

PREFACE

Rapid growth in the Chinese economy in the past three decades poses puzzles and challenges to neo-classical economic theory, as policies implemented during the reform process were often unorthodox. Although the Chinese experience has been widely studied, myths and questions about the reforms remain.

To fill the knowledge gap, and to inform a process of learning from China's development successes, IFPRI and DFID commissioned a series of case studies on the policy process of different initiatives, including rural transformation, dual-track price reform, village election, migration policy, and rural industrialization. Five of these papers were prepared for and discussed during the Global Development Network conference in Beijing, January 12–19, 2007; others were prepared and commissioned subsequently, for example in the context of the celebration of China's 30 years of reform in 2008.

This intellectual project was inspired by the essay on China's rural reform by Mr. Du Runsheng, the father of China's rural reform (published by IFPRI in 2006). The present collection of papers extends the analysis of initial rural reforms on which Mr. Du focused. Subsequent reforms emphasized broader issues such as markets and prices, rural/urban migration, taxation, and local governance. These later reforms fundamentally began the transformation of China from a largely agrarian and poor country to a middle-income and industrial country, although China remains at an early stage of industrialization with rampant poverty, particularly in western and central regions.

Uniquely, many of the authors of the case studies were deeply involved in these reforms, either through direct policymaking or through providing analytical and technical support that have led to these policy changes. They provide a first-hand account of the policy processes and demonstrate from their experience ways to promote policy reforms.

With in-depth insight, they highlight *how* the political processes took place, how social and political entrepreneurs shaped the choices and sequences of various reforms, and overcame the rigidities and sometimes erroneous beliefs. This is essential because policy processes are often a *de facto* “black box” to which erroneous beliefs about the policy process are often prescribed as reality.

The narratives by these authors provide important insights for other developing countries in their attempts to design their reform and development agendas. As China is increasingly held up as a model for development, we believe, it is crucial to ensure that its lessons are told, in all its complexities. This volume makes a modest contribution to articulating these lessons.