



Sala Thammaviharn, Vat Khily,
Sakkaline Road, Ban Khily,
P.O. Box 790,
Luang Prabang, 06000, Lao PDR

1st August 2020

Dear Friends:

Hoping this finds you all and your loved ones, healthy and staying safe; we apologize for the silence since our last newsletter.

Here in the Lao PDR we have of course also been affected by the COVID pandemic, but by good luck and good timing on the part of the government, we went into a strict lockdown very early, from which we have only just started to emerge. Travel has been off the books as all borders are closed, and this has presented some logistical challenges.

The good news here is that there has been a total of only 20 confirmed cases of COVID nationally, and no deaths. All but the most recent one have recovered and released from hospital.

In the face of this our work has continued, so please read on...

Current Projects:

The Arts School

We have completed three of the five planned buildings for the Arts School, and each is being put to good use...see several photographs below. Under the circumstances we have delayed the plans to complete the remaining two buildings until we all emerge from this pandemic and life goes back to normal.

In January of this year the annual Vipassana meditation retreat was held for ten days at the Academy, and the Arts School buildings were engaged as teaching and meditation spaces during the retreat. See some of the remarkable photographs of the retreat below.



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Emergency Restoration of the Buddhist Archives Building

Many of you know, and have visited, the Buddhist Archives of Photography, housed in the large two-story building in Vat Khili. For those of you who are not familiar, the Archives contain the largest and most important collection of historic photographs in the country. The National Archive of photography in Vientiane was destroyed years ago during wars and civil unrest.

Thankfully, many of the monks and Monasteries had accumulated large collections of photographs, some dating back to the 1880's - and had stored these collections in safe places so as to survive the wars and the revolution. Through his friendship with a senior Abbot, our Co-founder Hans Berger, became aware of these collections and their potential importance, and thus began the Buddhist Heritage Project.

Through a multi-part, multi-year grant from the British Library's Endangered Archives program, we embarked on an ambitious project of collecting, cleaning, scanning, digitizing and cataloguing these photographs, which eventually totaled almost 40,000 items. The entire collection is online at the Endangered Archives site of the British Library for scholastic and academic research.

So that is the background...and now to the current situation. The building housing the Archive is approximately 100 years old, and although it was well designed architecturally, and well-built according to the conventions of the time, we began to notice cracks in the walls in several places. To make a long story short, over a period of two years, and as a result of three separate and unrelated earth tremors from earthquakes in a neighboring province and northern Burma, the cracks grew to dangerous proportions.

A collapse of the building, or even a partial collapse, and the subsequent potential loss of life and the collection would have been catastrophic. We decisively acted earlier in the year to address the problem, and it has become a major restoration effort, involving the UNESCO Heritage House and numerous qualified construction engineers etc. Essentially the entire building had to be stripped and reinforced with steel and concrete columns and beams and new roof tiles and supports installed.

Thanks to the generosity of the Badur Foundation in London we were able to secure most of the funding needed, and works have begun. You will see from the photographs below the extent of the on-going works, and we will keep you posted of the progress.

More to come on this one!



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Feeding the Monks, Nuns and Novices at the Buddhist Academy:

This has become a huge challenge for the high school at the academy. With up to 700 mouths to feed every day they have relied heavily on local businesses to contribute food, especially vegetables. The complete cessation of any tourism income has forced most such businesses to close.

Thanks to the generosity of two staunch supporters in the U.S.A., we now can distribute, twice a month until March 2021, a large quantity of basics and high-protein foods, and this will help enormously. Our profound thanks to both people and sincere blessings from the Abbot and the student body.

Our Social Enterprise Experiment - In Spite of the Challenge the Future is Here!

Our Social Enterprise initiative, the shop CELADON, has this year fallen victim to the COVID challenge, and while we keep the shop open on most days, there are no tourists and thus no customers.

HOWEVER...we are not wasting our time, and have completed establishing the workshop nearby our shop and offices in the town; intended to enable students graduating from the Arts School (and others) to have access to a clean, purpose-equipped workshop where they could continue to practice and refine their skills, potentially deriving income from selling their output through the Project's shop. We mentioned this in our last newsletter and are happy to say that the workshop is now well equipped and functioning. Although we have no customers, we are using the time to refine, train and create with an eye to the future. You will find several photographs below of the workshop and CELADON.

May we extend to you the sincere thanks from all of us in Luang Prabang for your support and interest so far. Your contributions and moral support have already touched hundreds of young lives and will continue to do so over the next decades.

Our warmest best personal regards and blessings to you all and wishes for staying safe.

Brian Lingham, Project Coordinator,
Vatthana Siamkha, Assistant Coordinator and
The entire Buddhist Heritage Project Team.



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Novices at the Arts School well advanced in a wood carving class



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During the January Vipassana Meditation retreat with well over 1,000 attendees, some here practicing Walking Meditation, a particular feature of Luang Prabang Buddhism.



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The Arts School buildings became centers of meditation and instruction during the retreat



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With the Abbot, Sathu Nyai One Keo in the center, the Buddhist Heritage Project team delivers some of the food generously provided by our friends in the U.S.A. Here we brought Sticky Rice (a staple), several hundred fresh Pineapples and 700 hundred tins of high-protein Sardines. We try to vary the content of each delivery when possible.



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Satthu Nyai One Keo, the architects and engineers with Project team members checking the plans for the restoration of the Buddhist Archive of Photography building.



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One immediately gets a sense of the extent of work being undertaken in the interior of the Archive building, with new concrete and steel columns and beams to create the necessary support on both the lower and upper floors.



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Novices watching at our in-town workshop as a staff member demonstrates the use of tools.



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And one of the novices tries his hand at using the new band saw to create a cut out shape.



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A view in the evening of the front of our shop CELADON - all profits dedicated to the Academy and education.



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And an interior view of the shop giving a clearer idea of our products - many made in Luang Prabang