Reflections of the Last Editor of the *Annals* of the Southeast Conference

KENNETH W. BERGER  
*Duke University*

I succeeded Hal French to become the third editor of the *Annals*, coming to the position by a convoluted path. It began with a discussion with Frank Joseph Shulman, the eminent bibliographer, at the 1984 meeting of the SEC/AAS. Frank had long advised me in my career in Asian studies, perhaps because we shared some similarities in our backgrounds: both lacking Ph.D.s in organizations (our chosen AAS regional conferences) top heavy with them and being professional librarians largely in the company of teaching faculty.

In this instance he suggested that I establish an archive for the SEC based at my employing institution, Duke University. Intrigued by the idea, I won the support of the executive committee of the SEC and then of the Manuscripts Department of Perkins Library at Duke, where I worked half-time as a cataloger and half-time in the Reference Department.

So I became the first and, as it turned out, the only archivist of the SEC, which remains the only regional conference with an archive. The SEC was unsure where I should reside in the structure of the organization. In the end, I was placed under the *Annals* and its editor Hal French.

Then came the second piece of the puzzle. As Hal mentioned in his reflective piece in last year’s *SERAS*, I edited a couple of volumes dealing with archival and manuscript resources in North Carolina and Georgia based on three panels I had chaired at annual meetings. In the process I was named occasional papers editor, and became a designated member of the *Annals* editorial board. After a few years experience in those roles, Hal asked me to succeed him as editor. I probably sealed the deal with a demonstration of self-sacrifice on behalf of our publishing empire. At the end of the 1986 meeting in Raleigh, NC, I discovered that the McKimmon Center staff had discarded dozens of copies of our publications. I had to climb into a dumpster, and I was able to get many copies out in good shape — just minutes before the arrival of a rainstorm!
During my five-year term from 1989 to 1994, I maintained the Annals as it had been introduced by my predecessors: articles chosen among those present at the preceding meeting; abstracts of papers presented; a list of officers and other attendees; proceedings of the annual business meeting; and the meeting program as it actually occurred (as best we could determine). This was a time of technological change, and we gradually implemented a policy that manuscripts should be submitted on floppy disks (!), but as I had no administrative or secretarial support, I had to convert many papers using a single-sheet feed scanner and an optical character recognition (OCR) program.

SERAS's administrative structure evolved during my years as editor. It included, at different times, a manuscript editor and an abstracts editor; consistency was maintained, however, by designated consulting editors. Among the most important editorial contributors were Molly Spitzer Frost, John Seabury Thomson, Dottie Borei, Richard Rice, Lawrence Kessler, and Daniel Métraux (the last two later became editors of the journal). There were many scholars, including those active in our organization and those not so much, who shared their expertise by reviewing submitted manuscripts. Finally, there were the invaluable contributions of our business manager, my friend and colleague at Duke, Avinash Maheshwary. Not only did he handle finances and subscriptions, but also his extensive years of experience and contacts in publishing meant that the final production was always in competent hands.

My successor, Larry Kessler, instituted several major changes to the journal, including the name change to the Southeast Review of Asian Studies. He also shifted from the 8½ by 11-inch format to a more standard 6 by 9-inch. Larry will discuss his editorship in a later article, I am sure, but I mention these developments to mark the beginning of the evolution from a publication primarily of interest to members of the organization to a truly national scholarly journal. The sixth and seventh editors, Daniel Métraux and Steve Gump, included many features not related to the previous annual meeting of the conference. While I personally mourn the loss of an identity that reflected the personal ties to a small and very collegial regional conference, I am in awe of their successful creation of a respected journal held by more than 120 libraries.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunities afforded this casual Asianist. Though I lacked something of the pedigree of most of the conference's membership, I was accorded the honor of serving as editor of the Annals. In addition, I was honored to serve as president of the organization, as its only archivist, and as its only and continuing web master. More than that, it has been an honor and distinct pleasure to work with so many fine scholars and friends.