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Toward An Environmental Ethic in Southeast Asia.. Edited by Peter Gyallay-Pap and Ruth Bottomley. Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia: The Buddhist Institute, 1998, 183 pages, US \$20.00.

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In November 1997, a three-day seminar on environmental ethics organized by the Buddhist Institute of Cambodia in cooperation with the Heinrich Boell Foundation (Germany) and the UNDP Environmental Technical Advisory Program was held at the Center for Culture and Vipassana near Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Approximately fifty people participated, representing ten countries. The monograph under review represents the conference proceedings. It includes fourteen papers on Buddhist, Islamic, and indigenous/highland perspectives on the environment and the environmental crisis in Southeast Asia, two papers on governmental environmental management in Laos and Cambodia, and a code of environmental ethics drafted on the final day of the conference and intended for use by government authorities, local community organizations, business, the media, and academic institutions. The proceedings have also been sent to the Earth Council organized after the Rio Earth Summit as a Southeast Asian regional contribution to the Earth Charter scheduled for endorsement by the United Nations on January 1, 2000. The Phnom Penh conference and the monograph are part of an ongoing project on environmental ethics in the region promoted by The Buddhist Institute. From 1930 to its demise in war-torn Cambodia of the 1970s, the Institute was the country's premier center of learning and research on Buddhism and Khmer culture. In 1993 the Institute was reestablished by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

It is arguable that over the past twenty years the environment has become the dominant, most persistent global issue and a major topic for social ethicists. The subject has generated a major cottage industry of conferences, research studies, position papers, legislation, and monographs. Adherents to and scholars of the world's religions have also turned to religious traditions for resources to address the current global environmental crisis. Despite the less than exemplary historical record of the world's religions regarding the preservation and conservation of the natural environment, Buddhism and other religious traditions broaden the discourse of environmental debates and programs to include what Padmasiri de Silva refers to in his conference keynote essay as a "holistic perspective that discerns the environment and the environmental crisis as phenomena that cut across a human-nature-society matrix."

The environmental challenge facing the adherents to and scholars of the world's religions is how to transform deeply felt moral concern and intellectual assent to holistic and holocentric worldviews into practical courses of action that will make a difference at individual, societal, and global levels. The 1997 Phnom Penh seminar takes a step in that direction. The proceedings include essays on practice as well as theoretical papers that explore the worldviews of Buddhism, Islam, and the indigenous tradi-

tions of Southeast Asia looking for environmentally friendly insights. Of the more theoretical papers presented by Buddhist participants, the Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma's lengthy discussion of the Abhidhamma worldview is a greater distance from environmental practice than Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's talks on conserving "inner ecology" that were translated and annotated by Santikaro Bhikkhu. More importantly, individual papers on Buddhism, as well as the Islamic and indigenous traditions, discussed specific programs of environmental practice. These included the role of Buddhist monasteries and NGOs in environmental preservation in Cambodia, the role of Pondok Pesantren in development of community environment in Indonesia, the practice of community forests in northeast Cambodia, and specific government specific policies in Laos and Cambodia.

Given the range of conference presentations, the papers are an eclectic mix regarding both subject matter and quality. "The Role of Buddhist Wats and NGOs in Environmental Preservation in Cambodia," by Yi Thon, advisor to the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Cambodia, manages an unusual balance of historical, cultural, and practical perspectives on the problem of environmental degradation in Cambodia; Abdur Razzaq Lubis's essay, "Environmental Ethics in Islam" provides an exemplary doctrinal justification for Islamic ecology; and Sr. Rosario B. Battung's "Cherish and Nature the Life-Breath and Celebrate Our Cosmic Inter-Wovenness: Ecological, Feminist, and Indigenous Filipino and Asian Ethics and Spirituality," is a cogent, inspiring interpretation of ecological spirituality. Several of the other essays are less successful either because they are too abbreviated or make too vague a connection between religious worldview and environmental ethics.

Good intentions and conferences are insufficient to answer the environmental challenge. Over the past ten to fifteen years Cambodia's forest cover has been reduced by over fifty percent. These and similar environmental disasters can only be addressed by the transformation of the culture of consumption and the generation of sustainable national economies and lifestyles based on needs rather than wants. The long term effect of the 1997 Phnom Penh seminar remains to be seen, but its contextual setting in Southeast Asia, the diversity of its participants, and its intention to address local, regional, and global environmental problems make this volume of proceedings an especially valuable record and useful addition to the increasing body of literature on religion and the environment. One hopes that the Code of Environmental Ethics formulated at the conference that affirms the interrelatedness of the entire universe and the cultivating of caring and nurturing qualities in human beings over against dominating

and exploitative behavior will become guiding principles for action and not remain merely conference rhetoric.

The volume can be ordered from the Khmer-Buddhist Education Assistance Project (KEAP), P.O. Box 657, Crestone, CO 81131, or from The Buddhist Institute, EESEAP, P.O. Box 1047, Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia.