

BULLETIN OF THE BURMA STUDIES GROUP
Association for Asian Studies
August, 1986
#35

BURMA STUDIES CENTER

The Burma Studies Group met in conjunction with the SEASSI Conference at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, from July 31 through August 3.

On the 31st a Burmese art exhibit opened in the Swen Parson Gallery. On display were the beautiful items loaned to the new Burma Studies Center by SARAH BEKKER. The festivities began with a reception in the Gallery, followed by a formal meeting of the Burma Studies Group in a nearby conference room.

At the formal meeting RICHARD COOLER announced that the new Center had been funded as of July 1st. Formal approval awaits Regents action this fall, although they have started their discussions already. He also noted with pleasure that the University had given the Center new office space at 140 Carroll Avenue with more room than had been offered originally. He also said that plans were being made to publish the essay on Burmese Buddhist images and that EUAN BAGSHAW has been polishing up his translation to its final form. The library is working on a shelf list of NIU Burmese holdings, and librarian LARRY ASHMAN has been taking Burmese language this summer, along with THECLA COOLER, from KRIS LEHMAN and AYE KYAW at NIU.

MAUREEN AUNG THWIN will edit a new Burma Newsletter. She will assemble the clippings and news items. They will be printed and mailed out of the Burma Studies Center. Burma Studies Group members who would like to help Maureen as "clippers" should write her (up to 9/1/86) at 345 W. 88th St., N.Y., NY 10024, to make arrangements concerning what journals, papers, or magazines they will scour for news on Burma, which they would then send on to her (after 9/1, write her at New World Apartments 1846B, 24 Salisbury Rd., Kowloon, Hong Kong). Those who wish to receive a copy of the new Burma Newsletter should send \$5.00 U.S. payable to Burma Studies Group, c/o your editor for a year's subscription. We are very grateful to Maureen for volunteering to disseminate the news on Burma. The Bulletin in its present form will continue to be published.

At a later date we might very well create one set of fees which would cover the Bulletin, the Newsletter, and the expected Arts Bulletin, but at present we have a \$3.00 fee for the Bulletin and now setting a \$5.00 fee for the Newsletter.

KRIS LEHMAN noted that the founding document of the Burma Studies Foundation had been reworded by Peter G. Johansen, a lawyer in Boston who has volunteered to help, and that NIU counsel is now reviewing the wording, preparatory to a final version that will be submitted to IRS to seek 501C3 tax exempt status for the Foundation. A letter of understanding between the Foundation and the Center will also be composed. Gifts to the Foundation should await IRS approval of the Foundation's status. In the meantime loans to the Center can be made, as in the case of the Bekker Collection now on display. In discussion, members noted the need for reaching all those who might have Burmese materials for the Center, such as retired Foreign Service officers, and Burmese Americans. Notices and articles in the proper journals and publications will be important.

A lively discussion occurred on the need for a totally non-political stance for the Group, Foundation, and Center. Kris Lehman noted how the Burma Studies Group has never taken a position on political matters nor allowed itself to be associated with political issues. Individuals in the Burma Studies Group, of course, do have a wide range of opinions, but the Group itself takes no political stance at all as a matter of firm policy.

Kris Lehman urged members of the Burma Studies Group to share their video tapes and movies on Burma so that the new Center could build up a collection of such media. One of our new members, Win Win Ky:, has volunteered to work on this project, and doubtless you will hear from her in the near future. If you have any materials to share, please write to her.

Richard Cooler noted that the new Center would like to create a "Friends of Burma" or "Friends of the Burmese People" group that would involve Burmese people everywhere who might be interested in the Center's development.

Another matter discussed briefly included the appraising of gifts for tax purposes. The Foundation is, of course, restricted from appraising any gifts. Selecting and paying an appraiser must not be done by the receiving organization, according to IRS rulings. TERRY BAILEY noted that appraisers may no longer rely on photographs but must deal with the object first-hand. Since Terry cannot manage to do appraisals, the Foundation would welcome the names of those registered appraisers who could help potential donors of Burmese materials evaluate the worth of their contributions for tax purposes.

Mohinga - After the meeting, Aye Kyaw and Burmese friends served a fine Burmese mohinga dinner at the Swen Parson. The Burma Studies Center was thus a reality.

INTELLECTUAL FOOD

KRIS LEHMAN presented a paper, "Internal Inflationary Pressures in the Prestige Economy of the Feast of Merit Complex." His paper in Chin and Kachin society constituted a source of systematic inflationary spirals in their traditional economies and political systems. In particular, it takes issue with Leach's time-independent analysis of the significance of the Kachin Gumlao political organization, and argues that it came about not as part of an oscillation with chieftainship but rather as a consequence of the ultimately ruinous inflation of the ritual economy of chieftainship.

A series of presentations were given on the religious use of architectural space in Burma and Thailand. JOHN FERGUSON showed slides and overheads to introduce the basic Burmese designs of chedis, monasteries, and other structures as they have evolved in conjunction with royal counterparts. With no royalty, he wondered if such patterns as tazaungs would become cast in secular cement restaurants while the religious usages retained their vitality and meaning. RICHARD O'CONNOR, introducing the Thai examples, focused on how royal "domestication" of the monkhood favored the growth of ordination halls (sima or bot) and emphasis upon images (the pattern in Thailand, particularly Bangkok), whereas in Burma the chedi and relics were more important. He reasoned that Thai kings collected images and controlled the sangha through bots, not stressing relics because they evoke the land, particularly monastic landlordism.

SARAH BEKKER showed slides of religious structures in northern Thailand that showed or evoked Burmese style. She stressed the Burmese concentration upon the Hti or "umbrella" atop chedis. In one of her temples, the stairway nagas continued straight-through the building. Sarah included a side trip to Wat Phumin in Nan, where exquisite murals record turn-of-the-century life scenes. KRIS LEHMAN explored in "Monasteries, Palaces and Ambiguities" the sacred and secular implications of monastery design during the Kon baung period. He worked with southeast as most auspicious (Mahagiri nat in homes, Popa to Pagan, etc.), the pyathat or spire over the image, the inner world of the building as less public or secular and thus more monastic (the palace similarly designed for royal privacy), the importance of the singular building in Burma as opposed to many buildings in a Thai wat, less simā control by Burmese kings, and his assertion that images are more important than chedis to the monastery. RICHARD COOLER explained some of his research findings at Pagan in the mid 1970's. His main argument stressed the use of murals, votive tablets, and images of the Buddha within a temple as means of providing sanctity and merit, not instruction. He stressed that the interiors of the temples were often too dark, even with massive use of tapers, to provide edification for visitors. To prove his point, he explained how seismographic testing of Burmese (as opposed to Mon) temples dramatically revealed the existence of secret arched storage spaces in what might otherwise look like massive volumes of solid brick. In these spaces may lie much of the sanctifying and unlooted Buddhist history of Pagan.

In a carefully crafted presentation, TERRY BAILEY interpreted a 17th century bronze image of the Buddha. An inscription on the back of the image provided the date, the attendant side figures were interpreted as disciples, and the figure at the base in front as a male tree spirit. Terry compared this "new" image with European examples she has studied.

JERRY BENNETT shared with the group his reactions to a trip to a part of southern China, Keng Hung, a Shan state that retains Tai characteristics despite Han control. Even the water-throwing festival evoked northern Thailand, young robed novices abounded (few adult monks), and clearly some of the educators knew the Thai language.

PAUL SARNO initiated our first book review at one of our gatherings. He carefully surveyed Mel Spiro's Kinship and Marriage, indicating that, by and large, he liked it. Paul did feel that some of the conclusions were based on fairly small samples, and he noted a few places of apparent contradiction, but he found the book helpful and interesting. Audience response was enlivened by a Burmese male's challenge of how an anthropologist could learn about things Burmese women do not even talk about to their husbands!

JIM GUYOT led a panel on "Gender Roles in Burma and Thailand." He established a male power-female nurture polarity as a straw figure and urged participants to show similarities as well as contrasts. John Van Esterik compared his own field work in Thailand with the published Burmese village materials. Penny Van Esterik stressed the complimentary roles of men and women as well as the many ways women support the family. Carmel Chiswick spoke about her Bangkok research on salaries and education of Thai men and women, noting that whereas Thai men and women with education might start at near equal wages, the men earned more than the women over time.

SARAH BEKKER noted how Burmese women (and their daughters) once were powerful factors in Burmese economic life, but when the males in the army socialized businesses, the women were left few alternatives (such as the black market). A far-ranging discussion dealt with Buddhist assertions of male superiority, different attitudes towards nuns in the two countries, westernization of family laws, salary disparities favoring men and recognizing status, and ethnocentrism.

AYE KYAW spoke on "The Development of Colonial Education in Burma: 1826-1910." He observed that early British administrators influenced by the English classical economic theories "opened up" Burma to the world but did not open the world to Burma. Colonial education was an offshoot of this economic exploitation.

THE WORLD OF THE BURMESE CHILD

Elisabeth Musgrave has placed on loan to the Anthropology Museum at Northern Illinois U. an unusual collection of 112 items dealing with Burma and children. The materials will eventually be given to the Burma Studies Foundation and then to the Center.

The collection is comprised of the following: I. Paintings of ethnic groups (two watercolors by Tin U); II. Instructional materials for primary education (25 wall hangings used to teach Karen, Kachin, and Burmese languages); III. Children's apparel and cosmetics (wooden and leather slippers, a "muslin" net blouse, 2 dresses, a sarong, material for a Kachin sarong, and a tanaka kit); Musical instruments in miniature (waisted drum, small waisted drum, 2 bird whistles, 2 flutes, 3 gongs, 2 sets of hand cymbals, a miniature xylophone); Children's toys (2 papier-mache dolls, 2 brooms, 2 puppets, an elephant on wheels, a white horse, wooden mother and child, 2 miniature dahs, 1 comb, an acrobat, a clapper, a bamboo pistol, a bamboo cobra and alligator, a palm leaf rattle, 30-piece miniature kitchen set, miniature tiffen carrier, 2 vases, owl-shaped candy container, 3 baskets, a woven valise); Ceramic toys (4 tea pots, 2 carafes, a water pot, a water bowl, a curry pan).

OTHER NEWS

SARAH BEKKER will lead a tour to Burma and Thailand for the Institute for Asian Studies from January 24 through February 15, 1987. For details consult Susan Gullia, Williams World Travel Ltd., 1414 Ave. of the Americas, NY 10022. AYE KYAW has published "Burmese Sources for Lan Na Thai History" in JSS, Vol.73, pt I&II, Jan. & July 1985: 235-249. Mi Mi Khaing is visiting in Ann Arbor (c/o Prof. L.A.P. Goslig, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 130 Lane Hall, Ann Arbor, MI 45109). Recently returned to Burma are Daw Khin Win Kyi (from Washington U.), U Kyaw Myaing, U Denzil Abel (from Johns Hopkins U.), U Myitta (from U. of Oklahoma), Dr. Ko Ko (from U. of Hawaii) and U Saw Gibson (from Penn State U.). At present 23 Burmese are studying in the U.S. under USIS programs (14 for doctorates, 3 for masters, and 6 in non-degree programs. Patrick A. Pranke awaits final approval to study "The Saint and the Sacred Text: Preservation and Transformation of Scriptural Authority Amongst the Contemplative Monks of Burma." He hopes to study in Sagaing on a Fulbright-Hayes grant. LEEDOM LEFFERTS kindly sent from Rangoon the above information on educational exchanges between Burma and the United States. More of that material will be published in the next issue.