

insurance-based as general taxation covers some from those aged over forty since 2005. Extending taxation to those above twenty or under forty would be more financially solid (p. 66). Both Korea and Taiwan follow Japan's Asian-suited LTIC (Chapters 5 and 6, respectively) with the state as more than a regulator though faced with less fiscal resources from lower growth and prosperity.

Korea has additional unprecedented political challenges with changeover from Kim Dae-Jong to Rho Moo-Hyun (p. 85). Balanced growth became a priority. The socio-economic divide does not undervalue economic growth, but emphasized social redistribution as economic revitalization. Paradoxically, the series of social policy reforms has strengthened the state's social policy role (p. 86) with a more flexible labour market. Taiwan's constitutional reforms in the 1980s and 1990s with more democratization, is reflected in more active social welfare NGOs (p. 92) due to pull factors (state finance, divided government since 2000) and push factors (movements by labour, farmers, students, women). The political ideology remains unchanged — economic development before social welfare arrangements (p. 101).

Mandatory provident funds in both city-states of Hong Kong (newly-adopted) and Singapore (Chapters 7 and 8, respectively), and also in Malaysia are colonial legacies. They recognize the same constraints of poorer fiscal budgets and not overly burdening employers' share. Filial piety is more emblematic in Hong Kong, without any official retirement age (p. 103) compared to more government-made-and-run Singapore, which is as asset rich, cash poor (p. 134). Recommendations for Singapore to reassess mandatory retirement and de-emphasize age discrimination to accommodate the old must necessarily start with the government. More long-term care support in both physical and monetary ways as in North Asian contexts is however not quite suited to Singapore's pre-occupation with business costs and international competitiveness even as the government calls for a more graceful society with economic maturity. Filial piety is as regulation-induced as it appears more spontaneous in equally cosmopolitan Hong Kong.

Malaysia (Chapter 9) additionally has the urban-rural bias in tackling ageing, but is buttressed by largely Muslim traditional values. The same family networking, not state-ordained care for the ageing holds in Thailand in Chapter 9. It is the second oldest, demographically, after Singapore (p. 161). Chapter 10 concludes and repeats traditional values, such as respect for the old, gratitude or filial piety, but seems remiss with neither a quantitative or qualitative rumination of changing trends by generation, migration, globalization and technology to make more dynamic policy implications. While Japan, Korea and Taiwan may have adapted LTIC, possible predictions for others in East Asia may be worth some editorial scenario-setting. Whereas Western literature on ageing may speak of nanny power or the old empowered by sheer number and accumulated wealth, East Asian ageing seems less celebratory in this volume.

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***Going Local: Decentralization, Democratization, and the Promise of Good Governance.* By Merilee S. Grindle. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. Pp. 228.**

Merilee Grindle is Professor of International Development at the Harvard School of Government and one of the foremost authorities on governance, decentralization, and public sector reform. She has authored and edited works such as *Challenging the State: Crisis and Innovation in Latin America and Africa* and *Getting Good Government: Capacity Building in the Public Sectors of Developing Countries*.

Grindle's research has a strong practical orientation, and focuses on the nuts-and-bolts of implementing sustainable reform in industrializing countries. *Going Local* looks at how decentralization has been implemented in Mexico,

a large, diverse country of some 100 million that was, until recently, synonymous with one-party rule. The book sets out the key institutional and policy changes that set the decentralization drive in motion before analysing what has happened and to what extent outcomes match expected results.

Even before the end of the seven decade reign of the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in 2000, Mexico had begun to devolve a substantial amount of revenue-raising and implementation responsibilities to its thirty states and more than 2,400 municipal governments. In the 1980s, municipal governments were given control over property taxes, and made responsible for providing services such as water, sewage and solid waste management, urban transport, and roads. After 1994, federal government allocations to municipal governments rose from virtually zero to almost 2 per cent of GDP. Political dynamics in the country also changed, as greater civic activism and competition for office permeated to all levels of government. From a virtual PRI monopoly before 1990, opposition parties came to control more than 40 per cent of municipal governments by 2000. As a result, from being of little consequence, holding municipal office became increasingly attractive for local elites.

Going Local looks at how decentralization has affected the quality of governance in a sample of thirty municipalities spread across six states in different parts of the country. In order to do this, Grindle constructs an index to gauge the quality of governance in each municipality. Then, based on theories as to how decentralization is supposed to improve the quality of governance, she relates the scores of each municipality to one of four dynamics. These are: political competition; state entrepreneurship; public sector modernization; and civil society activism.

With regard to the first point, Grindle argues that decentralization did increase the opportunities for new groups to attain power. However, she goes on to demonstrate that this did not always translate into better governance. This is because greater competition often resulted in stalemates between interest groups, impeding progress and results. Furthermore, the long history of centralization

also meant that institutions at the local level were under-developed. Thus, while power was devolved and the possibilities for change increased, institutional capacity had yet to sufficiently develop to cope with this.

Grindle then analyses the role of state entrepreneurship, or rather, leadership. She argues that it was not intra-party competition that led to changes. Rather, building on the previous point, new groups with different ideas had an opportunity to be elected for the first time. These groups often moved between parties, choosing those that offered them the best possibilities to attain office. In addition, the evidence provides interesting nuances. First, rather than being able to catalyze local-level resources, a crucial aspect of leadership depended on the ability of officials to mobilize resources from other levels of government. Second, while technocratic approaches were valued — so too were more traditional concepts of approachability and personal generosity to constituents. Thus, officials had to meet both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ expectations of leaders.

Insofar as public modernization is concerned, Grindle argues that this was the most frequent type of change that elected officials sought to introduce. Initiatives ran the gamut of organizational strengthening, computerizing records and services, and changing incentives for municipal employees. These changes, too, were dependent on committed leadership for implementation — thus, they were tools used by change-oriented officials, rather than a stand-alone recipe for change. But, weak local-level institutions meant that while change was easy to implement, it was hard to sustain initiatives across administrations.

Perhaps the book’s most interesting and unexpected findings relate to civil society activism. Grindle argues that while there were many instances of civil activism, they were almost overwhelmingly geared to extracting resources for new services or facilities. Issues of accountability, transparency, and professionalism received scant attention — thus contradicting conventional wisdom as to the influence that greater civic

participation has for these aspects of governance. In addition, those municipalities that were better governed did not necessarily have greater or lesser levels of citizen activism. Rather, those better-performing municipalities had civic leaders who were more persistent and effective at using their personal connections to obtain results.

Despite its exclusive focus on Mexico, Grindle's emphasis on policies and implementation issues makes the book of relevance to countries in Southeast Asia. In addition, two characteristics of the Mexican experience make the lessons learned particularly poignant. The first is Mexico's move away from one-party rule and significantly increased opportunities for democratization — which certainly has resonance for this region. The second is the nature of the decentralization process itself, which has entailed real and substantial shifts to the local or municipal level, as opposed to the state level. This has direct implications for countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand that are wrestling with the challenges of this type of decentralization. In addition, the Mexican case shows that the lowest level of government is able to provide services such as water and sanitation, transport, and infrastructure maintenance. This is a lesson well-served for Malaysia, a country notorious for overt and covert centralization, as well as a marked reluctance to restore local government elections.

There are several areas where one can take issue with the book. The first is the construction of the index itself. It uses a range of indicators to gauge municipal governments according to their perceived efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, development orientation, and commitment to

enact change. However, bonus points for enacting change are given a disproportionate amount of weight, which undermines Grindle's assertion that history and institutions "matter". In addition, the indicators do not map well on to the four dynamics that she explores, making it hard to relate a given municipality's score to performance in any one area. That said, applied research entails getting one's hands dirty, and the luxury of theoretical abstractions are denied committed researchers of this ilk. In reality, the real strength of this book lies in its analysis of the decentralization process itself, rather than in rating one municipality above another.

Second, the book would have been strengthened by making explicit comparisons between Mexican and countries in Latin America or beyond. This is a crucial consideration, as it would have enabled the specificities of the Mexican case to be highlighted. For example, local government leaders in Mexico are only allowed to stand for one three-year term, placing a premium on quick, immediate results, but also dramatically reducing the possibilities of sustainability. Grindle also places a great deal of emphasis on the weakness of local institutions and how they undercut the possibilities of lasting reform. It would have been very helpful if this issue could have been 'unpacked' more, in order to tease out those institutional weaknesses that are specific to Mexico, and those likely to be encountered by all countries seeking to decentralize.

However, these quibbles are minor. *Going Local* is applied research at its best.

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