Book Reviews


In recent years the comparison of China and India has become more popular. 2010 alone saw at least three important publications on the matter. Barry Eichengreen, Poonam Gupta, Rajiv Kumar will see the publication of their book Emerging Giants: China and India in the World Economy. Yanrui Wu's Understanding Economic Growth in China and India: A Comparative Study of Selected Issues is also expected. Not to mention Ashok Kundra's India-China: A Comparative Analysis of FDI Policy and Performance. In the same year (2009) that Chinese and Indian Business. Historical Antecedents came out, at least four other, comparable titles saw the light of day: China and India in the Age of Globalization by Shalendra D. Sharma, Crouching Dragon, Hidden Tiger: Can China and India Dominate the West? by Prem Shankar Jha, Billions of Entrepreneurs: How China and India Are Reshaping Their Futures – and Yours by Tarun Khanna, and finally Peter Engardio's Chindia: How China and India Are Revolutionizing Global Business. Obviously not all books cater to a similar audience; Tarun Khanna's work clearly targets a much wider audience and is more of a non-fiction nature than, for instance, the volume that this review wishes to draw our attention to.

The reason for such an avalanche of books dealing with China-India comparisons, seems simple: the two so-called emerging ‘Asian giants’ are increasingly becoming countries to be reckoned with, not only economical but also political. Yet, as Kudaisya & Chin-keong also argue, few of the books published on the topic have offered a serious analysis. “Much of the focus of such works has been on economic performance, development strategies and the comparative advantage of the two nations.” (p. 1) Yet, as they continue to argue, “the comparative study of business as an agent of change in the two societies still remains something of a blind-spot.” (ibid.)
Reason enough so it seems to collect a number of essays in one volume to fill the historical hole left by others. A common concern among all essays in the volume in question is the interface between political systems and commercial propensities of mercantile groups. This then leads to six essays, three about China and the other three about India. Sherman Cochrane zooms in on the Chinese and overseas Chinese business history, and brings three challenges in that regard to the table. In the next essay David Faure brings the reader an institutional view of Chinese business. Won Siu-lun, finally, looks at the rise of Hong Kong as a network society. What the three essays on China share in particular is an interest in networks and networking in a historical context and through them understanding the rise of China (and Hong Kong) as an economic power.

From these essays we move on to India, where the central theme of the essays does not so much seem to be networks and networking but much more the concept of caste and/or community ties and the way they help develop, sustain or even hinder (further) economic development. Kudaisya makes an important analysis of the different economic strategies of the north Indian Marwari caste and the South Indian Chettiars. Dwijendra Tripathi, on the other hand, looks at technological innovation and education in relation to Indian industries. Finally, Adity Mukherjee zooms in on the linkage between Indian businesses, the state, civil society and the implications for global participation.

Each of the essays in this volume make a worthwhile contribution to ongoing debates about issues ranging from the importance and function of networks in encouraging and maintaining economic growth, the influence of local actors/communities in economic success (whether local or global), and historical dimensions and origins of economic development. And this is also how these essays should be read. The title of the volume, in this sense, covers neatly what is on offer: Chinese and Indian Business, Historical Antecedents. Yet at the same time, one would expect more. At least one would expect a more interesting and stronger analysis of the reason to bring China and India together in one volume. Is it really enough to say that both have recently received a lot of attention as growing economic/political superpowers? Is that what makes them interesting relative to each other? Because then one would also expect that this may lead to an introductory or concluding chapter where this is highlighted.

And this brings us back to the introduction of this review. Recently a whole range of books have come out that pretend to offer a comparison of