Asian Management Research Needs More Self-confidence[1]

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Abstract

The challenges faced by Asian businesses merit scholarly investigation, both to help local business and to enrich the global scholarly discourse. Such research should be able to make major contributions, for instance by explaining context-specific variables and effects, and by drawing on traditional Asian thought in developing new theories. Yet, recent work, in part due to a lack of self-confidence to analyze the implications of indigenous contexts, seems to have made little progress on this agenda.

I first discuss how Asian management research could potentially contribute to global management knowledge. On this basis, I outline institutional constraints that may suppress indigenous and innovative research and thus inhibit the potential impact of local work. I conclude that Asian scholars ought to be more careful in applying theories developed in other contexts, and they can be more self-confident in exploring locally relevant research issues, and in developing theories that explain Asian phenomena.

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1. Introduction: Rigour vs Relevance

Asian management research appears trapped between the apparently contradictory objectives of local relevance and international publication. Ultimately, scholars ought to inform teaching in for instance MBA courses, and thus indirectly management practice in Asia. Recent papers in APJM try to stimulate more innovative research designs to bring Asian research into top management journals, while being relevant for local stakeholders in the research (White, 2002; Tsui, 2004; Peng, 2005). Extending this discussion, I argue that locally relevant knowledge requires the recognition of the boundaries of existing management knowledge and a careful contextualization of new research projects. Asian researchers may thus develop indigenous discourses on organizational phenomena, loosely coupled with global debates on related phenomena (March, 2005). Such a loosely coupled research agenda may require more self-confidence in pursuing indigenous research agendas, and developing theoretical frameworks that address challenges faced by businesses in a researcher's own community.

Context is important for businesses, as they develop their strategies and practices to fit specific cultures, legal frameworks, geographies, and industry structures. Yet management research is often focused on "general theories" and pays relatively little attention to boundary conditions, and to direct and moderating influences of contextual variables (Hofstede, 1993; Whetten, 2002; Tsui, 2004). Thus, context remains an important yet inadequately examined aspect of business processes (Pettigrew, 1987, Johns, 2001). Research on management in Asia – and in consequence teaching at Asian business schools – thus often struggles to explain the realities of business in Asia. In particular, research agendas tend to be dominated by theories developed for Anglo-

American contexts, especially the USA, that are insufficiently adapted to local circumstances.

Therefore, I argue in this paper that Asian management research – and research in China in particular – ought to start out to a much larger extent from local phenomena and issues of concern to local managers. Theories should be adapted to explain locally interesting phenomena; or new models and theories ought to be developed to overcome low explanatory power of adapted theories. Research in Anglo-American institutions made remarkable advances in empirical social science research in recent decades. Yet, not all their theories provide powerful explanations of realities in Asia. According to my impression, many Asian scholars lack the self-confidence to challenge existing theories where they are unsuitable, and to push locally-relevant research agendas.

The problem of inappropriate theorizing has been recognized in the introduction to the first special issue on China in *Organization Science*, a leading USA-based Journal:

> *"… scholars primarily utilize existing management theories – whose substance is based on Western firms … It appears that original theorizing on Chinese business organizations and management is still in a primitive stage, especially in the behavioral areas" (Tsui, Schoonhoven, Meyer, Lau & Milkovich, 2004, p. 137).*

Scholars working within existing theoretical frameworks may in fact limit their cognitive horizons. Theories are like lenses that help with the understanding of complex patterns and causal relationships in the real world. Yet, any theory would miss features that the theory-builders did not incorporate. Empirical tests of hypotheses derived from mainstream theories may confirm the theory, even if the overall explanatory power is weak. On the surface, firm behavior may be sufficiently similar to allow Western theories to be tested and confirmed (Tsui et al., 2004), yet this does not imply that the same variables are actually important in the local context.

Support for the validity of existing theories may delight those who contributed to building the original theory (and who are likely journal reviewers). Yet, they may be of little value to local stakeholders in the research. The underlying epistemological issue may be insufficient reflection over the nature of universal knowledge and how such knowledge is generated (Cheng, 1994). There is little reason to believe that management practices would be frictionlessly transferable across cultures (Hofstede, 1993). Thus, theories have to be tested in multiple contexts by way of ‘empirical generalization’ (Tsang & Kwan, 1999) to establish their universal validity. Or, they have to be modified to explain how contextual variables would modify the predictions of theoretical models.

To advance Asian management research, thus, scholars have to shift their emphasis from theory application to developing new theories, and from benchmarking against Anglo-American models to comparative research within the region (White, 2002). Local business challenges and indigenous traditions provide rich sources of knowledge. By drawing on these, Asian scholars can be more self-confident when designing their research projects. On the other hand, the rigour of research methodologies in US-based research has established standards that scholars elsewhere may want to aspire.

This paper first outlines theoretically how a research project may contribute to global management knowledge, based on Cheng (1994) and Tsui (2004). My conclusion is that Asian management research ought to be more careful in examining boundary conditions of existing theories, and be more ambitious in developing new theories. I then investigate the PhD training and incentive systems of scholars at top Asian universities, and show strong influences of US-based scholarship. To advance Asian research, however, scholars have to rise beyond their teachers, and develop locally-relevant models and theories. This requires greater self-confidence in believing in the relevance of local phenomenon and the power of indigenous theoretical development.[2]

2. Theoretical Perspectives: Context and Management Knowledge

Management research in Asia aims to contribute to local and global management knowledge, and thus to participate in global 'scholarly conversations' (Huff, 1999) by developing theory or theoretically grounded models. This can take the form of entirely new theoretical models, the introduction of new phenomena or concepts into existing theoretical frameworks, or the refinement and empirical testing of theoretical concepts and hypotheses.

The scholarly management knowledge thus generated can be divided in three types (Tsui, 2004). First, context-*free* knowledge, also know as 'universal' knowledge, refers to "research findings that can be applied cross-nationally to explain or predict variation in a given dependent phenomenon using the same predictor variable(s)" (Cheng

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[2] Most scholars strive to attain an objective perspective on their work, yet subjective decisions and valuations may influence the arguments (Clark & Michailova, 2004). Thus let me briefly introduce my experience, and thus my potential biases. I spent most of my education and scholarly life in Europe – in particular Germany, Denmark and the UK. My research has focused on transition economies in Eastern Europe as well as Asia. In preparing this paper, I drew in particular on experiences gained in two sabbaticals in respectively Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as on field research in Vietnam, and from conversations with Asian scholars at conferences in Asia and elsewhere. I am thus not an expert on Asian management, but consider myself an informed observer of the scholarly 'scene'.

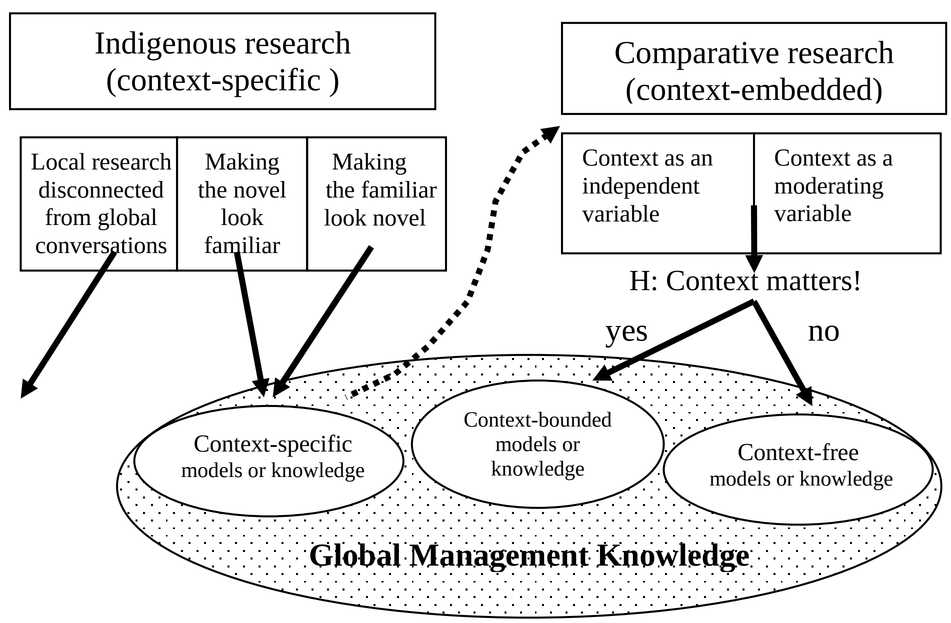
1994, p. 163). Theorists are often driven by the desire to develop general theories that would apply anywhere, and thus create context-free knowledge. Second, context-*bound* knowledge refers to what we know to apply in one context but not (or differently) in another context. Third, context-*specific* knowledge is what we know to apply in a particular context, but we do not (yet) know if this knowledge is transferable. Any single empirical study at a single location would generate context-*specific* knowledge, unless it is connected to research in other contexts such as to establish the boundary conditions of the knowledge.

The relevant context varies with the objectives of the study. Many studies define their context in terms of nation states, yet lower or higher level of aggregations may also be relevant units of analysis (Redding, 2005), including groups of countries (e.g. Central and Eastern Europe [Meyer & Peng, 2005], or Greater China [Peng, Lu Shenkar, & Wang, 2001]), or regions within one country (e.g. East versus West Germany [Frese, Kring, Soose & Zempel, 1996] or provinces with Vietnam [Meyer & Nguyen, 2005]). Context may also be more specific such as 'overseas Chinese family businesses' (Carney & Gedajlovic, 2003; Sim & Pandian, 2003; Erdener & Shapiro, 2005). Moreover, contexts vary over time such that old findings merit reinvestigation – including famous scales such as those developed by Hofstede (1980).

Unfortunately, many authors do not carefully define and discuss the "where, when and who" of their theories (Whetten, 2002), and thus they may (implicitly) claim general or context-*free* validity, when actually providing context-*specific* knowledge. This insufficient attention to boundary conditions may be particularly common among those working with US data. However, especially as reviewer, I also frequently encounter

China-based research claiming relevance for 'transition economies' or 'emerging economies' without investigating the validity of such a generalization. To make a claim of relevance beyond one country requires integration with the literature on the other countries, say Russia or Vietnam, and very careful reflections.

Figure 1: The creation of global management knowledge



Source: Inspired by Tsui (2004)

Figure 1 outlines how management research contributes to the development of 'global management knowledge'. Each contribution participates in 'scholarly conversation' with scholars elsewhere, and connects to existing 'global' knowledge through explicit contextualization. Context-specific knowledge may stimulate further research that investigates its contextual boundaries and incorporates contextual variables. Thus, both indigenous and comparative research can advance universal knowledge if scholars incorporate context in their analysis.

a) Indigenous Research

Local research disconnected from the scholarly literature in the field may have value in informing local management or policy makers. Especially research published in local languages is often context specific, but without systematically analyzing the contextual influences. This inhibits communication with scholars elsewhere. Such work does not contribute to global management knowledge, which weakens its potential impact. At the same time, implications derived for local audiences may fall short of what could have been achieved if scholars had made better use of the available global knowledge, both to explain causal relationships that are similar, and to point out puzzles that cannot be explained by existing theories.

Disconnected research may also lead to "uniquisim, a desire to present the phenomenon being studies as unique to that context" (White 2002, p. 295; also Peng 2005). Several phenomena have originally been described as national culture specific, but were later discovered to be of broader relevance across emerging economies:

- Networking is a common phenomenon among businesses across emerging economies. Scholars focusing on single countries have advanced specific terminology such as 'blat' (in Russia) or 'guanxi' (in China), and noted their distinction vs. Anglo-American cultures, but these concepts have important communalities (Michailova & Worm, 2003; Michailova & Hutchings, 2006).

- Diversified business groups continue to exist and grow in emerging economies, despite strong advocacy for focus strategies. What is more, they often appear to outperform more specialized firms (Khanna & Palepu, 2000; Nachum, 2004), contrary to a perceived wisdom business school teachings.
- Stakeholders other than owners have an important role in shaping business strategy in emerging economies. In particular, at times of radical environmental change, they appear to inhibit the implementation of corporate change, even if a wide-spread consensus supports the need for change. This has been shown in Eastern Europe after 1990 (Buck, Filatotchev & Wright, 1998) as well as in South East Asia after 1997 (White, 2004).
- Foreign investors acquire local firms with outdated technologies or organizational structure, and subsequently invest even more resources in the restructuring of these firms. This 'brownfield' phenomenon originally thought to be specific to Eastern Europe (Meyer & Estrin, 2001), has subsequently been shown in India and Egypt (Estrin & Meyer, 2004).

Scholars benchmarking an individual country vis-à-vis for example the USA may be blinded to the fact that similar underlying forces exist in many societies, albeit in different forms (Peng, 2005). Researchers who compare such phenomena across emerging economies and analyze how and why they vary, may thus obtain new insight and greater impact on both management practice and the scholarly literature.

Indigenous research can achieve such contributions to global scholarly discourses if it is appropriately contextualized, and at the same time embedded in the international literature. Contextualization needs to include the entire process of research. Theoretical models may incorporate variables of relevance in the specific context, measurements of key constructs have be valid for the given context, and the interpretation and development of policy implications has to reflect possible context-specificity of findings and thus limits to generalization.

Tsui (2004) suggests that context-specific research can be linked with global discourses in the field in two ways. First, "*Making the Familiar Appear Novel*" would take concepts or models developed in the literature, and adapt them to the local context by adding dimensions to concepts, or variables to models. Second, "*Making the Novel Appear Familiar*" would discover new phenomena, concepts, or relationships that are important in certain contexts, *and* discuss them in light of the existing literature on related phenomena. This kind of research approach would take inductive approaches and, if successful, generate grounded theory. Such indigenous research integrated with the global scholarly debates accounts for many of the most cited papers both on China (Tsui & Lau, 2002) and in Central and Eastern Europe (Meyer & Peng 2005).

A major contribution of indigeneous research in emerging economies has been the refinement of the impact of institutions on business strategy (Wright, Filatotchev, Hoskisson & Peng, 2005; Meyer & Peng, 2005). While there is a fairly broad consensus that institutions matter (Ingram & Silverman, 2002), scholars have pursued different avenues on how to incorporate institutions into their theorizing. I tend to prefer to incorporate institutional variables within theoretical frameworks driven by established theories such as transaction costs (Meyer, 2001; Bevan, Estrin & Meyer 2004) or the Penrosian 'Theory of the Growth of the Firm' (Meyer, 2006). Others prefer to advance an institutional perspective of strategy complementary to the existing theoretical angles of strategy (Peng 2003, 2006; Peng, Lee & Wang, 2005). Scholars investigating Asian contexts are uniquely positioned to advance these debates, and explore for instance *which* institutions, and *how*, would influence business strategies.

Other recent examples illustrate the potential of indigenous research:

- Meyer and Lu (2005) investigate the consequences of the vaguely defined boundaries of Chinese firms,
- Li (2005) investigates the institutional factors influencing the rise and fall of a specifically Chinese phenomenon, the township-village enterprises.
- Erdener and Shapiro (2005) investigate the unique features of the processes of the internationalization of overseas Chinese family enterprises.
- Yiu, Bruton and Lu (2005) investigate how Chinese firms build the resources that permit them to prosper as a business group.
- Several authors investigate the internal processes that shape the direction of corporate change in response to the 1997 Asian crisis (White, 2004; Andrews & Chompusri, 2005; Lee & Teo, 2005).

Such "high quality indigenous research" (Tsui 2004) with the potential for global impact requires a) deep knowledge of the local context *and* b) up to date knowledge of the literature. It may be pushed further by collaboration of scholars engaged in global scholarly discourses with local scholars familiar with the specific context. Some locally-relevant innovative ideas in my own work have arisen from such collaborations (Meyer & Lieb-Dóczy, 2003; Meyer & Nguyen, 2005; Meyer & Gelbuda 2006).

In emerging economies such as China, grounded theory building research should play an important role in the indigenous research agenda because many phenomena are substantially new or different in ways that are not clear from earlier research. This contrasts with contexts that have been researched extensively over recent decades, such as the USA. Thus, one would expect a different balance between theory-building and theory-testing, with more theory-building research in places such as China compared to the USA. Premature formalization and hypothesis testing may endanger management research to emphasize rigor over relevance, a tendency that has impaired the field of economics in recent decades (Mayer, 1993).

Theory building research may to a high degree apply qualitative methods such as in-depth longitudinal case studies, which are more suitable to discover previously not analyzed concepts and causal relationships. Methodologies and writing styles for such research have recently been advanced (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994; Langley, 1999; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004), which would help raising the quality and impact of qualitative research. Ideally, I would like to see more research projects that combine qualitative and quantitative methods.

Scholars working with quantitative techniques may first and foremost focus on generating new datasets, because advances in science are often related to data. On the other hand, sophisticated empirical techniques (implicitly) make many assumptions about the properties of the data. They should thus be avoided unless scholars have a good understanding of how these data were generated (especially for official statistics) and verify that assumed properties hold. In other words, scholars operating in emerging economies should be wary of what Thomas Mayer (1993) called 'driving a Mercedes down a cow track', namely running complex technology over a poor data, and thus picking up the measurement errors rather than the overall direction of the track.

b) Comparative Research

Comparative management research extends context-*specific* knowledge and aims to create of context-*bounded* knowledge. It thus enhances our understanding of any specific context by helping assessing when and how theoretical models can be transferred, and by pointing to phenomena and effects that are unique to a specific context. Consequently, there is huge potential to gain new insights for management from comparative research *within* Asia.

Comparative research may start out from theories developed in one context, and assess their generalizability. A general hypothesis would thus be that 'context matters'. If it can be rejected, we may conclude that the theory indeed constitutes context-*free* knowledge. The strongest evidence to reject arises from an exact replication of the original study (Tsang & Kwan, 1999). Otherwise, comparative research may establish the boundaries of a given theory or hypothesis, and thus context-*bounded* knowledge (Fig 1). Such research may include context in different ways. Firstly, national context may be analyzed as the main independent variable. This would generate conceptual extensions of the theory as a function of unique characteristics of the context, also known as 'empirical generalization' (Tsang & Kwan 1999). Secondly, national context may be analyzed as a moderating variable, i.e. national level attributes (e.g. individualism) are moderators rather than main effects in an equation. This leads to the conceptual extension of a theory (Tsang & Kwan 1999).

Cheng (1994) promotes testing theories pertaining to contextual variables by selecting countries that vary on the pertinent variable. Tsui (2004), in contrast, is skeptical about this approach, noting that researchers “must avoid involving two contexts that may differ on unknown dimensions.” Indeed, empirical tests based on the variation across only two or three countries usually allow for many alternative explanations because contextual variables may be highly correlated in such a data set – e.g. individualism with GDP per capita. Thus, such a test would have little explanatory power as the chances of a false positive are high. Hypothesis testing on country-level contextual variables thus requires datasets that cover a large number of countries.

Moreover, explanatory power is higher if countries share many characteristics, such as to control for example traditions, size or level of economic development. For Asian management research this implies that many of the relevant comparisons can be found within Asia, rather than by benchmarking vis-à-vis the USA (White, 2002). Comparative research may find relevant comparisons in territories that share certain cultural roots, such as mainland China vs Hong Kong vs Taiwan. For example, Sim and Pandian (2003) investigate the internationalization strategies by comparing Taiwanese and Singaporean firms, while Child and Tsai (2005) analyze institutional pressures on business strategy by comparing the environmental strategies of Taiwanese and mainland-Chinese firms.

Likewise, contexts with similar characteristics may present interesting comparisons. This may include distant but similar countries, as for example applications of Scandinavian models of international business to firms in other small countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Relevant comparisons may also be historical as hot topics in Asia today, such as small firms building international brands and entering foreign markets, may resemble challenges faced by US firms several decades ago.

Comparative research however does not have to be quantitative hypothesis testing. Rather, as many cross-national variations *within* Asia are only poorly understood, there may be a great need for exploratory and theory building research. Qualitative research in more than one country can discover important phenomena, especially by being sensitive to what may be special in one context but does not exist in the other. For example, Michailova and Worm (2003) analyze interviews with business persons in Russia and China to explore the pattern and processes of networking, such as to establish the commonalities and differences in the concepts of 'guanxi' and 'blat'.

Moreover, the huge diversity and segmentation within countries such as mainland China (Tsui et al., 2004; Schlevogt, 2002) provide considerable potential to apply and advance theories and concepts developed in international business research to analyze businesses transcending provinces, and to analyze the impact of varying contexts. By investigating within ethnic, cultural and geographic contexts, scholars may uncover heterogeneity where earlier research assumed homogeneity (White 2002). For example, the regional variation within a large country can be exploited to analyse the impact of contextual variables such as formal and informal institutions (Meyer & Nguyen, 2005).

Comparative research thus holds great potential for Asian management scholars, yet they also have to be aware of tripwires. Firstly, many of the concepts, especially abstract ones, may not travel well across borders. This applies even to simple concepts one might find on a restaurant menu: Ordering dumplings in Munich, Bavaria will get you tennis-ball-size objects cooked mainly from potatoes, whereas in Hong Kong one gets a range of delicate steamed dim sums. A ‘noodle-soup’ may get you a starter with broth, mildly spiced and decorated with tiny noodles served with a spoon in Munich, while in Hong Kong you would get a large bowl of spaghetti-like noodles with some broth added – and served with chop sticks. Even more so, people around the world think quite different things when they talk about abstract concepts that would translate to the same English term such as harmony, trust, partnership, contract, or loyalty. Yet management theory is rich in such contextually bound abstract concepts.

The marketing literature has extensively explored methodological issues around these issues distinguishing different aspects of equivalence (Styles, 1998). *Construct equivalence* distinguishes *etic* concepts that are common across cultures from *emic* concepts that are culture-specific. The underlying issue here is whether the concept evokes similar attitudes and behaviors among the individuals studied. *Measurement unit and instrument equivalenc*e is concerned with the practicalities of interpreting questionnaire data. For instance, can the same scale (metrics) capture the focal concept? Are the scale items (response categories) interpreted in the same way? Are measures calibrated in consistent units (eg Celsius vs Fahrenheit)? *Translation equivalence* is concerned that concepts or expressions cannot be translated such as to mean exactly the same thing in both languages. It thus is standard procedure to use back-translation or multi-lingual panels. *Sampling equivalence* is concerned about biases arising from the fact that samples may not be comparable. For instance, are all elements included in the chosen population? Finally, *survey administration equivalence* refers to the comparability of the research setting, administration, instructions, scoring procedures, timing etc. In particular, is response bias a potential problem in one of the populations (topic sensitivity, social acquiescence, commitment levels, familiarity, humility, etc.). These issues have to be considered when designing a research project. Tests can ex post identify such biases, yet there is relatively little one can do ex-post to rectify the biases.

In conclusion, while Tsui (2004, Li and Tsui 2002) focuses on single country indigenous research, I believe that well done comparative research holds at least as much potential for advancing Asian management research. Yet, such research should not simply document differences or correlations among variables. Rather, it has to explore causal relationships and processes to explain ’how’ and ’why’ contextual variables influence management practice.

The need for high quality indigenous and comparative research is widely acknowledged, yet rarely seen in top journals. Thus, the question arises why this is so. I argue below that Asian management research is strongly influenced by traditions developed in North America, some of which are more conducive than others in advancing locally relevant management knowledge.

Table 1: PhD Degrees held by Faculty Members in Asia Pacific Universities (2005)

	NCCU	NTU	NSYSU	NCKU	HKUST	HKU	CUHK	City U	CEIBS	NUS	Nanyang	SMU	UM	UQ	AGSM	Average
	TW	TW	TW	TW	HK	HK	HK	HK	CN	SI	SI	SI	AU	AU	AU	
USA	75.0%	84.2%	66.7%	63.9%	90.2%	51.2%	53.4%	29.6%	60.6%	57.0%	41.5%	57.5%	23.7%	10.2%	51.1%	51.5%
Canada	1.7%	1.1%	---	---	5.9%	12.2%	9.7%	4.9%	9.1%	8.3%	7.6%	6.2%	4.1%	1.1%	2.2%	4.6%
United Kingdom	7.8%	3.2%	5.1%	2.4%	---	12.2%	8.7%	15.5%	6.1%	12.4%	11.9%	7.5%	13.6%	5.7%	15.6%	9.1%
Germany	1.7%	---	6.0%	1.2%	---	---	1.0%	---	3.0%	---	0.8%	0.7%	0.6%	---	---	1.0%
Other Europe	0.9%	---	---	---	2.0%	2.4%	1.0%	2.8%	12.1%	---	3.4%	0.7%	0.6%	1.1%		1.3%
Australia	0.9%	---	---	1.2%	---	2.4%	1.9%	5.0%	3.0%	5.0%	6.8%	3.4%	33.1%	60.2%	26.7%	10.4%
New Zealand	---	---	---	---	---	---	1.0%	---	---	0.8%	0.8%	---	---	1.1%	---	0.3%
Taiwan	7.8%	7.4%	13.7%	6.0%	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	2.5%
Japan	0.9%	1.1%	3.4%	3.6%	---	---	---	0.7%	---	---	---	0.7%	---	---	---	0.7%
Hong Kong	---	---	0.9%	---	2.0%	4.9%	9.7%	7.0%	---	1.7%	1.7%	1.4%	1.2%	1.1%	---	2.2%
Singapore	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	0.7%	---	4.1%	7.6%	2.7%	1.2%	---	---	1.4%
Other Asia	---	---	0.9%		---	---	---	2.8%	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	0.3%
No PhD	3.4%	3.2%	3.4%	21.7%	---	14.6%	13.6%	15.5%	---	10.7%	13.6%	15.8%	13.6%	13.6%	---	10.8%
Info unclear	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	15.5%	6.1%	---	4.2%	3.4%	8.2%	5.6%	4.4%	3.7%
Inside careers [a)]	4.3%	5.3%	5.1%	1.2%	0.0%	2.4%	1.9%	1.4%	0.0%	4.1%	7.6%	0.0%	13.6%	36.4%	13.3%	6.5%
Number of faculty members	116	95	117	83	51	41	103	142	33	121	118	146	169	88	45	1468

Note: a) Inside careers: percentage of faculty member holding a PhD degree from the same institution as their current affiliation.

Universities : National Cheng-chi University (NCCU), National Taiwan University (NTU), National Sun Yat Sen University (NSYSU), National Cheng Kung University (NCKU), Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), Hong Kong University (HKU), Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), City University Hong Kong (City U), China Europe International Business School (CEIBS), National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technical University (Nanyang), Singapore Management University (SMU), University of Melbourne (UM), University of Queensland (UQ), Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM).

Territories: AU = Australia, CN = China (PRC), HK = Hong Kong (China), SI = Singapore, TW = Taiwan (China).

Sources: website of the respective universities, accessed July to October 2005.

3. Who is Educating Asia's Future Business Leaders?

The American influence on management educators and researchers in Asia arises from (at least) two effects. First, many scholars at top Asian business school obtained their education in the USA, and naturally maintain close linkages to US scholarly communities and carry on the research traditions within which they have been trained. Second, incentives faced by scholars in Asia may encourage writing for American rather than local audiences. I review the educational background of Asian management scholars before discussing incentives in the next section.

Scholars receive forming influences during their graduate education, and often carry on the traditions of their senior colleagues. Few truly outstanding scholars break free of such traditions, and develop their own schools of thought. Thus it is interesting to trace how leading universities influence researchers in the Asia-Pacific Region. For this purpose, we constructed a database of over 1400 faculty members in business schools and departments through a website analysis of 16 leading universities in Asia and Australia. These data reveal some interesting patterns (Table 1).

First, almost two out of three business faculty at these Asian universities obtained their PhD in the USA, while the percentage is much lower in the large universities of Australia, Melbourne and Queensland. The percentage is highest for Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) (90%) and National Taiwan University (84%), while it is lower in Singapore (Nanyang Technical University 41%, National Univeristy of Singapore 57%, Singapore Management University 58%). The top US educators are the University of Pennsylvania (n=37), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (n=32), Stanford University (n=30), University of Minnesota (n=28) and

University of Wisconsin-Madison (n=26). The share of US-educated scholars at these universities appears loosely related to their reputation in scholarly circles and the ranking of their MBA programs.

Second, the British influence is substantial but very uneven. The average share of British PhDs is 9%, yet it ranges from nil at HKUST to 16% at City University of Hong Kong. Top British institutions are the University of London (inclusive London School of Economics and London Business School) (n=34), University of Manchester (n=16), and University of Cambridge (n=14). Historical relationships and path-dependency may explain the strong presence of British trained scholars at older institutions in Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia.

Third, other English-speaking countries hold a respectable share, considering their small size with Canada accounting for 4.6% (top university: University of British Columbia (n=27)). Excluding the home market, Australia contributes 2.5% to the rest of Asia (top university: Monash University (n=5)). These countries thus present an interesting alternative to the traditional hubs of graduate training in management, yet they may be too small to have a strong independent influence.

Fourth, continental Europe has a negligible influence. Together, all non-UK universities in Europe have educated only 2.3% of faculty in this set of business schools and departments, which is even less than Australia, and less than any one of the top three US universities. Among the weak, Germans are the biggest accounting for 1.1%. The causes of this weak linkage between Europe and Asia are probably on both sides. Both have little knowledge of the other’s scholarly traditions and achievements. Moreover, few continental European PhD programs actively recruit students from Asia and seek and international placements of their graduates. Language barriers further inhibit mobility. A full discussion of the continental European PhD education and academic career paths – and its huge variations across the continent – is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the current lack of Euro-Asia scholarly exchange is to the disadvantage of both sides.

Fifth, there is very little movement of scholars across countries within Asia. In our database, a small percentage of scholars has a PhD from an Asian university: 2.5% come from Taiwan, 2.2% from Hong Kong, 1.4% from Singapore, while Japan contributes 1.0% and the rest of Asia 0.6%. Yet these are mostly scholars staying in the country where they earned their PhD; in fact no Taiwanese graduate holds a faculty position at another of these top universities. However, recently HKUST has emerged as a visible PhD educator for Asia having placed 11 graduates at other top schools, including 6 in Singapore. This is an encouraging new trend.

Sixth, some universities follow a traditional pattern of 'inside careers' as they recruit their own PhD graduates. This can severely inhibit intellectual diversity and stimulation, especially if university leaders spend most of their professional life at the same institution and thus lack insights on how universities are run elsewhere. Table 1 suggests that this does *not* appear to be an issue in top Asian universities. In Asia, the highest share of faculty who earned a PhD at the same institution is at Nanyang Technical University with 8%. In Australia, however, institutions have higher shares of insiders on their faculty, in Queensland even 36%, and this is also common in small countries such as Denmark. In contrast, some Asian institutions do not have a single faculty member with a PhD from the same place: CEIBS, which does not have a doctoral program, as well as

Singapore Management University and HKUST, which are still young institutions (established respectively in 2000 and 1991), and are governed by formal and informal rules modeled on top US universities.

In conclusion, Anglo-American educated scholars dominate leading Asian business schools, with US-educated professors accounting for 9 out of 10 in one of the top institutions, HKUST. On the other hand, scholarly exchange is small within Asia, or between Asia and continental Europe. In this sense, Asian management scholars appear rather homogenous in their research training.

4. Incentives

Over the years, I have discussed with many scholars in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan about the inner workings of Asian business schools. The general picture emerging from these informal interviews concerning career paths and incentives is as follows.[3] Asian business schools are eager to establish their research reputation on the international stage, and to create incentives for their faculty to conduct better research. While these are certainly laudable objectives, biases arise when US schools are explicitly or implicitly used as primary benchmarks. Since many university leaders are US-educated, their own prior experience forms the natural benchmark for performance criteria they may set. US style incentive schemes are introduced to govern in particular recruitment and promotion procedures. Thus, a high emphasis is put on publications in top journals identified by US norms and on citations in databases such as SSCI. While

[3] Since many conversations had a confidential character, I only report general tendencies rather than referring to specific universities.

ostensibly objective and international, these criteria implicitly create incentives to write for US audiences, for two reasons.

Firstly, short lists of ‘top’ journals are dominated by US journals. In fact, a common short list at leading Asian business schools appears to be “AMJ, AMR, OSC, SMJ, ASQ” all of which are US journals that pay little more than lip service to non-US audiences and (potential) contributors. Their readership is predominantly North-American, and so are their editors, their reviewers and in consequence the papers they would publish. To publish in these journals, authors would *not necessarily* have to use US data. Yet, they would have to present their research such that it appeals to US audiences, for instance in terms of the literature they embed their work in, and the theories they use. New theoretical developments would be of interest *if* they can be shown (or argued) to be of relevance to issues of concern to US audiences. Thus, for example, US-Chinese joint ventures would be of greater interest to this audience than collaboration between local Chinese firms, although there are far more of the latter.

The problem is *not* that US journals prefer to publish US materials; after all, this is what their – mostly US-based - readers are interested in. Most people in most countries are most interested in their own country – ranging from large countries such as China to small countries such as Singapore. The problem is that US journals are regarded as superior when it comes to research assessment exercises and promotion criteria in places *other than the USA*. There may be good reason for the good standing of these journals, for instance their methodological rigour, reinforced by reputation and path dependency. While it is natural that US institutions put the highest weights on US journals, it is highly problematic if Asian (or European) institutions adopt lists of top journals from US institutions.

Institutions adopting broader lists of journals may fall into similar traps. For instance, in Taiwan the National Science Council recognizes publications in journals included in the SSCI database. This, however, is dominated by US-based journals, especially in the field of management. Of the editors-in-chief of the 25 most cited journals in management, twenty are based in the USA, and five in the UK (Table 2). In particular, it includes is no Asian management journal.

Table 2: Top Journals the field of "Management" by SSCI Impact Factor

	Journal Title	Impact Factor	Editor in Chief, with affiliation	Editorial Team, Affiliations	USA editorial influence[a]	Other editorial influence
1	Academy of Management Review	3.7	Arthur Brief (Tulane U, USA)	Associate E: USA 4	100%	---
2	Administrative Science Quarterly	3.4	Donald Palmer, (U California Davis, USA)	Associate E: USA 4	100%	---
3	MIS Quarterly	2.9	Carol Saunders, (U Central Florida, USA)	Senior E: USA 7, Australia 1, Canada 1, Israel 1, New Zealand 1, Singapore 1	79%	Various, 4% each
4	Academy of Management Journal	2.6	Sara Rynes (U Iowa, USA)	Associate E: USA 6, Hong Kong 1	93%	Hong Kong 7%
5	Organization Science	2.3	Linda Argote (Carnegie Mellon U, USA)	Associate E: 14 USA, France 1, Germany 1, Norway 1	91%	Europe: 9%
6	Human Resource Management	2.0	Theresa Welbourne, (U Michigan, USA)	Associate E: 7 USA, 1 Japan	94%	Japan 6%
7	Strategic Management Journal	2.0	Dan Schendel (Purdue U, USA)	Associate E: USA 3, UK 1, France 1	80%	Europe 10%
8	Management Science	1.9	Wallace Hopp (Northwestern U, USA)	Department E: USA 19, Canada 1, France 1	91%	Canada & France 5% each
9	Information and Management	1.8	E.H. Sibley (George Mason U, USA)	Associate E: USA 1	100%	---
10	Leadership Quarterly	1.8	M.D. Mumford (U Oklahoma, USA)	Associate E: USA 10, Netherlands 1	95%	NL 5%
11	Research Policy	1.5	**UK** 3, USA 2, France 1, Germany, Japan 1		25%	UK 38%

12	Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes	1.5	D.A. Harrison (Pennsylvania State U)	No affiliations reported: 5	na	na
13	Academy of Management Executive	1.5	Peter Cappelli (U Pennsylvania, USA)	Associate E: 3 USA	100%	---
14	International Journal of Management Reviews	1.4	Steve Armstrong (U Hull, **UK**), Adrian Wilkinson (U Loughborough, **UK**)	Associate E: UK 3, USA 2, Australia 1, Portugal 1	14%	UK 71%
15	California Management Review	1.3	(UCLA, USA)	No names on website	100%	---
16	Journal of International Business Studies	1.3	Arie Lewin (Duke U, USA)	Departmental E: USA 19, Hong Kong 2, Australia 1, Canada 1, Denmark 1, France 1, Turkey 1	86%	Hong Kong 4%
17	Journal of Management Information Systems	1.3	Vladimir Zwass (Fairleigh Dickinson U, USA)	None	100%	---
18	Journal of Management	1.2	Daniel Feldman (U Georgia, USA)	Associate E: USA 1, Australia 1	75%	Australia 25%
19	Journal of Management Studies	1.2	Timothy Clark (U Durham, **UK**), Steven Floyd (U Connecticut, USA), Mike Wright (U Nottingham, **UK**)		33%	UK 66%
20	Harvard Business Review	1.1	(Harvard U, USA)	No name on website	100%	---
21	Journal of Economics and Management Strategy	1.1	Daniel F. Spulber (Northwestern U, USA)	Co-editors: USA: 23, Canada 3, Australia 1, Belgium 1, France 1	90%	Canada 5%
22	Corporate Governance	1.1	Christine Mallin (U Birmingham, **UK**)	none	---	UK 100%
23	British Journal of Management	1.1	Gerard Hodgkinson (Leeds U, **UK**)	UK 7, Netherlands 1, USA 1	6%	UK 88%
24	MIT Sloan Management Review	1.0	(MIT, USA)	No names on website	100%	---
25	Organizational Research Methods	1.0	Herman Aguinis (U Colorado Denver, USA)	Associate E: USA 4	100%	---
-	Asia Pacific Journal of Management	na	Andrew Delios (National U Singapore, **SI**)	France 1, Hong Kong 1, USA 1	17%	Singapore 50%
-	Management Organization Review	na	Anne Tsui (Arizona State U, Hong Kong UST & Peking U, **China**)	Senior E: 1 Hong Kong, 1 UK, 4 USA	50%	China incl. HK: 42%

Abbreviations: U = university, E = editors, na = not available.

Notes: a) Editor = 50%, editorial team = 50%, affiliation as reported on the journal's website. Where multiple affiliations are reported, they are shared in equal proportions. Note that affiliation and nationality may often vary, for instance most scholars from 'France' in this list are based at INSEAD and do not have strong ties to the country.

Sources: column 3: Social Science Citation Index (© Thomson International), columns 4 and 5: websites of the respective journals, accessed November 2005.

Scholars in the natural sciences may be less interested in regional journals, because their empirical research is less context-sensitive – a physics experiment would yield the same results in China or in America. Thus, the pressure to publish in US-based top journals may be of less concern in natural sciences. Yet, social processes are subject to contextual influences such that the notion of context-free 'general theory' needs to be thought out far more carefully in the social sciences. In consequence, where natural scientists determine promotion criteria at a university, social scientists such as management scholars may thus find it hard to argue for recognition of 'Asian' journals. One of my interviewees in Taiwan told me that the Taiwanese National Science Council is developing a new shortlist of journals that would take account of these concerns. Such an exercise, however, faces the challenge that there are no generally agreed upon alternative criteria, and individuals involved in creating lists may involve their personal preferences.

Secondly, when it comes to professorial appointments, a prime focus is on citations, with the SSCI, again, being an important source. As the SSCI includes primarily US-journals, a high SSCI citation score implies popularity in USA and UK academe, and among those outside the US who publish in Anglo-American journals. Moreover, citations to non-SSCI journals, such as local outlets, are recorded only for the first author and tend to be less precise (apart from the problem of clearly identifying scholars with common family names such as Li, Chen, Wang, … or Meyer). On the other hand, a leading Chinese or Russian scholar who influenced thousands of students, business persons and policy makers in his or her own country, may well achieve a SSCI count of zero – especially if he or she is writing in a language other than English. In other words, SSCI citation counts tend to replicate the biases inherent in top journal short lists.

Confronted with such incentives, many Asian scholars opt for research agendas and theoretical frameworks that downplay context and indigenous theory development (White, 2002). The problem has been recognized, for example in the aforementioned introduction to the *Organization Science* special issue:

> *"Especially worrisome at this juncture is that young Chinese scholars who are strongly encouraged to publish in top Western journals will force Western management theories to fit Chinese firms, rather than searching for new concepts and theories …" (Tsui et al., 2004, p. 141)*

The consequences of these incentives are dramatic. To put it bluntly, an expert of the Californian electricity industry would have a better chance of obtaining a professorship in Hong Kong or Singapore than an expert of the Chinese electricity industry. Universities would want to foster a scholarly community with local, foreign and international fields of expertise, and ideally intensive communication between scholars working in different contexts. However, my impression is that many top Asian institutions have not yet attained a good balance. In fact, I have been surprised how frequently Asia-based scholars work with US data – following data availability rather than substantive research interests.

The incentives described above do not necessarily coincide with official policies stated by the deans and department heads. Official policy in many institutions is to promote local research and local relevance, which may be reinforced by governmental funding organizations. Thus, I want to emphasize that the above characterization of incentives for scholars in Asia is based primarily on conversations with – many – younger scholars. More senior scholars – those who have tenure – tend to emphasize various means by which the criteria would be moderated to take account some of the above concerns. Thus, I noted a discrepancy between what senior people tell outsiders about their organizations, and what junior persons say about the senior persons. Yet, this is not a uniquely Asian phenomenon.

5. Implications and Policy issues

Asian management research will have 'arrived' once indiginous Asian intellectual traditions become an integral part of the global scholarly discourse. This may appear a long way, yet small changes in research agendas and university policies may generate rapid developments of scholarship, equalling the successes of Asian business.

In recent decades, US-based management research stands for most of the major advances in the management field. Yet, it is not the Holy Grail. In particular, this work is not designed to address the issues that Asian managers are struggling with, such as widely varying contexts that moderate key aspects of human behaviour. Thus, I believe that Asian management researchers should be more self-confident about the relevance of indigenous research, and not be unduly intimidated by the perceived expectations of US-based journal editors and reviewers. Loose coupling with global scientific dialogues would enhance both local and global management knowledge (March, 2005). At the same time, however, the Anglo-American literature provides leading research methodologies for empirical social sciences that ought to be adapted (but not uncritically copied).

In modifying the research agenda, the research training and supervision provided to young scholars should be a prime focus. I have argued that Asian management research needs more indigenous theory development, adaptation and testing. Hence, both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies are required. Yet, it seems to me that PhD training is generally emphasizing quantitative techniques over qualitative ones. Moreover, guidance from senior scholars may systematically discourage contextualized research. For example, in an autobiographic remark, Peng (2005) notes that his PhD advisors directed him away from China-related research, a phenomenon that I believe to be rather common.

It may be worthwhile to investigate the factors influencing young scholars' choice of research topic and method, and thus to test my proposition that research training is leading young scholars away from contextual research in Asia.

Scholarly associations are called upon to remedy the situation, and indeed many initiatives in recent years are likely to foster Asian indigenous and comparative research. For instance, new Asia-Pacific regional conferences, such as the Asia Academy of Management and International Association for Chinese Management Research (to the extent that it covers non-mainland Chinese research), provide forums for mutual learning and relevant comparisons, and may thus provide more fruitful scientific dialogues than either single-country conferences or global conferences. Asian journals such as the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* (APJM) and *Management Organization Review* (MOR) are committed to raising standards and to becoming prime outlets for Asia-related scholarship.

However, more could be done. Editors and reviewers have a focal role in promoting appropriate contextualization of research, for instance, by ensuring that boundary conditions of theories and empirical results are duly recognized. Scholarly exchange through PhD education abroad, sabbatical leaves and joint projects should be promoted both within the region and with partners beyond Anglo-American countries, notably continental Europe.

Furthermore, I want to suggest a more radical measure. Business schools in Asia-Pacific ought to collude and commit to recognizing one or two management journals based in the region as 'A' journals for recruitment and promotion purposes. This would induce leading and aspiring scholars to send some of their best work to these journals, which in consequence would raise quality, provided good editorial and review processes continue to be instituted and practised in these journals. In conclusion, greater self-confidence and continued methodological rigor can be expected to enhance the relevance and impact of Asian management research.

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