

foretold, but if the authors had focused a little less on Mahathir and his institutional impact, a little more on the impact of authoritarianism on society, they might have mentioned the influential Parti Islam newspaper, *Harakah*, more than once (and spelt it correctly! – p. 114).

Whatever perspectives the authors do select are discussed with invariable urbanity and flashes of comparative insight. This compensates well for the relative lack of presentational “structure”. However, the Pergau crisis in Anglo-Malaysian relations, 1994, merits discussion in more (or more accurate) detail, for Britain did not give a “loan”, nor did a British newspaper actually accuse Mahathir of corruption. These were figments of Mahathir’s own propaganda, and related just as much to his populism (reserved to the final chapter) as to foreign policy. Distinctly bizarre is the allocation of 8 pages to the 1983–84 confrontation with monarchy but only 12 lines to the far more decisive re-run of 1992–93 – with sensitive background omitted.

Very few readers will object to the American spelling but why is it “practised” [*sic*] inconsistently?

Roger Kershaw

HANS HENDRISCHKE, FENG CHONGYI (eds.), *The Political Economy of China's Provinces. Comparative and competitive advantage*. London, New York: Routledge, 1999. X, 287 pages, £ 19.99. ISBN 0-415-20776-2

This volume is part of a research project entitled “China’s Provinces in Reform”. Following the volume *China's Provinces in Reform: Class, Community and Political Culture* edited by David S.G. Goodman, this is the second in a series of publications related to the project. Like the previous volume it is the result of a workshop held in Hangzhou in October 1996. It aims at bringing out the links between economic reforms, political identities and geographical constraints along the lines of provincial development strategies. Using the concept of competitive advantage the volume outlines the new role of the provinces in the process of decentralisation in China.

The book focuses on seven provinces, providing detailed case-studies of Guizhou, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Hubei, Jiangxi, Jiangsu and Tianjin – representing the poor west, the central region and the developed east of China. The regional studies already published offer quite some analyses about the coastal provinces in China, but studies on the more inland-oriented provinces are rare. Therefore the choice of these provinces by the editors may be seen as a welcome addition. The studies presented in this volume are the result of fieldwork in the corresponding provinces, most of them are cooperation projects between Western and Chinese scholars.

Hans Hendrichske’s introductory essay provides a useful perspective on the concept of competitive advantage and strategic identity. The new role of the provinces as economic partners rather than collaborators acting under central administration is brought to the fore. In this context Hans Hendrichske predicts political and economic changes in China. According to him the coastal-inland dichotomy is no

longer sufficient to adequately define the role of the Chinese provinces during the reform process. They should be analyzed "with a view to their variations in terms of geography, competitive advantage, economic priority, demand from the centre, political ideology and cultural policy as determinants of emerging provincial identities" (p. 23). Of course this complex approach can not be found in all of the following chapters, which can only give some selected insights. But this does not detract from the volume as a whole, because the main concept of competitive advantage has been picked up in most of the chapters, although sometimes lacking in substantial depth.

The seven provincial case-studies all start with an overview of figures and facts concerning basic economic and social indicators as well as a map.

The problem of intra-provincial inequalities plays an important role in some of the chapters, especially that on Shaanxi written by Andrew Watson, Yang Xueyi and Jiao Xingguo and that on Jiangsu by J. Bruce Jacobs. This is worth mentioning because most studies treat the inter-provincial disparities in relation to the widening gap between coastal and central-western provinces. The question of disparities in the provinces themselves is often excluded. J. Bruce Jacobs concentrates on this aspect and shows clearly how difficult it is for Jiangsu's provincial government to overcome these inequalities by poverty alleviation strategies.

The chapters on Guizhou by Tim Oaks and on Hubei by Zhao Ling Yun deal particularly with the question of the economic take-off, the meaning and problems of that process for the central provinces. Tim Oaks takes into account the interesting question of the relationship between non-Han ethnic groups and the process of modernisation.

The chapters on Tianjin by Hans Hendrichske, on Shanxi by David S.G. Goodman and on Jiangxi by Feng Chongyi examine the role of provincial leadership in development, while the chapter on Tianjin takes up the significance of and the dependence on foreign investment.

In sum, this volume is an important addition to contemporary Chinese studies, one important contribution being its choice of provinces, in particular Guizhou, Shanxi and Jiangxi, which are rarely analyzed in the literature on China's modernisation.

The current question of China's WTO membership, which will have considerable impact on the provincial level – especially concerning internal competition without protective barriers – makes the concept of comparative and competitive advantage more important for China.

The book should be of value not only for those interested in provincial studies on China, but also for those interested in the Chinese reform process in general.

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