

Heterodox Economics Newsletter

GENDER AND CHINESE DEVELOPMENT: TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE SOCIETY, by Lanyan Chen, Routledge, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-415-46723-0; 177 pages.

Reviewed by Sara Hsu, Trinity University

Gender and Chinese Development is a much needed book on the role of women in China's development. Despite the fact that there are thousands of articles and books on China's economic development in general, there is surprisingly scant literature on the changing status of women since reform and opening-up in China. In this, there is the hidden assumption that gender equity is not a major issue in China. But, as Chen points out, the secondary status of women pervades Chinese society in all directions.

The book begins by covering the role of women in rural areas, discussing the separation of women into lower-paid work and social reproduction, while men have increasing income and leadership opportunities. Chen then turns to industrial reforms and the promotion of informal work. Chen discusses the marginalization of women into low-paid forms of informal work and the lack of social protection.

The family planning policy, which has been criticized for its effect of increasing abortion and infanticide of girls, is discussed in the following chapter, with policy recommendations to improve the rights of women in order to reduce sex selection. Part of the issue is the absence of women in decision making, which is addressed in the next chapter. Chen discusses the fact that representation in the political arena has remained relatively low, and when women do become officials, their role is more supportive than substantive. In order to achieve the enforcement of human and economic rights for women, women must be more actively involved in leadership.

Chen's work provides an excellent understanding of many of the gender issues associated with China's economic and political development. The book should be used as a jumping-off point for more detailed analysis on each issue. The impact of China's transition on women and girls has heretofore remained relatively unexplored and deserves much wider initiative.