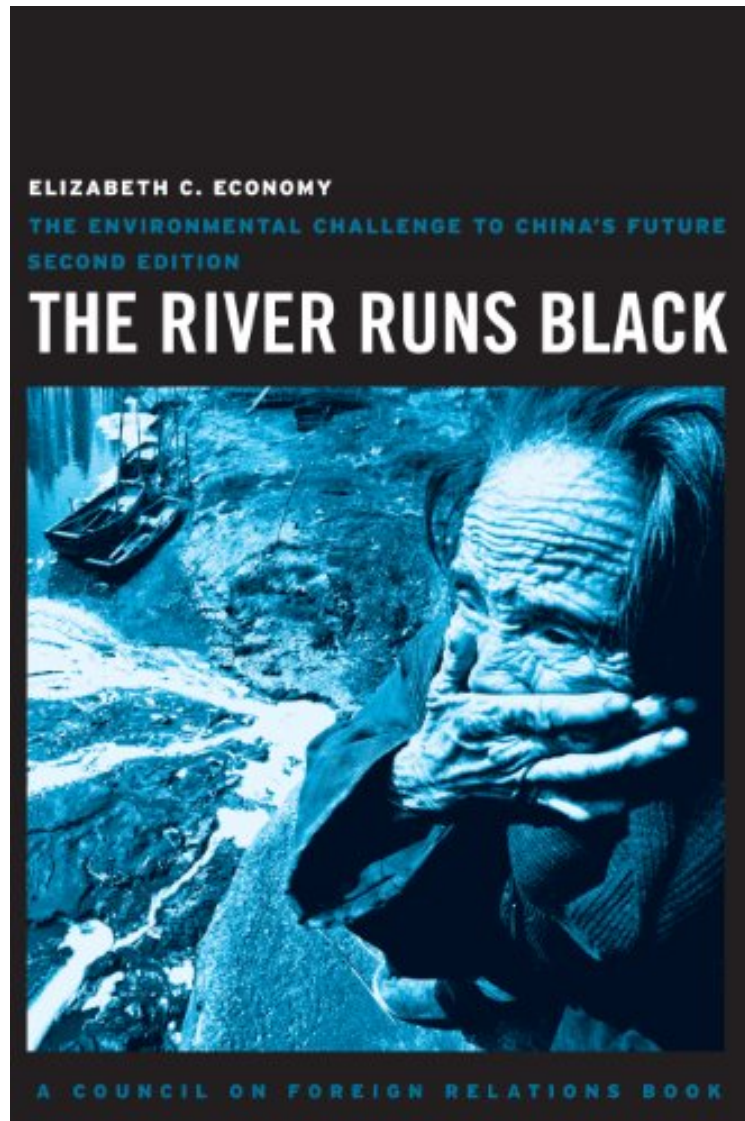


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Elizabeth C. Economy

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Elizabeth C. Economy : The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future, Second Edition (Council on Foreign Relations Books (Cornell University)) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future, Second Edition (Council on Foreign Relations Books (Cornell University))*:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Will environmental destruction pose limits to China's development? By J. I. Uitto This is a well researched, excellent book. Elizabeth Economy has followed environmental politics in China for a long time -- and is able to do so in Chinese -- so she knows her subject intimately (and many of the key actors in the country personally). For this reason, the book provides huge amounts of detailed information, which is valuable but also makes it a somewhat tedious read in places. The other drawback in the book is that, since it was published in 2004, many things have happened in the rapidly changing Chinese context. Still, the key messages contained in the book are as valid today as they were six years ago. Obviously, the facts about the historical background to exploitation of natural resources in China, the massive and destructive campaigns during Mao's rule, and the vast environmental costs of the explosive economic growth since then have not changed. The book is quite policy-relevant and forward looking. Some of the interesting parts deal with lessons for China from the Soviet Union and its former satellites, as well as from other countries in southeast and east Asia (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Thailand...) regarding how these have dealt with political and economic change, and how environmental politics have played out in those contexts. Throughout the book, Elizabeth Economy pays particular attention to the role of NGOs and political participation. She ends the book with three possible scenarios for China's future: (1) China goes green; (2) inertia sets in; and (3) environmental meltdown. The events of the past six years tend to support most the second scenario: extended status quo, in which priority is placed on economic growth and maintaining social stability, while environmental degradation continues. There are, however, cases that could support either the first or the second scenario as well. There are positive signs, especially at the central level where the government and CCP seem to have realized the importance of environment for continued prosperity. Similarly, great strides have been made in some cities, notably in Beijing in connection with the Beijing Olympics. On the other hand, in the interior especially environmental issues -- water quality and quantity, erosion and land degradation, deforestation and pollution -- are rampant resulting in increasing social, economic and political pressures. Time will tell which way China will turn. And this will have major implications for the world as a whole.

23 of 23 people found the following review helpful. China's burgeoning environmental crisis By Malvin "The River Runs Black" by Elizabeth C. Economy is an intelligent analysis of contemporary China and its burgeoning environmental crisis. This engaging book helps us understand how globalization is reshaping China and issues an urgent plea for international cooperation to help monitor and rectify an increasingly worrisome situation. Ms. Economy tells us how China's environment has been steadily deteriorating over the past centuries due to wars, political power struggles and overpopulation. However, today's problems are attributable to specific policy decisions by China's government that has favored rapid economic development through engagement with the international business community. Unfortunately, the particular kinds of economic development favored by China's rulers has led to myriad environmental problems including deforestation, desertification, and air and water pollution. The collusion of local government and business interests has made it difficult to obtain reliable data or to implement solutions where it is feared that plant shutdowns might result in mass unemployment and social unrest, making difficult problems seem untractable. Environmental consciousness in China has increased as the problems have become more visible and as the country has engaged with the world economy. Ms. Economy profiles some of the courageous and inspirational individuals who have struggled for conservation, urban renewal and grass-roots democracy such as Tang Xiyang, He Bochuan, Dai Qing and others. While environmentalists have achieved some successes (such as protecting endangered species of monkeys and antelopes), the author believes that the government's championing of highly destructive projects such as the Three Gorges Dam proves that much more needs to be done. Ms. Economy recounts the experiences of the former Communist nations of Eastern Europe to gain insight into how China might resolve its environmental problems. The Chernobyl disaster catalyzed local environmental groups into pushing for political reforms that brought down the Communists in the USSR and elsewhere. Recognizing that China's Communist Party is a "patronage machine committed to rapid economic development" and devoid of any ideological purpose other than self-perpetuation, Ms. Economy believes that increasing democratization in China could easily undermine the country's single Party system. Of course, China's leaders are keenly aware of this threat and consequently have tightly circumscribed the activities of environmental organizations, but the author is hopeful that the contradictions between increasing environmental degradation and the lack of a meaningful democracy will eventually force China's political system to change. In the last section, Ms. Economy speculates about the manner in which China may develop in the future. The author envisions three possible scenarios: China goes green; inertia sets in; and environmental meltdown. Ms. Economy thinks that the U.S. should take the lead in encouraging China to develop its regulatory system and implement green technologies so that the country can embark on an environmentally sustainable path. Indeed, the unpredictable consequences of a Chinese environmental meltdown should give the international community pause to consider how it might help China -- and by extension all of us -- to avoid a worse case scenario. I highly recommend this superbly written book to everyone.

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Good policy study By E. N. Anderson Previous reviewers have said good things about this book, and I can only agree. It is notably superior to other recent books about the Chinese environment, which (though often scholarly) are long on polemics and short on comprehensive vision. Dr. Economy focuses on politics and policies. These have been notoriously awful under Communism, but there is now a realization of the damage being done, and thus some hope.

Dr. Economy is as optimistic as one could reasonably be. Incidentally, interested readers should also look up her very fine chapter in Kristen Day's worthy edited volume *CHINA'S ENVIRONMENT AND THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*. I am not so optimistic. One reason is that my training is more in biology, and I am aware that the devastating damage China has done to its environment will not be clear for 50 to 100 years. It takes that long for pollution and environmental degradation to show themselves fully. As Dr. Economy says, China wanted to be "first rich, then clean" (that's the literal Chinese; she actually phrases it more academically). They thought that the west had done this. No, the west started conservation and scientific management long ago. The United States' golden age of conservation was under Theodore Roosevelt, when the US was still poor and rural. The US and western Europe never allowed anything close to what China has done. There was much degradation, but reaction always came eventually. China, like all Communist-led countries, missed this lesson. Marx had spoken: production is all, and top-down control is the way to do it. This has led, everywhere, to dismal environmental records, though much good has come from distributing food, health care, housing, etc., more evenly (this may no longer be the case). It is now too late. The white-flag dolphin, once common and resilient, is extinct, the Three Gorges are dammed, and much else has gone beyond possibility of repair. Dr. Economy does not draw as sharp a contrast as I would between traditional management and Communist excess. Traditional China had major Malthusian problems, but they were caused more by imperial policy than by environmental mismanagement at the riceroots level. The peasants and workers created a system based on harmony and balance. The system was full of problems, and never got as harmonious as we would now wish, but it worked; it kept hundreds of millions of people alive in spite of a premodern technology, and it managed the key resources--topsoil, water, forests, and so on--sustainably enough that there was quite a bit left by 1950. Recent books trashing the old system have titles significantly featuring elephants and tigers instead of people. Even if you prefer the charismatic megafauna, note that China had some elephants and a lot of tigers in 1950. So a flawed, antiquated, underproductive, but still well-designed and eminently functional system was sacrificed, and the result has been a royal mess. Yields of food are way up, thanks to modern technology (some of it developed in China by the Communists--to their credit), but the future is cloudy indeed. If you want the best account of what can be done and what is being done, look no further than this book.

China's spectacular economic growth over the past two decades has dramatically depleted the country's natural resources and produced skyrocketing rates of pollution. Environmental degradation in China has also contributed to significant public health problems, mass migration, economic loss, and social unrest. In *The River Runs Black*, Elizabeth C. Economy examines China's growing environmental crisis and its implications for the country's future development. Drawing on historical research, case studies, and interviews with officials, scholars, and activists in China, Economy traces the economic and political roots of China's environmental challenge and the evolution of the leadership's response. She argues that China's current approach to environmental protection mirrors the one embraced for economic development: devolving authority to local officials, opening the door to private actors, and inviting participation from the international community, while retaining only weak central control. The result has been a patchwork of environmental protection in which a few wealthy regions with strong leaders and international ties improve their local environments, while most of the country continues to deteriorate, sometimes suffering irrevocable damage. Economy compares China's response with the experience of other societies and sketches out several possible futures for the country. This second edition is updated with information about events during the past five years, covering China's tumultuous transformation of its economy and its landscape as it deals with the political implications of this behavior as viewed by an international community ever more concerned about climate change and dwindling energy resources.