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In 1990, the Dhammakaya Foundation hosted an international conference with some eight hundred participants in Bangkok (Thailand). Such massive numbers are characteristic of the non-profit religious organization of Dhammakaya (“Body of the Teaching”), founded in 1970. Typical pictures launched by this well-organized movement depict thousands of yellow-robed monks and white-dressed laypeople practicing meditation in seemingly endless rows. During the 1980s, the fast-growing reform movement gained an increase within Thai Buddhism, so that the staging of its first international conference with some distinguished scholars is also to be valued as a sign of maturity and showing one’s presence (for details see Apinya Feungfusakul, “Buddhist Reform Movements in Contemporary Thai Urban Context: Thammakai and Santi Asok” [Ph.D. diss., University of Bielefeld/Germany, 1993]).

The proceedings of this conference are arranged in three parts. Twenty-two papers, ranging from a three-minute address to elaborate scholarly investigations, deal with (1) the origins and developments; (2) the present-day situation; and (3) the future of Buddhism. The conference’s aim was, apart from promoting intra-Buddhist understanding amongst the various traditions, to globally take stock of the present state of affairs of Buddhism and to point to its future developments. Both latter objectives were achieved only in part, due to the varying quality of the papers.

Part I (13–102), on the origin and development of Buddhism, contains five scholarly papers. From among the three major schools of thought of early Buddhism, Lance S. Cousins outlines the Pudgalavāda’s concepts of “person” and “self,” whereas Alexis Sanderson explains the Sarvāstivāda’s theory of karma and the Sautrāntika’s critique. Lambert Schmithausen gives a sophisticated consideration of whether, according to early Buddhist doctrine, plants have been considered as sentient beings. According to him, “plants were felt to be a kind of border-line case, treated differently in different contexts, in a pragmatic way” (55). Shohei Ichimura, in his paper, treats the Madhyamaka and Nāgārjuna’s “innovative dialectic” in order to bring a solution to the “logical deadlock” that emerged out of failing to make a clear distinction between trans-empirical *dharma*s (elements) and empirical *pudgala* (person). The last contribution in this section, again by Sanderson on the ritual emergence of the Vajrayāna argues “that almost everything concrete in the system [of the *Yoginītantras*] is non-Buddhist in origin even though the whole is entirely Buddhist in its function” (92). Sanderson understands Vajrayāna ritual as influenced “at every turn” (96) by the Shaiva cult, but interprets the items in a Buddhist orientation. All five papers are very well-grounded on a philological basis and exercise a high command of secondary source knowledge.

Whereas the selection of topics in Part I may be a bit arbitrary, the coverage of Part II on “World Buddhism in the Present Day” (103–68) seems self-evident. Thus, eight papers give sketches of Buddhism in South Asia, Japan, France, England, the Netherlands, and Latin America. In addition, the two interesting “Open House Presentations” (263–79) on Buddhism in Malaysia and Singapore and on the Japanese Reiyukai Movement, may be included in this part. Most papers give a rather general outline of the historical development up to now, ending with a few words regarding future prospects (if at all). Notable exceptions are the instructive papers by Cousins on Theravāda Buddhism in England (giving a categorization of its adherents), and R.H.C. Janssen’s on the development of Buddhism in the Netherlands. The exposition on Buddhism in Latin America would have been a great chance to draw the reader’s attention to this usually forgotten region, regarding the dissemination of Buddhism outside Asia. Unfortunately, A. de Hoyos produces a lot of air bubbles, the most substantial being the thirteen addresses of groups given in the paper’s appendix. In particular, with regard to the presence of Buddhism in the Western world, one wonders why no surveys were given with regard to the United States and Germany. Apart from Great Britain, these two countries appear to be the most influential ones in the West, regarding both the spread and institutionalization of Buddhism as well as the research of Buddhism. Likewise, looking to Asia, Part II does not deal with the situation of Buddhism in China, Tibet, India, or Sri Lanka.

The final section, on the future of Buddhism (171–260), is dealt with in seven papers. Topics run from the Buddhist contribution to inter-religious dialogue (A. Guruge) and Buddhism’s relation to science and technology (J. Martin) to the importance of Buddhist education of filiality (H. Sure). Apart from the subtle and instructive exposition of Buddhism and environmental ethics by L. Schmithausen, the clear elaboration of the need for philological research in Buddhist Studies by A. Yuyama deserves special mention. Yuyama not only scrutinizes the different meanings and developments of philology, and especially the study of Asian languages in various Western countries, but also outlines “basic steps to be taken in Buddhist philology” (232–34). Taking these steps by heart would require learning a vast range of languages in order to responsibly translate and critically edit a Buddhist text.

Two papers, finally, address the conference’s title more directly. A. Guruge’s presentation of Buddhism in Europe in the twenty-first century calls for a closer cooperation of Asian immigrants and Western convert Buddhists who have been living separately side by side up to now. Whereas this observation is right, Guruge is wrong that “Europe is

looking for a dynamic personality who could provide the kind of enlightened leadership” (215), bringing together the various Buddhist traditions in Europe.

The grass-roots approach of many Western Buddhist organizations and centers would strongly oppose such an authoritarian approach, emphasizing instead a democratic and consensus orientated process. The latter in particular was exercised in 1985, as Buddhists in Germany passed a jointly accepted “Buddhist Confession” (a self-designation), stating key elements of Buddhist doctrine. As Guruge recommends Buddhists in Europe to work on “a unifying core of doctrines” (215) accepted by the majority of Buddhists, I wondered why this issue was not mentioned. Whereas Guruge’s exposition appears somewhat unbalanced, H. Bechert’s paper on “Buddhist Modernism” is straightforward and convincing. Revisiting the development of “Buddhist Modernism,” a term coined by him in the 1960s, Bechert opts to call the early phase more accurately “standard Buddhistic [*sic*] modernism” (257), taking the developments of the last three decades into view. With regard to these recent developments, Bechert points to new trends in contemporary (Asian) Buddhism (258–60). Among these new trends, which thus form part of the future of Buddhism (in the year 2000 and beyond), he draws attention to nature conservation activities, the overcoming of nationalist intolerance, a new appeal of the ascetic and simple life outside the established traditions, coinciding with a renewal of the ideals of the “forest-dwelling” monk and attempts to renew the *bhikṣuṇī* (nuns) ordination in Theravāda and Tibetan traditions. It is not that Bechert’s paper rescues the volume’s self-declared aim of pointing to Buddhism’s future on the entry to the twenty-first century entirely, but, unfortunately, many papers simply do not attach the book title’s prospect.

Attached to the papers is biographical information about the authors, a detailed glossary, and an index of subjects and proper names. Some colored pictures provide a vivid impression of the conference and its speakers. The volume is well-printed and arranged, and thus mirrors the high organizational skills of the Dhammakaya Foundation. As said before, the quality of the papers is of varying degree and the objectives of the book have not been entirely fulfilled. On a whole, however, the detailed and convincing papers by scholars such as Cousins, Sanderson, Schmithausen, Yuyama, and Bechert make the volume a worthwhile contribution on Buddhism’s way into the year 2000.