

Vaclav Smil: The Bad Earth. Environmental Degradation in China.

Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc./London: ZED Press, 1984.

247 pp., US \$ 13.50.

Smil summarizes his record of environmental degradation in China as "genuinely disquieting". After a close look at the facts concerning land, water, air and biota presented in this book most readers might arrive at the conclusion that this is a big understatement. I want to pick out only two items from the long and depressing list of environmental problems in China: deforestation and water pollution. China's forests are rapidly disappearing. Smil calculates that the country's loss of forest – due mostly to wrong policies like "taking grain as the key link" – has amounted to 24 percent in the last 3 decades. In spite of attempts at afforestation and a new forestry law, the situation is still deteriorating. As in many other areas of Chinese life, regulations issued from above are not carried out on the lower levels. Wood is rare and expensive and cutting and selling it is big business. For local cadres and peasants the prospect of getting "rich" quickly is far more important than the concern about later consequences of their actions such as changes of climate and water erosion. Immediate consequences are already visible: according to Smil the Chang Jiang floods in 1981, which directly affected 11.8 million people, were aggravated by widespread deforestation. And in all parts of the country there is a serious shortage of wood for paper, railway tracks and furniture.

In 1981, of 78 monitored rivers, 54 were polluted. Pollution is extremely serious in and near big cities since 90 percent of urban waste water is discharged untreated. In Shanghai the daily discharge of polluted water is about 5 million tons. Only 4 percent of the waste water is treated, the rest is dumped into the Huangpu River, which has become one of the world's largest sewers. But still the Huangpu serves as the principal water source of Shanghai – so every cup of drinking water taken from the river contains one half of chlorinated sewage. Another example is beautiful Guilin. Every tourist taking the obligatory boat-trip on the Li Jiang enjoys the scenery along a river severely polluted by industrial waste water. The cormorants traditionally used for fishing in the river have died. The picturesque Grand Canal is full of kerosene and phenol, and local fishery cannot exist there any more. While there is a Law for Environmental Protection and a number of local regulations, the actual practice in local polities is quite different.

Smil's account of other problems such as air pollution, water resources and desertification presents an equally depressing picture. The author points out that the state has very little money to spend on environmental protection, and that even the small sums often do not reach the projects they were designated for. And there is still another danger arising from the new policies of economic reform. The development

of a second (black) market will strengthen the tendency to disregard regulations and warnings and is likely to damage the environment even more. A lot of examples from Chinese newspapers illustrate how serious the situation has become.

Smil does not tire of criticising misleading propaganda publications and their repetition by Western "friends of China" in former years. His work, he admits, was made possible by the fact that there have been a number of Chinese scientists in recent years who conducted critical studies on environmental problems and called for immediate action. It can only be hoped that such voices will be heard.

Petra Kolonko

Rudolf G. Wagner: *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion.* (China Research Monographs No. 25). Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 1982. XII, 134 pp., \$ 12.00

With a copious amount of literature on the Taiping Rebellion in many languages one might wonder why another monograph should treat at length this apparently exhausted field once again. But anybody interested in uprisings, specifically religious movements in premodern China and elsewhere, has good reason to welcome the publication of Wagner's *Reenacting the Heavenly Vision: The Role of Religion in the Taiping Rebellion*.

Wagner's book is devoted "to reconstructing some of the categories that informed the Taiping perception of the vision" (p. 4). It is the author's intention to show that the perspectives developed by the Taiping leader, Hong Xiuquan, represented a complete world-view, coherent in itself, thus providing a convincing metaphysical rationale explaining Chinese *and* world history and the role of the Taipings within it. According to Wagner this world-view responded to both the Chinese charges leveled against Christianity and the revivalist theology of the foreign missionaries. At the same time it was meant to be enacted, i.e. to provide strategies necessary for establishing the Heavenly Kingdom on Chinese soil. While it was this world-view which accounted for the tremendous success of the Taipings, the failure to adapt the vision or strategies to the changing circumstances within and outside of the Taiping Movement was responsible for the final collapse and defeat: "... so that the vision was responsible for both the success and the demise of the rebellion" (p. 5).

Having thus defined the aim of his study in the Introduction (pp. 1-5), Wagner analyzes in Chapter II, "The Framework of Perception" (pp. 6-29), the syncretic construction of Hong's vision based on Chinese history, Chinese mythology, as well as