

in the two series of studies by Chinese scholars edited by Wang Ch'iu-kuei and John Lagerwey, and in a book of English-language reviews of these books that was published in 2002, in plenty of time for our author to consult if he had been serious about studying Chinese religions other than Christianity.

A related problem is the author's puzzling statement that there has never been a state religion in China (p. 81), when in fact the state supported an elaborate system of rituals and beliefs from the Shang dynasty on. It was a fundamental responsibility of emperors and officials at all levels of administration to sacrifice to a wide range of deities. Indeed, every dynasty published books of regulations for such rituals.

Christianity began as a fellowship of Jews who gave their allegiance to a new charismatic leader against the opposition of the Roman state and some orthodox Jewish leaders. They continued to meet hostility as they moved beyond Palestine to other areas of the Roman Empire, so it is understandable that their movement took a sectarian form that distinguished its own leaders, rituals and beliefs from those outside the group. This sectarian structure helped the early Christians establish themselves, primarily in cities, and later in areas of old Europe outside the Empire. There were analogous sectarian groups in China at about the same time and later, but the mainstream of Chinese religious ritual and practice was and is based in families, lineages and communities of farmers in rural villages. It is not sectarian in form, but includes everyone in the community, is organized by local people themselves, deeply institutionalized in the fabric of their lives, and has continued from generation to generation, in some cases for many hundreds of years. It is a tenacious tradition that has revived in many areas of the country since the early 1980s. Indigenous Chinese local religion is indeed organized and institutionalized, but in its own, non-sectarian ways, which are not the same as the European model that was brought in much later by Christian missionaries. This being the case, Professor Xie's argument that one reason China needs Christianity is because Chinese religious traditions are not well organized is questionable, and simply reveals his acceptance of a Western view of religion.

In sum, this book has serious shortcomings; it is suggestive of a promotion of conservative Christianity in the guise of an academic discussion. This is all too evident both in what the book says and what it lacks, and in its discussion of opposition to abortion as a prime example of what "public religion" might accomplish.

DANIEL L. OVERMYER

Governance of Biodiversity Conservation in China and Taiwan

GERALD A. MCBEATH and TSE-KANG LENG

Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006

x + 242 pp. \$65.00

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The plight of the global environment, while not being a new issue in itself, has become a daily cause for concern in the press, especially in the light of recent high-profile reports such as that by Sir Nicholas Stern. Given China's role as a leading producer and its potential as a consumer, its stance on environment and development is relevant to us all and the release of McBeath and Leng's work on the People's Republic's efforts in this field, also a much-debated topic, is a timely reminder of this.

Gerald A. McBeath of Alaska Fairbanks, and Tse-Kang Leng of National Chengchi University, Taipei, have produced a book that assesses the current situation of China and Taiwan's environment in terms of biodiversity conservation. They examine the agents and institutions involved, their motivations and efficacy, and the differences between the two systems. This analytical, rather than prescriptive, approach, combined with the comparative element, is particularly instructive. Without getting bogged down in the politics of such a contentious area they show the differences between the two regimes' conservation systems from political-legal, economic and social viewpoints, and the impact these have on the environment.

Such a comparison is filled with potential pitfalls. The sheer size of mainland China and the myriad ecosystems it supports sets it apart from almost anywhere else on earth. Yet comparison with the tiny island of Taiwan is useful in that it illustrates the impact a democratic system can have on environmental policy, while keeping many other cultural variables constant. Most interesting is the conclusion drawn: despite illustrating the correlation between Taiwan's more open approach to participatory methods, toleration of the 'third sector,' and its success in conservation policy implementation, the authors argue that democracy does not necessarily improve environmental practice.

While environmental issues have political causes, connotations and repercussions, the authors illustrate the great array of other reasons for falling short of environmental targets that are common to countries around the world. This book concentrates on the governance rather than politics of conservation and biodiversity issues, yet acknowledges political impacts and outcomes.

The book discusses the extent to which rigid political bureaucracy inhibits effective conservation efforts, particularly on the mainland, for example through stringent registration procedures that prevent environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) from forming a real nation-wide network. The authors describe the use of environmental issues for political ends and the sacrifice of ecological areas for economic gains. They argue that "Taiwan's democratic change does not necessarily lead to sound environmental governance. [...] The human factor still dominates the operation, co-ordination and transformation of biodiversity governance in Taiwan" (p. 208). As the authors contend, a dichotomy between the general populace's perception of environmental issues and that of business and industry is an important factor in conservation efforts, and as such "devotion to the environmental movement [is often] a casualty of intense political competition" in developing countries (p. 226). The section on China's environmental history and the history of environmentalism is particularly interesting, given environmentalists' reputations as troublemakers – indeed, former Taiwanese Premier Hau Pai-tsen condemned "three kinds of hoodlums" of which environmentalists were one (p. 196).

McBeath and Leng's work combines thematic analysis with a thorough evaluation of key agencies of all levels, from grass roots and NIMBY-style activists through to government agencies and international ENGOS, providing an assessment of the efficacy, constraints, motivations and achievements of each. Each chapter is presented in concise and largely self-contained sections which make it an ideal text to dip into as part of the reading for a degree course; however the depth and breadth of information means it would be equally useful to higher levels of academic research. The authors make use of a wide variety of written sources in both English and Chinese, as well as exploiting their well-developed *guanxi* network for interviews with government officials, NGO workers and access to research by different groups within the field of Chinese conservation. As they themselves emphasize, the key to environmental conservation lies in a comprehensive framework of local, regional, national and international organizations in the private and public spheres, and their

sources reflect this ethos with testimonies ranging from the academic to the anecdotal.

Written in a readable and concise manner, *Governance and Biodiversity Conservation* makes an interesting contribution to the study of Chinese environmental politics. While much of the content is already well discussed – there are many books eulogizing China’s natural environment and lamenting the CCP’s lack of commitment – the comparative element opens up a new facet. Somewhat surprisingly, the book is optimistic in tone, but ultimately concludes that the Chinese state’s approach to biodiversity conservation is “one step forward, and half step backward” (p.215), while Taiwan has equally far to go.

The authors make a very valid point in that change has come so quickly to China (and Taiwan to a lesser extent) that it is dangerous to make generalizations: on the evidence of Taiwan’s experiences a move to democracy on the mainland may not result in improved environmental governance. However, where environmental issues are concerned, the mainland in particular certainly has the potential to surprise us all.

KATHLEEN BURTON

China’s Geography: Globalization and the Dynamics of Political, Economic, and Social Change

GREGORY VEECK, CLIFTON W. PANNELL, CHRISTOPHER J. SMITH and YOUQING HUANG

Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007

xiv + 365 pp. £39.00

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It has been long time since a highly co-ordinated geography textbook on China has appeared. All the English language attempts at a geography textbook I saw in the last decade were individual chapters authored by different specialists that generally lacked strong coherency as a text. Thus this well-organised book, written by geographers working in US universities, is a welcome addition. It appears that Veeck and Pannell wrote the major share of the book with two chapters written by Smith and one by Huang.

The book deals with all the major areas that a course on the geography of China should cover, with more emphasis given to human geography subjects such as historical, political, population, cultural, economic, agricultural, urban and industrial geography. In contrast, physical geography is only covered in a single chapter. Many chapters, however, do incorporate the natural landscape in some form or other and the balance is good for a regional geography course. The historical chapter attempts to present a broad sweep of dynastic history replete with maps. As expected, topics such as the Grand Canal and the Great Wall receive extra attention. After a brief statement on the Chinese worldview, the political chapter gives the reader a nice overview of the territorial administration of China today with emphasis on minorities and territorial integration especially in Xinjiang, Tibet and southern China. Population distribution and growth changes since the 1950s are well illustrated by maps and graphs, with special emphasis on education, women and migration. The culture and cultural change chapter does not address cultural geographical issues such as cultural ecology or geographical aspects of urban cultural change as much as it looks at the role of scholars and artists in Chinese society with a large section on literature and film. Economic geography is discussed in terms of the