

Ogyen Choling Foundation

Annual Report 2014



We began operations as a Civil Society Organization (CSO), officially registered under the Civil Society Organization Act of Bhutan just 10 months ago. The Ogyen Choling Foundation is the first CSO in Bhutan with its primary focus on the preservation of a heritage site with historical structures and the traditional rites, rituals and customs associated with it. With our status as a Foundation, some of the ambiguities which existed under the erstwhile Ogyen Choling Trust Fund have been clarified, especially the one regarding the ownership of the properties.

During the year, the Board of Trustees met twice, on the 17th April and 25th May. The year 2014 was a busy one with lots of construction related works and learning and fulfilling the additional managerial requirements under the CSO rules and regulations, while at the same time coping with a significant increase in the number of visitors to the museum.

Facilitating Research & Scholarship

In keeping with our objective to facilitate research and scholarship in religious, cultural and historical studies, we have always welcomed scholars and researchers wishing to use Ogyen Choling as a resource center. Therefore, we were very heartened to see a remarkable increase in the number of visiting scholars and researchers during the past year.

We were especially happy to welcome **Lama Tseten Dorji**, the abbot of Tamshing *drastang* in Choekor, Bumthang. He was able to find several texts on the 15th century religious treasure discoverer, *Terton Pema Lingpa*, for his research on the subject.



Early in the year, **Ms. Monique Filsnoel**, a Masters student at School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, came to study and document the wall paintings in the temple. She and her husband photographed the temple paintings over several days. While Ms. Filsnoel will use these materials in fulfillment of her dissertation the foundation will soon have a comprehensive record of the wall paintings in the temple.

Dr. Karma Phuntsho, Director of Shejun Agency and the Loden Foundation came to personally hand over an entire set of the digital copies of the manuscripts and xylographs of the Ogyen Choling library. He had digitized the documents under an earlier project with the British Library's Endangered Archives funding. We are indebted to him for including Ogyen Choling's collection in his project. While in Ogyen Choling, the Shejun researchers were able to record a rare ritual of propitiating the water spirit. This ritual was commonly performed when a person suffers from blistering sores, which is allegedly caused by an angry water spirit. The only one in the village who still knows how to conduct the ritual is 86 year old Aie Sonam Pema.



Receiving a set of digital copies



Documenting the propitiation of the water spirit

Mr. Ratu Dukpa, the project manager of the Bhutan Oral Literature project, along with **Dr. Mark Donohue**, a linguist from Canberra University in Australia, came to Ogyen Choling to conduct research on *Bumthang-kha* (the language of Bumthang) and to identify and recruit a field worker for Tang valley.

In late November we were privileged to host **Professor Toni Huber** from Berlin University, who has a number of long-term Bhutan based research projects. He stayed at Ogyen Choling for over a week, enjoying the peace and solitude of our remote location.

We look forward to welcoming other scholars in the future.

The Museum

During the year, a small exhibit on the tradition and art of betel nut chewing was added to the museum. To improve security in the museum, CCTV cameras have been bought and we hope to have them installed soon.

The museum saw a marked increase in the numbers of visitors in 2014. As compared to 600 visitors during the previous 14 months, (January 2013-February 2014) we recorded as many as 1,300 visitors in the 10 months from March to December 2014. This does not even include the large number of Bhutanese visitors. At times there were as many as 3 or 4 different groups in the museum simultaneously. This proved to be rather overwhelming and the curator was unable to spend the same amount of time with each group.



A busy day in March

We were happy to welcome the first visitors from countries that had never been represented before including: Brazil, Uganda, Chile, Lithuania, Mexico, Philippines, and Guatemala. Other notable visitors included, the 3rd batch of senior government officials undergoing a training course at the Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) in Phuntsholing, the Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan, judges of the Federal Court of Switzerland, a Supreme Court judge from Cambodia, as well as many students, monks, nuns and pilgrims.

Temple and rituals

Over the years many of the stone slabs roofing the alcove which house the 105 prayer wheels around the temple had become dislocated and broken. Early in the year we replaced the stone slabs with slate and although it has changed the look, the slate roof has its own charm. The prayer wheels themselves were also in need of repair and maintenance and the temple caretaker undertook this task as his family's project. It was heartwarming for us to see his wife, his college going son and young grandson helping in the restoration of the prayer wheels.



This year's annual ritual of *Kangso* saw a few small but significant changes that were the inevitable result of the changing circumstances. One of the highlights of the festival has always been the ritual of lowering and re-hoisting of the *lhadar*, which is the big prayer flag made from an entire tree trunk. While it was customary for as many men, women and children as possible to participate in the ritual, in recent years, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of villagers participating in the event. Although we had hoped to continue the traditional method of lowering and re-hoisting the flag, the difficulty of doing so with less people, and concerns for their safety compelled us to compromise by building a permanent concrete base for the flag pole. This greatly lessens the effort needed to hoist the flag and reduces the task of having to dismantle and rebuild the base each year.



On the third and final day of the ritual it is customary to have one of every species of domestic animal represented in the procession that circumambulates the temple. This year there was no yak, sheep or goat in the procession because none were available due to the fact that the people of the valley no longer rear these animals. Even the stallion which represents the riding mount of the resident deity had to be substituted by a mare! (*Maybe it is time for even the deities to experience a bit of gender equality!*)

Construction and Maintenance

The progress of the various construction activities were a little slower than we expected. Nevertheless, we were satisfied with the overall progress, considering all the logistical and administrative problems associated with our remote location.

. Overall plan for the renovations and installations: Following the second visit of the Swiss sanitation expert, Walter Spielmann, in early May, the detailed plans for the remodeling of the *shagor* and for the plumbing and sanitary installations were completed with the support of a design company in Switzerland, and Fritz Baumgartner and his architectural design team in Thimphu.

Procurements in Switzerland: With the completion of the detailed plans, we started to procure materials for the water supply and sanitation systems. Thanks to the initiative of Walter Spielmann, and his contacts in the industry, much of the required materials are being provided free of cost or at reduced prices by different companies in Switzerland. A major expense for the foundation is the fire prevention/mitigation equipment, consisting of two fog pumps and associated materials.



Walter Spielmann enjoying a well-deserved coffee break

Construction of residential buildings: The casting of the concrete slab for the first building consisting of three residential apartments could finally be carried out in early May. After that it was a long wait before the roofing could be completed in August. In September Kunzang and Walter moved into their semi-completed apartment with temporary kitchen and bathroom facilities. The second residential building progressed steadily and the exterior walls were completed by end of the year.

Electrical installations museum and temple: As a precautionary measure against the ever-present fire hazard, all of the electrical wiring and installations in the museum and the temple were physically inspected and necessary repairs carried out. Wherever possible, PVC conduits were replaced with metal pipes. In order to provide better lighting in the museum, the wiring was extended and additional light points were installed.

Other construction: Work to replace barbed wire fence around the perimeter with a stone wall was initiated, and a patio with stone slabs was constructed between the old guest house and the *shagor*.

Media coverage

Television and other reporting: In 2014 Ogyen Choling featured prominently in a documentary on Bhutan made by the respected Swiss newspaper *Neue Zurcher Zeitung*. The documentary was shown twice on Swiss Public Television. We received some positive feedback from Swiss viewers who visited Ogyen Choling after they had seen the documentary.

In addition we also hosted the National Geographic magazine teams from Israel and Russia. They will be featuring Ogyen Choling in their articles on Bhutan.



The filming team starting a drone for aerial pictures

Website and Facebook: We are presently working on revising and improving the foundation's website and we hope to launch it as soon as possible. In the meantime we have an active **facebook** page, Ogyen Choling Museum. Please like us and keep up-to-date with our activities and the activities and events in and around the community.

Guest House

During its second meeting on the 25th of May, the Board of Trustees agreed to lease out the *shagor*, “to be use as a guest house” on the condition that the cost of the renovation and remodeling of the facilities would be borne by the guest house operators. Subsequently an application was submitted to the Tourism Council of Bhutan for a guest house under the name of ***Ogyen Choling Heritage House***. Despite the delay in renovating the shagor into guest rooms, largely because of the late shipment of materials from Switzerland, the guest house will start operating from March 2015.

Throughout the year we had many visitors who wished to have lunch with us. Earlier in the year we had already built a stone patio and some picnic tables in front of the kitchen and this proved to be a practical and useful addition as this space was regularly used throughout the season.

All the windows on the eastern side of the shagor have been fitted with double glazed window frames. This work was done by carpentry trainees from the ***Technical Training Institute*** in Chumey, Bumthang, who spent five days here under the supervision of their Swiss instructor, Tobias Blessing. Tobias planned and supervised the entire project as a part of his research on “the change in energy fluxes with improved windows” for his thesis at the Institute for Architecture, Wood and Civil Engineering in Biel, Switzerland.



The team from the Technical Training Institute, Chumey

We recently completed converting one of the two old loom/weaving rooms into a dining room. The first guests to use the dining room was the last group of guests in 2014. It was a very anxious moment to see how well the new dining room would meet the expectations of the guests - and especially to see whether the room would be warm enough against the winter cold. We were greatly relieved to see that the guests were happy and warm and that they enjoyed the ambience of the room!

Fundraising

Having been officially registered with the Civil Organizations Authority of Bhutan, the foundation is now permitted to actively solicit and receive donations and contributions for its activities. During the year, we received generous donations from a number of well-wishers both within Bhutan and abroad and we gratefully acknowledge their goodwill and support.

One of the first donations was received from Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother, Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck. Such a benevolent gesture by Her Majesty is a source of inspiration and encouragement and reassures us that our humble efforts are worthy of royal patronage.

We are also grateful to the Eustasius Foundation in Switzerland for a very generous donation of CHF 15'000 and to all the other donors who have generously contributed.

A donation box has been placed at the entrance to the museum and we have been pleased by the generosity of the visitors.



The youngest recipients of the Ogyen Choling Foundation 2014 academic prizes together with the School Principal (Khangrab Primary School)

Income & Expenditure

The table below shows the foundation's revenue and expenditures during the ten months period from 1 March to 31 December 2014. Donations above Nu 10'000 are individually mentioned. By far the most significant amount was spent on the building of the residential quarters. The family members benefiting from these quarters have contributed Nu 0.93 million.

Revenue	Nu.	
Donations and Contributions	403,871	
Museum Entry Fees	244,700	
Sale museum booklet, royalty from Ogyen Choling Manor book	46,684	
Bank draft maturing	71,951	
Contributions by Trustees for construction of residential buildings	932,541	
Loan	2,400,000	
Total Income	4,099,747	
Expenditures		
Construction of residential buildings (material and labour)		3,494,585
Maintenance & Repairs		96,800
Temple and rituals (salaries, small repairs)		73,440
Museum (salaries, electrification, small repairs)		272,938
Scholarship and Scholars		79,900
Administration and diverse		7,650
Total expenses		4,025,313
Cash balance 1.3.2014	2,779	
Cash balance 31.12.2014		68,467.78
Bank balance 31.12.2014		8745.22
	4,102,526	4,102,526

Donations above Nu 10'000

Source	Nu	Source	Nu
HM the .Royal Grand Mother	30'000	Vincent Denecker	38'500
Harry Frank	19'405	Francoise. Pommaret	36'000
Robert and Libby Group	37'390	Gabriela Siegenthaler	35'000
Tina Rohner Group	13'755	Mike Turbow	11'675
Bhutan Foundation	30'635		

The following donations received in Switzerland were used towards the payment of firefighting equipment:

Source	Amount CHF	Source	Amount CHF
S. Eustachius	15'000	Prof. Martin Menzi	250
Dr. Sepp Riedmann	1'198	Walo Bertschinger	1'000
Fabienne Grossenbacher	200	Dr. Christoph Bandli	500
Himalaya Tours	1'000		

Outlook

Foundation staff: Currently family members continue to provide their time and services pro bono. The Foundation will sign contracts with its first two permanent staff members at the beginning of the year.

The annual plan to be approved during the forthcoming board meeting largely follows the activity plan of the first 3 years as approved by the CSO authority:

Objective 1: Preserve and maintain the original buildings, temples, structures and artifacts of the Ogyen Choling complex:

- Regular maintenance and minor repair work on all structures as required
- Train a core group of “fire fighters” including staff from the Foundation and selected individuals from the village
- Complete the construction of the residential buildings
- Shift the family currently living in the *shagor* to the new building allow the conversion of the vacated space into guest rooms.
- Re remodeling of the *shagor* by the “OgyenCholing *Heritage* House operator”.

Objective 2: Facilitate and support the performance of traditional religious rituals and cultural observances of the OgyenCholing and the local community:

- Perform regular rituals and make temples available to visitors
- Prepare a project proposal for the restoration of the Shambala painting at the entrance of the main chapel in the temple.

Objective 3: Maintain and manage the museum:

- Shift the weaving exhibits into the *utse*
- Improvement of the existing narratives and translation into Dzongkha.

Objective 4: Provide space and resources for scholarship, meditation and retreat

- Strengthen scholarship program for local students
- Provide space and conduct weekly guided reading programs for local children.

Objective 5: Facilitate entrepreneurship and generate employment for the community and a market for local agricultural and handicraft products

- Regularly operate gift shop with local products
- Encourage weavers and other handicraft producers to generate marketable products.



We wish you all the best for
the year of the Wood Female
Sheep!