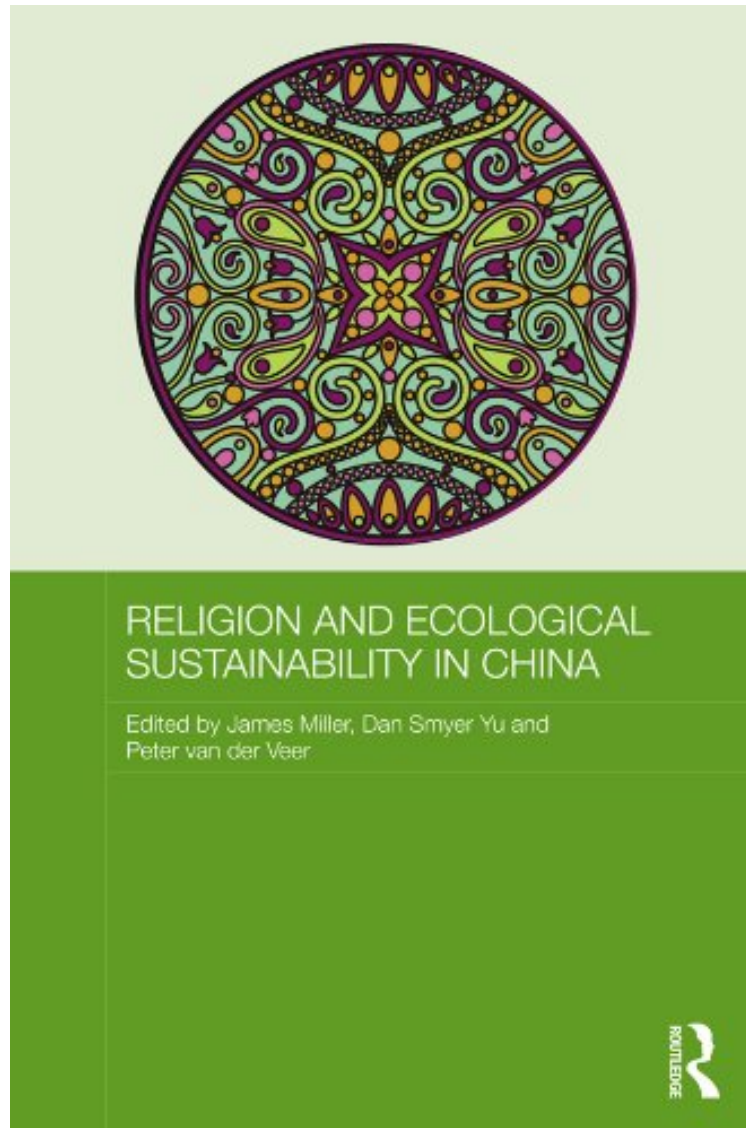


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From Routledge : Religion and Ecological Sustainability in China (Routledge Contemporary China Series) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Religion and Ecological Sustainability in China (Routledge Contemporary China Series):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good collection of papers By E. N. Anderson This edited volume deserves serious attention from those interested in China and in the environment, and I hope its absurdly high price will not discourage people from looking into it. Like most (if not all) collections of papers, it is uneven in quality, but

the best papers are seriously important and worthwhile. I have too little space here to hit all the high points, but a few that are particularly useful and innovative include Deborah Sommer's on early Chinese concepts of the earth (much more interesting than you might have thought); James Miller's paper on an early Daoist sect; Chris Coggins on fengshui groves and their exceedingly important role in saving forests and large trees until the Communists destroyed most of them; Rebecca Nedostup's on how borrowed western "rationalist" concepts of religion from 19th-century cultural evolutionism led to pernicious devaluing and attacking Chinese traditional religions; and Emily Yeh's really stunning and wide-ranging paper on Tibetan attitudes toward the environment, the changes of these in modern times, and the various western-world idealizations of them. I am in awe of these papers; I've been working on this material for 50 years and I never got close to making all these points. There are many other valuable papers here. Much of this book (not the paper by Coggins or Yeh, however) represents book-driven, text-based approaches. My approach comes from human biology and has been field-driven and broadly materialist. So I had a lot to learn here. But, also, a thoughtful point emerges. Book-driven research inevitably leads to privileging elite positions and meditative, thoughtful takes on the world. This can lead to seeing the Chinese as sages living in a world of visions. No paper herein does that, but I can imagine casual readers being lulled into that view. In contrast, the field approach in human ecology can lead to a crassly materialist approach in which too much attention is paid to uses of plants and animals relative to the subtleties of the thought behind such environmental management. I have fallen into this trap on occasion, and Ole Bruun catches me up on it in his paper in this volume. Fair point, but essentializing traditional belief and religion is also shaky as a strategy, depriving us of the lessons we could be learning. That is my one real criticism of this book: there is very little on what the world can learn from China's successes and failures in managing the environment, or from traditional Chinese (Han and minority) views and ideas about environments. This is a pity, since there is in fact a great deal that the world environmental and conservation community could learn--some good ideas and some (or many) cautionary notes. The editors would no doubt respond that this book is about documentation and analysis, not about recommendation, but in a world where long-predicted catastrophes and nightmare scenarios are rapidly becoming reality, can we afford to do that? Would a medical text on drug-resistant tuberculosis ignore the treatment side? That said, this is a collection that no one interested in Chinese environmental history can afford to miss.

This book sheds light on the social imagination of nature and environment in contemporary China. It demonstrates how the urgent debate on how to create an ecologically sustainable future for the world's most populous country is shaped by its complex engagement with religious traditions, competing visions of modernity and globalization, and by engagement with minority nationalities who live in areas of outstanding natural beauty on China's physical and social margins. The book develops a comprehensive understanding of contemporary China that goes beyond the tradition/modernity dichotomy, and illuminates the diversity of narratives and worldviews that inform contemporary Chinese understandings of and engagements with nature and environment.

"This volume makes a unique and valuable contribution to our understanding of the interactions between religion and nature/environment in China, both past and present. Not only does it cover Chinese religion in its multiplicity (not being restricted to Buddhism, Daoism, or Confucianism alone), it also turns a critical eye on how these two interact." Worldviews - Seth Clippard Hung Kuang University, Taiwan
About the Author: James Miller is Professor of Chinese Studies and Religious Studies at Queen's University, Canada. Dan Smyer Yu is the Research Group Leader at the Department of Religious Diversity at Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Germany. Peter van der Veer is Director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Germany.