

trade-induced impacts on poverty alleviation. Many of the concerns and solutions identified in the thematic chapters in the book are in line with the theoretical chapter, where it is argued that the effects of trade on the poor are often highly country-specific, and that there are several common factors and approaches in cases of successful trade-related poverty reduction.

Strategic liberalization, in the form of careful timing and sequencing with domestic regulatory measures and safeguards, finds favour in many of the chapters. Several channels through which trade influences poverty, such as product prices, wages, employment, etc., have been identified. However, one of the key deficiencies of the book is that micro-level poverty issues get blurred by the macro-level policy issues highlighted in the book, as the balance seems to be more in favour of macro policy issues.

It is suggested that international trade reforms must be led by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, along with larger developing countries. It must however be noted that benefits arising from multilateral liberalization and preferential market access are not always used or often do not help the poor. They tend to be captured by officials through nepotism, and export growth does not realize its potential to become pro-poor inclusive growth. Thus domestic policy reform, as highlighted in the book, is essential to reap the benefits from international trading opportunities. Moreover, the poverty reduction objective should be mainstreamed in developing countries' trade policies, while trade needs to be integrated in national poverty reduction strategies to gain maximum benefits from international trade.

The book is bulky, comprised of 33 chapters running to 795 pages, with the objective of providing the reader with a consistent and varied collection of studies so that the theme is comprehensively covered. However, it is noteworthy that some of the chapters do not exactly address the link between trade and poverty, but discuss other issues in the context of trade such as employment generation, etc. Thus, justice to the book's theme could have been better executed by dropping some chapters. Overall, however, the book is a refreshing move away from tedious ideological debates on free trade and towards informing the reader about how it really works at ground level, with frankness and clarity.

*Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Colombo, Sri Lanka* SAMAN KELEGAMA

**QUESTIONING COLLAPSE: Human Resilience, Ecological Vulnerability, and the Aftermath of Empire.** *Edited by Patricia A. McAnany and Norman Yoffee.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xvi, 374 pp. (Tables, figures, maps, graphs, B&W photos.) US\$90.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-521-51572-6.

It is refreshing to come across a work that articulates in a clear and accessible manner the critiques and concepts that I use regularly in the classroom and in

talking to public audiences about the role that archaeological and historical anthropological perspectives can play for understanding human-environment relationships. *Questioning Collapse* is a collection of essays that were written initially as part of an American Anthropological Association symposium and a subsequent advanced seminar responding to two of Jared Diamond's far-reaching and remarkably popular works, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, and *Collapse* (2-3). The book focuses on three main questions: Why are ancient societies often portrayed as "successes" or "failures" in the popular media? How are people living in the aftermath of empire characterized? How can current environmental issues be linked to what we know about past societies? (5).

The book is organized as a series of case studies in three parts flanked by an introductory chapter explaining the impetus for writing the book (McAnany and Yoffee), and a final chapter interrogating the question of what sustainability might actually be (McNeill). Part 1, "Human Resilience and Ecological Vulnerability," critically examines the reality of past environmental challenges and adaptations in chapters on Rapa Nui (Easter Island; Hunt and Lipo), the Greenland Norse (Berglund), and nineteenth- and twentieth-century China (Pomeranz). Part 2, "Surviving Collapse: Studies of Societal Regeneration," looks at the resilience of indigenous societies undergoing processes of social and environmental change in the American Southwest (Wilcox), the Lowland Maya Area (McAnany and Negrón), and Mesopotamia (Yoffee). Part 3, "Societies in the Aftermath of Empire," looks at the ways current environmental narratives have been shaped by European colonialism and imperialism among the Inca (Cahill), in Rwanda (Taylor), on Hispaniola (Woodson), in Australia (Murray) and in New Guinea (Errington and Gewertz).

What is perhaps most laudable about these essays is that they do not simply critique Diamond's wide-reaching works for overlooking minor details that only specialists would recognize. After all, any work produced in broad strokes is going to oversimplify specific information relating to a particular region or time period. While acknowledging that local narratives matter, and pointing out some of Diamond's more severe errors in factual and conceptual details, the authors repeatedly note the bigger problem with the just-so stories in *Guns, Germs, and Steel* and *Collapse*. Diamond has provided two parallel myths that are convenient for people living in the contemporary neoliberal West. First, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* nominally eschews the racist perspective of white superiority by explaining the success of European expansion in terms of geographic accidents, excusing colonial and imperial powers, "the haves," from any kind of cultural culpability. Next, *Collapse* focuses on cases of indigenous environmental mismanagement, suggesting that the world's "have nots" often wound up that way because they "chose" to overshoot their environmental limitations and their societies fell apart as a result.

Another notable aspect of this work is the prominent place that living indigenous people take in the book. Sidebars mention living Rapa Nui

(40), Maya (166-167), Assyrians and Chaldeans (194-199), and Australian Aboriginals (308-309), reminders that people from all of these societies that apparently “collapsed” still play an active role in the contemporary world. The excellent chapter by Micheal Wilcox is written from the perspective of a living Native American (Yuman/Choctaw) trying to put the apparent disintegration of Pueblo society (and Native American society in general) as outlined by Diamond into perspective. Comparing indigenous management of the landscape that sustained large populations across the region for many generations through sophisticated water management infrastructure with nineteenth- and twentieth-century American mismanagement that resulted in the disappearance of the Gila and Colorado rivers miles from their former outlets, Wilcox notes that, “Failure, apparently, is in the eyes of the beholder” (127).

Any of the chapters from *Questioning Collapse* offer similar useful insights that help provide a critical understanding of how ingrained Western notions of progress, civilization and social complexity frame narratives of the so-called success or failure of societies in light of their relationship to the environment. Ultimately, these case studies, which have a broad temporal and geographical coverage, serve as an absolutely crucial reminder that transformation is likely the one inevitable factor in history. Rather than simply tying social and environmental change to tragic catastrophe and destruction, *Questioning Collapse* provides a set of reminders that these processes, while sometimes accompanied by violent upheaval, usually reflect more of the resilience and adaptability of dynamic human cultures. This perspective is worth remembering as contemporary global society deals with its own environmental challenges.

*Washington and Lee University, Lexington, USA*

JAMES L. FLEXNER

**ECONOMIC OPENNESS AND TERRITORIAL POLITICS IN CHINA.**

*By Yumin Sheng. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xx, 292 pp. (Tables, figures.) US\$85.00, cloth. ISBN 978-0-521-19538-6.*

The question of whether the Chinese Communist Party can maintain its political predominance in the era of market reform has been one of the pertinent themes of debate among students of Chinese politics. While many scholars have invested their energies in evaluating the changing state-society relationship in post-Mao China, the discussion on the ability of the centre to retain its firm grip over local development has been no less animated. Seminal works by political scientists like Huang Yasheng, Yang Dali and David Goodman, among many others, have portrayed the perseverance of the centre in the face of the rise of local players. Economists like Qian Yingyi and Barry Weingast, however, are more inclined to project an inevitable decline of the power of the central government.