The River Runs Black. The Environmental Challenge to China's Future. By Elizabeth C. Economy. 2004. Cornell University Press, Sage House, 512 East State Street, Ithaca, New York. 337 p. US\$29.95 paper. ISBN 0-8014-4220-6.

Environmental degradation is accompanying the impressive economic progress of China. Among the elements shaping China's environmental path, politics, including political institutions, are key. *The River Runs Black* attempts to provide an integrated understanding to China's environmental policy and its effects on China's current and future environmental challenges.

The book begins with the story of Huai River pollution as a case study of environmental degradation. To find the current state of environmental thought, the author examines Chinese history in Chapter 2, "A Legacy of Exploitation," and observes that the political system has traditionally been highly subject to one or a few officials instead of scientific decision-making procedures. This *personal* system corresponds to intrinsically weak institutional capacity to protect the environment.

The most recent 25 years of economic reform have accelerated environmental deterioration. Chapter 3 illustrates that not only has the economy been paying a heavy environmental price, but also that public health and social stability are increasingly threatened.

Beginning with Chapter 4, "The Challenge of Greening China," the important contributors to China's current environment political system, central government, local officials, independent organizations, and the international community are considered. The discussions show the author's knowledge and understanding of China's situation. For example, the author suggests that the current environmental protection system depends excessively on local officials, a situation that works well for stimulating economic reform, but that is ineffective in preventing environmental deterioration. Because local revenue often relies on local factories, which are major polluters, local officials are predictably unwilling to shut down or modify these factories. The national government has shown lack of will to regulate the local officials.

On the other hand, the nongovernmental organizations and public media have become important voices for environmental protection. Chapter 5 describes their functions in, and relations with, the central and local governments. Some of the pioneering environmental activists and their organizations are introduced.

In my judgment, the author overemphasizes the role and necessity of "democracy" in improving environmental protection in this chapter.

Chapter 6, "The Devil at the Doorstep," discusses the international community's role in China's environmental protection, i.e., that of providing financial assistance and technical expertise, and their interactions with China's attitude and policy. The author provides guidance for the cooperation. In any case, improvements from inside China are necessary for more effective cooperation.

Examples from other countries show that environmental policy has potential effects on broader society. Chapter 7 provides examples from the former Soviet Union and some Asian countries, which have faced similar challenges to those that China is now facing. Using those cases, the author implies that environmental activism is a potential trigger for political reform. Finally, 3 possible scenarios are explored outlining how different choices will shape China's environmental, social, political, and economic future.

The River Runs Black explores in depth Chinese political deficiencies in environmental protection. It is a valuable warning for Chinese policy makers, and a recommendation to self-check their activities. The book provides suggestions for establishing a more effective political system for China's environmental protection. In addition, this readable book should help awaken those Chinese who haven't realized the harsh reality and the urgency of the environmental challenges they are facing.—*Shan Zhao*, Department of Natural Resource Sciences, Washington State University, Pullman, WA.