

## **Discourses on Political Reform and Democratization in East and Southeast Asia in the Light of New Processes of Regional Community Building**

University of Duisburg/Germany, May 22 – 24, 2002

This interdisciplinary conference was organized by Thomas Heberer and Claudia Derichs and financially supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Science Foundation) and the Ministry of Schools, Science and Research of North Rhine Westphalia.

The objective of the conference was to share discussion of the impact of current political discourses with scholars from different countries and various disciplines. The topics of the papers presented centered on reform politics in the PR of China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

The three day conference was organised in two parts, a theoretical introduction and case studies from the various countries. Thomas Heberer outlined the power of discourses and the political function of intellectuals. He referred to different definitions of intellectuals and linked these definitions to their role in the modernization process. Narrowing the discussion down to authoritarian states, he differentiated between etatistic and intellectual-critical discourses. Using the example of the discourse on corruption in the PR of China, he demonstrated the significance of discourses for political change. In his closing remarks he formulated further issues which have to be examined, such as the spillover process from the level of discourse into political action, the interaction between intellectuals and the political elite, the networking of other actors in East and Southeast Asia and their involvement in global (reform) discussions.

The second theoretical paper by Lee Lai To (Singapore University) examined different roles of intellectuals in "Asian societies". Distinguishing between their role as developers and disseminators of knowledge, their role in political leadership, as social critics and as social advocates, he outlined some central questions for the region in the near future, e.g. the reliance of many Asian states on foreign expertise as a jump-start to create a knowledge-based economy. Although he failed to clarify his understanding of "Asian societies", "Asian intellectuals" or even the term "intellectuals", Lee nonetheless raised significant questions such as the co-option of intellectuals by influential political figures, the incompatibility of their critical disposition with their joining political circles of the establishment, and the rise of new civic organizations.

During the discussion Edward Friedman (University of Wisconsin) tried to stimulate awareness for the need to deconstruct the term "Asian" and to

beware of the dichotomized discourses of "Eastern/Western" values. Also, the different roles that intellectuals in Southeast and East Asia play as political and societal actors were a topic of debate.

Throughout the case study sessions, the above-mentioned questions were mainly discussed with reference to specific countries. These papers often only focussed either on the description of reform discourses or the so-called actor level. The actual interplay between discourse, actors and policies, however, was not addressed sufficiently.

The first four sessions focussed on China. Lowell Dittmer (UC Berkeley) applied the theory of learning to the development of PRC foreign policy from 1949 to the present. Discussing different types of learning (ideological, strategic, forced) in relation to various changes in the international environment and the internal changes in China's (party) leadership, his analysis concentrated on the influence of historical lessons and external events on discourses and actors.

He Zengke (Center for Comparative Politics and Economics, Beijing) provided a detailed overview of current discourses on political reform in China. One of the issues figuring prominently in his discussion, nationalism, was picked up again by Ed Friedman in his commentary aimed at de-constructing democracy discourse by pointing toward the driving nationalist and chauvinist forces on both sides of the Falungong dispute. Friedman emphasized that the dominant discourse in China is anti-democratic and that even if a democratic discourse existed, it could only help to promote more scope for the discussion on democracy, yet not determine actual democratization processes.

Olga Borokh (Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow) presented a stimulating paper on the current debates on economic thought in China, especially on the relationship between economics and morality. She stressed the importance of translations of Western theoretical works into Chinese and the impact of social realities after 'marketization' in China on the discussion of the role (and duties) of economists. Merle Goldman (Harvard University) presented some new insights into the current position of the only opposition party in China, the China Democracy Party, which, according to Goldman, represents what CCP party leaders had feared most, namely the coalition of workers and intellectuals. Nora Sausmikat (Duisburg University) analyzed the interdependence of content and aim of Chinese reform discourses on the one hand and institutional affiliation and belonging to specific generations on the other hand. In her analysis, she linked biographical experiences with network abilities and democracy discourses. According to her, these factors determined the different discourse strategies and the success of the transmission of ideas.

He Baogang (ANU) and Carol Lee Hamrin (George Mason University) shed fresh light on the importance of the different roles of intellectuals in different political systems. Hamrin demonstrated that during the 1990s, with the shift to economic liberalization, there was a move from discourse to action and that professionalism and new strategies to influence reform evolved under new conditions. He Baogang outlined different models of democracy by concentrating on the village elections in China. He showed for example that a multiparty system is not a *conditio sine qua non* for rural democracy, or the "hybrid model of democracy", in China. This, in turn, triggered a discussion on the basic question whether universal elements of democracy do in fact exist.

The relationship between actors, discourses and state policies was addressed by some speakers in the sessions on Malaysia and Japan. In the case of Malaysia, global and domestic factors (global economy, Asian financial crisis, the arrest of Anwar Ibrahim) enhanced the role of NGOs at the discourse and activism level. Saliha Hassan (National University of Malaysia) stated that the discourses forced the state to evaluate its policies, although she did not elaborate on this process in detail. Claudia Derichs (Duisburg University) questioned the (Western) notion of an "idea travel" from intellectual and public discourse through think-tanks (as transmission belt) into the policy-making level of politics. She stated that each nation-state has its own way of handling the dissemination of ideas. Drawing from the results of her field work in Malaysia, she came to the conclusion that at least three conditions have to be met simultaneously, when an idea is meant to "travel" from the public into the policy-making level: acceptance of the power monopoly of the ruling party/coalition (at least in public statements), access to authorities and the right timing.

With regard to Japan, we were informed of the significance of timing. Jiro Yamaguchi (Hokkaido University) pointed out that the success of the "reform government" under Koizumi was due mainly to the fact that the country had already experienced a decade of disappointing attempts at reform. While Yamaguchi concentrated on the debate among politicians, Gabriele Voigt (Hamburg University) focussed on the influence of non-state actors (NGOs). She described new instruments of influence (new media, referendums) which are increasingly used at the grassroots level. Through a detailed description of the project of administrative reform in Japan, Karin Adelsberger (Duisburg University) demonstrated how different groups of intellectuals participated in this reform as advisors in think-tanks, study-groups or by appearing in the mainstream media. Again, as in the case of Malaysia, the impact of discourses on political reform is dependent on alliances between the political elite (here: the bureaucracies) and the discourse participants (here: scholars).

The case of Vietnam highlighted the strategy factor and the importance of international political events for internal processes. Carlyle Thayer (Australian Defense University) demonstrated how different actors try to influence party reform by petitions, informal in-house seminars and massive media actions. The content of the debates on a multi-party system, the request that political liberalization must accompany economic liberalization, and the three different discourses on liberalism very much resemble Chinese debates. As pointed out by Patrick Raszelenberg (University of Duisburg), the historical trauma of being dominated by China was one of the major reasons why the majority of Vietnamese intellectuals are pre-occupied with self-reflection and the search for indigenous political concepts. The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks forced the Vietnamese to recognize their unfamiliarity with the conflict in the Middle East and many used this event to define their own position in the world.

Structural factors like the rise of a civil society as an important force of democratization were emphasized by Dorothy Guerrero (Asia Foundation, Essen) and Martina Timmermann (Institute of Asian Affairs, Hamburg). Following different issue-based discourses like the human rights debate, Timmermann showed how global concepts were filled with regional contents and how they created a "regional identity". The transnational factors of community-building became a hot topic during the following discussions.

The papers at this conference covered an exceptionally wide range of topics. The multitude of different theoretical approaches applied by the participants permitted a rare view into the intricacies of political discourses in East and Southeast Asia. While papers relating to the situation in China clearly outnumbered those dealing with Southeast Asia, they still had something in common, which might be called the "actor-discourse-policy triangle". The quality of the discussions and the participants' passionate engagement guaranteed intense and lively exchange. The conference proceedings will be published next spring.

*Nora Sausmikat*

## **Buddhismus und Konflikt in Sri Lanka**

Bath, 28. – 30. Juni 2002

Unter dem Titel „Buddhism and Conflict in Sri Lanka“ führte die United Kingdom Association for Buddhist Studies vom 28. Juni bis 30. Juni diesen Sommers im Bath Spa University College, Großbritannien, eine internationale Konferenz durch, die von der Buddhist Federation of Norway finan-