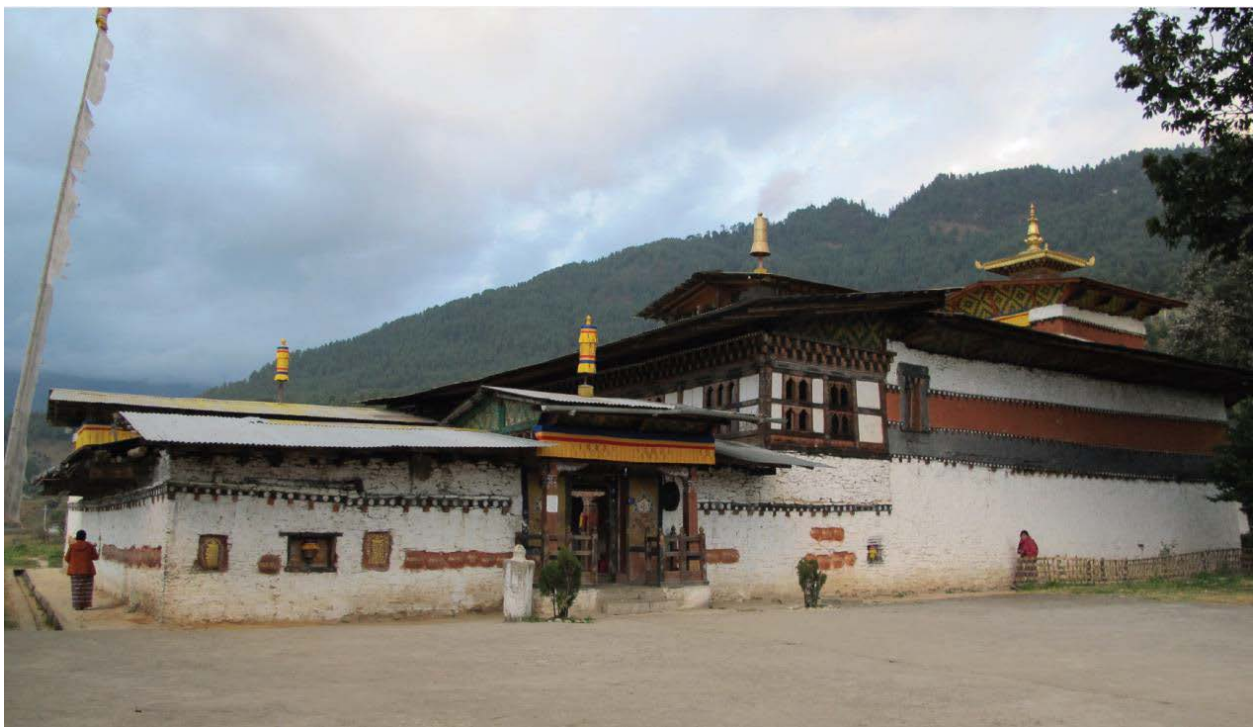


1. Tamzhing Monastery (Bumthang, North Central Bhutan)

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. 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* are associated with the monastery.



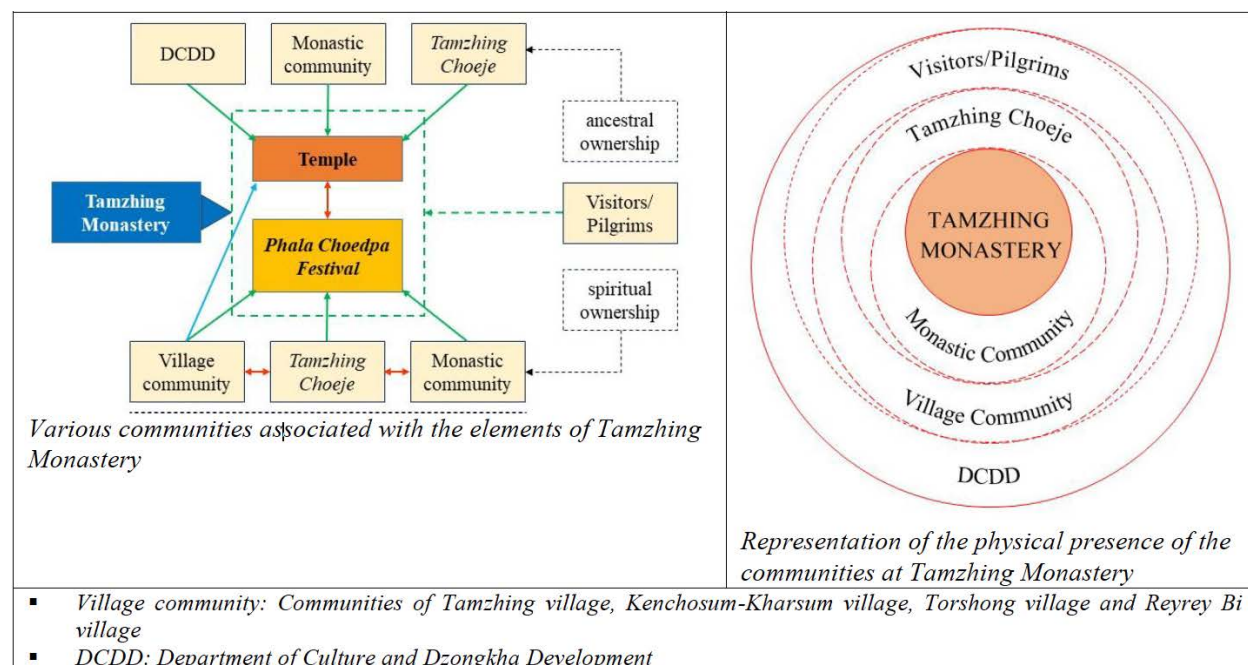
Historical Background

Founded in 1501 by Terton Pema Lingpa (1450–1521), a revered Bhutanese treasure revealer of Bhutan, Tamzhing Monastery holds immense religious and historical significance. Pema Lingpa is regarded as one of the five great tertons prophesied by Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava), and Tamzhing served as his principal seat in Bhutan. Today, the monastery stands as one of the most important Nyingma institutions in central Bhutan and continues to be a vital center for the preservation and transmission of Pema Lingpa's spiritual lineage. The Bhutanese Royal family is said to have descended from Pema Lingpa.

Cultural and Religious Significance

Tamzhing Monastery stands as a living testament to the spiritual legacy of Terton Pema Lingpa, serving as a repository of his teachings, sacred religious artifacts, and ritual dances such as the Tercham and the Pig Dance, which continue to be performed to this day. The monastery is home to some of Bhutan's oldest surviving murals, offering rare and invaluable insights into 16th-century Bhutanese art and religious expression. As an active religious institution, Tamzhing continues to house a monastic community and hosts significant religious ceremonies and festivals, most notably the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa*. Deeply embedded in the local community, the monastery remains a cornerstone of cultural identity and spiritual legacy in Bhutan.

Key stakeholders of Tamzhing Monastery



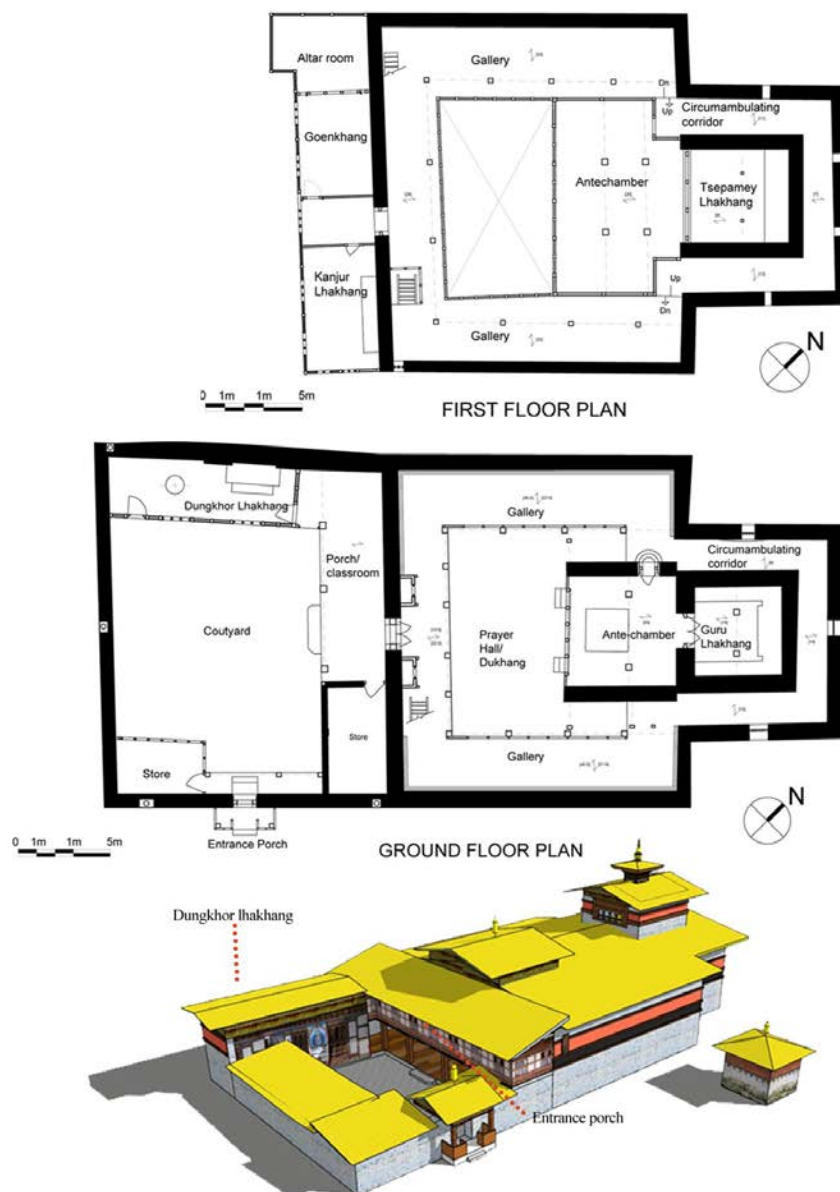
Cultural Elements Associated to Tamzhing Monastery

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. 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* to propitiate the local deity at the spot where Pema Lingpa discovered 'Kagay Thugi Melong' (Eight Heruka's Mirror of the Mind), located to the southeast of Tamzhing Monastery. These elements are not only the tangible markers of religious deposition but also the necessary components for religious practice and traditions.

Intangible Cultural Heritage: *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa*

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. It is the most public and visible legacy of Pema Lingpa and the local communities. 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). In addition to the sacred dances, women from the village communities called *zhem*, perform folk songs and dances in between the mask dances.

Tamzhing Monastery Complex



Urgent Need for Restoration

Conservation of the mural paintings of the main temple

The 16th-century mural paintings in the main temple hold significant cultural heritage value for the monastery. However, over time, they have suffered considerable damage due to prolonged exposure to smoke from butter lamps, structural issues, and human-related factors. These have resulted in visible deformation, cracks, and deterioration of the mural paintings, highlighting an urgent need for conservation measures to preserve their historical and artistic integrity. In addition to their conservation, the mural paintings need to be protected from damage caused by devotees circumambulating the inner sanctum, particularly those carrying or wearing the iron-chain coat (religious practice believed to cleanse the sins).

Structural Conservation

Certain sections of the structural walls have developed minor cracks, which have subsequently damaged the mural paintings, as the murals are painted directly onto the plastered surfaces of these walls. Therefore, repairing the underlying structural walls is a critical part of the mural conservation process to ensure both structural integrity and the preservation of the invaluable mural paintings.

Additionally, the timber joists (chams) in the ceilings have suffered insect-related damage, raising concerns about their structural strength. A detailed investigation is required to assess the extent of deterioration and to implement minimal intervention measures, replacing only the damaged timber members to preserve as much of the original structure as possible.

Maintenance of the roof of the main temple

A portion of the timber members used in the roof truss are reused materials that have sustained damage over time, posing a risk to the overall structural stability of the building. Additionally, the existing roofing sheets are aged and improperly laid, increasing the risk of water leakage. As part of the conservation effort, a thorough assessment of the roof truss and roofing system will be carried out, followed by appropriate repair and restoration work to ensure structural integrity and weatherproofing.

Fire Risk Mitigation

The existing electrical wiring and fixtures in the temple complex are outdated and improperly encased, posing a serious fire hazard due to potential electrical malfunctions. Therefore, a complete re-electrification of the entire temple complex is essential, incorporating modern, code-compliant electrical fixtures and safe wiring practices. Special care will be taken to ensure that all wiring is installed without causing any

damage to, or being laid directly over, the mural paintings, thereby preserving their historical and artistic integrity.

As part of the upgrade, the electrical works will also include the installation of a CCTV surveillance system and a fire alarm system to enhance safety, monitoring, and early fire detection. Additionally, a fire hydrant system will be installed as a key firefighting measure to improve emergency response and fire mitigation capabilities.

Repair and maintenance of the courtyard

An important aspect of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of Tamzhing Monastery—particularly its sacred mask dances—is the proper maintenance of the courtyard space. Beyond serving as a spatial element of the monastery, the courtyard plays a vital role in the transmission of knowledge, providing a dedicated area for mask dancers to rehearse and pass on these sacred traditions in preparation for the *Tamzhing Phala Choedpa* festival.

The courtyard also functions as an informal classroom for the monks, supporting their daily learning and communal activities. However, the existing stone slab flooring (*doleps*) is uneven and improperly laid, creating difficulties for dancers during practice.

Furthermore, the absence of a proper drainage system exacerbates the risk of water damage, posing a threat to the structural integrity of the temple. Addressing these issues is essential for both the preservation of cultural practices and the protection of the physical site.

Protection of the cultural elements

Several cultural elements strongly associated with Tamzhing Monastery remain largely unknown to the public and are left unprotected. Therefore, safeguarding these elements is crucial to preserve their cultural significance and ensure the continuity of the associated intangible practices.

Construction of ancillary structures and Landscaping

Currently, the monastery lacks proper classroom facilities for the monks. Teaching and learning take place within the temple premises and surrounding areas, which are not conducive to a learning environment and expose the monks to harsh and cold weather conditions. Moreover, the high foot traffic in these areas contributes to the deterioration of the sacred mural paintings. Therefore, the construction of a dedicated and well-equipped classroom is essential to ensure a safe and suitable learning environment while also preserving the cultural heritage of the temple. Additionally, the monastery does not have adequate toilet and bathroom facilities for the monks, which hampers proper hygiene practices. The absence of dedicated public toilets also poses a major challenge, especially during festivals and peak tourist seasons when large crowds visit the monastery. The construction of proper and dedicated toilet and washroom facilities is therefore urgently needed to address both hygiene concerns and the needs of visitors.

Further, the monastery requires the enhancement of outdoor spaces, pathways, signage, greenery, and the monastery's overall site aesthetics.

Safeguarding the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa

Although the *Phala Choedpa Festival* currently continues to be vital, it is increasingly challenged by the impacts of modernity. The out-migration of youth from rural areas, including this community, in search of better opportunities, has significantly affected local participation. This trend poses a serious threat to the continuity of the sacred dances and endangers the survival of the tradition itself. To ensure the preservation of this important cultural heritage, it is essential to undertake a comprehensive study of the existing management system, identify the challenges, and develop long-term strategies to safeguard the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa—an integral aspect of the Tamzhing Monastery's cultural and spiritual significance.