In this chronicle we continue the search for themes and trends in Asian Christian theology which EXCHANGE started in 1995.1 We will concentrate on data found in Asian periodicals published in the second half of 1995 and in 1996. In a few cases however we will have to go back to earlier issues. The previous chronicle paid attention to national developments in a number of Asian countries. The present review deals with some thematic trends. In our final paragraph we will take a quick glance at some developments in certain countries which were not included last time. The total picture has been influenced by three major events which took place in 1995: the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, which convened at Manila, Philippines in January 1996; the Tenth General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, June 1995 and finally of course the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in September of that same year.

FEMINIST THEOLOGY

The impact of the Beijing Conference, the influence of women theologians within EATWOT, and an increasing role of women in at least some parts of the churches and of Asian society, brought about a joyful growth of articles written by Asian women in the periodicals which we were able to analyze. The feminist theology in Asia deals with both context and text: with violence and oppression against women in Asia, with the often marginal place of women in society, with their role in the churches and with bible exegesis and hermeneutics.2

2 A number of important articles by women theologians in Asia can be found in the five volumes Doing Theology With Asian Resources, which have been planned to serve as reference books by the ATESEA. The articles brought together in these volumes did appear earlier in several Asian periodicals, and in books. Volume Two, Theology and Cultures, appeared in 1995. Unfortunately this volume does not indicate the sources of the material used, and footnotes from the original text are

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Violence against women

Voices from the Third World XVIII/1, June 1995, is partly dedicated to the papers delivered during a conference on ‘Eatwot Women Theologians on Violence against Women”. In a similar way In God’s Image 14/4, 1995 (Winter) provides a number of articles about this issue which formed the central part of a Women’s Forum held prior to the Tenth Assembly of the CCA, June 1995 in Colombo. At both meetings reports were given from several regional and religious contexts. Not only Christianity and sexual violence or other forms of oppression against women was discussed, but also the position of Confucianism, Hinduism and Buddhism, and Islam in this respect, as well as the situations in Bangladesh and especially Sri Lanka. Many of the reports give moving and shocking examples of oppression and sexual harassment. Surprising is the fact that both periodicals also give testimonies of women’s spirituality as a form of active resistance. Annathaie Abayasekera, a Tamil from the lower middle class who committed herself to work as a social organizer in the tea plantations of Sri Lanka, thus assisting in the struggles of women for full humanity, writes:

This involved taking some risks as a mother would - or as Jesus Christ himself did - when he cleared the temple with a whip in hand. It meant shouting out aloud the oppression of these workers and making alliances with those in the Church and Society who would stand for justice for and with them. It also meant a vulnerability - becoming as vulnerable as them. The powers that are always threatened when they realize that there are people who undermine their power or try to pass on power to the people so that the people may determine their future, thereby helping them to be subjects rather than the objects of their story.3

Another moving story is the one about Noh Soo-Bock who had to work as a comfort woman during World War II and was never accepted by her family afterwards. It has been written down and commented on by Chung Hyung Kyung.4 Chung’s comment is bitter and fierce:

Why are we [Asian women] brown? We became a brownised people by the symbolic representation of a graded colour system in this racist world. We became brown people who are closer to earth, nature, primitiveness, wilderness, chaos. We are the ultimate oriental mystics, exotic natives, and missing in some cases.