



Originals were painted green, losing hundreds of years of devoted aspirations

RISK ASSESSMENT: HUMAN CHOICES



PRESERVATION OF BUDDHIST TREASURES RESOURCE is the free online resource for monasteries and communities, with practical information on digital documentation, risk assessment and disaster recovery, safer storage, and preservation of thangka and other treasures. The resource comes from over 50 years of preservation work in monasteries.



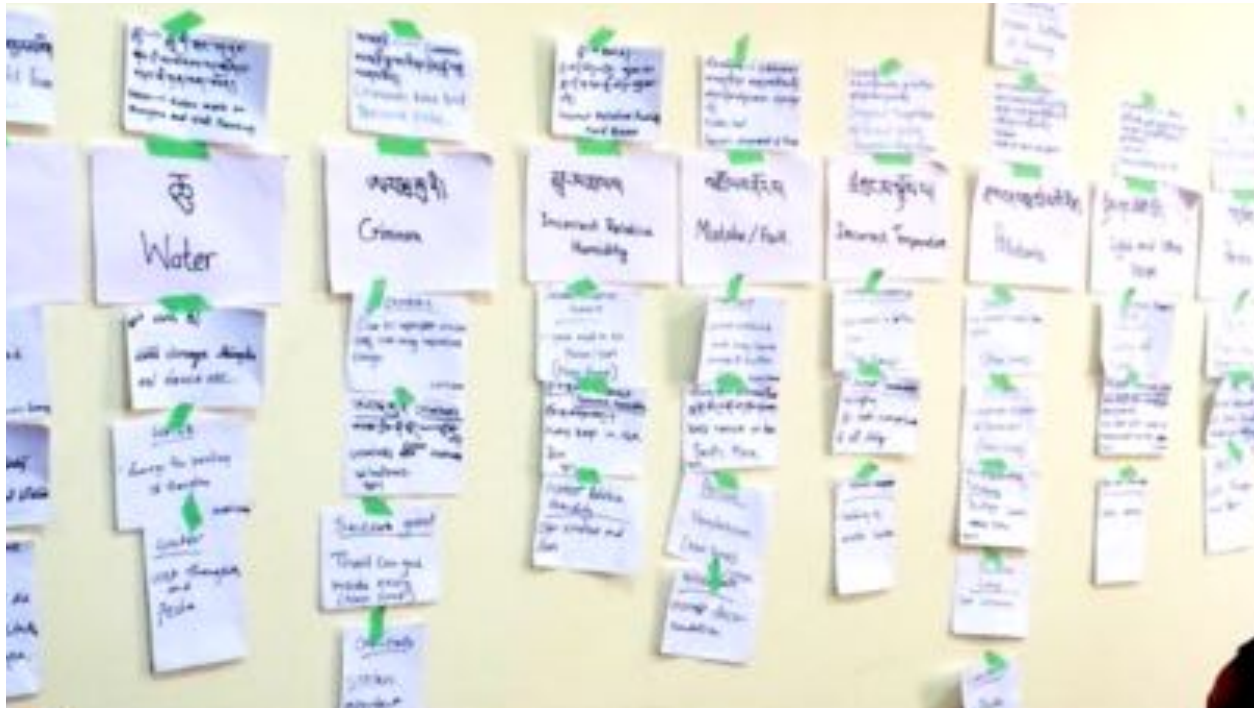
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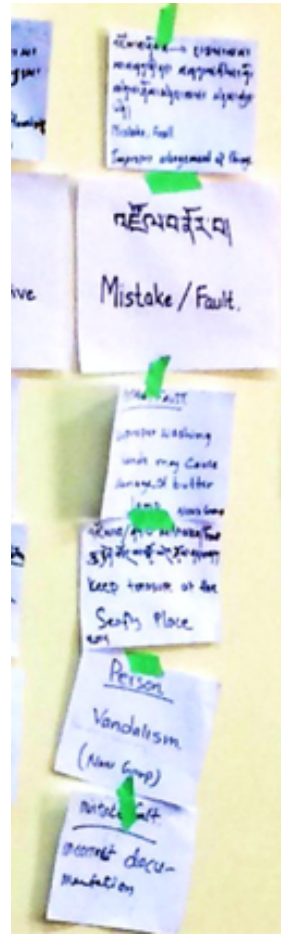
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Introduction



Risk Assessment by monks and nuns according to categories of risk and their own experiences of how these risks have damaged their own monastery treasures



We can all laugh about human fault. We cannot laugh about the weather too much, we cannot laugh about pollution, we do not laugh that much about the sun and how it causes wrinkles or fades textiles. But for some reason we all think people making mistakes is pretty funny. What happens when someone makes a mistake?

Importance of Documentation

Another possible “mistake” is not to research and document history of treasures in your monastery and community. Future generations will benefit from your entering those stories into your written records, and into digital documentation where that is possible.

If one monastery lends something to another monastery, or someone borrows one of your thangkas for a puja, or if the caretakers change, and there is no inventory or record, then it could be lost. It is very important to keep a list, or inventory, of the treasures that you have.

Elder Interviews

Interviewing elders on your smartphone or tablet can preserve the story of a treasure. If you don't get the history of something, then you'll never know that, for example, that thangka belonged to your Rinpoche's grandfather's teacher and was in his room on retreat. Those who are born a hundred years from now will never know because the Rinpoche's grandfather has since died and was never asked to tell the story, to share the history. Or that Mahatma Gandhi came to this room and blessed this community school for future generations. If there weren't pictures of it or the story written, that history might be lost. Documentation of our history is so important. That's why it's considered a "mistake" when the history of treasures is not documented. Please refer to the Documentation section of this Resource.



Nuns interview community elder about her life story and the history of her treasures. She has since died.

Intentional Damage

Another problem is graffiti and other intentional damage to cultural treasures. Physical damage to treasures happens out of devotion, but sometimes it happens from people behaving disrespectfully to other people's beliefs or out of ignorance. Paan-chewing visitors have been known to spit out the red juice onto wall paintings and temple textiles.



Graffiti from tourists on the side of a sacred temple



Vandalism to a Buddha statue with intentional damage: Five Buddhas were vandalized. Perpetrators demolished five Buddha statues made from cement, limestone, and sand. Each of the statues weighed over 120 kg. A concerned citizen explained that this act of destruction was an attempt to damage social and religious tolerance within the locality.



Tourists' disrespectful behavior, standing on top of a Buddhist shrine. The tourists were arrested and detained.

Unintentional Damage from Devotional Visitors

Sometimes damage to cultural treasures happens from activities of devotion. For many monasteries, touching sacred treasures in an important part of receiving blessings, and these protocols can result in unintentional damage. Many lhakangs are open to devoted visitors. It is the decision of the monastery community whether to continue this tradition, to stop and focus on repairing the physical damage to monastery treasures, or some choice in between. The Head Monastic will probably need to implement any changes.



Devoted visitors touch the bottom of these traditional statues every day. The statues are made of traditional construction, of wood, clay, and straw with a painted surface, which are very vulnerable and easily damaged by this contact.



Traditional large lineage figure statue is rubbed by devoted visitors to the temple. The gold layer is being worn away and the red layer that supports the gilding is exposed. On the top part of the statue, out of visitors' reach, the gold layers are undamaged.



Traditional prayer practice of touching the shrine in supplication for fulfillment of wishes

Damage from Offerings and Traditional Blessings

For example, this is a new statue and it is made of wood. Finely carved, very fragile wood. Visitors that came to this nunnery were stuffing money into the hands of the statue and the hand keeps breaking, again and again. Finally, the nuns considered placing signs up saying, "Please don't harm Manjushri by stuffing money in the hand." The wooden statue kept breaking. The nuns are discussing placing a donation box in front of the statue.



Traditional offering of money by placing it in the hands of deity statues.

It is a traditional custom to offer money. In many monasteries, nunneries, and even in museums, people try to insert money into statues. It is wonderful that they are offering, but this method of offering could be very damaging for old, fragile statues.



Traditional offering of money by placing it in the hands of statues



Traditional offering collected in plastic pinned to bottom of thangka. The thangka textile mounting is being damaged where the plastic is pinned. It would be safer for the thangka to have a box in front for offerings.

Damage from Overcleaning and “Restoration”



Shrine kapalas being cleaned with toilet bowl cleaner. This strong chemical is dangerous for the skin and lungs and can harm treasures.

Another human mistake is the cleaning of treasures in an attempt to make them look new. Some cleaning is safe, if the right methods and cleaning materials are used, but cleaning too harshly is a mistake.



Historic thangka painting was overcleaned with water and the fine details of the master painter were lost forever

For example, when a thangka became old and was darkened by butter-lamp smoke and incense grit in the lhakhang, traditionally, a thangka painter would be engaged to make a copy. Then the old one would be retired—perhaps in the Rinpoche’s room if it is not used every day. The new one would be used in the Lhakhang because it is stronger and the brighter colors are more true to that of the visualization. Scrubbing and repainting a venerable old thangka to make it look new was simply never done. Among other things, it ignores the accumulation of blessings.

More recently, there have been attempts at restoration, sometimes made at the recommendation of foreign experts, to make thangkas new. It is the choice of you, as people responsible for traditional heritage treasures, whether to permanently change their appearance through restoration.



Traditionally, thangkas were not "restored" to the extent they are now. Permanent damage can easily result from "cleaning".

But if you have a restoration studio in which they're cleaning thangkas with water, that is a human choice. You could be creating as much damage to the thangka, as the damp wall in an ancient monastery created. Restoration decisions such as cleaning a thangka with water, removing a thangka from its traditional textile mounting, scrubbing it, or gluing it, can be considered human mistakes. They are choices that cause damage, sometimes irreversible damage, that could have been avoided.

Repainting

Basic principles of conservation are to do a minimal amount of interference with the original, and to make sure that any changes are reversible to the extent possible. This is also true about any application of new paint over original paint layers of historic blessed thangkas; for thangkas this is neither traditional nor recommended.

Many monastics are discussing that a monastery and its community don't like that their wall paintings look dark, both inside and outside of the monastery buildings. The monastery administrators may decide to have these wallpaintings repainted with newer and brighter colors. In that case it is important to document the original paintings that are being changed or replaced.





Original “mani stones” were painted by pilgrims and greatly appreciated. Recently, the monastery and community decided to paint over the historic “mani stones” with plain green paint.

Repainting is another decision that people make. Documentation can preserve information about traditional treasures in order to inspire future generations. Another "mistake" that people make is trying to do "restoration" as opposed to simply preservation—for example, that you try to make an old thangka look like a new thangka. Documentation is especially important when any “restoration” efforts involve change in appearance, so that the original treasure can be remembered.

Please refer to the **Thangka Preservation** and **Wall Painting Preservation** sections in **Preservation of Buddhist Treasures**.

Monks' and Nuns' Observations in their Own Words

- Frequent touching of statues with bare hands can corrode metal statues due to natural body oil. Put up “Do not touch” signs.
- Place an offering bowl/tray in front of statues where visitors can be requested to make the offerings instead of inserting them into the statue’s hands, etc. Such actions can easily damage the surface of metal statues and crack wooden statues.
- Oil from frequent human touch and scraping by paper or coins have damaged treasures in many monasteries.
- Ensure that an attendant is always present when visitors come, so that the attendant can ask visitors not to touch statues, thangkas, and wall paintings, and not to stuff money into the statues.
- Traditional rolled thangka storage damages both the painting and textile components of the thangka. Thangkas can alternatively be stored flat by creating inexpensive flat storage units.
- Clean hands after filling butterlamps before touching thangka.
- Keep good documentation so that treasures are not lost or forgotten.

Summary

Planning ahead and preventing damages to your treasures includes all threats. Of the threats and risks, Human Mistakes are often the easiest to prevent. One common human mistake is misplacing a treasure. A person doesn't remember where it is, who borrowed it, or who last used it, and there is no record.

Failure to document is another avoidable human mistake, and can result in the loss of a treasure's history. Where did the treasure come from, what is its history, and how did it arrive at this monastery? It's important to interview the Elders in the monastery and community to capture this information for future generations. Proper documentation will also help caretakers track the location and understand past and current condition of a monastery's treasures.

Damage can also occur from visitors to monasteries or temple—whether intentional damage such as graffiti, or unintentional damage that may result from devotional activities such as making offerings or receiving blessings. It is important for a caretaker to be present whenever there are visitors near treasures. It is very helpful to establish good protocols in a monastery for receiving blessings and making offerings, and to have monks or nuns to monitor those activities.

Overcleaning, or the wrong kind of restoration, is another kind of human mistake that can result in irreversible damage to a monastery's treasures. Make as few changes as possible to simply stabilize the condition, and ensure that your actions can be reversed if necessary. Respecting the history of your treasures is such an important part of preservation.

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Basic Elements of Emergency Plan for Monasteries and Communities

1. People First
2. Who Do You Call?
 - Who is in charge?
 - Emergency phone numbers
 - Full monastery residence list, to text, WeChat, WhatsApp, etc.
3. Who Should Salvage Collections?
 - Monastery Treasures Salvage Team (trained previously)
4. Where to Bring Damaged Treasures
 - Another monastery?
 - Your monastery dining room, classrooms, etc.
5. What Do You Salvage First?
 - Decide your priorities, preferably before an emergency
 - Mark the location of these priority treasures on floor plans
6. Where Are the Emergency Supplies?
 - Stockpile supplies before an emergency occurs
 - Mark the location of supplies on floor plans
 - Contact local vendors for additional supplies
7. Who Provides Security During an Emergency?
 - Monastics, community members, or government?
8. What Information Technology Will You Need to Replace?
 - Survey your hardware and software currently in use
 - Store monastery files in "cloud" or duplicated offsite
9. Do You Have Insurance?
10. Who Has the Plan?
 - Make a list of who has copies of your Emergency Plan
 - Update Emergency Plan and Team

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Preservation of Buddhist Treasures

RISK ASSESSMENT ཉེན་ཁ་དཔྱད་ཞིབ།

- ❖ **Pandemic** ཡོངས་ཁྱབ་མིན་སྐོར་ནད།
- ❖ **Earthquake** མ་ཡོམ།
- ❖ **Fire** ལྷ།
- ❖ **Water** ལྷ།
- ❖ **Theft** ལྷ་སྐྱོན།
- ❖ **Pests** གནོད་འགྲ།
- ❖ **Temperature and Relative Humidity** རྫོང་ཚད་དང་ལྗོས་བཅས་ཀྱི་བཞུའ་ཚན།
- ❖ **Human Choices** མིའི་འདུལ་ག།
- ❖ **Pollution** འབགས་བཅོག།
- ❖ **Light** རྫོག་ལྷ།

EMERGENCY PLANNING AND DISASTER MITIGATION རང་དོན་འཆར་གཞི་དང་ཉེན་ཁ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་བཅས་ཀྱི་འཇུག་ལུགས།

SAFE STORAGE ཉེན་མེད་དོན་ལང་།

DOCUMENTATION ཡིག་ཆ་ཚོ་བཞག་དུ།



དགོན་པ་འདི་གན་འདོམ་གཅེས་སུང་སྲོང་བཤར་ཚོགས་པ།

Digital inventory འགྲུལ་ཆས་ཤོག་ནས་པོལ་མོར་འགོད་པ།

Risk assessment and disaster mitigation ཉེན་ཁ་ཚུན་འགོག་དང་མི་དུག་གདོང་ལེན།

Recording digital interviews with elders མི་རྒན་རབས་དང་འགྲུལ་ཆས་ཤོག་ནས་བཅར་འདྲི་ཐུབ་སྲོད་པ།

Scientific research ཚན་རིག་ཉམས་ཞིབ།

Current project ད་ལྟོ་བྱེད་པའི་ལས་འགན།

Free online preservation resource for communities and monasteries

དགོན་པ་དང་སྲི་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་ཚེད་དུ་གན་འདོམ་གཅེས་སུང་སྲོང་བཤར་ཚོགས་པའི་ ལྷན་ཁུངས་ཤིག་ལྷན་ཚུ་སྲོད་པའི་དུ་སྲུང་བ།



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