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Asian relevance, global impact: Asian management research entering a new era

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The objective of the *APJM* Review Issue

In 1998, the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* (*APJM*) was formally affiliated with Asia Academy of Management (AAOM), the official affiliate of the Academy of Management, with the mission to “encourage contextualized management research with Asian relevance towards contribution to global scholarship” (Lau, 2007: 401). According to Peng (2007), *APJM* has become a highly reputable and the most prestigious journal in Asian management research. To date, *APJM* has published over 1,000 articles with a five-year average journal Impact Factor of 2.647 (as of 2018).

As stated in the *APJM*'s objectives, two out of three key features of the journal are connected with regional relevance—focusing on key management and organizational trends in the region, and acting as the first and most prominent management journal published in and about the fastest growing region in the world. With this backdrop, *APJM* tends to publish more context-related research on topics that are of timeliness and growing importance in the region, as compared with mainstream international management journals. Increasingly, *APJM* has also striven to extend from local relevance to the integration with global impacts as witnessed in the rising “*Impact Factors Without Journal Self Cites*” in recent five years. In this regard, *APJM* has grown up! Therefore, we think that it is ripe for *APJM* to publish a Review Issue that aims to take stock of Asia management knowledge accumulated over the past few decades and to shed light on future research avenues to its readers.

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In our call for papers, we invited readers of *APJM* to submit proposals to present a systematic review of topics related to management and organizational research in order to promote conversations among management scholars interested in the Asia-Pacific region. In the review papers, we suggested authors to present a summary of existing literature of a particular topic, including its theories, findings, and implications. We also expected authors to provide recommendations in advancing knowledge and offering suggestions for future research that would be relevant to the Asia-Pacific region.

We received proposals from 40 different teams in response to our call for review articles. After the first round of review, we invited 16 proposals to further develop their ideas into full review articles and put them under the regular *APJM* review process to publish the best manuscripts. The final Review Issue contains nine articles covering research topics on the internationalization of Chinese enterprises, foreign subsidiaries' performance, technological catch-up of Asian firms, independent directors, leadership, abusive supervision, workplace ostracism, green human resource management, and research design in Chinese management studies. We provide a brief summary of each review article next.

Summary of the Review Issue articles

In "A review of the internationalization of Chinese enterprises," Alon, Anderson, Munim, and Ho go beyond the traditional review article approach by examining the research "impact" in terms of citation and co-citation analyses. Through traditional citation analysis coupled with data analytics visualization techniques, they conduct an interdisciplinary bibliometric citation analysis to uncover the patterns within the literature set of internationalization of Chinese firms. It is encouraging that *APJM* is ranked the third, behind the *Journal of World Business* and *Journal of International Business Studies*, as the most productive and influential journal publishing internationalization of Chinese firms. It is also encouraging that, in addition to testing existing theories, the authors have made good use of the context to extend and develop new theories in the four main research topics including suitability of foreign direct investment and multinational corporation models, location choice, entry mode choice, and drivers and motivations. Such findings give us more confidence that the Asian context provides great opportunities for new and universal theory development.

Bai, Du, and Solarino, in "Performance of foreign subsidiaries "in" and "from" Asia: A review, synthesis and research agenda," systematically review articles on the performance of foreign subsidiaries that are invested in Asia or invested elsewhere by firms from Asia. The review contains structured content analyses of 73 past studies that cover 679 relationships from the year 2000 until October 2017. Using meta-analyses, they look at four different determinants of foreign subsidiary performance, parent-firm characteristics, subsidiary characteristics, parent-subsidiary relationship, and country-level factors. They find that the majority of studies use objective measures of performance such as survival or economic performance, but only eight studies look at a subjective measure of performance using satisfaction measures. They also find that context has been generally underemphasized. For future research on Asia, regardless of "in" or "from," to gain more importance specific local context has to be examined. Furthermore, they show that underexplored areas are (1) micro-foundation of foreign

subsidiary performance, (2) portfolio view of foreign subsidiary performance, (3) non-market strategy of foreign subsidiaries and (4) institutional entrepreneurship.

Miao, Song, Lee, and Jin, in their paper titled “Technological catch-up by East Asian firms: Trends, issues and future research agenda,” discuss how East Asian firms, which have traditionally lacked technological competence, have caught-up with their Western economy counterparts. Their review, based on 76 articles, published in 17 journals over 23 years (1995–2017) presents an integrative theoretical framework to understand the process of technological catch-up from multi-theoretic perspective. The authors find that the extant literature uses a variety of theoretical lenses including the Schumpeterian economics, the resource-based view, the learning perspective, and the institutional view. The authors distinguish between technological catch-up and market catch-up and examine their inter-relationships. Based on the review, the authors identify external factors related to the institutional environment and the technological regime, and internal factors related to the technological capability, the catch-up strategy and pattern, and other organizational factors as determinants of the catch-up performance.

In “Independent directors in Asian firms: An integrative review and future directions,” Wei, Tang, and Yang argue that while the concept of independent directors (InDs) is formally introduced pretty late after the Asian Economic Crisis of 1997 in Asia, the proliferation of research in InDs in Asian firms warrants a systematic review. Including accounting and finance journals, they review 65 articles published in 21 leading academic journals from 2001 to 2016. In their review, they map the review using the following guidelines: (1) InDs’ presence, characteristics, monitoring behavior, treatment (P-C-B-T), and outcomes; (2) the contingencies that affect the link between InDs’ P-C-B-T and outcomes; (3) antecedents to InDs’ P-C-B-T; and (4) the moderating role of InDs’ P-C-B-T on other relationships of interest. They find that when it comes to the theoretical framework, while agency theory shows its dominance, resource dependence theory and institutional theory are frequently used as well. They recommend that future research in InDs in Asian firms should go beyond applying agency theory in that agency theory, at best, can only lead to incomplete understanding. Given that limited attention was given to firms in India and Japan, future research may look into firms in these two countries as well.

Since leadership matters to both organizations’ and followers’ performance, it is among the few topics that can draw attention from both macro and micro researchers in management. Yet, we still lack enough knowledge of the contextual factors that make certain leadership characteristics and styles more salient in Asia. Building on the previous Special Issue on leadership (Lam, Huang, & Lau, 2012), Koo and Park, in their article “Foundation of leadership in Asia: Leader characteristics and leadership styles review and research agenda,” approach this question by content analyzing 37 articles published in key management, finance and accounting journals from 1997 to 2016, and focus on the context in which leadership styles and characteristics have the most impact on three levels of outcomes (individual, team, and firm). In their review, Koo and Park identify power distance and collectivism as the two most prominent contextual factors of when leadership matters. In terms of future research, they encourage scholars in Asia to examine humility because harmony is a defining characteristic of collectivistic culture. Since family CEOs in Asia need to display humility characteristics despite their power, family leadership is also another worthy research topic in the future.

In “Is abusive supervision an absolute devil? Literature review and research agenda,” Zhang and Liu remind us why it is important to pay attention to Asian culture because it

can differentiate between the positive and negative effects of abusive supervision, one of the most intensively examined phenomena in the last two decades. While existing reviews have largely documented the negative consequences of abusive supervision, Zhang and Liu argue that such supervisory behavior can be tolerated and may even be embraced in Asia due to its unique cultural background (one of their reviewed manuscripts has shown that employees can be creative under abusive supervision; see Lee, Yun, & Srivastava, 2013). To pave the way for future research, Zhang and Liu propose six alternative views of abusive supervision after reviewing 48 Asian studies of this topic.

The study by Mao, Liu, Jiang, and Zhang, “Why am I ostracized and how would I react?—A review of workplace ostracism research,” provides a very comprehensive review on the topic of workplace ostracism research. Similar to other newly proposed constructs, culture is usually not the focal construct. Asian scholars follow the trend of research without paying attention to the specific cultural context. In this comprehensive review, of the 79 studies published in 14 mainstream management journals, 12 studies used Asian samples (two in Singapore and 10 in China). However, as the authors point out, none of them explicitly investigates the impact of any particular cultural aspects. The authors thus strongly suggest that future research should take into the consideration the effects the Asian culture on the phenomenon of workplace ostracism. They provide specific suggestions concerning how the cultural environment should be incorporated into the studies of the topic. Asian scholars interested in this topic may follow their suggestions and identify commonalities of this phenomenon in both the Eastern and Western settings as well as the uniqueness of this workplace ostracism in specific cultures.

The topic of green human resource management (GHRM) is by nature a globally concerned topic. To a certain degree, while everyone has concerns about the impact of business operations on our environment, research in this area is still struggling with the conceptualization of the phenomenon as well as good measurement scales. This is clearly pointed out in the review by Ren, Tang, and Jackson, titled “Green human resource management research in emergence: A review and future directions.” While the topic is a global one, it is very complicated as it involves three levels: institutional environment (e.g., national regulations and cultures), organizational factors (e.g., top management attitudes and practices), and individual employee attitudes and behaviors. As the authors point out, a multi-level conceptualization with contextualization is an important direction for future research. In this regard, Asian scholars studying GHRM should have a specific role in helping to develop and test the multi-level conceptualization by studying the specific context in various Asian countries. Asian countries, with great variations in government regulations and roles, and different stages of industrial development, should be able to offer excellent contexts to develop and test indigenous and context-specific theories in this topic.

Finally, in addition to a review of specific research topics, this Review Issue also includes a review of research design characteristics in Chinese management research. In Asia, research on Chinese management has drawn considerable attention, especially during the last two decades. Due to such popularity, Boyd, in the article “Paradigm development in Chinese management research: The role of research methodology,” believes that it is the right time to examine Chinese management research, which is in its early stage field of inquiry, in order to understand what it takes for this subfield of management to advance to the next stage. Based on the Kuhn’s (1996) model of paradigm development, Boyd focuses on the research design characteristics of Chinese management research. After analyzing early (2000–2005) and recent (2009–2014)

articles in four mainstream and one China-focused management journals, he finds that while prior Chinese management research studies have demonstrated a number of methodological strengths, they have also relied heavily on single-source data, used more control variables, reported results in patterns consistent with HARKing (hypothesizing after results are known). Boyd has accordingly offered several suggestions for Chinese management researchers to fine-tune their research designs.

Bringing Asian management research to the next era

There has been an increasing demand for making Asian management research more contributory through conducting more indigenous, context-specific research (Jia, You, & Du, 2012; Leung, 2012; Meyer, 2006; Tsui, 2009; Whetten, 2009). In order to bring Asian management to a completely new level, we urge Asian management scholars to consider three approaches to conduct impactful research that can bring both global impact and local relevance (Yiu, 2016).

Discovery of context uniqueness There is no doubt that the “soul” of Asian management research is its “context.” However, *APJM* authors seem to not have discovered the uniqueness of Asian context seriously and rigorously enough (Yiu, 2016). There have been calls that Asian management researchers should be more adventurous in endeavoring scientific discoveries and developing Asian-based universal theories (Tsang, 2009). Asian management researchers should leave their ivory towers and be critical of the relevance and usefulness of the research questions, theories, and methods in addressing phenomena in the Asian contexts (Pfeffer, 2007; Tsui, 2009). Discovering the uniqueness of the context is the first thing to do for developing impactful research.

Theorization of context uniqueness As many theories are bound by context-dependent assumptions (Whetten, 2009), there is a “need” to develop a theory that helps best explain regional relevant phenomena (Leung, 2012). To move forward, Asian management scholars should conduct more context-rigorous research by extending management theories with contextualized constructs and variables or developing contextualized theories to examine context-specific phenomena (Jia et al., 2012; Lau, 2006; Whetten, 2009). If Asian management scholars are able to theorize emerging and newly developed business phenomena and examine them thoroughly, it is likely that such context-embedded theory can serve as an important contribution to the development of truly universal theories.

Extension of context uniqueness In order to instill new ideas and perspectives that are derived from unique local phenomenon to global management, a bridging process is needed. Chen and Miller (2011) proposed an ambicultural approach to bridge the global divides between the East and the West. Asian management scholars can identify commonalities, transcend paradigmatic differences and integrate extremes. In so doing, universalities or universal theories that can be applied in both the Asian and Western settings may be enlightened.

In closing, we hope that Asian management research can move to a new era through more rigorous efforts in discovering, theorizing, and extending context uniqueness in

the region so as to inform and make global impacts on mainstream and international management research.

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