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China's Regional Development and Tibet

By Rongxing Guo. Singapore: Springer, 2016. xxii + 195 pp. Hardcover: US$ 99.99. ISBN 978-981-287-956-1. E-book: US$ 69.99. ISBN 978-981-287-958-5.

In Western academic literature, there has been much talk about the rise of China and whether or not it will become the world's next superpower. Although, since 2015, the Chinese economy has faced major challenges with a falling gross domestic product, China's economic success from the late 1970s until 2014 is unparalleled in history. In recent times, no other country has witnessed such high levels of economic growth and industrialization and lifted so many people out of poverty. However, much of the literature on China's economic growth focuses primarily on the Chinese mainland, neglecting the more peripheral parts of the country such as Xinjiang and Tibet. This book is thus a welcome addition to the existing body of scholarly literature. It is an interesting and well-researched account on Tibet that academics, journalists, policy-makers, and students will find very useful. It will also prove useful for nongovernmental organizations, particularly organizations with an interest in minority rights and protecting minority rights worldwide.

The book has a focus on center–periphery relations and concentrates primarily on the economic history of Tibet, or what is also called the Tibetan Autonomous Region or Xizang. The author takes both a narrative and an analytical approach to understand China's regional economic development and its implications for Tibet. The book is very well structured and gives us an insider's account of regional development in Tibet. China is remarkably diverse culturally and, territorially, is one of the largest countries in the world. Thus, as noted on the back cover, the only "feasible approach to analysing it, is, therefore, to divide it into smaller geographical elements so as to arrive at better insights into the country's spatial mechanisms and regional characteristics." Methodologically, the book takes a quantitative approach, providing an in-depth analysis of Tibet's political and economic situation.

Tibet has been chosen as a case study for China's regional development because it is one of China's largest provinces: China's second-largest province, just after neighboring Xinjiang, where centrifugal tendencies have also been strong. In this context, the author rightly makes a distinction between political Tibet and ethnographic Tibet at the very outset. Political Tibet is that geographical part of Tibet where there have been political protests against the Chinese central government and against what local people often perceive as Han Chinese oppression. In other words, political Tibet refers to that part where the separatist forces have been their strongest, trying to secede from China proper and become independent under the traditional leadership of the Dalai Lama. Ethnographic Tibet, on the other hand, is much larger, encompassing political Tibet along with the neighboring areas where ethnic Tibetan people live, both within China (including in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan) and across the national border in places such as Ladakh and Sikkim (both in India), Nepal, and Bhutan. The concept of ethnographic Tibet is thus much wider than the concept of political Tibet. Although this book revolves primarily around political Tibet, or what is also known as the Tibetan Autonomous Region, it does make references to ethnographic Tibet. Tibet has also been chosen as a useful case study of China's regional development because it is one of China's ethnic minority or *minzu* provinces. Tibetan people are ethnically and culturally very different from the Han Chinese, the dominant ethnic group residing in China proper. Finally, Tibet has been chosen because it has been actively involved in secessionist nationalism, which the Chinese authorities in Beijing have always viewed with considerable suspicion. This book thus deals with a very sensitive area, but manages to give a holistic account by looking into the major historical, political, and economic trends of the region.

The book provides us with an excellent account of Tibet that is useful for both general readers and specialists who are actively involved in research on China. Each chapter starts with an abstract, thus offering readers a synoptic outline of its contents, and keywords. What makes the book even more interesting are the useful maps, tables, graphs, diagrams, and photographs. The list of dates and associated major events is especially helpful for both scholars and students. Each chapter ends with a list of references, providing further guidance to readers who wish to do further reading. The book begins with a brief history of Tibet that helps to set the context. This historical background is essential to understand the later political and economic developments in Tibet, and also to get a balanced view of Tibet. Chapter 2 is also historical, but deals with the more contemporary history of China. The year 1949 is crucial in this context because this is when the People's Republic of China came into existence. This chapter deals with the major economic developments that have taken place in Tibet since 1949 and pays special attention to the assimilationist policies taken by the Chinese Communist Party to forcefully integrate Tibet within the broader framework of the People's Republic of China. The chapter also addresses the major developmental projects that have taken place in

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Tibet in recent times. Chapter 3 deals with the fight for independence from Chinese rule and focuses on Tibetan nationalism, considering the uprisings that have taken place in the region since the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959.

Chapters 4 to 6 provide us with much qualitative and quantitative analysis that furthers the key arguments put forward by the author. Chapter 4 focuses on China's economy and argues that, although China has steadily increased its share of global manufactured exports, the situation inside China is far more complicated. The chapter thus takes a closer look at these complications and contradictions. Chapter 5 sets out to analyze how China's interprovincial economic policies have been applied to Tibet. Comparisons are often made with neighboring provinces such as Xinjiang. The chapter looks at major developmental activities such as the railways that have connected Tibet to China proper and neighboring countries, and the role that these will play in future international trade. China's increasing economic connectivity with other countries in the Asian Pacific is likely to make neighboring powers, such as India, feel threatened. Finally, Chapter 6 talks about how China has tried to keep its borderland non-Han provinces under control and analyzes the policies that have been taken to achieve a harmonious society for China as a whole.

Overall, the book is a good one in terms of providing a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of Tibet's regional development. Finally, because the book deals with both political history and economics, it will be very useful for researchers and students in both disciplines.

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