

## Conference of the "Journal of Contemporary Asia"

Manila, 10. - 12.11.1989

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the journal, Peter Limqueco, its bustling co-editor, organized an international conference. The more than 40 participants came from Australia, Germany, India, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand. What brought them together to this conference was primarily the question: With all these changes, what still remains of Marxism?.

All in all 29 papers were presented and discussed. A wide range was covered. Problems of socialism in general, questions of economic development or non-development, economic changes and state power, foreign debt, export-led industrialization, peripheral accumulation in newly industrializing countries, state and society in South Korea and events in China, Indochina, Hong Kong, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan, India and the Philippines.

There was no agreement possible on the terminology and how terms should be defined: neo-Marxism or post-Marxism, for example. Some thought that Marxism is in a stage of international crisis and that socialism is in a period of political decline, while others stated that it is a crisis of post-Marxologists rather than a problem for post-Marxism.

Quite often things remained rather vague. Since 1987 there is "pseudo-private ownership" in Chinese agriculture, somebody maintained. Many participants spoke about "revolutionary movements" which made me wonder whether they really are revolutionary or just call themselves so. Bruce McFarlane described the crack-down on protesters in Peking (June 1989) as a "massacre". To the former representative of the Communist Party of the Philippines to the People's Republic of China, it was just an "event".

When many were feeling rather gloomy Michael Vickery and Harada Kinichiro brushed aside the notion that socialism is on the decline. Vickery thought it fit to proclaim that "It must not be forgotten that it is Stalinist Rumania which has been able to repay its foreign debt." And for China he alleged "that much of what Chinese students were protesting against was capitalist-type inequalities resulting from business freedom initiated by Deng Xiaoping".

Informative and thought-provoking were discussions on Indochina, mostly initiated and led by Melanie Beresford, Ben Kiernan and Michael Vickery. Highlights were reports from Kavi Chongkittavorn, Bureau Chief in Phnom

Penh for the Thai daily, *The Nation*. His background information about domestic affairs in Cambodia and the detailed descriptions of the intricate pressures and interests from abroad in themselves made the conference a most worthwhile affair.

Throughout the conference there were open debates, sincere efforts to differentiate between appearance and reality and multi-faceted discussions. Some people connected with the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* sometimes embark upon a dry, theoretical, and esoteric approach. The conference displayed a pleasant difference: more theoretical papers were followed by sound description and sober analyses of recent developments. Thanks to the organizers, especially Peter Limquenco, this was the blend that made the conference a stimulating and rewarding event.

*Werner Pfennig*

## **International Colloquium (II): The Sociopolitical Impact of Modern Buddhism on Emerging Asian Communities (Korea) - What is Buddhistic Modernism?**

Seoul, 22. - 23.11.1989

Religion in the ancient past was man's only means to understand the forces that ruled the universe in which he lived, and to explain to him what his own particular role was, or was to be. Those holding religious powers thus frequently also wielded a strong worldly influence.

That has changed, meanwhile, in many societies – due to several religions competing with each other within the same group, the spreading of non-religious attitudes, decentralization of political power and frequent changes in leadership under more or less democratic systems, etc. To what extent then have religions been and still are able to influence the direction in which a society has been, or is, moving in modern times?

To answer this question with regard to Buddhism – presumably not only in an academic sense, but also for practical application of the results – the director of West Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation in South Korea, Mr Thomas Awe, and South Korea's leading Buddhist institution for third-level education, Dongguk University, in 1988 jointly organized a colloquium in