

BURMA STUDIES GROUP
Association for Asian Studies
NEWSLETTER

#6

20th July, 1976

On the basis of our fairly well-attended annual meeting on 20th March of this year, during the AAS Meetings at Toronto--on which I shall report to you briefly in this Newsletter--we are now ready to hold our first Burma Studies Colloquium this coming Autumn. And I shall outline, below, the nature of these plans at the present time.

The March meeting opened at 4:30 and ran nearly two hours until 6:00 p.m. An at least partial list of those attending will be found at the end of this report. Our first and chief order of business was the planning of the colloquium. It was decided that it ought definitely to be held, and in view of an approximate consensus about people's time schedules, including that of the Chair, it was felt that the first week, say, of November would be most appropriate, preferably on a week-end. It continued to be felt appropriate to try and hold the colloquium at Denison University in Granville, Ohio, on account of the fact that they hold a famous collection of Burmese materials in their museum, possibly the best in North America; many of us would like to see it who have not yet done so; it is, for reasons expressed already in previous communications, necessary and proper to have the colloquium held at an institution where Burma Studies already exist--and the work of the curatorial staff in Burma Art History at Denison is deservedly known. So, I am asking herewith, that the authorities at Denison, with whom I first came into communication when we were only tentatively planning this colloquium, agree to a date (two days) in the earliest part of November, 1976, so that I may very rapidly announce it to our Burma Studies Group and get firm commitments from them as to attendance and direct participation. I am also herewith requesting Jane Terry Bailey, the Burma Art Historian at Denison, please to serve as co-Chairperson of the Colloquium--not only out of institutional courtesy to the proposed host university, but also because of her position amongst Burma scholars in this country.

As I announced during the March meeting, our Group has, in the hands of our immediate parent body, SEARG/AAS, about Fifteen Hundred Dollars available to it, and the largest portion of this, if not indeed all of it, is available to be expended upon the planning and execution of this Colloquium. That is not much, and as a consequence I suggest that those attending and/or participating will of necessity have to find the means to get there and be there for two days. This is no doubt a burden for some of us, though perhaps our respective institutions may be able to help out some of us. But let it be remembered that there is a definite long-term purpose to this colloquium, namely, to serve as a pilot whose hoped-for success will permit us to approach certain agencies for future funding that may permit future colloquia for the clear purpose of maintaining such momentum as Burma studies has in this continent and even advancing it; and this purpose is of personal and practical concern to all of us.

In connection with the practical concerns of this Group, Ms. Marta Nicholas of SEARG (Southeast Asia Research Group--'Council' no longer) attended our session and in addition to helpfully counselling us upon the question of the availability of the aforementioned Fifteen Hundred Dollars and the conditions on its use, pointed out to us that, almost certainly, after this year, any 'county group' within SEARG, indeed within AAS, will have to seek funds for its activities on its own; none is likely to be made further available through AAS/SEARG, because the Ford Foundation is not expected to provide us further support. So the success of our colloquium is perhaps a pressing necessity.

The actual planning of the colloquium at the March meeting then proceeded and its chief subject was the intended format of the colloquium. After extensive discussion all round, from the chair and from the floor, it was decided that it should consist of a mixture of both substantial prepared papers and shorter reports of work in progress. In either case, of course, the purpose is at least twofold: to let Burma scholars, who because of their small numbers in this continent tend to be somewhat isolated from each other, know what their colleagues in various branches of Burma studies are doing, and to provide a basis for discussion between scholars whose interests, ideas and work may have a mutual bearing. The ultimate purpose, of necessity, is to enrich the teaching and research of each of us, and to this end I wish to ask specifically that, wherever possible, those of us planning to attend bring our respective students, because it is through our teaching and through the students we teach that Burma studies will maintain intellectual momentum.

Having regard to presentations, Professor Josef Silverstein, of Rutgers University, has already mentioned that he has some definite ideas having to do with reporting recent scholarship, mainly, I believe, historical, by Burmese scholars in Burma. Professor Silverstein agreed to help the Chair prepare the detailed plans for the colloquium and, in particular, perhaps to make a presentation, himself, upon these lines. I am herewith asking him to respond further to me on this matter, since I think we are all especially eager both to come abreast, where we can, of scholarly work by our colleagues back in Burma and to maintain, where we can, contacts with scholars and scholarship in Burma. On the subject of Art, Art History and related matters, it seems to me fitting that one of the Burma staff at Denison be asked to make a presentation; I herewith ask them to consider this and get back to me very soon about it. In the matter of Burmese literature the people at the University of Michigan seem to me to be in the best position to come up with at least one longer presentation, especially in view of the presence there, these days, of both Mi Mi Khaing and Sao Saimong Mangrai. I should have liked Professor A. L. Becker of Michigan's Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies to help me materially in this regard, but he may be out of the country at this writing; I am asking our Group's secretary, Dr. LaRaw Maran, to get into immediate contact with the people at Michigan to arrange something definite in this matter. Having regard to historical research, there appears to be a good deal of interest going on round the country. Again, it seems to me that Sao Saimong, now at Michigan, may wish to report upon his work on Shan chronicles--a topic the Chair has a personal involvement with. Dr. John Ferguson is currently engaged upon a work on the history of monastic 'sects' in Burma, making extensive use of the materials collected by Dr. E. M. Mendelson, and he may well wish to present at least a brief report on aspects of this work. Michael Aung Thwin is about to present an important doctoral dissertation concerning the Pagan period and I am asking that he attend and say at least something upon this or one of his related pieces of research. A good deal of work has recently been done amongst us on Burmese music; I think particularly of the research in Burma of Dr. Robert Garfias of the University of Washington, Seattle, and am asking him, if he can possibly attend, to present a paper to us. Beyond this, I await suggestions from the membership and I REMIND YOU ALL THAT IT IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE FOR THE REQUIRED SUCCESS OF THE COLLOQUIUM THAT YOU COMMUNICATE WITH ME AT ONCE, BOTH AS TO THE SPECIFIC INTENTION TO PRESENT A LONG OR A SHORTER COMMUNICATION AND AS TO YOUR CONCRETE PLANS TO ATTEND.

The Chair, with the advice of Drs. Maran, Silverstein and, if he is currently available, Becker, will bear the burden of making any selection amongst offers of presentations in the, perhaps unlikely, event that too many offers are forthcoming for a two-day colloquium.

The Chair was encouraged in these plans both by the fact that a substantial show of hands was made at the March meeting of those pretty definitely planning to attend the Autumn colloquium and by the substantial nature of the short presentations made by several scholars in the latter half of the meeting--and the discussions amongst them that these short presentations generated. This was the more gratifying, as these were

Impromptu presentations occasioned by a request made by the Chair half-way through the meeting. Professor Silverstein spoke about such things as the usefulness of making available to Burma scholars here U Tin Maung Gyi's work on political theory. Michael Aung Thwin spoke about some of his work on certain problematical aspects of the historiography of the Pagan period. Other scholars reporting upon aspects of their respective recent work on Burma were: Professor John Cady, Paul J. Bennett, D. Jon A. Wiant, Dr. Maran LaRaw, Dr. I. Khin Khin Jensen and Dr. John Ferguson. If some, at least, of these are going to elaborate upon their preliminary remarks of March, we should have a most useful Autumn session. And it is particularly to be remembered that much of the value of such a colloquium will rest in the discussions amongst mutually interested scholars and students almost more than in the mere presentation of papers and reports.

The Sessions will be organized as follows: (1) There will be three major sessions each centering in and around a theme--culture and history, languages and literature and arts and linguistics. (2) Each session will feature a major, possibly invited paper plus, 3 or 4 shorter, related papers--vignette reports. (3) After the three major sessions on specific themes, there will be a final session where all the other shorter "vignettes" which do not fit into any of the three major themes will be presented and discussed. The breakdown in terms of papers is as follows:

1. Major papers--3 on the three themes--possibly invited papers
2. Shorter papers--3-4 per session on central themes--thus 9 to 12 total
3. Shorter papers on topics other than the central themes--5-7

Thus, 3 major papers plus at least 14 and as many as 19 shorter papers will be featured.

This will be done over two days of two sessions per day. The Chair wishes to leave the evenings open for more unstructured interaction amongst scholars attending--or perhaps one of the scheduled sessions can be held on the first evening with an afternoon free. In any event, I wish to leave open a good block of the time for us all to become acquainted with the important Burma collections at Denison and I herewith request, say, Dr. Jane Terry Bailey of Denison to try and make some provision for seeing to this and perhaps making some more definite presentation to us from that collection and/or her extensive slide collections on Burma.

Finally, I am respectfully asking the people at Denison, who know more about these things than others of us, to let me know as soon as they can about several things: how are arrangements best made for getting to and from Denison? How are arrangements best to be made for each of us to reserve reasonably priced and accessible lodging for the period of attendance? Is there a facility available where we can dine together to continue our discussions over meals? When should the Colloquium actually be scheduled and how may we best notify the membership as early as possible about final practical details, e.g., the precise place or places of the meetings over the two days?

As soon as ever I hear from my committee and the people at Denison, I shall get back in a Newsletter to the membership, but I am meanwhile, encouraged by the show of hands in March, asking all of you to let me know by mail of your plans to attend and/or make a long or short presentation. PLEASE DO THIS NOW.

As to other business from the March meeting: Dr. F. K. Lehman of the University of Illinois was re-elected to the Chair. Dr. Maran was asked to stay on for a while as Secretary and Editor of the Newsletter, but at his request for some relief from this post, which he has held since 1972, Dr. John Ferguson agreed to assist him as required with a view to eventually taking over the post. It was agreed that all requests for being included in the mailing list of the Newsletter--and they continue to come in both from this continent and from abroad--be honored, since it is a good way of keeping whatever contact we can with colleagues wherever they may be. This costs something and our funds are dreadfully short and pressed upon; but the Chair holds out the decided hope that for the time being at least the University of Illinois will continue to absorb at least a substantial part of the cost of production and, perhaps, even some of the cost of postage of these Newsletters.

Twenty-odd persons attended the March meeting, viz.,

F. K. Lehman (Chair) (Illinois)
 LaRay Maran (Secretary) (Indiana University)
 A. L. Becker (University of Michigan)
 David J. Steinberg (AID)
 I. Khin Khin Jensen (Augsburg College, Minneapolis)
 Vernon Jensen (University of Minnesota)
 Michael Aung Thwin (University of Michigan)
 Paul J. Bennett (Department of State)
 Jon A. Wiant (Department of State)
 Josef Silberstein (Rutgers University, New Jersey)
 Mya Thanda Poe (Library of Congress)
 John Davis (Madison, Wisconsin)
 John S. Thomas (Department of State)
 John P. Ferguson (Warnerville, N.Y., 12187)
 Professor and Mrs. John F. Cady (Ohio University)
 Won Z. Yoon (Dept. of History, Siena College, Loudonville, N.Y. 12211)
 Konrad and Sarah Bekker (The Asia Society, N.Y.C.)
 Herbert and Florence Spivack (211 E. 70th St., N.Y.C. 10021)

and others of which I have no record, because they failed to sign in.

LaRay Maran (Secretary)
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 (c/o F. K. Lehman, at Illinois
 until early August)

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