

**Quesnel, Louise, Ed. (1995) *Les sciences sociales et l'environnement/Social Sciences and the Environment*. Ottawa, Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 233 p. (ISBN 0-7766-0420-1).**

**Rodney R. White**

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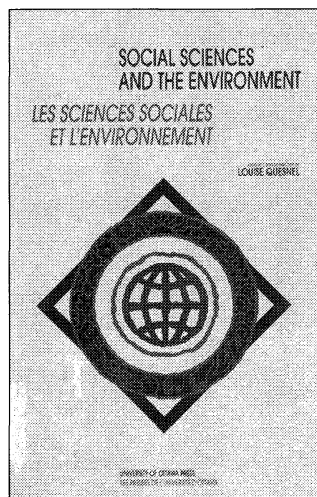
Chacun de ces textes mérite débat. On peut en discuter certaines options, chicaner les chrono-chorèmes. Mais on est sensible à la richesse et la cohérence d'une pensée nourrie par une culture exempte de cuistrerie. Le pari valait d'être tenu; le livre a valeur d'itinéraire intellectuel d'un auteur distingué et trop discret.

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This book is the outcome of a two-day conference organised by the Social Science Federation of Canada in February 1994, representing the work of 16 contributors, including social scientists and representatives of first nations, government, unions and the private sector. The general objective of the conference was to determine how each of these perspectives might contribute to an understanding of current environmental issues.



The contributors represent an impressive sample of distinguished Canadians, many of whom have been concerned with environmental issues throughout their careers. Underlying the book, and perhaps the conference itself, is an uneasy feeling that the social sciences have not become fully engaged with the environmental challenge. There is even a suggestion that "people" and the "environment" are somehow antithetical. This alarming possibility is best captured by a remark made by Henry Lickers to the effect that: "Western ideology has always seen the environment as raw, untouched or having enormous potential. Therefore, Western society has not adapted but tended to modify the environment to suit the individual, industrial and social needs of the people" (p. 47).

Perhaps it is the possibility that people in certain cultures (such as Western society) can envisage themselves as somehow apart from the physical environment in which they dwell that is the most alarming outcome of these conference proceedings. As a geographer, I find such a viewpoint bizarre — yet what else is implied by the division of our field into "physical geography" and "human geography"? Surely, in these days, when the human alteration of the composition of the atmosphere has been demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt, such a dichotomy has become obsolete, even dangerous.

The contributions to this volume are somewhat mixed, including an excellent introduction in English and French, several brief presentations, written as delivered at the conference, three lengthy essays in scholarly format, and three brief reports on the conference as a whole. The final assessment is given by Olaf Slaymaker who notes that none of the contributors defined "environment", or examined the relationship between social sciences, natural sciences and the humanities, while all — save Henry Lickers — omitted to mention the ethical dimensions of our environmental problems.

This is not to say that the conference missed its target. Several useful observations were made in the search to understand the relatively minor engagement of the social sciences in environmental issues. Both Paul Villeneuve and Gary Gallon noted that behavioural change was a more complicated matter than technological innovation. Ivan Head pointed out the disturbing fact that "the broad behavioural modifications that will become necessary remain as yet beyond our comprehension" (p. 36). Jean-François Léonard provided a very interesting historical analysis of the shifting role of municipalities and the private sector with regard to environmental management. Many of the contributions will serve as helpful guidelines to the work that social scientists could contribute to the array of environmental problems that we face.

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RIGG, Jonathan, éd. (1995) *Counting the Costs. Economic Growth and Environmental Change in Thailand*. Singapore, ISEAS («Environment and Development Series»), 267 p. (ISBN 981-3055-08-1)

Cet ouvrage regroupe une sélection des communications présentées dans le cadre de la *Fifth Thai Studies Conference* tenue au *School of African and Oriental Studies* à Londres, au mois de juillet 1993. Au total, 12 textes, 15 collaborateurs, 82 tableaux, illustrations et figures, forment la richesse des 267 pages de ce volume.

Parmi les différents textes, plusieurs se révèlent des contributions solides à la compréhension des liens entre les problèmes environnementaux que connaît la Thaïlande et sa croissance économique. L'introduction par Jonathan Rigg constitue en soi un exposé riche d'idées et d'informations qui va beaucoup plus loin que la seule présentation des textes du

