

Book Reviews

A. S. Bhalla. *Uneven Development in the Third World: A Study of China and India*. London: Macmillan, 1992. xix+353 pp. Hardbound. £47.50.

The book reviews the development experience of two major countries in Asia, India and China. India has followed a democratic liberal course in politics, based on Westminster-style parliamentary practices. However, its economic policy has tilted towards socialism, with government control on the major sectors of the economy. China, on the other hand, has evolved a political culture that is totalitarian in nature; all political power is concentrated in the hands of the Communist Party. Hence, economic decision-making was also centralised until a few years ago when China began a process of economic liberalisation.

The book begins by defining what uneven development signifies. Development strategies and their outcomes are used to illustrate the phenomenon of uneven development. The author describes three such strategies, namely, industrialisation, sectoral/regional balance, and economic liberalisation. The effect of these strategies on the growth of output, inequalities in income consumption, and class inequalities in an intra-regional, inter-regional, and rural-urban divide are specifically discussed for both India and China. Other topics of interest that are dealt with in the book include technology policies and access to health and education services. The latter two subjects, in particular, are discussed in terms of class, regional background, and rural-urban bias.

Some interesting conclusions emerge from the analysis—depending on the respective development strategy followed, and the particular political setting. The author has summed up the development outcomes in the two countries in the table reproduced below (p. 243).

Development Outcomes in China and India

Item	China	India
I Growth	High	Low
II Inequality		
– Intra-regional	Low	High
– Inter-regional	High	High
– Rural-urban	Low	High

China has done better than India, having achieved quite high rates of economic growth along with a more equitable spread of the fruits of that growth. Thus, China has demonstrated an ideal condition that development economists usually urge nations to strive for—namely, growth with equity. China achieved this under Mao, a period that was politically authoritarian in nature. The implication here is that it may have been easier to bring about the required structural reforms in the economy under a system of governance that is totalitarian in nature. This, then, leads us to the debate of democracy or dictatorship as the suitable setting for economic development. Needless to say, there have been dictatorships that have resulted in a severe economic burden to their people in several of the less developed countries of the world.

However, it is important to note that in the field of health China has fared better than India. Health indicators show that China has lower mortality rates and a higher life expectancy than India. There is also a better distribution of health services between rural and urban areas, with the poor having easier access to such services in the rural areas. The better provision of health-care in China as compared to India is a consequence of greater spending on health as a percentage of the GNP. Also, government policies were successfully implemented to promote health-care. In particular, the emphasis on community participation in raising the level of health-care proved to be beneficial in rural communities.

With regard to education, however, both countries have inequalities of access to education which are caused by the large income inequalities among the well-off, the not-so-well-off, and those residing in rural as compared to urban areas.

In conclusion, the success or otherwise of the development path followed depends not only on the strategy of development but also on the policies that have to be implemented to bring this about. However, policies are not made in a vacuum; these are devised within a given political milieu, and it is quite conceivable that well-thought out policies may suffer from bad implementation, negating the development process. Not only does politics contribute to the success or otherwise of such policies, it also plays a part in the choice of such policies. Thus, the political aspect may not be ignored when considering policy formulation and implementation. It assumes even greater relevance as there are forces emerging in both the countries which are threatening political stability.

The book has much to recommend it. Concisely written, it presents massive statistical and other information, as well as an interpretation of the development experience of two major countries, China and India, both of which are aspiring to become the future Koreas and Japans of Asia. The volume is also sufficiently detailed in its reasoning and presentation of arguments with respect to its central thesis—i.e., why both countries followed, whether deliberately or otherwise, a development strategy that caused uneven development. However, a number of other

issues raised here require more systematic research. For example, one area addressed, though not explicitly, is the issue of population. Both countries' population policies have been successful in reducing the rate of growth of population. A consequence of this is that there is less pressure on educational and health facilities.

One final observation. The price of the book at UK £ 47.50 converts to approximately Pakistan Rs 2500.00 at the current rate of exchange—well beyond the average purchasing power of an academic. Perhaps the publishers should consider reducing the prices, if they wish to increase sales in Third World countries. This would also have an increasingly salutary and positive effect on the dissemination of information.

Mir Annice Mahmood

Pakistan Institute of
Development Economics,
Islamabad.