

Burma Studies News

#2
Summer '74

- The Headlines:
1. The Burma Studies Group has been reconstituted.
 2. F.K. 'Kris " Lehman elected Chairman of the Group.
 3. Chairman Kris in Rangoon, Burma.

This is your "now you see him, now you don't" Newsletter editor again. And I have some news for you and so, without any further preliminaries, let me lay them on you.

The Burma Studies Group, or the hardy elements from its membership met during the Boston AAS meetings last April and proceeded to reconstitute the Group. John Badgley, our chairman going into the meeting, could not make it to Beantown. Circumstances surrounding John's new activities, more about which soon, required that we must get a new chairman without delay. At a lunch meeting (Trader Vic's at the Statler-Hilton) Kris Lehman was elected the new chairman.

I have received the exciting news from Sheila Lehman that Kris made it to Rangoon from London and that he met with many people and had numerous discussions that were interesting and encouraging. As soon as he comes back we shall issue another Newsletter to inform you of the Rangoon corner. Meanwhile, the Chairman's report about the last meeting, the proposed program, etc. (Please overlook the fact that some news items are already dated.)

Report from the Chairman

Burma Studies Group

In the first place, this is to notify all of you that the Group has been formally reconstituted after about a year's hiatus. Previously, John Badgley has stated he would be unable to continue as Chairman. Some of us then tried to get Ko Thein Swe to take the chairmanship, but I met with him in Chicago in September, 1973, and he said he had to refuse. His explanation was the very forceful one, that as a holder of a current Burmese passport who is in good standing with the Burmese Government, he can do more for us in the way of liason work with Burma if he does not speak as an officer of our American-based group.

The next stage of things took place at the 1974 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in Boston. Maureen Aung Thwin, La Raw Maran and others together with myself (F.K. Lehman) decided to call an ad hoc meeting of Burma people during this convention. The immediate reason was that we

were given the information that Southeast Asia Regional Council (SEARC) has been able to let us have about fifteen hundred dollars from its now released Ford Foundation money, to be disbursed by October 1, 1974.

Meanwhile, A.L. "Pete" Becker, the newly elected chairman of SEARC, the outgoing chairman of SEARC L.A. Peter Gosling (both of Michigan) have said that SEARC cannot ask directly through themselves for funds for some of our more ambitious proposals of the last couple of years from Ford, since the sums sought for these Burma-oriented matters would be too large in proportion to the total SEARC budget proposals. They are therefore letting us have the aforementioned small amount for miscellaneous expenses, e.g. some degree of funding of the on-going Wolfenden Society publications in Burma-related linguistics and, clerical expenses. Then they are putting in a separate Burma request to cover such things as La Raw Maran's Kachin-Burmese comparative dictionary and grammar project (current) and the rotating Burma seminar we proposed earlier.

We do not know how much might come from these requests, but Ford has proved to be at least tentatively interested in some of this. However, the rotating seminar proposal has to be rewritten, or perhaps just clarified, because Ford is not interested in any sort of in-input to direct training or teaching, or to initiating training anywhere. We should rather ask for what I conceive to have been our original intent, namely, that this rotating seminar be oriented to professional development and materials development that will feed already existing teaching and research programmes on Burma. The central notion is that various colleges and universities ~~of~~ have already got Burma studies going on, and in order to keep this type of programme alive, up-to-date and in touch with one another and with current developments ~~u~~ in the field, we need the facility for interchange of ideas and materials such a rotating seminar offers.

I believe, from my conversations with Becker and Gosling, that it will make sense to put forward such a proposal to Ford, and I understand that they are doing something of the sort. It will of course, be up to us, if Ford proves interested, to formulate the proposal in clear and concrete fashion along these general lines. The seminar would have to rotate amongst campuses (and other institutions?) already having some element of Burma Studies in their teaching, which, as I understand now, are chiefly such places as Cornell, Indiana, Illinois, Hawaii, Denison, Bucknell, Michigan and at most a couple of other colleges or universities (please let me know) and perhaps the Asia Society in New York (its Burma Council). Of course there are Burma scholars at all sorts of other places, e.g., most of our constituency, and the rotating seminar would presumably be attended by these people on either an open or invitational basis, depending upon the subject or subjects to be dealt with at any given session, and, of course, upon the amount of funding made available.

Anyhow, our ad hoc meeting was held as a luncheon at the Statler-Hilton. Seventeen of our constituency were present, and although two others attending the meeting (A.L. Becker and Dorothy Guyot) could not be present at the meeting, they were immediately thereafter informed of our deliberations in full. (In a session chaired by the redoubtable editor of Burma Studies Group Newsletter, F.K. Lehman was elected as new chairman - I put this one in, the editor.) Before I agreed to serve I asked that I be allowed to make a brief statement of my ideas for our future activities. I began by informing everyone present of the aforementioned funding prospects and ideas about the rotating seminar. I seconded La Raw Maran's proposal that he and I reinstitute the informal newsletter of the group, (the evidence of which you shall see in the next issue, editor). I asked that a list be compiled that will bring up to date our membership roster, and that this list be soon expanded into a sort of register of what each of us is currently doing in the way of teaching and research concerning Burma. I HEREBY ASK EACH OF YOU TO SEND TO ME THIS INFORMATION AS WELL AS INFORMATION ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH BURMA STUDIES ARE CURRENTLY REPRESENTED AT YOUR INSTITUTIONS.

I made several other tentative suggestions in line with the general point that our activities should in general be confined to protecting, perpetuating and furthering academic study of Burma and her peoples in this country during a period when direct access to Burma by students and teachers is very severely restricted. In line with this idea, for instance, it might be very useful if we were to have compiled a roster of persons and 'communities' of Burmans and other peoples of Burma currently living here and in Canada. It is after all, important that students of Burma who have no current access to the country have at least a limited opportunity for original research and study of things Burmese and of the languages of Burma. Without such an opportunity, it seems to me, Burma Studies cannot be expected to stay alive. No real difficulties should arise from making such information available, since in any case the number of graduate specialising on Burma in all disciplines put together will certainly remain extremely small. Consequently, there is absolutely no danger that Burmese people resident in the US will ever be inundated with bothersome requests for information and data.

I further suggested that we start at once to compile two kinds of bibliographical lists. First, we really need a list of holdings in this country of Burmese manuscript materials (parabeik, palm-leaf, etc.) Libraries and universities have a certain amount, and it ought to be identified, but I suspect that there is a great deal more in private hands, both amongst our constituency and in the possession of others whom various of you know about. In the latter case, you should ask permission of the owners before making their holdings publicly known. After all, the purpose of compiling such a list is to make such materials available for possible study, and some people do not wish to be bothered with requests for use of their holdings.

We also need a list of holdings in your various college and university libraries and museums of Burma printed materials, especially Burmese

language materials. This has been dealt with previously by this group but I think, at too high a level. The Library of Congress holdings are still being processed, I understand, but it remains so monumental a job to produce a distributable list of their Burma holdings that we seem to be able to do little about it at the moment; this became clear, I should think, at the 1972 meeting. Cornell has been publishing the catalogue of its Burmese language holdings in its series of monthly acquisitions-and-holdings lists for its Southeast Asia Collection. It will be no problem to circulate these through our constituency should this be requested. I have seen no evidence of Yale's doing anything to publish a listing of its Burmese holdings, and would hope they could be induced to undertake this soon. I AM HEREBY ASKING JOHN MUSGRAVE and KO THEIN SWE to inform me on these matters, namely, (1) What is the current status of the plan to make an available list of Library of Congress Burmese holdings? (2). What do we know about available listings of Yale holdings? (3). What about the possibly sizable Burma/Burmese oldings at Michigan and Berkeley? I at least have not heard anything further on these matters since the 1972 meeting.

Then I am asking each of you to try to compile a list of what each of your campus libraries and museums have in the way of Burma collections in western languages and Burmese language printed materials (including Shan, Karen, Kachin, Chin, etc.,...) Please include dictionaries, ephemera, newspapers, magazines, whatever. This ought not to be a very onerous task, since I suspect that most of your institutions that have anything along these lines have very little.

Finally, it will be most useful if each of you that has any recent experience can let me know two other things: (1). WHAT WAYS have you been able successfully to get books from Burma? (2). What does each of you know about current or recent research done in Burma by anyone: Who has DONE IT, and WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Meanwhile, we are still actively pursuing the possibility of having one or two of our number invited as observers to the next, or a future Burma Science Congress (the next, I think is next December). I spoke on the telephone, on 16th May, with Tom Spooner, who replaced Ann Swift as Chief, Southeast Asia Programs, Cultural Affairs-East Asia, Department of State. He is now going to take up this matter again through our Embassy in Rangoon. If anyone were to be invited that person would have to meet certain conditions, and in particular would have (a) to know Burmese, the Science Congress is conducted in Burmese) and (b) to be a scholar in a subject not felt to be sensitive politically, as most of the social sciences are.

I told Mr. Spooner, and I now tell all of you, that I intend to visit Rangoon for a few days in early June, amongst other things to look into this matter and look into whatever can possibly be done to open or maintain any scholarly interaction and communication between our country and Burma. Mr. Spooner is asking our Rangoon Embassy's Cultural Affairs Officer, Mr. Frank Coward, to try to

arrange appointments for me with relevant Burmese officials. When I return to this country in July I shall inform you all of any outcome of this inquiry.

Our out-going chairman, John Badgley has kindly sent me his file of papers on our activities during his period in office, and I am going through his file in order to familiarize myself with these affairs to see what previous activities that I have not been clear about need to be revived or pursued further. This will take a bit of time; it should be done by the end of this summer.

To conclude, I am appending to this letter the roster of our membership as brought up to date by me during the past weeks. Those who attended the Boston meeting are marked with an asterisk. If you know of others who should be on our list, please let me know.

----- end -----

It appears as though the next newsletter will come quite soon after your receiving this one. Due to inevitable delays, this issue has not really left my desk as soon as I had expected. Sometimes I have this notion that I don't much care for summers as things, which normally move quite slowly, don't move at all. And the typing gets especially bad.

Whatever the consequences, here it is.

Cordially,

La Raw Maran

La Raw Maran
718 E. University St.
Bloomington, In 47401