'Globalizing' Management Theories: Knowledge, Ignorance and the Possibility of a Postcolonial Critique

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Abstract

In international management, the study of culture has rapidly become critically salient. Business and management consultants, academics and practitioners alike all claim that the development of cross-cultural skills is crucial in the new era of globalization. This, they claim, will enable managers to better manage the risks within a globalized economy and consequently, add to greater productive growth and increased competitiveness. This 'turn to culture' has generated diverse competency skills training programmes, units and writings dealing with cross-cultural skills in management. Whilst the call for greater cultural literacy in international business and management is welcome, many of these 'new' analyses tend towards the simplistic. This paper posits that international management knowledge is actively constructed by these experts and that in their representations of culture, the issue of power is neglected and/or glossed over. The paper therefore argues that to understand these cultural representations, it is necessary to locate these views within a discourse of truth and power. Via a contrapuntal reading of key critical international management texts, the paper seeks to challenge and provide a counterpoint to these views. In so doing, it aims to foster a more critical, reflexive, engaged and open management practice.

Reading Management against the Grain

The collapse of the Berlin Wall, transformations in Eastern Europe, Latin America, China and Southeast Asia have led one writer to proclaim the end of history and the triumph of the indomitable west, accompanied by its twin angels – liberal democracy and market capitalism (Fukuyama 1992). In this view, international capitalism and its 'free' market mechanisms have swept away all vestiges of the old ideological order and integrated previously autonomous enclaves into a 'borderless' and global system of production and consumption (Dicken et al. 2001). In
this scenario, 'all that is solid melts into air'. From this perspective, as a global economy appears to take shape, manifested through its dense criss-crossing market and social relationships, so nations, national boundaries, space and time all appear to be redundant. The 1997 Asian financial crisis gave credence to supporters of this relentless march of western liberal market economic system. 'Corrupt', 'cronyistic' Asian-style 'capitalism' was found wanting and certainly not as robust, efficient or 'transparent' as western market economies. But as the 21st century unfolded, Enron, MC1 and other spectacular corporate collapses in the west soon put paid to the view that cronyistic, opaque and corrupt practices represented a 'continental exception'.

Indeed, as the Asian economic crisis and other crises have shown, the world has become increasingly integrated, linked and interdependent. However, as the events of and after September 11 have shown, ideology and history have not ended. Rather, they signalled that the west was still adaman to impose its hegemonic stronghold. George Bush and his allies rallied around the need to defend their western values of 'freedom', 'democracy', 'human rights', 'rationality' and 'decency' against the Others. But, as various writers have argued, if the world is indeed globalized, it is churlish to examine one's environment and position independently of others (Giddens 1989; Gray 1999; Mittelman 2000; Ohmae 1995).

In such turbulent times, business and management theorists (like other social scientists) have the opportunity to reflect on, conceive of and present an alternative, inclusive discourse. Sadly, this opportunity has not been grasped and analyses continue to be grounded in or derived from western theorists and their underlying model of a specific (and preferred) system of organization and management. Such analyses are typically derivative or seek to replicate previous studies. There are, however, exceptions and these are often grounded in debates over government intervention in economic activities (Wade 1990; Weiss 1998). Conventional economists and their adherents argue that government intervention can never be justified, as this 'distorts' the market, impacting on the optimal allocation of resources and the maximization of efficiency. The alternative position proclaims that even if markets are efficient, market failures are still clearly discernible, and intervention certainly does not work in all circumstances; it may even be inappropriate (Todaro 1997: 573-600; Amsden et al. 1995).

For many 'Asians', government intervention is not only a matter of common-sense but is also culturally rooted, in the way their organiza-
tions and institutions are structured. They argue that 'Asian values' permeate Asian societies and affect social and cultural mores, and as businesses and management practices are steeped in these mores, they too are affected. Recent analyses on the Asian financial crisis, for example, whilst noting these cultural attributes, also called for a deeper and more integrative framework. For example, Joseph Stiglitz (2002) reminds us of the immature and under-developed nature of the Asian financial markets, which played a critical role in the crisis but somehow was missing in international financial analysts' calculations. John Clammer (2004) also insists on this historicity and in his account calls for a nuanced approach, where culture of the state and culture of the market are simultaneously interrogated.

Clearly, there is an emerging view that greater reflexivity is needed. Indeed, a reflective and critical analysis of western management economic and business systems would find that the claims of distinctive Asian and/or cultural characteristics are also present, albeit not so patently apparent in non-Asian societies and cultures (e.g. as in discussions of interlocking directorates, networks and the distinction between negative 'protectionism' and positive 'export-enhancing subsidies').

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is not only to critically examine western management discourse but also to subject it to what Said has called a 'contrapuntal' reading. This requires the discovery and development of a simultaneous awareness both of metropolitan histories and of those subjected and concealed histories, against which the dominant discourse acts (Said 1993: 59). In short, a contrapuntal reading involves an engagement or mutual consideration of otherwise disparate social practices, of culture and histories and the present from which a counter-point may be then constructed. This is often obtained via the juxtaposition of the dominant text alongside counter-texts. At its core it posits a sensitivity and awareness of power and its attendant effects in informing and enabling representations, understanding and knowledge.

I begin, therefore, by examining some of the salient features of the nature and development of western management theories. Clearly, the term 'western' is problematic. I do not wish to homogenize the west and simplify history by reducing the complex processes whereby theories and practices that have originated in Western Europe have been increasingly universalized and domesticated in a wide range of different global contexts. This does not, however, mean that 'western' as a concept cannot be used historically to delineate and mark out, as Stuart Hall puts it, 'the effects of hegemonic representations of the Western self rather than its
subjugated traditions' (Hall 1992: 276). Indeed, this intent is embedded in this paper. As such, my task is not to show and/or argue that western theories are wrong, but rather to point out their partial nature and to suggest that an alternative, more inclusive form of scholarship can be (re)discovered. In 'talking and/or writing back', I hope to effect a strategy of resistance that deconstructs this received but dominant knowledge, enabling the deployment of different readings and approaches.

This struggle for domination, for Foucault, can be both systemic and hidden. It sets the field and terrain for definition and engagement and in relentlessly constructing its subject and naturalizing its own position, it creates what Williams (1958) calls 'structure of feelings' that 'linger', 'support, elaborate and consolidate the practice of empire' (Said 1993: 14). Western writings on management contribute to and reinforce perceptions and attitudes about the west and the world. Western writing accepts and appropriates for itself a sovereign, independent and normative view of the world, self-validating and consolidating its authority and power (Latouche 1996; Rist 1997).

Contrapuntal reading, as I have suggested, enables the reader to reveal the overlapping intersections of power and resistance. Resistance, however, requires more than a sense and act of opposition alone. It requires first the recovering of 'geographical territory' and then a strategy enabling the 'changing of cultural territory' (Said 1993: 252). This demands not only the breaking down of barriers that exist between different cultures through an active engagement with the dominant discourse, but also 'to transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories' (Said 1993: 261). In management theory, this involves a deconstruction of the widely held view of western universalist and transcendental management theories as well as the study of East Asian business on western management thought. The latter is done to recover cultural space, to illuminate and to problematize processes that are already well- presumed, researched and claimed, enabling a re-evaluation of the awareness that alternatives do exist and that they can even be attractive possibilities.

'Deconstructing' Management Theories and Practices:
Spatial Spread and Truths

The eminently popular and influential management guru, Peter Drucker, wrote that management was:
something new, distinctively western. Prior to and outside of the modern west, resources have always been considered a limit of man's activities, a restriction on his control over his environment—rather than an opportunity and a tool of his control over nature. (Drucker 1954: 4)

In one fell swoop, Drucker defines management as quintessentially western, differentiating it from other civilizations, and allowing the west to achieve economic and social superiority. The dissemination and inculcation of western management concepts and practices, Drucker maintains, are a precondition for growth in non-western developing societies; without it, these societies would be unable to grow and progress.

This cultural conditioning is rife in the literature surrounding economic modernization. At its heart is a developmental hierarchy. Its history, however, belies its anthropological underpinnings—civilization demands a transformation in work patterns and discipline that sets it apart from 'childish and irrational' savages, barbarians and/or primitive cultures. These assumptions, as Trahair (1984) has noted, enabled Elton Mayo to develop his ideas of human relations. Indeed, this reasoning lies at the heart of much management theorizing, whereby the rational manager provides oversight, supervision and leadership for the irrational worker (Waring 1991; O'Connor 1999).

The work of Weber can similarly be thus framed. In his analyses, Weber argues that western societies were technically and developmentally superior because of their embrace of a distinctly western administrative tool—the formal rational bureaucratic organization. According to Weber, this superiority derives from its: 'precision, speed, lack of equivocation, knowledge of the documentary record, continuity, sense of discretion, uniformity of operation, system of subordination and reduction of frictions' (Weber 1946: 196), unlike patrimonial non-western societies. Because of this, other cultures will seek to imitate this western, rational and bureaucratic model in order to transform themselves and become economically competitive.

Important in Weber's view was the concept of specialization. In his formulation of the bureaucratic organization, Weber argued that specialization allows people to specialize in particular activities. This not only makes work processes more efficient and precise but also (economically) rational. Similarly, Taylor argued that when tasks within organizations were broken down and individual workers worked on discrete processes, the organization was able to realize greater output, efficiencies and that it also facilitated complex tasks. Conversely, specialization also affects knowledge distribution in that people have
reduced knowledge and understanding of the whole process, and thus become marginalized.

Lest the arguments rendered here be considered esoteric, I seek to ground some of these discursive effects via the activities of western business organizations such as the East India Company, the Dutch East Indies Company, the Hudson Bay Company, the Royal African Company and similar ventures (Dunning 1992: 96-132). The activities of the 'overseas manager' involved a combination of the supervision of economic activities with the attempt to discipline, transform and control indigenous people, their institutions, traditions and practices (Memmi 1965, 1984; Alvares 1988, 1994). When combined with the prevailing norms of 'gentlemanly' conduct, the overseas manager would instead be likely to institute some form of 'hierarchical' structure to manage his clients and organization. Specialization of tasks was critical to this imperial project, as it seeks to integrate disparate groups in the pursuit of economic activities and/or profits. This model contained basic assumptions about the desirable traits for workers and managers and legitimized and naturalized a particular type of organization over other types, at both the global level (between states and societies) and the local (as in between the different disparate indigenous groups). The identification of these traits with a particular (cultural/racial) system also engenders a hierarchy between groups of workers and people within and between organizations and societies, and continues to be played out in current global practices.

Clearly, early business organizations demonstrated almost intuitively what western management theorists have sought to articulate as productive routes of enquiry. An examination of these organizations will readily show them to be imbricated within the state's logic. Not only do they combine both public and private interests but they also demonstrate the critical nature of public-private relationships as they pertain to market activities and mechanisms, e.g. state largesse, monopoly behaviour, amongst others. More critically, they demonstrate the core components of business activities: the extension of territorial and temporal sovereignty and the critical embedded nature of business and political networks. They also reveal that managers take on multiple roles: diplomat, monarch, negotiator, wizard, head of a clan, spokesperson or just a more important node in a network of skills and resources."

This discussion suggests that contemporary western theories of management share some continuities with colonial management practitioners. They both engage in the quest for 'one best way' of managing,
to enable greater productivity, efficiency, profits and growth. They also both seek to 'diffuse' civilization (Bhabha 1994), acculturate and educate the ignorant from wrong beliefs and/or inefficiency (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). Where they differ is that the latter were 'culturally embedded', unlike the former who seek a universal model transcending national and organizational borders. This 'desire', which was disciplined and managed via scientific justification (Venn 2000; Rose 1990), endows western management theories with greater legitimacy for they are both scientific and rational. Inadvertently, these (research and discursive) practices produce reality, 'domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault 1977: 194) of the non-western world, and in so doing, act to preserve and reproduce western superiority.

**Travelling Theories and Transgressive Acts**

Despite the lack of a global management theory (Clegg 1990; Clegg and Jermier 1994; Clegg et al. 1999) and the 'inappropriate parochialism' (Boyacigiller and Adler 1991) of contemporary (western) management theories, these theories with their embedded discourse of a 'one best way' of management, have been globally successful. (For example, in the area of international management and international business, Edward Hall and Geert Hofstede have been extremely successful in inducting practitioners to cultural sensitivity and awareness.) Hofstede's work has been replicated and falsified and accordingly, students and corporations from all parts of the world have sought to embrace the current 'cultural' (and spatial, conceptual and prescriptive) fix emanating from western management theorists. In large part, bolstered by its scientific, performative and rational credo, these theories have traversed (cross-cultural and national) borders.6

In international economic and business practices, according to management theorists, a failure to conform to this 'one best way' translates into an inability for organizations and societies to remain competitive globally. Hence, it is not uncommon for researchers in international and/or comparative management and/or economics typically to offer the same prescription, namely co-operation with foreign investors. This, they maintain, will not only bring capital but also, via their innovative and scientific management techniques, will result in radically transformed societies and economies. While there is no dispute that these societies and economies can be transformed, the question of innovation and the transfer of such techniques and technology are not so clear-cut.
Indeed, path-dependency theorists have suggested that lock-ins may prevent such transformations (David 1975; Krugman 1986). Similarly, those working on innovation have pointed to the counter-effects of institutional and structural conditions of national and regional innovation systems (Nelson 1993; Patel and Pavitt 1994). What is however apparent is that such 'ready-made' scientific prescriptions have also made it possible for western corporations to continue to control natural and economic resources. Why has this state of affairs prevailed? And do theories only travel one-way, i.e. from west to east? Or do they interact, and in so doing, open up new sites of discursive possibility (Deleuze and Parnet 1987)?

In his discussions of 'white hegemony', Richard Dyer (1988) has suggested that the valency and potency of the power of whiteness lies in its ability to project a seemingly natural, neutral, transcendental image, comprising the full diversity of human experiences. This universalism is clearly apparent in western management theories' promise that its adoption would enable and induce a seemingly and entirely knowable and visible reality, where economic growth is both desirable and realizable. As such, for those anxious of their positions and desiring the transformative and advanced image of the west, these management prescriptions offer both comfort and reassurance (Fineman and Gabriel 1994: 385). For the recipients of this knowledge, this is no mere passive transfer of knowledge. The recipients are reassured and also gain additional social and cultural capital via their mastery of these skills and knowledge. This reinforces their economic capacities; hence their attraction, adoption and adherence.

In discussions of the non-western Others, as I have indicated, there is a tendency to (re)present them as non-individuated selves, interchangeable and often unorganized contra the stable, organized western. This orientalist discourse, as Said (1978) has argued, is a closed system, resilient and enduring. In management discourse, this is seen in both popular and academic writings on international and/or comparative management/marketing/business. These texts, while paying due attention to cultural differences, often proceed with set analytical frameworks of countries within the anecdotal, although rendered universalist discourse. Prescriptions are similarly rendered based on these analytical observations.

Contemporary culturalist accounts have also challenged the universalist assumptions embedded within the international and comparative analyses. In their wake, they have posited (and resurrected) enduring
culturalist customs and traditions as alternative worldviews affecting management behaviours and practices. Clearly, these accounts\textsuperscript{10} have induced greater cultural sensitivity and suggest a greater awareness of institutional practices and yet, like our universalists, many of these accounts are nonetheless orientalist themselves. There is often in the literature an over-simplification of a culture, which glosses over its internal cleavages (race, class, gender and regional).\textsuperscript{11} For example, in discussions of China, ethnic, regional and gender differences are constantly ignored. There is no recognition in this literature of conflicting interests and dissenting voices\textsuperscript{12} are silenced. More critically, in these writings a form of unitary Asian traditions and customs are portrayed as eternal and essentialized. Differences are glossed over and pressed into the service of a singular customary and/or traditional whole, conveying both eternity and continuity. This quest to make 'the east different from the west' seeks to exile the one from the other (Kabbani 1986: 59). However, as Ashis Nandy has so brilliantly and poignantly argued in his chapter on the 'Uncolonized Mind' (Nandy 1983), it marks a failure to rid one from the other. Instead, there is a double-bind; its logic constrains choices and forces the 'eastern man' to 'stress only those parts of his culture which are recessive in the West and to underplay both those within which his culture shares with the West and those which remain undefined by the West'. Paradoxically, this binds the east 'even more irrevocably to the West' (Nandy 1983: 73; see also Memmi 1965; Carrier 1992).

Charles Taylor (1992) has suggested that this bind is a highly political charged process where there is contestation for recognition. In such a politics, identity and recognition can only be forged through dialogical interactions and relations with others. This requires the transgression of space, leaving open the question of identity. Unfortunately, while there is a recognition of differences, these differences have become borders of claims of 'authentic' (cultural) readings and (re)presentations; there is not enough transgression or dialogue. In the first part of the paper, I have sought to transgress and (re)write the nature and development of (a potted version of) western management thought and practices. In the subsequent section, I sketch out the contours of an East Asian telos which may help to stimulate discussion and provide dialogue for transgression.
Loong Wong

Geography Lessons: Knowledge and Ignorance

Because of the dynamism associated with the Japanese economy and subsequently the 'tiger economies' (South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong) and more recently China, East Asia has assumed critical import for policy-makers, businesses and academics. As a place, East Asia lacks geographical homogeneity despite academic pronouncements. For Richard Whitley (1992), the differences between East Asian states are greater than the differences separating those states from western states. Indeed, if we extend East Asia to the South, the cultural differences become significant. Language, civilizations and territories all confound the issue and as such, rather than an object of inquiry, East Asia presents more as a theoretical problematique. Business schools and management theorists, however, have the luxury of not engaging with this issue, although their methodologies and questions are imbricated within a sociology of knowledge of East Asia, unified by a 'Confucian' felo (Reid 1999; Tung 1996; Rozman 1991; Redding 1990). This culturalist account, as Huntington has suggested, is invariably a threat to western civilizations and is also incompatible with the tenets of a western liberal market economy. Indeed, this telos has undergirded analyses and while providing a useful alternative discourse, it is too narrow. It fails, as Warner and his colleagues (2003) have pointed out, as there are significant internal variations even within this belief-system, and potentially different economic strategies.13

This potentiality, I suggest, can be approached via greater sensitivity to historical and cultural contexts and needs to include a consideration of the following areas:

- Different conceptions of the nature of a state;
- The issue of ethnic homogeneity;
- Cross-border connections and movements;
- Acceptance and rejection of foreign influences; and
- The presence/absence of natural resources.

In East Asia, it is possible to discern two basic conceptions of the state. There are the rigid, pyramidal, hierarchical organizations found in Japan, Korea, Vietnam and China (Keyes et al. 1994; Osborne 1997: 27-34). Here borders are fixed and stations within society generally fixed and marked by external honours or characteristics that are controlled and determined by the rulers. By contrast, in Southeast Asia, the state is often seen as a series of concentric circles in which proximity to the central power-wielder also denotes proximity to the state. This conception is characterized by weak control over borders (Wolters 1999).
As a necessary corollary to the preceding point, it is apparent that there will be varying attitudes of states towards cross-border activities. More importantly, their ability to enforce such control will vary also. In Northeast Asian societies, historically there has been greater control and this persists today, e.g. the Korean peninsula. In contrast, ethnic minorities populate the Laotian, Burmese and Thai borders and state representatives are not only resented but they also have no effective control of the border areas (Rigg 1997). Indirectly, this impacts on the ethnic composition of these societies. Where a central state prevails and tighter control is enforced, such societies are able to marshal more resources and hence, more resistant to external influences; they also tend to be more homogeneous societies. On the other hand, the converse is also true—there is both greater heterogeneity and social interactions and reciprocity.

Typically, East Asian societies (except China) are resource-poor economies and have therefore developed market-seeking activities. In contrast, resource-rich Southeast economies tend to be typically rent-seeking economies and historical analyses tend to support this view. As such, western firms seeking to conduct their business activities have developed their mode of entry, structure and involvement accordingly.

As significant as these differences are, globalization and economic integration have been critical and transformative of these traits. They have become contingent and variable values acted upon by an ‘immense range of sociopolitical and discursive processes, strategies and struggles that cannot be derived from any single encompassing dynamic’ (Brenner 1998: 461). The ensuing complex patterns of interactions are fluid and have changed rapidly, creating ‘interstitial zones’ operating within and between states, nations and societies. Their interconnections elude and challenge our conventional assumptions of territorially shared ideas and practices, requiring us to privilege process, flows, space and their interactivities. This focus on process, space and flows has given rise to what some analysts call the ‘network society’ (Castells 1997; Van Dijk 1999).

**Relationships and Networks: Rediscovering the Human Element**

Over the last 20 years, the concept of networks and relationships has manifested itself in contemporary accounts of business practices. They are influential prerequisites as well as the results for decision-making processes in organizations (Morgan 1986: 173-4); critical in the
co-ordination of world-wide actions and information (Luhmann 1998; Walker 1985). More importantly, it puts to rest the view that business transactions occur voluntarily in an environment of atomistic exchange informed wholly by rational expectations. At the forefront of these analyses are those derived from close investigation of East Asian firms. They typically portray East Asian business practices and activities as creating and fostering long-term relationships, with the continual structuring and restructuring of their access to networks of relationships thereby reflecting the ways that individuals operate in society (Hamilton 1991; Burt 1979). These processes are engendered through formalized rituals such as the exchange of gifts, the sharing of meals and companionship, and mutual acceptance of each other’s personal network of relationships (guanxi).

This reciprocity is ‘a specific set of linkages among a defined set of actors, with the additional property that the characteristics of these linkages as a whole may be used to interpret the social behavior of the actors involved’ (Mitchell 1969: 2). This is true for many countries in the region e.g. guanxi relationships are emphasized particularly in Chinese business practices. One can invoke various examples: Robert Kuok and his role in Hong Kong and China; Lucio Tan in the Philippines; Li Ka-Shing in China and Hong Kong, amongst others. Indeed, more recent studies have suggested that dense intersecting business interests existed not only within but also across ethnic groups e.g. in Indonesia and Malaysia (Gomez 1999; Wibisono 1995). Consequently, business behaviour and practices, it is argued, need to take into account the nature and form of relationships affecting the firms.

The rationale behind this behaviour is easily explained. In order to ensure that contracting and sub-contracting business practices are efficient and/or effective, it is necessary to be able to trust these agents, who are required to provide suppliers at times when it is not desirable to integrate them into the firm. This can be seen, for example, within the textile and garment industries where sub-contractors are seamlessly ‘integrated’ into a global commodity chain (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994). Nike, Levi Strauss, Reebok, The Gap and others readily come to mind.

The bonding between different partners is an important and necessary part of a successful business operation (Burt 1979), and these arrangements may also impact on operational methods. The ICT industry reflects this tendency. For example, in Taiwan Acer and Mita provide parts and designs for many well-established western firms such as HP,
Compaq and Dell amongst others (Levy and Kuo 1991), while in India, TCS, Infosys and others provide knowledge expertise for firms outsourcing aspects of their operations. In Malaysia, the case of Eng Technology, a local SME, transformed into a regional MNC through its extensive links with Intel is similarly instructive (Jomo et al. 2003).

Recent western management theorists have sought to develop this issue of networks and relationships further. There are now numerous studies on networks, centring on the need to move to a 'new' or 'network' paradigm. They emphasize the changing nature of contemporary fluid and flexible business practices, pointing to networks as a superior mode of organizing. This has arisen from the perception that networks facilitate dynamic inter-firm collaboration clusters, enhancing competition and innovation, generating economic efficiencies, and promoting both growth and wealth (Gulati et al. 2000; Best 1990). Because of this, network research has examined typologies (Miles and Snow 1986; Snow et al. 1992), processes within networks, and the formation as well as the efficacy of networks as an organizational practice. (For information, finance and innovation means and ends, see e.g. Baum et al. 2000; Delmar and Davidsson 1998.) The study of networks has become a central feature of relationship marketing and management; in other areas, it has impacted significantly on customer relationship management, particularly the notion of loyalty and supply chain management. In e-commerce, virtual relationships, trust and 'stickiness' (which is the quality that prevents visitors from quickly clicking away from a website) all draw their inspiration from the study of networks. The study of entrepreneurship similarly benefits from a consideration of networks, network behaviour and the value of network (social)capital. While many of these features now appear obvious and common-sensical, it was not until they were presented as in a mirror form that their import were recognized and understood contrapuntally.

An Obvious State: Embedded Business Relationships?

In the west, firms are assumed to be in business for the sole purpose of profit maximization, and hence they organize their activities accordingly. This concentration on profits and realizing shareholder value has led to some poor decision-making, e.g. Enron, Parmalat, HIH Insurance amongst others (Hutton 1996). Long-term considerations are sacrificed for short-term gains and have grave implications for the wider economy (Schwartz 1991; Collins and Porra 1994; Hallsworth 1996). Recent studies
of corporate activities have, however, shown that firms are increasingly involved with a wide range of goals (Elkington 1999; Kelly 1994; Hawken 1993). The Body Shop, for example, shows that it is possible to commit to significant changes to developing societies and generate economic growth at the same time.

While it is possible that this is sometimes little more than strategic branding of the corporate logo, it is also apparent that many East Asian firms, as a matter of policy, follow other objectives than pure profit maximization (Mendoza 1991: 123-35). These goals and objectives may be national and political, e.g. in the cases of Malaysia (Renong, Sapura), Singapore (Singtel, Temasek Holdings) and South Korea (Posco, LG, SK Group), where companies were channelled and/or directed into key industries. Taiwanese firms, on the other hand, have bestowed 'trade diplomacy' on their nation via their trading activities, and their recent investments in China have helped to stabilize inter-Strait diplomacy, despite occasional political gestures and posturings.

East Asian firms, even when free to determine their own activities, have tended to focus on developing long-term business activities and relationships rather than a mere consideration of the 'bottom line', e.g. the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation, the Bangkok Bank, the YTL Corporation (from Malaysia). The point is not that East Asian businesses operate in a radical and unique way from the rest of the world, or that their cultural background precludes them from focusing solely on the 'bottom line', but rather that they seem to take a wider contextual view. One prime example of this practice is Singapore Airlines, which seeks to position and reinvent itself continuously in the competitive global aviation sector. Of course there is SingTel, which is attempting to buy into regional markets as part of its corporate growth strategy. It could be argued that these are Singaporean examples and so are not typical of firms within the region. Whilst there is some truth in this claim, one can readily invoke other local conglomerates which have been strategic, e.g. Petronas in Central Asia, Ayala Corporation in the Philippines and Acer and their respective global thrusts.

In contemporary business literature, the institutional view has gained great currency and is used extensively to examine a multitude of business practices such as networks, alliances, behaviours and governance, amongst others. In East Asia, this is approach is also being recognized (Wilkinson 1996; Hefner 1998) and analysts have suggested that the debate over development needs to move beyond the state or market nexus (Chan et al. 1998; Huang 2000). They point out that the involvement of
the state 'is a given' and that the task rather is to focus on the efficacy and quality of these interventions (Evans 1995; see also Amsden 2001; Woo-Cummings 1999). For Evans (1995), close ties to key social groups are fundamental for the state to effect economic and business growth.

East Asian business practices have also shown that, contrary to conventional economic theories, it is possible for economic growth to go hand in hand with a reduction in economic/social inequality, and for improvements in the quality of life for significant numbers of people to take place (Birdsall et al. 1995; Campos and Root 1996). Firms typically provide some form of welfare services (e.g. health benefits and a contribution to pension funds are key concerns in the PRC and the greater Asian region) and contribute to human resources development (via training and support to training and/or development funds, particularly in Singapore and Malaysia). The latter is critical as these economies and firms seek to effect their transition to higher value-added and technologically advanced industries, often with state support (e.g. the development of information and communications technology industries in Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, and biotechnology industries). There is clearly a recognition that the state can play an important role either in sponsoring or mobilizing strategic economic industries within the private sector and that such relationships and/or networks are crucial and embedded within these societies. East Asian managers and their attendant management practices similarly need to give due consideration to these values and to their realization as they negotiate, manage and transform their firms accordingly.

Conclusion

'Management', as Alvesson and Willmott (1992: 1) put it, 'is too potent in its effects upon the lives of employees, consumers and citizens to be guided by an instrumental form of rationality.' Indeed, managers have become, as MacIntyre (1981) points out, 'central figures' of our age. Their actions are highly (and disproportionately) rewarded, widely reported and profoundly felt (via the stockmarket and effects on employment, economic growth and emulative behaviour). The desire to be as successful as these 'heroes' has engendered the growth of management as a field of study. Through it, students learn to 'do management' via management theorists who proclaim their ability to unravel these success secrets. In the main, the key to success lies in its desirability, augmented and certified through the claims of scientism, rationality.
and performativity, which confer upon such recipients and practitioners status, credibility and legitimacy.

In this paper, I have sought to 'deconstruct' the lineage of this claim and open up some alternative lines of enquires (Grey et al. 1996). Following in the footsteps of others, I have argued that because management is a constituted act and is imbricated and invested with power, it has been able to traverse (national and cross-cultural) borders. Adopting a 'critical post-colonial' reading of management texts and a consideration of East Asian business practices, I have sought to open up the prevalent discourse of management.

The interpellation of East Asia in my argument is important for since the late 1970s, this locus has become a significant field as well as an area of study. As a consequence of the global economic crisis and as East Asia became economically significant, management theorists and practitioners began their search for the new defining 'input' to revitalize productivity. The dynamism and growth of East Asian economies prompted them to re-evaluate culture as a critical variable in development and growth. Previously seen as a constraining agent, culture now provides the basis for a new discursive thrust: 'corporate culture', 'shared culture', 'cross-cultural' studies have now all become critical management constructs and tools for management academics, analysts and practitioners alike.

Clearly, the context and experiences of East Asian business practices provide a lens through which we can analyse and further interrogate the silences within the dominant, 'ready-made' mode of management discourse. This process is not internally consistent or homogeneous; but by tracking its trajectories, we can unravel a myriad number of possible alternatives to contemporary management theories. Their formulations of new forms of organizations and organizational practices enable us to reconsider critical issues of corporate behaviour, governance and practices and their attendant effects, and to frame alternate discourses (Foucault 1991a). These discourses are not merely academic abstractions – they have an immediate influence and impact on the way the world is organized and experienced by all its actors.

Management discourse is then like any regime of truth where the complicity between power and knowledge is at times visible, at times less so. It is a story and a history where management scholars, social scientists and management practitioners produce, construct and constitute management practice(s) and knowledge. Within this framework, knowledge construction is a 'cultural' practice, suffused with power and informed
by values and assumptions. The central task of this paper has been not simply to document the power of voice and the right to voice, though these are crucial considerations; it has also been to participate in the active creation of a space— theoretical, methodological and textual— where silences, gaps and claims evoked by modern discourses and practices are rendered more visible, transparent and accountable. By focusing on the social organization of how this knowledge is constructed, represented and constituted, I have sought to redirect attention to the 'cultured' and 'objectified' practices and relations of knowledge and power-making, and its claims to objectivity, truth and knowledge. In focusing on the intersections between self and other, knowledge and power, producer and subject, I have sought to demonstrate the futility of 'innocent' and 'objective' knowledge. My aim has been to recuperate a more integrative but situated approach, where knowledge is ever-present, latent and even 'lethal'; where it is always represented and only understandable via our locus and relations. As such, global management theory can be only part-fiction, part-performance but never the whole Truth.

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NOTES

1 I would particularly like to thank the generous comments offered by the reviewers.
2 Weber's work is based on an ideal type, drawing on the traits of the type that is the opposite of the bureaucratic from patrimonial societies that are not western or are pre-modern. Indeed, arguably, there is no singular 'western' administrative practice—they are all different and are historically constituted, e.g. the social model of Germany and Scandinavian countries vis-a-vis the putatively individualized American economy and society.
3 Lyotard (1984) noted that this economically rational practice is distinctively western and is both historically and intellectually rooted in liberal discourse.
4 These roles are clearly discernible in contemporary managerial practices. For example, Mintzberg (1973) has noted that contemporary managers play multiple roles—informational, interpersonal and decision-making. Others have reinforced and further expanded on these roles; see Kotter (1982) and Hales (1993).
5 See, for example, the work of Pfeffer (1993) and Donaldson (1995).
6 This is not too dissimilar from Pascale's (1990) argument. According to Pascale, the march and triumph of managerialism is a by-product of professionalization of management. Such 'professionalization' confers upon it legitimacy, 'scientism' and respectability.
7 Bruno Latour (1987), for example, has been highly critical of this. For Latour, analytical models are but representations of the world. In the 'ready-made' scientific view, however, such models are often not treated as representations or constructs but as concretely and actually the world itself. Robert Chia (1996) has argued that there
are serious consequences emanating from this application of 'ready-made' science to the study of management and business. Amongst other things, it discourages critical thinking and reflexivity; engenders a 'thin' view of organizations, glossing over critical features, and privileges management structures rather than processes. The latter fetishizes techniques and ignores management as a human act, producing a truncated management practice.

There have been a number of critiques of these rhetorical management texts—see, for example, the works of Clark and Salaman (1996, 1998) and Watson (1994)—amongst others.

The propagators of these management skills set and knowledge also gain—via their fees and enhanced reputations.

See, for example, the works of Hoecklin (1994), Adler (1991), Hampden-Turner and Trompenaau (1993, 2000). There is also the very influential work of Geert Hofstede (1984). Chen (1995), although differentiating between Asian management systems in his book, nonetheless describes these different Asian cultures without their internal divisions. Backman (1998) in his critique of Asian business, whilst finding variants, was able to ascribe the failure of Asian firms to a lack of corporate governance and cronynism. Whilst substantively true, this fails to account for the different trajectories of Asian business systems. Critically, this work focuses solely on failures and not some of the successes and carries the title *Asian Eclipse: Exposing the Dark Side of Business in Asia*. One could ask, given recent corporate failures in the USA and Australia, whether one might ever anticipate seeing its antithesis: 'Exposing the Dark Side of Business in the West'? The debate surrounding Asian values is perhaps the best example of this approach, where myriad Asian cultures are somehow constituted into a singular culture.

This is certainly true for analyses of Japan, where until the 1980s, Japan was presented predominantly as a conflict-free zone and Nakane's renditions of Japanese society as the only valid representation. For a critical account of this, see Mower and Sugimoto (1986).

For example, the economic trajectories of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore are shaped as much by small businesses, entrepreneurialism and state actions as by Confucianist beliefs and practices.

Comparable situations in the west have existed for many years but generally are not so well acknowledged, although since the 1980s, this literature has proliferated (Blois 1972; Mitchell 1969).

This practice can be similarly seen in the west. The defence and telecommunications industries are classic examples of this state-led behaviour, although rarely attributed as such. Perhaps the best example of state actions in fostering a strategic industry would be the case of the Airbus, where a consortium of European countries came together to realize and support the industry. Today, it is the only significant rival to Boeing, which incidentally is an important beneficiary of state funds. More gall- ing are the subsidies given to various industries in Europe, Australia and the USA, e.g. the agricultural, automobile and steel industries, which are clearly politically strategic with the motivation of keeping an electoral edge.

For example, the debate surrounding stakeholders versus shareholders.

These institutional analyses on developing countries were first applied to Africa (Bates 1981, 1987, 1989). In East Asia, they found their fullest and most popular expression in the World Bank's 1997 report, *The State in a Changing World* (see also Harriss et al. 1997). Douglas North (1981, 1990) is a major proponent and popularizer of this view globally.
This can be traced back to Foucault’s discussion of the mobilization of ‘technologies of the self’, through which individuals and groups create and define themselves and realize themselves as ‘moral agents’ (Foucault 1988; 1991b).

Lacan (1977) has been the most forceful and articulate exponent of this view. In his formulation, desire arises from a sense of lack and a perception of the Other. In the context of management, western managers convey success and power. Accordingly, access to their putative skills constitutes a driving desirable product and outcome for students and other non-managers, in both western and non-western societies.

This was clearly articulated by Locke (1996) in *The Collapse of the American Management Mystique*, where he suggests that since the 1970s, German and Japanese management discursive practices were seen as undermining American supremacy.

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