New Book: Poverty and Development in China: Alternative Approaches to Poverty Assessment
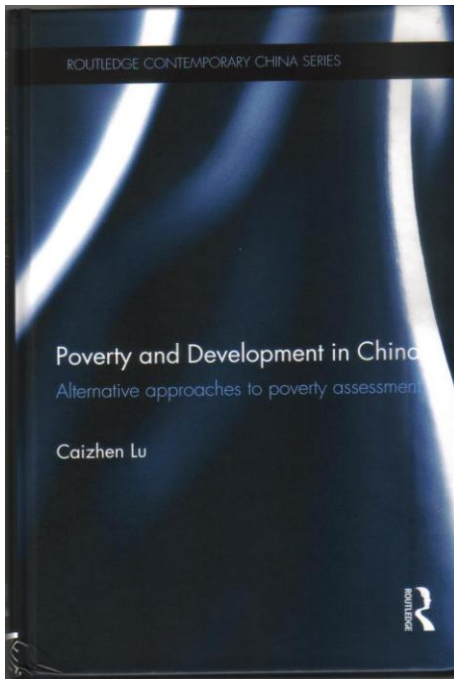
By **Caizhen Lu**

With Foreword by **Robert Chambers** and Preface by **Ashwani Saith**

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"For this book makes major original contributions to poverty research and to understanding how we understand and identify poverty. It gives rich and credible insights into life, conditions and poverty in rural China. Beyond that, it raises sharp questions with universal significance about methodology and policy. It illuminates the strengths and weaknesses of alternative methodologies. And it shows how our methods determine what we learn, who we consider to be poor and what we decide should be done. It confronts all of us who are concerned with poverty research and policy with evidence that demands deep and critical reflection.

For it should be on every reading list for poverty studies in all countries, North and South, and should be considered by policy-makers in China and elsewhere. It is rare that we are presented with such a feast of insight and such a frontal challenge."

–**Robert Chambers,** Professor, the Institute of Development Studies, UK

Main Contents
1. Introduction
2. Poverty in China: Macro Perspective
3. Economy, Society and Deprivation in Yunnan
4. The Official Poverty Identification Method: 'You Are the Poor'
5. Monetary Poverty Approach: 'They Are the Poor'
6. Participatory Poverty Assessment: 'We Are the Poor'
7. The Multidimensional Poverty Indicators: 'Who Are the Poor'
8. Conclusions and the Policy Implications of Choice of Approach from the Multiple Identifications

China has made huge economic strides in recent decades but poverty is still a major issue on the agenda for rural China. *Poverty and Development in China* analyses how poverty is recognized and measured and how people in poverty are identified, literally asking who is poor in China? Caizhen Lu's research compares four approaches to poverty assessment: China's official poverty identification method; the participatory approach to poverty assessment; the monetary approach; and use of multidimensional poverty indicators. Each of these is applied to the same population of households to identify the poor in rural Wuding County, Yunnan Province.

The analysis shows that there is in fact very little overlap of households identified as poor by the various means, and that choice of approach does matter in the outcome of who is identified as poor. This has implications at the theoretical, methodological and policy levels. Lu discusses these in detail, concluding that, at present, there is a need to shift away from poverty-reduction strategies that narrowly emphasize income-generation activities, as these are often short-term efforts. Instead, the focus should move towards a broader combination of short-term and long-term strategies to break poverty's inter-linked structural causes.

Caizhen Lu is a Research Associate in Development Studies at Center for Mountain Ecosystem Studies, the Kunming Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China; and the World Agroforestry Center, China and East Asia Node. Her research interests focus on poverty studies, gender, social equity, natural resources management and vulnerability and adaptation to climate change with both quantitative and qualitative approaches.