

November 1998

## Book Review: Ecological Policy and Politics in Developing Countries by Day Desi

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### Recommended Citation

Henderson, Conway (1998) "Book Review: Ecological Policy and Politics in Developing Countries by Day Desi," *Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 26 : No. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops/vol26/iss1/5>

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Ecological Policy and Politics in Developing Countries*. Day Desai, editor. (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998. Pp. 327)

Uday Desai has assembled nine country studies on environmental problems in rapidly developing countries. These countries, in the order of their appearance, are China, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, India, Mexico, Venezuela, Nigeria, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia treated together. Established country-specialists are asked by Desai to address a common set of broad questions: what are the environmental problems in each country, what is the respective government's policy, and how effective is the policy? This volume comes from the SUNY series in International Environmental Policy and Theory and is to be followed by another edited volume dealing with countries already successfully industrialized.

Although each article has its interesting particulars, such as China's population burden in the Lester Ross article, Indian noise pollution in the R.K. Saprú article, or the critical role of forests in Thailand in the contribution of Jonathan Rigg and Philip Stott, a picture of the environmental situation in the developing context does easily emerge. The central theme is that economic growth is a tenacious priority that dominates environmental priorities. However, the authors often recognize that international pressure and domestic NGOs call for environmental reform. Unfortunately, the poverty of most of the countries and the absence of strong, mature democratic frameworks impede these pressures from successfully challenging economic priorities.

All the contributors to the volume do identify at least some positive environmental programs in each country. These programs, unfortunately, are not as effective as they could be due to such matters as a lack of technical expertise, monitoring systems, and corrupt practices that avert environmental rules. Moreover, the progress in any of the countries, with the possible exceptions of China and India, does

not include using market forces, as is done in the West, to help protect the environment. The "greening" of trade rules and making the "polluter pay" are practices in their infancy. Despite strong contributions by skilled writers who offer even quality among the articles, an unusual outcome in an edited volume, the best feature of *Ecological Policy and Politics in Developing Countries* is the thinking of Uday Desai in his introduction and conclusion. To paraphrase an environmental catch-phrase, Desai's contributors write locally while he thinks globally. The most interesting points in the volume involve his review of the worldwide environmental movement, his awareness of the ecological interdependence of the world concerning such matters as the ozone layer and global warming, his insight that the world's wealth must be more equitable if we wish for the poorer countries vigorously to reform their country environments, and his awareness that environmental improvement will depend in part on the success of the democratic revolution in the world, so that people suffering from environmental damage can freely demand reform.

Clear writing, consistent quality among the articles, a sprinkling of maps, tables, and graphs, and references for each chapter will allow this edited book to assist not only the environmental specialist but to be useful for undergraduate reading. Nevertheless, one wonders if Desai would have offered more had he simply written a book elaborating his insights, especially since so many developing environmental problems are repetitive from country to country.

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