

SPAFA AFFAIRS

Training for High-Level Cultural Administrators

As modern nation-states in Asia pursue programmes for national unity and economic progress, 13 representatives from Southeast Asia joined hands at the **SPAFA Training Course for High-Level Cultural Administrators** to call attention to the paramount importance of cultural values as an integrating principle for any national development programme. The course was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from July 17 to 31, 1988 and was co-organized by SPAFA with the Office of the National Culture Commission (ONCC).

Single-minded attention to technological and economic progress has generally created the tendency to overlook the importance of culture as a motivating force linking people to a common past and giving direction to their future. Most of the economic modernization programmes presume that benefits will automatically accrue to the majority of the people regardless of cultural and economic differences.

But experience has demonstrated that results of such presumption do not always come in the same direction.

"We have been fighting so hard to make people in the Philippines understand that economic development means nothing without cultural

awareness and development," says Philippine participant Father Gabriel S. Casal, Director of the Philippine National Museum. "This is specifically the theme of the SPAFA Training Course for High-level Cultural Administrators."

"Frequently, the military and the economy are given highest government priorities in spite of the fact that culture is the one important factor in uniting the peoples of the country," adds Nikom Musikagama, one of the Thai participants and incumbent Director of their Division

of Archaeology. A large number of cultural projects in many Southeast Asian countries, he says, have not yet been clearly identified for implementation because of financial constraints.

In implementing the course, SPAFA hoped to equip administrators with knowledge on the complexity and intricacy of culture and the understanding that every other aspect of governmental policy or programme will have a direct impact on culture. Hence, lectures given emphasized that culture has a variety of manifestations and expressions and that national policies should take into consideration the various cultures existing within the nation. And, for a better appreciation of the course, organizational structures and services more responsive to cultural differences and aspirations were also



Professor Dr. Adul Wichiencharoen, former SEAMES Director (extreme right), lectures as participants of the training course listen attentively.



Above: Participants pose for a souvenir photograph.



Lef: Nikom Musigakama of Thailand (far left) explains parts of the Ayutthaya Historical Park to his co-participants.

presented to the participants during the programme.

“The SPAFA training course in reality became a forum for an exchange of ideas, sharing and learning from one another’s experience and expertise,” says participant Neomi T. Olivares, Acting Executive Director of the Presidential Commission on Culture and Arts of the Philippines.

“The participants drew up, as a concrete evidence of their formal discussions, a paper compiling those national cultural policies and projects, discussed during the programme, that were considered or proven to be effective in contributing to national development through the implementation of cultural programmes. Since the paper was going to be presented to the participants’ respective

governments as general recommendations for effective cultural administration, it had to remain very general in scope.”

Among the many topics of interest discussed during the course, held at the Thailand Cultural Centre (TCC), were: National Cultural Policies of Participating Countries, Cultural Plans in National Development Plans, and Implementation of Cultural Projects. Presentation and group discussions covered six days; study visits to selected historic sites in and outside Bangkok took four days.

As experts and high-level cultural administrators, the participants unanimously agree that the course was a worthwhile learning experience. In fact, they are recommending that a similar activity should be held again in the future.

“I learned the weaknesses of cultural people. I learned that they are not so adept to management and administrative techniques,” says participant Saowaros Tongpan from the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board of Thailand. She hopes that budget people could be invited to future similar SPAFA activities so they could teach high-level cultural administrators how to better defend their proposals.

“We, cultural administrators, are so isolated and the course has taught us to place ourselves in the shoes of other bureaus,” admits Neomi. “We now realize the need to translate our cultural concerns in economic terms.”

“More than anything else, it is the value of sharing experiences,” says Father Casal who believes the training has actually opened up minds and made one realize the multiplicity of cultural elements. He rounds off the SPAFA training programme by saying:

“I am not aware of any other entity that brings all the Southeast Asian countries together effectively and productively.”

Participants of the training course were: Nunus Supardi and Haris Sukendar Djojowasito of Indonesia, Dr. Othman bin Md. Yatim and Kamaruddin Zakaria of Malaysia, Father Gabriel S. Casal and Neomi T. Olivares of the Philippines, Leen Kim Swee and Yap Pau Eng of Singapore, and Dr. Chaleo Manilerd. Nikom Musigakama, Prof Dr. Wibha Kongkananda, Saowaros Tongpan, and Suthep Bunchongchit of Thailand.