

Jingfang Liu and Phaedra C. Pezzullo (Eds.), **Green Communication and China: On Crisis, Care, and Global Futures**, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020, 310 pp., \$44.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by
Marcus Breen
Boston College

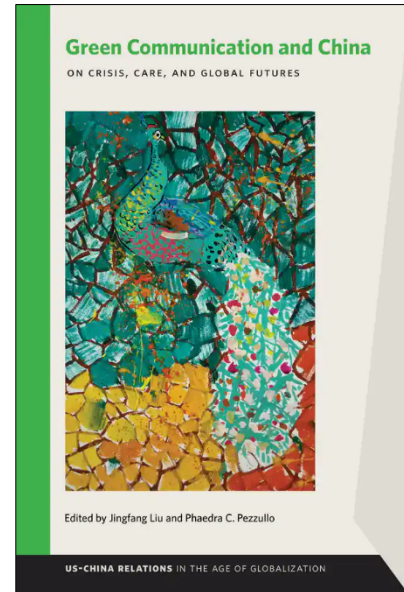
On March 4, 2021, the Pew Research Center reported survey data showing that 89% of Americans have strong negative attitudes toward China, with a headline that read, “Most Americans Support Tough Stance Toward China on Human Rights, Economic Issues,” and stated that most Americans considered China to be “a competitor or enemy rather than a partner” (Silver, Devlin, & Huang, 2021, para. 2). Elsewhere, the Pew authors noted: “A majority of Americans have negative feelings toward China, up substantially since 2018” (Silver et al., 2021, para. 3). Score one for U.S. corporate media’s propaganda in influencing public opinion.

The Pew data appeared the week I began reading **Green Communication and China: On Crisis, Care, and Global Futures**, a wonderful book edited by Jingfang Liu and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, serving as an antidote to the U.S. government and its corporate media allies’ efforts to undermine China’s emergence, which includes academic collaborations. Despite that, this book is a positive testament to the rise of the field of environmental communication.

Phaedra C. Pezzullo (full disclosure, I am a friend and colleague of both editors) says in her engaging introduction that China is framed by the U.S. media as “the worst environmental culprit and the planet’s best last hope” (p. xiv). She makes the case for why more interactions between U.S. and Chinese researchers are needed:

Overall, this book illustrates how environmental communication may be studied in culturally specific contexts (such as the nation of China or a subcultural movement in one city), through cross-cultural analysis (particularly framing China-U.S. relations), and as a way to rethink the agenda of the academic field of environmental communication, which tends to focus, although not exclusively on, assumptions inherited from hegemonic Euro-American cultures. (p. xv)

Against the sense of cooperation about the environment between the world’s dominant powers stands the U.S. government, which continues the China Initiative, established in the Department of Justice by the Trump Administration in November 2018 (Sessions, 2018). By 2020, the category “Develop an enforcement strategy for non-traditional collectors” included: “At the outset, the Department identified academia as one of our most vulnerable sectors, because its traditions of openness, and the importance of international exchanges to the free flow of ideas, leave it vulnerable to PRC exploitation” (Justice News, 2020, para. 9).



Contrary to this constraint, the openness of academic research that characterizes Pezzullo and Liu's anthology is a welcome addition to the emerging literature about China, the U.S. government notwithstanding.

The breadth of essays in *Green Communication and China* suggests many directions for increased environmental communication research that must be given more support in communication departments everywhere for educational institutions worldwide to meet their obligations to contribute knowledge in finding solutions to climate change. Given the scale of the challenges, this book combines social science and humanities analysis to reflect, as Pezzullo notes, the first principle of environmental communication, recognition that "everything is interconnected" (p. xvi); the media and the environment, along with understandings of Chinese history and philosophy, as Xinghua Li explains in "Selling the 'Wild' in China."

Openness to many pathways is necessary to analyze China's current efforts to engage in comprehensive green energy reform. As Junyi Lv and Thomas Goodnight show in their creatively engaging exploration of "cultural diplomacy" at work in the Belt and Road Initiative, as it plays out in the Pacific Island nations, "China aspires the take the lead in global climate change mitigation," (p. 156) using a mixture of trade, investment, diplomacy, and resource exploitation.

Structured in sections titled "On care," "On Crisis," and "On Futurity," *Green Communication and China* suggests that the field of environmental communication is establishing its value as a specialization within communication studies, with especially rapid growth in China, as coeditor Jingfang Liu notes in her conclusion. Its interdisciplinary approach directs the field toward critical analysis, without the myopia of recent America First exceptionalism that begins with the unsustainable fantasy of American liberal democracy as the political theory that should be imposed on the world.

In fact, the tone of open inquiry makes it a valuable guide to media and communication students, with an eye to the growing field of China studies. Its broad applicability makes it an effective case study text of applied communication principles for upper level undergraduates, as well as graduate students and general readers, who would benefit from the informed criticism, together with the optimism embodied in Chinese President Xi Jinping's slogan, "Community of shared future for mankind" (Xiaochun, 2018, para. 1).

Its scope, as Pezzullo notes, is further informed by the somewhat desperate (my term, not hers) "crucial debate" between China and the United States, to enhance the "sense of collective politics [that] is emerging in new ways," (p. xxxiii) due to the global nature of climate change. The rise of global ecocriticism is part of this movement.

Each chapter offers original research perspectives on Chinese approaches to environmental communication, opening the door to understanding the issues for newcomers to China studies. In effect, the book is an excellent example of the way only multidisciplinary in and across communication studies can get at the issues of the day.

Of special note, because of my recent focus on media in China, is the chapter by Pietari Kääpä, "The STEMing of Cinematic China: An Ecocritical Analysis of Resource Politics in Chinese and American Coproductions," as it provides a mixture of political economic and film industry analysis that informs a reading

of cultural policies that incorporate competing national ideologies. As such, it offers a summary of recent films as a window on cooperation between the two nations.

At a reverse scalar level, chapters about local efforts in cities like Hong Kong and Dalian, to reduce pollution by fighting for changes in government and industry action, suggest that indigenous social media operate in Chinese civil society in constructive ways. Two questions emerged from these articles, and, to a lesser extent, Jingfang Liu and Jian Lu's chapter on the Green Peacock and Environmental NGOs: How is civil society in China constituted within the unique national political conditions of the country, and secondly, perhaps, more pressingly, what role do The Party and local party affiliates have in environmental communication?

The answer to the first question needs to be addressed to avoid the assumption that civil society is the same in every country in the world, in which wildly different political systems operate. The answer to the second question is more pressing because details about how The Party operates through residential housing associations is unique to Chinese traditions that have recently been taken up and magnified by The Party, in the mobilization of community action. The ways in which environmental communication functions in this context will help to better understand how China is moving to address the pressures of hypermodernization.

All of the chapters enrich the reader by providing knowledge about this remarkable country, making it difficult to mention them all in this short review. Combined, they add up to a rich reference offering examples of mixed research and writing methodologies, including ethnographic and experiential contributions, public policy analysis, and rhetorical studies, as China becomes, as Jingfang Liu notes, "an international environmental leader" (p. 214).

Disturbingly, much of the optimism experienced when reading this book is challenged by the barrage of anti-Chinese rhetoric, that is fed by the U.S. government, in its determination for the United States to remain the sole global superpower, the hegemon with swagger, while undermining China's efforts and achievements in environmental transformation and development, generally.

As noted in "Environmental Communication between Conflict and Performance," Guobin Yang's evocative postscript, "the history of China's environmental communication is one of conflict" (p. 235). In the current geopolitical context, this comment may be rewritten to show that China now faces monumental pressures that are intended by its opponents to generate conflict that distracts it and the world from the essential research that informs environmental and ecological action.

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