

BAGMAL NEWSLETTER

March 1987

BAGMAL CALENDAR

April 3, Friday 7:30-9:30 p.m. Forum on U.S. Immigration Law and Gay/Lesbian Peoples, sponsored by Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders and BAGMAL. Speakers will provide information on Applying for a Green Card, New regulations under the Immigration Reform Act.

April 5, Sunday. 2 p.m. Business meeting and Discussion at Siong-huat's 91 Westland Ave. #420 Boston (536-9309). Discussion topic: Gay Pride - what does it mean to gay and lesbian Asians? Also planning for Gay Pride Week, June 1987. Directions: one block from Symphony Hall, corner of Westland and Hemenway. Bring dime to call from across the street to be let in.

April 12, Sunday. 1 p.m. Potluck brunch at Timmy Pham's 54 Gorham St. #1 Somerville MA 02144 (628-9205). Theme: Thai New Year. All members and friends welcome. Directions: take Red Line to Davis Square, left at Holland Street exit, 5 blocks then left on Gorham Street to 54.

May 9, Saturday, 6 p.m. Potluck and slideshow at 80, the Fenway, #34 Boston. Andrew will present slides of his 2 years in the People's Republic of China. All members and friends welcome.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DUES: Please pay up. \$5 will keep this newsletter and other mailings coming for a year. The Steering Committee has decided that May will be the deadline for payment, after which further mailings to non-paid up persons will be terminated. Send checks to our mailing address or bring money to our next function.

ADS: The BAGMAL newsletter is accepting classified ads. Paid-up members will be allowed one free ad but must pay \$2.00 to cover postage charge for forwarding ad replies. Others pay \$2.00 per ad + \$2.00 postage charge. All ads must be less than 40 words. Ads will be numbered. No addresses will be printed. Replies to ads will be collected by the newsletter staff and forwarded to advertisers.

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BAGMAL is Boston Asian Gay Men and Lesbians.

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MINUTES OF BAGMAL MEETING March 15 1987

Chaired by Vickie Lew, held at Jing Achacoso's, recorded by Andrew Li

1. POTLUCK LUNCH

Good food and socializing

2. INTRODUCTIONS

Each person present introduced himself or herself to the others: Ray Wong, Sohkom Dinh, Jack Lo, Lester Wong, Jing Achacoso, Andrew Li, Siong-huat Chua, Vickie Lew, Takeo Sakashita, Stanley Li, Wen-chi Chou, Jeffrey Nguyen, Timmy Pham, Danny Leong, Ken Ishiwata.

3. AGENDA

Vickie read the meeting's agenda: mainly items having to do with the structure of the group. Somebody made the suggestion that one item at every meeting - after perhaps - could be the sharing of experiences of interest, good or bad, to other members. Racist incidents are an example.

4. STEERING COMMITTEE

We discussed the nature of the steering committee and reached the following conclusions. It will have meetings separate from business/discussion meetings (not to mention social events) so as not to test the patience of those members who are unmoved by the workings of committees. It now consists of the co-chairs, Vickie and Jack, and, so far, two volunteers, Jing and Andrew. We encourage all those interested to join the Steering Committee. Meetings will be announced in advance and are most definitely open to anyone interested or even just curious. (You don't have to join the committee to come).

We discussed and rejected endorsements as a function of the Steering Committee. We often receive requests for endorsements from other groups, politi-

cal candidates, and the like. We decided to require at least one month to consider a request so that there will be time to discuss it at a general meeting. Siong-huat told us, by way of background information, that our mail is of four types: announcements, newsletters, recruitment (for committees, etc. but sometimes for jobs) and letters from individuals. The latest mail is available for inspection at every meeting.

5. PURPOSE OF BAGMAL

We agreed that the group's most important function is to provide a way for us as gay and lesbian Asians to get to know one another. For this reason we emphasize social events, and especially their reliability, hence our eagerness to get people committed far in advance to organize events. Besides monthly social events we will be having monthly meetings for discussion of an announced topic.

6. FUND RAISING

Jack talked to us about this important theme. We decided to keep the \$5/year fee as a separate item for mailing costs. This is payable by the May meeting (3 May). The cost of social events will be charged directly to participants (cost of a meal or a ticket, for example). In addition, there will be a "tax" of \$1 per person which will go into a fund for special events.

As an aside, the mailing list is not yet available, but soon will be (to members only). If you don't want your address or phone number on it, just let Siong-huat (536-9309) know.

7. NEWLETTER

The newsletter will be sent to all those who pay the \$5/year mailing fee. Minutes will be included to paid-up members (i.e. Asian members). Siong-huat, who is in charge of the newsletter, suggested selling ads - for roommates, etc. - as another way of raising money. He appealed for more participation: Ray and Andrew volunteered. Interviews with members will be a feature of our publication.

8. OUTREACH

Vickie urged anybody who knows an Asian lesbian who might be even remotely interested in the group to call her (787-4213). We want to reach potential members through colleges, bars, the media.

9. GAY PRIDE WEEK

In June, Siong-huat is trying to arrange showings of the Taiwanese film "Niezi" (the Outcast Son), which is based on the Chinese-language novel of the same name about gay hustlers in Taipei of the fifties and sixties. The author, Pai Hsien Yung agreed to make an appearance if we can arrange screenings.

10. SOCIAL EVENTS

Sunday 12 April at 1 p.m. Potluck at Timmy's (54 Gorham St. #1 Somerville 02144 (628-9205) Sokham volunteered to organize September's social event but still needs at least one more person to help. If September is not convenient, October, November and December are still open. Call Lester (566-6707).

EXCERPTS OF AN INTERVIEW WITH PAI HSIEN YUNG
by Siong-huat Chua

Many of our Chinese readers will already be familiar with Pai Hsien Yung, the very prolific and widely read novelist and short story writer from Taiwan. Professor Pai Hsien Yung was a guest of the MIT Chinese Cultural Festival Feb 20-21 where he introduced "Jade Love", a movie of his novel of the same name, and a video of his play, "Wandering in the Garden, Waking From a Dream". The latter is a multi-media drama combining operatic styles and classical mythology in the story of the reunion of three former opera actresses recalling their checkered pasts. Not noted at the festival was the fact that among his many accomplishments, Professor Pai has also written many short stories as well as the first modern Chinese novel dealing explicitly with Chinese homosexuals. Entitled *Nie Zi*, and set around the gay cruising park, *Xin Gong Yuan* (New Park) in Taipei, the novel has been recently made into a movie receiving popular and critical acclaim in Professor Pai's native Taiwan. Professor Pai was kind enough to grant BAGMAL an interview on short notice after the showing of "Waking...". The following are highlights. The full interview will be appearing in a forthcoming issue of Gay Community News.

You are the first Chinese writer to write on gay themes and in Chinese. Of course you were already a very established and well-known writer before you wrote your novel, *Nie Zi*. How was that book received by your reading public.

I think generally speaking it has been received quite well, to my surprise. In the straight community, there has been no antagonism to this book. Recently it was made into a movie. Of course this is the first modern Chinese novel to deal with the homosexual scene. So of course it aroused a lot of curiosity among my readers. However they did not read it as a so-called "gay novel", rather as a novel that deals with people - the people just happen to be homosexuals.

You said you were surprised. Did you expect controversy or antagonism?

I think I did. After all it was the first novel that deals openly with this theme. And at first I didn't know what to expect from the readers. I speak of the audience in Taiwan and Hong Kong which is larger than here. Up to this day I have not read any really antagonistic reviews. Of course in some of the reviews they would discuss the literary values, techniques. But as far as the homosexual theme it has been pretty well accepted.

Were there any critics who ignored that the book was about homosexuals?

They didn't ignore it. They didn't just choose

it as an issue, shall I say.

The novel deals mainly with family relationships of these young homosexuals. Of course in Chinese society, family relationships are the most important and certainly these homosexual boys are no exception. My theme is the relationship between parents and children in this context.

I get the impression that attitudes towards homosexuality are more liberal in Taiwan than in Hong Kong.

You are right. In Hong Kong there is a law against homosexuality. In Taiwan there is no such law there. No laws against gays.

Apart from the law in Hong Kong, some Chinese

community leaders there say that this is a British problem, that there is no such thing among the Chinese. I'm wondering whether in Taiwan there was a similar reaction - that you were writing about something that does not exist in Taiwan.

No. In Taiwan people acknowledge the fact that it is universal. And also it's been part of our history, of China. In China we have a long history of that. I think, the people of Taiwan recognise it is part of the tradition. From the ancient times, poets and writers wrote about it. Actors have always been associated with homosexuality. And during the last dynasty, the Manchu Dynasty, homosexual practice was open. It was socially accepted. They might not think highly of it but it was socially acceptable in the Ching Dynasty.

They don't deny it but they think it is "bu zheng chang" (not normal).

Yes, yes of course there are these reactions sometimes. However the summer before last, 1985, there were several panel discussions., open ones, on homosexuality. The panelists were doctors, psychologists, educators, writers, they all got together and

writers, they all got together and they had open panels on this subject. The press

What prompted the discussion?

AIDS. AIDS aroused people's concerns. Like here too there is the stigma of the disease- they blame the problem on gays. As we know this certainly is not true, this did not originate with homosexuality, although homosexuals are among the high risk groups.

What year was Nie Zi written and published?

It was published in 1983.

Did you write it much earlier?

I spent a number of years, actually, working on it. It was finally published in '83.

It was portraying which period?

The late 60's and early 70's.

I was in Taiwan about two years ago and I met some young Chinese gay men there. Of course they had read your book and were obviously very impressed by it. They did say that it was slightly pessimistic. Do you think that gay life in Taiwan has changed substantially since the

time depicted in your novel so that these young gay men see things differently now.

I don't think it was a pessimistic book. Yes I did write a tragic or sad book because I wrote about the tragic situations, of the broken families of these people. But I think in the book the message at the very end is rather positive. I think my thesis, my message is just that homosexuals are human beings after all so the most important thing is still love. Those who find love.. ..I think it is still the redeeming force. Compassion instead of pity, I think a lot of this comes through.

In the novel you describe this social scene around Xin Gong Yuan (New Park in Taipei) which you describe as "our kingdom", (Zai Wo Men de Huang Guo Li) and so on. How long has this scene been around or how long have you been familiar with it?

God knows how many years. it's been around... nobody knows. I think in the book I say from time immemorial. (laughs) I think it has been there for a long, long time.

And the police generally leaves the place alone?

Most of the time. Sometimes they harass the people but most of the time they leave it alone.

I think that is a major difference between Taiwan and Hong Kong. Perhaps in Hong Kong it has to do with the British influence.

I think so. Chinese people take a rather, generally speaking... - not liberal, they are prudish - but they are resigned to it. A more mellow attitude, they are not uptight, generally speaking, unlike the West.

Chinese think you can do what you want but you have to have a family.

They don't talk about it. If they do know about it they just well....(shrugs).

Nie Zi was a book that you took a long time writing and you thought that it might be controversial. But was it something that you felt you had to write, that you felt strongly about, or that you felt was in you and had to come out?

Oh yes I always wanted to write a book on homosexual people, on Chinese homosexuality.

Before that, as someone in the audience here pointed out, most of your char-

acters were women. And you mentioned that you felt a special affinity with women. Was this because this was before you could write a book about homosexuals.

No, no. Actually because I have created some rather strong women characters, that's why people have the impression that I write about women all the time. Which is not true. I have written about generals, soldiers, military men, revolutionaries, all kinds of people. But as you saw on the video today, this is a bunch of interesting women. My women characters must have left a strong impression on my readers.

Do you think the gay liberation movement in the West has had an influence in opening up social attitudes towards homosexuality in Taiwan? I think gay liberation has had that effect in Hong Kong.

Well I'm not sure how much impact it has made in Taiwan. I don't think the liberalization has anything to do with the gay movement here in the West. I think it has to do with the general liberalising tendency of Taiwanese society as a whole. People there tend towards more liberal views in cultural affairs as in

eral views in cultural affairs as in political affairs. And that has to do with the opening

Did the liberalising tendency have to do with your decision to publish a book on homosexuality?

I don't think so. Because I wrote some homosexual stories when I was in college. That was in 1960. At that time gay liberation had not started yet and I knew very little about the American gay scene. I was in Taiwan and I knew very little about the gay scene over there either. So I guess out of my.... I always wanted to write about homosexuality.

As to the opening up of Taiwanese society, the very fact that the movie of Nie Zi could be made in Taiwan at all, that is a sure sign of liberalization. Because they have much stricter censorship for movies which of course have a much greater impact on people.

Let's just talk a little about your life now in L.A. (Professor Pai teaches at U. C., Santa Barbara) Other than your teaching activities are you connected with any gay groups in your area?

I'm not very active. I spend most of my time doing writing and research and so I am not

I am not very politically active. And also where I live, Santa Barbara is a small town. I am concerned about gay activities and gay activism. I have been reading things about that because I feel it is important and I am concerned.

There are large gay Asian groups in North America, in LA and San Francisco and a very active one in Toronto.

Yes the communities in LA and San Francisco are very large. I think it is very important to establish your identity. - Gay and Asian together.

That is why it is so exciting to encounter your creative output.

I do think that the Asians or for my part the Chinese society ... the reaction to their gay sons and gay daughters is quite different. It's a different attitude. And also the relationships are quite different. So I guess we do need some kind of expression.

What are your current projects?

I have been working on a new novel.

Any gay themes?

Not this one. Maybe in the future I will write some more in short stories about homosexual people.

About the movie, is there a distributor here in the US.?

It's been shown in New York and Los Angeles and maybe San Francisco. Perhaps one day it will get to Boston.

I would like to get it here. Most of what is called gay culture here is by white Americans. You are among the first to have written and expressed something for Asian and Chinese gay people. It is important that your work find a larger audience.

It would be wonderful if you could get the film here.

Perhaps we can get you to introduce it.

Sure, sure I would be glad to come.

BRINGING NIEZI TO BOSTON

BAGMAL is currently working on bringing the movie Niezi and Professor Pai Hsien Yung to Boston for a premiere screening some time during Gay Pride Week celebrations in June this year. If you would like to help in this effort or have ideas about screening venues, co-sponsors, publicity, etc. please contact members of the Steering Committee or write to our Mailing Address.