



Editorial

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Critical Perspectives on Asian Business and Management

In this special issue, *Asian Business and Management* brings together a collection of papers that, conceptually and empirically, critically engage with the field of business and management in terms of theoretical debates, research paradigms or through the use of critical epistemologies. The special issue supports the work of the journal in encouraging an awareness of social issues in the study of business and management and in drawing attention to the inter-relationships between business and the wider societal context.

The paper by Becker-Ritterspach enters the theoretical debates on the transfer of organizational forms and practices across institutional contexts. Drawing on an emerging body of research rooted in the Varieties of Capitalism literature, the paper examines the case of a German manufacturing organization in India. It analyses how the transfer and organizational hybridization of work practices at the micro-level can be systematically related to different institutional patterns at home and in the host countries. Conceptually, the paper argues for the contribution of Varieties of Capitalism analysis in helping to explain how and why processes of transfer and their outcomes may take the forms that they do.

Loveridge further emphasizes the embeddedness of the multinational in wider societal contexts, focusing specifically on the interfaces of the multinational and its host institutions. The paper examines the multilayered nature of the socioeconomic interfaces between the social systems that comprise the MNE and those of the political economy of the host. The interaction of expatriate managers and their peers in host agencies is examined as transactions along socially and politically segmented networks in which social boundaries may include some and exclude others. Critiquing rational models of analysis of informal structures, the paper seeks to look at the embeddedness of these structures in a wider context that helps to inform understanding of the day-to-day social processes surrounding the construction of these interfaces.

Mir and Mir critically reflect on the recipes for economic development within a nation and argue for contextual sensitivity rather than a 'one way fits all' recipe in the name of 'compliance with globalization'. Using the case of



India, they examine the role of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry in the growth of the economy and structural impediments to the role of ICT as 'catalysis' for growth. They note that ICT cannot be used to transform existing social inequalities and imbalances; ICTs can be vehicles of service delivery, but not agents of social change themselves. ICT is argued to have the potential for a role as a catalyst for growth in policies that take on board the specific social, cultural, political and economic specificities of the institutional contexts they are implemented in.

Wong then examines how analysis of Chinese management and business practices has invoked 'Chinese cultural traits' as explanatory variables. While such a cultural explanation is seen to extend our understanding and points to the inadequacy of a strict economic approach, it is seen as falling into the trap of historical fallacy. In over-privileging selected aspects of 'Chineseness', researchers are seen to have produced partial and skewed analyses, invariably reproducing dualistic practices and thinking. 'Chineseness' in such accounts is taken as a given, reflecting a discourse of power which can silence alternative voices and readings. The paper argues that a sustained critical analysis requires greater reflexivity and a historically informed approach, sensitive to the contestation of ideas within China itself and the impact of alternative Chinese cultural practices. The paper argues for a move beyond functionalist accounts of culture, as is often argued in the 'world-making' of Chinese management and business discourse, and to see 'culture's consequences' through their ambivalence, repressive effects and liberatory potential.

Chan focuses on analyzing how micro-credit programs can be effective in poverty alleviation, taking the specific context of rural Malaysia and the introduction of micro-credit programs to women in the rural sector. The rural women studied were seen to face geographic and informational isolation, fragmentation of services, limitations regarding transportation, gender biases and inequalities, educational limitations and disproportionate poverty. The paper provides insights into the ways in which the loans were perceived by the women themselves and how the loans enabled their mobilization to improve their socioeconomic status. The specific social, cultural, economic and wider institutional context faced by the women is examined in explaining the reluctance of some women to participate in the schemes. The paper reflects on how the strategies of the NGOs may be developed to enhance the long-term effectiveness of micro-credit programs in such contexts.

As guest editor of this Special Issue, I would like to thank Harukiyo Hasegawa, editor-in-chief of the journal, for providing the opportunity to bring together this collection of papers on 'Critical Perspectives on Asian Business and Management'. The papers here are seen to contribute critical perspectives through bringing back into focus issues of power relations, giving voice to actors often neglected in representations of business and management



and by contextualizing the study of management and business as a social process within and across specific societal contexts, having social consequences and possibilities through their interactions in local communities.

I would also like to thank the reviewers and Assistant Editor who worked on this special issue.

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