



# The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement

*Susan M. Darlington*

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*A firsthand look at the Thai Buddhist environmental movement and its activist monks.*

Thai Buddhist monks wrap orange clerical robes around trees to protect forests. “Ordaining” a tree is a provocative ritual that has become the symbol of a small but influential monastic movement aimed at reversing environmental degradation and the unsustainable economic development and consumerism that fuel it. This book examines the evolution of this movement from the late 1980s to the present, exploring the tree ordination and other rituals used to resist destructive national projects. Susan M. Darlington explores monks’ motivations, showing how they interpret their lived religion as the basis of their actions, and provides an in-depth portrait of activist monk Phrakhru Pitak Nanthakhun. The obstacles monks face, including damage to their reputations, arrest, and even assassination, reveal the difficulty of enacting social justice. Even the tree ordination itself must now withstand its appropriation for state projects. Despite this, monks have gone from individual action to a loosely allied movement that now works with nongovernmental organizations. This is a fascinating, firsthand account of engaged Buddhism.

“...this insightfully innovative study deserves wide readership. Darlington skillfully describes and analyzes a fascinating element of socially engaged Buddhism while succinctly synthesizing important historical particulars that contextualize her narrative. The effectiveness of Darlington’s historical and ethnographic approach in this book charts an important methodological path for future scholars of engaged Buddhist studies to follow while exploring more of the field’s uncharted territory.” — *Journal of Asian Studies*

“An excellent book for anyone concerned with religion and environment ... Essential.” — *CHOICE*

Susan M. Darlington is Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies at Hampshire College.



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