

revenue” (*feishui shouru*). The latter is the term now widely adopted by Ministry of Finance and local budgetary officials. In two chapters, the authors classify all fees and levies collected by government agencies as extra-budgetary – in fact, this is not always the case. Nontax and extra-budget revenue are not synonymous. Fees and levies are nontax revenue, which in turn is divided into extra-budget and within-budget categories. As extra-budgetary revenue traditionally connotes arbitrariness and lack of oversight, a failure to distinguish between nontax revenue and extra-budget revenue can mislead readers to neglect important institutional reforms in the budgetary control of certain nontax revenue streams. However, these comments do not diminish the value of the volume. I heartily recommend it for those who interested in a new era of Chinese public finance.

YUEN YUEN ANG

*Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development in Rural China*

Edited by ZHENG YISHENG

Leiden; Social Sciences Academic Press and Koninklijke Brill, 2011

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In the course of his lively introduction, Zheng Yisheng admits of this collection of authors that their “very diversity of perspectives may be their defining characteristic.” One can, however, have too much of a good thing. It is difficult to discern a binding theme to this collection of articles, penned by researchers who hail from institutes in Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and Beijing. As such a list indicates, the use of “rural” in the title is misleading. This is a volume about development issues in western China. The unfashionable rural heartlands of central China are, as usual, nowhere to be found. Where eastern China appears, it often takes the form of a foreign power seeking to exploit the resources of western China, without paying its due.

For those looking for an introduction to Chinese perspectives on debates around the environment and development in western China, this volume will be a valuable starting point. As the papers were written for a Chinese policy audience, it also provides an introduction into how academic elites seek to influence policy debates. One is reminded of Shambaugh’s spectrum of global Chinese identities, and wonders what influence these voices might have on the Chinese polity. However, for those familiar with the situation-problems-solutions (*xianzhuang-wenti-duice*) structure, it can be wearying. There are only so many sentences one can read constructed around “should” and “could” before thinking, yes, but it won’t. Add lengthy passages of development jargon translated back into English, and there’s some heavy going.

The strongest chapters in this uneven volume are Zheng’s introduction, Ma Jun’s explication of the paired development of hydropower and energy intensive industries, and Li Zhou’s analysis of why government responses to environmental problems fall short. Zheng’s analysis of the political economy in western China is one of the most concise in print, warning against “administrative-entrepreneurial alliances” and “internal colonialism.” The chapters that follow, with discussion of ecological taxes levied on the east, and unfavourable terms of trade, add to the sense that western and eastern China have become separate realms.

The first three chapters (and chapter six) largely praise the Western Development Strategy, but miss the opportunity to explore how different provincial governments

have pursued different strategies in alleviating poverty and protecting the environment, or to place the achievements in a global perspective. Wang Xiaoyi makes a commendable effort to critique “disparities” resulting from different development paths, and Li Zhou tackles distortions to factor pricing and the contemptuous attitudes of elites towards the “common people,” but overall these chapters are long on polemic, short on references. Definitions of opaque terms such as “ecological infrastructure” and “poverty incidence” are neither spelt out, nor critiqued. Comical statistics are presented without comment. My favourite was the transformation that occurred in Ningxia between 2000 and 2004, where the “poverty incidence” dropped from 14.21 per cent to 1.56 per cent (p. 233).

In the strongest chapter of the volume, Ma Jun explains how the development of hydropower in western China, far from being a boon to the environment, attracts energy-intensive industries such as aluminium smelters and yellow phosphate plants, and results in the construction of more coal-fired power stations to cover the slump in electricity generation during the dry season. The fate of resettled communities, some receiving as little as 10,000 yuan per household, answers the question posed by Han Wei in the following chapter as to whether farmers have been “empowered” by the introduction of participatory poverty alleviation methods in western China.

Yu Changqing’s critique of how the political system is ruining western China deserves a wide readership. He examines three high-profile ecological projects: panda protection, northern shelterbelt construction and converting pastures back to grasslands, where boasts of great advances accompany environmental destruction. He wryly notes, “Cutting trees for economic development is a political achievement, afforestation after all of the trees have been cut down is also a political achievement and can also bring project funds. Water conservancy is a political achievement, and applying for funds to restore wetlands to combat water exhaustion resulting from water conservancy is also a political achievement.”

The achievements of this volume, though considerable, are overshadowed by omissions. A striking absence from chapters that discuss poverty alleviation is any mention of the role of Japanese aid to China during the 1980s and 1990s. How did China’s experience as a recipient of aid shape its approach to western China? The legacies of Maoist approaches in western China are hinted at, but this theme also lies underdeveloped. There is a sense that the Western Development Strategy was driven by similar philosophies that motivated the “go global” push, launched by Jiang Zemin in the same year, but the philosophical basis that underpinned these massive investments remains for a future volume to explore.

GRAEME SMITH

*The Chinese State’s Retreat from Health: Policy and the Politics of Retrenchment*

JANE DUCKETT

London and New York: Routledge, 2011

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Jane Duckett presents a vigorous argument for the need to understand the politics of the withdrawal of the Chinese state from the health care service after 1978, a hitherto under-researched topic in contemporary Chinese studies. This book identifies changes in the functioning of the health system as the outcome of a highly politicized and