

Verner Worm, *Vikings and Mandarins: Sino-Scandinavian Business Cooperation in Cross-cultural Settings*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 1997. 247 pp. ISBN 87-16-13360-9.

Verner Worm's comparison of Chinese and Scandinavian psychology and their consequent attitudes towards personal and business relations serves multifarious purposes for any Sinologist or those wanting to do business in China. It allows us to learn about the problems of managing joint-ventures and wholly owned subsidiaries; it allows an insight into Chinese thinking; in discussing Scandinavian psychology it allows others to understand more fully this disproportionately important group while at the same time providing an opportunity for other Westerners to compare themselves to both. This last

aspect is important in a field dominated by Americans, where European contributions are often overlooked and where many studies often reveal more about America and American attitudes than about China itself. While learning about America is not a bad thing, any chance to learn about Europeans as well as China should be grasped and European contributions appreciated. In this case, the issues and problems discussed by Worm show that while much has changed, many of the problems encountered by Bill Purves in the early 1980s (*Barefoot in the Boardroom*), remain. *Vikings and Mandarins* does not tell us all we need to know about running an enterprise in China but it goes a long way to filling the gaps left by many recent books that concentrate on the initial negotiations and hammering out of the deals needed to establish such enterprises rather than on how best to run them once the deals have been concluded.

To provide a basis for understanding, Worm sets out the historical factors (such as religion) which underlie Chinese and Scandinavian outlooks, while doing his best to avoid over-generalisations. Worm lists the important influences behind attitudes towards the family, personal relations, the importance of networks, the much harder to grasp concept of 'face', time, privacy, materialism, the importance of hierarchy and status, tactics, attitudes to outsiders etc. These factors exert a profound influence on the structures and decision-making procedures of firms. At the end of each chapter is a valuable summary with recommendations on how to overcome problems and minimise differences.

Worm's process of explaining the basis of beliefs and how they affect behaviour is often very effective. For example, his explanation of the general Chinese attitude towards 'truth' highlights the absence of a firm Chinese belief in the concept of absolute truth. This absence allows truth to have a relativity literally unimaginable to many Westerners firmly grounded in Judaeo-Christian, and particularly Protestant religious traditions. For many potential readers, if it averts misunderstand-

ings and curses about perceived Chinese duplicity, this explanation alone should be a revelation worth the cost of the book and the time needed to read it. Ditto the explanation of the nature of time (monochronic versus polychronic), and how this is reflected in the two cultures. Similar clear explanations are developed for the varying manifestations of many other vital concepts, such as loyalty to the firm, individualism versus collectivism and the like. I was particularly struck by the treatment of the concept of face. While by no means unique to China, the 'giving' and 'losing' of face in China is more subtle and important. Worm's discussion of the factors surrounding this issue certainly gave this writer pause for thought. The effects of the influences of these factors on management are well covered.

Worm finishes with several chapters comparing management ethos: specific chapters cover such issues as planning and organisational structures. Important differences towards responsibility, status, hierarchy and other factors often lead to problems for the Scandinavian managers. These differences result in much more centralised organisations than would be the case in the managers' home countries and there is a constant struggle by managers who assume that the Chinese should have internalised rules and norms to the same extent as themselves. The relativity of 'common sense' is revealed repeatedly. Worm's comprehensive approach means he uncovers important oversights by Scandinavian managers: for example, the apparent almost total neglect of non-material motivations to inspire workers.

I would be very surprised if the problems encountered by Scandinavian managers differ markedly from those experienced by Germans, Americans, Australians or other Westerners operating in China. A few typing errors and other very minor issues of style and translation notwithstanding, Verner Worm has done an admirable job of covering many complex issues in a straightforward, clear and concise way. The organisation of

his material, both overall and within each chapter, is very systematic and comprehensible. However, more practical examples of issues, problems and their solutions would have been more useful than many of the quotes about attitudes towards them. This quibble notwithstanding, Worm's book will be very useful to those contemplating setting up business in China and it works equally well as a very useful text for those wishing to advance their knowledge of Chinese psychology and inter-cultural communication. For those wishing to learn about Scandinavians, this book is also a good place to start.

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