



Ogyen Choling Foundation

Annual Report 2016

The year of the Monkey commemorated three important birth years: It was the birth year of Guru Rinpoche (eighth century), who introduced Buddhism to Bhutan as well as the birth year of the great Dzogchen master, Longchen Ramjampa (1308-1363), who is believed to have chosen the site of Ogyen Choling and also named it. It was also the birth year of our Fifth King His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. So it was a year of great significance, reflection and celebration for all Bhutanese and especially for Ogyen Choling.

We started the new year (lunar calendar), by observing the *shudrel –phuensum tsogpa* ceremony (a tradition of offering and sharing, instituted in the 17th century by Shabdrung, the founder of Bhutan) in the temple in the morning and hosting a lunch for the senior citizens from the village (all above the age of sixty). The occasion was made more special as a group of Canadians joined us for the occasion to additionally celebrate Nancy Strickland's (the head of the erstwhile Bhutan Canada Foundation) birthday as she also turned sixty in the Monkey year.

Religious rituals and observances.

Shortly after the new year celebrations, the village observed their annual *choedpa* prayers. The whole village came together for the prayers which was conducted in the Ogyen Choling temple. It is an old practice whereby every year a different village household assumes the lead responsibility for the observance of the ritual.



Choedpa procession leaving the temple for the village

Besides conducting the regular rituals in the temple, this year we also invited five nuns from the Pema Choling Nunnery to conduct the ritual of *choed* ("cutting through", practice of severing the ego-clinging) in the Tara temple in the auspicious sixth month of the lunar calendar.



Nuns performing the ritual of choed

We were happy that we could once again observe the Kangsoe prayers. It was specially encouraging to have the participation of the 22nd generation of the Ogyen Choling family, represented by Shaedrup, the son Gyalsten K. Dorji.

In the past people often borrowed the Kangjur texts (Buddhist canonical scriptures) from Ogyen Choling temple to be read in their houses. Nowadays these texts are widely available and our texts are rarely borrowed. However, this year, a family in upper Tang borrowed all the 108 volumes of the Kangjur text for a reading in their house. They chose to read our texts because they valued the age of these texts which they considered added to their sanctity. The family had to mobilize more than sixty people to carry the texts in an impressive procession.



Shaedrup joining the new generation of flag bearers



Book carriers

The Museum



Students being introduced to the museum

Visitors to the Museum

There was again an increase in the numbers of foreign visitors from 1500 in the year 2015 to 1708 in the year 2016. A high ranking in the Trip advisor (where we are ranked second for “things to do in Jakar”) may have contributed to this increase during a year when the number of tourist traveling to Bumthang district had significantly decreased. During the year we also introduced a nominal fee for Bhutanese visitors. There were 342 local paying visitors. Students are not charged.

We are gratified that more and more schools and educational institutes recognize Ogyen Choling Museum as a worthwhile place to visit and now send their students here regularly. For example, the scouts of Bumthang had their summer camp in Misethang Central School and over three days, 220 scouts visited the museum.



Scouts salute in front of the museum

This year Ogyen Choling was honored by the visits of their Majesties the Royal Queen Mothers. Her Majesty Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuck came in November. Her Majesty Ashi Tshering Yangdon accompanied by Yum Sonam Chuki, mother of Gyaltsuen Her Majesty the Queen Jetsun Pema, visited the museum and temple in the same month. Included in the royal entourages were notable personalities such as the Dasho Dzungda, Dasho Drangpon and the Director General of the Department of Culture as well as the representatives of the local government.

Voices from the visitors book

"I am Tenzin R. Penjor. I love the museum and uncle guide! I am 7 years old (5th July)"

"This is a must for all visitors to Bhutan. You will learn so much about Bhutan's history and culture. Forget about Game of Thrones, this is real living history. Thank you so much it was truly wonderful. Best wishes"- Alan & Cieran Doran, Dublin, Ireland. (3rd. September)

"In a far flung place like Ogyen Choling Tang Bhutan, your passion to rediscover your roots, preserve with your dedication the fascinating family heritage, thereby giving us mortals an insight into Bhutan's history – has made our day! We will certainly spread by word of mouth to all and sundry to take time out and ensure they visit here!! My hats off, kudos to you."- A. Venkat Krishnan, New Delhi India (13.September).

A special visitor to the museum and temple was Lama Thubten Rinpoche from Utah, USA. Originally from Guam, Lama Thubten is a professor at the Utah university and an accomplished Buddhist practitioner. The community members who gathered to receive blessings from him were more than happy with the easy access to him and enjoyed his spontaneity and warmth.



Lama Thubten meeting the villagers

Improvements to the museum

Throughout the year small repairs and improvements were made in the museum. The use of a vacuum cleaner has made the cleaning and dusting much easier. The work of filling in the gaps in between the planks in all the rooms was finally completed and has proven to significantly reduce the dust in the rooms. The exhibits with the yatra fabrics and the masks got a facelift after the display cupboards were added. We are hopeful that over time we will be able to have display cupboards for most of the artifacts.

Cloth production exhibit

Finally the cloth production exhibit could be opened on the ground floor of the Utse. The opening coincided with a group of French visitors who were specially interested in the art of weaving and textiles. Women from the village demonstrated the process of spinning, dyeing, wrapping and weaving. This exhibit is the 22nd thematic display in the museum.

Scholarship, early learning.

Support to libraries in the schools of Bumthang could be continued thanks to Mr. Abraham Phillipose of Kerala. Mr. Abraham was a colleague of Kunzang Choden when they taught in Jakar School in the 1980's. Mr. Abraham has been sending books to the Foundation after his visit to Ogyen Choling in February 2016. The Foundation will use the last consignments and other books to start a small borrowing library for the children in Ogyen Choling.

In conjunction with the regular Sunday reading programme, Yoko Ishigami and her friend Satomi, Japanese artists based in Thimphu, conducted a two day workshop on making crafts in March. The attendees ranged from pre-school children to college students. It was enjoyed by all participants.



At the end of October artist Pema Tshering (also known as “Tintin”), one of the founding members of Volunteers Artists Studio in Thimphu (VAST-Bhutan) spent two days with the children from the village teaching them drawing and painting. The children enjoyed the intensive art classes.



The regular Sunday reading program benefited from the enthusiastic participation of occasional visitors.



Documenting and inventories

Documenting and making inventories of the artifacts of the Foundation is an ongoing process. The preparation of detailed records for all the different artifacts and other items belonging to the Foundation was discussed during the last three board meetings. Over the course of the year we realized that our initial expectations were far too ambitious and that it will take years till we will have detailed records. Nevertheless, good progress was made in terms of understanding the complexities involved as well as starting to generate some of the lists and inventories. Such as:

- Most of the books have been digitalized with copies stored in the British library (this task was carried out by Dr. Karma Phunthso's digital project). Copies of the electronic files were handed over to Ogyen Choling Foundation.
- An initial list of all museum items has been prepared by Dolma Roder in 2015. The list was further refined during 2016.
- The Culture Department informed us that the inventory of the temple artifacts in Ogyen Choling are part of the master copy for all the temples of Bumthang and that we can make photo copies/ or scan the 100 pages pertaining to Ogyen Choling. We will use this record to systematically make an updated inventory and also make a version in English.

We were fortunate to have Ms. Monique Filsnoel as a consultant to document the temple paintings in October–November. Ms. Filsnoel, assisted by the temple care taker (Nawang Jamba), the development officer (Kelszang), and a trustee (Ugyen Rinzin), worked systematically and diligently to photograph and measure the wall paintings, the statues and thangkas. In the process of documenting, the altars were also cleaned out thoroughly and the glass panels that covered the altars were removed to have a better view of the statues. This has given the altars a new and pleasing look. Monique's husband, Paul helped with the photography at a later stage.



From 12th October to the 13th November I stayed at Ogyen Choling. Every day I worked in the temple carrying out the documentation of the rich iconography on the walls. The main purpose of my work was to make photographic records of all the visual art of the temple, the mural paintings as well as the sculptures and also to document the collection of thangkas. Together with the wonderful local team we opened the window frames, dismantling the carved wood frames, removing the sculptures (not the larger ones) to clean them and also to repair them when necessary. As for the thangkas, they were measured, photographed and assigned a number, all the details are being compiled in an inventory to create a catalogue. Once free from their coat of dust, the sculptures were returned on their shelves and a unanimous decision was taken to not replace the central window glass panels to keep the large sculptures open to the worshippers and visitors.

My sincere and warmest thanks go to the Ogyen Choling Foundation and to the Ogyen Choling team.

Monique Filsnoël, PhD Candidate, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London

The temple

Repair of the temple stairs: The steep and potentially dangerous stairs leading to the upper floor in the temple has long been a matter of concern. The steps were worn out and slippery from more than a hundred years of use and required attentive maneuvering even for local visitors. During the visit of the Home Secretary, there was an incident which could have been serious. This definitely added to the urgency of addressing the problem. We are happy that we found a solution which allowed us to keep the original stairs by replacing the most worn out parts with wood strips and changing the inclination of the stairs. The repaired stairs feel a little hard on the feet right now but will soften with age and use.



Room for butter lamps built into the corner of the shagor wall – and making lamps ready for offering

The structure for the butter lamps could be completed before the end of the year. The shed for the fire engine was also completed and the fire engine is now housed there.

The book shelves adjoining the main altar had moved over the years because of occasional earthquakes and tremors. Spaces had developed in between the walls and the cupboards that allowed for mice activity causing some damage to the book covers, but fortunately not to the texts themselves. The texts were moved out and metal plates were used to cover the walls and new shelves were installed. The old wooden doors were replaced with glass frames so that visitors and devotees can now view the texts. All the book covers were washed and are now being repaired by the village tailor.



Renovations, constructions

The family of Ugyen Rinzin moved into their new house at the beginning of 2016. This made it possible to start remodeling work in the south wing of the shagor.

We were lucky to have a second input by a Swiss sanitary specialist early in the year. Mr Nico Lauper, who has just completed his professional training as a plumber in Switzerland, could work with the Ogyen Choling Foundation for six weeks. He continued the installation of bathrooms, and other sanitary facilities. Despite his young age, his professional skills and his ability to lead, teach and motivate young Bhutanese assistants resulted in excellent work progress. He leaves behind a Bhutanese assistant from the valley whom he trained to a level where he can continue simple installation and maintenance work on his own. Unfortunately we still could not install the pump which should boost the water pressure. Presently the water pressure is enough for all the rooms but when there is high occupancy the pressure will be too low in the shagor rooms to enjoy a good shower.

My Time in Bhutan

It's a year ago that I left Switzerland for Bhutan to work for 6 weeks as a plumber for the Ogyen Choling Foundation. I had to lead and train the local boys how to build sanitary facilities for the guests rooms. It was a challenge for me, a young man of 19 years old, not only with regards to the work but also being the first time alone out of Switzerland. It was also the first time in my life in an unfamiliar environment with people I've never met before. I was pleasantly surprised when I got to know my local co-workers, they were so friendly and willing to learn new ways and techniques in plumbing. We were a good team together and I really enjoyed that because I could see that they were happy and eager to learn. Bhutan is one of the most beautiful countries I have ever been to and I met some of the most pleasant people I know. I cannot find the right words to express my joy at one of the best things I've done in my life.



Nico Lauper, Sanitary installer/plumber, Waedenswil



The first of the two stairs leading to rooms in the south wing of the shagor could be completed, providing access to three guest rooms. The wood for the second stairs is at site being seasoned. Good progress was made with the structures for the new kitchen.

Guest house operation

The Ogyen Choling Heritage House officially started operations on 1st February. The spring season started rather slowly making it possible for the team of local recruits to have some extra time to learn aspects of housekeeping, cooking and serving. Many visitors expressed their appreciation for the facilities in general and especially for the sanitary installations.

The regular lease payments from the guest house to the foundation will provide a substantial financial boost for the foundation.

Big and Small Projects

Boundary wall/play ground

With the major work on the building completed, we hope to seriously work on improving the entrance area which will include a proper parking area. The boundary wall which is being build will enclose the chortens, to protect them from stray cattle. The enclosure will also be a protected space for the elderly from the village to circumambulate the chortens and a playground for the smaller children with a swing, a seesaw and maybe a slide.

Repairing the Chorten

The chorten between the shagor and the guest house was in a poor state. The wooden beams under the stone roof were rotten and the roof was in disrepair, allowing more water leakage into the chorten. The wooden beams were replaced and the stone roof was redone. It was finally painted.



Residencies

Over the year, minor work was continuously carried out on 3 of the 4 apartments belonging to members of the Ogyen Choling family:

- Work on the apartment belonging to Gyalsten could be completed to a level that the facilities could finally be used. The apartment is currently accommodating Foundation staff, Kelsang
- Only minor work was carried out for the apartment of Kunzang Choden. Although the apartment is being used there is still much to be completed. Except for the surrounding landscaping work, all remaining work in the house will be financed by the owner.
- The apartment of Sonam Wangchuk is still not completed. Thanks to the flexibility of the owner, the remaining work can be carried out later based on the availability of finances and labour.

Community forest

The Ogyen Choling community was happy to receive an extension of 10 years lease for their community forest. The social forestry program is important for the community providing easy access to forestry products and at the same time giving the community the opportunity to build capacities for community based resource management.

Other information

Tang Road Black-topped

2016 was a year for unhappy road conditions at a national level. Travelers on the national highway complained and griped about the terrible condition of the road between Wangdiphodrang and Bumthang, but for us in Tang, it was a different story. The Tang farm road which was dreaded by all travelers was finally black topped up to the block centre at Misethang. This has made it much easier for visitors and pilgrims to reach us. We dare to dream that one day the road will be improved all the way to Ogyen Choling.

Reporting: During the last Board meeting held in January 2017 it was decided that for more timely updates and reporting we should switch to having bi-annual reports rather than annual reports.

Financial

Thanks to the generous donations from friends and well wishers of Ogyen Choling and the income from the museum and leasing the guest house facilities, the income for 2016 added up to over Nu 1.6 million. With this, our income was enough to cover all the expenses, in spite of considerable investments for construction activities. This is the first year that we have moved out of the negative figures.

A very generous anonymous donation received from Switzerland helped to reduce the balance payment required for the fire mitigation project to less than US\$ 8000. We are very pleased with the overall financial status. With further reductions in the construction activities in the coming years and continuous income from the guest house lease we are optimistic that more resources will become available for community based projects, educational projects and also reducing the liabilities.

Donations received in Bhutan (we value all donations but due to space only amounts of Nu 5000 and above are listed individually here)

Source	Nu
HM Gyalum Tshering Pem	10000
Adrian Chan	10000
Ang Hui Hong	6700
B. Podwardhan (Goa)	5775
Mrs & Mr Hamilton (through Bhutan Foundation)	166575
Diepak Elmer	6500
Dominique Bastien	14750
Leslei Daren	6700
Betsy	6700
Erica Nobs and Silvia Baitieri	13160
Fabienne Grossenbacher	13400
Francoise Pommaret	5000
Himalaya Tours (Marina)	12060
Hon Justice Christoph. Bandy	32900

Source	Nu
Kaspar &Regula Mettler	67000
Kunzang Choden	50000
Monika Kraemer	37250
Monique Filsnoel	15000
Roger &Nancy Harmon	11220
Shejung project	22000
Swan Koh	5000
Matthew Theuri	5000
Vincent Denecker	36875
Willi & Eva Steiner	67000
Other donors	20640
Donation box	61720
Total donations	708'925

Donations received from Switzerland (used towards fire mitigation project)

Source	CHF
Anonymous (Donation inspired by HH Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche)	10000
Anna Schluep – Roder	200
Kurt Lenherr	200

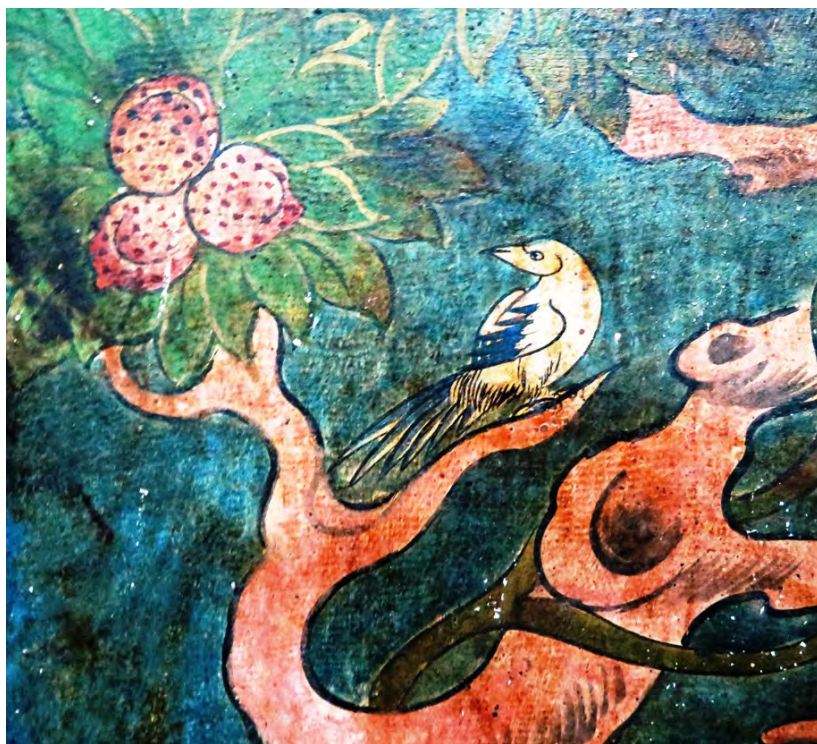
Summary of income and expenses

Income	Amount in Nu
Donations	708'925
Entrance fee museum	348'440
Compensation grassland	113'000
Lease guest house Jan-June	300'000
Others	191'896
Total	1'662'261

Expenses	Amount in Nu
Staff & employment	253'667
Scholarship, community	33'296
Construction material	573'542
Construction labour, consultants	774'242
Others	24'154
Total	1'658'901

The Foundation also would like to acknowledge all the help received in kind. Appreciation is hereby expressed to the board members for their time and other support; the continuous architectural advice by Fritz Baumgartner; the donations in kind such as lighting materials from Paul Sochaczewski & Monique Filsnoel, the floor heating elements by Rudolf & Heidi Roder and the continuous flow of books from Abraham Philipose.

With this bird from a wall painting in the Tara temple we wish you all the very best for the year of the FEMALE FIRE BIRD.



We would like to convey our gratitude to all our donors and friends. Your goodwill and support have brought us this far. Thank you!

For further information consult:

www.oling.bt

www.facebook.com/Ogyencholing

or write to kunzangcr@gmail.com

For information on how to make donations write to wrjakar@gmx.ch