

Deborah S. Davis and Wang Feng eds, *Creating Wealth and Poverty in Postsocialist China*, Stanford University Press, 2009, 293 pp..

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First presented during a conference in January 2006, the chapters of the book, says the acknowledgement, gained a lot from the discussants at that time as well as critical readings before publication. And it is true that the final product is of high quality. However the title does not seem to convey well its content, or only in a broad sense.

For example, Ch. 4 “The Labour of luxury: Gender and Generational Inequality in a Beijing Hotel” describes the management of personnel which may not be significantly different from high level hotel elsewhere in the world, and quite indirectly speaks of wealth and poverty. Ch 8, on the contrary does speak of “creating wealth” in a precise analysis of “land sale as the primary source of government wealth,” with the example of what has happened in Zhejiang province (p.112). The following Ch 9, “Resolution Mechanism for Land Rights Disputes”, complete the picture with another approach; we see with five well chosen cases, how “the parties that control information, possess power, and perform the actual execution” (p.138) triumph in those disputes. This also is not a specifically Chinese trait, but illustrates how it tears community, and aggravate social costs. Statistical analysis, presented in Ch 2 “Market versus Social Benefit: Explaining China’s Changing Income inequality” demonstrates how health benefits, “increasingly linked to employment status, sectors, or type” (p.35) have a strong influence on inequality among urban population; and because taxes reduction after 1995, there is a fall in rural inequality; so, the last paragraph conclude that market forces does induce income inequality but “public policy has also influenced outcomes” (p.36), either in inequality in coastal area, or reducing it in poor area. Quantitative analysis also proves, in Ch 3, that gender inequality is growing in China, adding that was not the case in some Eastern European countries after market reform.

The mention in some kind of disorder of these chapters are intended to indicate the plurality of approaches assembled in the book; readers may be more familiar or interested with one or the other. This is inevitable when a publication comes after a conference. After all you are not under obligation to read all the chapters in a row; you may even benefit more in perusing the pages now and then when you reflect upon this or that particular issue.

So let us introduce other intriguing or worth pondering conclusions presented by

the authors, which should draw diverse degree of attention. Ch 5, by P. Evans and Staveteig, questions the assumption that productivity gains, based on exporting manufactured good after absorbing natural resources from abroad will spread to the broad mass of the citizenry, and so result in more equalitarian society (p.69). The model may have worked in 19th century England, but is not true in today's China, because of the advance of technology in manufacturing sectors. How, then, offer employment to increasing non-agricultural labour force? And the authors to promote a capability-oriented strategy to avoid dramatic imbalance in employment and widening inequality.

Inequality? We know that is not only a matter of amount of money or other so-called objective criteria. Ch 13, with a quantitative survey, and Ch. 14, using qualitative method, are there to say it again. Ch12 employs statistics to show that hierarchy, market and network influence urban occupational mobility and employment. The conclusion adds with pertinence that such a coexistence of the three factors is common in any society...So it probably will not be a mixed system specific to transition in China; a good reminder to avoid the trap of "with Chinese characteristics".

Health and education are two very significant fields to assess wealth and poverty. Ch.10, dramatically, stress that, despite remarkable progress during the last 50 years, life expectancy gap between more and less developed countries is as wide as between countries in the world. The author adds that it is striking since China is still "under a unified social and political system." As for education, Ch.11, mingling statistics and interviews in a case study in the poor province of Gansu, confirm that children performance and attachment to school are often more decisive than economic burden, which means, as largely known and accepted, that education system depends on much more than financial cost, in poor as well as rich places.

In a rather theoretical style, Ch 6 explains that "renting-seeking ability" is a major factor of social stratification in urban China; a simple and useful frame is proposed (p.94) and should prove fruitful for future researches. In a very different style, the lively Ch. 12 contains a bitter-sweet narrative of "institutional changes that are full of inconsistencies and contradictions (p.111). The author was in a village in 2005 when loud-speakers announced a meeting at 9:30 pm the same day..."...about preparing the visit of a township inspection team sent to assess the implementation of the Government Slope Land Conversion Program" (p, 96). The whole story is worth reading: there you have life at the grass-root level described; the author concludes

with some reflections on the need to rethink village and township ways of governance, since corporatist coordination is in disarray. The chapter and others in the book give a strong feeling that rural China needs much more attention from researchers to understand what is going on in the country.

We have not yet mentioned Ch. 1...because the authors, who are the editors of the book, just write just an overview of the issue, of very good quality, as usual in their publications. They stress that the contributions go beyond consideration of income, when studying wealth and poverty. That it should be obvious does not prevent to repeat it to make sure that research encompass as many influential factors as possible. The book has tried with success to go a step further in that direction.