



Editorial: Asia's Service Industries in a Global Context

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As economies mature, the service sector plays an ever more important role. The annual Euro-Asia Research Seminar, held under the auspices of several major French universities and with participants from a number of countries, has been focused on changes in management necessitated by foreign investment in Asian economies. It was apposite, therefore, that the Eighth Seminar, held in Aix-en-Provence in May 2002, should have as its theme the growth of Asian service industries within a global comparative perspective. Accordingly, it seemed timely to devote this issue of the journal to services. However, given space limitations, it has only been possible to include five of the conference contributions, with focus on the two most populous countries of the region, China and India, both undergoing economic transition, in addition to Japan, currently in the midst of industrial restructuring, but undoubtedly still the greatest economy in Asia.

The papers included require no introduction, since they speak for themselves, but it is in order to place their significance within a global perspective. We must, for example, be wary of ethnocentrism and not assume that standards enforced by the professions in the West are suitable for and easily transplanted to Asian countries. Even though developing countries like China need to develop a Western-style legal infrastructure to implement the rules of the game in commercial transactions, traditional social values and structures are still potent, as in Japan, and such systems of supervision adopted are likely to become hybrids rather than exact replicas of foreign practice. The distribution sector is again a case in point. Moreover, irregularities in auditing and corporate governance in American companies are clear reminders of deficiencies in the implementation of professional standards in a Western setting.

In addition, in a wider context, the evolution of the service sector both reinforces and reflects the social changes in motion in Asian countries. It has been argued that one of the prerequisites for the emergence of representative government is growth in civil society, the main feature of which is pluralism or the presence of economic and social powers independent of government. As societies and economies become more complex, free associations under private



or professional auspices increasingly become actors in the realm of national policy. Thus, from both economic and political perspectives, the development of an effective service sector becomes a priority. It is to a number of such concerns that the articles in this issue are addressed.

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