

ZHU LING / JIANG ZHONGYI, *Public Works and Poverty Alleviation in Rural China*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1996. 209 pages. ISBN 1-56072-395-5

The book analyses the findings of extended field research about the effects of government programs for the alleviation of poverty in the People's Republic of China. In some provinces poverty is still endemic; the population does not participate in economic development; living conditions remain much below the national average. In 1985 the government began a massive anti-poverty campaign against growing regional and social disparity. Since direct delivery of food and clothing has a short-term effect only, the government wishes to create a basis for self-sustained local growth by improving the infrastructure in poor regions through work programs, which offer employment and income for the poor underemployed rural households. These programs are part of the general economic reforms, begun in 1978. Official statistics offer different estimates of the numbers of poor, ranging from 102 to 130 millions, i.e. about 12 p.c. of the rural population (1978); in 1988 the estimate was 28 million rural households with 120 million persons, 250 poverty-stricken counties with a per capita net annual income below 260 yuan.

The authors first review the anti-poverty strategies over time - from direct deliveries to the creation of industrial enterprises and construction work, from funds to loans with subsidised interest. Some programs aim at food security in very poor areas, which are often marginal regions inhabited by ethnic minorities, and improved social services. The researchers then analyse the socio-economic conditions of the research regions and of their sample: 38 villages, 360 households and 1,625 individual beneficiaries of anti-poverty programs.

Progress in solving the problems was limited; some issues call for an extended effort, e.g. enlightenment about marriages between close relatives, frequent in some ethnic minorities. Illiteracy is clearly higher than the national average, worse for females than for males. There is thus still a long way to go "to accomplish universal secondary education for poor areas. Illiteracy elimination should be the primary human resource investment project for such stark poverty counties as Xiji" (p. 96). Most households suffer from severe unemployment and seasonal underemployment. Therefore the projects are mostly implemented during the slack season, when there is no urgent farm work. But work programs cannot offer employment to all who would like and need it.

Participation in the work projects shows a certain bias in favour of the better-off sections; the poorest households are not among the beneficiaries.

Project planners try to give priority to villages with little farmland and to more remote areas, while administrators in the towns have the opposite desire, viz. to select places with better conditions, since success is both more probable and visible. Generally, however, the projects aim at equality of chances in the mobilisation of labour.

In chapters 6-7 the research findings are discussed. Most of the places of research are not yet fully integrated in the money economy. Their per capita tax paid in 1991 ranged from 4 to 9 yuan, while public transfers were about 20 yuan per annum. Annual village taxes varied from 12 to 37 yuan per capita. In the most favorable cases the public work programs create 17 p.c. extra income per household. There is still a high degree of income equality from farming in the research villages, and public transfers contribute to maintaining this equality. Most households joining the work programs spend their additional income on consumption, which indicates their low living standard (and/or fear of inflation).

The anti-poverty programs improve the income and opportunities of the poor, but are limited and cannot solve all their problems. Additional measures are necessary, e.g. better access to credit.

Chapters 8 and 9 critically assess the authors' findings and the results of the official strategy in the struggle against poverty. Projects alone cannot offer a final solution. The poor need help in other fields: in education, health care, culture etc. The projects do not trickle down to the poorest villages and the poorest households. The dissolution of the People's Communes in 1979-1980 has changed both the administrative system and power relations in the village. The more wealthy, or more active or better informed peasants have better chances today, and equality is more difficult to achieve and to maintain. Efficiency of the projects, one objective of the authorities, undermines equality.

The number of projects has increased rapidly, and many administrative departments are involved. Local authorities are required to make up central funds. Therefore, goods and materials from government are sometimes locally sold in order to raise the necessary capital and to purchase or hire the necessary equipment. The center has banned such deals, but to no avail. The effect is lower income for the work done. The state benefits to some extent: delivery of grain (after good harvests) and industrial surplus products eased government expenses for unsold stockpiles.

The authors emphasise the necessity of non-governmental evaluation of the projects, since subaltern officials might not dare to criticise mistakes and failures. Democratic decision-making might help to avoid such mistakes.

Finally, the macro-economic constraints are reviewed. The poorest regions are also far away from the centers of economic progress. Industrialisation is difficult. Thus, small-scale farming will remain the basis of the economy for a long time to come. Government should - according to the authors - encourage private initiative and private enterprises (p.168) and encourage the formation of credit cooperatives by the farmers. Social and regional differentiation are growing. Children drop out from primary school, particularly in the villages, largely due to poverty. But teachers, too, change their job due to low salary.

The problems of rural schools and education call for more public funding in this essential field. The same criticism applies to rural health care, which also declined with the dissolution of rural communal services and the People's Communes. However, the authors do not blame the post-1978 reforms for the deterioration of the basic social services, and they demand increased state intervention. Food security for the poor regions is not sufficient. This critical chapter 9 ends with the following lines:

"Although it is really something of a dilemma to push forward the comprehensive reforms and to reduce poverty, yet for the sake of elimination of poverty from its roots, the choice can only be the further promotion of reforms. Based upon this promise, the poverty in China cannot be a problem to be solved in several years. Instead, the antipoverty schemes will be prolonged and transcency public actions." (p.183)

Anti-poverty programs are implemented in other developing countries, too, particularly in India, where for many years, food-for-work programs have been executed by the FAO. Some reports about India are very critical of the real trickle-down effect. It seems useful to compare results and effects in India and China, to analyse the differences in methods, efficiency, achievements, and the trickle-down effect. Such an analysis might shed some light on distinctions and analogies between the two socio-economic systems. The authors deal with the issue; they see the distinctive features in the targeting mechanism of the governments, and in the fact that half the labour input in China are "obligatory workdays". They call for corrections of planning features and reforms of the system. On the other hand, they mention "market failure" and see that "economic growth does not necessarily mean social development. The alleviation of poverty and the enhancement of the life quality for all citizens still needs government interventions through income redistribution and public investments. The combination of a stable and continuous economic growth and an equal distribution of social securities means an ideal state of development." (p.191)

The book is an interesting report of field research; but it goes even further by putting the Chinese anti-poverty strategy in the larger framework of economic reform strategies and sees the programs as necessary concomi-

tants to the same. These put an end to the initial poverty. Therefore, a countermeasure is called for to limit inequality and, thus, to avoid social and regional polarisation and political unrest.

The book is essential reading for researchers on China, for economists, sociologists and all who are interested in development of the "Third World".

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HELMUT WEIDNER, *Basiselemente einer erfolgreichen Umweltpolitik. Eine Analyse und Evaluation der Instrumente japanischer Umweltpolitik.* Berlin: edition sigma, 1996. 637 Seiten, DM 68,-. ISBN 3-89404-152-8

In den vergangenen Jahren hat sich Japan eines Jahrhundertplans unter dem Titel „New Earth 21“ angenommen. Das auf der UNCED 1992 in Rio geäußerte Ziel, bis 1997 bis zu JP¥ 900 Mrd. als umweltorientierte Entwicklungshilfe zur Verfügung zu stellen, wurde bereits 1996 überschritten. Seit wenigen Jahren ist Japan fortwährend Organisator regionaler und globaler Umweltkonferenzen - im Herbst dieses Jahres folgt beispielsweise die UN-Klimakonferenz in Kyoto.

Japan gelang es, nach dem ökologischen Raubbau an Mensch und Natur in den Jahren des raschen wirtschaftlichen Wachstums zu Beginn der zweiten Hälfte dieses Jahrhunderts, durch den geschickten, integrativen Einsatz von umweltpolitischen Instrumenten sich vom ökologischen Selbstmörder zum scheinbaren umweltpolitischen Schrittmacher zu wandeln. Das von höchsten japanischen Politikern geäußerte Bestreben, eine weltweite Vorreiterrolle in der Umweltpolitik zu übernehmen, steht im scharfen Gegensatz zur bis 1988 verfolgten Politik der Ignoranz gegenüber zahlreichen globalen Umweltproblemen.

Wie es Japan gelang, binnen kürzester Zeit trotz eines scheinbar unflexiblen bürokratischen Apparates umweltpolitische Strategien und Regelungsinstrumente national wirksam einzusetzen und zudem eine präventive Ausrichtung seiner Umweltpolitik zu vermitteln, steht im Mittelpunkt der Arbeit Helmut Weidners. Dabei orientiert sich sein Erkenntnisinteresse an den Voraussetzungen und Ansätzen, die Basiselemente einer effektiven, aktiven Umweltpolitik zu analysieren und zu evaluieren – nicht zuletzt auch im Vergleich mit den Entwicklungslinien der Umweltpolitik anderer Länder wie z.B. Deutschlands.

Darüber hinaus sieht es Weidner als seine Aufgabe an, die umweltpolitischen Erfolge Japans detailliert zu behandeln.