

The Study of Agricultural Geography: A Scholarly Guide and Bibliography

Author: Thomas A. Rumney
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Reviewed by: Michael Troughton, Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario, London Ontario, Canada.

This is a monumental work, but it is also one of the most difficult books that I have ever tried to review. Professor Thomas Rumney has produced the largest academic bibliography of any specific, specialized area of Geography that I have encountered; it claims to contain over 12,000 references to works in agricultural geography, which are organized by continent, country and topic area. As someone who has called himself an agricultural geographer for over 40 years, I can only be impressed by its scale and the dedication involved in producing this work. I know how useful it would have been to have had it available for reference during my own career, and I can only envy my younger colleagues with access to it.

However, as I tried to fashion a scholarly review, I have to say that I found some problems with the work. The first problem was content. This may sound odd in the face of 12,000 entries, but with a very few exceptions, there are virtually no references post 2000, and for many countries and topics the latest entries were from the mid-1990s, even in areas where one is aware of more recent published work. It may be, of course, that the time taken to publish this book is the reason for the 'early' cut-off, but it is a pity, because the last 5 years have seen a flood of books, monographs and journal articles, not least here in Canada. Perhaps, now that the 20th Century has been well covered, someone can begin to amass and, hopefully, publish a 21st Century edition.

The second problem, and something that I found disconcerting, was the order of referencing. While the Bibliography is indeed divided into innumerable sections, through which, with the help of the Table of Contents, one can explore the listings for particular themes, nevertheless, within each section the authors are listed chronologically rather than alphabetically. Professor Rumney suggests that a chronological listing serves to "provide the reader with a picture of the development and directions of geographical research on agricultural geography from its academic beginnings to the present" (xxvi). As one familiar with putting together alphabetical lists of references, whether for a book or article, I found perusing the longer sections, in particular, a problem; for example a key section "General Texts, Articles and Theses" within "Part 1-General and Theoretical Works" runs to 380 entries over 25 pages; most of us I believe, would find it easier to assess this theme via an alphabetical listing.

This brings me to my third major problem. The subtitle states "A Scholarly Guide and Bibliography". There is no doubt about the Bibliography, but I miss the "Scholarly Guide". Although there is a detailed Table of Contents which breaks down the field geographically, and an absolutely necessary Author/Editor Index,

the guiding text is limited to a two page Preface. It is this lack of interpretation that makes this so difficult a book to evaluate. Its author has organized 12,000 references in a gazetteer-like fashion, but we lack any opinion as to either their overall or relative worth.

It is easy to be picky, and I will not dwell on some mistakes in the spelling of authors, which affects the Index, but I do sense that the enormity of the task meant that cross-referencing has remained incomplete. One inevitably searches for one's own publications, and I was reasonably satisfied by the inclusion of my work up to 1999, so that I may assume the same for others, at least those in North America. The Bibliography is very comprehensive for the USA and Canada (almost one third of all entries) and for the UK and France, and I was impressed by the number of entries for both India and China. In perusing some countries in other regions that I know something of, for example Denmark, Finland and The Netherlands in Western Europe, I could detect a number of significant omissions, but on the other hand, for others in Eastern Europe (e.g. Hungary and Poland), the listings seemed more complete.

The Bibliography lacks, by design, virtually all government publications, both national and international. One might wish for a parallel compilation of key reports, etc. from the FAO, EU and other international agencies with agricultural responsibilities, as well as from national agencies, such as the USDA. This would be another huge task, but would add important dimensions in areas such as the political economy of agriculture and the frameworks for global and national comparisons.

In conclusion, I can only repeat that this is, undoubtedly a monumental production, which should be of use to practicing agricultural geographers, especially those wishing to follow particular themes, and assess academic contributions over time. On the other hand, it is a starting place rather than a completed work. Professor Rumney has gathered a wealth of 'data sources' into an organized form, it is up to others to build on it and demonstrate the work's utility.