



Tang, Bumthang, Bhutan

OGYEN CHOLING FOUNDATION

Annual Report 2022

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Introduction

Overall, there was a general feeling of uncertainty as the year 2022 began tentatively as nobody knew what to expect after the long pandemic constraints and restrictions. We braced ourselves and prepared to face whatever changes would come. All the while we never stopped the day-to-day activities related to the Foundation and tried to stay positive and forward looking.

After an unusually cold January, with temperatures dipping below minus 10 degrees C. the year of the Tiger was celebrated in February with the usual traditional ceremonies and feasting with the community.

During the last board meeting it was decided to change the reporting system. To avoid repetition, we will henceforth send out a comprehensive annual report and share updates through quarterly newsletters and regular Facebook updates.



The elders from the village enjoy a drink on losar

Maintenance and improvements of structures

Although the aftereffects of the pandemic closure were an ever-present reality and complicated our work, especially access to materials, we continued to carry out the necessary works outlined in our projected plans. The most important activities included:

- *Stabilization of the slope on the west side of the Nagtshang.* By combining fencing off the slope area, planting trees, installing roof gutters and a water drainage line we are confident that the slope has been stabilized. All the water previously draining into the slope has been collected and drained away from it.

- *Independent water supply:* By installing an exclusive system just for the Ogyen Choling manor, the water supply for the guest house and for the fire prevention has become much more reliable. This work could be done after seeking the village's concurrence and paying the community a sum of money.
- *Lighting and other electrical installations:* The lighting and the electric wiring were improved in all rooms of the museum. Similarly improvement on the electrical wiring and lighting was carried out in parts of the guest house.

We could also respond to some unexpected ad hoc jobs that needed immediate attention. In July after a heavy spate of rain, part of the wall behind the temple collapsed. Sand, cement, and gravel were sourced immediately and brought to the site so that the repair could begin as soon as the rain stopped. The rebuilding project progressed well and will be completed in the first half of 2023.



Repairing the Chukor mani at the entrance of the village

Museum

One positive outcome of the infrequent visitors to the museum was that the assistant curator had enough time to systematically translate all the labels and narratives into Dzongkha and to improve some of the signage and displays. At the same time the English versions were also revised and improved. A short introductory text was prepared for each theme.

From October onwards the entrance fee has been increased from Nu 200 to Nu 400 for inter-

national guests and from Nu 20 to Nu 50 for Bhutanese visitors.

After the country opened officially for tourist in September, visitors to the museum started to slowly come again. We recorded 424 international and 674 Bhutanese visitors paying the entrance fee. In addition, we recorded visits of students from 11 institutes, religious schools, training centres etc. We estimate that about 500 students visited the museum. Entrance is free for students.



Two examples of introductory displays

Temples and Rituals

The annual rituals and prayers were observed as usual, and culminated in the observance of the Kangsöe in its full form over three days for the first time in two years. During the Covid restrictions we could conduct the prayers for only one day and it was restricted to the immediate community. This year the Kangsöe was once again open to the public.

Although, Ogyen Choling has always been included among the eight original (Ling gya) or the “eight spiritual sanctuaries” established by one of the greatest Nyingmapa masters Longchen Ramjampa (1306-64), the focus for pilgrims and devotees of Longchen was mainly the cave (a small rock outcrop) in the rock face above the village which was used as his meditation cave. We believe that the master used the cave and the surrounding area for meditation and special teachings in the forest, and the place of his dwelling was Ogyen Choling where an original temple existed. The present Ogyen

Choling temple was probably built on the very spot of the original residence of Longchen.

In February, the Ogyen Choling Foundation along with the village observed the commemoration of the Master’s 659th death anniversary (Longchen Kuchod). Tang Trulku Choni Rangshar Rinpoche led the one-day prayers in the temple. Rinpoche also inaugurated the permanent exhibit of relics in the temple and gave blessings to the public with the family's private relics. At the Rinpoche’s instigation, the 108 volumes of the Kanyur (the scriptural collection of the words of Buddha) from the temple were carried to a place near the meditation cave and read. The villagers eagerly participated in carrying the texts in a procession. The carrying of the texts is a pious deed to accumulate merit.

We hope that the Longchen kuchod will continue as an annual event. In consideration of Longchen’s association with Ogyen Choling, discussions have been initiated for a project to add a special shrine room for Longchen, in the main temple. It is hoped that the project will materialize in 2023.



People carrying Kanjur texts

Scholars and Research

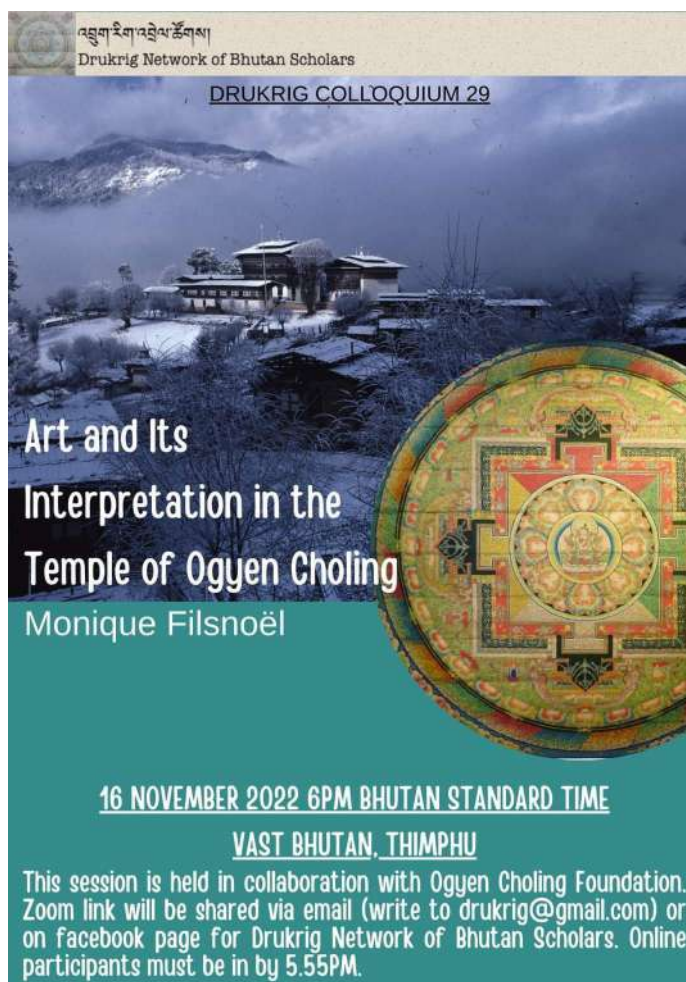
During the annual ritual of Kangsoe in October, Dr. Monique Filsnoel presented her PhD thesis (SOAS, London) in the temple in the presence of the community. The leading lama for the ritual, Thowadrak lama conducted special prayers and most of the people present offered Dr. Monique Filsnoel congratulatory *khadars* (white silk scarves). It was a poignant event for all present.

Dr. Filsnoel stayed on for a few days after Kangsoe to continue to document the paintings in the *utse lhakhang* as this was the only shrine room that was not included in her research. The

wall paintings in the Goenkhang will not be photographed because of the sanctity accorded to it.

As it was considered important to share Dr. Filsnoel's research with a wider audience, Dr. Karma Phuntsho arranged for her to speak at Drukrig (Network of Bhutan Scholars) Colloquium. It is gratifying to report that the forum was well attended, and the interactive session was lively.

Dr. Monique Filsnoel's thesis makes an important contribution towards the documentation of Ogyen Choling's history and especially the temples. It is envisaged that for the non-academic audience Dr. Monique Filsnoel will work on a book which will be easily readable.



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Drukrig Network of Bhutan Scholars

DRUKRIG COLLOQUIUM 29

Art and Its
Interpretation in the
Temple of Ogyen Choling
Monique Filsnoël

16 NOVEMBER 2022 6PM BHUTAN STANDARD TIME
VAST BHUTAN, THIMPHU

This session is held in collaboration with Ogyen Choling Foundation. Zoom link will be shared via email (write to drukrig@gmail.com) or on facebook page for Drukrig Network of Bhutan Scholars. Online participants must be in by 5.55PM.

*Presentation on the wall paintings in Ogyen Choling by
Dr. Monique at VAST Bhutan*

Education and scholarships

The ECCD reopened on 3rd of May after government schools were formally reopened. The ECCD had 8 children. After the very successful occupancy of the Heritage House in 2019 we were encouraged to prepare an additional room for guides. With the disruptions in the country's tourism, the additional room has been converted into a classroom for the ECCD. The space is within the *shagkor* complex and is equipped with toilet facilities. The courtyard provides a clean and protected space for the children to

play. We are lucky to have the same facilitator, Ms Yeshey Tshomo, who had run the ECCD from 2018-2020 with competence and passion. Two children from the centre have graduated to join government schools.

We anticipate the same number of children will enrol in the coming year.

As in the previous years the Foundation could continue to offer financial support to six children in the Khangrab Primary school. The Foundation was happy to offer cash prizes once again for the academic achievers in the three top positions in each class for all the classes in both the schools in the valley.



Children in the ECCD

Visitors

Soon after the pandemic lockdown was eased, the Ogyen Choling Heritage House had the opportunity to host 34 visitors for three nights in April. All the visitors were Buddhist practitioners who were seeking a quiet place for reflection and meditation. The Government allowed this group to come to Bhutan on condition that they did the mandatory 21 days quarantine.

Although the guest house did not operate as in the pre-pandemic days, we were fortunate to entertain a steady trickle of guests, especially after the formal reopening for tourists in September. Not all the guest houses in Bumthang were so fortunate and many of them are non-functional.

We hope that two projects which included Ogyen Choling in their assignments will give wider publicity to the guest house and the Foundation:

- Matt Dutile, photographer and explorer, working on a project that will include Ogyen Choling in a forthcoming issue of the Dwell Magazine.
- Andrew Benfield, writer, and documentary movie maker working on a documentary for BBC titled, *The search for the truth behind the Yeti legend* also included an interview recorded in Ogyen Choling.

Based on the reservations for 2023 we are optimistic that we will be able to survive the economic doldrums faced by the tourism industry.



Some of the visitors to Ogyen Choling in 2022

Other news

Staff Turnover

Kelzang Namgyel (Development Officer) who had been working for the Foundation for the last seven years resigned to pursue other opportunities. He left the Foundation at the end of May. The museum benefited much from his hands-on initiative in maintaining and improving the displays. Many visitors to the museum expressed their appreciation and commended on how well he conducted the tours.



Ex-development officer Kelzang Namgyel

Phuntsho Tenzin who was working with the Ogyen Choling Heritage House from the beginning of the year and had occasionally helped with the museum was considered as the replacement for Kelzang. He had completed a training course for guides and helped with the guiding until he was officially appointed as the Assistant curator in October with the Board's approval. He is presently employed on a contract basis.



New assistant museum curator Phuntsho Tenzin

Changing board member and chairperson

Following the advice of the CSOA the following changes in the composition of the board were made.

- The chairman Sonam Wangchuk who had served the Foundation since its inception in 2014 was replaced by Gyalsten K. Dorji who was a board member.
- The Executive Director Kunzang Choden resigned from the Board and was replaced by Dechen Roder. Kunzang Choden will continue as executive director.

Pension fund

Finally, all the employees of the Foundation and the Heritage House have been enrolled in the national Pension Fund.

Tang Road

The much talked about and long-awaited improvement of Tang Road became a reality this October. The dirt road from the Gewog centre in Misithang to the end of the valley, covering 15 km, has been black topped. Similarly, the “infamously notorious” road from the Kizom bridge to the Ogyen Choling village has been consigned to history as it has been upgraded to a Base Course status in early 2023. This will not only ease the mobility for the community but will also enhance tourism.



The new base course road to the Ogyen Choling village and manor

Financial

Despite the Covid and all its related problems our income for the year 2022 was good, amounting to 3.37 million. We have received generous donations amounting to 2.47 million, other income was from lease payments by the guest house (0.6 million), museum tickets (0.15 million), and others (0.15 million). Thanks to the healthy finances it was possible to reduce our liabilities by 2 million.

Donations received.

Donations up to Nu 10'000

Dolma C. Roder, Christopher Coats, Sky Mind Retreat group

Donations Nu 10'000-50'000

Annagret Schlumpf, Anne Gossot, Dakinny Production, Francoise Pommaret, Group Steve/Roger, Harry Frank, Fabienne Grossenbacher, Werner Kuelling, Brigitta Kunz, Martin Menzi, Monika Kramer, Urs Niederhauser, Reto and Gerda Ludwig, Vincent Danecker,

Donations Nu 50'000 - 100'000

Dominique Bastien, Richard O. Frey, Amis du Bhutan

Donations Nu 100'000 - 300'000

D. Hamilton (through the Bhutan Foundation), Gerard and Ann Tardy, Swiss-Bhutan Association, Kaspar and Regula Mettler

Donations above Nu 300'000

Erick Rinner, V. Gossweiler

We embark on the new year with renewed confidence and much hope that the year will be a satisfying and a successful year for the Foundation. We take this opportunity to thank all the well-wishers and donors who have stayed with us in the challenging period and helped us to come thus far. We will continue to look forward to your continued goodwill and support in the future to help us to go forward with our goals and objectives.

With our warmest wishes

