



Global Production Networks and Rural Development: Southeast Asia as a Fruit Supplier to China. *Bill Pritchard (ed).* Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, USA, 2021, pp. vii + 184. ISBN 978-1-800-88387-1 (hbk), 978-1-800-88388-8 (ebk).

In recent decades, the structure of food consumption in China has changed dramatically with China becoming increasingly centred in global agri-food systems. Notably, Southeast Asia plays a key role in the export of fruit. As a Chinese citizen, I enjoy tasting a variety of fresh tropical fruits from Southeast Asia, such as dragon fruit from Vietnam and durian from Thailand. These fruits were difficult to find when I was a child in the 1990s and early 2000s. Nowadays, it is easy to buy them in a fruit shop or online. More surprisingly, there are a growing number of fruit shops in cities in China, many of which are small-scale and expanding in urban residential quarters. As a researcher focusing on agricultural and rural development, I am very concerned about how these tropical fruits are produced and organized in Southeast Asia and then exported to China. I am also concerned with how fruit production and trade are (re)shaping rural spaces in both China and Southeast Asia. These topics have been explored in detail in this timely and valuable book entitled *Global Production Networks and Rural Development*.

Comprising nine chapters in total, the introductory chapter cogently argues that the topic of fresh fruit exports from mainland Southeast Asia to China is under-researched. It also points out the various challenges in approaching this issue—one major challenge concerns the availability, quality and traceability of data in the fruit trade. Indeed, the focus of this book is on fruit export via informal or local channels that are complex and not fully covered by official data. ‘Global Production Networks’ is a key phrase in the title of the book and is adopted as a framework to highlight value creation through networks of connection and coordination of economic actors, which guides subsequent chapters. More interestingly, the introductory chapter explores regional development implications from integrated and comparative perspectives. It discusses concordance and differentiation not only between countries like China, Europe and North America that demand fruit (e.g., regarding quality control and the distribution and marketing of fruits) but also between Southeast Asian countries that supply fruit.

The comparisons in the book are based on detailed country-specific analyses from Chapter 2 to Chapter 8. These chapters cover five major tropical fruits in four mainland Southeast Asian countries. Specifically, they focus on watermelon production in Laos (Chapter 2), mango and watermelon exports from Myanmar (Chapter 3–4), durian and longan exports from Thailand (Chapter 5–6), and watermelon and dragon fruit exports from Vietnam (Chapter 7–8). Most of the fruits discussed are not new products in the countries involved, such as durian in Thailand and watermelon in Vietnam. These countries have a long history of producing these fruits for the domestic markets and exporting them to China. However, with the increasing demand for fruit in China, the size of fruit production and trade is dramatically expanding. Two key characteristics can be synthesized. Firstly, there are diverse business models of fruit investment in different Southeast Asian countries, such as Chinese-led direct investment in production in Laos and Myanmar or investment in packing houses in Thailand and Vietnam. Nevertheless, fruit exports from Southeast Asia to China are becoming more convenient, and the role of the Chinese entrepreneur in production networks is expanding. Key features of climatic suitability, geographical proximity, accessibility, informality and mobility are interwoven, contributing to the efficiency of the fruit trade. Secondly, the border or borderland is becoming a frontier for fruit trade. Due to cross-border fruit trade, the border is creating new patterns of spatial interactions, such as encouraging cross-border migration (from Cambodia to Thailand) among people working

to export longan to China. However, many chapters show concerns about the 'shadow' of export-oriented development and transformation in the fruit trade. Two points are highlighted: the technological upgrade in production, and the value capture of trade for Southeast Asian countries given the contemporary fruit business models.

As this book excessively emphasizes Southeast Asian countries as suppliers, Chapter 9 provides fresh perspective as it examines the transformation in China, focusing instead on the demand for fruit. Although one chapter cannot adequately elucidate what has happened and is happening with fruit production and consumption in China, this chapter highlights two crucial points. The first is the rapid development of e-commerce, known as 'New Retail'. The second concerns the consumption habits and preferences of different generations. This raises the following question: what will happen to fruit production and trade in Southeast Asia when the next 'generation' encounters 'e-commerce' in China in the future? The economic linkages could be a topic for future research.

As demonstrated, this book contributes to the existing knowledge gap on fruit trade in mainland Southeast Asia. However, it still leaves many questions that require further exploration. Firstly, when it comes to understanding rural development in Southeast Asia as a result of booms in the fruit trade, although some chapters portray the interactions between fruit investment and the communities involved, more attention should be given to the changing role of smallholders in production networks, as well as the changing agrarian livelihoods in Southeast Asia.

Secondly, the case studies in the book focus only on a certain type of fruit in a given country. Although Chapter 1 attempts to synthesize beyond these country-based analyses, the syntheses and comparisons at the regional level are still insufficient. For example, in the case of watermelon trade in both Vietnam and Myanmar, although brokers are found to play an important role, the business models, developmental trajectories, and future directions of fruit trade in each of these two countries are divergent. More information is needed to capture the temporal and spatial interactions, such as data regarding production costs and the pathways for cross-border trade.

Thirdly, the knowledge of dynamic fruit production and consumption in China remains sparse and should be taken into consideration. For instance, many chapters address the potential risks in fruit production networks from the perspective of demand—such as their dependence on single export destinations and strict quality controls. Furthermore, many fruits (like watermelons and dragon fruits) are cultivated inside China on the border between Southeast Asian countries. Where and how various fruits are produced should also be considered in answering the question: 'who will feed China?' Also, unexpected and uncertain situations should be reconsidered, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the concomitant disruptions in cross-border trade.

In sum, this book provides thought-provoking insights and important contributions to the ongoing discussion of booms in the fruit trade in contemporary Southeast Asia. Most of the chapters are based on long-term observations and fieldwork. The book is a valuable and recommended resource for readers interested in global production networks, crop booms, rural development and border economies in East and Southeast Asia.

Xiaobo Hua 

College of Humanities and Development Studies
China Agricultural University
huaxb@cau.edu.cn

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