

Burma studies NEWS

#4

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Hello again,

We are happy to bring to you a record second issue of the NEWS!! I can't remember when we had two issues of this within the span of a semester; so Hokey!! to the driving spirits, wherever their origins might be. Since the last issue (September), quite a variety of interesting things have happened that we can report. Among others, several people wrote to me either to send news bits or to request to be included in our NEWS mailing list. However, before things get out of hand, I plan to yield the floor to the Burma Studies Group Chairman. So see you later.

NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

It appears that the Burmese Studies Group people must seriously plan to be at Denison University, Granville, Ohio, sometime soon to take in the impressive collection of Burmese arts and crafts. I have been receiving news about events forthcoming at the Museum of Burmese Art and Culture from its curator, Prof. Jane Terry Bailey. Many of us have probably learned to react on the basis of many a display of two longyis and a teakwood elephant being dubbed "a Burmese collection" in this country. It is the case, however, that the Denison collection is the 'real McCoy' and we should plan to make a visit soon. It is about 24-5 miles East of the Buckeye State capital, Columbus, on state highway 131, I believe. And Granville is on the map. So there.

I was quite happy to hear from several people since the September issue of the NEWS. Ms. Rose Marie Porter, who is working on her doctoral dissertation, which is on "Early Burmese Buddhist Temple Paintings," is also teaching at Denison University Art Department, where she lectures on Oriental Art History. Prof. Joseph A. Withey of Hanover College, Hanover, Indiana writes that he is busy with his research work on "Chinese Influences on Burmese Popular Theatre" in addition to teaching two courses which bear directly on Burma. Several more wrote to ask that their names be included in our mailing list; now of these some are not even "Burma Studies" people--I find myself saying, "Gosh, if only the Burma Studies people would write me and tell me about their current interests and projects!" Which brings me to the point: Are you getting the NEWS? How about a little input like whether we should continue to send you the NEWS or whether you prefer that your name be dropped. From the editor's hot seat, nothing bears down harder than correspondents who do not respond and members who don't let on if the postal service works or not. So write--let us know.

The Teaching of Burmese and Other Matters.

In October I attended a meeting of Language Resources Committee for Southeast Asia which met at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. We met jointly with the Southeast Asia Regional Council (SEARC) on matters of special interest to our group:

funding for programs such as our group envisages, southeast Asian language instructions; the role of country-level study groups in light of rapidly changing administrative and funding situations, etc. Let me recount a few of these issues for you.

1. The issue that is very crucial to the continuing existence of groups like ours is the one relating to funding. Whereas, it was the general arrangement in the past for the SEARC of the Association for Asian Studies to earmark a "sum of money" for activities undertaken by the country-level groups in the region, assuring that some funds will be available, the new situation is radically changed. There will no longer be any "automatic" appropriation simply because there is a Burma Studies Group; if we do not come up with activities and programs which could be approved and supported, the mere fact of our existence will no longer suffice for the setting up of funds even to cover postage for the NEWS. Our Group Chairman has earlier elaborated on the need for a concrete program in his column, and so I shall proceed on with the other topics. The moral lesson though, is a clear one--get the programs and activities going or we sink from sight and disappear below the sea-level into the Bay of Bengal.

2. The second issue came out as a bit of advice given us, in order to help us continue as a group and this refers to the question of having something resembling an executive committee. As you recall, at the Boston meeting of the Group last April, the Burma Studies Group had to be reconstituted. Kris Lehman was asked to take the chairmanship and given a "mandate" by voice-vote to go on with doing whatever needs to be done so that we would not disappear. We have put our three issues of the NEWS relating to the Burma Studies Group activities since then and hopefully, the Group will not perish. Which brings us back to the issue in the beginning: perhaps it is now the time to give the impression that things are back in the normal track, and that the reorganization of the Group by the Chairperson has progressed to the point where we can elect or appoint a committee to assist him. The Ann Arbor meeting advised that the format of operation with a "committee" is better in the eyes of those on high than one where "a person or two" functions on behalf of a group.

My suggestion is this: 1. That we recognize the potential as well as the limitations of a committee approach. In previous years when a limited fund of fifteen hundred dollars was normally set aside for our group, we did not need to worry that there might be no funds to cover our NEWS postage, nor did we have to worry about any interesting program like the rotating seminar, etc., because, given fifteen hundred and the possibility of zero more, there was not much we could begin to put our dreams on. Now that the procedure and spirit have been changed and proposed programs will be judged and supported on the basis of merit, why don't we have a little ambition?

This means, of course, that we should have a committee to assist our chairman; but it also means that the group must meet periodically and this implies what is already obvious. We can't, for practical reasons, have someone from Pluto and another from Bhama and charge them with assisting our chairman.

2. My advice is this. Let us elect two council members by mail, using the facilities of the NEWS, to assist the chairman and keep the arrangement until the San Francisco meeting next April. Furthermore, let us elect these two council members from among us who would be willing and able to meet with the Chairman in drawing up the programs and plans in the coming months. With the reminder that the Chairman lives in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, may I have your nominations please?

You may nominate yourself or someone else. I shall make up a ballot in the next issue of the NEWS which can be conveniently returned to me. So, two issues of the NEWS hence, we should have two council members to assist the chairman of the Burmese Studies Group. These names we shall present to the SEARC and Asian Studies Association as our bona fide executive. Are you still with me? Let me repeat, May I have your nominations please!

3. The third topic covered at the Ann Arbor meeting dealt with the new fact of life these days that the money to support the instruction of Southeast Asian languages has disappeared. No more sugar-daddies--not that there were any previously, but that it was, on theory, not impossible to obtain certain funds to support these programs. The situation now is that programs in languages like Burmese, Cambodian, Lao and possibly Tagalog Vietnamese are in danger of being lost. Thai and Indonesian are the only languages capable of generating sufficient student interest to warrant language programs on the intensive training basis during the summer. These summer programs, as the Indonesian Program at the University of Wisconsin at Madison has demonstrated, are economically feasible without large transfusions of funds from the Foundations or the Federal Government, possibilities which have evaporated now. But the core of student recruitment into Burma studies, for instance, also hinges upon language teaching and we will never be big enough to organize our own summer program without some form of subsidy. And since languages which can't pull their weight in dollars are considered undesirable dead-weight by languages which can, it seems as though Burmese will remain indeed very feeble in language programs.

Two things to note: Instruction in Burmese at the college level has been on the one hand within the context of regular programs in Burmese at schools like Yale, Cornell and Hawaii where there are regular programs and staff--meaning that they have the dough and all they need are students. But there have been insufficient student interest in these schools to warrant regular programs and thus, they are being phased out, where not gone already. At the Universities of Illinois, Indiana and Michigan the story is just the opposite, or almost. Students can be found, but the school administration is in no mood to set up a regular program in Burmese language in any of these places. So, on the other hand, Lehman at Illinois, Maran at Indiana, and Becker at Michigan struggle along with special overloads simply to accommodate a few students each year in Burmese. How much extra load can anyone seriously expect one to be willing to shoulder year in and year out?

Where and when are we going to teach Burmese? The solution is not in sight. We can only hope that the overload carrying people will continue to bear that weight for awhile or that by some miracle, Yale and Cornell send the good guys at the Big Ten schools CARE packages featuring checks to support Burmese language programs. Remember, based on my four years of experience at Indiana, attracting students, and good ones at that, into Burmese is one of the easier things. There are happy moments in my recollection when I was teaching Burmese classes of 12 students as an overload! And yet, all these kids with two years of Burmese are now finding that it is not leading anywhere in terms of coordination at the higher level. And believe, Kris Lehman, Pete Becker and I would love to teach courses on Burmese literature, history, anthropology, linguistics, etc., as well. But, be reminded that we are the people who overload ourselves and that is the crunch. There isn't much beyond what we are doing now that

can be added. Lord, at five feet and five inches rice-bred height, I certainly do not entertain the thought of being prematurely bent!

So, it seems as though the Chairman and his to-be-elected council will have more than metaphysical hairsplitting and hkaukswe eating to do.. I would like to hear your thoughts on this dilemma.

Other News

Of interest in recent developments is the seminar exploring Burmese syntax to be held at Indiana University next semester which begins about the middle of January, 1975. This is a cooperative venture between Kris Lehman and myself within the mechanism provided by the Committee for Institutional Cooperation, a program where the Big Ten and the University of Chicago share faculty, programs, students, etc. This grew out of the long-standing need which has been felt at Illinois and Indiana where there have almost always been a few students in Burmese in recent years. In this arrangement, the Illinois participants will commute to Bloomington each Monday evening. We will also pay considerable attention to the syntactic organization of the languages in the area, Cambodian, Thai and Vietnamese. At this writing, we are assured of at least 12 participants in the seminar and this figure may go up to 14.

The long-awaited date of completion of the Kachin Dictionary is actually within sight now. We expect to finish the initial volume of 17,526 word entry dictionary next month, certainly by sometime in January. Continuing will be a project to compile a reference grammar of Kachin-Jinghpaw and it is expected that the finished work will be approximately in the same order of magnitude as John Okell's reference grammar of Burmese, both in depth and breadth. The American Council of Learned Societies made a Grant-In-Aid of research to help support this project. In 1976, the centennial celebrations for the Kachin writing system will begin and it is the hope of the research and technical staff of the Jinghpaw Dictionary Project that a completed 22,000 word dictionary and two-volume reference grammar can be presented to the Kachin people at that time.

Final Notes

Until next time, I shall close with the plea that you let us know whether you receive the NEWS, wish to continue doing so, wish to have us stop bugging you, etc., and your advice, suggestions and especially these two items: your nominations--two names, for the Council, and a short description of your current work, interest, etc.

Matters directly relevant to the Group should be sent to the Chairman at his residence; it has the advantage of mail delivery on Saturday: 1316 Grandview Drive-East, Champaign, Illinois 61820; and material to be put into the NEWS and your nominations should be sent to me at 718 East University Avenue, Bloomington, Indiana 47401.

Until next time, cam-ma lou. chan-tha ja. ba sei

La Rau

INTERIM REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN

You will all have noticed that the Editor has from time to time asked for and been receiving information from various of you about your research concerning Burma. This is important quite apart from informing us all about who is doing what so that we at least all know where to inquire and look things up and send students who have parallel interests. For the plans for some kind of rotating seminar or colloquium, however slow in maturing, have still to be made and it seems to me that the only way to make such plans reasonably concrete is to compile an inventory of what people in various places having some on-going research and/or teaching concerning Burma are actively engaged in. That way, we can reasonably propose specific topics for such seminars and try to specify which topics should be taken up at which places. So I again ask you to keep the Editor informed on these matters if you have not so far done so--and, of course, it is important that specific suggestions be received from any of you who have already concrete ideas about the venue of such seminars and the subjects to be proposed for them, keeping in mind that if funding is to be managed it cannot be for 'course development' or 'materials development' but only for what one might call support of already on-going work on Burma at the institutions to be involved.

This brings me to two related matters. First, the Council that the Editor has proposed. It should be the business of this Council, once elected, to sit down, preferably with the officers of SEARC, through whom all funding requests are necessarily to be channeled, and formulate our specific requests, not only in connection with the Seminar but also having to do with other things, e.g., perhaps some of the translation or bibliography-compiling projects hitherto under discussion amongst us in these pages and at earlier meetings. That Council ought to be formed up speedily and that for two reasons: to begin with we have asked AAS to put on the program of its next annual meeting (April, San Francisco) a regularly scheduled meeting of the Burma Studies Group, and it will be vitally necessary that thoroughly concrete proposals, if not something even firmer, be brought to this meeting by the Council and myself. Otherwise we shall just go on talking, planning castles-in-air and exchanging hypothetical proposals in these pages, which is what has been going forward for too long already. The Chairman can co-ordinate suggestions, and I have been doing that recently, but he cannot unilaterally invent ideas for his constituency. A Council can possibly do the latter and bring it forward to SEARC.

Second, you all know that last April we were told that the officers of SEARC were about to put together a package in the name of our Group and based upon discussions amongst us up to that time and submit it to the Ford Foundation. My recent conversations with Pete Becker, current Chairman of SEARC, informed me that Ford was approached and said at that time that they were unwilling to entertain a Country Group proposal, the reason being that Ford were then preparing to underwrite a sort of Southeast Asia funding agency to be administered by a combination of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies (SSRC, ACLS); they wished to allocate no such funds in the interim, preferring to let such money gather interest awaiting the establishment of the SSRC-ACLS operation. That operation is about to come into existence and Pete Becker tells me that the package that was to have gone forward last Spring will go forward soon in the new framework--it was written up but has been held pending these new developments. I should like to see a copy before saying more about it and I am informed I shall soon get a copy, and it seems to me that

before it finally is put up to SSRC-ACLS-Ford, the Council and I should be able to suggest to SEARC modifications, if any, on the basis of what has been said in these pages this past year and suggestions received from you, our constituency.

Marginalia now: U Nu informs me that his autobiography, U Nu--Saturday Son, will be published by Yale University press early in 1975. Meanwhile, I have just got a copy of his new manuscript, Buddhism, Theory and Practice, which looks interesting in the extreme--no plans, I understand, yet exist for its publication and the original together with the question of its eventual disposition are in the hands of Mr. Louis Walinsky. Meanwhile, I continue, somewhat slowly owing to the pressure of other work, to translate his Ngare Hsou Gyo ne La Byo, a story based on Buddhist doctrinal points.

Sao Saimong Mangrai, the Shan historian has arrived in this country at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, after much delay. He will spend at least a year there doing research and teaching a seminar on the Shan chronicles at the Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies.

The well-known Rangoon International Cookbook, long out of print, has been reprinted in a new edition in Taiwan, and is now available here; this we are told of by the Mantons, former Burma Baptist missionaries, subsequently stationed in Taiwan and now living in Champaign, Illinois.

F. K. Lehman