

Review: The Dragon & The Elephant: Agricultural and Rural Reforms in China and India

Ashok Gulati and Shenggen Fan (Eds.)

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The economies of China and India have gained recognition as growing Asian giants, who have made wonders in attaining not only higher levels of growth but also mitigating the plight of their masses through a variety of public programmes. A variety of reforms undertaken by these economies have engaged researchers worldwide in making detailed enquiries about these economies mainly for tracing out potential lessons for other developing nations who are yet in the preliminary stages of a voyage towards economic growth and poverty mitigation. One such sincere effort is made by 'International Food Policy and Research Institute' (IFPRI) who have brought researchers and practitioners from both the countries together to provide a detailed (comparative) account of rural and agricultural reforms undertaken by these Asian giants. Consequently, as many as thirty-two eminent scholars from both countries have engaged themselves in providing a comparative account of rural development and agricultural reform experiences of China and India, mainly with an interest to enquire about the nature, pattern, processes, impacts and potential lessons emanating from the rural and agricultural reforms undertaken by both economies.

The subject matter of the book is quite comprehensive, informative and thought-provoking. Specifically, the twenty-two contributions address the issues of land tenure system, land institutions, land reforms, health systems, public investment and poverty reduction, anti-poverty programmes, agricultural trade, agricultural diversification, rural non-farm sector, agricultural research and technology etc. Obviously such broad coverage of subject matter, besides the comprehensiveness of each and every contribution, makes this anthology a unique volume providing a comparative account of the rural segments of both economies. It is noteworthy that though a number of books on comparative assessment of Chinese and Indian economy's growth performance have emerged recently, the appearance of this anthology fulfills the long desire of researchers and practitioners who wish to understand the dynamics and contrast of rural segments in these economies. Overall, the book is well-conceived and well-written and above all, is quite user-friendly with detailed index, references and succinctly described contents. Given the twofold aim of the book, i.e. "What can the two nations learn from each other in terms of their reform experiences and their impact on agricultural growth and poverty? What can countries in transition learn from these two experiments?" (pp. xxi), a careful reading leaves no disappointment with the editors' and writers' sincere effort in fulfilling these objectives.

The analytical exercises provide a range of policy and strategic options to attain the twin objectives of high growth and poverty reduction in the future. Strengthening of specific institutional arrangements, development of sound safety nets, introducing suitable trade and market reforms in addition to channeling properly the public spending undertaken by these economies have been the major thought-provoking policy guidelines emerging from this volume. It is, beyond doubt, an outstanding contribution to the existing literature on the Chinese and Indian economies and thereby a must-read for the students of international relations, practitioners, policy makers and researchers interested in not only the economies of China and India but also those who are interested in eradicating poverty from the globe and ameliorating the conditions of rural poor.

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