



Ogyen Choling Foundation

Annual Newsletter

2024

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As we reflect on the year 2024, we feel a sense of gratitude for being able to accomplish most of the targets we had set out for the Foundation and much more. As usual, in the first quarter of the year, we observed the routine annual rituals and smoothly phased into the second quarter of the year. The activities related to the Foundation and the Heritage House picked up momentum in the second quarter. Despite the monsoon rains which caused damages in many parts of the Himalayas in the third quarter, we were blessed to be unaffected, so we could continue our activities and welcome international tourists, pilgrims and students to the museum and the temple. The fourth quarter of the year saw an unprecedented numbers of visitors to the museum and the occupancy of the Heritage House was particularly good.

This annual report is a summary of all the activities and achievements already reported in the three quarterly reports. The last quarter, October-December, will be reported in more detail. The most significant input during this quarter was the completed installation of a solar photovoltaic system providing a backup power supply. Thanks to this, we can now be assured that we will no longer have to request our visitors to the museum to use their cell phone torches to experience the museum.

MAINTANENCE AND IMPROVEMENT OF STRUCTURES

Most of the maintenance was carried out by the permanent staff without any financial implications. The only expenditures were for materials and equipment.

Two technical professionals from the Zhenphen Solar Company worked on the installation of solar panels with the Foundation staff for 10 days, and we are happy to note that the power generated from it is now used in the guest house and the museum. We are grateful to the donors who contributed the material. In the process we not only were familiarized with the technicalities but also the bureaucratic procedures for initiating green power alternatives.

Panelling work on some of the most vulnerable rooms in the utse were carried out. These rooms which were exposed to the wind and dust are now not only warm and dust-free, but it also improved the room aesthetically and the artifacts are more visible. We hope to continue panelling more rooms in the future.

The chorten near the temple was repaired and painted.

Other maintenance activities included fixing rat damage to a bathroom water drainage system, checking and repairing leakages in parts of the roof, building a roof over veranda near the kitchen, completing the wall leading to the main gate and installing a permanent metal gate.



Installation of the solar panels

RITUALS AND TEMPLE

The various rituals carried out over the year are described in the quarterly reports. We are pleased that all the traditional rituals and prayers could be carried out starting with the ceremony for the Longchen Kuchoed in late January and culminating with the Kangsoe and Choggay Lhamo in October.

Kangsoe: In the time-honoured tradition, the annual ritual of Kangsoe could be conducted successfully to everybody's satisfaction. It is always heartening to see the community come together during the prayers. Despite his advanced age and his bad knee, the lama from Thowadrak kindly agreed to lead the prayers for three days. We hope he will be able to continue to perform the prayers for many more years.

Tormas: The permanent tormas (rGyungtor) in the innermost sanctum of the goenkhang in the main temple had disintegrated with age. These tormas (ritual cakes) are the representation of the 19 different deities that the family honours. The last set may have been made nearly fifty years ago by the last hierarch, Trulku Nuden Dorji. The new ritual cakes were moulded by professionals in Thimphu and installed in the goenkhang.



Dasho Dawa unpacking the Tormas

Support to local festivals: Following an old tradition, on the first day of the local festivals of Namkai Rabney and Chojam Rabney, the pazaps, the warriors, come to Ogyen Choling manor, early in the morning, singing a song describing the physical features and the symbolism of the manor. The warriors, numbering anywhere from 10 to 17 men, dressed in combat gear, come into the courtyard in a procession and perform the sword dance. The original purpose of the procession was to invite a family member or a representative of the family to preside over the festival. The warriors are then invited for tea (suja) and buttered rice (dresel) followed by drinks. Over the years this tradition became a cursory practice, performed without much excitement. Now, the Foundation is making efforts to keep this tradition of the festival alive and relevant. Besides the customary tea and drinks, the Foundation offers cash incentives to the warriors and the households which sponsor the festival.



Pazaps entering the courtyard

MUSEUM

Solar panels: The energy from the newly installed solar panels were connected to the museum and this guarantees a permanent uninterrupted source of power to the museum.

Thangka exhibit: Some headway has been made on the thangka exhibit. After in-depth discussions with the staff, board members and experts we are in the process of finalizing the concept of the display room and the items to exhibited.

Swords: The rusty and damaged swords on display in the museum got a new lease on their lives after the assistant museum curator spent many hours cleaning and polishing each sword.

Visitors: The roaring year of the dragon, 2024 was a year that introduced many visitors, pilgrims, scholars, Buddhist practitioners and scholars/students to the establishment. We recorded over 2833 international visitors, which is an increase of 50% compared to 2023. While we welcomed the repeat visitors with gratitude, we were also delighted to see many new faces.



Visitors to the museum

SCHOLARS AND RESEARCH

The Khangrab Primary school included a day in Ogyen Choling as a part of their reading week in September. The students visited the museum and then had a reading and an interactive session with the Foundation staff.



Students of Khangrab Primary School

Dr. Monique Filsnoel and her partner Paul came during the Kangsoe and spent time to update the information on the wall paintings in the utse lhakhang and take additional photographs of the wall paintings. This work will add to the already existing documentation of Dr. Filsnoel on the temples of Ogyen Choling.

The visits and contributions by the following scholars were already highlighted in the quarterly report:

- Dr. Ariana Maki, Associate Director Tibet Centre and Bhutan initiative, University of Virginia
- Dr. Karma Phuntsho, Founding Director of Loden Foundation and Board Member of Ogyen Choling Foundation
- Khenpo Sonam Bumder from the Central Monastic Body and Lopon Dorji Gyalsten from the College of Language and Culture (Trongsa)
- Mrs. Namita Dalela (wife of HE Sudhakar Dalela, the Ambassador of India to Bhutan), textile expert.

EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Unfortunately, the status of the ECCD is presently unclear, as there may not be enough students to justify the running of the facility. Unless there are adequate numbers of children, we may have to close the facility for 2025.

The routine activities of supporting selected students in the Khangrab Primary School and providing prizes for academic achievements for the Khangrab Primary School and Tang Central School could be continued. This year, to add some variation, we could add books and Swiss knives in addition to the cash prizes.



ECCD students at the closing ceremony

OTHER NEWS

Ogyen Choling was chosen by UNDP Bhutan as a venue for the UN partnership segment entitled “We the Women”. Ten senior girl students from Tang Central School were invited to engage in a discussion on women after a dialogue with the Executive Director of Foundation and a visiting student from Thimphu.

We are grateful to Dr. Pema Gyamtsho, Director General of ICIMOD (International Centre for integrated Mountain Development) for bringing some of the international Board Members of ICIMOD to Ogyen Choling for an excursion after their general annual meeting in Thimphu.



Participants at the UNDP “We the women” dialogue

FINANCIAL

We recorded an income of 6.2. million. The major sources of income were: lease payments from guest house (3.6 million) donations (1.2 million), and museum tickets (1.2. million). Thanks to the positive balance it was possible to reduce our liabilities by 2.3 million and allowing us to start investing in a first instalment towards the trust fund being mandated by the Government. The materials for the solar photovoltaic system were provided as a gift by two major donors.

DONATIONS RECEIVED.

Donations up to Nu 10'000

Diane Stadelmann, Claudia Zingg, Daniel and Ruth Schwitter, Steven Sonnenberg, Dhondup D. Roder, Armin Kobel, Bettina Steinhauser, Dechen Sangmo, Sandine and Owen Gueydon, Dolma C. Roder Dechen W. Roder

Donations Nu 10'000-50'000

Monika Kraemer, Vincent Denecker, Francoise Pommaret, Reto and Gerda Ludwig, Fritz Loppacher, Eddie & group, Slovakian group, Acife Kenny, Peggy Sun, T.E. Strikland Fabienne Grossenbacher, Windhorse group, Nancy Strickland

Donations Nu 50'000 - 100'000

Dr. Pema Gyamtsho, Dominique Bastien (through Loden Foundation), Richard and Rosmarie Frey

Donations above Nu 100'000

Doug and Tsognie Hamilton (through the Bhutan Foundation), Gerard and Ann Tardy, Dr Lars Heine, Erick Rinner

We also take the opportunity to thank all who have supported our activities over the year. We would especially like to mention:

- Edy Wirth and Steve Hiscock for their input towards the solar photovoltaic project
- Dasho Dawa Ex MP of Chokhor/Tang for facilitating the production and delivery of the permanent tormas
- Pa Chiao Ting for the donation of thangka prints of Yamantaka and Bhavachakra which she painted and for the badges of Ogyen Choling which will be sold at the souvenir shop of Ogyen Choling.

We would like to extend our best wishes and express our appreciation for your support and good wishes for Ogyen Choling Foundation. We hope that you will continue to remember us just as we will keep you in our thoughts in friendship and gratitude.

Tashi Delek

Team of Ogyen Choling Foundation



A daily scene of the choughs coming home to roost under the roof of the Nagtshang every evening