



Bumthang, Bhutan

# Ogyen Choling Foundation

Annual Report

2023

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The Annual Report is a summary of the quarterly reports that have already been circulated. The year 2023 began on an optimistic and positive note. The disruptions experienced from the pandemic had long faded away and we had every reason to look forward to securing the same momentum we had enjoyed before the pandemic

# MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS OF STRUCTURES

Throughout the year our permanent staff, especially Chador Tshering, and Ngawang Jamba continuously worked on minor repairs and small construction projects, such as remodeling a bathroom, fence repairs, enlarging the gate, completing the retention wall of the parking, and painting the roof of the temple.

We are happy that we could increase the security by adding more lights in the compound as well as a camera near the *chorten* at the south end of the compound. Unfortunately, we could not get the smoke and burglar alarm system back into operation. Hopefully the problem will be solved early in 2024.



*Completing the painting of the temple roof*



*Putting up a new signboard to the museum*



*Repaired wall and the patio behind the temple*





# RITUALS AND TEMPLE

The annual religious and social events were celebrated as usual. It is always reassuring and encouraging for the Foundation to be able to bring the community together to engage in these important shared activities. For the second year the community joined the Foundation to observe the death anniversary, or *Kuchod* of Longchen Ramjampa.

This year, the Lunar new year ushering in the female Hare, fell on the same date as the 43<sup>rd</sup> birthday of His Majesty the King on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February. The happy and auspicious occasion called for a double celebration. It was gratifying to see that all the elders who were present during the last *Losar* celebration were still among us. The oldest member Aie Sonam Pema at 98 years old was able to join us in the celebration.

Despite the Election Commission's restrictions during the National Assembly Elections, the *Kangso* (annual prayer ritual) could be fully celebrated again for the first time after Covid. We are grateful to the Thowadrak Lama who graciously agreed to lead the rituals for three long days.

Some of the other rituals conducted were the *Zhingdrup* prayers (prayers for peace), *Gonpo Dhoechod* (routine offerings to the local deity), *Sarphud* (offering of first harvest), Ritual of *Troma Chöd* (expedient wisdom method to sever the root of suffering). Timely rituals of appeasing the Nagas or the *Lu* in the compound were also conducted.



*Namkhai Nyingpo Rinpoche blessing the relics in the temple*



*People from valley gathered in the courtyard to receive empowerment and blessing*

# CONSECRATION OF REPAIRED MONUMENTS

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of November which was the holy day of *Lhabab Duchen* (The Descending day of Lord Buddha) we were blessed with the visit of Lama Namkhai Nyingpo Rinpoche. Rinpoche visited the temple and the museum and had lunch with us. Although it was a private visit, people from the village spontaneously came together to seek his blessing. The gathering of the devotees in the courtyard was impressive. Rinpoche kindly performed the *rabney*, consecration ceremony for the religious monuments that had been renovated and repaired in the last few years.

- The memorial *chorten* on the south-west end of the compound which was vandalized.
- The memorial *chorten* near the temple which was beginning to fall apart.
- One of the *chortens* in the middle of the village part of which had collapsed after a spate of heavy rain.
- A water driven prayer wheel located between Ogyen Choling and Chogyam.
- A water driven prayer wheel above Ogyen Choling to the east.



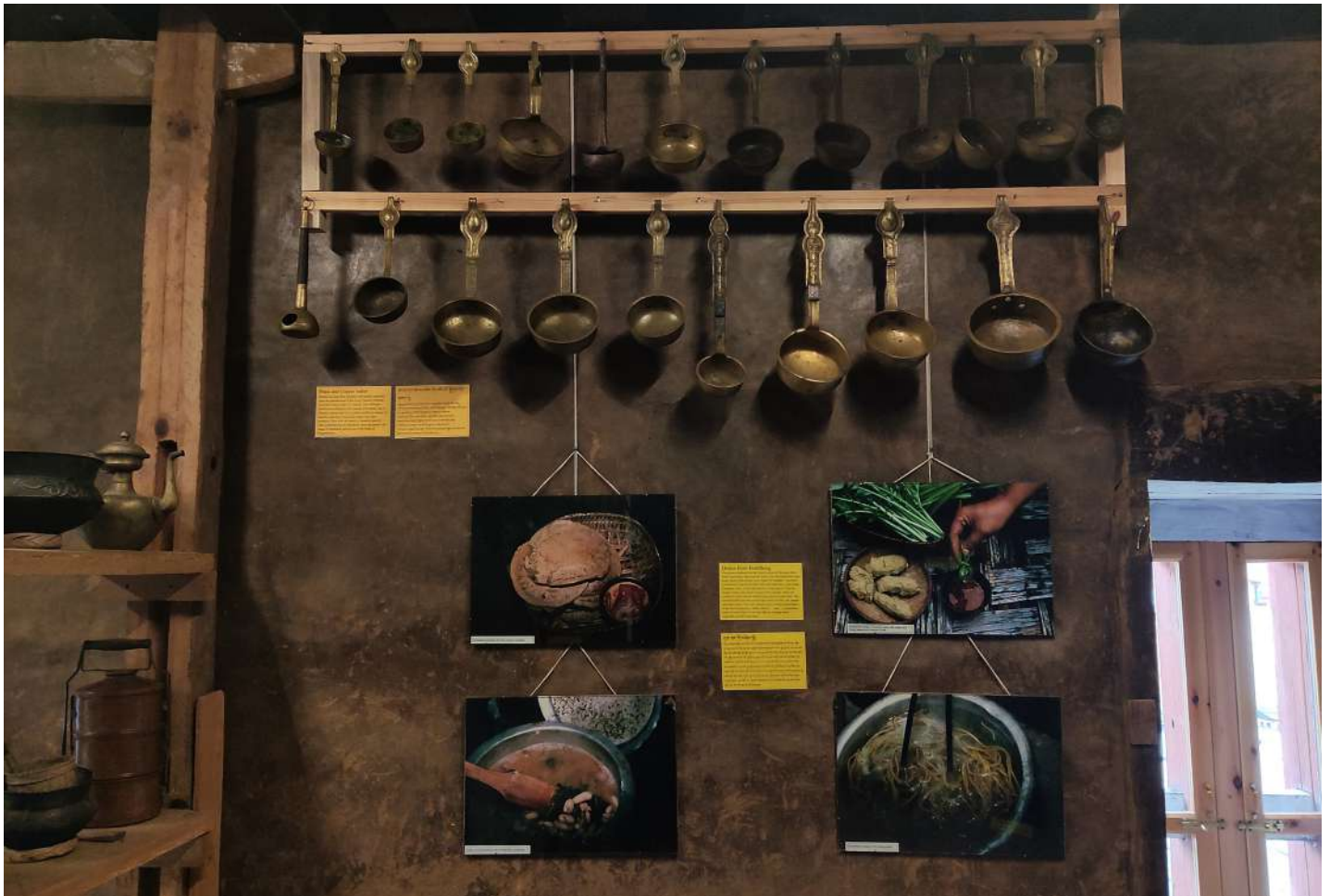
*Namkhai Nyingpo Rinpoche blessing the repaired monuments*



# MUSEUM

The Assistant Curator, Phuntsho Tenzin, continuously worked on the improvement of the displays, updating narratives, adding new signage, cleaning artifacts, and reorganizing displays. Visitors can see many improvements, but we are aware that this work will never end. This year our most notable constraint was the unpredictable cuts in the electricity supply. During October, which is our main season we had many days when visitors had to go to the museum with flashlights and using the light of their mobile phones. The lack of light significantly affected the quality of a visit to the museum for this reason we have started seriously looking for possible alternative power sources .

With the improved approach road to Ogyen Choling, the number of pilgrims and visitors has increased again. Over the year we recorded 1884 international, 698 Bhutanese visitor, and 554 students which is, however, still slightly below the numbers of 2019



*Reorganized display of the ladles and the pictures of the traditional food*

# SCHOLARS AND RESEARCH

For the second time we were happy to host a workshop of writers. The Himalayan writers' workshop was organized by James Hopkins and led by the well reputed writer Eric Weiner, who is the best-selling author of "The Geography of Bliss." Remarkably all the workshop attendees were women.

With the extended stays of three scholars in Ogyen Choling over the summer, we feel optimistic that one of the main objectives of the Foundations, to host scholars is being realized (see the quarterly newsletter of April- June 2023 for more details of these visits).



*Attendees at the writer's workshop in a group session in the sun*



# EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIPS

There was an average of 6 to 7 children in the ECCD throughout the year. At the end of the year, 4 children graduated to go to kindergarten. Based on the new registration it is foreseen that the ECCD will have 7 or 8 children for the new session starting in March 2024. The facilitator was able to attend a 10-day training workshop in Trongsa. The facilitator could appreciate how well connected and accessible the Ogyen Choling ECCD is compared to the remote centres in Trongsa. In her absence we could enlist the help of a graduate from the village to be the substitute. The school did not have to close.

We were able to offer a modest stipend to 6 children from the Khangrab Primary School. Recipients were identified by the teachers based on need. Should the resources of the Foundation remain positive we hope to offer the same scholarship to the some of the children of the Tang Central school. We had discontinued the scholarship after the school was converted to a central school about 10 years ago.

The academic prizes for the two schools could be offered to the top performers. The cash prizes were distributed on national day.



*ECCD students performing songs and dances on the final day of school*

# OTHER NEWS

## GUEST HOUSE

The guest house had a good year, recording an income similar to the one of 2019. We noticed an increased demand coming directly from visitors rather than the recommendation of tour companies. We attribute this partly to ‘word of mouth’ advertisement by those who have stayed in the guest house. Additionally the publicity received through an article in Dwell Magazine certainly helped.

A record number of 47 people attending a retreat over three days, stretched our facilities and services to the limits. Although big groups are profitable, the carrying capacity of our facilities are not adequate. In the future we have decided to limit the intake to 35 people at any one time

## MEDIA AND PUBLICITY

Brent Olson of Ethos Bhutan introduced Ogyen Choling to Matt Dutile, photographer for Dwell Magazine. Matt Dutile’s photographic feature on Ogyen Choling can be accessed here <https://www.dwell.com/article/ogyen-choling-heritage-house>.

Film maker Andrew Benfield’s project Yeti for a podcast on BBC radio 4 sounds also includes interviews in Ogyen Choling. See: 8. *Yeti Chasers will Never Find Them*. – BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0fxt8p5>

The journalist Riddhi Doshi, covered Ogyen Choling with an interview which appeared in the Mint Lounge. See: <https://lifestyle.livemint.com/how-to-lounge/art-culture/ogyen-choling-bhutan-first-private-museum-ancestral-manor-author-kunzang-choden-111700637935160.html>

We appreciate these forms of media coverage and publicity for the Foundation as we do not actively engage in an PR or advertising.

## MEETINGS, TRAININGS

The Executive Director attended the CSO meeting organized by Bhutan Civil Society Network in Lobesa, Punakha in December. It was a good opportunity to meet and interact with the other CSOs. The Assistant Curator had the chance to attend the Bhutan Transparency Initiative workshop on Accountability and the Media Engagement workshop organized by Bhutan Media Foundation. These were excellent opportunities for the Assistant Curator to gain exposure and meet colleagues from other CSOs.

Through the initiative and financial support of Dr.Monique Filsnoel, her husband Paul and their friends, the Assistant Curator has been able to enroll in a three month online postgraduates course on Southeast Asian Art Historiography at SOAS.



## AUDIT

The Regional Audit Office in Bumthang once again carried out the audit for the Foundation for years 2021- 2023. While we would like to kindly acknowledge their professional and timely services, we would also like to state that the audit office had no complaints nor memos on the accounts.

## ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS

Concerted efforts were made by board members and the Executive Director to generate and finalize the Accountability Standards as required by the CSOA. The resulting guidelines will help to guide us in our day-to-day management of the Foundation.



*CSOA officers in Ogyen Choling on an evaluation of the accountability standards*

## SEISMOGRAPH

Thanks to the spontaneous goodwill and support by Professor Gyorgy from ETH Lausanne, Ogyen Choling has a seismograph which records the earth movements. This is especially meaningful for Ogyen Choling as all its structures were destroyed by a major earthquake in 1897.

# FINANCIAL

With an income of Nu. 4.7 million, we consider 2023 to be a financially very successful year. The major sources of income were: lease payments from guest house (Nu. 2.4 million) donations (Nu. 1.4 million), and museum tickets (Nu. 0.8 million). Thanks to this it was possible to reduce our liabilities by Nu. 2.3 million.

## DONATIONS RECEIVED.

### **Donations up to Nu 10'000**

Prof. Tadashi; Prof Asakawa, Ms Kunga, Christopher, F. Pommaret, Palmo, Sherab, Monique Hill, E. Reinhardt, F. Gähwiler group

### **Donations Nu 10'000-50'000**

My Bhutan, Martha A. Moulton, Dhondup Roder, Ms Teju, Catherine Stoss, V. Bollman, Ms Amy Lin, Rajini Chavda, B&T Schmutz, F. Grossenbacher, Ms Sita, V. Denecker, R&G Ludwig

### **Donations Nu 50'000 - 100'000**

D. Bastien, Amis du Bhoutan, R.& R. Frey

### **Donations Nu 100'000 - 300'000**

D. Hamilton (through the Bhutan Foundation), Gerard and Ann Tardy, anonymous donor

## THANK YOU FOR OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

We would like to express our sincere thanks to M. & P. Filsnoel, G. & R. Graham, L. & F. MacDonald and K. & H Clark for their spontaneous support of Phuntsho Tenzin's course at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Thank goes to Prof. György Hetényi, for making a seismograph available to be placed in Ogyen Choling.

The Foundation would also like to acknowledge the donations by visitors who have contributed stationery and toys to the ECCD.



As we reflect on the year gone by, we are filled with a sense of gratitude that our lives and activities could continue without natural or human disturbances. In a world torn by, greed, injustice, vengeance, and violence, we feel truly blessed to live in peace and serenity here in Bhutan. We would like to extend these blessings to all of you. We wish that the world will have a chance to live in peace and harmony.

*Tashi Delek*  
*Ogyen Choling Foundation Team*

