

REASONS AND LIVES IN BUDDHIST TRADITIONS

STUDIES IN HONOR OF MATTHEW KAPSTEIN



Edited by Dan Arnold, Cécile Ducher,
and Pierre-Julien Harter

PARTICULARLY KNOWN for his groundbreaking and influential work in Tibetan studies, Matthew Kapstein is a true polymath in Buddhist and Asian studies more generally; possessing unsurpassed knowledge of Tibetan culture and civilization, he is also deeply grounded in Sanskrit and Indology, and his highly accomplished work in these cultural and civilizational areas has exemplified a whole range of disciplinary perspectives.

Reflecting something of the astonishing range of Matthew Kapstein's work and interests, this collection of essays pays tribute to a luminary in the field by exemplifying some of the diverse work in Buddhist and Asian studies that has been impacted by his scholarship and teaching. Engaging matters as diverse as the legal foundations of Tibetan religious thought, the teaching careers of modern Chinese Buddhists, the history of Bhutan, and the hermeneutical insights of Vasubandhu, these essays by students and colleagues of Matthew Kapstein are offered as testament to a singular scholar and teacher whose wide-ranging work is unified by a rare intellectual selflessness.

Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism

This series was conceived to provide a forum for publishing outstanding new contributions to scholarship on Indian and Tibetan Buddhism and also to make accessible seminal research not widely known outside a narrow specialist audience, including translations of appropriate monographs and collections of articles from other languages. The series strives to shed light on the Indic Buddhist traditions by exposing them to historical-critical inquiry, illuminating through contextualization and analysis these traditions' unique heritage and the significance of their contribution to the world's religious and philosophical achievements.

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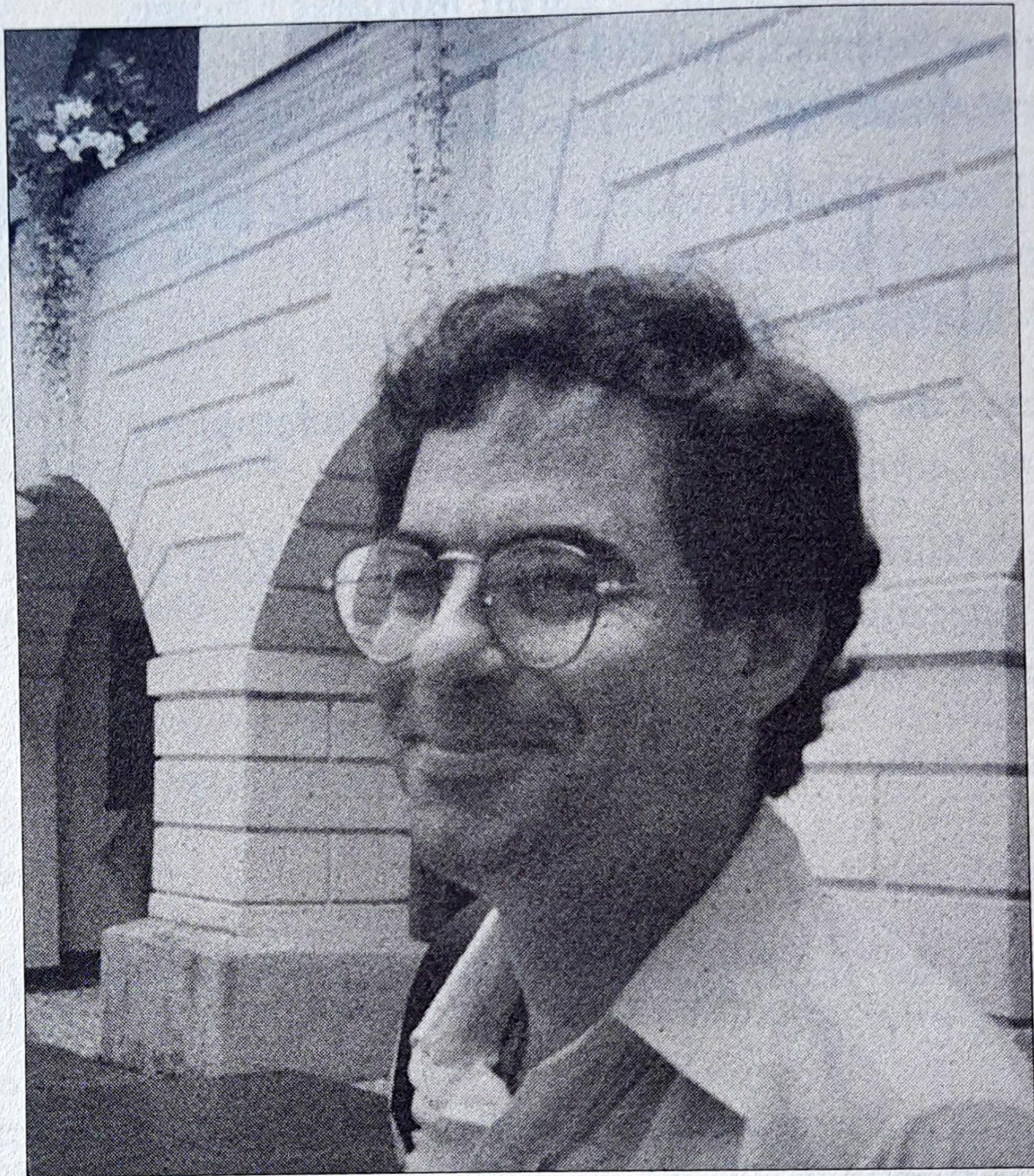
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Matthew Kapstein, 1985, at the meeting of the International Association of Tibetan Studies in Munich.

Photo by Janet Gyatso.

Preface

THIS VOLUME OF ESSAYS in Buddhist and Tibetan Studies celebrates the contributions and influence of Matthew Kapstein on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. In the course of a career of teaching at Columbia University (1989–96), the University of Chicago (1986–89, 1996–present), and the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris (2002–18), Matthew Kapstein has been a prolific intellectual historian of Tibetan civilization and a philosophically inclined scholar of Indian and Tibetan traditions of thought, and his scholarship and teaching have influenced a generation or two of scholars in religious studies, art history, philosophy, and other disciplines, particularly as they pertain to Indology, Tibetology, and Buddhist studies. The essays included herein were solicited specifically for this volume, and all therefore represent original contributions written particularly by way of honoring Matthew's considerable role in the intellectual lives of the contributors, all of whom have variously been students, collaborators, and/or colleagues of his.

These disciplinarily various essays in Tibetan and Buddhist studies reflect something of the intellectually wide-ranging character of Matthew's own scholarship and teaching, which is also reflected in the four different books by Matthew that have lent their titles to this volume's parts. Part 1 takes its title from *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2000), an erudite monograph comprising case studies in the historical development of Tibet's broad domain of religious thought. Part 2 is titled after *The Tibetans* (Blackwell, 2006), which, despite its concise title, represents a magisterial synthesis comparable in scope and significance to R. A. Stein's 1962 *Civilisation tibétaine*. Part 3 takes its name from *The Rise of Wisdom Moon*, an elegant translation (for the Clay Sanskrit Library, 2009) of a Sanskrit philosophical play by the eleventh-century Vedāntin Kṛṣṇamiśra. Part 4 is named after *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought* (Wisdom Publications, 2001), a widely appreciated collection of essays that incisively engage a broad range of the sophisticated philosophical traditions of

India and Tibet. The thematically and methodologically various contributions to this volume are grouped according to the one among these works by Matthew to which they most nearly correspond; however, it is in the nature of the case, given the breadth of Matthew's own scholarly work as well as the differing North American and European contexts in which he has influenced so many different students and colleagues, that much of the work herein resists such straightforward characterization. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to hope that everyone who has admired any of Matthew's work will find in the present volume something of the thematic interests and scholarly virtues that inspired their admiration.

In addition to thanking all of the contributors for their timely provision of scholarly essays befitting Matthew's influence (and also for their patience with our editorial predilections), the editors would like to thank the two anonymous referees who read the manuscript for Wisdom Publications for their close attention and helpful comments. The editors would also particularly like to thank David Kittelstrom, editor extraordinaire, whose careful and thoughtful work on this volume are typical of a career dedicated to ensuring the consistently high quality of books from Wisdom Publications. The editors would also like, finally, to note the untimely passing of one of the most noted contributors to the volume: the University of Chicago's Steven Collins, a world-renowned scholar of Pali Buddhism (and longtime colleague to Matthew) who died in February of 2018. Happily for us, Steve had already by then submitted his contribution, well in advance of the original due date for contributors; we are, then, fortunate in being able to include an essay—"What Is Buddhist Wisdom?"—that affords a glimpse of Steve's last book, which he had finished shortly before his untimely passing, and which is to be posthumously published by Columbia University Press as *Civilization, Wisdom, Practices of Self: Theravāda Buddhism Seen Anew*. While the present collection of essays is by way of honoring the scholarly contributions of Matthew Kapstein, we would like to dedicate any further merit to the continued flourishing of the clarity of thought typical not only of Matthew but also of Steven Collins; the world is surely much in need of it. As for the proceeds, royalties from this volume will be donated to Karuna-Shechen (karuna-shechen.org), which does important work in a part of the world much loved by Matthew.

A Note on Transliteration and Phonetics

In hopes of ameliorating the alienating effect of Tibetan orthography on non-Tibetanists, select common words have been rendered phonetically through-

out this volume: Lhasa, Dergé, thangka, Nyingma, Kadam, Kagyü, Sakya, Geluk, Jonang, Bön, Ü, Tsang, Kham, Amdo, Kangyur, Tengyur, Dalai Lama, Pañchen Lama, and Karmapa. Within each essay, recurrently used Tibetan names and terms are also rendered phonetically, with Wylie transliteration supplied on the first usage. In the interest of precision for the specialist reader, however, all other Tibetan is rendered in Wylie transliteration, with words capitalized according to initial letter rather than root letter.

From Poti to Pixels: Digitizing Manuscripts in Bhutan

Karma Phuntsho

THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN has come to be seen as the last bastion of Himalayan Buddhist civilization after the decline of Buddhism in Tibet and other parts of the Himalayas. With its long history and undisturbed continuity, Bhutan's far-flung temples and monasteries today represent a literary and cultural treasure that is largely unharmed and still unexplored. The literary collections in these temple and monastic repositories, which brought Professor Matthew Kapstein on his most recent trip to Bhutan, remained unknown and all but impossible to access, and their values unappraised and unstudied. Despite the spiritual, academic, and artistic significance of these collections to the local communities, scholars, and practitioners, they remain in precarious condition, vulnerable to damage and even destruction.

This paper describes a program of digital documentation of the manuscripts that has the twin aims of preserving the manuscripts in digital copies and making them broadly accessible. It briefly discusses the intent and processes of preserving and disseminating rare manuscripts in digital copies, and the outcome and impact of such a program in the context of the widespread change that Bhutan is undergoing. It reveals both the urgency of digitization of archives and the expedience of digital technology in duplicating and disseminating texts from secluded areas.

Bhutan's Remote Archives

The second half of the twentieth century was the most tumultuous period in the history of Himalayan Buddhist literature. The rich literary wealth of Tibet underwent widespread destruction and dispersal during the Communist takeover of Tibet and Mongolia and the Cultural Revolution. In recent years, numerous projects of reproduction, documentation, and digitization of texts have arisen as corrective efforts to preserve and consolidate the damaged and dispersed texts. The Himalayan literary heritage has never before seen

such massive and systematic reproduction and distribution as is happening today through institutions both in the Himalayan countries and in the West. Their works have significantly reshaped our understanding of the Tibetan literary landscape and the overall accessibility to the materials.

Bhutan, however, has remained largely aloof from the events that reshaped the literary landscape of the Tibetan Buddhist world elsewhere. Due to its long isolation and independence and its conservative cultural and political policies, Bhutan generally managed to avoid the ravages of political turmoil and unbridled change outside its borders, and it is seen today as a unique repository of the cultural and religious wealth of the Buddhist Himalaya. The country has now shed its isolation and is undergoing a rapid transformation through the forces of modernization and globalization. (See plate 3.)

The temple libraries of Bhutan are perhaps some of the world's most secluded collections of books. Most of the temple archives are located in remote areas at high elevations and still not connected by motor roads. Some of them are at several days of hiking distance and rarely visited by people outside the local communities. Official records list about 2,200 temples in the country, out of which an estimated two hundred have substantial collections of books. The earliest temples are said to have been established in the seventh century, and some claim to have books produced as early as the eighth century, although the archival collections generally date from the fourteenth to the twentieth century, and the vast majority of books were created during the medieval period of Bhutan's history, from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.

While most of the libraries belong to monastic centers and were created by religious hierarchs, some are private family collections, accumulated by the members of the family and passed down as heirlooms. The manuscripts were mostly produced locally, and some establishments also had small xylographic printeries. The abundance of *Daphne* and *Edgeworthia* plants, from which paper was made, not only made book publishing vibrant in Bhutan but also allowed Bhutan to export paper to Tibet. Bhutanese travelers often brought huge reams of paper to Tibet to print books such as the Kangyur scriptural collection, as no Kangyur woodblocks were available in Bhutan itself. The collections in Bhutan thus include handwritten manuscripts and local xylographic prints made in Bhutan, as well as books printed in Tibet.

As items of great spiritual significance and use in religious rituals, the books are treasured by the local communities as a cultural heritage. They are normally wrapped in leather "books" (books) bound between

are nonetheless exposed to dust, dampness, worms, and in some cases rodents. Not uncommonly, books are brittle and worn due to age and intensive use.

Thus the books lie vulnerable to damage despite being cherished and cared for. The local communities have neither the resources nor the knowledge and skills for preservation. For example, the temples are not properly protected against fire. An accidental fire from ubiquitous butter lamps and incense could instantly reduce a library to ashes, as has happened numerous times throughout Bhutan's history. Today, with Bhutan's hydropower boom and amateur electrification in many locales, short circuits have become a major cause of temple fires. In the past decade alone, Wangdi Phodrang (*dbang 'dus pho brang*), an eminent fortified monastic and political center founded in the seventeenth century, and Pagar (*spa sgar*) Temple, a vibrant monastery well known for book production in medieval times, were both destroyed by fire alleged to have been caused by a short circuit. Temples may also be damaged by windstorm or earthquake, not infrequent in the region. The devastating earthquake of September 2011 affected 339 temples in western Bhutan, with seventeen destroyed beyond repair.

In addition, Bhutan is undergoing sweeping social and cultural change due to its engagement with the rest of the world. Materialism is spreading across the country, and the voracious markets for religious antiquities in the West and the Far East have led to increased commodification of religious antiques, including books. Thieves hunting for religious treasures have broken open almost all the stūpas in the country, many of which had been left vulnerable by the widespread migration from rural villages to urban areas that has left the cultural heartlands empty and unprotected. (See plate 4)

The Digitization Process

The book in Bhutan and the culture associated with it are today in a state of transition. Aware of their spiritual, educational, social, cultural, and academic value and of the urgency to safeguard some of the precious collections, I embarked on a mission of exploration and digitization of Bhutan's archival collections. A more detailed narrative of my initial adventures of digitization is published elsewhere.¹ What follows is a briefer account.

My first quest for rare manuscripts began in 2003 after Rob Mayer asked me to find for him copies of two Vajrakīla tantras from *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* (Collected Tantras of the Nyingma) manuscripts kept in Gangteng (*sgang steng*) Monastery. I was then traveling across Bhutan with my teacher, His

1. Karma Phuntsho 2010.

Holiness Penor Rinpoché (*pad nor rin po che*). We halted at Gangteng Monastery, where His Holiness conducted a public ceremony for over ten thousand people, and I visited the monastic library with its elegant *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* manuscripts. I requested Gangteng Tulku to allow me to photograph them, but as I expected, he replied with a vague “no” and polite smile. Although he understood the virtues of documenting such rare books and the use academic scholars could make of the photos, he was unsure about the overall benefit of such reproduction.

His response betrayed the influence of the religious conservatism associated with traditional restrictions on esoteric knowledge typically held by traditional lamas, and the general cultural protectionism that the Bhutanese state strongly enforced.² There was understandably a felt worry among lamas that sacred texts may be “disturbed” by the act of photography and that, once in digital form, their sanctity would diminish through wide and easy replication, rendering inapplicable the restrictions traditionally imposed on access to the esoteric content of books such as the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*, which fall within the highest category of Buddhist tantric teachings.³

Less evident perhaps was also the concern that such malleable and reproducible formats as digital images may undermine the unique ownership of the texts and the socio-religious legitimacy and authority they held. Moreover, he was also aware of the problematic and often controversial nature of the academic study of such sacred texts, as critical scientific analyses carried out by academics and their conclusions often contravened long-held traditional beliefs and stories about the texts and their applications.

I was fully aware of such cultural sensitivities and religious agendas but keen to play the game correctly, with investment of time and effort. So I persisted with my requests in the following months, giving all the good reasons I could think of. After a long test of persuasion and endurance that lasted months, I managed to win his consent to document the *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* collections. My association with prominent religious masters such as Penor Rinpoché, then the head of the Nyingma order, and my own stature among the monastic communities as an author no doubt helped my dogged determination.

2. A few weeks before our encounter, he was reprimanded by the Minister for Home Affairs for footage showing the inside of the protector chapel (*mgon khang*) in a documentary produced in the UK. The filming had taken place during his absence.

3. Such open access can be paramount to the serious violation of tantric *samaya* precepts generally known as the “open proclamation of secrets” (*gsang bsgrags*). One root precept of esoteric Vajrayāna Buddhist practice is to refrain from divulging the secret teachings and practices to people who have not been initiated.

With his permission, I made my first journey to photograph the books on a grueling country bus crammed with farmers and sacks of rice. I was equipped with many packets of presents, the latest Minolta camera, a laptop, CDs and batteries. The bus broke down twice with punctures during the ten-hour journey. At Gangteng, I stayed with my former colleagues, who were then teaching in the monastic college as abbots. Their friendship and support was a great asset for my work, from finding the caretaker of the monastic library and assistant monks to providing me with timely and comforting meals.

The images I produced for Rob Mayer in 2003 were produced almost single-handedly using a Konica Minolta Dimage F200. I spent approximately ten hours every day taking photos of the voluminous books. The configuration was basic, with a board on which to place the texts and a camera with a tripod. I initially focused using the LCD screen but soon found out that the screen view did not exactly match the resultant images. I also discovered later that the view from the viewfinder did not match the images produced. Hence, the best method was to set the camera and texts in the position to produce a good sample and thereafter maintain the same position.

The greatest challenge was the lack of electricity in Gangteng at that time. The monastic college ran a power generator for three hours in the evening. During this time, I had not only to charge the computer fully but also to create backup CDs. The scarcity of electricity taught me how to run my computer power efficiently and at times also seriously obstructed the photography, as I ran out of computer power to download the images from the camera cards. Worse, the power from the generator was not strong enough to recharge the camera battery. I tried to use another generator in the village that its owner kindly lent to me, carrying it on my back to the monastery, but unfortunately it could not recharge the batteries either. Thus, when all batteries were empty, I had to leave Gangteng after a couple of weeks. The following spring, I returned to Gangteng armed with a bag full of lithium CR-V₃ batteries and resumed the photography of the forty-six volumes of *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. Wrapped with a blanket in the cold temple hall, I took almost a thousand images each day making optimal use of daylight. After completion of each volume, I downloaded the card onto the computer, checked the images for defects, and saved them in multiple copies. All the images were produced in a fine jpeg format of roughly 1.20MB that Rob Mayer later claimed to be the best *Rnying ma rgyud 'bum* copies produced to date.

However, it was only in November 2004 that a major initiative to digitize the entire collection of manuscripts in Gangteng was planned. The Lisbet Rausing Charitable Trust had given the British Library a generous fund to start the Endangered Archives Programme. The aim was to document

endangered archives around the world. Although I learned about the competition for funds only two days before the deadline, my application for funds to photograph the entire collection of manuscripts at Gangteng was successful. With funding in place, I labored again to get the written permission to document the entire collection. Thanks to my prior work in building connections and confidence, the permission was granted without much delay.

Funded by the Endangered Archives Programme, I set off to Gangteng on my third trip under the aegis of the Gangteng Tulku. I was fully equipped this time with two laptops, two Canon cameras, several rechargeable batteries, camera cards, card reader, external hard drives, and DVDs for storage. In Gangteng, we built an outdoor station and began photography in earnest with the assistance of six monks from the monastic college. Two of the monks prepared the folios for photography, two laid the texts on the board, and two of them took the pictures. At lunch break and in the evening, two of them helped me download the images from the cards, sort the files, and make backups. To overcome the electricity problem, I financially contributed to the acquisition by the monastic college of a much larger kerosene generator able to recharge batteries and run for several hours. (See plate 5.)

When we finished the photography of the entire collection of manuscripts in Gangteng, there was 1,476GB of data comprising over 284,300 images of some 500 volumes of texts. The images were produced in duplicate copies of jpeg and raw formats, each with the size of roughly 2MB and 7MB respectively. The jpeg files are good for easy access and distribution. Although the file size is not large, the quality of the images is enough for reading purposes while being easily transferable. Raw images on the other hand are in a proprietary format and thus require specific software to open them. However, they retain the maximum data captured by the camera and allow shooting parameters to be changed even after the photo is taken. Using the proprietary software, these files can be converted into other formats such as tiff and jpeg of varying capacities.

This short description of my initial foray into digitization captures the various cultural, logistical, and technological challenges one faces in successfully digitizing an archival collection. The first challenge, obviously, is to find out what the collections hold. Without any comprehensive inventory or catalogues for archives, it is often by word of mouth or through a pilot visit that one finds out whether a temple has a significant collection. In this regard, the incomplete list generated by the National Library and Archives of Bhutan (2006) for some temples was of immense help.

The lack of information on the collection is made worse by the physical remoteness of the temples. One is lucky if the temple is accessible by motor road. Most temples are not, and when they are, the roads are perilous. On the

way to Bonbji, the team had to drive over a wobbly wooden bridge over a big river. Similarly, the road to Thadrak was blocked by a vast stretch of ice that the team had to break to proceed with the project.

Once on site, the temple heads are often not around to give access, and if they are, they are unwilling to grant it due to their lack of knowledge about digital documentation, fear of extra work, and a general cultural conservatism. While enhanced mobile connectivity has helped reach people to seek prior permission and support, my own connection to the monastic world as well as the official backing from the Departure of Culture and Central Monastic Body helped us gain access to most archives. Thanks to a growing awareness of the benefits of cultural documentation, and also to recommendations from archive owners who have benefited from our work, access to collections has now become much easier.

The next challenge, after obtaining permission, is to find a suitable space for the photography. Temple interiors are mostly dark, while most places outside have poor or no protection against direct sun and wind. A space with the right lighting condition is crucial as digital cameras were used instead of scanners. Digital photography is indeed the most effective and economic approach to preservation under the circumstances prevailing in Bhutan, and it is the best method to make the resources speedily available to a wider audience. It is preferred over microfilms, as the latter, almost always in monochrome, have a considerable level of data loss and are constrained in distribution, while color digital images capture and retain a maximum degree of similarity to the original, which helps the reader understand the text better. They are also more easily duplicable, convertible, and distributable. (See plate 6.)

Moreover, the remote archives lack stable electric power, thus the use of a scanner, photocopier, or any other devices requiring stable power are not feasible. Even if there is electricity, most available scanners do not have sufficient width to accommodate a traditional *poti* leaf, and the alternative of a feed-sheet scanner is not suitable for fragile books. Besides, such equipment is difficult to transport, while digital cameras are easy to transport and use with computers and rechargeable batteries. The digital SLRs we used thus far also produce simultaneously crisp and clear raw images of compact data, for archival purposes, and jpeg images, which are easily distributable. The raw images can be easily converted into tiff images of various sizes.

Photography is carried out mostly outdoors in the shade with good natural light. Transparent plastic covers and curtains are sometimes used to diffuse strong sunlight and protect the texts from sudden rain or wind. Wooden boards are used as backgrounds to hold the texts and are covered with gray cloths for balancing color. As it is difficult to find copy stands with sufficient

horizontal arm length to photograph texts lying face up from above, we photographed the books as one would take a portrait of a person. The texts rest on small pins on the wooden board, and the camera is tilted on the tripod to a parallel degree. The pins are relocated according to the width of the leaves, and as many leaves as fit on the camera's picture frame are placed on the board simultaneously. In later projects, a color card to facilitate color correction was added on the board. Since our work in Drametse (*dgra med rtse*) in 2007, measuring tape has been placed horizontally and vertically to capture the physical dimensions of the books during digitization in various places.

Once the camera is set, the shutter is released with an external shutter trigger in order to avoid pressure on the camera. The focus and frames are set each time the camera is moved for changing card or battery. To get sharp images, it is often useful to zoom in and set the focus before taking the shots. As discussed above, the frame and brightness of the picture seen through the viewfinder, on the LCD and on a computer screen differ slightly, so it is important to check the images on a computer screen before finalizing the setting. Such practical experience, gained heuristically from trial and error, was as useful as training in the control of camera settings and photographic skills.

The photography since the project in Drametse and Ogyen Choling (*o rgyan chos gling*) was mostly undertaken by a group of dedicated and talented staff led by a chief proficient in the Tibetan Buddhist textual tradition, digital photography, and computing. The staffs consist of learned individuals, conversant with the texts and familiar with digital photography. They take the pictures, check the images, make final copies, and create the list and catalogue.

Local monks or lay priests were hired as assistants to help set up the station, move, unwrap and wrap the enormous bundles of texts, put the pages in order, and turn the folios during photography. This helped young people associated with the temples to gain exposure to and learn from the processes of documentation. Employing them ensures that members of the host community gain basic knowledge of digital data and their use. Many of these assistants later joined the team as full-time staff.

Despite the utmost care given to the equipment, problems with the cameras and digital tools were inevitable. We had one serious incident while working in Drametse, some twenty-five hours' drive from Thimphu, the nearest place with limited access to technical support. One of the cameras displayed a mysterious "error 99" and refused to take pictures when the shutter was released. The pictures it did take were fuzzy, dark, out of focus, and distorted. The camera had to be sent to the Canon service center in Bangkok, which was unable to identify the cause of this malfunction but replaced the entire mirror box, shutter frame, and three other interior parts. It most likely succumbed to

the severe trial it was going through, one that Canon engineers may not have expected.

Another technical problem occurred when one of the hard drives started to malfunction and show rainbow-colored lines on the images. Fortunately, this problem was noticed before substantial data loss. The faulty hard drive was returned to the agent in Thimphu, but this put the team under severe storage constraints. This problem of digital storage shortage was faced during most projects as we produced more data than expected, and the size of the images increased with each new generation of cameras.

Outcomes of the Program

Since 2005, a total of forty-four archives have been digitized, including twenty-one archives through funding from the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP039, EAP105, EAP310, and EAP570) and ten temple archives associated with the tradition of Bhutan's foremost saint, Pema Lingpa (1450–1521), through a project at Cambridge University funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council. The projects have focused on handwritten manuscripts and printed books if they were rare and, particularly, if the woodblocks were lost. The map provided (see plate 7) shows the coverage and digital outcomes of the digitization.

Copies of the images, in raw and jpeg formats, have been deposited in the National Library and Archives of Bhutan for safekeeping and shared with archive owners when they requested copies. Copies are also retained in the Loden Foundation, an educational charity in Bhutan, and shared with the archive owners, Central Monastic Body, the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, and many scholarly or religious persons who approach us with requests for copies of rare books needed for study or religious services.

A detailed catalogue based on the master template of the British Library is being written. Some of the collections are available online through the EAP website. Besides digitally preserving the books that are in precarious condition and making them easily available, the digitization program also helped enhance the awareness of cultural preservation using digital technology. The Loden Foundation has since 2013 carried out a complementary project of audio-visual documentation of the intangible cultures of Bhutan in order to preserve the dying cultures as well as obtain a comprehensive understanding of Bhutan's past.

Most of the collections photographed are outstanding literary holdings in their size, quality, antiquity, and integrity. For the world at large and Bhutan in particular, they represent an astounding heritage of enormous value and

significance. The digital reproduction of the collections not only fulfilled our dual objectives of conserving the unique collections in digital surrogates and of making them easily accessible but has also helped us vastly enhance our understanding of the literary history and culture of the Himalayas in general and the individual archives in particular. Through several discoveries and insights revealed by the projects that cannot be discussed here for lack of space, the process helped us unravel the underlying assumptions about Bhutan's literary past and assess its significance as a whole.

MAJOR COLLECTIONS DIGITIZED

COLLECTION	PROVENANCE OF MANUSCRIPTS DIGITIZED
Bka' gyur	Gangteng, Nephug, Thadrak, Chizhi, Dongkarla, Phajoding, Dodedra
'Bum	Dongkarla, Drametse, Yagang, Tsakaling, Mendru Gonpa, Dodedra
Rnying rgyud	Gangteng, Drametse, Tshamdra, Pagar, Dongkarla
Dgong 'dus	Phurdruk Gonpa, Lama Sa-nga, Dongkarla
Gter mdzod	Prakar
Mdzod bdun	Prakar
Rdor gling chos skor	Ogyen Choling
Pad dkar gsung 'bum	Phajoding
Pad gling chos skor	Tsakaling, Gangteng

In addition to a great number of manuscript renditions of well-known canons and other collections, the projects have also brought to light many unknown titles. A general analysis of the content and the provenance of the collections also gives insight into the religious and socioeconomic history of different parts of Bhutan and the extent of the transmission of ideas and practices within Bhutan and with other parts of the Himalayan region. A glance at the collections of the archives also revealed that the *mgyogs yig* script that Bhutan claims as its unique national script was not so common before the twentieth century, while the *dbu med 'bru tsha* script, which the Bhutanese today consider a Tibetan script and are generally unable to read, was widely used for writing noncanonical manuscripts.

Transformation of the Book-View

The culture of the book in Bhutan and the Buddhist Himalayas is witnessing unprecedented changes today as the traditional *poti* format is being quickly replaced by other formats. As mentioned, the second half of the twentieth century was perhaps one of the most dramatic chapters in the history of the book in the Tibetan Buddhist world, involving destruction and dispersal, but also efforts at preservation and revival. During that critical period, book culture also encountered modernity and its technological advantages, which in many ways facilitated its resurgence both in the Himalayas and abroad, while also bringing about far-reaching changes both in the physical production and the perception of the book.

With the influx of modern goods and practices, mass-produced industrial paper has replaced traditional handmade paper, modern metal nibs have supplanted local bamboo pens, and modern metal typesetting has replaced xylographic blocks. In terms of format, the bound codex format has become more popular than the traditional *poti* style, and along with this, books have increasingly come to be seen as literary and educational tools rather than as sacred objects with transcendent value.

The meeting of Himalayan book culture with the dominant Western tradition of the book and modern printing has not been without problems and challenges. It has led to dramatic changes in the ways people construct, organize, reproduce, access, and disseminate knowledge and information. With books increasingly published in bound codex, some among the conservative quarters of Bhutanese society fear that the sanctity of texts and cultural practices involving the traditional book could be lost. As most of the bound books that the Bhutanese initially encountered were on mundane and secular topics, the Bhutanese people did not associate modern books with sacred literature. Thus, when the Buddhist canons are printed in the bound format, they do not inspire the same kind of awe and respect as they do in the *poti* format. Thus, the change in physical appearance has led to a significant shift in the perception of books and their transcendental and ritual use.

If the Bhutanese book culture is going through a significant change through its convergence with modernity and the bound-book tradition, a fundamental shift in people's attitude, approach, and use of books is unfolding with the convergence of Bhutan's cultural world with digital technology. With IT facilities reaching even the most remote parts of the country, and Facebook and WeChat gripping its people, the book culture is witnessing yet another new chapter. Like bound books, digital books stored in CDs and hard drives

inspire an even lower sense of sanctity, and also cannot perform the same role as traditional books in rituals and ceremonies.

Digital technology has transformed the way we organize and seek knowledge today. In nearly a decade of efforts to preserve Bhutanese archives in digital copies, I have reproduced some forty-four libraries, which now fit in a few pocket-sized external hard drives. Ancient scriptures available on a shimmering screen at the click of a mouse instil a very different perception and approach than illuminated tomes in a rustic temple. Digitization certainly has its advantages. For instance, it allows unprecedented access to collections located in the remotest corners of the country and provides unprecedented ease of access for codicological, historical, philological, and bibliographic use. Besides access, the digital copies are also highly portable, convertible, and adaptable according to the needs of one's study. The digital zoom facility, which allows easy magnification of small print, is but one advantage of digital copies over the original books.

However, the full ramifications of this transition from solid *poti* to malleable pixels of digital data are yet to be seen. Digitization is certainly bringing changes to the cultural system of thinking. Although with traditional books we do not face much of the common issues of copyright violations, plagiarism, and so forth, the Bhutanese book culture is confronted by other cultural problems, such as the loss of sacred instrumentality and uncontrolled access to esoteric teachings mentioned above.

Despite these problems, the Bhutanese literary world on the whole is enamored by digital technology and ready to embrace its advantages. This is visible in lay priests carrying tablets containing texts for their rituals and village elders using WeChat for community connections. It may not be too farfetched to imagine hard drives adorning the temple shelves and being paraded across valleys, DVDs replacing the scrolls filling prayer wheels, and micro SD cards containing hundreds of sacred texts being worn as amulets. Indeed, if the book culture takes such a turn, digital books would take on a special ritual function. Yet it is also quite possible that the non-literary functions of the Bhutanese book will be largely lost. At this critical juncture, it may be worth asking whether or not the book will survive and be of expedient use in its traditional *poti* format, and what major changes will reshape the Bhutanese view of books.

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