

the

# burma studies group news

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September 10, 1974

This is the much promised second issue of the News.

I am naturally very sorry that I could not bring it out during August, or even the tail end of July. But my work in the Jinghpaw Dictionary Project demanded 12 to 14 hours each day, and since the third week of August, I've been back teaching full-time. I am constantly trying to find free time when I also feel sufficiently zestful to get up and puncture some ditto masters.

It's about nine in the evening and I am still in my University office, no dinner yet even. Which reminds me that I may well continue typing this News at my home office later in the evening. I might as well introduce you to both of my type-writers then; this one is my University office mate, a Royal-Secretarial, manual; that one is an IBM selectric with (Ahs) prestige elite type-face.

I shall see you the other side of the Chairman's Report. Cato to Rangoon,  
- La Raw.

## Report of the Chairman

I was in Rangoon from the 12th to the 17th of June, it being, as you know, now the simplest thing to get a seven-day tourist visa for Burma. Among my purposes was the sounding out of local people on the possibilities for any kind of research in Burma, the possibilities of establishing and maintaining contacts with the scholarly and scientific community in Burma, and possible ways to expedite our acquisition of books from Burma.

My first conversation was with Mr. Frank Coward, the new Cultural Affairs Officer at our Rangoon Embassy. His remarks were as follows.

It is distinctly possible to put forward proposals for research through his office, that is, in the first instance through the Cultural Affairs desk, Southeast Asia (Tom Spenser) at the Department of State. He submits these as proposals to the Ministry of Culture of the Union of Burma. There are currently three persons in Burma on this basis, working on musicology, art and closely related matters on roughly nine-month's schedule. There are however, several problems that make it somewhat unlikely that any but a very few proposals get approval:

(1). It is a government-to-government request- although funding can come from anywhere more-or-less, with the exception of certain foundations. Therefore, for every person allowed in from our country the Burma Govt. is under pressure to allow one in from each of certain others, e.g. the Soviet Union; and this proliferation of demands the Burma Govt. is unwilling to get out of hand.

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My own wild guess, based on private conversations with Burmans, well-placed but not in government, is that, should the Burma government at any time resume accepting direct applications for visas, this problem would not arise, and it is considered important that from time to time such private applications be put forward to test the atmosphere in this way. But such applications must, though still altogether unlikely to succeed, be sincere - not just trial balloons - and clean, which brings us to

(2). It is still the case that certain 'sensitive' topics will be disallowed for research, e.g. politics and much else in social science, especially with even implied bearing upon ideology and policy, foreign or domestic. There is no official list of these topics or disciplines, so I must be deliberately vague and allusive here. Nor is it easy to say what kind of proposal might be felt to be 'sensitive.' For example, I have informally raised the possibility of doing a year's work in Mandalay on the grammar and lexicon of the old Court language. None is able, at this juncture, to guess how it may be received, since on the one hand, descriptive linguistics seems to have been a relatively safe subject in recent years - a few linguists from abroad have worked in Burma and continue to do so (e.g. the West German team Drs. Jangen, working on the Burmese-German Dictionary, a govt.-to-govt. arrangement of course.) On the other hand, the thing might possibly be thought to bear upon the question of monarchy and the aristocratic tradition. I can only know by trying!;

Moreover, officially at least, foreigners are restricted to Rangoon, Mandalay and Pagan, in large measure owing to wide-spread insecurity, and any proposal for work elsewhere, especially for work in frontier states or rural areas, and for work that involves moving about freely and with itinerary not clearly specified in advance is certain to be turned down. Of course, it is in fact possible to go briefly to a few places other than the three mentioned, and John Musgrave informs us he was in Taunggyi briefly and that Pete Becker might have intended to do the same.

(3). Our Cultural Affairs officer has two choices: he can request sponsorship of a proposal from the Burma government (Cultural Ministry) or merely permission. The latter leads to extreme frustration, at least should the researcher have little knowledge of Burma and few contacts, or should he require assistance from government personnel. One or more recent researchers on the arts, who needed to have access to government collections of one sort or another have encountered this problem in extreme form upon being allowed in. Moreover, once again, an essential point for a proposal seems to be a rather detailed and clearly specified itinerary, research program, purpose, and time schedule! However, there are, for other sorts of researchers, possible advantages in mere permission as against official sponsorship. This at least is my judgement based upon private conversations with Burman friends, and would if at all, apply to persons with good prior contacts in Burma and whose research does not require assistance from officials.

(4). Finally, there is a most peculiar problem. Many possible kinds of proposals, e.g., combining research with any kind of association with one of the Burmese Universities, would most appropriately be put up to the Education Ministry, and only this Ministry could have any way of judging and passing on

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them. However, proposals from our Cultural Affairs section must unavoidably go to the Ministry of Culture; and this can get them turned down - or just not responded to - not on account of their merits but because of their being inappropriate for consideration by that particular Ministry. Indeed, for whatever actual reason, initial request having proceeded to the Cultural Affairs section, I was able to meet with the new Education Minister, Dr. Khin Maung Win (Philosophy). I recommend that direct approaches to this Ministry continue to be made by prospective researchers on this account.

Now as to books, there is a list of publications put out by the Burma Govt., and it appears that we can get a copy through Mr. Coward, our CAC, Rangoon. I have asked for it, and shall repeat the request.

It is still extraordinarily difficult, however, to get books from Burma even when citations are fully given. Contacts with the Import-Export Corp. are tedious and problematical affairs and full of red-tape. But now there is a slight relaxation. Your college or university library can now initiate an exchange arrangement with the University Central Library in Rangoon. U Thaw Kaung, Director. The best person to get in touch with on this is his assistant, Daw Khin Khin Ohn. The arrangement works this way: You request certain volumes; they in turn request a list of foreign, e.g. American, books of equivalent value. Your library sends the latter and the University Central Library arranges to get the Burmese books, obtain the ministerial clearance for the transaction and sends them on to your library - quite expeditiously, I am assured. You can by paying additionally, have books sent by air, but ask Daw Khin Khin Ohn for details. Again, the Central Press List, published at Rangoon every three months is available for this, but the Library will get, where available, anything you request.

By the way, there is in process an 8-volume Pali-Burmese dictionary being put out by the Department of Religious Affairs, at K. 25 the volume - ka. to ta. are so far available. I have seen it, and it looks very good.

It is also once again possible to subscribe to the Journal of Burma Research Society, through its Secretary at the University Central Library, on an annual basis - life memberships cannot be purchased by foreigners. The cost is K. 10. and no 1974 number of the Journal has yet come out. Individual back numbers, where available, are K. 6.

I have asked U Aung Thaw, the Director of the Archaeology Department to send us from time to time, copies of reports of his department, and he seems well-disposed to the request. I hope to hear more on this.

Official rumour has it that 'soon' a tourist visa will be available allowing 30 days instead of the present 7.

Finally, as for attendance at the Annual Burma Science Congress, there seems to be no problem at all, according to my friends at the University and at the Central Research Institute.

It lasts about a week - in December, but the exact dates are not yet settled, and I shall let you know when I know. A tourist visa for 7 days can be got. If you arrange to be in Rangoon on the right days, so long as you are not asking to be there officially, i.e. as an officially invited observer, or to give a paper, it seems that you can simply attend. The whole thing is conducted, of course, mainly in Burmese. Burmese scholars and scientists are currently quite free and eager to talk and exchange ideas with their foreign colleagues, and postal correspondence is now perfectly easy and untrammelled.

We have received replies to my previous newsletter from John Musgrave (mainly about lack of progress to date on bibliography processing of the Yale and Cornell cards, to be classified by subject; also from John Cady, who gave us a copy of his University's (Ohio U) list of English Language holdings on Burma, as well as a letter from Joyce Wright, Head of the Asia Collection at the Library of the University of Hawaii. She raises the problem of costs in time and effort involved in a formal copying of a library's Burma holdings toward a Union list we might organize. However, what I proposed in the last letter was something less formal and less formidable. We need informal lists like that from Ohio University, of often very modest size, so students round the country can know where to get the various items - this is in no way a union list. When we get more responses we shall put some of this in a future newsletter.

F.K. Lehman  
13 August, 1974

Hi, its me again. I would like to thank several people who had the kindness, patience and resourcefulness to write letters to me after last Newsletter. I really appreciated receiving them as they seemed to make an otherwise icky summer of intensive labour worthwhile. Sarah Bekker wrote to say that (1). Daw Mya Sein's current address is not as we gave but at the following - Daw Mya Sein, c/o Mr. J.D. Poe, 7016 Richard Dr., Bethesda, Md., 20034; Tel. (202) 229-9759. She further suggested adding the name of Mr. Ray J. Ferguson, YMCA, 50 E. Putnam Ave., Greenwich, Conn. 06830; Tel. 869-1620, to our list. Mr. Ferguson was with the YMCA in Rangoon for more than 10 years. I think I remember him along with the Eastmans, the Hla Bu's and the Hla Thwin's, a formidable list of great friends now dwindled.

News from John Musgrave indicates that there is now a Burmese at Yale Divinity School and he thought the name was U Kyaw Than. It rings a little bell somewhere, perhaps this is the U Kyaw Than who for years was with the World Council of Churches as the South and Southeast Asia Representative. John also adds that Daw Tin Tin has resumed cataloguing the backlog of Burma holdings at Yale. John was in Burma last April spending a precisely timed 3 1/2 days at Taungyi, and the other 3 1/2 at other places, it seems. Lucky man. (Dear John, don't let these linguists fool you, anyone who can't make the tse-lung and the sa-ling spoken contrast will starve north of Katha.) Margaret Aung Thwin wrote to inquire when there will be some Burmese goody recipes; I say, next time, may be. She said her Seminole friends are doing fine. The point tho' is how's their cooking? Any ngapi for instance?

We also heard from Michael Mendelson who requests that the editor should consider inserting the following passage, a request gladly obliged.

" IN BURMA STUDIES NEWS, Summer 1974, both E. Michael Mendelson and Nathaniel Tarn are listed as being available at the Dept. of Comparative Literature, Livingston College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

This is needlessly confusing. Nathaniel Tarn is indeed Professor of Comparative Literature at that institution but has nothing to do with Burmese Studies and his name should be taken off the address list. Anyone interested in contacting E. Michael Mendelson should please do so at 96 New Street, New Hope, Pa., 18938.

For all practical purposes, E.M.M. is no longer alive and well, although he did address the South East Asia group at Cornell University on one occasion last year. The only other bit of news worth recording is that Mr. John P. Ferguson of Cornell has discovered an abandoned manuscript entitled Sangha and State in Burma which purports to be by E.M.M. and has heroically edited it into a publishable venture. Cornell University Press will perpetrate this monster at some time in the foreseeable future.

Ghostly memories being strong ones, affectionate salutations are telepathically forwarded to all friends on the list. May She open up again soon and may you all flourish."

Thank you, E.M.M., we shall look forward to the day when your "monster" peers over the ledge of the light of print.

Prof. John Cady wrote to say that, as always, he's busy writing. In fact, there are three items he is preparing; (1). A long survey of the history of SEA since 1945, a sequel to his classic, SEA: its Historical Development. This new book is now in page proof and will come out late in 1974, both in paper back and hard bound. (2). A volume to appear early in 1975 in the Harvard Press Series to be called The United States and Burma; the work has been written and partly edited already. (3). a contribution dealing with the Southeast Asia portion of the college text Asian History by the Forum Press. It will appear this year, about late fall.

So it seems that Prof. Cady has really been doing some work. His association with Burma studies goes back to 1935 and in these years he has accumulated, in the form of a library collection and his personal papers, a truly outstanding source. As this collection is being given to Ohio University Library, it seems that for Burma Studies, and SEAN history, Ohio U Library will continue to be a significant source. To Prof. Cady, our greetings, well-wishes and "Bravos" uttered in gusto.

Additionally, we heard from Joyce Wright of U of Hawaii, Ann Swift from the Dept. of State, and from Mr. David Steinberg of AID and Mr. Louis Jacob of the Library of Congress for inclusion of their names in the mailing list. I suggest we retire Nate Tarn, update Daw Mya Sein's address, make Daw Khin Khin Jensen's school Augsburg College, and add these: David I. Steinberg, Director, Office of Technical Support, Bureau for Asia, AID, Dept. of State, Washington, D.C. 20523, and Louis A. Jacob, Head, Southern Asia Section, Reference Dept., Orientalia Division, The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540.

Until next time, this ends the News and the page. *Where should I affix my customary*