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Book Reviews

China's Agricultural Development: Challenges and Prospects, Edited by Xiao-Yuan Dong, Shunfeng Song and Xiaobo Zhang, The Chinese Economy Series, Ashgate Publishing Limited, England, U.K., 2006. Pp.xii+311. £65.00.

China's Rural Economy after WTO: Problems and Strategies, Edited by Shunfeng Song and Aimin Chen, The Chinese Economy Series, Ashgate Publishing Limited, England, U.K., 2006. Pp.xiv+367. £65.00.

These two volumes provide a very comprehensive and authoritative account of development in China's agriculture and rural economy after 1978 when China started new economic policy which helped the country to achieve miraculous economic growth. These volumes published independently are collections of essays by renowned experts and span almost all aspects of growth and development of agriculture and rural economy. Some Chapters also throw light on other countries and provide accounts of comparative performance of high performing Asian economies including Taiwan.

For nearly three decades China's gross domestic product (GDP) has grown at more than 9 per cent per year and agricultural production has grown by more than 5 per cent per year. Obviously, this offered tremendous opportunities to the country to alleviate poverty, improve food security, and to convert the country into a modern industrial state. However, this process has not been smooth. China had to pass through a difficult transition from centrally planned economy to market economy. It had to create new institutions, property right regimes and new regulations. These two books provide a very valuable account of achievements in the area of agriculture and rural development and the challenges and prospects of agriculture and rural sector.

The contributions in the first book focus on agricultural development, challenges and prospects. It is reported that during the initial years of reforms during 1978-84 farmers' income on per capita basis increased at twice the rate of increase in income of city residents. The situation got reversed after that, as, agricultural income could not keep pace with rapid increase in urban income. Low income of farmers have now become a major issue in the country. This is also leading to forced migration of rural workforce to urban areas but still population engaged in agriculture is much larger than its share in output. It is surprising that workforce in agriculture in China and other high performing economies including India is not declining to the extent it did in developed countries. This is an important issue for developing Asian countries. Nevertheless, the growth in China's agricultural output has been quite impressive.

The book highlights role of plant biotechnology and total factor productivity in raising farm output. China made heavy investment in science which paid rich dividends by raising production frontiers.

High performance of rural industry and town and village enterprises and agriculture has been highly beneficial for the coastal region having superior agro-economic conditions. The western region with poor natural resource shows much lower performance. This has resulted into widening of disparities in income, infrastructure and human capital. Further, liberalisation of trade under WTO is estimated to have adverse impact on agricultural income and positive impact on non-agricultural incomes.

Part II of the book on 'Agricultural Development' analyses the performance of agriculture, estimates efficiency and deliberate on future prospects of grain supply meeting the demand. These chapters reveal how the dietary patterns in China are changing and what are their implications for grain demand. Information presented in some of the Tables show that between 1985 and 1996 the ratio of foodgrains used as food and feed has changed from 76:24 to 60:40 due to very fast growth in demand for feed. The authors are optimistic that China would be able to maintain high level of grains self sufficiency despite the high growth scenario of demand. However, there is some confusion about demand projections presented in Table 12.16 (p.231) as these are lower than the figures for demand during 1996 reported in Table 12.4 (p. 214).

The final part of the book contains papers on risk and uncertainty in farmers' income arising mainly due to price shocks and how price uncertainty affects acreage allocation. The role of insurance and futures in facing price risk is also explored.

The chapters in the first book edited by Dong, Song and Zhang often use agriculture and rural sector interchangeably. This seems to be a special feature of China that rural sector is so overwhelmingly agricultural that they become synonymous.

The second book edited by Song and Chen contains contributions which focus on rural economy after WTO in a broader sense of the term rural. It contains a chapter on gender inequalities by the renowned economist, Bina Agarwal. The chapter highlights the significance of gender discrimination in property rights and empowerment of women to address inequalities. This is followed by a case study which demonstrates that women's access to work in rural China positively affects their status within the household. There is some disagreement about the impact of market reforms and privatisation on female workers. Mac Phail and Dong conclude that these policies result in disproportionate lay-off of female workers, rising gender wage gap and force women to compromise domestic work which reduces their status within household. The chapter by Rozalle, Zhang and Brauw on the other hand find that development of China's rural economy under new policies has been favourable for women and they recommend that these policies should be continued.

Four chapters in the book closely examine income equality in relation to farmers land rights and other causal factors. Inequality is also examined across provinces,

between rural-urban and within rural areas. It is demonstrated how state officials and private companies connive to evict farmers from their land and render them assetless and forcing them to become labourers. This kind of exploitation and exhortation are generally not known to readers outside China as they are masked by the growth story.

The chapters in Part III portray the painful experience of rural migrants in urban areas. How they are discriminated in wage, access to state facilities and other privileges available to urban counterpart. This kind of discrimination is usually institutionalised.

The last section of the book discusses the role played by local government in infrastructure for rural development, health care, credit supply, and public finance and how rural organisations are governing themselves and how they are affected by change in central regulations.

These two books are a rich addition to the literature on growth and development of agriculture and rural economy in China. All the contributors follow empirical approach and provide highly objective analysis of issues and concerns. Almost all the chapters employ some quantitative techniques (regression analysis or model) to investigate causes and affect relationship even when the phenomenon appears to be qualitative. The outside world is generally enamoured by high growth of China's GDP and exports. How this economic transformation is affecting the farmers and rural areas is generally not known. The contributions in this book highlight the plight of farmers and rural area in the growth process. They demonstrate how painful is the economic transition for rural people. Another important lesson from China's growth and development is that growth often leads to rising disparities.

These two books would be very useful for those interested in agricultural and rural development of China, impact of growth on rural economy, and how local institutions have evolved to meet new economic conditions and system. The books are unique in the application of quantitative techniques to study various agricultural and rural issues and thus they are of great value for the researchers engaged in empirical work.

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Environmental Requirements and Market Access: Reflections from South Asia, Edited by Nagesh Kumar and Sachin Chaturvedi, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2007. Pp.v+264. Rs. 695.00.

The book under review is the outcome of the study undertaken by Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) with the support of UNDP for assessing the incidence of food safety regulations, labeling requirements, quality and compositional standards on South Asian countries. Researchers from different South Asian countries examined the incidence of environmental requirements in the

developed countries and their impact on market access for developing countries products especially those from South Asia. Scholars/contributors to this book have also critically analysed the various dimensions of environmental and health related standards and their impact on South Asian trade in terms of their prohibitive effect, discriminatory impact and high compliance costs. Based on the regional case studies, the editors of the book set the agenda of action points for governments, business houses, and, international agencies to address the challenge.

The subject matter of this volume is categorised into three parts. After the introductory chapter the first part covers an overview of broader issues related to the environmental requirements and market access and review of literature. Chapter 2 by Jürgen Wiemann presents Multilateral Framework of Rules and Agreements for international trade in the context of developing countries. The framework has been responsive to the new theme of environmental and health standards and produced some new institutional arrangements for dealing with trade conflicts in this area. WTO agreements on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Environmental Related Trade Barriers (ETBs) aim to ensure that these standards and regulations do not cause adverse impact on trade. The new multilateral rules and agreements have strengthened WTO dispute settlement procedure. For example, endangered sea species are protected by multilateral agreements like Biodiversity Convention or Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Similarly, the dispute settlement procedure pertaining to SPS have led to reintroduction of trade restrictions between developed countries to avoid importing health risks. Several conflicts are already visible related to different perceptions of health risks of genetically modified food between North-South and also developed countries. Wiemann also discusses the implications of progressive dismantling of trade barriers and increasing quality requirements for the developing countries producers in relation to greening of international trade from below. Wiemann suggests that multilateral and bilateral aid agencies can support governments of developing countries by providing early warning information about upcoming new standards and regulations and assist to establish the necessary infrastructure for testing and certification. An inventory of issues in the current debate on environmental standards and trade with specific focus on environmentally sensitive goods is provided in Chapter 3 by Sachin Chaturvedi and Gunjan Nagpal. This Chapter also examines the impact of increased product based standards on trade of South Asian countries and if there is any migration of environmentally sensitive industries into South Asia. The literature cited in this chapter has shown that it is difficult for developing countries to trade with the developed countries, due to differences in quality requirements. Further, a number of studies cited in this chapter indicate that environmental standards of the North have affected the trade prospects in certain important export-oriented sectors of developing countries. The existing literature reviewed by the authors fails to establish the extent of migration of pollution intensive industries. The authors have suggested that research funding and grants for designing environmental sound technologies may

contribute to the dynamic adjustment of firms in developing countries to higher standards.

Part Two of the book attempts to put together national experiences from South Asia. The country studies covers India (Chapters 5 and 6), Pakistan (Chapter 7), Bangladesh (Chapter 8) and Sri Lanka (Chapter 9). S.K. Mohanty and T.R. Manoharan in Chapter 4 discuss the environmental related non-tariff measures (NTMs) faced by the South Asian countries in their trade with European Union (EU) as the EU market is largely protected by NTMs. To examine the level of NTMs protection the authors have used frequency-ratio and found that in most agricultural products NTMs are high. The case study presented by Sachin Chaturvedi and Gunjan Nagpal in Chapter 5 on trade and environmental standards and migration of environmentally dirty industries in India puts together evidences on how environmental standards are affecting agricultural exports and brings out the need for domestic preparedness to face these challenges. The authors of this Chapter have also made a few recommendations pertaining to technical assistance to clearly understand the relationship between eco-labelling and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT); upgrading the national system for testing, certification and laboratory accreditation; developing dynamic and vibrant strategy to face ETBs, government support to promote organic food products by removing procedural constraints related to certification costs, technical requirement and SPS measures. The authors advocate for research and development support to develop data base for profiling trade and environmental related cases and to quantify the trade distortion effects of those environmental measures. In Chapter 6 Shashi Sareen discusses the Indian response to the changing standards and quality issues in international trade. Sareen suggests that India needs to take advantage of the international standards for addressing various concerns either by taking up with the importing governments or through amendments in the international standards especially Codex standards to ensure that non-tariff barriers are not imposed in an unjustifiable manner and the export of the goods from developing countries increase in the world market. Shaheen Rafi Khan and Toqeer Ahmad in Chapter 7 discuss the trade and environmental standards and also present data on migration of dirty industries in the context of Pakistan. They suggest that trade can have both environmentally malign and beneficial impacts, and, also environmental regulations can be trade restricting but they also offer new market niches and can lead to the institutional challenges. The authors suggest that there is a need for mutual appreciation of constraints by North and South so that the environmental standards debate does not remain confined to polarities. Zaid Bakht (Chapter 8) provides an overview of Bangladesh external sector highlighting its strengths and weaknesses, policy reforms in liberating markets, environmental impacts of exports and review of incidence of relocation of industries due to less stringent environmental standards. Bangladesh has been working out various strategies to cope up with the environmental standards without allowing them to adversely affect the exports. In this regard, the review of four major export items,

namely shrimp, leather, fertilisers and readymade garments suggests that the environmental hazards of exports are quite high. Bakht concludes that in spite of the impressive growth performance, the external sector of Bangladesh has remained extremely narrow and undiversified both in terms of commodity composition and market orientation. To overcome the structural constraints to export diversification in general and solving the environmental ills of export industries in particular Bakht suggests that there is need for technical and financial support from the developed importing countries for Bangladesh. Sampath Jayasinghe (Chapter 9) discusses the trade and environmental standards debate in Sri Lanka. He also examines the effects of complying with domestic environmental standards and requirements on Sri Lanka's international competitiveness. The author suggests a strategy to tap the first mover advantage of Sri Lankan exports by an early implementation of technical assistance programmes for improving the standards. Part Three of the book has only one chapter (10). In this Chapter Nagesh Kumar and Sachin Chaturvedi put together an inventory of lessons emerging from the analysis of the previous chapters. These policy lessons covers some issues for action at the level of national governments that are likely to prepare the exporters in these countries to face the emerging challenge more effectively. Issues for action at national government level may include creating mechanism for information sharing on the new emerging environmental standards adopted by different countries to the exporters especially the small and medium enterprises; capacity building of small enterprises for compliance with the new standards through provision of technology and necessary raw materials; evolve own environmental standards and quarantine regulations; effective participation in international setting; generating consciousness about environmental concerns in the industry, databases, exploiting opportunities for environmentally-friendly goods and services; diversification of export commodities and markets; and, equivalence agreements with major trade partners. These will help moderate the incidence of new environmental standards on the South Asian countries. Issues to be taken at the WTO and other international fora and for regional co-operation have also been identified by the authors.

All chapters of this volume provide critical assessment of increasing stringent environmental requirements, food safety standards and labeling norms and their impact on trade in the context of South Asian countries. This volume makes a major contribution to the existing literature on environmental requirements and exports from south Asian countries, which will be of great interest to economists, public policy makers and analysts, scholars and other stakeholders in agriculture, trade, industry and NGOs.

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Gandhian Way: Peace, Non-Violence and Empowerment, Edited by Anand Sharma, Indian National Congress, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2007. Pp.320. Rs.3000.00.

Mahatma Gandhi started the Satyagraha movement – “the firmness of the force of truth” – on 11th September 1906 and to commemorate the centenary of the movement, the Indian National Congress convened an International Conference on “Peace, Non-violence and Empowerment Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st Century”, in New Delhi on 29-30 January 2007. That the appeal of the Mahatma is universal is reflected in the fact that delegates from 91 countries and 129 organisations participated in the Conference: countries included, small and big, developed and developing and countries from the former communist block. The list of participants is an admirable mix: political leaders of all hues, philosophers, leaders of civil society organisations, and Nobel Laureates. The proceedings of the Conference have been now published in a beautifully printed Volume of 320 pages. The Volume has been interspersed with the historical photographs of the Mahatma. It is indeed an intellectual treat to browse through this carefully edited Volume and no social scientist can afford to miss this book. It transports us to an altogether different world from the usual dry and doctrinaire discourses on development.

The Volume is divided into five sections: Section I on Gandhian Philosophy in the 21st century; Section II - A Non-violent Approach to Conflict Resolution and Peace Building; Section III - Gandhian Philosophy for Poverty Eradication, Education and People’s Empowerment; Section IV - Dialogue among People and Cultures; and Section V - Towards a Nuclear Weapons – Free and Non-violent World Order.

The theme of the Volume is so eclectic that, obviously it would not be possible to do justice to it we attempt to cover the whole subject in this brief review. Instead, the review seeks to focus on Section III on poverty and related economic issues. A distinguished participant in the Conference emphasises: “I am struck by the enormous range of relevance that Gandhi’s life as well as his writings have for us in the political world today” (page 105); and one would like to add “economic world”. In a way the whole attempt of the Conference was, as C.K. Prahalad puts it appropriately to “re-contextualise Gandhi for the 21st Century” (page 155).

The uniqueness of the Mahatma was that not only was he obsessed with the objective of eradicating poverty but also that he opted voluntarily to live poverty, as it were. To quote Rabindranath Tagore: “He stopped at the threshold of huts of the thousands of dispossessed, dressed like one of their own. He spoke to them in their own language. Here was living truth at last, and not only quotation from books. For this reason the Mahatma, the name given to him by the people of India, is his real name” (page 185). Perhaps this experience enabled him to view poverty in a macro socio-economic perspective, instead of treating it as merely statistics of assessing the number of people below the poverty line (BPL), as we are now accustomed. Bhikhu

Parekh has admirably encapsulated the poverty profile, as sketched by the Mahatma, in the following paragraph:

“Second, poverty dehumanises human beings, wastes the potential and deprives their lives of all sense of meaning and purpose. It is one of the worst forms of violence that human beings can commit against other human beings. It is as bad as killing, and even worse for the fact that it is silent, slow and invisible, arouses no anger, and is outside the purview of anyone’s direct responsibility. As long as even one person is starved, is malnourished or lacks decent housing, the social order stands indicted lacking legitimacy. Basic human needs have the first claim on Society’s resources, and it has an obligation to arrange its economic affairs in a manner that the needs of all its members are met” (page 140).

The guidelines for development policy formulation were given by the Mahatma himself: “I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore to him a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away” (Statement made in August 1947, quoted on page 141).

Judged by these twin criteria, how does our performance in the area of development fare? Far from satisfactory. To quote Prahalad again: “Actually, today, in India, there are more poor people than the entire population of India in 1930. That is a reality that we have to confront” (page 156). This is the situation after we have completed ten Five Year Development Plans! The policy environment seems to have particularly worsened since the 1990s, after the liberalisation of the Indian economy and the introduction of concomitant economic reforms. The policy makers seem to have shown neither the passion for reducing poverty nor the compassion to the poor. This is because one of the by-products of reforms has been the intoxication of the Indian policy makers with the undiluted market theology of the IMF and the World Bank. One hopes that the present Volume will have a de-toxifying effect on such policy makers.

Two examples can be cited in support of the above statement. First, in respect of foodgrains management policy, what is disturbing is that India which is the abode of the largest number of chronically underfed and undernourished persons in the world, exported a huge quantity of 27 million tonnes of foodgrains during the three consecutive years, 2001-02 to 2003-04.¹ This was the result of two regressive measures taken earlier: first, the Government introduced in 1997, targeting in the public distribution system (PDS) in the form of Targeted PDS or TPDS. “Thus, the narrow targeting of the PDS based on absolute income poverty is likely to have excluded a large part of the nutritionally vulnerable population from the PDS”.² Second, due to the continuous raising of the issue prices of foodgrains the

concessionally priced foodgrains became increasingly inaccessible to the poor. Cereal prices, in real terms, rose by 33.2 per cent between 1996-91 and 1999-2000. The inevitable consequence was the mounting foodgrains stocks with the Food Corporation of India (FCI). No wonder our policy makers saw a soft option in exports for tackling the issue of the so-called "surplus foodgrains". This was nothing short of development atrocity. The irony was further compounded: while our objective in taking the two regressive measures mentioned above was to reduce subsidies for domestic consumption of foodgrains, the same policy makers did not have any qualms about subsidising exports of our foodgrains!³ If the Mahatma were alive, perhaps, one could speculate, there would have been a satyagraha against such mindless pursuit of flawed foodgrains management policy.

The second example pertains to the current controversy surrounding Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The insensitiveness with which farmers are being alienated from the lands they are cultivating, for establishing SEZs, is, at least in some cases, appalling. The Nandigram episode leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Contrast this with the Mahatma's approach. When Birla set up a mill in the princely state of Gwalior, the Government obtained the land for him without paying adequate compensation to its poor owners. Gandhi pursued the matter with him in a series of letters and told him to drop the project rather than harm the just and legitimate interests of the poor (page 143). The present day policy makers would do well to carefully read this Volume.

In the name of economic reforms, there were other policy mistakes committed: the flow of credit to agriculture declined sharply and a large number of small farmers were thrown out of the banking system and an inequitable interest rate structure biased against the small borrowers and in favour of the private corporate sector emerged.³ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently conceded in its Report that "to compensate for sub-BPLR lending, other segments are charged higher rates of interest, thus leading to cross subsidisation of the economically well-off borrowers by economically poor borrowers".⁴

While the record in the areas of food security, employment and financial engineering is quite disappointing, there is much to celebrate in terms of empowerment of the poor. Edward Samuel Miliband of Britain pays compliments to India for her progress in education and decentralisation of political power. "We strongly admire the lead shown by India with Primary Education for All Programme – *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*" (page 170). He also makes a reference to programmes of educating of street children in metropolitan centers. But Marianne Mikko exhorts, India to go a step forward: "Finland has been emphasising technical education for some decades now. As a result, the majority of us present here today probably have Nokia cell phones in our pockets. Thinking ahead, even before the goals of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* are achieved, new goals must be set. In most of Europe, only primary education is compulsory. But, most countries regard secondary education as a norm. I am sure India will also set this goal for itself. India should set itself a goal

of letting the local talent to flourish so that they can rival any talent in the world” (page 188).

Reverting to Miliband “I think what Gandhi taught us was that the extraordinary things could be achieved if the power is in the right hands. That is why India, I think, is to be congratulated on the integration of the *panchayat raj* system of local government in which there are now three million elected members and one million of them are women, I think this is the largest representation of women at elected level in the world” (page 170).

Muhammad Yunus asserts that “Mahatma Gandhi’s life and example have influenced not just the history of our subcontinent but indeed of the values of modern civilisation. At the United Nations, the world had united in the year 2000 to adopt the Millennium Development Goals which aimed to reduce extreme poverty by half before 2015” (page 35). Yunus’ main contribution is in the sphere of finance. He argues that the existing financial institutions have systematically excluded the poor from financial services and this amounts to financial apartheid. “What the Grameen Bank has sought to do over the 30 years since its inception is to provide financial services to the very poor on terms that are suited to them” (page 36). Micro credit has thus emerged as an important institution which contributes in a significant way to poverty reduction. Globally, nearly, 100 million of the world’s poorest have now been reached with microcredit. The recent emphasis that Indian policy makers have placed on expansion of microcredit institutions perhaps reflects a response to this movement.

Market phobia does not disappear so easily, however. One of the methods recommended by C.K. Prahalad for implementing Gandhi’s message in the 21st century is:

“Allow the market to allocate resources in a transparent fashion such that resource-use is constrained. Eliminating energy subsidies, pricing water appropriately” (page 159). Let me take up the pricing of water issue. Traditionally, World Bank has been advocating privatisation and pricing of water as a solution to water scarcity. It had to retreat from this position because empirical experience has shown that water pricing “operates on the perverse principle that poorer you are the more it costs”.⁵ The Human Development Report 2006, affirms that access to safe and affordable water supply should be considered as a basic human right. Government should therefore ensure that all citizens have access to a minimum of 20 liters of clean water per day and those who cannot afford to pay get it free.⁶ In India we should treat water security on par with food security. We need not be shy of subsidies because after all subsidization is a characteristic of a civilised society.⁶

Happily, on the eve of the Eleventh Plan all this is changing. Indian policy makers seem to have gone through a process of intellectual transformation to realise that moving away from undiluted market theology is essential to ensure that the development content of growth does not wither away. The Eleventh Plan itself is based on a strategy of inclusive growth in the real sector. Rural Employment

Guarantee scheme is the best that could have happened to the rural poor. On its part, Reserve Bank of India is pursuing the policy of financial inclusion. Already, 100 per cent financial inclusion is achieved in 28 districts and in Puducherry microcredit institutions are being actively promoted. The quantum of credit flow to agriculture doubled during the three year period 2004-07. While the change in the approach to development is in the right direction, we have a long way to go. All those involved in India's development – administrators at the Centre, States and the Panchayat Raj institutions, leaders of the co-operative movement, educationists, health care experts, NGOs, - would greatly benefit from going through this Volume. In fact Indian social scientists should address the task of evolving a native development discourse, as contra-distinguished from imported growth models; and the present Volume provides ample material on which to build such a discourse.

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