

Pema Wangchuk

**MANAGING LIVING RELIGIOUS HERITAGE:
TAMZHING MONASTERY IN BUMTHANG, BHUTAN**

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Central European University

Vienna

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(Bhutan)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Pema Wangchuk**, candidate for the MA degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

The academic research on the cultural heritage of Tamzhing Monastery is very limited and focused on specific elements of the monastery. There is no critical study on the monastery's heritage carried out yet. This thesis is an attempt to critical investigation into the current understanding of the Tamzhing Monastery's heritage. The study is based on the literature review, field visits and semi-structured interviews conducted with the members of the local communities of Tamzhing Monastery as well as relevant heritage professionals and experts in Bhutan. An investigation is carried out employing the living heritage approach. Within this approach, particular attention is given to the interconnectedness and interdependency of the tangible and intangible elements, associated sacred sites, and most importantly the associated communities of Tamzhing Monastery. In addition, Bhutan's current protection and management system employed by the central heritage institution is investigated to understand the applicability, shortcomings, and opportunities for Tamzhing Monastery.

The central discussion in this study is the reconceptualization of the Tamzhing Monastery from a 'heritage site' to a 'living religious heritage' to present its cultural heritage in its entirety. The *Phala Choedpa* Festival and *Tamzhing* temple complex, the two significant elements of the monastery, are discussed in depth to make arguments in the thesis. Special emphasis is placed on the agency and the importance of the associated communities for the management of the monastery as a living religious heritage. Furthermore, the continuity of Tamzhing Monastery as a Buddhist monastery, connections between all the associated communities, and preservation of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival and temple complex are emphasized. The study ends with recommendations for formulating a contextualized management plan for Tamzhing Monastery.

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This research would not have been possible without the constant guidance and support of my supervisor, Professor (Dr) Alice Choyke who had rendered her valuable time and knowledge. She has been an integral part of this journey, and for that, I am forever grateful. I am grateful to Professor (Dr) József Laszlovszky, Günhan Börekçi, Anastasia Felcher, Zsuzsanna Arendas and Eszter Spät for their continued support and consultations which have been valuable in shaping my thesis. I want to thank my classmates at CHSP (2022-2024 academic year) for their valuable feedback and comments that helped shape my thesis.

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I dedicate this thesis to everyone.

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Introduction

The introduction of the heritage registration and designation system, as well as the concept of a cultural landscape for the protection and management of cultural heritage in Bhutan,¹ has fostered the national effort for the implementation of management plans for the heritage sites deemed to be important. To date, only two management plans have been ratified and implemented.² The slow progress of the management plan implementation along with a lack of local heritage expertise have left a significant gap for Bhutan's remaining heritage sites which are in constant conflict with modernization and change. Thus, this academic research focused on a specific monastery and marks a scholarly effort to contribute to the management of one of the nationally important living religious heritages in Bhutan.

The thesis focuses on *Tamzhing Lhondrup Choling*, famously known as *Tamzhing Monastery* in *Bumthang* district for scholarly inquiry. In 2021 while carrying out the inventory of religious heritage sites in *Bumthang* as an architect mandated to the preservation of built heritage under the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development (central heritage institution), Ministry of Home Affairs of Bhutan, I realized that the true significance of these sites is the combination of tangible and intangible elements. This knowledge and awareness made me question my assumptions and understanding of heritage prompting a deeper exploration into the interconnectedness of tangible and intangible elements. A significant outcome for me is the broadening of my professional ethics as a built heritage conservationist towards 'heritage community'—a conceptual shift I discuss in the fourth chapter.

¹ Department of Culture, "Cultural Heritage Bill of Bhutan" (2016), <http://departmentofculture.gov.bt/en/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Cultural-Heritage-Bill-of-Bhutan-ver.-2016AUGenglish.pdf>.

² I discuss these management plans in the third chapter.

Focused on built heritage in heritage practice, I have observed that a huge aspect of intangible elements is missed in the subsequent preparation of the conservation or management schemes, an argument I raise in the third chapter. Currently, understanding of the Tamzhing Monastery is based on the temple complex sidelining the annual religious festival called the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa* which is an important component for both the monastery and the local community. Thus, I investigate how the tangible and intangible elements of Tamzhing Monastery are interlinked and explore how they should be included holistically in the management plan. Henceforth for clarity and consistency for the readers, throughout the thesis, I will be using the name ‘*Tamzhing Monastery*’ instead of ‘*Tamzhing Lhondrup Choling*’. I am making this conscious choice to allow readers to immediately recognize that the thesis has a larger scope than just dealing with the physical structure—it also incorporates the tangible-intangible heritage and participation of all associated local communities.

Due to the significance of the founder, Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) and Tamzhing Monastery for Bhutan and Himalayan Buddhist communities, several literature and scholarships are available. In not-so-strict chronological order, I will list them under broad categories of founder, temple and festival, and briefly explain the information they provide. Karma Wangchuk’s book entitled ‘*Buddhism: The Spiritual Lineage of Dzogchen Masters*’, published in 1988 provides accounts of the Pema Lingpa as *dzogchen* (great completeness)³ masters showcasing his religious prowess.⁴ Sarah Harding’s translated book ‘*The Life and Revelation of Pema Lingpa*’, published in 2003, besides the legacy of Pema Lingpa provides his regional influence.⁵ The recent work of Karma Phuntsho

³ “What Is Dzogchen?,” accessed May 7, 2024, <https://studybuddhism.com/en/tibetan-buddhism/tantra/mahamudra-dzogchen/what-is-dzogchen>.

⁴ Karma Wangchuk, *Buddhism: The Spiritual Lineage of Dzogchen Masters* (Anmol Publication Pvt. LTD., 1998), 103–26.

⁵ Sarah Harding, *The Life and Revelation of Pema Lingpa* (Snow Lion Publications, 2003).

‘*The History of Bhutan*’ published in 2013 provides the religious and cultural legacy of Pema Lingpa in the history of Bhutan.⁶

Michael Aris provides his commentary and observational analysis of the *Tamzhing* temple and its mural paintings. In his article, he refers to the autobiography of Pema Lingpa in ‘*The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by its Founder*’ published in 1988.⁷ Pierre Pichard’s report titled ‘*UNESCO Mission to Tamzhing Monastery, Bhutan*’ from 2004 provides important information on the structural changes to the temple structure and the surroundings.⁸ This is the first attempt to study the architecture of the Tamzhing Monastery. Ariana Maki in her dissertation, ‘*The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study*’, published in 2012 provides insight into the mural iconography and the whole mural program of the earliest structure of *Tamzhing* temple complex.⁹ In addition to the main focus, Maki also provides valuable information on the other elements of Tamzhing Monastery, which my thesis explores in depth. In 2013, Tamzhing temple’s wall painting study and conservation was carried out by the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development of Bhutan in collaboration with the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London.¹⁰ The official report provides a detailed account of the scientific analysis of the mural paintings, their chronology, the status of preservation, and the probable development of the temple structures.

Yeshe Lhendrup’s research on the ‘*Tamzhing Phala Choedpa: The Annual Festival of Tamzhing Monastery*’ in 2016 provides information about the significance of the annual religious festival

⁶ Karma Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan* (Random House India, 2013), 160–75.

⁷ Michael Aris, “The Temple-Palace of gTam-Zhing as Described by Its Founder,” *Arts Asiatiques* 43, no. 1 (1988): 33–39, <https://doi.org/10.3406/arasi.1988.1234>.

⁸ Pierre Pichard, “UNESCO Mission to Tamzhing Monastery, Bhutan,” July 2, 2004.

⁹ Ariana Maki, “A Visual Transmission: Bhutanese Art & Artists from the 17th-19th Centuries,” n.d.

¹⁰ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, “Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery,” Project Report, 2013.

and the mode of transmission of the knowledge of the mask dances.¹¹ Thinley Jamtsho provides data on the significance of the most popular mask dance of the festival, the ‘*Peling Phag Cham*’ published in 2011.¹² Similarly, Phuntsho Tashi provides an account of the significance of the most sacred mask dances from the festival ‘*The Sacred Dance of Peling Ging Sum*’ published in 2011.¹³

These sources need to be harmonized to understand Tamzhing Monastery as a living religious heritage. However, the imperative roles of the associated communities such as the monastic community, ancestral family, and village communities, all integral components of the monastery’s heritage are largely missing in the above available literature. As a result, the monastery’s cultural heritage is presented neither holistically nor accounts for agencies of these associated communities. In addition, no literature critically examines the cultural heritage of Tamzhing Monastery and the conservation approaches practiced. This necessitates reconceptualizing Tamzhing Monastery’s cultural heritage addressing the multi-faceted issues faced by the monastery. Therefore, this dissertation represents an inquiry into the critical examination of the re-interpretation of the cultural heritage of Tamzhing Monastery along with the examination of the conservation practices at the site today. Finally, I will provide recommendations for the formulation of a management plan for Tamzhing Monastery as a living religious heritage in the form of guiding principles. In addition, specific recommendations will also be provided based on the issues outlined in the thesis.

¹¹ Yeshe Lhendup, “Tamzhing Phala Choedpa: Annual Festival of Tamzhing Monastery,” ichLinks, 2016, <https://www.ichlinks.com/>.

¹² Thinley Jamtsho, “པེལ་ཕག་ཇམ་མཁའ་ (Peling Phag Cham),” in འབྲུག་གི་དངོས་མེད་ལམ་གྱི་ལྗོངས་ (Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bhutan), ed. Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi, Singye Samdrup, and Ariana Maki (Paro, Bhutan: The National Museum of Bhutan, n.d.), 209–18.

¹³ Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi, “The Sacred Dance of Peling Ging Sum,” *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, no. 24 (2011): 55–68, https://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/jbs/pdf/JBS_24_03.pdf.

Research questions

In light of the above inquiries and the aim of providing recommendations for the formulation of a contextually driven management plan for Tamzhing Monastery, the following set of questions must be answered:

- 1) What is the appropriate approach to interpreting and presenting the Tamzhing Monastery as a part of Bhutan's cultural heritage? How are the tangible and intangible elements interlinked with each other? What additional elements in the monastery's vicinity must be considered in the management plans beyond the physical fabric of the monastery's structures?
- 2) What roles does Tamzhing Monastery play in the social cohesion of the communities? What are the different roles of the local communities in maintaining the monastery's living heritage and ensuring its sustainability?
- 3) What are the issues and challenges faced in practice by Tamzhing Monastery due to the forces of modernization and the heritage protection system?
- 4) Are there regulations or policy gaps between the central heritage institution and local understandings and needs? How can they be bridged?
- 5) What are the measures required to safeguard the annual religious festival? And how can the central heritage institution support the community to safeguard the annual religious festival?
- 6) What are the understandings of the different stakeholders on the conservation approaches (murals and temple structures) and what are suitable conservation approaches for Tamzhing Monastery as part of living religious heritage?

Methodology and structure of the thesis

Three field visits and semi-structured interviews represent the primary research approach. This approach helped to contribute to the available literature by including contemporary realities.¹⁴ The study of the architectural history of the temple complex and locating sacred sites were possible using this approach. Further, interactions with the local communities (the monastic community, the ancestral family, and members of village communities) and heritage professionals who are associated with the monastery provided insights into the complexities as well as the challenges present at the site.

The literature review concentrates on the historical accounts of the Tamzhing Monastery since its foundation and few recent reports until 2014. This approach contributes to the understanding of the development and socio-cultural change of Tamzhing Monastery. The official reports and documents help understand the heritage-making of Tamzhing Monastery. The analysis of official documents and the institutional framework for the protection and management of cultural heritage in Bhutan is carried out to understand the conservation practices and identify any shortcomings that need to be addressed or provisions that can be included in the management plan.

For the formulation of the recommendations, I have largely built on the ‘living heritage approach’ advocated by Gamini Wijesuriya. Wijesuriya provides a comprehensive understanding of the living heritage approach developed during the ICCROM 2003 Forum on the theme “Conservation of Living Religious Heritage”¹⁵ and the ICCROM 2013 Forum on the theme “Asian Buddhist

¹⁴ Three field visits were undertaken for the purpose of this thesis. In addition, earlier visits were made as an heritage professional and also as a pilgrim many years ago.

¹⁵ Herb Stovel et al., eds, *Conservation of Living Religious Heritage: Papers from the ICCROM 2003 Forum on Living Religious Heritage: Conserving the Sacred*, ICCROM Conservation Studies 3 (Rome: ICCROM, 2005).

Heritage: Conserving the Sacred”.¹⁶ Within this approach, I focus on the tangible-intangible interlinkage and the role and stake of local communities aimed at the continuity of use, connection of communities and care in the management of the monastery.

The first chapter presents the biography of Tamzhing Monastery through its historical layering and the impacts of socio-cultural changes over time. The complex network of communities associated with various facets of life at the monastery is also presented. This includes the monastic community, the *Tamzhing Choeje* (ancestral family), village communities and the most recent addition, the central heritage institution (the State).

In the second chapter, I analyze the stakes of the associated communities and their potential roles in the management plan. Further, I analyze the interplay between the tangible and intangible elements within the monastery. Using the data collected from the field surveys and interviews, I identify the issues and challenges faced by the monastery.

In the third chapter, I examine Bhutan’s cultural institutions and protection policies to contextualize Tamzhing Monastery within Bhutan’s current cultural heritage protection and management framework. Further, building upon the analysis of the second chapter, I focus on the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa* Festival and the physical temple, more specifically the mural paintings, to understand the pertinent issues and probable solutions to ensure its sustainable future. I chose these two elements specifically as they represent the most important religious-social elements of the monastery.

¹⁶ Gamini Wijesuriya, ed., *Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred*, ICCROM-CHA, Conservation Forum Series 1 (ICCROM-CHA International Forum on Conservation, Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred, Rome, Italy: ICCROM, 2017), http://asc.mcu.ac.th/cafe/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/asianbuddhist_web.pdf.

The fourth chapter marks the culmination of the previous three chapters. Based on my findings and analyses, I provide recommendations for the formulation of a management plan for Tamzhing Monastery as a living religious heritage. In addition, specific solutions are provided for the safeguarding of the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa* Festival and the conservation of the mural paintings.

Chapter 1: Biography of Tamzhing Monastery

Before delving into the discussion of the heritage of the Tamzhing Monastery, it is important to understand the context of the monastery that is in focus. Thus, in this chapter, I will present the biography of the Tamzhing Monastery—its historical and contemporary significance. It will be presented through its historical changes vis-à-vis the changes of the associated socio-cultural fabric. In addition, the current significant connections of the monastery with the network of communities present at the site will be presented. The primary goal of this chapter is to present the complexities and the living nature of the site. A more in-depth analysis is reserved for the remaining chapters.

1.1. Location of Tamzhing Monastery



Figure 1. Map showing the location of Bhutan and highlighting Bumthang district in the map of Bhutan. (modified by author)
Rear- (Source: https://koryogroup.com/ckeditor_assets/pictures/810/content_bhutanworldmap.png, accessed January 21, 2024)
Front- (source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/upload/ae/bf/74/districts-of-bhutan-map.png>, accessed January 21, 2024)

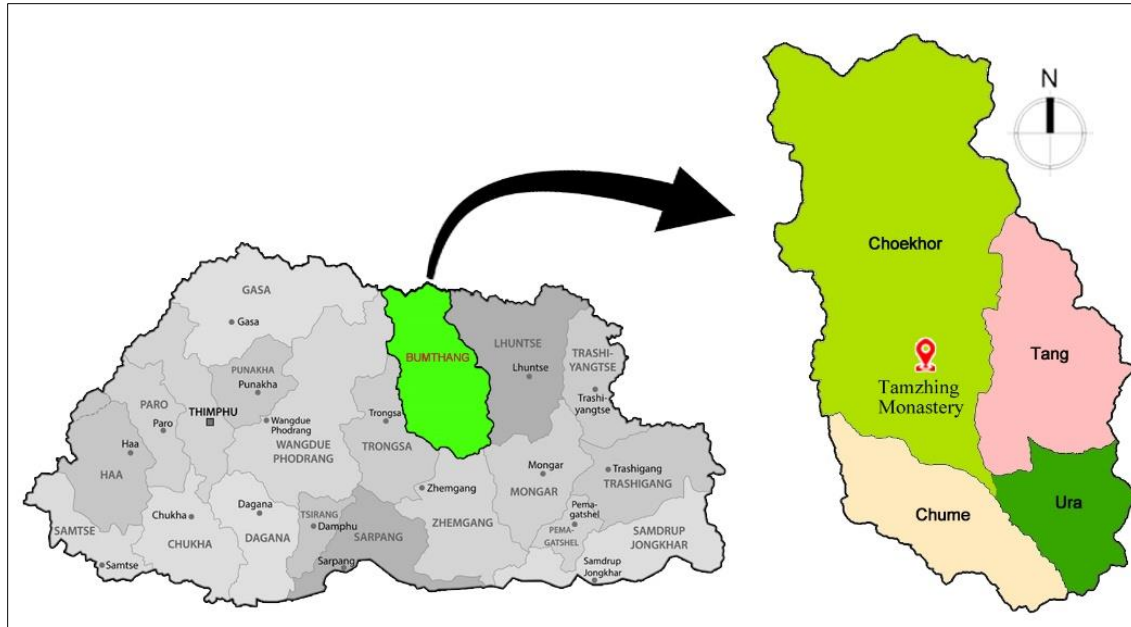


Figure 2. Map showing the four gewogs comprising Bumthang district. (modified by author)
(source: https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-3dyuFnJFMkE/ViMnCQuvAI/AAAAAAAAANqo/EpNfTy6nT-Q/s1600/imageedit_13_9512810666.jpg, accessed January 21, 2024)

Tamzhing Monastery is located at 27°35'16" N, 90°44'16" E, about 2630 meters above sea level in *Bumthang* district, in central Bhutan. *Bumthang* encompasses the four mountain valleys of *Ura*, *Chumey*, *Tang*, and *Choekhor* forming the four block (sub-district) administrations called *gewogs* headed by elected local representatives called *Gups*. Tamzhing Monastery falls under the jurisdiction of *Choekhor* gewog and lies in the northern part of the valley about five kilometers away from the nearest town, *Chamkhar* (See Fig. 2 and 3.2). The monastery is surrounded by agricultural land with predominantly traditional houses located in the northern, eastern and southern parts of the monastic territory. Four villages, namely, *Tamzhing*, *Khenchosum-Kharsum*, *Torshong* and *Reyrey Bi* under sub-block called *Pedtsheling-Tamzhing chiwog*¹⁷ are associated with the monastery (See Fig. 3.1).¹⁸ This local institutional and communal set-up at the site is

¹⁷ *Chiwog* is the smallest of the electoral precincts under block administration, a *Tshogpa* is elected to represent administrative matters. In alignment with this system, semi-structured interview with the *Tshogpa* was carried out for the thesis.

¹⁸ The approximate demarcation of the village was prepared in consultation with the *Tshogpa*. Cadastral map of the individual village is not available.

important for understanding how it functions within the larger cultural institutional framework for the protection of cultural heritage in Bhutan, a topic which is addressed in the third chapter.

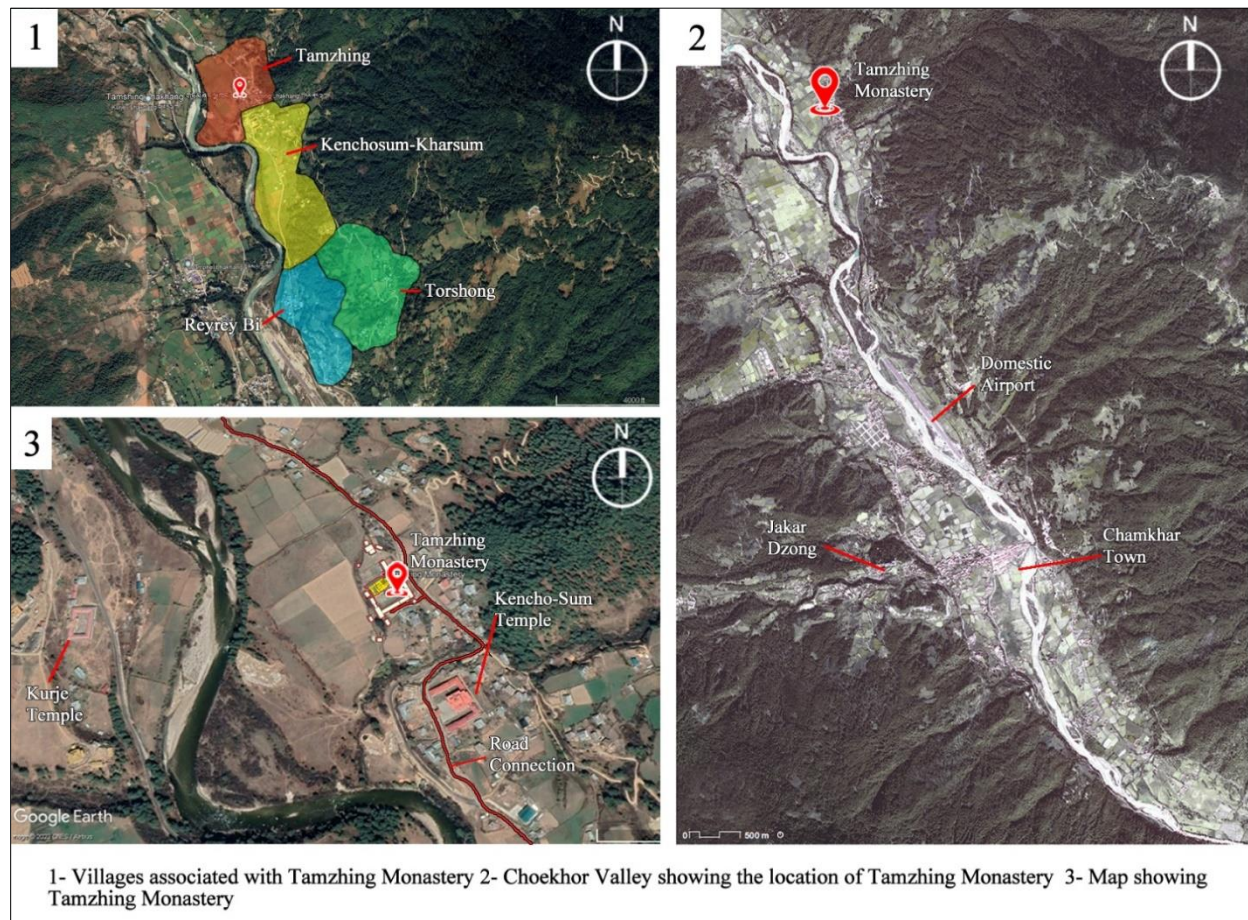


Figure 3. Location of Tamzhing Monastery (modified by author)
(Source for 2: Ministry of Work and Human Settlements, "Master Plan-Bumthang Valley, Bhutan," Master Plan, 2013, 15.)

The monastery is accessible via motor car to the rest of the districts from *Chamkhar* town, south of the monastery. Within sight to the southeast, lies *Kenchosum* Monastery (temple of the three gems of Buddhism). In the following sections, the relationship between Tamzhing Monastery and *Kenchosum* Monastery within monastic education and religious activities will be discussed since they function within one monastic structure and patronage. It is important to discuss this relationship as it is integrated into the function and management of the Tamzhing Monastery.

1.2. Pema Lingpa: the founder and his legacies

Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) is etched into the ‘religious-cultural-political’¹⁹ memory of Bhutan, making him an important figure whose name is often invoked in present-day national discourse. Given the extensive and long accounts of Pema Lingpa’s legacy, only selected accounts of his legacy pertinent to Tamzhing Monastery today will be presented.

His contribution to the religious landscape and introduction of the religious tradition that is now known as the ‘*Peling tradition*’ is highly revered and still shapes Bhutanese society. A Bhutanese historian and Buddhist scholar, Karma Phuntsho, in his book “The History of Bhutan”, points out that “the spirit of Pema Lingpa permeates Bhutan’s religious, cultural, social and political spheres”,²⁰ as a “spiritual father and a cultural hero.”²¹ Sarah Harding’s translation book titled “The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa”, also celebrates him “as a folk hero and spiritual master, a source of national pride and inspiration.”²²

His influence and popularity were not limited to his home region (*Bumthang*) but extended to the regions of Tibet.²³ This influence, later also became significant for the institution of the proper ‘monastery’ at *Tamzhing* a few centuries after his death. Pema Lingpa, through his discoveries of *termas* (religious treasures),²⁴ was able to establish himself as a true disciple of Guru Rinpoche²⁵

¹⁹ I will skip the political influence of Pema Lingpa as it is not relevant to the thesis. If interested, readers can refer to Karma Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan* (Random House India, 2013), 160–75 and Ariana Pansa Maki, “The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study,” 124-35.

²⁰ Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan*, 171.

²¹ Phuntsho, 160.

²² Harding, *The Life and Revelation of Pema Lingpa*, ix.

²³ Harding, 22.

²⁴ *Terma* are various forms of hidden teachings that are key to Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhist and Bon spiritual traditions. *Termas* can be in the form of scroll or other objects like statues, revealing sacred teachings or point to another *termas*.

²⁵ Guru Rinpoche or Guru Padmasambhava, meaning ‘precious guru’, is an eighth-century CE religious figure who spread Buddhism to Bhutan, Tibet, Nepal and India.

and spread the *Nyingma* tradition of Buddhism in Bhutan.²⁶ Since Pema Lingpa's most important prowess as a spiritual master was the *terma* discovery,²⁷ he is famously known as '*Terton* Pema Lingpa'²⁸ meaning 'treasure discoverer'. Due to this religious achievement, Pema Lingpa is recognized among the 'Five Terton Kings' in *Vajarana* Buddhism.²⁹

1.2.1. Foundation of *Tamzhing* temple

Besides *terma* discoveries, Pema Lingpa constructed and founded many temples and religious centers.³⁰ Ariana Pansa Maki in her dissertation "The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study" notes that the temple was significant as a consolidating factor³¹—consolidating his influence on local leaders and communities.³² Phuntsho notes that, among all the temples Pema Lingpa built, the *Tamzhing* temple was the most important of all.³³ Additionally, Maki recounts that Pema Lingpa consolidated the majority of the discovered treasures within the walls of the temple, embedding the temple and site within the spiritual landscape of the Buddhist realm.³⁴

²⁶ The Nyingma tradition is the oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism (other three, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug). Nyingma means "ancient," as it founded on the first translations of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Tibetan, in the eighth century.

²⁷ These *termas* provided the foundation for the new and unique approaches to Buddhist teachings, Maki, "The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study," 1.

²⁸ A comprehensive list of the *termas* with detail and the place of discoveries by Pema Lingpa is described in website "The Great Terton Pema Lingpa – Rigzin Pema Lingpa Foundations," April 29, 2014, accessed October 28, 2023, <http://www.peling.org/pema-lingpa/>.

²⁹ Harding, *The Life and Revelation of Pema Lingpa*, x.

³⁰ Harding, 48.

³¹ His local residence was at *Pemaling* was in *Tang* valley on west. *Choekhor* valley is more central than the other three blocks or valleys (*Ura*, *Tang* and *Chume*).

³² Ariana Pansa Maki, "The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study" (2012), 142.

³³ Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan*, 169.

³⁴ Maki, "The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study," 138.

Due to this significance, there are evidence of treasure-seeking by devotees damaging the mural paintings, refer to the Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, "Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery," 153.

Tamzhing temple became a key destination for pilgrims and a central axis for the dissemination of Pema Lingpa's teachings, offering initiations, and holding large-scale rituals since its completion in 1505.³⁵ At the age of 72, Pema Lingpa passed away at *Tamzhing* temple.³⁶ Embodying Pema Lingpa's profound legacy and his final day at *Tamzhing* temple has transformed the temple and the environs as the most important 'site of memory' of Pema Lingpa for the pan Buddhist in Bhutan. *Tamzhing* Monastery today plays a pivotal role as a physical and spiritual link between the past and present and provides the apparatus to continue the legacy.

1.2.2. Lineage: socio-religious legacy

The three socio-religious institutions that grew from Pema Lingpa were the family line (known as *Tamzhing Choeje* at *Tamzhing* Monastery),³⁷ the incarnations line, and the transmission line or disciple line (*see Fig. 4*).³⁸ Pema Lingpa's incarnation line of speech, mind, and body, respectively *sungrul*, *thugse*, and *gyalse*, have maintained the continuity of *Peling* tradition consolidating Pema Lingpa's position as a protector of Buddhist devotion and religious heritage.³⁹ The incarnation lineages are those of his direct incarnation (*Peling sungrul*), from his son *Dawa Gyaltsen* (*Peling*

³⁵ Maki, "The Temple of *Tamzhing* Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study," 142.

³⁶ Harding, *The Life and Revelation of Pema Lingpa*, 49.

³⁷ Many *Choejes* grew from Pema Lingpa's sons. Pema Lingpa's son *Drakpa Gyalpo* formed the *Tamzhing Choeje* at *Tamzhing* Monastery. One source account that the *Tamzhing Choeje* was formed by Pema Lingpa's youngest son *Sangda* and another source account from his son *Dawa Gyaltsen*. However, in a comprehensive Royal Family Tree of Bhutan drawn by the Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies clearly shows that *Tamzhing Choeje* is formed by *Drakpa Gyalpo*. "Royal-Family-Tree-20.6.17. Pdf," accessed January 28, 2024, <https://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Royal-Family-Tree-20.6.17.pdf>.

³⁸ Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan*, 170.

³⁹ Raymond, "Lhalung Sungtrul Rinpoche: A Conversation with Pema Lingpa's 11th Incarnation," *Tea House* (blog), September 16, 2023, accessed October 27, 2023, <https://teahouse.buddhistdoor.net/lhalung-sungtrul-rinpoche-a-conversation-with-pema-lingpas-11th-incarnation/>.

thugse) and his grandson *Pema Thinley* (*Peling gyalse*).⁴⁰ This father-son trio is often referred to as *Peling Yabse Sum* (see Fig. 4).⁴¹

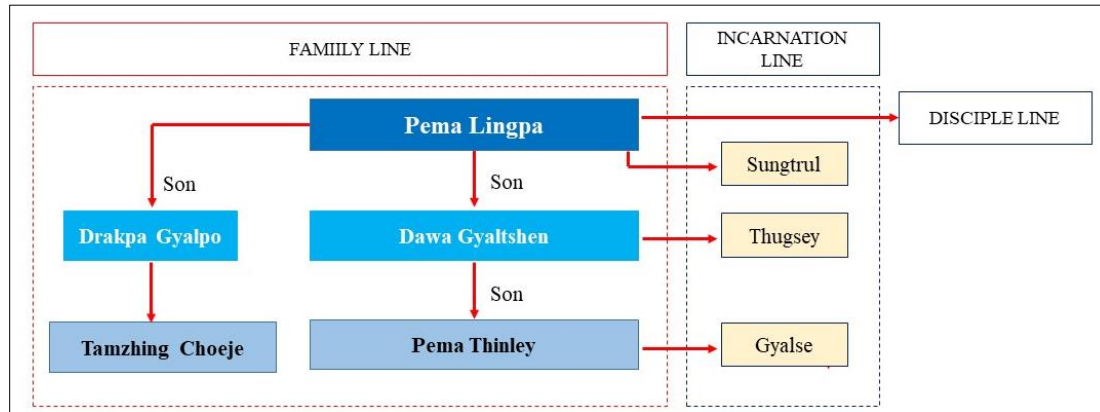


Figure 4. Schematic diagram showing the family and reincarnation line of Pema Lingpa (illustration by author)

Lhalung Sungtrul Rinpoche, Jigdröl Kunzang Dorji, is the current *Peling sungtrul*, the eleventh speech incarnation of Pema Lingpa and spiritual leader of *Tamzhing Monastery*.⁴² The descendant family (*Tamzhing Choeje*) of Pema Lingpa continues to be active in the matters of Tamzhing Monastery along with the monastic community. The contemporary inter-relationship and stakes of the incarnation line and family will be discussed in detail in the second chapter.

1.3. Historical layering of the temple and site

The foundation of the temple was laid in 1501 and completed in 1504.⁴³ It was only much later that in 1964 Tamzhing became a monastery with monks settling from Tibet fleeing the Chinese ‘cultural revolution’. Tamzhing Monastery underwent many changes since the construction of the temple. To locate the earliest structure built by the founder, and later additions and changes to the

⁴⁰ Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan*, 170.

⁴¹ Phuntsho, 170.

⁴² The detailed incarnation lineage of the father-son trio can be referred to “The Great Terton Pema Lingpa – Rigzin Pema Lingpa Foundations,” April 29, 2014, <https://www.peling.org/pema-lingpa/>.

⁴³ Maki, “The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study,” 145.

complex, these changes are presented on two levels: the overall complex and the architectural history of the temple structure.

1.3.1. Evolution of the site: overall complex

Fig. 5 presents the changes to the site in connection to the temple structure itself that took place in response to the changing environments and needs of the communities. *The following discussions are to be read with the numbers assigned in Fig. 5.* The chronological representation is reconstructed from the literature reviews, field surveys and interviews.

(1) Aris clearly illustrates that the Tamzhing temple was originally a single-storied structure with an inner sanctum.⁴⁴ Pichard adds that the inner sanctum had a treasury (on a separate upper floor), and the height of the inner sanctum was taller than the surrounding structure.⁴⁵ The literature does not account for the *nagtshang* (ancestral family house of the *Tamzhing Choeje*) and a few of the houses of the *draps* (people with no land holdings who worked for *Tamzhing Choeje*).⁴⁶ A family member of the *Tamzhing Choeje* recounts that there was a four-storied *nagtshang* beside the temple.⁴⁷ While several oral sources confirm the presence of the ancestral house as recounted by the eldest member (Sherub Wangdi, 89 years old at the time of the interview) of the *Tamzhing Choeje*, an archaeological study of the remains of the foundation would be required to confirm the claim and exactly locate the structure.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Aris, “The Temple-Palace of gTam-Zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 33–39.

⁴⁵ Pichard, “UNESCO Mission to Tamzhing Monastery, Bhutan,” 6 & 9.

⁴⁶ Sherub Wangdi, Sherub Tenzin, and Pema Norbu, Interview with the family members of *Tamzhing Choeje*, in person, January 5, 2024. A list containing the names of the interviewees and their affiliation is attached as appendix 1.

⁴⁷ The presence of the family house was shared during the interview with family members of *Tamzhing Choeje*, Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu.

⁴⁸ The presence of the ancestral house near the temple is also confirmed by Mr Tashi Lhendup, conservator from DCDD, who is from Bumthang and recounts the time he visited *Tamzhing* as a child to attend the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa*. He remembers the house was still standing.

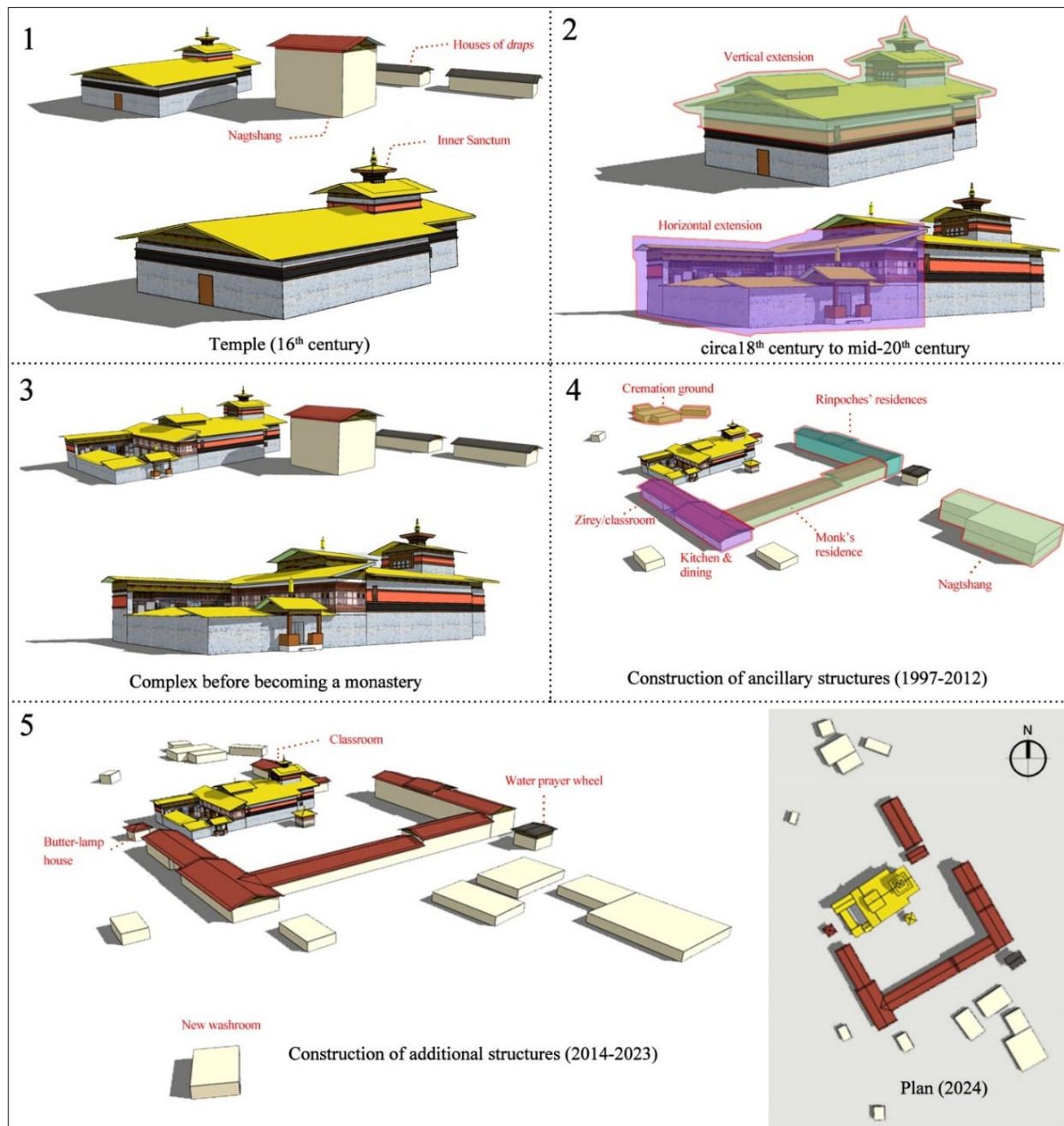


Figure 5. Evolution of Tamzhing Monastery site (illustration by author)

(2) The temple remained in its original state for over two centuries since its foundation. However, from the eighteenth century, the structure underwent various changes and additions. This part is discussed in detail in the next section.

(3) Not much is known about the immediate surroundings of the complex while these changes took place. The surroundings were most likely to have been agriculture fields with few houses of *draps* and the ancestral house of the *Choeje*. Historically, Aris accounts that during the search for a suitable place for the temple, the local leader informed that there was a good place with a space “in front for the horserace” for the temple’s consecration.⁴⁹ This particular piece of information suggests that the area was relatively empty at the time probably with a few houses in the vicinity (the presence of a village). As presented earlier, Tamzhing became the hub for annual large-scale religious gatherings—the area around the temple would have largely remained vacant to accommodate the large number of devotees and pilgrims.

Before the 1950s, the system of *draps* serving the landlords (*Choeje*) was a common practice in Bhutan. Major political and social reforms were introduced by the Third King of Bhutan *Jigme Dorji Wangchuck* (1929-1972) in the 1950s. In this period, two of the reforms were the land reforms leading to the redistribution of land to the *draps* and the abolition of ‘slavery’ and ‘serfdom’.⁵⁰ This period of reform also marked changes in the socio-economic structure of Tamzhing.⁵¹ The members of the *Tamzhing Choeje* recount that many working *draps* left *Tamzhing* although a few of them continued their lives at *Tamzhing* with their share of land after the redistribution of land as per the reforms.

(4) Until 1964, *Tamzhing* mainly served as a temple and became a proper ‘monastery’ after offering refuge to fleeing Tibetan monks, especially from *Lhalung* monastery⁵² during the Chinese cultural

⁴⁹ Aris, “The Temple-Palace of gTam-Zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 33.

⁵⁰ “Bhutan - Modernization under Jigme Dorji, 1952-72,” accessed January 13, 2024, <https://www.countrystudies.us/bhutan/12.htm>.

This particular event in the history changed the social and political landscape of Bhutan.

⁵¹ Karma Phuntsho, Interview with a Bhutanese historian and Buddhist scholar, in person, December 25, 2023.

⁵² Pema Lingpa had gained followers and patronage in Tibet, *Lhalung* monastery was also included and the connection continued even after his death. Read Sarah Harding’s book, *The Life and Revelation of Pema Lingpa*, 20-22. and

revolution in Tibet.⁵³ About six monks from Tibet settled and lived in *Tamzhing* temple.⁵⁴ Only in around 1979 was a separate residence for the monks constructed parallel to the temple. Wangdi recounts that the ancestral family at the time lived in the *tsamkhang* (meditation house) located north of *Tamzhing* village and abandoned the *nagtshang* (ancestral home) leaving it to fall into ruin.⁵⁵ With the materials (especially the stones) from the *nagtshang*, the residence of the monks and a new two-storied ancestral house as a replacement were constructed near the monastery. This was followed by the construction of residences for *Peling sungtrul* and *Peling thugsey* in 2000.⁵⁶ The kitchen-dining and a separate classroom (which also serves as a *zirey*⁵⁷) were constructed in 2012.⁵⁸ Similarly, structures for the cremation ground were also constructed using contributions from the community and funds from the *Gewog* Development Grant during this time.⁵⁹

(5) Since 2014 many ancillary structures got added to the complex. A washroom was constructed in the complex in 2014, followed by a *karmi khang* (butter lamp shed) in 2022 with the latest addition of a new classroom in the northern part of the complex in 2023. *Fig. 6* shows the site map of the Tamzhing Monastery complex as of 2023.

Maki's work "The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study," 184.

⁵³ Maki, "The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study," 182–83.

⁵⁴ Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu, Interview with the family members of *Tamzhing Choeje*.

⁵⁵ Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu. Sherab Wangdi, 89 years old, narrates why the house deteriorated and the advice of the 16th Karmapa (1924-1981) for the dismantling of the house.

⁵⁶ Pichard, "UNESCO Mission to Tamzhing Monastery, Bhutan," 3.

⁵⁷ *Zirey* is a room from which one can witness a festival or perform ritual for the mass, usually the head lams or important guest gets seated in this room.

⁵⁸ Pichard, "UNESCO Mission to Tamzhing Monastery, Bhutan," 3.

⁵⁹ Before, makeshift structures were built to conduct the cremation rituals. Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu, Interview with the family members of *Tamzhing Choeje*.



Figure 6. Present-day Tamzhing Monastery complex. Left: Site map, Right: Photo of the main temple (Illustration and photo by author)

1.3.2. The architectural history of the temple

While the temple may appear as a single entity now, it underwent significant changes over time. The physical traces of the extension and addition are well-preserved and visible in the clear line of construction of two walls, differences in architectural elements, etc. It is difficult to trace these changes on the mud-plastered interior walls because they have paintings on them. In addition, there are statues, *thangkas* (scroll paintings), and other objects blocking the visual observation. However, the analysis through the architectural documentation—the study of the wall thickness, wall connections and openings provides a better understanding of the architectural biography of the structure. A much more nuanced understanding of these changes can be developed through the mural painting schemes (old and new) studied by the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development (DCDD) in collaboration with the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London which was a key resource for this particular study.

The earliest structure: the original structure founded by Pema Lingpa

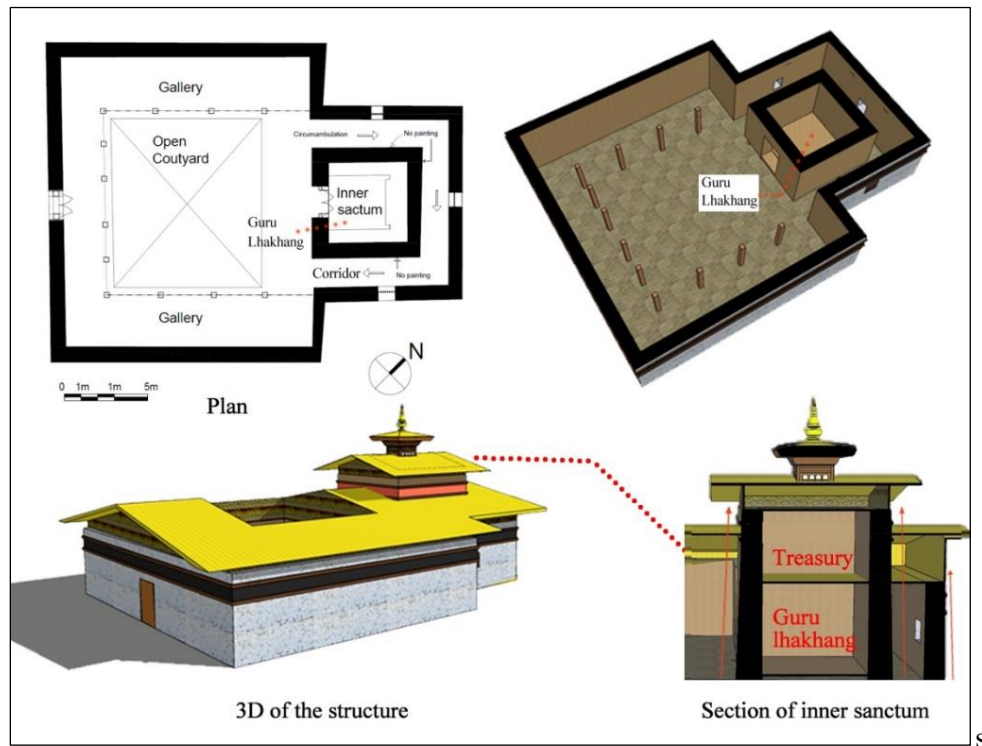


Figure 7. 3D depiction of the earliest structure (illustration by author)

The earliest structure was a single-storied colonnade gallery with a band running all around external walls with an inner sanctum taller than the colonnade gallery as illustrated in Fig. 7.⁶⁰ The inner sanctum called the *Guru lhakhang* (temple of *Guru Rinpoche*) is surrounded by external walls creating a space for a circumambulation corridor. For clarity, gallery and corridor will be used in the discussion of the colonnade gallery and circumambulation corridor respectively. The inner sanctum supposedly opened to an open courtyard,⁶¹ with twelve wooden columns forming a U-shaped gallery.⁶² The load-bearing walls are constructed with stone masonry embedded in mud mortar with very few openings to preserve the structural integrity of the structure. This type of

⁶⁰ Although, currently appearing as a black band, it cannot be concluded whether the color was originally black or red before the addition of the first floor.

⁶¹ Maki, "The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study," 147.

⁶² Aris, "The Temple-Palace of Tam-Zhing as Described by Its Founder," 34.

construction with tapering walls is quite typical for older types of temples and houses in Bhutan. The whole structure roughly measures 25 meters in length and 19 meters in width. Literature mentions the earliest mural paintings on the inner walls of the gallery and corridor and provides crucial information about the identification of the oldest structure and what initial painting schemes were employed.⁶³

Changes to the temple: renovation and extension

Sometime in the eighteenth century, there is evidence of a fire which may have led to the collapse of the original roof⁶⁴—evidence of burning in numerous areas such as the burnt stone and charring of the original plaster of the walls in the east corridor of the temple.⁶⁵ The original fire-damaged painting would have been repainted. One clear evidence of historical repainting is in part of the section of the circumambulation corridor on the ground floor (*see Fig. 8*). The methods and materials used are characteristic of the practice of mural painting during the eighteenth-nineteenth century.⁶⁶ There is no literature available about who and how the renovation was carried out, however, the *Tamzhing Choeje* family speculate that it would have been most probably overseen by the *Choeje* family of that period.

⁶³ The conservation report on the mural painting by the Department of Culture of Bhutan provides details of the painting schemes with photographic documentation. Refer to Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, “Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery.”

⁶⁴ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 49.

⁶⁵ During the field surveys, the charring was also observed on the walls in the attic (below roof).

⁶⁶ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, “Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery,” 51.



Figure 8. The earlier painting scheme was revealed after the removal of the later painting scheme.
(Source: Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, "Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery," Project Report, 2013. p.97)

With the opportunity provided by the fire, the renovation may have been included with the addition of another floor. The addition of the floor would have included the addition of another layer of the band (red) above the existing band (black) to the external wall (*see Fig. 9*).⁶⁷ The dating of the painting scheme ranges between the eighteenth to the twentieth century on the newly added floor.⁶⁸ The open courtyard most probably was then converted into a closed space into a *dukhang* (prayer hall) with roofing. The conversion of the treasury of the inner sanctum into *Tsepamey lhakhang* (temple of the Buddha of Long Life) by increasing the height of the walls to maintain prominence in appearance (taller than the rest of the parts of the temple). Two columns in the inner sanctum were introduced to support the *Tsepamey lhakhang* which did not exist earlier according to the Aris' account.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ The band, usually colored red, signifies a religious building and it is locally called as *khey-mar*

⁶⁸ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, "Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery," 51–53.

⁶⁹ Aris, "The Temple-Palace of gTam-Zhing as Described by Its Founder," 34.



Figure 9. Tamzhing temple: showing phases and direction of extensions. (photo and illustration by author)
First upward and then left to right. Blue arrow: the red band is the evidence of the additional floor which is the initial extension of the temple. Orange arrow: it shows the lateral extension of the temple which is the later extension of the temple.

The presence of the older band (see Fig. 10) of the inner sanctum, now covered by the roof over the corridor and the installation of the new band (red) which is still visible, is evidence that the height of the inner sanctum was raised.⁷⁰ Charring on the wooden segment of the band supports the damage caused by the fire.

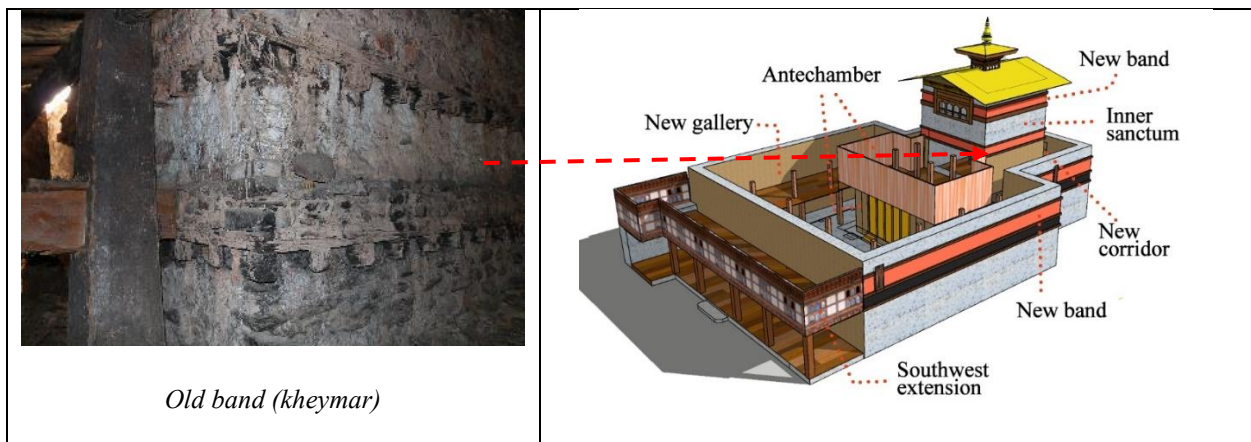


Figure 10. The presence of the old band and charring on the inner sanctum wall and a 3D image showing the changes. (photo and illustration by author)

Later a timber structure was added on the southwest end of the first floor (temple front) to accommodate the *Goenkhang* and *Kanjur lhakhang*.⁷¹ The earlier changes made to the temple

⁷⁰ Pichard, “UNESCO Mission to Tamzhing Monastery, Bhutan,” 9.

⁷¹ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, “Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery,” 51. *Goenkhang* is the room or temple of the protective diety.

followed the same architectural characteristic of stone walls with very few openings. The southwest extension, however, adopts new architectural characteristics (*see Fig. 9 and 10*). In the late nineteenth century, an antechamber was added to *Tsepamay Lhakhang* on the first floor before the antechamber on the ground floor was introduced.⁷² This is evident because the wooden beam of the first-floor antechamber is visible, resting on the floorboards of the first floor and supported by the newly introduced wooden post (*see Fig. 11*). Four additional wooden posts were introduced to support the antechamber on the first floor. The antechamber walls are constructed in the form of partition walls (*ekra*⁷³) and follow the profile of the external wall.⁷⁴ As per the DCDD's report, the addition of the antechamber is attributed to the *Kunzang Tenpe Nyima* (1843-1891), the eight incarnations of Pema Lingpa or eight *Bakha Trulku Khamsum Rigdzin Yongdrol*, who was invited to teach at Tamzhing.⁷⁵ It is evident that the monastery continuously served as the seat of Pema Lingpa's incarnations and the continuity of monastic education.



Figure 11. The floor beam of the antechamber rests on the floorboards (left), The wooden post supporting the wooden beam (right) (photos by author)

⁷² Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 52.

⁷³ *Ekra* is constructed with a bamboo weave which is then plastered over with mud (it is similar to bamboo wattle and daub construction).

⁷⁴ Four rectangular posts have smaller cross-sections with no cornice or decorations compared to the other pre-existing square columns.

⁷⁵ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, "Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery," 51.

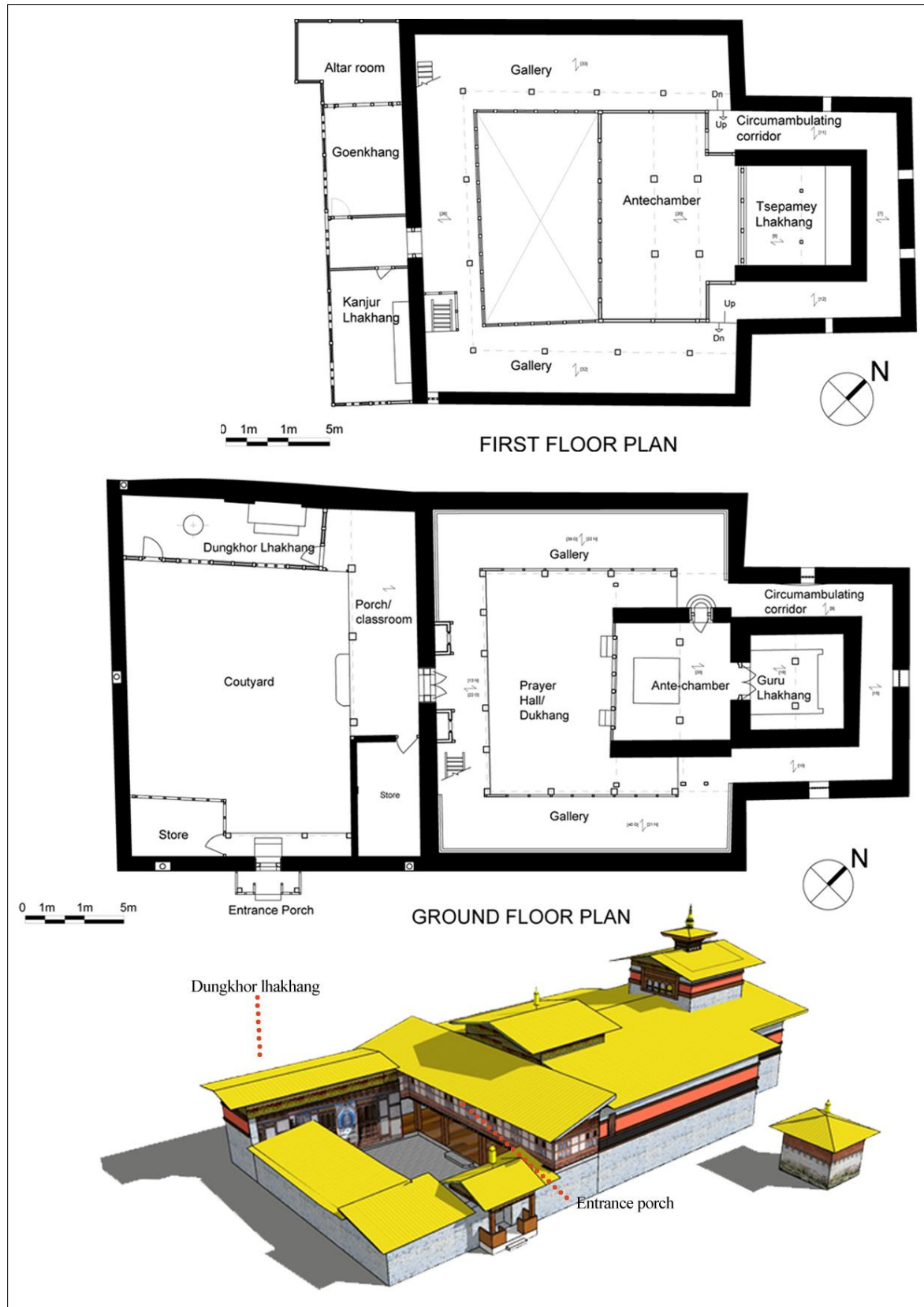


Figure 12. The final extension to the temple structure (illustration by author)

In the first half of the twentieth century, the antechamber was added to the *Guru lhakhang* on the ground floor by the Royal Grandmother, *Ashi Phuntsho Chodron* (1911-2003), with a later scheme of mural paintings.⁷⁶ The two antechambers provide space for gathering monks and performing rituals. The final extension was the construction of the entrance courtyard with the addition of *Dungkhar lhakhang* (a prayer wheel temple dedicated to Pema Lingpa), a storage and a butter lamp shed (now turned into a storage space) with boundary walls at the northwest end (*see Fig. 12*). Now the plinth of the whole structure roughly measures 40 meters in length and 19 meters in width.

1.4. The religious and social fabric of Tamzhing Monastery

Till this point, the historical significance and architectural changes with socio-religious community changes were presented. This section delves into the complexity of the site through the ‘association’ of the various ‘communities’ at present. I will provide an overview of the living communities, both local and more distant, who actively engage with the site—exploring how the resident monastic community, the ancestral family, the immediate village communities, the general public, and the State are associated with the site and how these communities interact with each other. Thus, the section is organized from the inside to the outer communities to better understand the complex social-religious network of the Tamzhing Monastery.

1.4.1. *Peling* tradition and monastic education

The monastery serves as the seat for both *Peling sungtrul* and *Peling thugse*.⁷⁷ The ‘Pema Lingpa Foundation’ was founded in 2012 under the patronage of H.E *Peling sungtrul, Jigdreel Kunzang Dorji* for the advancement of the *Peling* traditions.⁷⁸ Under this foundation, more than 300 monks

⁷⁶ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 53.

⁷⁷ The prayer hall (*dhukhang*) has two thrones dedicated to the two lineages signifying the seats at the monastery.

⁷⁸ “Rigzin Pema Lingpa Foundations – -The Pema Lingpa Foundation,” accessed October 26, 2023, <https://www.peling.org/>.

are enrolled in numerous *Nyingma* institutions, *Drametse* in *Mongar* district, *Yungdrucholing* in *Trongsa* district, *Tama-takma Samten Tharpacholing* in *Zhemgang* district, *Dechencholing*, *Tamzhing* and *Kenchosum* in *Bumthang* district.⁷⁹ Within this religious organization, *Tamzhing* Monastery and *Kenchosum* collaborate and coordinate religious activities and monastic education—it is logically convenient because of the proximity.



Figure 13. Annual religious activities at Tamzhing and the spaces used. (illustration by author)

Numerous religious activities are conducted at the monastery throughout the year, with a minimum of one activity taking place each month excluding the daily rituals.⁸⁰ These activities take place in various spaces within the monastery. Fig. 13 shows the use of spaces at the site for different

⁷⁹ “Rigzin Pema Lingpa Foundations – -The Pema Lingpa Foundation.”

⁸⁰ The list of the annual religious activity is attached as appendix 2.

religious activities (following the lunar calendar).⁸¹ The principal of the monastery notes that during these activities, members of village communities visit the monastery to make offerings and receive blessings.⁸²

The monastery provides monastic education from the first to the sixth grade with subjects from the basic rituals to the complete ceremonial and ritual traditions of Pema Lingpa. In addition to serving as a religious center, the monastery is also home to novice monks. They spend a significant portion of their formative years at the monastery. After completing studies at Tamzhing Monastery, the novices are enrolled in *Kenchosum* for the continuation of their higher studies.⁸³ Currently, there are 35 novice monks and 10 teachers (senior monks) at the monastery.⁸⁴ Apart from traditional monastic education, modern educational subjects such as English, Information Technology and Life Sciences have been included in the curriculum since 2020.⁸⁵ Three teachers are hired on contract by the monastic administration to teach these subjects which is funded by the Pema Lingpa Foundation.⁸⁶

Fig. 14 shows the daily schedule of the monks at the monastery and the various spaces used at different times of the day (except on Sundays).⁸⁷ Different classes are taught as per their standards in different spaces. From 5:30 pm to 6:00 pm, the classes are dismissed for ‘social work’, which involves cleaning the temple, monk dormitory, and surroundings. During the field visit, I observed novice monks attending classes within and around the temple premises. Some were learning the art of making *torma* (ritual cakes) at the entrance porch, and a few were on the lawn doing

⁸¹ Sonam Tashi, Interview with the Principal of Tamzhing Monastery, in person, October 29, 2022.

⁸² The offerings can include fruits, milk, butter, local wine and incense, etc as well as monetary donations.

⁸³ Tashi, Interview with the Principal of Tamzhing Monastery.

⁸⁴ Tashi.

⁸⁵ Tashi.

⁸⁶ In person communication with caretaker (*kunyer*) and a senior monk (teacher) on 29/11/2022

⁸⁷ Tashi, Interview with the Principal of Tamzhing Monastery.

assignments while I was interacting with the senior monks. While I was documenting the upper floor of the temple, a few monks began sweeping the floor and cleaning the inside of the temple. It demonstrated the presence of an established system of daily care in the monastery integrated into monastic education.



Figure 14. Spaces impacted by the daily activities of monks at the monastery. (illustration by author)

1.4.2. Local communities and associations

Tamzhing Phala Choedpa: the annual religious festival

Tamzhing Phala Choedpa is a five-day religious festival that takes place from the ninth to the thirteenth day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar at the monastery.⁸⁸ It is the most public

⁸⁸ The tenth day marks the main day of the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa*

and visible legacy of Pema Lingpa and the local communities. In short, it is also referred to as *Tamzhing tshechu* or *Phala Choedpa*. However, for further discussion in this thesis, I will refer to it as the *Phala Choedpa* Festival.

The institution of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival can be traced back to the founder and his vision for the construction of the temple. It is believed that Pema Lingpa's protective deity, *Dorji Phamo*, appeared in his vision in the form of a pig and showed him the spot for the construction of the temple.⁸⁹ He received another vision of the protective deity instructing him to perform the pig dance during the consecration of the temple.⁹⁰ Thus, the *Phag Cham* (pig dance)⁹¹ has been performed since the consecration and is one of the unique and important dances performed during the festival. The name *Phala Choedpa* meaning 'Festival of the Pig Dance' also originates from this dance.⁹²

In addition to the *Phag Cham*, other sacred dances known as *tercham*⁹³ are also performed which totals 29 mask dances (a few of the mask dances are also repeated) over the three-day event.⁹⁴ The sacred mask dances were composed by the founder and performed as per his recorded textual explanations.⁹⁵ It is strongly believed that the mask dances have the power to cleanse sins and

⁸⁹ "Phagla Chothpa – Rigzin Pema Lingpa Foundations," April 29, 2014, <https://www.peling.org/annual-festival-phagla-choethpa/>.

⁹⁰ "Phagla Chothpa – Rigzin Pema Lingpa Foundations."

⁹¹ To read further about the detailed performance sequence and meaning of each steps, refer to Thinley Jamtsho's work, "པད་ཐུང་ཕག་འཆས། (Peling Phag Cham)," in *འབྲུག་གི་དངོས་ཤིང་ལམ་སྟོན། (Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bhutan)*, ed. Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi, Singye Samdrup, and Ariana Maki (Paro, Bhutan: The National Museum of Bhutan, n.d.), 209–17.

⁹² Sonam Chopel, "Phala Choepa and Boar Dance at Tamzhing Temple | Mandala Collections - Texts," accessed May 16, 2024, <https://mandala-texts-dev.internal.lib.virginia.edu/text/phala-choepa-and-boar-dance-tamzhing-temple>.

⁹³ Connection to the *terma* discoveries of the founder. *Tercham* are the dances also composed by *tertons* (treasure-revealers) to aid in their discovery of treasures.

⁹⁴ The program list of the three-day event is attached as appendix 3.

⁹⁵ Maki, "The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study," 416.

remove obstacles on the path to enlightenment.⁹⁶ Because of this religious significance, it attracts huge crowds of people.

The event serves as both a religious festival and a long-standing tradition deeply rooted in the practices of the village communities and later, the monastic community. The sacred dances called *tsun cham* are performed by the monks from *Tamzhing* and *Kenchosum* Monastery and *boe cham* by laymen from the village communities (*Tamzhing*, *Kenchosum-kharsum* and *Torshong* villages).⁹⁷ In addition to the sacred dances, women from the village communities called *zhem*, perform folk songs and dances in between the mask dances.

To ensure the festival's success, the representative of each of the four villages and a family member of *Tamzhing Choeje* have formed a committee called the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Tshogpa*.⁹⁸ This committee is responsible for the arrangement of dancers, practice and rehearsal of the dances, logistics and coordination for the main event.⁹⁹ The coordination also involves monitoring the dancers and managing the crowd. They are also responsible for the collection of rental fees for the pop-up stalls during the event. There is a system for funding each day of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival presented in *Table 1* in the second chapter.¹⁰⁰ This funding includes the contribution of mask dancers or *zhem* and a monetary contribution to be spent on food for the dancers and important guests as well as the *chagyap* (a monetary fee for monks who perform the ritual during the event).¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ National Library & Archives of Bhutan, *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bhutan*, 2015, 49–50.

⁹⁷ Tashi Galey, Interview with the *Tshogpa* (local people's representative), in person, December 1, 2022.

⁹⁸ Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu, Interview with the family members of *Tamzhing Choeje*.

⁹⁹ Galey, Interview with the *Tshogpa* (local people's representative).

¹⁰⁰ Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu, Interview with the family members of *Tamzhing Choeje*.

¹⁰¹ Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu.

Cremation ground: more than a stone

The cremation ground located in the northern part of the Tamzhing Monastery is one of the sacred sites that the community associates with. It is considered holy as it is believed to be blessed by Pema Lingpa. A stone with his hand impression sits at the center of the cremation structure (see *Fig. 15*). Only the local communities who are involved in the *Phala Choedpa* Festival have access to the service of the cremation ground, with high lamas or notables being an exception.¹⁰²

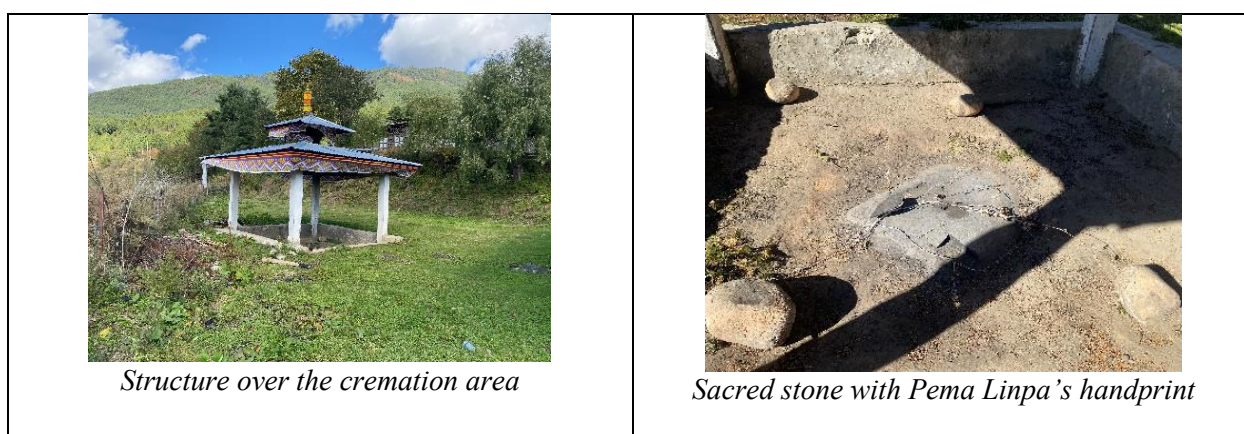


Figure 15. Cremation ground with the roof structure and the holy stone believed to be blessed by Pema Lingpa (photos by author)

1.4.3. Visitors: pilgrims and devotees

While the *Phala Choedpa* Festival annually attracts large audiences, the monastery also receives pilgrims and visitors throughout the year. Devotees visit various altar rooms of the temple complex (rooms indicated in *Fig. 12*)—these rooms house many sacred statues, manuscripts, religious objects and relics. It also houses the *Peling chakap* (the iron chainmail). The iron chainmail is believed to have been handmade by the Pema Lingpa himself, demonstrating his blacksmithing

¹⁰² Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu.

skill.¹⁰³ Individuals wear the 25-kilogram chainmail and make three circumambulations¹⁰⁴ around the inner sanctum housing the statue of *Guru Rinpoche* (see Fig. 16)—the act is believed to cleanse them of their sins.¹⁰⁵ The act of circumambulation is continued on the first floor but without the chainmail. I remember my father making the circumambulations with the iron chainmail at the temple when I was ten years old. I continued this tradition during my field visit.

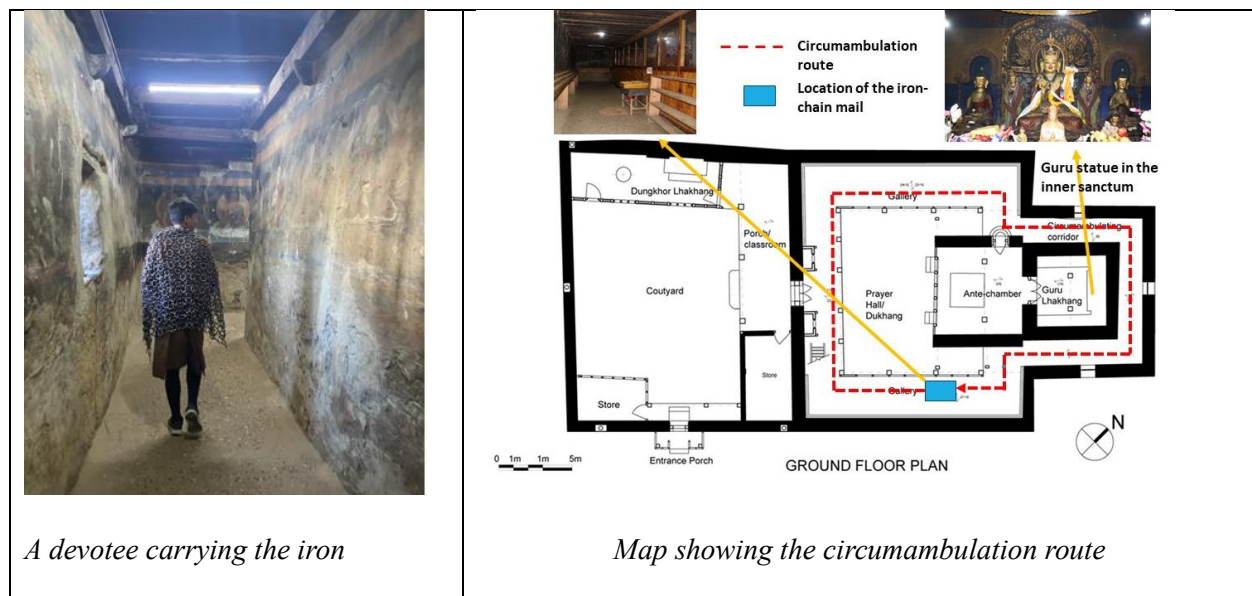


Figure 16. A devotee carrying the iron chainmail along the circumambulation route. (photo and illustration by author)

Each of the rooms is cared for by a monk called *kunyer* who is responsible for facilitating the visitors in their religious activity and providing security for religious objects and relics housed within each room. The iron chainmail is also locked in a glass case but is opened at the request of the visitors. In addition to devotees, international tourists either visit the temple for its historical

¹⁰³ Maki, “The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450–1521): An Iconological Study,” 114.

¹⁰⁴ Three is an auspicious number in Buddhism.

¹⁰⁵ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, “Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery,” 155.

and mural art or to experience the live *Phala Choedpa* Festival. However, the aspect of tourist visits or tourism is not the focus of my thesis, which I elaborate on in the second chapter.

1.4.4. Making Tamzhing Monastery part of the national heritage

In his article “New Approaches to Conserving the Wall Painting Heritage of Bhutan”, Stephen Rickerby et al. state that for the first time a systematic approach was applied to wall painting study and conservation at Tamzhing Monastery in Bhutan.¹⁰⁶ The study was carried out by the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development in collaboration with the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London from 2012 to 2014. The scientific study concluded that there are several painting schemes (at least ten schemes within the whole temple complex) painted at different periods, the oldest painted under the supervision of Pema Lingpa.¹⁰⁷ In addition, the study shows that there has been historical repainting carried out on some parts of the oldest mural painting. Currently, the oldest mural paintings are cleaned, repaired with “compatible earth”¹⁰⁸ and stabilized to prevent further deterioration.¹⁰⁹ This, however, has left some parts of mural paintings with missing parts or deformation of the painting scheme (missing faces of the religious figures and damaged background landscapes).

One of the significant outcomes of the study was the finding that the Tamzhing temple contains one of the largest, stylistically unique, and possibly oldest, sets of wall paintings in Bhutan.¹¹⁰ The implication of this outcome will be discussed in detail in the second chapter. Due to its significance,

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Rickerby et al., “New Approaches to Conserving the Wall Painting Heritage of Bhutan,” *Studies in Conservation* 59, no. sup1 (September 2014): 130, <https://doi.org/10.1179/204705814X13975704318632>.

¹⁰⁷ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, “Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery,” 25.

¹⁰⁸ The study was carried out on the properties of material (earth) on which murals are painted and the earth from the area was then studied and was used for the repair.

¹⁰⁹ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, “Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery,” 3.

¹¹⁰ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 23.

Tamzhing Monastery is a ‘registered heritage site’ in the ‘National Inventory List of Heritage Sites’ of Bhutan and has the potential for designation. While Tamzhing Monastery is also inscribed in the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage sites, the discussion in my thesis is solely in the context of its recognition as a national heritage.¹¹¹ Therefore, this broader international aspect is not the focus of my study.

Chapter conclusion

Since its foundation in 1501-1505, the monastery has undergone numerous physical changes vis-à-vis social changes, adding to the complexity of the site spanning over six centuries. The oldest mural paintings and the evidence of construction phases enable us to identify the oldest part of the complex founded by the founder and trace the chronological architectural development of the complex. These historical layering and physical changes of the monastery are testimonials of the ‘changing nature’ of a ‘living site’ which should be considered in the management principles.

A new socio-religious community of the monastery was formed after the major social reforms and the arrival of the fleeing monks from Tibet between the periods of 1950s to 1960s. The community network formed by the *Tamzhing Choeje*, the monastic community, and village communities has been successful in sustaining the religious and cultural traditions of the monastery to date. Tamzhing Monastery draws various kinds of visitors beyond the *Bumthang* region even to the present day. The most recent development at the monastery is the scientific study carried out by the State and the subsequent valorization of the mural paintings and the *Tamzhing* temple. All these aspects will be elaborated and analyzed in the following chapters.

¹¹¹ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Tamzhing Monastery,” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed October 26, 2023, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5697/>.

Chapter 2: Tamzhing Monastery, a Living Religious Heritage

Building on the first chapter, here, I will look deeper into the complexities of the Tamzhing Monastery. In this chapter, I will investigate all the local communities that are intimately associated with different facets of the monastery. Within this, I will explore the roles and stakes of the associated communities for the functioning and sustaining of Tamzhing Monastery. An analysis of the interconnectedness and interdependency between tangible and intangible elements within the monastery will also be carried out. In the final section of the chapter, I will present the issues and challenges that pose a threat to the sustenance of Tamzhing Monastery as a ‘living religious heritage’ to the associated local communities and the country as a whole.

2.1. Active community dynamics

Sarah Court and Gamini Wijesuriya rightly pointed out that ‘heritage’ is created by the ‘people’ for the ‘use’ of the people, highlighting the inherent connection between communities and heritage sites.¹¹² In addition, Lucas Lixinsky argues that beyond the recognition of the importance of the local community in heritage management, it is crucial to define “who the community is” to involve them in heritage management.¹¹³ Thus, identifying the diverse communities connected with heritage sites becomes one of the important tasks of the management planning process. This activity will also contribute to clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the communities within

¹¹² Sarah Court and Gamini Wijesuriya, “People-Centred Approaches to the Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Living Heritage” (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, 2015), 3.

¹¹³ Lucas Lixinski, “Stakeholders in International Heritage Law,” in *International Heritage Law for Communities: Exclusion and Re-Imagination*, ed. Lucas Lixinski (Oxford University Press, 2019), 95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198843306.003.0003>.

the management plan. Recognizing the communities as ‘custodians’ of the heritage sites as well as the ‘bearers’ of the heritage values becomes critical to maintaining a heritage site’s relevancy and sustainability—exploring the communities’ potential to actively contribute to the management plan and policies becomes a necessity.

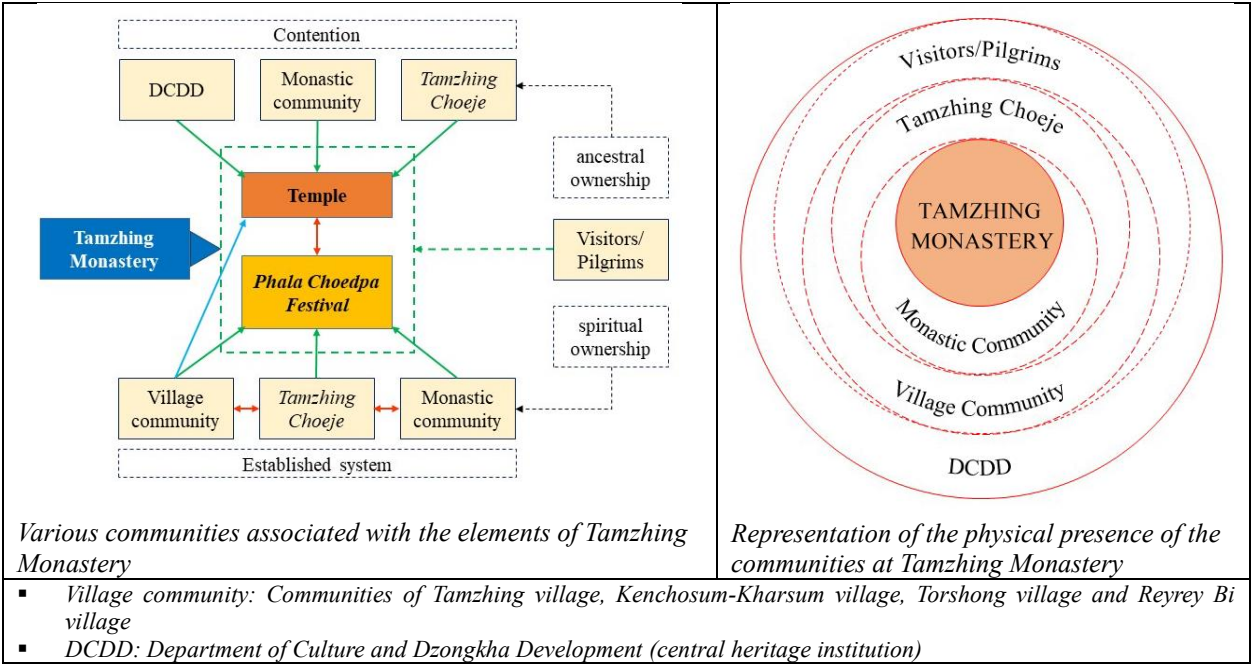


Figure 17. Overview of associations of communities. (illustrations by the author)

As presented in the first chapter, Tamzhing Monastery has several communities that are integrated into various aspects. *Fig. 17* provides an overview of the association and physical presence of the different communities at Tamzhing Monastery. The illustration also provides an overview of the association of the communities with the specific elements of the monastery. The following subsections focused on the system of ownership and association of various communities will further explore and expand on *Fig. 17*.

2.1.1. Structural and spiritual ownership

Ownership at Tamzhing Monastery is understood in two dimensions, structural and spiritual (objects and religious tradition). The family of *Tamzhing Choeje* (religious clan of *Tamzhing*, ancestral family) holds the structural ownership of the temple and the cremation ground by ancestral right. The monastic community under the patronage of the 11th incarnation¹¹⁴ of Pema Lingpa holds the spiritual ownership as the guardians of the monastic education, religious tradition and the custodianship of the movable religious objects such as statues, relics, etc.¹¹⁵ Although there is a distinction between types of ownership, the two different communities are intertwined through Tamzhing Monastery and its living traditions. The ancestral family continuously maintains religious ties through their ancestral responsibilities while the monastic community plays an important role in conducting the religious activities.¹¹⁶ This in-tandem results from these two communities' cooperation and shared responsibility. Shared responsibility was also evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Movement and social gatherings were not permitted in Bhutan and the *Phala Choedpa* Festival was performed exclusively by monk communities.¹¹⁷ Like any other annual religious festival in Bhutan, it has to be conducted annually as it is performed for the well-being of the whole community according to the family members of *Tamzhing Choeje*.¹¹⁸ Acknowledging this complex ownership system and the cooperation between the communities is important for developing a management strategy for the monastery.

¹¹⁴ The significance of the incarnation line and present religious lineage system at Tamzhing Monastery was discussed in chapter 1.

¹¹⁵ Department of Culture, འབྲུག་གི་རྫོང་གཞིས་དང་ལྷ་ཁང་དགོན་པའི་ཚོ་ཡིག། (*National Inventory of Dzongs and Temples of Bhutan*), 2018, 8. The custodianship of the movable religious objects housed within Tamzhing Temple is vested in the title (incarnation of Pema Lingpa), rather than being entitled to the individual.

¹¹⁶ As presented in the first chapter, *Tamzhing Choeje* family funds the second day of *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa* (a five-day annual religious festival).

¹¹⁷ Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu, Interview with the family members of *Tamzhing Choeje*.

¹¹⁸ I discuss the significance of *Phala Choedpa* Festival in detail in a later section of this chapter.

2.1.2. Exploring community(ies) associations

Tamzhing Monastery's community association can be categorized into two facets under a broad understanding, i.e. the established system and the nascent system or rather recent developments that have created contention. The established system concerns the function of religious events such as the *Phala Choedpa* Festival, where all the communities associated with it as well as the existing management system called the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Tshogpa* (committee).¹¹⁹ The communities involved in this tradition include the monastic community, the ancestral family and the four village communities (I categorize it under 'village community'). The village community is comprised of *Tamzhing*, *Kenchosum-Kharsum*, *Torshong* and *Reyrey Bi* villages.

The nascent system deals with the diverse opinions concerning the conservation of the temple creating a contention. The contention among the communities can be linked to modern conservation knowledge, religious concepts, and longstanding ritualistic traditions. The communities with conflicting perspectives are the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development (State), the ancestral family and the monastic community. I will discuss this in detail in the third chapter.

Table 1 presents the overview of the association and the stakes of each of the associated communities at Tamzhing Monastery.

¹¹⁹ The function and the members of the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Tshogpa* is discussed in the first chapter.

Table 1. Matrix of the communities' association and stakes at Tamzhing Monastery (prepared by author)

Community	Association and Responsibilities	Stakes (Potential)
Monastic community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious transmission of the Peling teachings. • Daily care and protection of the temple and its surroundings. • Monastic education from the first to the sixth grade to novice monks. • Participation and presiding the religious activities. • Religious service to the communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary bearers of the Peling teachings and religious practices. • Continuity of the religious traditions • Bearer of the knowledge of sacred mask dances (<i>Tsun cham</i>)
Tamzhing Choeje family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership and protection of the temple • Ownership and management of the cremation ground. • Responsibilities related to the organization and funding of the Phala Choedpa Festival. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represent ancestral and historical connections to the monastery. • Continuity of the religious traditions
Village community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in the Phala Choedpa Festival and religious events. • Collaborative efforts in organizing and funding the Phala Choedpa Festival. • Direct engagement with the monastery for living traditions and practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support for the successful conduct of the Phala Choedpa Festival. • Bearer of the knowledge of sacred mask dances (<i>boe cham</i>)
Visitors/Pilgrims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making offerings, seeking blessings and spiritual guidance. • Participating in religious practices and rituals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributing to the relevancy of the monastery • Contribution to the local economy
DCDD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection and management of Tamzhing temple • Approving authority • Monitoring and supervision of the conservation work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing support to the local community. • Bridging of modern knowledge and traditional practices

2.2. The interplay of tangible and intangible

The *Tamzhing* temple and *Phala Choedpa* Festival stand as prominent attractions for visitors and pilgrims; however, many are unaware of the other cultural sites or elements intricately associated with Pema Lingpa located in the environs of Tamzhing Monastery (*see Fig. 18*). These elements are an integral part of the religious activity conducted at Tamzhing Monastery. For example, on the seventh month of the lunar calendar, the monastic and the village communities conduct a ritual called *soelkha*¹²⁰ to propitiate the local deity at the spot where Pema Lingpa discovered ‘*Kagay Thugi Melong*’ (Eight Heruka’s Mirror of the Mind),¹²¹ located to the southeast of Tamzhing

¹²⁰ *Soelkha* is a common practice in Bhutan. It is conducted for the benefit and wellbeing of individuals, family and community.

¹²¹ “The Great Terton Pema Lingpa – Rigzin Pema Lingpa Foundations,” April 29, 2014, <https://www.peling.org/pema-lingpa/>. Accessed on 29/01/2024.

Monastery (see Fig. 18). These elements are not only the tangible markers of religious deposition but also the necessary components for religious practice and traditions. It also demonstrates how an intangible event gave rise to a tangible site which now caters for an intangible ritual—reinforcing the simple fact that the tangible and intangible complement each other within the context of this monastery. To further the argument on the interconnectedness and interdependency of the tangible-intangible elements, I will discuss the example of the tangibility and intangibility of significant elements of the Tamzhing Monastery in the following sections.



Figure 18. Map showing the location of the cultural sites and procession route during chamju¹²² (Illustration by the author)

¹²² It is the day before the main event (3 days) of the mask dances. During this day, all the mask dancers and female dancers undergoes cleansing ceremony and rituals. It also marks the final rehearsal of the mask dances equivalent to giving examination hence the name *chamju*, *cham* meaning dance and *ju* meaning examination.

2.2.1. Unveiling tangibility of intangible elements

To unveil the tangibility of intangible elements, I will examine the *Phala Choedpa* Festival, with a focus on the physical elements and spatial dynamics at play. The available literature and data from the semi-structured interviews with the mask dancers, the ancestral family and the *Tshogpa* (local people's representative) provided information about the festival.¹²³

It is generally assumed that intangible heritage elements are not attached to a specific space or place. This situation may be true for certain expressions or practices; however, the *Phala Choedpa* Festival is deeply rooted in the place. The rootedness lies in the reason for its introduction at the very space or place—the foundation of the *Tamzhing* temple.

When asked about the possibility of conducting the festival outside of the Tamzhing Monastery (creating a possible scenario), members of the ancestral family offered the following response:

We must know the significance of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival and the very reason why it was first introduced by Pema Lingpa. It does not make sense to conduct the festival at any place other than Tamzhing. In addition, the festival wards off evil and misfortunes and brings prosperity to the communities, therefore, it must be conducted annually without fail.¹²⁴

Expanding on the above response; as covered in the first chapter, the introduction of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival was to commemorate the consecration of the temple and implementation of the very specific instructions received by Pema Lingpa from his protective diety. In his vision, a pig showed him the spot and the layout for the construction of the temple.¹²⁵ As a physical metaphor, the performance of the pig dance involves the selection of a spot for construction, the act of digging

¹²³ *Tshogpa* is local people's representative of *Chiwog*. *Chiwog* is group of villages, basic electoral precincts of Bhutan. Tamzhing Monastery and the four villages associated with it falls under the *Pedtsheling-Tamzhing chiwog*.

¹²⁴ Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu, Interview with the family members of Tamzhing Choeje. The interview was carried out in *Dzongkha* and *Tshangla* (local languages) and the excerpt used is translated to English by the author.

¹²⁵ "Phagla Chothpa – Rigzin Pema Lingpa Foundations."

the foundation, and the act of drawing the layout of the temple.¹²⁶ Due to the specificity of the sacred dance, the festival becomes inseparable from the space of the Tamzhing Monastery. The temple is the link between the founder's dream sequence and the performance of pig dance in the human realm. This profound connection blurs the boundaries between the tangible and intangible, emphasizing the idea that the temple is not merely a backdrop for performance but a sacred space that conveys sacred meaning to the pig dance. Therefore, the separation of the place from the *Phala Choedpa* Festival would reduce it to mere folklore.



Figure 19. Performance of the pig dance, Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Festival.
(source: Karen Greenspan, "The Treasure Dances of Bhutan," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, accessed May 21, 2023, <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/bhutan-treasure-dances/>.)

During the first day of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival called *chamju*, all the participants (monks, laymen and women) undergo a cleansing or purification ceremony. As depicted in *Fig. 18*, the participants assemble at the water mill (associated with Pema Lingpa) and conduct the cleansing

¹²⁶ Jamtsho, "པད་ཐེང་ཕག་འཆམ། (Peling Phag Cham)," 211.

ceremony.¹²⁷ The water mill plays an important role in initiating the most important religious festival of the monastery. Participants dwell within the temple complex till the end of the festival, with laymen occupying the first-floor gallery, women occupying the ground-floor storage room, and monks in their respective quarters. Morning and evening rituals are continuously conducted in the presence of the participants in the temple for cleansing and blessing the participants in preparation for the main event. Therefore, the temple becomes crucial for the ‘proper’ conduction of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. The dynamic nature of the intangible heritage embodied in the festival is intertwined with the static, tangible essence of the sacred spaces of Tamzhing Monastery. Moving from the materiality of spaces to the objects of the sacred mask dances. The account provided by Khenpo Phuntsho Tashi shows the significance of the sacred mask dance of *Peling Ging Sum* performed at Tamzhing Monastery and now throughout Bhutan. He categorizes it into three ‘realms’:

...the outer, the inner and the secret realms. The outer significance relates to [the] transformation of ordinary body movement into physical mindfulness through the bodily gestures used within the dance which serves as a body yoga which cleanses the negative channels and helps to purify other forms of physical illness....The inner significance is associated with efforts that transmute the ordinary body of the performer into a deity form through the wearing of specific deity-faced masks and costumes. Through this action [,] both dance performers and spectators become joined together within the mandala and this results in the subduing of malevolent spirits and the removal of obstacles. The secret significance aims to transform [the] ordinary expression of the three doors—that of the body, speech and mind—into the ultimate mandala of [self-rising awareness].¹²⁸

Tashi emphasizes the importance of several physical elements, including the mask dancers’ bodies, masks, and costumes in serving as a transformational means to create a connection between the

¹²⁷ This ritual is presided over by a lama. It involves purification or cleansing by pouring holy water onto the heads of the participants and a blessing by the lama. This purification process is also continued to the temple area and repeated on the fifth day of the event which marks the end of the festival.

¹²⁸ Tashi, “The Sacred Dance of Peling Ging Sum,” 56.

mask dancers and the deity. It highlights the importance of the mask dancers manifesting as the deity to create a sacred space or as Tashi puts it, to create the ‘ultimate mandala’ for the audience to connect with and take refuge in. On a basic level, the sacred mask dances provide entertainment for the audience but at a deeper level, they offer a pathway to liberation from suffering.¹²⁹ Thus, religious objects become an important medium to realize the belief in the ultimate significance of the sacred mask dances.

Similarly, during the *Phala Choedpa* Festival, the costumes or *cham-gho*, masks and objects are adorned by the dancers according to the type of sacred mask dances they perform.¹³⁰ Further expanding the significance of *Peling Gingsum*. It is comprised of a trilogy of dances, *Juging* (stick dance), *Driging* (sword dance) and *Ngaging* (drum dance)—signifying the location of evil, subjugation of evil and celebration of the victory over evil respectively.¹³¹ The dancers of *Juging* wear several kinds of animal-headed masks and hold a stick, the dancers of *Driging* wear a red, wrathful mask and hold a sword and the dancers of *Ngaging* wear a green wrathful mask and carry a drum (*see Fig. 21*).¹³² Such adornment extend to the other sacred mask dances performed during the festival. As accounted by Tashi, these tangible adornments serve as a medium, allowing ‘ordinary’ dancers to manifest as divine entities.¹³³ The assemblage of these tangible elements and the manifestation of the mask dancers as divine entities contribute to the transmission of spiritual welfare to the audience, highlighting the imperative role of tangible elements in expressing intangible elements.

¹²⁹ Jaḡar Dorji and National Library (Bhutan), eds, *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bhutan* (Thimphu: Research & Media Division, National Library & Archives of Bhutan, 2015), 50.

¹³⁰ These objects include hand drums, hand bells, swords, sticks and, mirrors, etc which have symbolic significance in the mask dance.

¹³¹ Dorji and National Library (Bhutan), *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bhutan*, 53–54.

¹³² Tashi, “The Sacred Dance of Peling Ging Sum,” 58–61.

¹³³ Tashi, 56.



Figure 20. Trilogy of Peling ging sum dance during Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Festival.
(source: Karen Greenspan, "The Treasure Dances of Bhutan," Tricycle: The Buddhist Review, accessed May 21, 2023, <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/bhutan-treasure-dances/>.)



Figure 21. Masks are stored in the temple when not used. (Photo by the author)

2.2.2. Unveiling the intangibility of tangible elements

The attributes of sight and touch of the tangible elements enable the scientific and artistic study of their physical characteristics; however, this focus often overlooks the underlying intangible characteristics that truly define their significance. Thus, to delve beyond the physical characteristics, I will explore the intangibility of the tangible elements of Tamzhing Monastery taking the temple and its physical elements into the focus. I revisit key points presented in the first chapter and complement them with information gathered from semi-structured interviews with the members of the local communities and observations from the site visits.

Tamzhing Monastery is a depository of spiritual memories, and stories that unfold and are added. As discussed in the first chapter, Tamzhing has become the ‘site of memory’ for Pema Lingpa, his teachings, and his legacy in socio-cultural history. Maki labels *Tamzhing* temple as ‘centerpiece temple’ of Pema Lingpa, highlighting it as an important source of his teachings and blessings for devotees and pilgrims.¹³⁴ The various rooms of the temple serve specific or multiple functions and are continuously used. This continuous use has contributed to sustaining the relevance of the temple and the memory of the founder—and this memory is maintained by the associated local communities. In another sense, the absence of this ‘use’ or ‘function’ will endanger the relevancy and connection of the monastery to the various stake-holding communities.

The strong belief system of the communities gives meaning to the tangible elements of Tamzhing Monastery. The sacred spaces of Tamzhing Monastery are embedded in the temple through mural paintings, relics and statues¹³⁵ and the site through sacred elements.¹³⁶ The true significance of these tangible elements lies in their associated relationships with the communities underpinned by belief. For example, the cremation ground (see *Fig. 18* for the location) is revered by the communities associated with Tamzhing Monastery as they believe that it is blessed by Pema Lingpa (a holy stone marks its place, see *Fig. 15*). Communities strongly believe that it has the divine power to prevent the people from being reborn in the hell realm if they are cremated there.¹³⁷ For this very reason, it is revered by the communities and protected. Thus, the true significance of the cremation ground rests on the belief in its divine potential without which it will be reduced to any ‘normal’ stone or cremation space. The same is true for the 25-kilo iron chainmail worn by

¹³⁴ Maki, “The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study,” 138 & 140.

¹³⁵ Maki, 32.

¹³⁶ The sacred elements at the sites are the tangible elements presented in the *Fig. 19*.

¹³⁷ Department of Culture, གནས་ཡིག་གུན་པན་ལམ་རྟོན། (*Essential Guide to Sacred Sites*), vol. 5, 2012, 116.

pilgrims in the temple. They ascribe a spiritual value to it and religiously circumambulate around the inner sanctum of the temple wearing it.

Describing the planning of mural painting schemes and relics of the *Tamzhing* temple by Pema Lingpa, Maki gives the following account:

As is the case elsewhere in the Himalayas, in Bhutanese Buddhist temples the images within communicate the history, basic religious tenets and methodologies of a particular tradition, lineage or site. While the teacher himself would be considered the living source of the tradition, the *sculptures* and *paintings* serve an equally important role in providing an *understandable, accessible* display of the most important aspects of *Buddhist practice*. In the temple environment, these *visual ‘art’ elements* frequently act as *conduits* to the same degree [as] the *teacher* [himself and] are frequently objects of *devotion* in their own right.¹³⁸ (emphasis by author)

Maki points out that the mural paintings and relics are not just part of the art and architectural composition but act as the substitution for a Buddhist master or teacher which is an important aspect for Buddhist practitioners. In this understanding, such objects are not merely physical objects but a medium for the connection between the sacred and the human realm. Thus, the reverence of these sacred objects supersedes their artistic or material value. The reverence is manifested through the practice of offering light, food, water, etc. to mural paintings (only light offerings) and statues (*see Fig. 22*) and the conduction of continuous religious rituals by the monastic communities. These offerings and rituals serve as integral elements for devotees to express their devotion and practice *dharma* (Buddha’s teaching).¹³⁹ From the Buddhist perspective, in addition to strengthening the faith of devotees, these intangibles uphold the value of the sacred objects present at the site. Therefore, it is only through the intangible expressions of devotion and

¹³⁸ Maki, “The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study,” 159–60.

¹³⁹ “The Importance of Offerings,” Jampa Ling, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.jampaling.org/teaching-items/the-importance-of-offerings/>.

ritual that one can truly grasp the meaning and spiritual essence embodied within the tangible elements of the monastery.



Figure 22. Picture showing the offerings in the inner sanctum of the Tamzhing temple. (photo by the author)

2.2.3. Embracing the unity of tangible and intangible

Mounir Bouchenaki (Assistant Director General of Culture, UNESCO at the time), in his keynote address during the 14th General Assembly and Scientific Symposium of ICOMOS, highlighted the interdependency of tangible and intangible elements stating that “they are two sides of the same coin: both carrying meaning and the embedded memory of humanity” and imperative of holistic heritage approach.¹⁴⁰ Investigating deeper into the *Phala Choedpa* Festival and the physical elements within Tamzhing Monastery reveals that the tangible and intangible elements are inseparably linked. Acknowledgement of this interconnectedness and interdependency is critical

¹⁴⁰ Mounir Bouchenaki, “The Interdependency of the Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage,” January 1, 2003, https://www.academia.edu/65858694/The_interdependency_of_the_tangible_and_intangible_cultural_heritage.

for the interpretation of Tamzhing Monastery as a living religious heritage. Recognizing the role of both tangible and intangible elements provides for a more holistic appreciation of Tamzhing Monastery as heritage, allowing us to understand its significance in the lives of communities at the site, devotees and the broader socio-cultural fabric. Embracing the unity of the tangible and intangible elements within the monastery and its environs is critical for the formulation of a management plan.

2.3. Issues and challenges

There are several concerns and challenges associated with the Tamzhing Monastery and its future. The challenges also provide an opportunity to reconceptualize the cultural heritage of the Tamzhing Monastery, which is one of the main objectives of the thesis. The issues and challenges presented here are gathered from the interactions with the communities during my field visits. The issues and challenges can be grouped into four broad categories, each essential for ensuring Tamzhing Monastery's long-term viability and proper functioning as a living religious heritage. While I will present the issues and challenges in this chapter, the potential solutions will be discussed in the third and fourth chapters.

2.3.1. Incomplete interpretation and presentation

As already presented in the introduction of the thesis, one of the main justifications of the research topic is to reconceptualize or reinterpret the heritage of the Tamzhing monastery. Currently, the central heritage institution's understanding of Tamzhing Monastery's heritage is built majorly on the temple complex sidelining the *Phala Choedpa* Festival which is an important component of the monastery and the local communities. As a result, the monastery's cultural heritage is neither

presented holistically nor accounts for the importance of communities' presence and role in the development of management schemes.

As witnessed, the monastery is not just a historical site nor just a collection of sacred objects but represents a living heritage that continues to play a vital role in the lives of the local communities and vice versa. In addition, I discussed the interplay between the tangible and intangible elements of Tamzhing Monastery to display their interconnectedness and recognition of the various communities as active stakeholders who carry the living value and manage them.

2.3.2. Sustenance of *Phala Choedpa* Festival

Although the *Phala Choedpa* Festival currently has a well-established management system, it faces issues due to modernity.¹⁴¹ The out-migration trend from rural areas has hit this community as well, with many young people leaving the village in search of other opportunities.¹⁴² This phenomenon poses a significant threat to the continuity of the community's participation in the sacred dances and the tradition's very survival is at risk. This is not a risk for the monk dancers as there is support from the larger monastic institution under the patronage of the 11th *Sungtrul Rinpoche*.¹⁴³

Another phenomenon that will influence the *Phala Choedpa* Festival is the new settlers in the villages. Of the village communities associated with the festival, *Reyrey Bi* Village was integrated some two decades ago (*see Fig. 3*) which was formed from the communities branching from the

¹⁴¹ Many scholars, particularly historians, consider the 1960s as a transformative period in Bhutan's history, symbolizing the dawn of modernization. During this time, several reforms, external relations, and developments were initiated. 1960 also marks the threshold year as one of the criteria for registration of heritage sites in the national inventory list. While modernity in Bhutan commenced in the 1960s, its realization is multi-faceted and has yet to reach full capacity, particularly in rural areas.

¹⁴² This phenomenon is common to the other villages in Bhutan. One of the notable examples is the *Drametse Ngacham* (mask dance of the drums), inscribed on Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008.

¹⁴³ *Sungtrul* means the speech incarnation of Pema Lingpa and current *Sungtrul Rinpoche* is the 11th incarnation. The significance of this phenomenon is discussed in detail in the first chapter.

other three villages that owned the land at *Reyrey Bi* and a few of the new settlers.¹⁴⁴ The communities of the *Reyrey Bi* do not participate as dancers but only fund the fifth day of the festival.¹⁴⁵ As a recent phenomenon, the *Tshogpa* (local people's representative) shared that some of the lands have been sold to 'external parties' thereby diluting the homogeneity of the community. Interviews with the communities are almost conclusive that the communities do not feel that there is any risk to the tradition from the new settlers and foresee no shortage of participants for the festival in the future. The reasons for these opinions are that the festival is a religious activity for the welfare of the community and the belief that there will be always people in the villages willing to participate in the dances.

While the above opinions are appealing, they may be more wishful thinking than a reflection of practical reality. The enduring success of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival stems from the common faith shared by its surrounding communities, despite their dilution by newcomers in recent times. This collective devotion to the same religious beliefs creates a natural connection with the spiritual significance of the festival, serving as a unifying force that transcends differences of place of origin. However, the land transaction is the right of the individual landowners and a matter of opportunities or situations for trade. The scenario of the dance participation will look very different when the new settlers are of different faiths or are atheists and outnumber the existing religious communities. Given that participation is not a mandated law, willing participation in religious activity seems very unlikely for such people, thereby threatening the relevance of the festival. On the contrary, the very festival that creates social cohesion may create social bitterness. The ongoing development in the *Choekhor* Valley also aggravates this situation, the area will be more exposed

¹⁴⁴ Galey, Interview with the *Tshogpa* (local people's representative).

¹⁴⁵ Wangdi, Tenzin, and Norbu, Interview with the family members of Tamzhing Choeje.

to the outside world and potentially increase the interest of the external parties. Therefore, for sustenance of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival requires contextual solutions and long-term strategies for the transmission of traditional knowledge.

The support given by communities associated with the monastery in the form of resources and cooperation, is crucial for conducting the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. Another concern raised by the communities was the kind of financial expenditure that is needed to hold the festival. Currently, there is no financial support from the government for holding this festival. As presented in the first chapter, the ancestral family and the designated village community are responsible for funding all five days of the festival while the monastic community conducts all the religious activities as well as participates as mask dancers (*see Table 2*).

Table 2. Funding system during the Phala Choedpa (compiled by author)

Day	Name	Funding or sponsor	No. of households
First	<i>Chamju (cleansing ceremony)</i>	<i>Tamzhing village</i>	20
Second	<i>Main event</i>	<i>Tamzhing Choeje, ancestral family</i>	1
Third		<i>Khenchosum-kharsum village</i>	25
Fourth		<i>Torshong village</i>	16
Fifth	<i>Thruesel (closing ceremony)</i>	<i>Reyrey Bi village</i>	16
<i>No. of households recorded during the interview with the Tshogpa (as of 2023) and it is liable to change</i>			

The funds are equally divided among the households within the village assigned the specific day and not averaged across the whole of the five communities. Thus, for conducting the *Phala Choedpa* Festival, the *Tamzhing Choeje*, representing a single household, proportionally contributes the most while the village with the lowest number of households also contributes comparatively more than the village with the larger number of households. This system of financing will keep changing as the households themselves change in number, with some households branching out from the older households, the arrival of settlers new to the area or households leaving it. The designated *Tamzhing Choeje* family is obliged to contribute financially

due to its ancestral responsibility while, at the same time, these contributions act as one way of maintaining its legitimacy. However, from the point of view of the village community, there is inconsistency in funding mechanisms that would require streamlining and easing the financial burden.

2.3.3. Bridging modern conservation and traditional practices

As introduced in the first chapter, the most recent development is the scientific study carried out by the State and the subsequent valorization of the mural paintings and the temple. The exclusive emphasis on the tangible elements of the monastery has given rise to the contention that the significance of its intangible elements and the agency of the communities involved have been somewhat neglected. The one that produces contention is the differences in the social or traditional knowledge and modern concepts and knowledge of cultural heritage bodies, a situation that is also evidently a consequence of a modernizing Bhutan. These points of contention are diverse, but I would like to highlight two specific issues that are significant for living heritage, opening up a discussion of appropriate approaches for the conservation and protection of living heritage monuments.

Based on their material, artistic, and historical value, a moratorium has been issued by the DCDD concerning any kind of intervention on the mural paintings and structural walls until a conservation or restoration plan is finalized.¹⁴⁶ Thousands of butter lamps were offered to the mural paintings along two gallery corridors on auspicious days and during rituals (see *Fig. 23*). For the protection of the mural paintings, offering butter lamps is also discouraged by the DCDD.

¹⁴⁶ Utsha Gurung, Interview with the Chief, Antiquity Division, DCDD, Online, August 23, 2023.



Figure 23. A devotee offering light to the mural paintings.
(Source: *Conservation of the wall paintings of Tamzhing Monastery, Bumthang Dzongkhag* p.11)

The monastic principal noted that the monastery also aspires to protect the temple and mural paintings.¹⁴⁷ However, the heritage institution's understanding of the protection or conservation and that of the resident monastic community can differ from each other—for instance, the protection of the mural painting can be understood either as restoration with repainting completely or repainting the damaged part or conserving the mural paintings in their current state.

The oldest mural paintings which are in the oldest part of the temple complex are stabilized. However, several parts of the mural paintings have missing sections (*see Fig. 24*) which is problematic to the monastic community and the ancestral family. There are diverse opinions on both the butter lamp offering¹⁴⁸ and the conservation approach for the mural paintings. There is a take on the fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy and culture of practice, valuing the traditional practice (merit making) over the freezing approach that embraces new modern concepts. These differences should be expected given the diverse communities with stakes in Tamzhing Monastery.

¹⁴⁷ Tashi, Interview with the Principal of Tamzhing Monastery.

¹⁴⁸ The traditional use of butter for butter lamps as fuel is now hugely replaced by the cheaper options. This shift has notably resulted in surge of number of butter lamps offered at Tamzhing and throughout Bhutan. This phenomenon will be discussed in the next chapter.

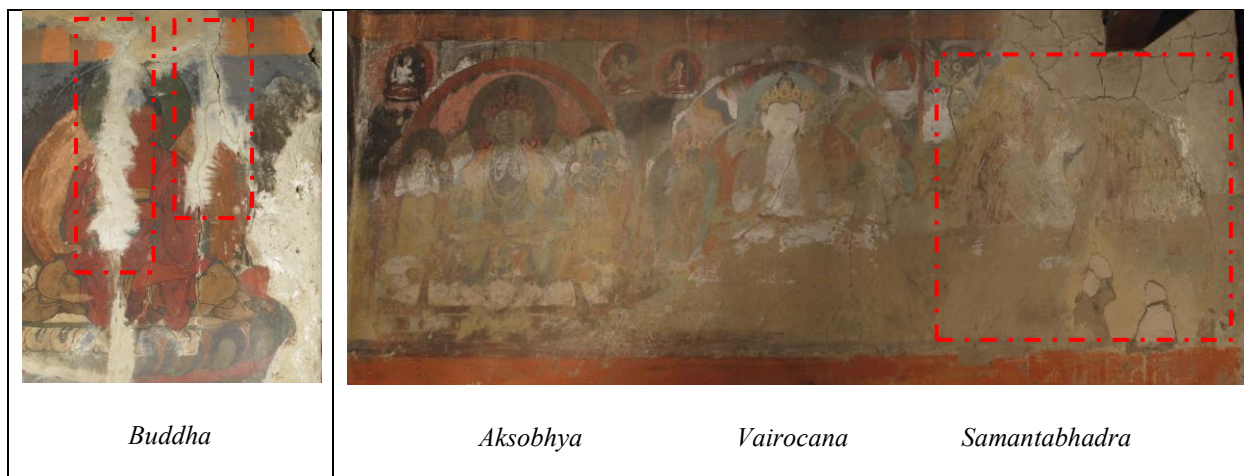


Figure 24. Mural Paintings with disfigurements. (highlight by author)
 (Source: Conservation of the wall paintings of Tamzhing Monastery, Bumthang Dzongkhag p.12 and p.93)

Another consequence of the material value of the mural painting, which is also attributed to its added value of extreme age, is the creation of central hegemony over the mural paintings with later additions. The notion has been created among the local communities that the oldest is the ‘original’ and the rest are not as worthy of protection. This attitude is evident in the porch mural painting, already facing degradation because of exposure to the elements and the monks who lean against it (see Fig. 25). The mural painting on the porch has been damaged by contact with the monks’ robes as they sit during the class lessons. This differential application of value connected to age threatens the valorization of the later schemes of mural paintings at Tamzhing Monastery and raises questions about how different stakeholders understand the value system. I will discuss all the above issues in the third chapter as it will be more meaningful to discuss this issue once the current protection system of cultural heritage is presented, especially as it applies to the living religious heritage of Bhutan.

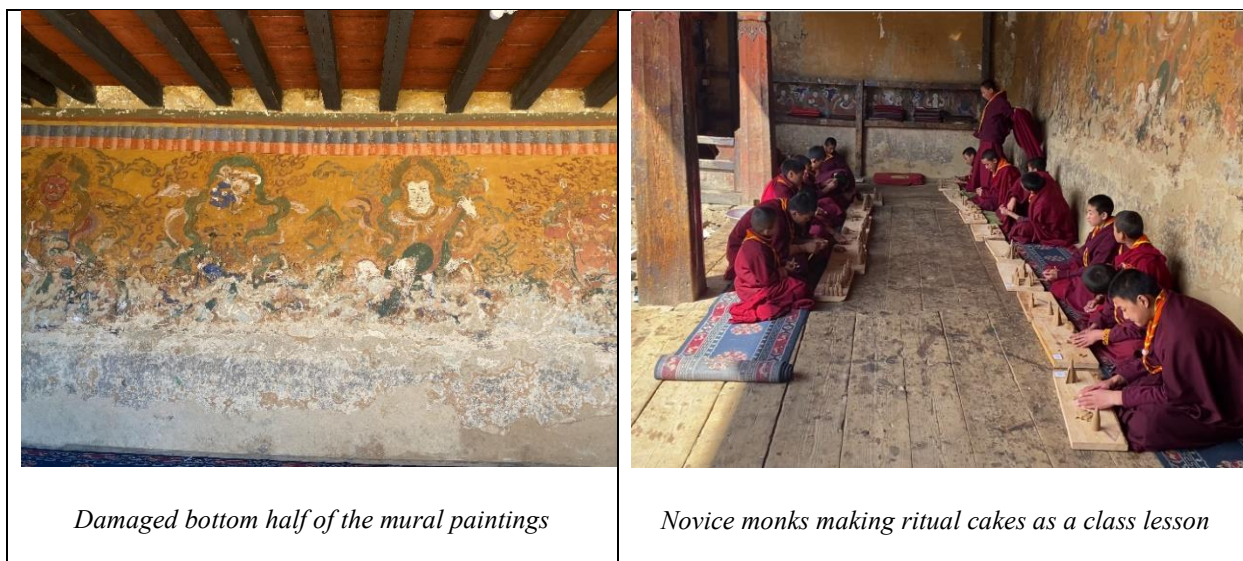


Figure 25. Condition of mural painting of the main porch of the temple. (photos by author)

2.3.4. Infrastructure needs and tourism considerations

As presented in the first chapter, the Tamzhing Monastery complex has physically evolved since its foundation responding to its changing socio-cultural environment—a fundamental characteristic of a ‘living site’. Naturally, requirements such as restoration, renovation, and new construction are part and parcel of Tamzhing Monastery. Facilities are required for the proper functioning of monastic education (such as classrooms) and visitors and spectators during the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. For example, currently, the toilets (under one structure) shared by the monks and the visitors are not practical and require dedicated facilities. Further, the situation is aggravated by the presence of a huge crowd during the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. Therefore, a proper master plan for the monastery is required with considerations such as the capacity of the site, requirements, architecture, and accessibility. I will not provide a master plan as it is not the main focus of the thesis.

In addition, the tourism component also needs to be considered to see how it can be integrated into the management of Tamzhing Monastery. However, an in-depth study of tourism considerations

does not lie within the scope of the thesis. Tourism can be both a boon and a problem. Tourism is not yet a big issue for Tamzhing Monastery and other heritage sites in Bhutan. Hence, it has not been presented in this thesis as part of the issues and challenges currently facing Tamzhing Monastery. There are no registers for the exact number of tourists visiting Tamzhing Monastery, however, as per the Bhutan Tourism Monitor report, a total of 11,950 tourists visited the *Bumthang* district for various reasons in 2019 (pre-pandemic).¹⁴⁹ The relatively low number of international visitors may be credited in large part to the tourism policy of ‘High Value, Low Volume’ in Bhutan which regulates the number of tourists and hence systematically mitigates the negative impact of tourism.¹⁵⁰ In addition, the Tourism Rules and Regulation 2022 of Bhutan mandates all tours to be accompanied by certified tour guides who are responsible for the tourist’s well-being as well as briefing them on visiting etiquette.¹⁵¹

Chapter conclusion

The true significance of the Tamzhing Monastery stems from the combination of the Tamzhing temple complex and the *Phala Choedpa* Festival, and the interplay of the tangible and intangible elements within the monastery. Thus, this compels a re-interpretation of the heritage of the Tamzhing Monastery, i.e. shifting the monastery from a ‘Heritage Site’ to part of Bhutan’s ‘Living Religious Heritage’. The deep understanding and cooperation between the associated communities are crucial for the sustainability of Tamzhing Monastery as a living religious heritage. The socio-

¹⁴⁹ Tourism Council of Bhutan, “BHUTAN TOURISM MONITOR 2019,” Annual (Thimphu: Tourism Council of Bhutan, n.d.), 20, https://www.tourism.gov.bt/uploads/attachment_files/tcb_K11a_BTM%202019.pdf.

¹⁵⁰ “Tourism Policy.Pdf,” 14, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://bhutan.eregulations.org/media/Tourism%20Policy.pdf>.

¹⁵¹ Sangay Tenzin, “Tourism Rules and Regulations 2022,” 2022, 5–6.

religious traditions in which the communities participate contribute to the social cohesion and harmony of the communities.

Tamzhing Monastery, nevertheless, faces multifaceted challenges threatening its sustainability as a living religious heritage due to modernity. The sustenance of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival is confronted with the decreasing numbers and interest of local communities in learning sacred mask dances, particularly the youths. Moreover, the valorization of the mural paintings by DCDD based on the material and artistic value, and by the local communities based on religious beliefs and traditional practices have created contention, demanding an investigation into the current protection and conservation practices in Bhutan. The forthcoming chapters will navigate the complexity of cultural heritage concepts, approaches and management contextualized to Tamzhing Monastery.

Chapter 3: The Context of Bhutan's Protection Policy for the Living Religious Heritage

In this chapter, I will contextualize Tamzhing Monastery within Bhutan's national protection and management framework such as the institutional functions and the Cultural Heritage Bill (2016) of Bhutan. Special attention will be given to Bhutan's living heritage, emphasizing the involvement of the community in the protection of heritage. Additionally, I will analyze how tangible and intangible elements are treated within the national management framework. Supplementing this analysis is a review of the '*Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan*', representing national efforts in Bhutan to develop and implement management plans for heritage sites. These analyses will allow me to assess the successes, implementation gaps and opportunities of Bhutan's current management system.

Further, I will analyze the issues and challenges presented in the second chapter, to propose potential strategies to address them. One key focus will be on the continuity of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. Additionally, another focus will be on the different 'value typologies' and 'assessment of values' by different stakeholders for conservation decision-making. I choose these two elements specifically as they are the most important religious-social elements of the monastery. However, recommendations to address the two issues will be provided in the fourth chapter.

3.1. The centralized cultural heritage protection system: institutional framework of Bhutan

Bhutan’s cultural heritage protection and promotion is a centralized institutional system. Since Tamzhing Monastery is listed as a ‘registered heritage site’, it falls under the centralized institutional protection system. The institutional framework operates within a hierarchical system that includes both central and local government entities (*see Fig. 26*). At the central government level, the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development (DCDD), under the Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for overseeing heritage protection for both the tangible and intangible heritage. DCDD is mandated for the formulation of overarching policies, guidelines, and regulations for the protection and management of cultural heritage in Bhutan.¹⁵²

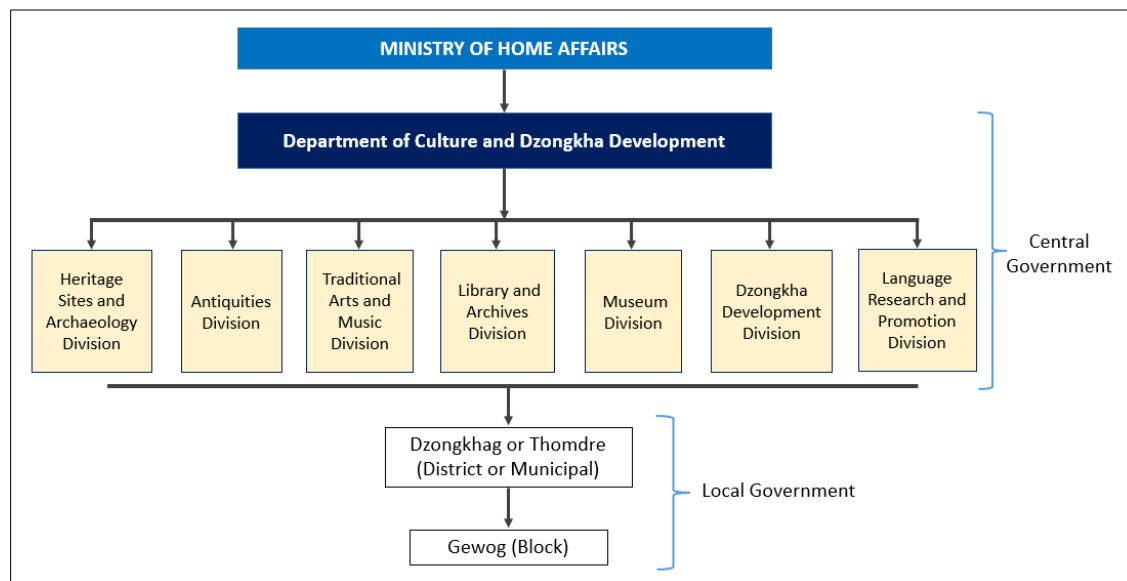


Figure 26. Institutional framework for the protection and promotion of the cultural heritage of Bhutan. (illustration by author)

¹⁵² “Who We Are – Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development,” accessed August 10, 2023, <https://doc.gov.bt/divisions/>.

At the local government level, the district or municipal office is responsible for executing and implementing these central directives within their respective jurisdictions.¹⁵³ For proper protection and management of heritage, the local government institutions collaborate closely with the central heritage institution, communities, and relevant.¹⁵⁴ Within this set-up, applications for works involving heritage sites follow the system shown in *Fig. 27. Bumthang District and Choekhor Block Administrations* are the responsible institutions for matters dealing with Tamzhing Monastery and the administrative link to the central agency.

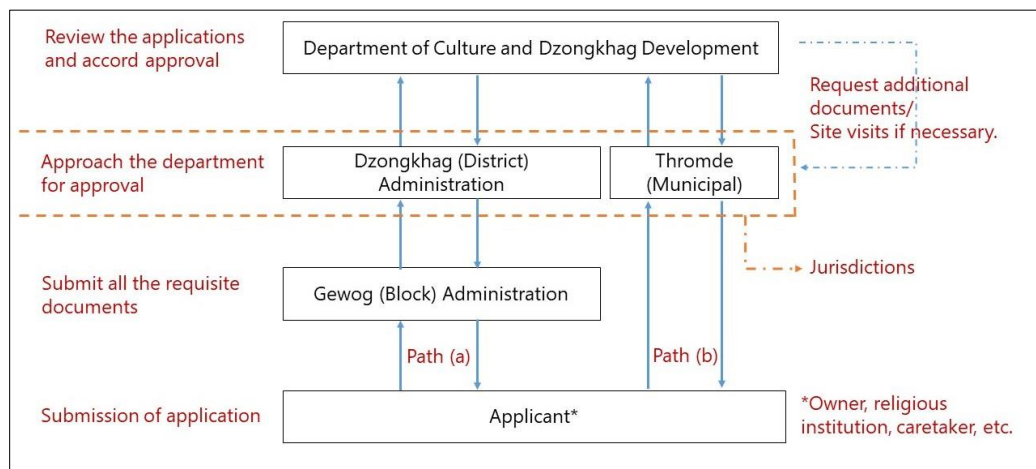


Figure 27. Procedure for application to carry out work on heritage sites. (modified by the author)
(Source: Department of Culture, “Relook into the Approach to Decentralization of Works into Heritage Sites” (Thimphu, March 31, 2022), 14.)

At present, Tamzhing Monastery adheres to the standard administrative procedure path (a) as depicted in *Fig. 27* for approval of all types of works (renovation, maintenance, new construction, etc.). This approach may suffice temporarily for piecemeal works. However, in light of the profound significance of Tamzhing Monastery along with its inherent socio-religious complexities,

¹⁵³ Karma Tenzin, “Making Conservation Decisions in Bhutan, Especially in the Context of Heritage Sites,” in *Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred*, 1 (ICCROM-CHA International Forum on Conservation, Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred, ICCROM, 2017), 79, http://asc.mcu.ac.th/cafe/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/asianbuddhist_web.pdf.

¹⁵⁴ Yeshe Samdrup, Interview with Heritage Official at the Heritage Sites and Archaeological Division, DCDD, in person, July 25, 2023.

a better, long-term solution is imperative, one that is comprehensively addressed within the individual management plan. Once agreed by all stakeholders, the plan should replace the more fragmented efforts, providing a streamlined process that minimizes the need for recurrent approval from the central agency. Additionally, a monitoring system is imperative to ensure the seamless operation of the management plan and to facilitate timely revisions in response to site changes.

In the existing operational framework, the central government is largely responsible for the interpretation and definition of heritage, particularly for registered heritage sites while the involvement of the local government and the communities (inhabitants and associated groups) is limited only to ‘assisting’ and ‘implementing’ roles. It may be (this is only speculation, of course) that this gap is due to the recent arrival of the ‘concept’ of conservation of cultural heritage in Bhutan, coupled with limited expertise in the local government and community.¹⁵⁵ While the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs was established in 1980, the concept of heritage conservation did not materialize until a decade later in 1990.¹⁵⁶ It was not until 2003 that the first technical division for the built heritage conservation was established.¹⁵⁷ This gap in the cultural heritage process and participation needs to be bridged, particularly in preparing a ‘feasible management plan’. Optimistically, there has been a surge in the involvement of local government and associated communities in the protection strategies and preparation of management plans in recent years. The *Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan (2020)*¹⁵⁸ and *Stewardship Plan*

¹⁵⁵ Initially (the exact period not known), approval of work on heritage site was decentralized to local governments. However, due to detrimental changes in nationally important heritage sites, the approving authority reverted to a totally centralized system. In 2022, a re-examination into the decentralization of the works was instituted again leading to a hybrid model: registered heritage sites remain centralized, while non-registered heritage sites are decentralized. Information retrieved from the presentation report, *Department of Culture, “Relook into the Approach to Decentralization of Works into Heritage Sites” (Thimphu, March 31, 2022).*

¹⁵⁶ “Who We Are – Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development.”

¹⁵⁷ “Who We Are – Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development.”

¹⁵⁸ Department of Culture, “Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan” (Division for Conservation of Heritage Site, Department of Culture, 2019).

for the Protection and Management of Nobgang an Important Cultural Site (2021)¹⁵⁹ stand out as promising examples for further implementation.¹⁶⁰

3.2. (In)Applicability of the provisions of the Cultural Heritage Bill, 2016

Currently, Bhutan has implemented the Movable Cultural Property Act 2005, yet there is no legislation specifically dedicated to the protection of heritage sites within the country. However, the Cultural Heritage Bill (referred to as CHB-2016, hereafter), if enacted, will repeal the Movable Cultural Property Act of 2005 and include the protection and management of heritage sites and intangible cultural heritage.¹⁶¹ Heritage sites refer to heritage buildings, cultural sites and archaeological sites.¹⁶² The institution of the management plan is mandated by the CHB-2016 for the designated heritage sites. Since the CHB-2016 has yet to be ratified, it remains challenging to accurately establish its effectiveness, drawbacks, and resulting outcomes.

Nonetheless, Stefania Abakerli and Patricia O'Donnell in their report entitled “Poverty and Social Impact Analysis of Bhutan’s Draft Heritage Bill”, provide an insight into the potential impacts of the CHB-2016 in four key areas, “assets, employment, financial architecture, and governance”.¹⁶³ The findings and recommendations, especially in the ‘governance area’ in which heritage management is subsumed, are of particular interest. As per the report, the overall impact of the

¹⁵⁹ “Stewardship Plan for Protection and Management of *Nobgang* as an Important Cultural Site – Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development,” accessed March 10, 2024, <https://doc.gov.bt/satrap/>.

¹⁶⁰ These management plans are pilot projects and reference for the local governments to prepare similar management plans in future. Information from *Yeshi Samdrup, Interview with Heritage Official at the Heritage Sites and Archaeological Division, DCDD*, In person, July 25, 2023.

¹⁶¹ Department of Culture, Cultural Heritage Bill of Bhutan, 2.

¹⁶² Department of Culture, 46.

¹⁶³ Stefania Abakerli and Patricia O'Donnell, “Poverty and Social Impact Analysis of Bhutan’s Draft Heritage Sites Bill,” 2014, 5.

CHB-2016 is positive, creating a broadened understanding of the heritage and its elements, improved stewardship, and the institution of financial support from the government for the protection of the registered or designated heritage sites irrespective of the ownership.¹⁶⁴ However, to mitigate a few of the negative potential impacts or threats, the report recommends the *engagement of key stakeholders* such as *owners, caretakers, local authorities*, and other concerned agencies in the *identification, registration, designation, and stewardship* of heritage sites.¹⁶⁵ It highlights the criticality of the involvement of the key stakeholders throughout the process of heritage definition and management planning of heritage sites.

Delving into the CHB-2016, Chapter 4 titled ‘Cultural Landscape’, Article 31 states that:

A Dzongkhag Administration or Dzongkhag Thromde Administration shall identify cultural elements of local importance, [that] contribute to the cultural landscape, such as built structures, distinct architectural style, settlement patterns, land-use patterns, natural settings, and geographical formation of cultural significance, as well as practices of Intangible Cultural Heritage.¹⁶⁶

The local government is mandated to identify cultural elements inclusive of both tangible and intangible elements, however, it fails to address the involvement or consultation with the local communities with which the cultural elements are associated, thereby, undermining their role in the management of the cultural elements. Something similar was cautioned by Abakerli and Donnell.

Regarding the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, measures are outlined in Article 198 which include the provision of “subsidies and incentives to the bearer, capacity building of the bearer, [the] inclusion of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the school curriculum, survey, research

¹⁶⁴ Abakerli and O’Donnell, 8.

¹⁶⁵ Abakerli and O’Donnell, 9.

¹⁶⁶ Department of Culture, Cultural Heritage Bill of Bhutan, 10.

and documentation, and public awareness raising through media, publication, exhibition and concerts.”¹⁶⁷ The application of this provision has the potential to be an important instrument in the safeguarding and promotion of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival at Tamzhing Monastery.

The registration and designation of heritage sites in Bhutan are identified based on their ‘cultural heritage value’, which becomes central to the preparation of the management plan. The CHB-2016 defines cultural heritage value as “...aesthetic, architectural, archaeological, historical, scientific, religious or spiritual significance that is of importance to the nation of Bhutan...” and also includes, “association with a particular community for social, cultural or spiritual reasons”.¹⁶⁸ The CHB-2016 take into account a wide array of values typologies, however, the Bill fails to identify the ‘entity’ responsible for assigning these cultural heritage values, thus, adding ambiguity to the valuation process. This lack of clarity regarding the ‘value assessment system’ has significant repercussions for the subsequent protection and management of heritage. In the last section of the chapter, I discuss the diverse value assessments by different stakeholders and the dynamics of the value assessments.

3.3. Review of the existing management plans in Bhutan

The *Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan* was ratified on 23rd June 2020 and the *Stewardship Plan for the Protection and Management of Nobgang as an Important Cultural Site* came into effect on 21st October 2021. The two management plans concern two distinct site contexts, the diverse approaches adopted, and the strategies implemented. One of the main objectives of the stewardship plan was to enhance the local economy by creating economic opportunities with community engagement and initiatives—designed by rehabilitating a historic

¹⁶⁷ Department of Culture, 32.

¹⁶⁸ “Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development - DoC,” 45, accessed April 26, 2023, <https://doc.gov.bt/en/>.

traditional house into a community-managed restaurant and cultural hiking packages.¹⁶⁹ While this model does not directly concern the issues discussed in my thesis, its implications are noteworthy for the way the plan was designed to boost the local economy and address the issue of rural-urban migration. This model holds promise as a community project that could complement the Tamzhing Monastery management plan and provide scope for future research.

Imbalance within the Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan

The *Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan* (hereafter referred to as PDMP) prepared for *Punakha Dzong*¹⁷⁰ in compliance with the still-to-be-ratified CHB-2016 is the first of its kind in Bhutan. Situated in the *Punakha* district, the seventeenth-century historic *Punakha Dzong* monument was founded by *Zhabrung Ngawang Namgyel* who is revered as the unifier of Bhutan. The site formerly served as the ancient capital until the mid-twentieth century,¹⁷¹ and now assumes the role of the winter capital for Bhutan's Central Monk Body.¹⁷² It continues to serve as the residence of the monastic community and its administration and office for secular district administration, upholding the continuity of the dual system of governance. According to its management plan, *Punakha Dzong* represents a "remarkable example" of a heritage building in Bhutan. Hence, it has been designated as a "heritage building of special importance",¹⁷³ the highest level of recognition under the provisions of the CHB-2016.

¹⁶⁹ "Stewardship Plan for Protection and Management of Nobgang as an Important Cultural Site – Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development."

¹⁷⁰ The term *Dzong* is equivalent to a fortress, containing both secular and religious administration of the district.

¹⁷¹ Department of Culture, "Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan," 110.

¹⁷² The *Zhung Dratshang* or the Central Body of Monks is an autonomous religious institution headed by the *Je Khenpo* (religious leader). It is the protector of and responsible for overseeing all religious activity in the country. Druk Journal, "Zhung Dratshang: The Central Monk Body of Bhutan | The Druk Journal," accessed August 26, 2023, <https://drukjournal.bt/zhung-dratshang-the-central-monk-body-of-bhutan/>.

¹⁷³ Department of Culture, "Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan," v.

The principle of the PDMP is underpinned by the protection of the historic monument, the *Punakha Dzong* structure marked as a ‘core zone’ in the management plan. Similarly, there are several other structures such as the monastic schools and crematorium which are assigned to the ‘conservation zone’. The regulations and guidelines outlined within the plan follow a stringent framework, particularly when it comes to the principal structure (the *Dzong*). Furthermore, an even more stringent level of restriction is applied to the older part of the *Dzong* founded by *Zhabdrung* and his immediate successor and relaxed for the later parts (extensions) of the structure, accommodating intervention works.¹⁷⁴ This approach employs the preservation of the ‘oldest’ or ‘original’ structure notion, fixating on the ‘historic and material value’. Similar notions are employed at Tamzhing Monastery at present.

To understand the effectiveness and limitations of the management plan, a semi-structured interview was conducted with Phub Dorji, a senior monk (representative of monastic stakeholders) who actively contributed to the formulation of PMPD.¹⁷⁵ Although similar interviews with other involved stakeholders will be more enlightening, the interview still provided valuable insights that are relevant to this thesis. The interview focused on four key areas, including the satisfaction levels concerning the management schemes, engagement of monastic stakeholders, considerations of tangible and intangible elements, and any identified drawbacks following the plan’s implementation after the ratification of the plan. In response, the interviewee expressed a high level of satisfaction with both the involvement of stakeholders during the preparation process and

¹⁷⁴ Department of Culture, 21–22.

¹⁷⁵ Phub Dorji, Interview with a senior monk of the Central Monk Body (stakeholder representative of the monastic community): Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan, in person, January 8, 2024.

the schemes within the management plan.¹⁷⁶ It shows that the involvement of local stakeholders during the planning process does lead to acceptable management schemes.

I want to highlight here that safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage is not explicitly included in the management plan, but rather, the responsibility for this heritage aspect was delegated to the National Library and Archives of Bhutan, a branch of DCDD.¹⁷⁷ Regarding the intangible elements, the interviewee (senior monk) elaborated that the annual religious festivals (such as *tshechu* and *dromchoe*) are well managed and sustained by the strong presence of the Central Monk Body and the involvement of local *gewogs* (village communities).¹⁷⁸ Altogether, two ideas appear here, firstly, that the tangible elements require immediate attention hence the main focus of the management plan and secondly, the assumption that the intangible heritage will continue as long as the communities endure. However, this approach as developed in the management plan inadvertently creates a disparity between the tangible and intangible elements. As covered in the second chapter in depth, the approach misses an opportunity to explore the interconnectedness and interdependency of the tangible and intangible elements.

Opportunity: conclusion of the interview with the senior monk

The senior monk highlighted that the primary drawback of the management plan was the discontinuity of focal persons or representatives of the stakeholders involved during the planning and implementation phases.¹⁷⁹ He remarked that this discontinuity caused delay and confusion in carrying out the tasks outlined in the plan. As a result, this emphasizes the importance of

¹⁷⁶ The interviewee was 99% (in his own words) satisfied with the involvement of stakeholders and the management plan schemes.

¹⁷⁷ Department of Culture, "Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan," 18.

¹⁷⁸ Dorji, stakeholder representative, Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan.

¹⁷⁹ Dorji.

incorporating a sensitization system into the management plan to delineate mandates and support changes in the respective focal person across stakeholders. In addition, there is a need to document the management planning process as historical documents for future reference and continuity of the processual knowledge.

3.4. Examining the safeguarding system of the *Phala*

***Choedpa* Festival**

As presented in the second chapter, the *Phala Choedpa* Festival is now confronted with the decreasing laymen's interest in mask dance. The continuity or rather the growth of community participation to date can be attributed to the unbroken transmission of the knowledge of the *Phala Choedpa* and the continued relevancy of the festival. Rightly, UNESCO states that “[t]he viability of intangible heritage practices relies on the ongoing transmission of the special knowledge and skills that are essential for their enactment or embodiment”.¹⁸⁰ In addition, UNESCO stresses that “[s]afeguarding ICH means ensuring its viability among today's generations and its continued transmission to tomorrow's”.¹⁸¹ Therefore, the transmission of knowledge of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival and the modality of the transmission need to be explored further. For this thesis, I understand ‘knowledge’ as having two components—knowledge of the significance of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival in general and knowledge connected to the mask dances and folk dances themselves (*see Fig. 28*). Within the knowledge of mask dances and folk dances lies the knowledge of choreography, techniques, rituals, costumes, among other things. The mode of transmission of

¹⁸⁰ “UNESCO - Transmission,” accessed March 23, 2024, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/transmission-00078>.

¹⁸¹ “UNESCO - Transmission.”

knowledge can be understood as the pedagogical method required for proper transmission of this body of ‘knowledge’.¹⁸²

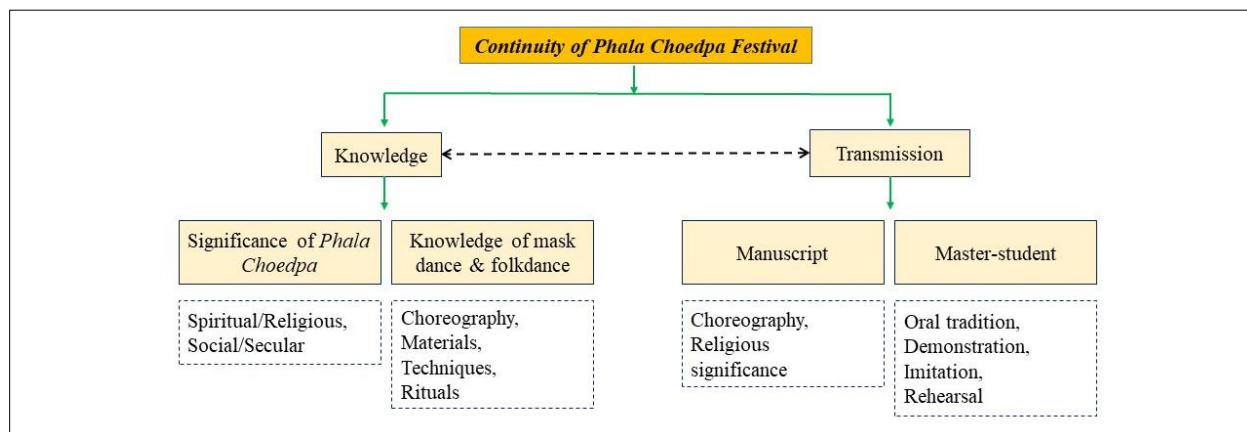


Figure 28. Schematic diagram of transmission of knowledge necessary to ensure the continuity of the Phala Choedpa Festival (flowchart by author)

To explore the mode of transmission of knowledge and the continuity of *Phala Choedpa*, the elements in Figure 28 will be expanded in the following sections.

3.4.1. Knowledge of the significance(s) of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival

The central purpose of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival is the ‘welfare’ of the ‘local communities’ in terms of bringing peace, health, merit, and prosperity, underpinned by its undoubted religious or spiritual significance. However, the long-standing tradition of collaborative and shared responsibility among different communities for successfully conducting this festival has its own social (secular) significance. The former provides the ‘motivation’ for holding the festival, and the latter is critical for the ‘process’ of holding it, which contributes to fostering social cohesion. This social responsibility and collaborative practice are also evident in other community-driven

¹⁸² “UNESCO - Kit of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” accessed March 23, 2024, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/kit>.

activities witnessed at the site. This includes activities like the *woola* (labor contribution) for the construction of communal structures and houses, or during the annual harvest, which operates on a ‘reciprocity of favor’ basis.¹⁸³ As a result, advocating for these ‘elements of significance’ within the community becomes critical to instilling a greater appreciation for the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. This approach has the potential to revive local interest in the festival and increase participation.

Returning to the potential scenario outlined in the second chapter, particularly regarding the dilution of communities due to the influx of new settlers, fixating solely on the religious significance of the *Phala Choepa* Festival may raise concerns among households of different faiths, branches of Buddhism or non-believer communities. However, emphasizing the social agency inherent to organizing the festival can create space for participation, allowing households to contribute according to their capacities. While the local village communities may embrace both the religious significance and the need to contribute to the festival as dancers or financially, newcomer communities can embrace its social significance by contributing to social responsibilities such as management or donations.

3.4.2. Opinions of the mask dancers

To understand the issues and challenges at the site, as well as opportunities for the *Phala Choedpa* Festival, semi-structured interviews with the mask dancers, *Kezang Dorji* (pseudonym) and *Pema*, representing the monastic and village communities respectively.¹⁸⁴ Their responses to the questions are presented in the table below:¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Jagar Dorji and National Library (Bhutan), eds, *Intangible Cultural Heritage of Bhutan* (Thimphu: Research & Media Division, National Library & Archives of Bhutan, 2015), 131.

¹⁸⁴ Kezang Dorji and Pema, Interview with Mask Dancers of the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa*, in person, January 6, 2024. Specific questions were devised after a first round of interviews in 2023 with other interviewees and my preliminary assessment of the site.

¹⁸⁵ Only a few of the questions are included here to keep the discussion relevant to the thesis topic.

Table 3. Result of the interview with the mask dancers (by author)

Questions	Answers ¹⁸⁶ (Kezang Dorji: KD & Pema: P)
What are the challenges and issues encountered by the dancers in their efforts to sustain the Phala Choedpa Festival?	KD: Younger monks are interested, but the older monks are leaving the monastery. P: Declining interest in participation yearly especially among the youth. Sun and weather are issues sometimes during rehearsal and the main event.
What measures or actions should be taken to ensure the continuity of the festival?	Important for the elder people to educate and encourage youths to continue the tradition.
What kind of support is needed from the government? (policies or funds or system, etc.)	Funding for conducting the Phala Choedpa Festival
What is your opinion on the potential scenario where there is a lack of interest among the local community to learn and perform the mask dances?	KD: If there is no participation from the community, then the monastic community will perform all the mask dances. P: Firmly believe that there will be participants for the mask dancers even though there is declining interest.
Will it be appropriate for people from outside the associated community to practice and perform the mask dances during the Phala Choedpa Festival?	As long as the community has enough people, it will be an in-house festival. If there are not enough people, then this can be a solution.

The interview highlighted the important role of the ‘elders’ in educating and encouraging the younger generation to appreciate, value and participate in the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. The ‘elders’ in the community also include the senior mask dancers and senior monks. This answer implies that dissemination of knowledge is not the sole responsibility of the *champo*, the lead mask dancer, but rather a social duty of the older generation—an inherent debt owed to the younger and future generations. I discuss the responsibilities of the *champo* when examining the mode of knowledge transmission.

The interview also underscored the notion that should future village community participation in the *Phala Choedpa* diminish, two potential solutions could be considered: either the monastic community could assume full responsibility or involve dancers from other, outside communities. However, these potential solutions have implications for the association of the Village Community with the *Phala Choedpa*, a matter I discuss in the section ‘*Projecting probable scenarios of the village community in Phala Choedpa Festival*’ of the fourth chapter.

¹⁸⁶ Similar opinions are grouped together, while differing opinions are presented separately under their initials.

3.4.3. Mode of transmission of knowledge: mask dances

The Chinese scholars, Changqing Sun, Hong Chen, and Ruihua Liao have noted that the transmission of knowledge is fundamental for passing on intangible cultural heritage from generation to generation.¹⁸⁷ In addition to the transmission of knowledge, the mode of transmission is also crucial for ensuring proper and sustainable knowledge transmission to the participants and the general village communities associated with the Tamzhing Monastery. As presented in the first and second chapters, both the monastic community and village community have their mask dance performances and hence separate systems for the transmission of knowledge. In this section, I only discuss the transmission of knowledge of mask dances performed by the village community as this is the area that faces future problems.¹⁸⁸

The interview with the mask dancers revealed that the time taken to acquire the techniques and learn the steps depends on the individual dancers and their capacity which can take from days to months and also depends on the number of dances one performs.¹⁸⁹ The mode of transmission of knowledge of mask dances still follows traditional practice. Yeshe Lhendup, a researcher at the National Library and Archives of Bhutan, provides information on knowledge transmission.¹⁹⁰ Lhendup reports that all the choreographies of the mask dances are transmitted using traditional means which involves sharing oral accounts and demonstrations by the *champo* and then imitation by the trainers or learners “until they acquire [the] right technique”.¹⁹¹ Lhendup reports

¹⁸⁷ Changqing Sun, Hong Chen, and Ruihua Liao, “Research on Incentive Mechanism and Strategy Choice for Passing on Intangible Cultural Heritage from Masters to Apprentices,” *Sustainability* 13, no. 9 (May 7, 2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13095245>.

¹⁸⁸ The mask dances are taught as part of the monastic curriculum from grade five and above novice monks “Tamshing Lobdra – Rigzin Pema Lingpa Foundations,” May 7, 2014, <https://www.peling.org/tamshing-lobdra/>.

¹⁸⁹ Dorji and Pema, Interview with the Mask Dancers of Phala Choedpa.

¹⁹⁰ Yeshe Lhendup, “Tamzhing Phag-Chham: The Boar Mask Dance of Tamzhing Monastery,” *ichLinks*, 2015, <https://www.ichlinks.com/archive/elements/elementsV.do?elementsUid=13874510565076677498>.

¹⁹¹ Lhendup.

that the steps are documented in the choreography manuscript called *chamyig*, however, the unexpected loss of the manuscript of *Phag Cham*, in particular, has resulted in the loss of fifty percent of the steps which is a concern for the elders of the village community.¹⁹² It is safe to assume that the changes to the steps of the mask dances except for the *Phag Cham* do not change due to the presence of *chamyig(s)*, however, small nuanced changes are possible due to the interpretation and intervention of different master dancers over a time.

3.5. Investigating the value assessment system

‘Cultural Heritage Values’ become central as they determine conservation decisions. One of the principles adopted by the CHB-2016 of Bhutan is value-based protection, where ‘Cultural Heritage Values’ become integral to the protection system¹⁹³ as already observed in PDMP discussed earlier. In their work “The Significance of Values: Heritage Value Typologies Re-Examined,” Fredheim and Khalaf address value typologies and their implications for heritage conservation and management.¹⁹⁴ They advocate for evaluating the value evaluation in practice and supporting ‘holistic approaches and diverse engagement in the process. Building upon this concept, I will examine the value typologies, whether defined or not at *Tamzhing* temple and analyze the value assessment system that could determine the future of the heritage element in the focus here.

As presented in the second chapter, different communities associated with Tamzhing Monastery have their understanding of what is valuable and how they approach the value typologies. *Table 4* presents the overview of the value assessment by different communities and their respective approach towards the value typologies.

¹⁹² Lhendup.

¹⁹³ Department of Culture, “Capacity Building Program,” 2022, 10–17.

¹⁹⁴ L. Harald Fredheim and Manal Khalaf, “The Significance of Values: Heritage Value Typologies Re-Examined,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 22, no. 6 (July 2, 2016): 466–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2016.1171247>.

Table 4. Communities and value typologies (by author)

Community	Value Attributes or Typologies	Concerns	Tangible Expressions	Approach or Attitude	Result
DCDD/Conservators	Artistic, Historical, Age, Architectural	Originality and authenticity of materials	Mural paintings, structural walls	Conservation, Protection	Contention with offerings (butter lamps) and repainting, Neglect of newer paintings
Monastic Community	Spiritual or Religious, Tradition*	Continuation of practices or rituals, Accumulation of spiritual merits	Mural paintings and temple structure	Repainting damaged parts, Offerings	Contention with freezing of tradition
Tamzhing Choeje	Spiritual or Religious, Tradition	Continuation of practice, Accumulation of spiritual merits	Mural paintings and temple structure	Repainting damaged parts, offerings	Contention with freezing of tradition
Village Community	Spiritual or Religious, Tradition	Accumulation of spiritual merits	Mural paintings and temple structure	Offerings	Spiritual connection
Pilgrims	Spiritual or Religious	Accumulation of spiritual merits	Temple as a whole	Offerings and religious activities	Spiritual connection

**Tradition: the tradition of repainting damaged or deteriorated mural paintings or part of them with the motivation of completing the painting schemes and gaining spiritual merit. The tradition of offering light (butter lamps) to the mural paintings.*

Table 4 illustrates that the conservators primarily prioritize art and historical values, while other communities prioritize religious or spiritual values. The intangible elements are deeply rooted in religious beliefs, rituals, or practices, and motivated by the notion of accumulating spiritual merits. While I previously addressed the value assessment conducted by the conservators, I will now elaborate on the assessment of value by the monastic community and ancestral family, as they are the primary stakeholders.

The repainting of damaged mural paintings is a living tradition engrained in religious beliefs. A study was undertaken between 2008 and 2010 by Lisa Shekede and Stephen Rickerby in collaboration with DCDD, entitled “Buddhist Wall Paintings of Bhutan: Material Traditions and Conservation Realities”.¹⁹⁵ They note that overwhelming material evidence of major important Buddhist temples (including the Tamzhing temple) demonstrates that mural paintings in Bhutan

¹⁹⁵ Lisa Shekede and Stephen Rickerby, “Buddhist Wall Paintings of Bhutan: Material Traditions and Conservation Realities,” n.d..

have never remained static but have undergone modification throughout their history.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, according to the conservation project report of the DCDD, there is evidence of historical repainting being carried out in the temple in parts or as a whole (schemes).¹⁹⁷ Along with *thangkas* (scroll paintings) and statues in the temple, mural paintings illustrate the rituals, deities and Buddhist masters that support Buddhist practice.¹⁹⁸ The mural paintings serve as a didactic function for Buddhist teachings; hence the ‘complete’ mural painting schemes are very crucial for the communities at the site—degraded and incomplete mural paintings become devalued.¹⁹⁹

The mural paintings also function as a means for devotees to practice *dharma*. As a part of this tradition, devotees offer light to the mural paintings in the form of burning butter lamps. The act of offering in general is an ‘antidote’ to attachment or in another understanding it is the practice of altruism.²⁰⁰ The symbolic meaning of an offering of light is the removal of ignorance (one of the three poisons of Buddhism, the other two being attachment and hatred) just as the light dispels darkness.²⁰¹ Therefore, the tradition of offering light to the mural paintings is considered an essential part of the living tradition by the monastic community. Thus, patronage²⁰² of the mural paintings and making offerings of light are part of the Buddhist practice and spiritual merit-making process.²⁰³

¹⁹⁶ Shekede and Rickerby, 236.

¹⁹⁷ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, “Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery.”

¹⁹⁸ Maki, “A Visual Transmission: Bhutanese Art & Artists from the 17th-19th Centuries,” 102.

¹⁹⁹ Shekede and Rickerby, “Buddhist Wall Paintings of Bhutan,” 236.

²⁰⁰ “Buddhist Water Bowl Offerings as an Antidote to Attachment - Buddha Weekly: Buddhist Practices, Mindfulness, Meditation,” August 19, 2016, <https://buddhaweekly.com/buddhist-water-bowl-offerings-as-an-antidote-to-attachment/>.

²⁰¹ “Butterlamp Offering | Make an Offering | Chagdud Gonpa Foundation,” accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.chagdudgonpa.org//offerings/butterlamp-offering>.

²⁰² There are several other forms of patronage and offerings.

²⁰³ Shekede and Rickerby, “Buddhist Wall Paintings of Bhutan,” 236.

There is a distinct contrast between the approach of the ‘conservators’ and the ‘non-conservators’ (the monastic community and ancestral ‘owner’ family) with two distinct positions for the management of mural paintings emerging: the conservator advocates for conservation of the mural paintings (often incomplete) with a prohibition on ‘destructive rituals’ while the non-conservator advocates for continuous repainting of the damaged mural paintings (to completion) and veneration through continued rituals. The main source of contention at the site stems from these two conflicting positions.

3.5.1. The dilemma: values are neither static nor consistent

The value typologies are complex, and at times, contradictory when approaches to protect them are considered. Assessment of the values occasionally changes with additional knowledge or if new contexts are provided around the values; therefore, assessing ‘value’ can become unpredictable. Complexity and unpredictability are what make it difficult to devise an appropriate protection scheme that satisfies all stakeholders. I will now present the inconsistencies in the positions of the value assessment of the stakeholders demonstrating the changing nature of the value assessment that may come with additional knowledge or new contexts.

The most significant change in the valorization or prioritization of new values for heritage sites by the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development can be observed at the *Drugyel Dzong Ruin*. The site was ‘heritagized’ as an ancient site and even submitted to the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2012.²⁰⁴ However, this changed in 2016 when it was announced to be reconstructed to commemorate the birth of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Bhutan,

²⁰⁴ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Ancient Ruin of Drukgyel Dzong,” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed March 31, 2024, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5694/>.

the birth year of *Guru Rinpoche*, and the 400th year of *Zhabdrung's* arrival in Bhutan.²⁰⁵ The motivation for the reconstruction transformed the heritage site from being valorized as a historical ruin to a symbol of commemorative value. In addition, upon the completion of the reconstruction, the commemorative value would be extended with functional value. If this notion is taken into consideration, switching to other value typologies can be viewed as a viable approach to monument protection in Bhutan.

The monastic community's acceptance of the strict conservation of the mural paintings demonstrates the possibility of a higher degree of reverence and valorization. This phenomenon was recently observed in the total reconstruction of the *Utse* (central tower) in the seventeenth-century *Tango* Monastery after it suffered a failure of its structural integrity.²⁰⁶ 700 square meters of mural paintings (a special painting style called the *menlung* tradition) were detached, conserved and reattached back after the completion of the reconstruction of the structure.²⁰⁷ The monastic community praised the DCDD for conserving the mural paintings during the consecration ceremony. The acceptance of this preservation stemmed from the fact that the conservation efforts facilitated the continuity of the sacredness inherent in the original mural paintings. It is believed that sacredness is embodied in the old mural paintings through spiritual blessings called *jinlab* (which are manifested through persons, sacred objects, or events).²⁰⁸

During my field visit, Sonam Wangchuk, a monk who was assigned as *kunyer* (caretaker) at the time of the interview at Tamzhing Monastery shared his views on the old mural paintings and their

²⁰⁵ Bhutan's Daily Newspaper, "Drukgyel Dzong Reconstruction Almost Complete," Kuensel Online, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://kuenselonline.com/drukgyel-dzong-reconstruction-almost-complete/>.

²⁰⁶ Bhutan's Daily Newspaper, "Tango and Chari Monasteries Consecrated," *Kuensel Online*, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://kuenselonline.com/tango-and-chari-monasteries-consecrated/>.

²⁰⁷ Newspaper.

²⁰⁸ "Jinlab: Blessings | Mandala Collections - Texts," accessed April 1, 2024, <https://texts.mandala.library.virginia.edu/text/jinlab-blessings>.

future.²⁰⁹ He emphasized that the old mural paintings hold their value due to the presence of *jinlab* and, thus, should not be repainted. He elaborated, pointing out that modern paint materials differ significantly in quality and composition, and could have potentially compromised the value of the mural paintings—something that a conservator would say.²¹⁰ With curiosity, when questioned about this statement, he disclosed that he acquired information on the concept of conservation from the internet.²¹¹ If this notion is taken into consideration, it shows that the conservation of old mural paintings should be a priority provided that the knowledge behind the concept of conservation is made available to local stakeholders.

Delving deeper into the practice of offering burning butter lamps to the mural paintings at Tamzhing temple reveals conflicting interpretations of tradition. Because this kind of offering is rooted in the pursuit of accumulating spiritual merits, devotees are inclined to offer a greater number of butter lamps. However, the true significance of the butter lamp lies in the symbolic act of offering light. Here the importance is not the ‘butter lamp’ itself but rather its ‘light’. An interview with Karma Phuntsho, a historian, and the author of “The History of Bhutan”, sheds light on this practice.²¹² Phuntsho critically examines the tradition of butter lamp offerings at Tamzhing temple, noting that the increasing number of light offerings over time correlated significantly with the economic progress of Bhutanese society and the availability of cheaper options such as the ‘hydrogenated vegetable cooking oil’ (one popular brand, *Dalda*) imported from India, compared

²⁰⁹ Sonam Wangchuk, Interview with a monk, a member of monastic community, in person, January 5, 2024.

²¹⁰ Tashi Lhendup, a conservator involved in the conservation of mural painting at *Tamzhing* temple shared that the painting style at *Tamzhing* temple comprise of having least three paint layers, and therefore, repainting any section having even one paint layer will completely damage the historical value and opportunity to research.

Tashi Lhendup, Interview with the conservator involved in the Mural Painting Conservation Project of Tamzhing Monastery, in person, January 3, 2024.

²¹¹ Wangchuk, assigned as caretaker of the temple during the interview.

²¹² Phuntsho, Interview with a Bhutanese historian and Buddhist scholar.

to the traditional expensive ‘butter’.²¹³ He critiques this transition from the original concept of a light offering to a more materialistic tradition.²¹⁴

All four scenarios offer insight into the dynamic nature of the value typology system. It demonstrates that the values are neither static nor consistent. Besides, values evolve in response to changes in the socio-economic context and when additional knowledge is available. This complexity poses numerous dilemmas when considering the appropriate way forward for the future of the mural paintings at Tamzhing Monastery.

Chapter conclusion

Investigation into the protection and management system for the cultural heritage in Bhutan highlighted the need for a contextualized management plan for the Tamzhing monastery within its centralized system. Further, the CHB-2016 is promising for the protection of cultural heritage but attention has to be given to the value assessment system and the involvement of the local community for its effectiveness. The interview with the senior monk involved in the formulation of PDMP highlighted the positive outcome of stakeholders’ involvement in terms of ownership of the plan. It also highlighted the opportunities for a management plan to make it more effective. Investigating the safeguarding of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival highlighted the requirement to enhance the current system of transmission of knowledge of the festival. Meanwhile, the reconciliation of modern knowledge and traditional practice for the conservation decision for mural paintings and the temple necessitates diversification of the value assessment system considering the religious beliefs and traditions. The recommendations to address the issues outlined above will be provided in the fourth chapter.

²¹³ Phuntsho.

²¹⁴ Phuntsho.

Chapter 4: Recommendations: Managing Tamzhing Monastery as a Living Religious Heritage

Given its expansive scope, the formulation of a management plan for Tamzhing Monastery requires meticulous planning, extensive stakeholder consultations and approval from the Cabinet Secretariat of the Royal Government of Bhutan for implementation.²¹⁵ The heritage management plan comprises activities including identifying the stakeholders, demarcating protection boundaries and buffer zones, and articulating management strategies.²¹⁶ As outlined in the scope of the thesis, my focus is not on the formulation of a management plan for the Tamzhing Monastery but rather on providing recommendations for the formulation of one. Thus, in this chapter, I will provide recommendations that will guide the formulation of such a management plan for this culturally important monastery. Within this, specific recommendations for the *Phala Cheodpa* Festival and *Tamzhing* temple complex will also be provided. These recommendations were developed based on the analyses and findings from the previous three chapters.

4.1. Living heritage approach: broadening the heritage of Tamzhing Monastery

Within the South Asian heritage context, Neel Kamal Chapagain defines ‘heritage management’ generally “as a process of maintaining (and, sometimes enhancing) the significance of a particular

²¹⁵ Since the CHB-2016 is not ratified, the approving authority for the individual management plan is vested to the Cabinet Secretariat of Royal Government of Bhutan.

²¹⁶ Department of Culture, “Punakha Dzong Heritage Site Management Plan.”

heritage and making it available for relevant groups of people to engage with it.”²¹⁷ The definition provides a comprehensive amalgamation of the discussions outlined in the previous chapters of this thesis—particularly part about the maintaining the significance(s) and continuity of the accessibility of Tamzhing Monastery to its associated communities. As already discussed in the previous chapters, Tamzhing Monastery requires a holistic approach to protection and management. Therefore, I propose reconceptualizing the perception of the Tamzhing Monastery as a ‘Heritage Site’ to a ‘Living Religious Heritage’ of Bhutan, thus, broadening the concept of heritage beyond the physical site itself. The religious and social values inherent to Tamzhing Monastery are crucial factors in determining its importance as a ‘living religious heritage’.

As introduced in the introduction to the thesis, Gamini Wijesuriya has provided a comprehensive understanding of the living heritage approach developed from the ICCROM 2003 Forum on the theme “Conservation of Living Religious Heritage”²¹⁸ and the ICCROM 2013 Forum on the theme “Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred”.²¹⁹ Wijesuriya summarized the living heritage approach for the conservation and management of heritage as follows:

- As a philosophy: It emphasizes continuity as the primary driver for the definition, conservation and management of heritage.
- As a process: It facilitates a [community-led] (bottom-up), interactive approach to conservation, emphasising core community values (recognizing, however, a hierarchy of values and stakeholders), recognizing changes and utilising traditional or established management systems (in terms of practices, materials, knowledge) [to] deliver benefits to the community (e.g. spiritual, social, economic, developmental, etc.) while taking care of the fabric.

²¹⁷ Neel Kamal Chapagain, “Introduction: Contexts and Concerns in Asian Heritage Management,” in *Asian Heritage Management: Contexts, Concerns, and Prospects*, eds, Kapila Silva and Neel Kamal Chapagain (London: Routledge, 2013), 9, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203066591>.

²¹⁸ Herb Stovel et al., ed., *Conservation of Living Religious Heritage: Papers from the ICCROM 2003 Forum on Living Religious Heritage: Conserving the Sacred*, ICCROM Conservation Studies 3 (Rome: ICCROM, 2005).

²¹⁹ Wijesuriya, *Asian Buddhist Heritage*.

- As a product: The community is empowered (a strong role in decision-making) to safeguard heritage with new decision-making mechanisms.²²⁰

Wijesuriya highlights the continuity, consideration of community values and empowerment of the community as an overarching principle in conservation decision-making process and management.

Wijesuriya defines continuity as continuity of use (original function), which in turn addresses the continuity of community connections and continuity of care.²²¹

These three aspects of continuity need to be defined for Tamzhing Monastery.

- i. *Continuity of use or function:* Tamzhing Monastery is a revered Buddhist monastery, serving as an important ‘site of memory’ for Pema Lingpa. It stands as an important monastic institute for *Peling* teachings to novice monks and devotees alike. Moreover, it is revered as a pilgrimage destination and serves as the foundational site for the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. *(As discussed in the first and second chapters)*
- ii. *Continuity of community connections:* Multiple communities and their rights and obligations are woven into various facets of life at Tamzhing Monastery. Their connection and engagement extend through religious and social responsibilities which entail the continuity of traditions and religious practices, as bearers of knowledge and transmitters of sacred teachings and mask dances as well as participation in the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. *(Key stakeholders were identified in the second chapter)*
- iii. *Continuity of care:* Traditional systems of care and management exist in various facets of Tamzhing Monastery. These are underpinned by the idea of shared responsibility among

²²⁰ Gamini Wijesuriya, ed., “Introduction,” in *Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred*, ICCROM-CHA, Conservation Forum Series 1 (ICCROM-CHA International Forum on Conservation, Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred, Rome, Italy: ICCROM, 2017), 2, http://asc.mcu.ac.th/cafe/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/asianbuddhist_web.pdf.

²²¹ Wijesuriya, 2.

communities both for the protection of the temple and the safeguarding of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. The festival is safeguarded through the traditional system of knowledge transmission and the institution of *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Tshogpa* oversees the logistics during the festival. (*As discussed in the second and third chapters*)

The living heritage approach involves keeping the three kinds of continuities discussed above central to the formulation of any management plan. While there is a distinction between these three kinds of continuity, the three are nevertheless interlinked with each other. Building on this philosophy, I recommend the following five guiding principles to instrumentalize the living heritage approach at Tamzhing Monastery. Although presented under different headings, these guiding principles often intersect and complement each other.

Principle 1: Inclusion of both the Tamzhing Temple complex and the Phala Choedpa Festival

At the heart of this thesis, I underlined the absence of a holistic understanding and representation of Tamzhing Monastery's cultural heritage by the central heritage institution in the second chapter. More attention is provided to the temple complex. Similarly, in the third chapter, I emphasized the imbalance of tangible versus intangible heritage addressed in the '*Punakha Dzong* Heritage Site Management Plan.' Thus, the first and foremost guiding principle of the management plan of the Tamzhing Monastery should be the inclusion and comprehensive addressing of both the tangible cultural heritage represented by the *Tamzhing* temple complex and the intangible cultural heritage embodied in the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. The consideration of the interrelation of tangible and intangible elements is addressed in guiding Principle number 4.

Principle 2: Active involvement of associated communities

The guidance note on the “People-Centred Approaches to the Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Living Heritage” published by ICCROM provides the rationale behind this approach and benefits for community engagement in the conservation of cultural heritage.²²² Reflecting on the inherent connection between the ‘heritage’ and ‘people’,²²³ the focus should be on the associated communities and how they interpret the past, connect to the present and aspire to the future of the Tamzhing Monastery. The monastic community, the *Tamzhing Choeje* (ancestral family) and the local village communities are all key stakeholders. Therefore, it is recommended that these stakeholders be involved directly in the management process. Specific roles for the identified stakeholders are recommended in a later section of this chapter entitled ‘Key stakeholders of Tamzhing Monastery’. This approach recognizes them, beyond their roles as site managers and custodians. It offers them agency in the value interpretation, definition, and decision-making for effective management. This concept is further discussed in ‘Safeguarding the *Phala Choedpa* Festival’ and ‘Middle path: dialogical approaches in conservation’, in later sections of this chapter.

The involvement of the associated communities is critical for the effectiveness and sustaining of the management plan and for fostering feelings of ownership in the management plan.²²⁴ The ownership of the management plan was evident during the interview with the senior monk who participated as a representative of the monastic community in the formulation of the ‘*Punakha Dzong* Heritage Site Management Plan.’ This strategy will not only help heritage professionals in managing the monastery but also strengthen communication and foster trust between the central

²²² Court and Wijesuriya, “People-Centred Approaches to the Conservation of Cultural Heritage: Living Heritage.”

²²³ Court and Wijesuriya, 3.

²²⁴ Court and Wijesuriya, 5.

heritage institution and associated communities of Tamzhing Monastery, resulting in a healthier working environment and making the engagement more meaningful.²²⁵

Principle 3: Refining the existing roles and systems

It is strongly recommended that the traditional systems at Tamzhing Monastery not be disrupted by the heritage institution in the process of protecting or managing it. Instead, the emphasis should be placed on enhancing and streamlining these traditional systems based on the findings from the analysis and identified issues outlined in the previous three chapters. As indicated in *Fig. 30*, three interventions are recommended for the existing management system: (i) reconceptualization of ‘heritage professionals’ involved in Tamzhing Monastery as the ‘heritage community’, (ii) enhancing the system for safeguarding the *Phala Choedpa* festival and (iii) introduction of a dialogical approach in the conservation of the temple.

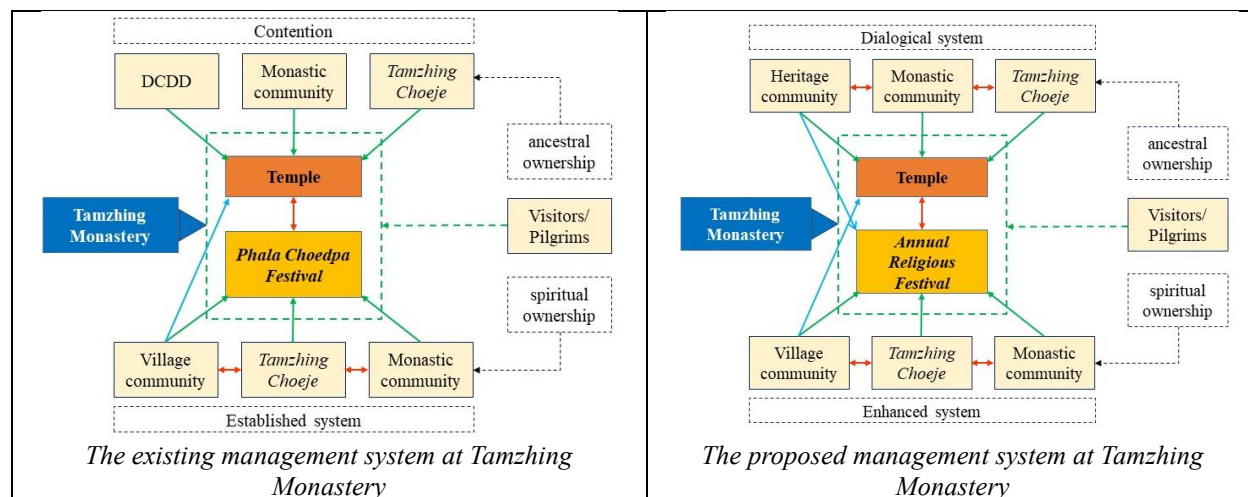


Figure 29. Recommendation for the association and management system of Tamzhing Monastery. (illustrations by author)

Through the reconceptualization of Tamzhing Monastery’s heritage, there arises a parallel need to redefine the role of the heritage professionals (DCDD) engaged with the monastery within the

²²⁵ Court and Wijesuriya, 5.

framework of the living heritage approach. This re-definition extends beyond the traditional boundaries of conservationist roles, transforming heritage professionals into a ‘heritage community’.²²⁶ In this paradigm, their roles extend beyond conservation to active participation in the living heritage process—a majority of heritage professionals at DCDD are Buddhist and partake in the religious practices like any other pilgrims or devotees such as circumambulation, offerings and interactions with the communities.²²⁷ From the Buddhist perspective, heritage professionals would also contribute to the religious or spiritual values of the monastery. This conceptual shift also serves to somewhat dismantle the barrier between heritage professionals and the associated communities.

Based on the analysis presented in the second and third chapters, it is evident there is a need to strengthen the system for the safeguarding of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. Thus, there is a need for an enhanced system for the transmission of knowledge with support from the elders of the local communities and the State. These recommendations are further elaborated in a later section of this chapter, ‘Safeguarding the *Phala Choedpa* Festival.’

Similarly, to bridge modern conservation and traditional practices, it is essential to adopt a new approach to reach a middle ground. A dialogical approach involving the heritage community, monastic community and *Tamzhing Choeje* is recommended. By fostering a democratic process,

²²⁶ The concept of heritage professionals or those who work with heritage as a ‘community in practice’ is discussed in the ICCROM’s guidance note by Court and Wijesuriya, 3–4.;

The Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, adopted by the Council of Europe, provides the definition of ‘heritage community’ as “...consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generation.” “Council of Europe – Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199) – Translations - Treaty Office - Wwww.Coe. Int,” Treaty Office, 2, accessed April 23, 2024, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/-/council-of-europe-council-of-europe-framework-convention-on-the-value-of-cultural-heritage-for-society-cets-no-199-translations>.

²²⁷ Tashi Lhendup, heritage professional involved in the research and conservation of the mural paintings of Tamzhing Monastery is himself a Buddhist. In addition, being a contributor (interview) to this thesis also embeds him into the larger heritage community.

this approach aims to find a ‘middle path’ for conservation and development decisions. Further, this integrated approach should also apply to the other ancillary structures and facilities at the site. Detailed discussions of this approach are provided in a later section of this chapter, ‘Middle Path: A dialogical approach to conservation.’

Principle 4: Embracing the unity of tangible and intangible

The significance of Tamzhing Monastery is not just as a catalogue of tangible and intangible elements but rather it draws from the intricate interplay between the two. This inter-relationship was discussed in the second chapter. Similarly, in the first chapter, I explored the utilization of physical spaces during both daily and annual religious activities at the Tamzhing Monastery. This spatial relationship also needs to be addressed in the larger planning schemes as these spaces are crucial for the functioning of various religious activities. This same treatment should be considered even for those elements of the monastery that are not covered in the thesis. Embracing the unity of tangible and intangible elements will also help sustain the monastery’s relevance and ties to the associated local communities. Therefore, the unity of the tangible and intangible should be considered one of the central guiding principles for the formulation of management strategies or conservation decisions for Tamzhing Monastery.

Principle 5: Managing change

In the previous chapters, I have presented the multi-faceted changes that Tamzhing Monastery has undergone. In the first chapter, the biography of Tamzhing Monastery was presented through the detailed structural evolution of the temple, the expansion of the monastery complex and the socio-cultural changes that have taken place during its long history. Similarly, for the *Phala Choedpa* Festival, I presented the changes in terms of community engagement and performance in the

second chapter. Further, I also presented how with changes in time and contexts, the prioritization of values also changes in the third chapter. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that change is inevitable and an imperative characteristic of a living heritage. The management plan should address this phenomenon and work with it instead of resisting it. However, it should be noted that these changes happened without erasing the past or traditional knowledge.

Accommodating all sorts of changes can be counter-productive and pose a threat to the significance of the Tamzhing Monastery. Total change without a trace of the past is not worthy. Therefore, a thorough scrutiny system considering the implications of the ‘change’ must be conducted. The following guiding questions are a starting point for the discourse on accommodating change.

1. Is the change natural or anthropogenic, preventable or manageable, and reversible or irreversible?
2. How does the change fit in with other principles outlined under the living heritage approach?
3. How does change affect the valorization of various tangible and intangible aspects of the Tamzhing monastery?
4. Is the change in management necessary to safeguard the *Phala Choedpa* Festival or the physical protection of the temple?
5. Are all the associated communities aware of the change’s implications and do they accept them? Will the change enhance or diminish community engagement?

To put the meaning of ‘change’ into the context of this thesis, a component of change is discussed in the following section of this chapter, ‘Safeguarding the *Phala Choedpa* Festival’. It is presented by accounting for current trends at the site and projecting probable scenarios. In particular, changes

in the tradition of mask dancers and the threat to the connection with the local village communities are discussed to visualize how change can be scrutinized by considering all the known factors.

4.2. Safeguarding the *Phala Choedpa* Festival

Five interventions have been identified as necessary to safeguard the *Phala Choedpa* Festival in light of the significance of the festival, the opinions of the mask dancers, and the current mode of transmission of knowledge of the festival discussed in the third chapter. *Figure 30* illustrates the specific intervention required to enhance the safeguarding system.

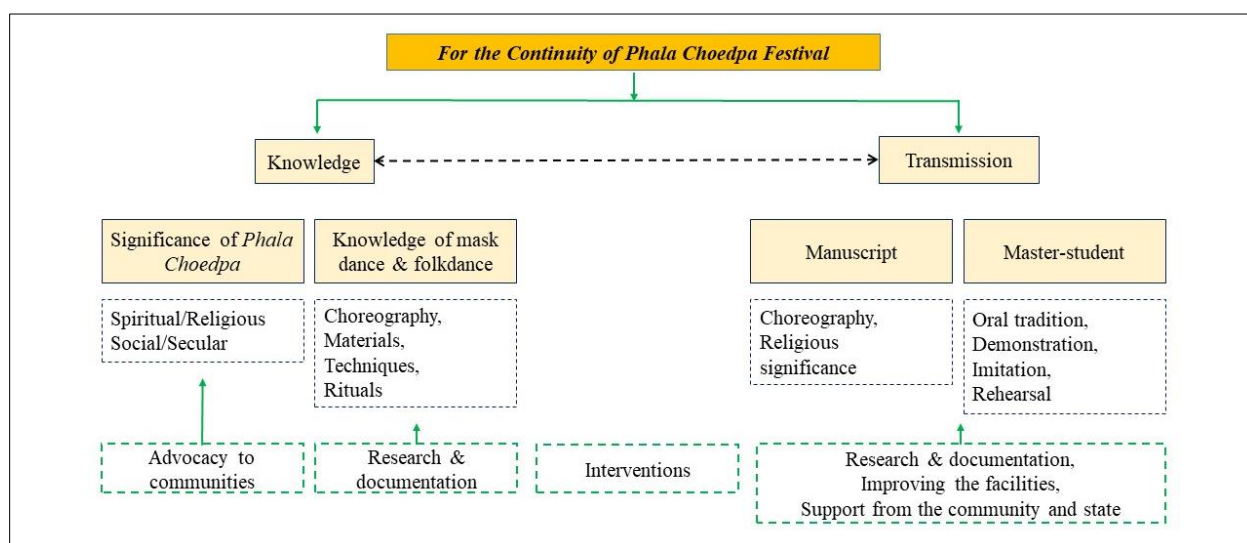


Figure 30. Interventions for the safeguarding the *Phala Choedpa* Festival (flowchart by author)

- i. Advocacy and sensitization of both the religious and social significance of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival to the local communities and new settlers.

Currently, the religious significance of the festival is given importance and is pronounced within the local communities. However, it is imperative to advocate and sensitize the local participants to the social importance of the festival, thereby enriching the overall significance of the festival. This new emphasis will foster a deeper appreciation among the youth, new settlers and even the participating communities and help rejuvenate interest and encourage greater participation in the

festival. Additionally, it highlights how the festival serves to underpin social cohesion within the community and between local communities, thereby positively influencing other social activities.

- ii. Recognition and enhancement of the roles of the older generations for the younger generations in the local community.

As expressed by the mask dancers during the interview, the social responsibility for the dissemination of knowledge to the younger generation rests upon the shoulders of the elders within the associated communities. The ‘elders’ can be composed of but are not limited to the lead mask dancers, the principal of the monastery, senior monks, and elders in the village communities. The ‘knowledge’ is what has been articulated in the third chapter and serial number (i) of this section.

- iii. Research and documentation of knowledge and mode of transmission of knowledge.

As discussed in the third chapter, Yeshi Lhendup, a researcher from DCDD has reported the partial loss of the manuscript (*chamyig*) of *Phag Cham* which is a concern shared by the elders of the community. Therefore, digitization of all the dance manuscripts, the process of oral transmission of the dances (master-apprentices tradition), and the overall festival are critical. However, digitization should not be targeted at standardization and petrifying the ICH element but rather the preservation and safeguarding of knowledge of the traditional materials and processes. Digitization should be used as an assisting tool in the transmission of traditional knowledge. Support from the heritage professionals from the DCDD is crucial for this part of the management plan as they possess the necessary technical expertise and experience, which I elaborate on in serial number (v) in this section.

- iv. Improve facilities where the transmission of knowledge takes place.

Rehearsals for the mask dances take place in the courtyard of *Tamzhing* temple and occasionally at *Kenchosum* temple, however, both spaces are exposed to the elements.²²⁸ As indicated in guiding Principle 4. of the living heritage approach, it is imperative to maintain these spaces appropriately. For instance, the courtyard's *dolep* (stone slab flooring) should not be slippery or unstable to ensure dancers' safety. It is critical to find an alternate roofed space for the dancers to practice during heavy rain and intense sunlight. Dancers devote time away from their daily work to learning and practicing, so efficient planning is crucial. Furthermore, the advent of technology presents an opportunity to improve facilities correspondingly. Instructional sessions using recorded videos (through television or projector)²²⁹ in the monastery's *zirey* (multi-purpose room).²³⁰ *Zirey* is a potential space for the dancers to practice during adverse weather conditions. Future research in the gamification of knowledge transmission has the potential to engage the younger generation and foster interest.

- v. Support from the community and State

A collective effort by the local community is key for successfully conducting and safeguarding the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. While communities show support during the process of transmitting knowledge about the festival by providing food and refreshments for the dancers, this support must extend to encouragement and acknowledgement of the importance of this phase.

²²⁸ This issue was raised by the masked dancers during the interview.

²²⁹ As observed in the first chapter, the monastery has already embraced modern technology and knowledge such as information technology which is taught to the novice monks. Even the village communities are becoming increasingly digitally literate.

²³⁰ However, this needs to be discussed with the monastic community and agreed upon.

Furthermore, as highlighted during the discussion of the CHB-2016 in the third chapter, the application of Article 198 of CHB-2016 emerges as instrumental.²³¹ This provision enables the State to support surveys, research and documentation, and public promotion of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. In addition, the provision also includes its integration into the school curriculum, further ensuring the festival's preservation and transmission for future generations.

Projecting probable scenarios for village communities' involvement in the Phala Choedpa Festival

Stovel et al. in their concluding remarks on the ICCROM 2003 Forum titled 'Conservation of Living Religious Heritage' emphasized that "[the] evolution and adaptation of religious practices, rituals, or festivals to contemporary circumstances should be understood as a normal part of the continuity of living religious heritage..."²³² In a way, Stovel advocates that adapting to change within the intangible element is pivotal for maintaining its viability over time. However, a crucial and challenging issue arises: what types of changes can be embraced without altering the essence of the intangible element and what is this 'essence'? These questions also present a formidable challenge to academics as they depend on the acceptance of the academic solution by the communities under discussion. Nonetheless, given the analysis and observations in the previous three chapters, it is safe to say that the 'essence' in this case lies in the 'purpose' of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival, which immediately brings the communities to the forefront.

²³¹ Article 198 states "subsidies and incentives to the bearer, capacity building of the bearer, [the] inclusion of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the school curriculum, survey, research and documentation, and public awareness raising through media, publication, exhibition and concerts." Department of Culture, Cultural Heritage Bill of Bhutan, 32.

²³² Stovel et al., eds, *Conservation of Living Religious Heritage: Papers from the ICCROM 2003 Forum on Living Religious Heritage: Conserving the Sacred*, ICCROM Conservation Studies 3 (Rome: ICCROM, 2005), 10.

Initially, the mask dances were performed only by the local village community, a situation that changed in the 1960s with the establishment of the monastic community and their participation in the festival. At present, a recently formed village (*Reyrey Bi* village) also engages in a form of funding contribution for the festival.²³³ These additions have been embraced and integrated into the pre-existing system. To date, there is still a tendency to allow for growth in community participation.

Stovel et.al. provide a very broad and multifaceted idea of what change might constitute, but here, the notion of change will be narrowed down to the continuity of participation of the ‘village community’ in the festival. I will discuss the probable scenarios and potential adaptations needed to sustain the festival, ensuring that any introduced changes are not at odds with the present connections these communities have with this festival. The various scenarios are presented in *Table 5* for easy comprehension. I have developed these scenarios through a series of interviews (with local communities and heritage professionals) and investigating other religious festivals such as *Thangbi Mani*²³⁴ in *Bumthang* District.

Reading *Table 5*: The most desirable scenario is, of course, the continuity of the current system. However, as we proceed down the table, the desirability of the scenario decreases, posing a threat to the festival’s relevance and connection to the village community. It is important to note that the acceptance of these changes will ultimately be determined by the communities associated.

²³³ A historical and anthropological study of the festival could trace these changes in the form, materials, or choreography of the mask dances.

²³⁴ Kunzang Tenzin, Interview with a community member, Thangbi Mani, in person, January 8, 2024.

Table 5. Matrix of the probable scenarios and implications (by author)

Scenarios	Participants (dancers)	Strategies	Remarks (Implications)
1	Monastic Community + Village Community	Maintain the viability of the ICH element and the inclusivity of new settlers. Improve the present mode of transmission of knowledge.	The proper safeguarding of the ICH element.
2	Monastic Community + Displaced Community	Maintain the viability of the ICH element and its strong network, the transmission of knowledge	It will still maintain its significance but will require a robust management system*.
3	Monastic Community + Different Community	Payment to the dancers	Institutionalization of the ICH element
4	Monastic Community + RAPA	Institutionalization and standardization of the ICH element	Reduction of the significance of the ICH element
5	Monastic Community	Mask dances performed by the laymen will have to be performed by monks	The connection to the village community will be threatened
ICH element: Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Festival Displaced Communities: youths and communities from the villages situated in parts of Bhutan Other communities: communities from the villages not presently associated with the Phala Choedpa Festival RAPA: Royal Academy for Performing Arts, an institution for the preservation and promotion of performing arts and culture in Bhutan			
*Management must give special attention to networking and improved coordination, given the complexity of ensuring the participation of individuals from the displaced community, many of whom are civil servants, business owners, or employees in private companies, thus, adding another layer of complexity to the coordination efforts.			

4.3. Middle path: a dialogical approach to conservation

Drawing upon the guiding principle of Bhutan’s development philosophy, the Gross National Happiness index, emphasis has been on the ‘balance’ between material and spiritual development.²³⁵ Diving into Buddhist philosophy and practice, devotees resonate with the concept of the ‘middle path’ which is “applied to any dualism or diametrically opposed pair...”.²³⁶ With these two crucial observations, it is evident that the pursuit of ‘balance’ and the ‘middle path’ is the approach inherent to Bhutanese tradition and national policy. Thus, in this section, I will investigate how a middle ground can be achieved for the future of mural paintings and the physical temple structure of the Tamzhing Monastery. The search for the middle path is explored in Asian contexts such as the Buddhist temples in South Korea and Nepal.²³⁷

²³⁵ “HISTORY OF GNH – GNH Centre Bhutan,” accessed April 18, 2024, <https://www.gnhcentrebhutan.org/history-of-gnh/>.

²³⁶ “What Is the Middle Way?,” accessed April 18, 2024, <https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/middle-way/>.

²³⁷ Wijesuriya, *Asian Buddhist Heritage*, 34–35 & 55–62.

Currently, the prioritization of the materialistic value typologies favoring the modern conservation practice has created an imbalance in the methodology adopted for the value assessment of Tamzhing Monastery and the mural paintings in particular. To bring balance to the value assessment, a new approach is necessary—the consensus between the DCDD and the local communities is critical. Given Tamzhing Monastery’s status as both a national heritage site and a living religious heritage, resolving these issues at the site necessitates pursuing a collective objective rather than an individualistic one.

Randall Mason in the article entitled “Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices” discussed the various methodological approaches involving the assessment of values for conservation planning.²³⁸ He emphasized that the goal of developing methodologies for value assessment is to generate knowledge, increase transparency, and encourage meaningful participation and not to establish a universal solution.²³⁹ One approach he outlined was the identification of the key stakeholders and involving them in the value assessment process, providing them with a stake in the decision-making process.²⁴⁰ The ICCROM 2003 Forum identified the reconciliation between modern conservation and traditional practices as one of the issues of living religious heritage.²⁴¹ As a way forward, the Forum recommends engaging in dialogue and involving associated communities to build trust and facilitate agreement on potential solutions demonstrated through a variety of case studies.²⁴²

²³⁸ Randall Mason, “Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices,” in *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage*, 2002, 5–30, https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/pdf/assessing.pdf.

²³⁹ Mason, 14.

²⁴⁰ Mason, 17.

²⁴¹ Stovel et al., *Conservation of Living Religious Heritage*.

²⁴² Stovel et al., 5–7.

A South Korean scholar, Sujeong Lee, in the article entitled “Finding a Middle Path for Saving the Contradictory Values of Living Buddhist Temples in South Korea”²⁴³ and a Nepali scholar, Neel Kamal Chapagain, in the article entitled “Perception and Management of Heritage in the Buddhist Context: Observations from Nepal”,²⁴⁴ provide a practical understanding of value assessment and decision-making processes in the Buddhist context. Both cases advocate seeking the ‘middle path’ for bridging the contention between Buddhist practice and modern practices of conservation.

The contention at the *Haeinsa* temple complex (thirty-nine structures) in South Korea revolved around the balance between accommodating contemporary religious practices and preserving secular values.²⁴⁵ This contention was developed after the reconstruction of six buildings at the *Haesina* temple complex. Lee proposed revising the pre-existing value framework to ensure ‘fair consideration’ of diverse value typologies by both religious and secular communities and integrating a value assessment system into the conservation decision-making process before any physical intervention.²⁴⁶

Similar to the Tamzhing Monastery, the contention at the Buddhist temple in *Lomanthang*, Nepal was between the conservators following their professional ethics by conserving the originality by not repainting the missing parts against the local community arguing that the incomplete restoration of the mural paintings would devalue them.²⁴⁷ Chapagain reports that a consensus was arrived at in which the conservator team “compromised” by drawing the outlines of the larger

²⁴³ Sujeong Lee, “Finding a Middle Path for Saving the Contradictory Values of Living Buddhist Temples in Korea,” in *Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred*, 1 (ICCROM-CHA International Forum on Conservation, Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred, ICCROM, 2017), 34–43, http://asc.mcu.ac.th/cafe/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/asianbuddhist_web.pdf.

²⁴⁴ Neel Kamal Chapagain, “Perception and Management of Heritage in the Buddhist Context: Observations from Nepal,” in *Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred*, 1 (ICCROM-CHA International Forum on Conservation, Asian Buddhist Heritage: Conserving the Sacred, ICCROM, 2017), 53–62, http://asc.mcu.ac.th/cafe/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/asianbuddhist_web.pdf.

²⁴⁵ Lee, “Finding a Middle Path for Saving the Contradictory Values of Living Buddhist Temples in Korea,” 35–36.

²⁴⁶ Lee, 42.

²⁴⁷ Chapagain, “Perception and Management of Heritage in the Buddhist Context: Observations from Nepal,” 58.

missing sections to reveal the complete image of the mural painting without fully repainting them – a solution which the local community accepted.²⁴⁸ Tashi Lhendup, a conservator involved in the conservation of the mural paintings of *Tamzhing* temple shared the possibility of ‘reconstruction’ of totally damaged or lost (no paint layers).²⁴⁹ This acknowledgement demonstrates the opportunity exists for a detailed investigation of other possibilities.

The above discussion underlines the fundamental importance of employing a participatory and dialogical approach when assessing values and making decisions for heritage conservation. The case of Buddhist temples in Nepal and South Korea serves as compelling examples for Tamzhing Monastery. Therefore, the most practical methodological approach for the future of mural paintings and the temple complex of the Tamzhing Monastery is adopting the dialogical process between the DCDD and the associated local communities. Throughout this process, it is essential to avoid prioritizing the protection of old mural paintings, while neglecting the protection of the later mural paintings (eg. mural paintings on the porch) of the temple complex. Similarly, this approach should be applied to find a solution for the butter lamp offering to the mural paintings.²⁵⁰ The methodology of involvement of the associated communities in the value assessment and the decision-making process is the ‘middle path’ approach that will bring consensus to all the parties involved. This methodology encourages diverse communities to share their assessment of value typologies, providing thorough explanations and information to foster mutual understating and appreciation for each other’s viewpoints. In this case, all the value typologies are considered and thoroughly examined by all the associated communities. As presented in the earlier section, the

²⁴⁸ Chapagain, 58.

²⁴⁹ Lhendup, Interview with the conservator involved in the Mural Painting Conservation Project of Tamzhing Monastery.

²⁵⁰ One possible solution is to offer butter lamps in fewer numbers and only on auspicious days, and to use protective glass casings to prevent butter or oil spills and smoke damage to the paintings. This method will also mitigate the fire risk posed by butter lamps. Paintings will be protected and at the same time allow religious practice to continue.

availability of information changes the lens of assessing the values. I see this as not a ‘compromise’ but rather a dynamic process of generating new and meaningful knowledge, echoing Mason’s perspective.²⁵¹ This approach may even mark an invaluable opportunity to explore how Buddhist philosophy can contribute to the practice of conservation as underscored by Chapagain.²⁵² This methodological ‘middle path’ concept approach should prove to be an instrumental management tool that can periodically help accommodate the changes taking place at the site, making the ‘living aspect’ of the heritage more meaningful and relevant to the changing socio-cultural context of the monastery.

4.4. Key stakeholders of Tamzhing Monastery

Table 6. Key stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities in the management plan (by author)

Community	Roles and Responsibility
<i>Monastic community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuity of function, association, and care of Tamzhing Monastery ▪ Management of the Tamzhing temple complex ▪ Safeguarding of the Phala Choedpa Festival
<i>Tamzhing Choeje, ancestral family</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuity of function, association, and care of Tamzhing Monastery ▪ Conservation of the Tamzhing temple complex ▪ Safeguarding of the Phala Choedpa Festival
<i>Village community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continuity of association and care of Tamzhing Monastery ▪ Safeguarding of the Phala Choedpa Festival
<i>Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Tshogpa*</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management for the conduction of the Phala Choedpa Festival ▪ Management of funds for the Phala Choedpa Festival
<i>Elders**</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educating on the significance of the Tamzhing Monastery to youths and new settlers ▪ Sensitization of both religious and social significance of the Phala Choedpa Festival ▪ Support and guide for the management of Tamzhing Monastery
<i>Heritage Community**</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring the implementation of the management plan ▪ Support for the management of Tamzhing Monastery with technical backstopping. ▪ Conservation of the Tamzhing temple complex ▪ Research and Documentation of the Phala Choedpa Festival focused on the transmission of knowledge.
<p><i>*Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Tshogpa: A member each from the Tamzhing Choeje family and five village communities</i></p> <p><i>**Elders: lead mask dancers, the principal of the monastery, senior monks, and elders of the village communities.</i></p> <p><i>***Heritage Community: Heritage professional of Heritage Sites and Archaeology Division, Antiquity Division, and National Library and Archives of Bhutan</i></p>	

²⁵¹ Mason, “Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices,” 14.

²⁵² Chapagain, “Perception and Management of Heritage in the Buddhist Context: Observations from Nepal,” 58.

4.5. Key considerations

i. Delineation of the zones

The formulation of a management plan entails the demarcation of zones into conservation (core) and buffer zones as per CHB-2016²⁵³ which is also included in the operational guidelines for the protection of World Heritage sites.²⁵⁴ The demarcations with clear boundary lines require meticulous planning and consultation with associated communities and public institutions such as the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport,²⁵⁵ the Department of Forest and Park Services,²⁵⁶ the *Bumthang* District Administration, and the *Choekhor Gewog* Administration. Additional factors such as land ownership, land use, hazard risks, etc. under the demarcated zones should be considered. However, initial recommendations for zoning can be proposed based on the significance of sites and religious activities highlighted in the first and second chapters. The core zone should most definitely encompass the *Tamzhing* temple and the immediate surrounding ancillary structures. For the demarcation of the buffer zones, it is imperative to include other sacred sites linked to the founder and important for religious activity as presented in the second chapter. The details of these sacred sites are provided in *Table 7*. In the formulation of regulations for the buffer zone, specific provisions for the protection of these sites need to be incorporated into the management plan.





²⁵³ Department of Culture, Cultural Heritage Bill of Bhutan, 25–26.

²⁵⁴ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention,” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>.

²⁵⁵ The village settlements are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport (previously known as Ministry of Work and Human Settlement) of Bhutan. The development plan for the whole Bumthang Valley has been developed by the Ministry. For more detail refer to the Ministry of Work and Human Settlements, “Master Plan-Bumthang Valley, Bhutan,” Master Plan, 2013.

²⁵⁶ A part of the villages falls under the jurisdiction of the ‘Tamzhing Lhendup Community Forest’ comprising 47 households and 346.20 acres. (information retrieved from the information board at the site).

Table 7. Details of the sacred sites associated with Pema Lingpa for inclusion in the buffer zone. (by author)

Name of the sacred site	Identifying Feature	Coordinates	Photographs
<i>Duethro (cremation ground)</i>	<i>Stone with Pema Linpa's handprint</i>	<i>27°35'23.1" N, 90°43'55.6" E, 2617 m elevation</i>	
<i>Kagi Yangzo gi Melong (Eight Heruka's Mirror of the Mind)</i>	<i>Stone and tree with flag: spot where Pema Lingpa discovered the treasure (Eight Heruka's Mirror of the Mind)</i>	<i>27°35'14" N, 90°44'20" E, 2630 m elevation</i>	
<i>Thrue-shog (Bathtub)</i>	<i>Stone in the shape of a tub and Pema Lingpa's footprint on the stone</i>	<i>27°35'25" N, 90°44'13" E, 2640 m elevation</i>	
<i>Peling Chutha (water mill)</i>	<i>Stone water mill, carved by Pema Lingpa</i>	<i>27°35'11.7" N, 90°44'22.9" E, 2638 m elevation</i>	
<i>Peling Dodrom (stone in the shape of a box)</i>	<i>Associated with Pema Lingpa</i>	<i>Could not be located during the field survey</i>	NA

ii. Periodic review

The management plan should be reviewed periodically to remain relevant in the changing environment of Tamzhing Monastery. This will provide an opportunity to revisit management approaches or strategies for possible revision following their implementation. Like Tamzhing Monastery is a living religious heritage, the management plan should also be treated as a living document.

iii. Documentation of process

As identified during the interview with the senior monk, there is a need to document the management planning process as historical records for future reference and continuity of the

processual knowledge. In addition, the record of the revision, additions, and amendments made to the management plan should also be part of this documentation record.

iv. Monitoring and advocacy system

It is important to institute a monitoring system within the management plan to ensure that activities and action plans outlined in the management plan are implemented as per the plan and to make a record of the issues that have come up during the implementation of the management plan. This responsibility should be delegated to the local government of *Bumthang* district as part of its institutional framework. In addition, it is also necessary to institute an advocacy system necessitating orientation and familiarization with the management plan, and the roles and responsibilities of individual actors.

4.6. Recommendations for immediate action

Irrespective of the completion of a management plan, the analysis has revealed there is a need for immediate attention to be directed at certain structural elements at Tamzhing Monastery. Due to the narrowness of the passageways and the frequent congestion caused by multiple visitors attempting to navigate them simultaneously, the iron chainmail frequently collides with the walls.²⁵⁷ Similarly, the mural paintings on the front porch have suffered damage during class lessons. Installing *jadang tazi* (traditional wooden railings) to separate the backs of the monks from the mural paintings would be an effective solution (*see fig. 31*).²⁵⁸ It will protect the mural

²⁵⁷ Department of Culture, MoHCA and The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, “Conservation of the Wall Paintings of Tamzhing Monastery,” 155.

²⁵⁸ There is a practice of covering the mural paintings with *mentse* (ceremonial cloth) with the objective of protection in some temples but it is not recommended as it damages the paintings by flaking the paints when the cloth rubs on them due to touch or wind. Moreover, it covers the mural paintings from the view of the visitors which is not desirable.

paintings from damage from human-induced risk and, at the same time, allow the traditional practices to continue.



Figure 31. Installation of wooden railing for the protection of the mural paintings. (illustration by author)

I highlighted the need to streamline the funding process for the *Phala Choedpa* Festival to ease the burden on the village with fewer households in the second chapter. To ensure consistency, I propose consolidating all household funds from four villages into the public bank account managed by the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Tshogpa* (committee). The funds from the *Tamzhing Choeje* should be excluded from this joint fund because of their ancestral responsibility. The collected funds would then be equally distributed over the four days of the festival assigned to the four villages. The committee is responsible for the collection of fees from the pop-up stalls during the festival. The committee is also responsible for the arrangement of the dancers, rehearsal, and other logistics for the festival. Religious objects and other items required for the festival are procured or restored with the fees collected at these stalls. Therefore, it is only logical and convenient to consolidate the funds. However, this proposal needs to be examined by the communities and agreed on to implement it.

Chapter conclusion

The formulation of an effective management plan for Tamzhing Monastery requires holistic and context-driven planning and management strategies. To address this, the living heritage approach has been adopted as the guiding philosophy. Five guiding principles are recommended for the formulation of a contextualized management plan. The guiding principles are; the inclusion of both the *Tamzhing* temple complex and the *Phala Choedpa* Festival, active involvement of associated communities, refinement of existing roles and systems, embracing the unity of tangible and intangible elements, and managing change. It is critical to recognize Tamzhing Monastery as a dynamic living religious heritage deeply connected with its associated communities. These communities are critical to be recognized as key stakeholders in the management plan and involved in the management formulation process. Specific recommendations are provided for the safeguarding of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival and the conservation of mural paintings. In addition, the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders are also identified. Furthermore, irrespective of the management plan, recommendations for immediate actions at the site are provided in the chapter as well.

Conclusion

The evaluation of Bhutan's current protection and management framework for cultural heritage sites revealed gaps still existing between practice and sustainability, particularly in formulating management plans for heritage sites. Both tangible and intangible heritage are of national interest in terms of protection, however, a more holistic consideration of the tangible and intangible nature of these sites is generally missing in management plans. In addition, the agency of the local community in the identification and assessment of values for conservation is mostly overlooked. A greater degree of clarity regarding local beliefs in the value assessment system for tangible heritage elements, not only based on their age and academic artistic evaluation must also be integrated into the CHB-2016 bill.

Through this thesis, I have presented the complexities surrounding the Tamzhing Monastery and the multifaceted challenges faced by the monastery due to modernization. To address these challenges, a contextualized management plan will be necessary for Tamzhing Monastery. Thus, as a first step, this thesis provides recommendations for the formulation of such a management plan in which the living heritage approach has been adopted as the guiding philosophy.

Tamzhing Monastery is an evolving entity deeply intertwined with its associated local communities. Since its foundation in 1501-1505, Tamzhing Monastery has undergone continuous change vis-à-vis the socio-religious fabric of these particular local communities, contributing to the complexities as well as the significance of the monastery. Thus, the treatment and protection of Tamzhing Monastery as part of Bhutan's living religious heritage should emphasize the dynamic character of the monastery's presence in this cultural landscape in order to make its cultural vitality and religious legacy sustainable.

The true significance of Tamzhing Monastery comes from the combination of the physical materiality of the temple complex and the *Phala Choedpa* Masked Dance Festival, and the dynamic interplay between these tangible and intangible elements embodied in the monastery and its surroundings. The religious and social values of the monastery stem from the communities with which it has been traditionally associated—the monastic community, the *Tamzhing Choeje* (the ancestral family), and the village communities (*Tamzhing, Kenchosum-Kharsum, Torshong and Reyrey Bi* villages). These local communities are identified as important stakeholders in the management plan. The complex community network intertwined with the various elements of the monastery highlighted the critical roles played by these local communities and the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development (State) in the functioning and management of Tamzhing Monastery. A deeper understanding and shared responsibility benefiting the entire community of local stakeholders will be critical for the future of the monastery. Tamzhing Monastery plays a pivotal role in fostering rich socio-religious community connections and cohesion.

Tamzhing Monastery has an existing traditional management system for running the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. At the same time, the communities have their belief system for valorizing the mural paintings and the temple mediated through traditional knowledge and practice. It was crucial to work around these realities and accordingly propose recommendations. Investigating the *Phala Choedpa* Festival reveals that its vitality rests on its religious and social significance and the unbroken transmission of knowledge concerning the dances. However, enhancement of the existing system is required to safeguard the festival and maintain/reinforce the continuity of community participation. Similarly, the investigation into the current value assessment system at the monastery reveals that currently, it favors heritage experts' values and does not acknowledge the communities' understanding of values thereby creating a source of contention at the site. Thus,

through this thesis, I aimed to address the central heritage institution responsible for the protection, and management of cultural heritage in Bhutan for consideration and implementation of the recommendations outlined in the thesis. I am not advocating abandoning the current practice but broadening the approach.

Adopting the living heritage approach as a philosophy, the recommendations are proposed as guiding principles for the formulation of the management plan aimed at three continuities for Tamzhing Monastery— continuity as a *Peling* Monastery, attention to the connections between all the associated communities, and preservation of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival and temple complex. Hence, five guiding principles are proposed for the formulation of a contextualized management plan: 1. ‘inclusion of both the *Tamzhing* temple complex and the *Phala Choedpa* Festival’; 2. ‘active involvement of associated communities’; 3. ‘refinement of existing roles and systems’; 4. ‘embracing the unity of tangible and intangible elements’; and 5. ‘managing change’. However, the Department of Culture and Dzongkhag Development (DCDD) have to accept and approve these recommendations. In addition, DCDD plays a pivotal role in ensuring the successful implementation of the management plan.

Within the proposal, specific recommendations are also provided for the two most significant elements of the monastery. Enhancement of the current transmission of knowledge of the festival with support from the local community and the central heritage institution is proposed for the safeguarding of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. Similarly, a ‘middle-path approach’, involving a dialogical process between heritage communities and associated local communities is proposed for the conservation of the mural paintings to ensure the preservation of both material and religious values.

Recommendations for immediate actions are proposed and include the installation of wooden railings for the protection of the mural paintings as well as streamlining the financial system supporting the running of the *Phala Choedpa* Festival. However, the proposed recommendations, though aimed at practical solutions, remain academic at this point. Thus, further consultation with the central heritage institution and the communities and their acceptance will be required in practice. That next step, however, goes beyond the scope of the present thesis.

Besides the focus of this thesis, research on the incorporation of tourism-oriented plans and activities into the management of the village settlement to bring dignified opportunities to the communities to alleviate socio-economic stressors holds great promise. This strategy has the potential to combat rural-urban migration, thereby also protecting the steady supply of local participants in the festival.

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Glossary

<i>Chakap</i>	:The iron chainmail
<i>Cham</i>	: Masked and costumed dance associated with religious significance
<i>Cham-gho</i>	: Mask dance costume or attire. <i>Cham</i> means mask dance and <i>gho</i> means costume or attire.
<i>Chamju</i>	: Examination of mask dances before the main event
<i>Champoen</i>	: Lead mask dancer responsible for the transmission of knowledge of mask dances
<i>Chamyig</i>	: Manuscript of mask dancer. <i>Cham</i> means mask dance and <i>yig</i> means manuscript
<i>Chiwog</i>	: Group of villages, basic electoral precincts of Bhutan
<i>Drap</i>	: The serf working under the monastic body or <i>choeje</i>
<i>Dratshang</i>	: Monastic institution
<i>Drukpa Kagyu</i>	: A branch of Tibetan Buddhism
<i>Dzong</i>	: A monument or fortress housing secular and religious institution
<i>Dzongdag</i>	: District Administrator
<i>Dzongkhag</i>	: District administration
<i>Gewog</i>	: Block administration
<i>Jinlab</i>	: Spiritual blessings which are manifested through persons, sacred objects, or events.
<i>Karmi</i>	: light offering (butter or oil as fuel)
<i>Khaep</i>	: Tax-paying household
<i>Lhakhang</i>	: Temple
<i>Phag cham</i>	: Pig mask dance
<i>Peling tradition</i>	: Teachings of Pema Lingpa
<i>Nagtshang</i>	: Manor house, an ancestral house
<i>Nyingma</i>	: A branch of Tibetan Buddhism
<i>Sangha</i>	: Buddhist community of monks, nuns and novices.
<i>Tamzhing Choeje</i>	: Ancestral family line of Pema Lingpa of Tamzhing Monastery.
<i>Tamzhing Phala Choedpa</i>	: Annual religious festival at Tamzhing Monastery.
<i>Tamzhing Phala Choedpa</i>	
<i>Tshogpa</i>	: Committee responsible for arrangement of dancers, rehearsals and coordination for the Phala Choedpa Festival.
<i>Tercham</i>	: Sacred dances composed by <i>tertons</i> to aid their discovery of treasures.
<i>Terma</i>	: Various forms of hidden teachings that are key to Vajrayana and Tibetan Buddhist
<i>Terton</i>	: Treasure (<i>terma</i>) discoverer
<i>Thromde</i>	: Municipal Corporation
<i>Thruesel</i>	: Closing ceremony of mask dance festival
<i>Tshogpa</i>	: <i>Tshogpa</i> is the local people's representative of <i>Chiwog</i> . <i>Chiwog</i> is a group of villages, basic electoral precincts of Bhutan. <i>Tshogpa</i> is elected to represent administrative matters.

Appendices

Appendix 1. List of interviewees and their affiliations

Sl No	Name(s)	Affiliations (Position at the time of interview)	Mode	Date
1	Sherub Wangdi, Tenzin Sherub and Pema Norbu	Tamzhing Choeje Family, member of Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Tshogpa (committee for managing Phala Choedpa Festival)	In-person	05/01/2024
2	Sonam Tashi	Principal of Tamzhing Monastery	In-person	29/10/2022
3	Karma Phuntsho	Bhutanese historian and scholar	In-person	01/12/2022
4	Tashi Galey	Tshogpa, the people's representative	In-person	01/12/2022 and 04/01/2024
5	Utsha Gurung	Chief, Antiquity Division of the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development (DCDD)	Online and in- person	23/08/2023 and 03/01/2024
6	Yeshe Samdrup	Heritage Professional, of the chief of the Division for Heritage and Archaeology Division, DCDD	In-person	25/07/2023
7	Phub Dorji	Senior Monk, member of the monastic community. Participated in the formulation of the Punakha Dzong Management Plan	In-person	08/01/2024
8	Sangay Wangchuk	Monk at Tamzhing Monastery, Caretaker of the temple	In-person	05/01/2024
9	Tashi Lhendup	Conservator of Antiquity Division, DCDD. Focal for the conservation of mural painting of Tamzhing Monastery	In-person	27/10/2022 and 03/01/2024
10	Kezang Dorji (pseudonym) and Pema	Mask Dancers	In-person	06/01/2024
11	Tshering Lhamo	Community member of Tamzhing village	In-person	06/01/2024
12	Kunzang Tenzin	Community member of the Thangbi Mani Festival	In-person	08/01/2024

Appendix 2. Annual religious activities held at Tamzhing Monastery (Source: Sonam Tashi, Principal of Tamzhing Monastery)

Sl No	Name of the activity	Month (lunar calendar)
1	Peling Zhithro Ngagi Tshochong: Longsey Sangwa Nichu Choko	First month
2	Yarngo Marngo tshechu	Second month
3	Gaywai kanjur chenpo	Third month
4	Saga Dawa Tshechu	Fourth month
5	Guru'i Bumdhey	Fifth month
6	Minzir Dremi, Mani Drung-dub	Sixth month
7	Soekha for 5 days Rehearsal for Phala Choedpa (starts about 20 days prior)	Seventh month
8	Tshechu: Tamzhing Phala Choedpa	Eight month
9	Lhabab Duechen	Ninth month
10	Peling Phurpa Yangsoi Torchab Peling Guru Drakpo torchab	Tenth month
11	Kangtsho Choepa	Eleventh month
12	Peling Kagyu	Twelfth month

[illegible]

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No	Day one 05/10/2022	Day two 06/10/2022	Day three 07/10/2022
1	Dance of <i>Acharyas</i> (known as <i>Atsaras</i> in Bhutan)	Dance of <i>Acharyas</i> (known as <i>Atsaras</i> in Bhutan)	Dance of <i>Acharyas</i> (known as <i>Atsaras</i> in Bhutan)
2	<i>Lang Zam</i> - Bull-headed mask dance (performed by monks)	<i>ShaZam</i> -Deer-headed mask dance (performed by monk)	<i>Throzam</i> -Dance of the two wrathful deities (performed by monks)
3	<i>Phak Cham</i> – Swine-headed mask dance (performed by layman)	<i>ShaZam</i> -Deer-headed mask dance (performed by layman)	<i>ShinjeYab Yum</i> -Dance of the lord of Death (performed by layman)
4	<i>JuGing</i> -stick dance (performed by monk)	<i>Zhaw lee Cham</i> -Dance of evil spirits (performed by layman)	<i>Durdag</i> -Dance of the lord of Cremation Grounds (performed by monks)
5	<i>DriGing</i> -sword dance (performed by monk)	<i>JuGing</i> -stick dance (performed by layman)	<i>Zhana Cham</i> -Black hat dance (performed by monks)
6	<i>PelingNga Cham</i> -Pema Lingpa's mask dance of drums (performed by layman)	<i>DriGing</i> -sword dance (performed by layman)	<i>SangayLingpaNgacham</i> - SangayLingpa's mask dance of the drums (performed by layman)
7	<i>Guru Tshengye</i> -Dance of Eight Manifestations of Guru Padmasambhava (performed by monk)	<i>NgaGing</i> -Dance with drums (performed by monk)	<i>Chen DrenNgama</i> -Dance Receiving <i>TseoMarpo</i> , the wrathful deity (performed by monks)
8	<i>ZhanaNgacham</i> -Black hat dance With Drums (performed by layman)	<i>Zhanagphurcham</i> -Black hat dance of Vajrakilaya (performed by layman)	<i>TseoMaro</i> -dance of the protective diety <i>TseoMarpo</i> (performed by monks)
9		<i>Durdag</i> -Dance of the lord of Cremation grounds (performed by layman)	Display of <i>TshepaMey</i> statue (Buddha of infinite life) sculptured by Pema Lingpa
10		<i>ShinjeYab Yum</i> -Dance of the lord of Death (performed by monk)	<i>PholeyMoley</i> -Dance of the noble man and ladies (performed by layman)
11		<i>TshangpaiGing</i> -Dance of the Gods (performed by layman)	

TASHI DELEK

