

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

Seoul on "The Sociopolitical Impact of Modern Buddhism on Emerging Asian Communities" (cf. *Internationales Asienforum*, Vol. 19 (1988), p. 398ff.). A follow-up colloquium on basically the same subject was held on 22 - 23 November 1989, again in Seoul.

Professor Cho Hi-Young, who as organizer on the Korean side held the keynote speech of the 1989 conference, pointed out that according to Buddhist thought, the social blessing of mankind can only be achieved through social justice and the abandoning of unsocial features, such as hatred, lust, and blindness; applied Buddhism thus has a potential for political and economic reforms. He also saw a "hidden" influence of Buddhism on decisions in Korea in these fields.

In his paper on "Buddhist Modernism" (a term introduced in its present meaning by himself in 1962) Professor Bechert (Göttingen University) reviewed recent and current development trends in Buddhism. Describing twelve main features of his subject (among them a de-mythologization of Buddhism; a tendency to engage in social work; a social philosophy of equality, extended to the secular order and implicating a democratic society; revival and popularization of meditation), he proposed to use the term "traditional Buddhist modernism" for the variety of systems within this spectrum, as compared to very recent developments such as involvement with ecological aspects, and reassertion of the values of traditional Buddhism.

The rector of the Thai National Institute of Development Administration, Professor Somsakdi Xuto, maintained that in his country Buddhism, although not an obstacle to modernisation, had not much to offer in solving important negative issues arising from it, such as environmental deterioration, the growing income gap between rich and poor etc.

As for Myanmar (formerly Burma), where Theravada Buddhism still prevails, it was demonstrated that from the outset of British colonialism until today, organized Buddhism and secular politics mostly kept apart – a rule broken time and again, however, by individual monks.

Except for the latter three papers, the colloquium centered on (South) Korea, where about 20 to 25% of the population confess the Buddhist faith. All Korean speakers were professors at Dongguk University, but attendance included outsiders from other institutions and professions as well.

Professor Hong Seung-Gee analysed the economic and other reasons behind South Korea's outstanding economic success during the past decades – which, while abolishing absolute poverty, left a wide gap in income distribution. Referring to basic Buddhist teachings, he implied a contribution of Buddhism to the economic success, but also demanded a more balanced social policy instead of the priority given to maximizing economic growth rates.

Discussing "Buddhism and Management in Modern Industrial Society", Professor Kim Byoung Ki compared the vertical structure of human relations and emphasis on "virtue" of Neo-Confucianism, which was dominant in Korea up to the end of the Yi Dynasty (in 1910), with the horizontal structure of relations and rational attitude of Buddhism. Much of Korean society still is under the influence of Confucianist thought. Therefore, according to Professor Kim, a new corporate ideology is required which, in addition to material rewards, will give spiritual satisfaction, such as pride, happiness, and a feeling of security, equality, achievement and fulfillment.

Similarly, Professor Park Kyung Kyu in his paper on organizational behavior in Korean business organizations emphasized the Buddhist concept of *wha* (harmony). Leadership in a business corporation is based on a manager's value orientation, and leadership behavior is reflected in the work of employees. *Wha*-oriented leadership, which renounces egoism and uses an objective and harmonious approach, thus can attract much cooperation from employees.

An important means of propagating Buddhist thinking is education, which was the subject of the two final papers. First, Professor Choi C.S. gave what possibly was an insider's view of education in Korean Seon monasteries (Seon, or Zen in Japanese, meaning meditation). Generally, monastic regulations in Korean Seon Buddhism are more detailed and more strict than they were in China, from where meditational Buddhism is derived. Also typical for Korea is the method of holding "word-head". Professor Chung B.Y. surveyed current developments in Korean Buddhism and Buddhist social education in this country, ranging from Dongguk University to colleges, various institutions for the training of monks or laymen, and to rehabilitation centers for the handicapped or criminals. He stressed that mere knowledge of Buddhism will not be enough to solve the problems of future societies; practical application of Buddhist doctrine is also required.

The colloquium was well organised and great hospitality shown. Astonishing for a German attending a Korean conference for the first time was the very candid, to-the-point and almost business-like style of discussion by the Korean participants, which was quite helpful in obtaining a clear view in a short time.

Buddhist influence in various non-religious fields in the past was demonstrated by the colloquium in a mostly general way. A more important outcome, however, may have been the proposals put forward on how to make use of Buddhist doctrine for the future benefit of Korean society.

There was consensus among the participants that the 1988 and 1989 colloquia, within the limited time available, have outlined and addressed major

questions, but provided only some of the answers and left a variety of points untouched. Therefore, Professor Chang of Dongguk University proposed to first clearly define (South) Korean industrial society and on this basis to formulate a model for its future development, and only then to turn to possible applications of Buddhist doctrine.

But the 1989 colloquium has already proved that Buddhism holds the potential to further improve social conditions in Korea – in a quiet and peaceful way, thus differing from the methods of friction or conflict frequently used in professional politics.

*Günter Siemers*

## **Buddhism into the Year 2000**

Bangkok, 7. - 20.2.1990

Ziel der Konferenz war es, Buddhismusforscher und praktizierende Buddhisten – Mönche wie Laien – aus der ganzen Welt zu einem Gedankenaustausch über die Perspektiven des Buddhismus in den kommenden Jahrzehnten, und zwar auf dem Hintergrund seiner Vergangenheit und gegenwärtigen Präsenz, zusammenzuführen. Veranstalter war die Dhammakaya Foundation, eine Organisation des 1970 gegründeten, nordöstlich von Bangkok gelegenen Wat Phra Dhammakaya. Eines der Hauptziele der Organisation ist die Verbreitung von Meditation und an buddhistischen Werten orientierter Bildung. Es werden deshalb auch für Laien entsprechende Kurse angeboten. Spezifikum der im Wat Phra Dhammakaya gelehrtens Meditationspraxis ist die Vision des lichthaft-strahlenden Dharma-Körpers des Buddha.<sup>1</sup>

Die Konferenz fand vor einem größeren Publikum (mehreren hundert Mönchen und etwa ebensovielen Laien) statt und war von dem Organisationskomitee und Bhikkhu Mettanando als Executive Secretary bewußt öffentlichkeits- und medienwirksam gestaltet worden.

Die Vorträge waren, dem Konzept entsprechend, auf drei Bereiche verteilt: Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft, wobei mehrere Vorträge Brücken zwischen diesen Bereichen schlugen.

1 Vgl. H. Bechert, Preface zu: F. Bizot, *Les traditions de la pabajjā en Asie du Sud-Est*. Abh. d. Akad. d. Wiss. in Göttingen, 1988, p. 10.