

ios: 1) China “goes green;” 2) nothing fundamental changes, and environmental problems remain a drag on the economy, or 3) there is “environmental meltdown.”

Altogether this is a very good, balanced review of China’s environmental problems. It displays advances in knowledge since publication of Ross’s pioneering *Environmental Policy in China*,<sup>4</sup> although Economy’s study lacks the analytical framework of this work. It treats many of the same themes in *Managing the Chinese Environment*,<sup>5</sup> but in a more integrated fashion. By emphasizing the enormity of China’s environmental challenge, Economy adds to the debate among scholars and statesmen as to what actions by developed countries can mitigate China’s environmental degradation and correspondingly help forestall global environmental crises.

## References

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*Hey, Mr. Tally Man, tally me banana...*

Taylor, J. Gary, and Patricia J. Scharlin. 2004. *Smart Alliance—How a Global Corporation and Environmental Activists Transformed a Tarnished Brand*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

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Who can forget the Chiquita Banana Lady? The image of the gaily decked-out Central American woman has been around since the 1930s (as the symbol of United Fruit), making Chiquita one of the best-known and most-recognized product brands in the United States for decades. Today, goes the conventional wisdom, the most important thing a company owns is its brand. Where bananas are concerned, that makes a great deal of sense. After all, aside from the sticker, who can tell two brands apart?

Chiquita, though, has been badly bruised by its share of public relations problems. For much of the 20th century, United Fruit (UF) was the literal landlord of many of the infamous “banana republics.” In the early 1950s, the populist Guatemalan government of Jacobo Arbenz tried to tax and confiscate UF

4. Ross 1988

5. Edmonds 2000.

lands that had been left uncultivated so as to keep them out of the hands of other banana growers. The close ties between United Fruit and the Eisenhower Administration were a major element in the American-engineered coup against Arbenz in 1954 (which became the model for the debacle in early 1961 at the Bay of Pigs).

During the following three decades, UF changed owners and names, becoming United Brands and, eventually Chiquita Brands International. In the early 1990s, anticipating a windfall market in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, and hoping to make greater inroads into the EU, the company began to buy up land in Central and South America and to invest in new banana processing and transportation facilities. Alas! The so-called Banana War followed and Chiquita Banana was not able to flood the European market with its cheaper fruit. Chiquita went bankrupt, but not before using its financial muscle to get the Clinton Administration to bring a trade complaint against the EU's policy of favoring small banana farmers in its former colonies (the "ACP countries") and imposing tariffs on "dollar" bananas.

That story is much more complicated, of course, but you would not get a good sense of what really happened from reading this book. Gary Taylor and Patricia Scharlin, in a rather circuitous and not always transparent fashion, try to tell the "long" story of Chiquita, and how it clawed its way back from the financial abyss through certification of its banana supply chains, in collaboration with the Rainforest Alliance's Better Banana Program. According to their story, the cause of Chiquita's downfall was unfair trade barriers and anti-Americanism in Europe, rather than poor planning, lousy market research and reckless investment on the part of the company. But the result, claim the authors—who run an environmental consulting firm and seem rather favorably disposed toward Chiquita—was to purge the company of its evil history and damaging practices, and to demonstrate the efficacy of private certification of corporate behavior.

Only in the last chapter do Taylor and Scharlin raise any doubts about relying on the "free" market to provide social goods when they write (p. 232):

From a slightly different viewpoint, one could observe that the corporate responsibility movement is a tragic sign of societal decline. Have we reached such a low ethical point that corporations need to be rewarded for simply doing what we expect every citizen to do: behave honorably to our fellow humans and respect the ecosystems on which life depends?

Here, whether they realize it or not, the authors hit on a key matter: Can well-behaved corporations substitute for a society's commitment to the rights and conditions inscribed in law, regulatory regimes, and international conventions? Can private certification, relying on the raised consciousness of discerning consumers and good will of plantation managers, soften the hard edges of global capitalism and competition for the shopper's dollar or euro?

The story of Chiquita's virtuous "comeback"—and some might argue that this is no more than canny marketing strategy—does not really answer these questions. Taylor and Scharlin claim that the company's private push for higher standards in the banana business has brought along its competitors, who have little choice but to remain in consumers' good graces if they are to stay in business. What the authors don't acknowledge is that, if and when times get tough—as they are bound to do in an agriculture-based industry subject to the business cycle—corporate social responsibility will appear to be a costly frill when measured against tight profit margins.

*Smart Alliance* is best read as a poorly-written and confusingly argued public relations brief (whether that was intended or not), and not as a thoughtful and interesting case study that might be of interest to students.

Unless, of course, you have a thing for Banana Ladies.