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### Rejoinder to “Confronting the crisis of confidence in management studies: Why senior scholars need to stop setting a bad example” from the Asian perspective

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# **Rejoinder to “Confronting the Crisis of Confidence in Management Studies: Why Senior Scholars Need to Stop Setting a Bad Example” from the Asian Perspective**

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Critical issues that Bill Harley discusses, such as the lack of value in management research output, which can potentially undermine confidence in management studies and business education, can possibly be amplified by the diffusion of the same research practices, goals, and norms around the world. Interestingly, business research practice whereby researchers aim to publish in high-ranked academic journals began in research-intensive U.S. business schools. But it has been spreading to business schools in many countries. Researchers in non-U.S. contexts used to write not only papers, but also books on local or regional topics in their own language. Now, it is becoming increasingly common to see those researchers writing only papers in English—aiming to publish in high-impact factor journals. This is certainly true in several Asian countries. Although the issues raised by Bill Harley touch on three levels—university, business school, and the management field—given the space constraint, I will focus only on research at Asian business schools in general, and also specifically research in the management field in this short rejoinder to share an Asian-context perspective.

Business schools are booming in many countries in Asia due to the rising demand for business education and credentials. Business schools located in such places as Hong Kong and Singapore attract students from other Asian countries as well as from other parts of the world. However, it is important to note that Asia is diverse, and it is not appropriate to generalize all Asian business schools across the region and argue that they all follow the same model. Business schools in some locations in Asia are competing fiercely for high program (such as MBA and EMBA) rankings, while others offer programs sometimes in their own language and care less about such rankings ([1]). Further, while business researchers in locations such as Singapore and Hong Kong are expected to publish their research in high-ranked academic journals, those in some other locations face much less pressure to follow the same practice. Hence, the problems of management research that Bill Harley has raised are relevant only in certain countries and locations in Asia (and possibly globally). I will thus focus on business schools in locations in Asia that seem to follow the research practice modeled after the U.S. business school model.

“[W]hile business researchers in locations such as Singapore and Hong Kong are expected to publish their research in high-ranked academic journals, those in some other locations face much less pressure to follow the same practice.”

If we look at Asian business schools with high research rankings, they are dominantly from the two locations: Hong Kong and Singapore. As shown in Table 1, based on the UTD 100 Top Business Research Rankings that use only top-ranked journal publications to assess research performance of

each school, there were six Asian business schools among the top-100 schools in the 2001–2005 publication records: four in Hong Kong, two in Singapore. It was not surprising to see the schools in Hong Kong and Singapore appear in the rankings, because English is widely used, and they have been following the U.K. higher education model although their systems, at least in Singapore, seem to be moving toward the U.S. model. Further, universities in Hong Kong and Singapore had been hiring those who were educated at U.K. and U.S. universities. More recent rankings show that the schools in Hong Kong and Singapore have generally improved their rankings. In 2017, there were four Asian schools in the top-50; two from Hong Kong and two from Singapore. One noticeable change in the most recent rankings is that there are two schools from mainland China and one from India. It seems that elite schools in China and some other Asian countries are adopting the same top-tier journal research practice, suggesting that this trend will likely be accelerated in Asia or at least among the top Asian schools, which in turn would accelerate competition to publish in the top-ranked journals.

TABLE 1 Research Rankings of Asian Business Schools (By the UTD Top-100 Business School Research Rankings)

2005 (2001-2005)			2010 (2006-2010)			2017 (2013-2017)		
Rank	University	Location	Rank	University	Location	Rank	University	Location
28	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	Hong Kong	18	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	Hong Kong	25	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	Hong Kong
51	National University of Singapore	Singapore	41	National University of Singapore	Singapore	32	City University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong
72	Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong	61	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Hong Kong	35	Singapore Management University	Singapore
73	Nanyang Technological University	Singapore	67	Singapore Management University	Singapore	38	National University of Singapore	Singapore
87	City University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong	68	Nanyang Technological University	Singapore	58	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Hong Kong
88	Hong Kong Polytechnic University	Hong Kong	75	Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong	62	Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong
			77	City University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong	71	Nanyang Technological University	Singapore
			83	University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong	76	University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong
			99	Korea University	South Korea	87	Fudan University	China
						90	Indian School of Business	India
						97	Tsinghua University	China

What can explain the strong performance, especially of the schools in Hong Kong and Singapore, in recent years? Besides the use of English language, another advantage of those schools is the support they receive from the local government. It is well known in the academic community that business schools in Hong Kong and Singapore offer competitive packages to attract good researchers from other countries. In addition, by using their financial resources, they can reward those who perform well in research, often defined as publications in top-ranked journals. Schools in these countries also remove those who do not meet their expectations. Hence, they are in a good position to attract, retain, and reward high performers and screen their faculty members rigorously on their performance.

Asian universities generally lack a long and strong track record of scientific research compared to their Western counterparts. For example, only a limited number of Asian universities have Nobel Prize laureates. They are thus motivated to gain academic reputation and respect in the academic community and society at large. To attain higher research reputations quickly, an increasing number of Asian universities, especially those endowed with greater resources are joining the publication competition based on journal rankings and impact factors. Business schools in these locations in Asia have strong aspirations to move closer in rankings to the global top business schools, especially in the US, causing them to emphasize publication in top-ranked journals.

Furthermore, with regard specifically to business schools in Hong Kong and Singapore, their funding model is important to note.<sup>1</sup> Although all universities in Hong Kong and Singapore are funded by government, graduate programs of their business schools such as MBA and EMBA cannot rely on

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to my colleagues for pointing this out to me.

public funding. To attract students to those programs, especially given their small "domestic" market, the rankings of these programs matter, and consequently, so do publications in top-ranked journals. Thus, tenure, promotion, and compensation of their faculty are increasingly affected by publications in high-ranked academic journals. Performance of senior administrators are also often linked to the programs' rankings of which faculty research is usually one component in the assessment.

"[E]lite schools in China and some other Asian countries are adopting the same top-tier journal research practice, suggesting that this trend will likely be accelerated in Asia or at least among the top Asian schools."

"In order to attain higher research reputations quickly, an increasing number of Asian universities, especially those endowed with greater resources are joining the publication competition based on journal rankings and impact factors."

It should be noted, however, that the research component accounts for a very small percentage in the program-ranking assessment and other factors are more important such as students' salaries after graduation. In addition, business school deans in Asia (and perhaps elsewhere) are faced with growing expectations from the local business community to provide services in terms of business education and training (or educating students who have relevant skills) and intellectual outputs that are relevant to practice. After all, business schools are seen as part of the local society in most countries. This suggests that while faculty members in selected Asian business schools are expected to publish their research in top-ranked journals, their programs' success does not rely heavily on such outputs, and expectations of the business community cannot always be met by those publications either.

"[T]here is now a debate in the academic community and local government as to how well the type of research that boosts the university rankings serves the country's needs."

Interestingly, while Singaporean universities have been performing well in the global rankings, there is now a debate in the academic community and local government as to how well the type of research that boosts the university rankings serves the country's needs. This debate is mainly about research at local universities, but it is possible that similar issues will be raised about research that business school researchers do, especially as business schools are professional schools. Also of interest, universities in Hong Kong will include the implications for the non-academic community as a new component when assessing the research performance from 2020, following the U.K. Research Grants Council funding model.<sup>2</sup> Although this change will not require all researchers to engage in research with practical impact, it will broaden the scope of research that they can pursue.

Still, as more and more Asian business schools join the publication competition, the emphasis on publications in top-ranked journals will likely intensify in Asia. This is leading to a huge increase in the number of journal submissions from Asian schools. At the same time, despite such increase, there is a perception that Asian researchers are not carrying their fair weight in maintaining the academic and publication system on which their academic career and rewards increasingly depend. There are no data to show that this is true, and it is likely that different schools engage quite differently. In the highest ranked schools, there seems no evidence that the external service of faculty differs from that of any other leading school. Generally speaking, these schools recognize external service contributions and reward (not always financially) their faculty members who take on such responsibility. Elsewhere, such practice may still not be as prevalent, as the current focus of many Asian schools is to increase their visibility through publication. One potential risk of such single-minded pursuit is that while those schools may eventually attain higher research rankings, they may not earn "respect" as good citizens among their global peers. It is certainly an interesting avenue for further research.

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<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to one of colleagues in Hong Kong for informing me of this change.

“[A]s more and more Asian business schools join the publication competition, the emphasis on publications in top-ranked journals will likely intensify in Asia.”

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