

## **ASIEN 63 (April 1997)**

### Abstract

#### **Phnom Penh as the "primate city" of Cambodia and its revival since 1979**

*Gerd R. Zimmermann*

When in 1939, M. Jefferson introduced the term "primate city" into the geographical literature, it was defined as the demographical predominant urban centre of a country. In the meantime an expanded concept is now used by other scholars of socio-economic subjects. Up to now, however, the reasons for the existence and further growth of such "primate cities" could be confirmed only in a quite general way with references to some special functions. In the present article the same procedure has been adopted in analysing the development of Phnom Penh until the first years of Cambodia's independence. The dramatic evacuation of the city in 1975 and the data collected since its revival from 1979 onward enable us to give detailed reasons for the rapid socio-economic development in comparison with other urban centres and the rural areas of Cambodia. These facts may even be generalized, so that a "primate city" is defined as that city in a country in which all the basic needs of a society are located in the most differentiated way and with the greatest socio-economic dynamism. With all these functions the "primate city" exerts a stronger attraction than other urban and rural areas which contributes to an enormous population increase. Phnom Penh is the first example, for which extensive figures have been available for a more detailed analysis on this object.