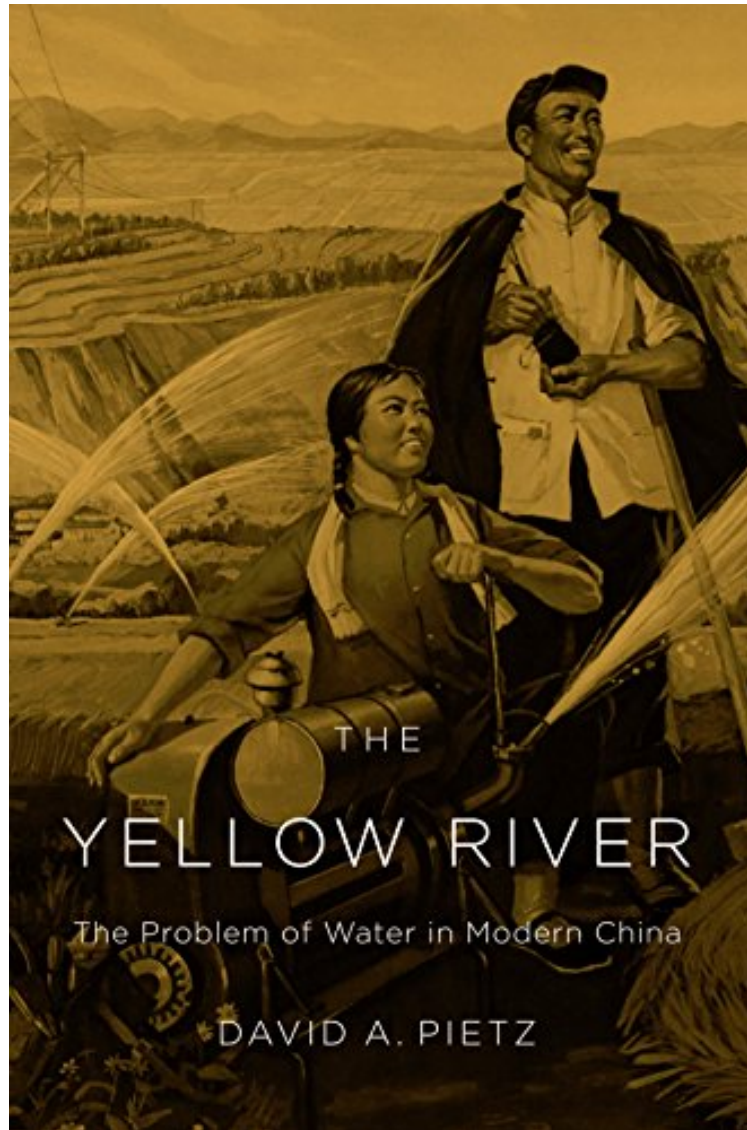


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The Yellow River: The Problem of Water in Modern China

David A. Pietz

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David A. Pietz : The Yellow River: The Problem of Water in Modern China before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Yellow River: The Problem of Water in Modern China:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Really good environmental history By E. N. Anderson David Pietz has provided a superior history of water management in northern China. In spite of the "modern" in the title, he spends over 100 pages on a notably judicious and incisive history of water management from prehistory on down to Qing. He provides some really fascinating lore on water engineering in the 1930s, usually a decade rather shorted by environmental historians. He then settles down to the long and complex history of water management under Mao and the later Communist leaders, ending with problems for the future. China is notoriously not only short of water but

prone to epic droughts and floods, but the story of what the Chinese have done with that is the exciting narrative. (It is pretty well summed up by a Chinese saying: "Freezing to death, stand straight and face the wind; starving to death, never bend.") What is special about this book is Pietz' sensible, judicious, and informed take on key issues, from the rise of irrigation 3000 years ago to the controversies over big dams today. In an age of rather overheated rhetoric about China (pro and con) this is refreshing; more to the point, it makes this book particularly valuable. I found the following review helpful. A must read for the study of engineered rivers in arid lands. I add a few comments to Anderson's excellent review: Pietz places 20th century water management in the Yellow River nicely in the context of modern reservoir construction worldwide, beginning with the Tennessee multipurpose model--energy production, flood control, irrigation, regional development. There is an insightful discussion of a much debated current issue: increasing flow in the Yellow by importing water from the Yangtze, hundreds of kilometers to the South. Problems arising as reservoirs age, such as the buildup of sediment, are covered, so is the emerging impact of climate change on river water volume. The significance of the book is highlighted in three numbers quoted by Pietz: China has 20 percent of the world's population, 9 percent of available land and 6 percent of available water.

In the Maoist years the North China Plain was re-engineered to use every drop of water for irrigation and hydroelectricity. As David Pietz shows, China's urban growth, industrial expansion, and agricultural intensification rested on compromised water resources, with effects that cast a long shadow over China's future course as a global power.

Written in an accessible style, the book has something to offer to those unfamiliar with China as well as to China specialists...It is easily the most useful and insightful addition to the relatively new field of Chinese environmental history. (Lillian Li, Environmental History) The book provides an invaluable addition to environmental and science studies, as well as to ecological history. Most importantly, it is a major contribution to the study of water, which remains not simply the source of all life on earth, but our most precious and endangered resource. In the face of global climate change, Pietz makes China's experiences understandable. (James L. Hevia, New Global Studies) It is arguably one of the most important books I have ever reviewed. (Tony Allan, recipient: 2008 Stockholm Water Prize, China Information) Environmental historians commonly acknowledge the difficulty of establishing the global significance of local study, but Pietz's book is exemplary in this regard. He makes it clear that the Yellow River posed a water problem of global proportions...This book significantly adds to the burgeoning field of global environmental history. Its scholarly yet also accessible style will appeal not only to specialists of the field but to a wider audience interested in China's environmental issues. (Yan Gao, Agricultural History) Though the Maoist technology complex had profound impacts on China's waterscape that persist today, compounded by the effects of pollution and global warming, Pietz is careful to show that the challenges facing contemporary are not only based in Mao's "war on nature," but instead have historical roots that reach much further back in time. This is fascinating reading for anyone interested in modern China, the histories of ecology and environment, and contemporary policy. (Carla Nappi, New Books Network) About the Author David A. Pietz is UNESCO Chair of Environmental History and Professor of Modern Chinese History at the University of Arizona.