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Joseph Y. S. Cheng (ed.), *Guangdong : Preparing for the WTO Challenge*

Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press, 2003, 380 p.

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NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Jonathan Hall

- ¹ The economic development of south China was an unforeseen phenomenon. In a very short time, Guangdong took “one step ahead”¹, putting itself in a leading role over the rest of the country. Its geographical and cultural proximity to Hong Kong, and its economic links with the former territory, have made it a favourite place for researchers², while Western scholars have also made their contribution to the growing number of studies³. This book edited by Joseph Y. S. Cheng (City University of Hong Kong) is another addition to the long list. It is particularly interesting for its precise information on unknown aspects of the way the Chinese state operates. Good examples of this are provided by the remarkable contribution from Linda Chelan Li on the botched reform of the state budgets, by another excellent article from Jessica Chi-mei Li on the fight against corruption, and likewise by the contribution on the changes in the Chinese university system from Joshua Ka-ho Mok, who is a leading specialist in the area. The work is a rich source of economic information and references to policies adopted by the authorities, and this is its strongest point.
- ² Strangely enough, the articles on Guangdong’s economic development and integration into the global economy are less convincing, although this is a major theme running through the work. In many respects, they appear little more than catalogues of policies and administrative measures adopted as a result of China’s joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Yet they do provide a precise account of the state and Party directives, laws, and regulations, even if sometimes they appear to be a too faithful reflection of the analyses put out by the Guangdong authorities themselves (for

instance, on reforms in the banking system, and industrial policy). This makes the work a good introductory text for an analysis of the economy and public institutions of southern China. The same applies to the announced reforms in social security, and the rules governing pensions and unemployment. In addition, I should mention the well-documented article on working conditions and provisions for handling disputes between workers and employers.

- 3 The political stakes raised by these articles hardly seem to concern the writers, who remain (prudently ?) quiet on such matters. The only article which does bring them up deals with the minor issue of reform in the granting of administrative authorisations. Far better insights into this topic are to be found in the two excellent issues of *Perspectives chinoises* on the WTO⁴. This volume likewise has nothing on the effects of growing consumption, urbanisation, technological development, or the creation of new enterprises.
- 4 Despite a good introduction by Joseph Cheng, the work lacks any reflection on the driving forces behind current economic development, and in particular on the specific role played by Guangdong in relation to the rest of China. Are the stakes involved in China's joining the WTO—even in strictly economic terms—any different in Guangzhou and its surrounding area, as compared with, say, Zhejiang, Shandong or Dongbei (China's north-east)? The reader can find no answers to such questions, and would probably tend to conclude that in the end there is nothing special about Guangdong, which is contrary to both the volume's title and the real situation.
- 5 Graham Johnson's article is the only one that seeks to grasp the specific situation of Guangdong, in its social and historical dimensions. He puts forward the idea that Guangdong has been able to profit from its marginal position in the Chinese political and economic system. Not having heavy industry and being an impoverished area and source of emigration were factors which became the basis of its future development when it was granted exceptional political and administrative status in the 1980s.
- 6 Finally, in this volume there are very few references to the debate that was already well under way in 1999, especially between Chinese officials, over the thorough-going changes to the industrial and economic structure of the large enterprises which were then, and still are, the power base of provincial government.

NOTES

1. Ezra Vogel, *One Step Ahead : Guangdong Under Reform*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1989.
2. Sung Yung-wing, Liu Pak-wai, Richard Y.C. Wong, and Lau Pui-king, *The Fifth Dragon : The Emergence of the Pearl River Delta*, Singapore, Addison Wesley, 1995 ; Stewart MacPherson and Joseph Y.S. Cheng (eds.), *Economic and Social Development in Southern China*, Cheltenham (UK), Edward Elgar, 1996 ; Yeung Yue-man and David K.Y. Chu, *Guangdong : Survey of a Province Undergoing Rapid Change*, Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press, 1998 ; Joseph Y.S. Cheng (ed.), *Guangdong in the Twenty-First Century* :

Stagnation or Second Take-off?, Hong Kong, City University of Hong Kong, 2000 ; Yeung Yu-man, Jianfa Shen, and Li Zhang, *Hong Kong and the Western Pearl River Delta : Co-operative Development from a Cross-Boundary Perspective*, Hong Kong, The Chinese University Press, 2004.

3. Leo Douw and Peter Post (eds.), *South China : State, Culture, and Social Change*, Amsterdam, KNAVW, 1996 ; Thierry Sanjuan, *A l'Ombre de Hong Kong : le Delta de la Rivière des Perles*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999 ; Rigas Arvanitis, Pierre Miège, Zhao Wei, "A Fresh Look at the Development of a Market Economy in China", *China Perspectives*, No. 48, July-August 2003, pp 50-62.

4. *China Perspectives*, No. 40, March-April 2002, and No. 41, May-June 2002.