festival, thus refreshing Bhutanese youth interest in calligraphic practice.<sup>13</sup> However, while the demonstration will serve as an important meeting for calligraphers and hopefully initiate discussions about the future of calligraphy in the long run, no sustainable strategy is currently being pursued for the preservation of calligraphy as a living tradition. According to Lopen Dung Dorji, this is either the task of monasteries, or of living calligraphers available to come together and form an additional institution.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Chhoeophel, interview.

<sup>14</sup> Lopen Dung Dorji, interview.

## CONCLUSION

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Materials have historically defined the aesthetic, methods and meaning of calligraphic practice in Bhutan: the *joyig* script was gifted from Tibet in exchange for exports of *deyshog* paper; inks which articulated sacred texts were not merely pigment, but pure vessels imbued with precious materials; and the bamboo nib embodied the measurement upon which the uniformity of letters depended.

While certain agencies are making efforts to document these practices and methods, documentation alone is far from the preservation of a living tradition. This study has examined the questions of value that emerge in the process of preservation: What is actually lost? What is the worth of the continued practice of an outdated medium?

Perhaps this is where the individual comes into play, in a modernizing culture defined by institutional standards and national priorities. While collective assumptions of worth are the work of culture, and monetary values the product of society, individual judgments may penetrate through established value systems. In this way, the act of preservation is charged with political implications.

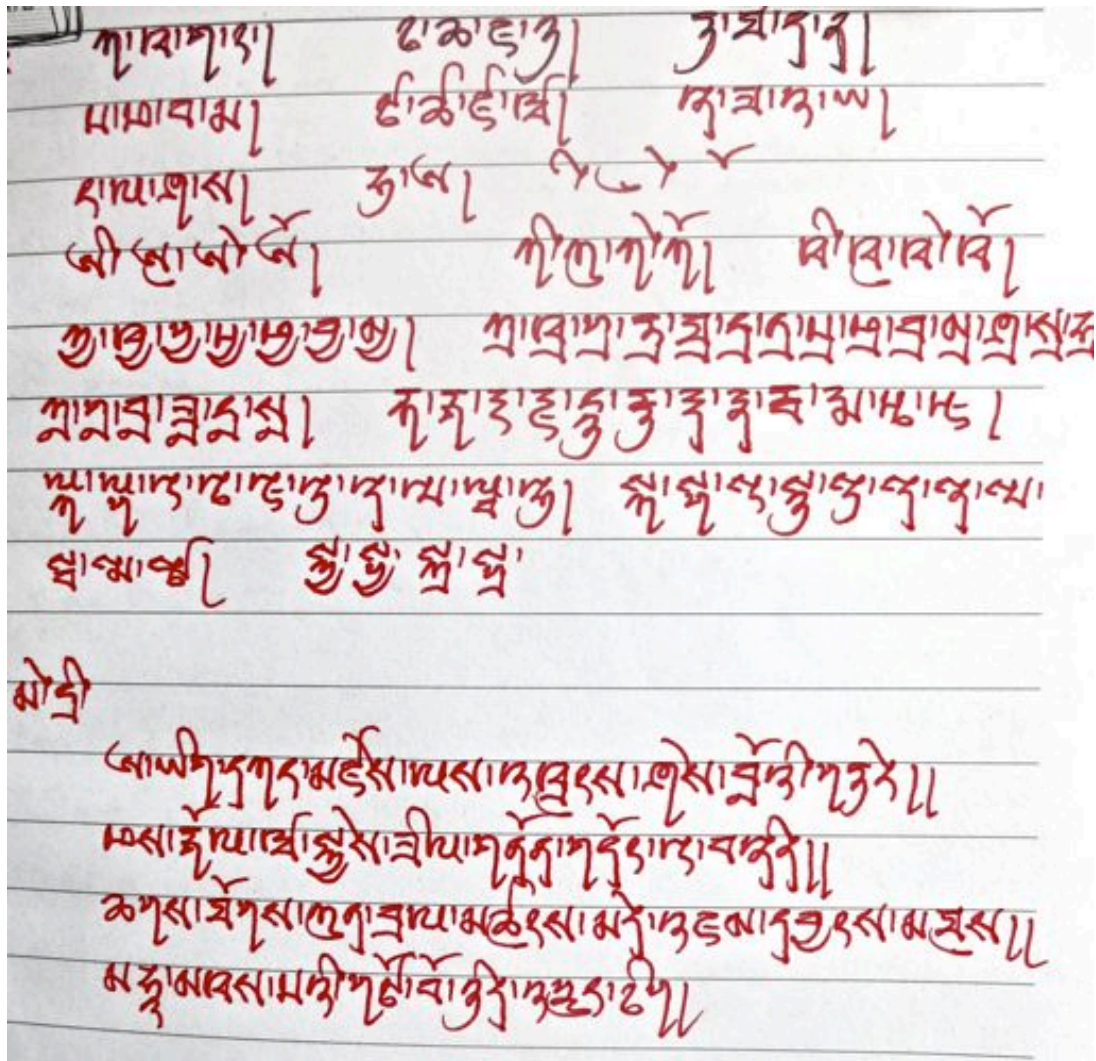
The survival of tradition is dependent, therefore, on individual inspiration; whether it is the determination to claim ownership over the means of production, or sentimental connection to indigenous sources, or devotion to the traditions surrounding the *dharma*, the life force of the calligraphic tradition can only be preserved in the heart of a human, not the shelves of a library.



## APPENDIX A

### JOYIG ALPHABET

As written by Sangay Phuntsho, teacher, National Institute of Zorig Chusum.



## APPENDIX B

### LENTSA ALPHABET

As written by Ugyen Tenzin, student of the 68<sup>th</sup> Je Khenpo Tenzin Dundrup.



## APPENDIX C

### *DEYSHOG* PAPER SAMPLES

*Paper manufactured at the Jungshi Handmade Paper Factory in Thimphu.*

WHITE DAPHNE *REYSHO*

WHITE DAPHNE *SARSHO*

BLACK DAPHNE *REYSHO*

BLACK DAPHNE *SARSHO*

## APPENDIX D

### INSTITUTIONS FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION: MISSION STATEMENTS

#### DZONGKHA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

<http://www.dzongkha.gov.bt/>

**Mission:** The DDC's mission is to encourage and enhance the use of the Dzongkha language and through this to help preserve the cultural heritage of Bhutan; promote peace, cohesion, & stability in the country; thereby helping achieve the Gross National Happiness objectives of the nation. To fulfill this mission, Dzongkha language will be standardized and functionally advanced to meet the growing need of its usage in different domains of knowledge as well the needs of its role as the national language.

#### NATIONAL LIBRARY & ARCHIVES OF BHUTAN

<http://www.library.gov.bt/>

**Aims & Objectives:** The National Library of Bhutan has the goal that all Bhutanese, wherever they are, will have access to both Bhutan's documentary heritage and to the information resources of the world. To achieve this, the National Library builds up and maintains a national collection of Bhutanese materials with the aim to provide an effective gateway to national and international resources of information in the near future.

**Functions:** The Library was established in 1967 and merged with the National Commission for Cultural Affairs in 1985. The National Library carries out the following functions:

- Collection and preservation of ancient Bhutanese Literature on religion, cultural, history & social traditions.
- Provision of facilities for research and other academic pursuits.
- Preservation of old and rare books & manuscripts
- Preservation of traditional xylographic blocks.
- Research and documentation of literary works and stories inherited through traditional and oral communication methods.
- Promotion and publishing of literary works on traditional and contemporary themes.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF BHUTAN  
[www.nationalmuseum.gov.bt](http://www.nationalmuseum.gov.bt)

**Vision Statement:** Preservation, promotion and conservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage towards the fulfillment of Gross National Happiness.

**Mission Statement:** The Mission of the National Museum of Bhutan is the interpretation of history and culture of Bhutan through the preservation and exhibition of tangible culture towards the fulfillment of Gross National Happiness.

We achieve the mission through:

1. Research
2. Conservation
3. Exhibition
4. Education

AGENCY FOR THE PROMOTION OF INDIGENOUS CRAFTS  
[www.apic.org.bt](http://www.apic.org.bt)

**Vision:** APIC shall be “a lead agency promoting a vibrant and sustainable crafts industry by ensuring quality products, enhancing employment opportunities and contributing to GNH.

**Mission:** An organization that promotes equitable growth of handicrafts through the enhancement of skills and business knowledge of the craft community with emphasis on innovation, product development and marketing.

SHEJUN FOUNDATION  
[www.shejun.org](http://www.shejun.org)

The Shejun Agency was established with the aim of preserving and passing on the rich cultural heritage of Bhutan to future generations. Shejun means knowledge transmission in Classical Tibetan and Dzongkha. Active since 2004, Shejun presently focuses on the documentation and study of Bhutan’s written heritage and oral traditions. The organization is located in Bhutan’s capital, Thimphu, and made up of a group of committed national and international scholars, field researchers and support staff. Shejun works in close collaboration with local partners such as the Department of Culture under Bhutan’s Ministry of Home and Culture and with leading international research universities such as Cambridge University and the University of Virginia.

## APPENDIX E

### METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out over the month of April 2014, in the capital city of the Kingdom of Bhutan. The author conducted a series of interviews with multiple governmental and private agencies involved with the preservation and/or documentation of the cultural heritage of Bhutan. All interviews excepting Lopen Dung Dorji were conducted in English. In addition to this conversation-based research, the author approached learning calligraphic method and traditional material manufacture through experiential means, taking daily lessons in the *lentsa* and *joyig* scripts and observing manufacturing processes at their source.



## FURTHER RESEARCH

For those students interested in pursuing research on related subjects in Bhutan, I would recommend the following topics:

- The process of systematizing and documenting the many unwritten languages of Bhutan, including the creation of dictionaries and rules of grammar.

Sherub Gyeltshen, Secretary  
Dzongkha Development Commission  
Thimphu, Kingdom of Bhutan  
email: [shegyel9@gmail.com](mailto:shegyel9@gmail.com)  
[www.dzongkha.gov.bt](http://www.dzongkha.gov.bt)

- Exploring the material traditions of Eastern Bhutan, such as the manufacture of soil pigments, dyes, and handmade paper. Possible collaboration with the National Library of Bhutan, which in the near future will initiate a large-scale documentation project involving traditional art and craft materials:

Dr. Yonten Dargye, Phd, Chief Research Officer  
Research and Media Division  
National Library and Archives of Bhutan  
Thimphu, Bhutan  
email: [yondars@gmail.com](mailto:yondars@gmail.com)

- A deeper exploration of calligraphy in contemporary monastic settings – prevalence, relevance, and interaction with original instructive texts.

Khenpo Phuntso Tashi, Director  
National Museum of Bhutan  
Paro, Bhutan  
email: [mindfulliving101@gmail.com](mailto:mindfulliving101@gmail.com)

- Translation projects: Few literary resources are available in English concerning the history and development of calligraphic scripts, though there is some extensive scholarly work completed in Dzongkha. Collaboration with the National Museum or Library, or the Shejun Agency for Bhutan's Cultural Documentation and Research, would be recommended in this case.

[www.shejun.org](http://www.shejun.org) / [contact@shejun.org](mailto:contact@shejun.org)

(note the Shejun Agency's creative calligraphic logo)



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