

## KONFERENZEN

## Konferenzberichte

**"Environmental Stability and Cultural Collisions" - Conference Sponsored by the Northwest Regional Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies**  
Oregon/Eugene, USA, 8.-10. November 1991

The theme of "environmental stability and cultural collisions" in Southeast Asia drew 180 participants to the Consortium's fourth annual conference, November 8-10, 1991, at the University of Oregon in Eugene. Scholars came not only from North America but also from France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Laos, and agencies such as UNICEF. A number of Asian participants currently studying in the U.S. actively shared their perspectives during the conference.

In his welcoming statement, Dr. Thomas A. Bartlett, Chancellor of the Oregon State System of Higher Education, stressed the importance of studying the rich and varied cultures of Southeast Asia.

In recent years, much media attention has been devoted to Southeast Asia's economic successes and related growth. Much less has been directed to the environmental and cultural impact of such changes. In his keynote address, Dr. Michael Dove wove together historic and contemporary perspectives on the complex links among politics, economics, environment, and culture in Southeast Asia. Dove recently was at a Yale University as a Faculty Fellow in the Program in Agrarian Studies and is currently a Research Fellow at the Environment and Policy Institute of the East-West Center, Honolulu.

A major theme in Dove's address was the tension in development between local and external interests reflected in a parable from forest dwellers who search for diamonds in the hills above Martapura, southeastern Kalimantan: "*Siapa yang mendapat batu besar, dia pasti susah nanti*" ("Whoever finds a big stone will eventually suffer"). Its value overwhelms the normal marketing channels: how can the *orang besar*, "the big men", obtain it without bestowing wealth unsuitable to a remote indigenous inhabitant? Dove challenged the criticisms aimed at local people and communities for environmental degradation in Southeast Asia, and argues contrarily that local peoples suffer from the "sin of proximity," and that in reality "rural peoples are impoverished by the degradation of their resources by external forces." Another theme emphasized was the lack of genuine dialogue with local people and communities.

Dove suggested that we should not ask "how can we help?", but instead "how are we hurting?" These questions echoed the philosopher Ivan Illich's warnings for North Americans to come to Latin America, not to help, but *to learn*. With his profound respect for "the small man," Dove called for genuine dialogue to confront environmental challenges globally as well as in Southeast Asia.

Dr. Dove's theoretical framework and overall synthesis was reflected time and again in the conference papers which touched on the many that new manifestations of "development", such as tourism (now the world's leading industry), the Growth Triangle Project, extended metropolitan regions and related *desakota* (merging of town and village), World Bank projects, economic reforms, demographic changes, and economic diversification are affecting the environ-

ment and cultures of local people in Southeast Asia. There was also emphasis on the responses of local people to these challenges to their cultures and environment as reflected in the dramatic growth of nongovernmental organizations, as well as various citizens and religious movements, particularly in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines.

The discussion of the emerging Growth Triangle Project involving Singapore, Malaysia (Johore), and Indonesia (Batam), generated considerable controversy, as the potential adverse environmental and cultural impacts of this project were delineated. There was also extensive discussion of the dramatic growth of extended metropolitan regions (EMRs) in Southeast Asia and the complex cultural collisions resulting from such hyperurbanization.

Among a number of other key policy issues considered in sessions were the following:

- Indonesia's log export ban.
- Appropriate technology for sustainable development in Laos.
- Natural resource management in Laos.
- NGO pest management in Indonesia.
- The role of Buddhism in restoring ecological equilibrium.
- Utilization of natural food resources in Northeast Thailand.
- The role of agriculture in Indonesia's development.

As suggested by the diverse policy issues above, a notable feature of the conference was its highly interdisciplinary nature, including such fields as geography, political science, anthropology, history, education, literature, religion, business, music, linguistics, and health (physical and mental). No single academic discipline can begin to address the complex links between environment and culture and the holistic approach emphasized at the conference seemed widely appreciated.

In addition to the formal and informal intellectual and policy discourse fostered by the conference, there were also a number of special events with a strong cultural dimension. There were two museum exhibits on Indonesian *wayang kulit* (a form of shadow play), a showing of videos from and about Southeast Asia, and an Indonesian *gamelan* concert.

Next year's fifth annual conference of the consortium will also be highly interdisciplinary in nature and will be hosted by the Institute of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia, in beautiful Vancouver, October 16-18, 1992. We would welcome participation by German scholars with an interest in Southeast Asia. A call for papers has been sent to Dr. Günter Schucher, editor for the journal *ASIEN* [siehe Konferenzankündigungen].

A volume of abstracts of the 61 papers presented in 1991 may be ordered from Southeast Asian Studies, 110 Gerlinger Hall, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1228. Cost is \$6.00, surface third-class mailing. Also a bibliography of 118 citations related to the conference theme was compiled by Laura Landeen, and is also available from the source above for \$3.00, surface third-class mailing.