

Bulletin of the Burma Studies Group
Association for Asian Studies
Southeast Asian Council

June, 1979

Annual Meeting

#17

The Burma Studies Group held its annual meeting on Saturday, March 31, at the Los Angeles Hilton. The following were in attendance: Kris Lehman, John and Catherine Ferguson, John and Vivian Cady, Margaret Aung Thwin, John and Betty Musgrave, Edith Piness, Albert Moscotti, Maureen Aung Thwin, Michael Aung Thwin, David Steinberg, Vernon Jensen, William Gage, Konrad and Sarah Bekker, Marguerite Crawford, James and Mya Thanda Poe, William Solheim, and Joseph Silverstein.

Election results have a certain familiar strain to them: Kris Lehman as our fearless chairman and John Ferguson as secretary and Bulletin editor. No rival contenders for the honors were proposed nor on hand to be pressed into service.

General agreement was reached on holding our next colloquium at Denison University in the fall of 1980. The president and secretary were strongly impressed with the fact that the membership demanded better planning and notification for the next colloquium. "Improve or expect the velvet sack treatment," was the command we heard from our constituents.

In response to a request from Bardwell Smith, of the Sri Lanka Studies Group, the group discussed the possibilities of joint meetings. It was decided (1) that efforts should be made to organize joint Sri Lanka-Burmese panels at the AAS meetings; (2) that at our colloquium gatherings, specific scholars of Sri Lanka should be invited when their interests touched upon ours; and (3) that our colloquium meetings should remain focused basically upon Burma.

Various research projects were discussed. Michael Aung Thwin reminded all of the need to identify important, untranslated Burmese reference sources that might be selected for translation. He was also encouraged by us all to seek funding for obtaining oral histories from some of the Burmese now living in the U.S. John Ferguson urged those who had manuscripts prepared to submit them as soon as possible in case Brill decides to issue two volumes in response to the enthusiastic outpouring of papers for the first volume.

The Bulletin editor urged all to send post cards to him telling of their Burma news -- trips, articles and books, courses, new media on Burma, etc.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the group was treated to a showing of a color video tape of the movie, "To Be Born a Burman," a 16 mm. movie made recently by an Australian team. The response to the film was very enthusiastic. Maureen Aung Thwin, through whose kindness we were able to see the movie, was asked to convey to the Australian producers our hope that the film would soon be commercially available here.

The Studies Group had its traditional dinner at the Hilton this year, but many also savored delicacies together the next evening as well at a local Thai restaurant. As usual, most "business" takes place at these gatherings.

As part of the general meetings, the following presented papers that dealt directly or partially with Burma: FORREST MC GILL on "Pala Versus Burmese

Art: A Case Study"; MICHAEL AUNG THWIN on "Prophecies, Omens, and Dialogue: Tools of the Trade in Burmese Historiography"; OLIVER POLLAK on "Burma under the Last Two Kings: A Study in Marginal Modernization and Dependency"; EDITH PINESS on "British Administrator in Burma: The Career of Sir Herbert Thirkell White"; ALBERT MOSCOTTI chaired the panel, "New Directions in Historical Research on Burma." JOHN CADY was a discussant for the same panel. At the Asian Folklore Studies Group meeting SARAH BEKKER delivered a paper "The Naga: Many Faces, Many Forms" and JOHN FERGUSON gave a paper on "The Great Goddess Today in Burma and Thailand: An Exploration of Her Symbolic Relevance to Monastic and Female Roles."

Our next meeting will be in conjunction with the AAS meetings at Washington, D.C.

Other News:

RICHARD COOLER successfully defended his doctoral thesis at Cornell this spring. In a little volume, ed. by G. B. Milner, Natural Symbols in South East Asia (SOAS), 1978, are two articles on Burma: H. L. SHORTO on "The Planets, the Days of the Week and the points of the Compass: Orientation symbolism in 'Burma'," and HLA PE on "Burmese Attitudes To Plants and Animals." U NYUNT HAN discussed current archeological work in Burma and future research possibilities before the Burma Council of the Asia Society on June 1st. EDMUND LEACH will be spending the fall term this year at Cornell University. MARY KYAW THET is currently in the States, after twenty years of teaching history at the University of Rangoon. She is interested in possibly working on some translation projects and can be contacted c/o Dr. Lin Aung Thet, 7350 S.W. 108th Terrace, Miami, Fla. 33156. ROBERT GARFIAS presented a lecture "Burmese Music and Dance: An Indian and Southeast Asian Perspective" to the Asia Society on March 2, 1979. ROBERT TAYLOR wrote from the Dept. of Government, University of Sydney, N.S.W. 2006. He has written a lively review of U Nu - Saturday's Son called "A Modern Bodhisattva: How U Nu Sees His Life" in Politics, the journal of the Australian Political Studies Association. Bob reports that published Burmese materials are coming in an exchange program from the Universities' Central Library, Rangoon, to the Australian National Library, the Australian National University Library, and the Fischer Library at the University of Sydney. Your editor believes that similar exchanges take place in the U.S., for example at the Library of Congress and at Cornell University. U MYO LWIN of Cornell told me that the Burmese allocation of limited funds for the project makes it difficult for many books a year to be exchanged.

Special Note

It would save your editor unnecessary mail solicitation expense if each of you would send me news items regularly. It only takes a few minutes to do so. We all would enjoy learning about your activities! Please mail to

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