

rather than hinders an inquiring, innovative mind that is not afraid to question authority. Encouraging and fostering such a value system, while at the same time ensuring political and social stability, is perhaps one of the most important challenges facing Asian countries as they move into the next millennium.

GERALD TAN
Flinders University

Verner Worm. *Vikings and Mandarins: Sino-Scandinavian Business Cooperation in Cross-Cultural Settings*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 1997. Approx. 208 pp.

This book takes a less well explored but very useful approach in the literature on cross-cultural management. While there are no dearth of cross-cultural studies in general, books analysing and delineating the cultures involved in an intercultural encounter and examining their impact on managing foreign business operations in the host country are as rare as they are helpful to business people and firms from the cultures involved. Certainly, more books of this type are badly needed. Although the cultures dealt with are by necessity particular, the ways and means of handling cross-cultural encounters and their consequences are of a less specific character and could suggest important implications for international management in general. The objective of the book is to investigate the effect of cultural differences on interpersonal relationships and the management of Scandinavian firms in China. This is a legitimate and useful aim and the research agenda is two-fold: to create understanding and to provide guidance.

The text builds on the author's Ph.D. thesis, which was written in Danish. The fact that the text has been translated into English by two persons other than the author makes it sometimes a little difficult to follow and understand. Although the

style of writing most of the time probably lives up to the intention of appealing to both business executives and academics, much of the first chapter is an unnecessary turn-off as it reads more like an academic research report than an introduction to a business book. Chapters 2 and 3 introduce management in China and Scandinavia against the necessary backdrop of the culture and politics in those areas of the world. Whether China and Scandinavia really represent sufficiently coherent and uniform cultural and political spheres to be covered in this manner is debatable, but can be accepted as a simplification to deal with the subject matter and achieve the purpose of the book.

The comparison of the two cultures in China and Scandinavia in Chapter 4 is somewhat mechanistic, relying on inferred or actually measured scores by such authors as Hofstede, Hall and Trompenaars. Hofstede's original study did not include China but several subsequent investigations by other researchers have rectified that shortcoming (*cf.* Lai and Lam 1986). Ignoring these studies, the book seems to discuss Hong Kong scores as a substitute for Chinese scores.

Chapters 5 to 8 deal with culture-specific interpersonal relationships whereas Chapters 9 and 10 discuss organizational and managerial activities. Being the core chapters of the book, the material here is well presented and easily accessible, not the least due to the frequent quotes from expatriates and Chinese in relation to key concepts discussed. All of these chapters end with a section of recommendations to expatriates and foreign firms, which are very useful in their concrete suggestions.

This book focuses on cultural differences and, admittedly, they are more important than similarities since the effectiveness of the international manager is contingent upon adjustment to another cultural context. However, by also pointing out cultural similarities, areas of natural compatibility could have been identified where less problems can be expected. Also, since more than double the number of Scandinavians than Chinese were interviewed and most problems and frustrations are pointed out by Scandinavian managers, the text tends to become somewhat lop-sided, mostly

arguing the case from only one side. Although the author seems to be aware of this shortcoming, readers need to constantly remind themselves about this bias which ignores the fact that Chinese employees probably find Scandinavian managers as troublesome as vice versa.

Except for one firm, which was a wholly Scandinavian-owned firm that originated as a joint venture, all respondents came from joint ventures. Such collaborative endeavors tend to magnify cross-cultural management problems, which is useful in this case, but Sino-foreign joint ventures also tend to suffer from other endemic difficulties. Typically, the partners have different goals with the venture which could appear as cross-cultural concerns instead of the conflict of interest issues they really are (Selmer, in press). For that reason, the growing trend of establishing wholly foreign-owned firms in China could have been better represented among the respondents (Vanhonacker 1997).

Furthermore, the author warns against stereotyped pictures, but since such incomplete and distorted pieces of information affect the organizational and managerial daily behaviour of involved parties, stereotypes deserve more attention and investigation instead of warning signs. Actually, the author deals with stereotypes without probably realizing it. By asking Scandinavians for their view of their own role as expatriates, by asking the Chinese for their view of expatriates, and by asking the Scandinavians for their perception of the Chinese view of expatriates, the three notions of autostereotype, heterostereotype, and metastereotype have been applied without mentioning these concepts explicitly (*cf.* Everett, Krishnan and Stening 1984). Having such insights about the host environment makes life easier for expatriate managers anywhere and China is no exception.

It should be remembered that not only Western expatriates could experience difficulties in China, also business executives from ASEAN countries, and even more so if they are of Chinese descent.

Common wisdom has it that Overseas Chinese would do better in China than anybody else, but the reality seems to point to the reverse. Due to their common ethnic heritage the Chinese nationals implicitly presume that the Overseas Chinese also know how to behave properly in the Chinese social context. Any mistake in that respect of an Overseas Chinese is not easily forgiven, whereas Westerners are much less expected to know and follow the local social code of conduct (Selmer 1997). Consequently, ways and means of Chinese business networking in ASEAN cannot simply be transferred wholesale to contemporary China, which represents a very different social environment from any of the ASEAN countries.

Generally, the book is a very powerful reminder of the crucial role of culture in international management, not the least in China, and can be recommended to any reader interested in modern business. Having said that, it is fair to try to assess if the book has achieved what it attempted to do. Whereas the collected material is rich and interesting and goes a long way in realizing the intention of creating understanding, academic audiences familiar with Chinese culture and the growing literature on cross-cultural management in China will not find many new, previously not covered issues. The saving grace is the Sino-Scandinavian perspective that sheds new light on well known concepts like *guanxi* and "face". Thus, for comparative business organizational studies, the volume under review perhaps will be of interest for diverse purposes, be it research or teaching. Against the background of the thorough and engaging discussion of Chinese interpersonal relationships as well as organizational and managerial activities, the book most certainly achieves its intention of guiding Scandinavian business executives and firms how to improve their performance in China. Besides this target audience, the book would constitute a valuable reader for MBA students and participants in executive development programmes dealing with business in China.

REFERENCES

- Everett, J.E., A.R. Krishnan and B.W. Stening. *South-East Asian Managers: Mutual Perceptions of Japanese and Local Counterparts*. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Eastern University Press, 1984.
- Lai, G.T.-L. and C.Y.-W Lam. "A Study on Work-Related Values of Managers in the People's Republic of China (Part II)". *The Hong Kong Manager* (February/March 1986).
- Selmer, J. "Which is Easier: Adjusting to a Close or a Distant Culture? The Experience of Western & Ethnic Chinese Expatriate Managers in the People's Republic of China". Paper presented to the International Management Division at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts, 10-14 August 1997.
- Selmer, J. "Strategic Human Resource Management: Expatriate Managers in China". In *International Management in China: Cross-Cultural Aspects*, edited by J. Selmer. London: Routledge, in press.
- Vanhonacker, W. "Entering China: An Unconventional Approach". *Harvard Business Review* 75, no. 2 (1997): 130-40.

JAN SELMER
*Department of Management,
Hong Kong Baptist University*