

Brian Moeran, *The Business of Ethnography. Strategic Exchanges, People and Organisations*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School, 2005, 225 pp., notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 1 84520 195 7 (paperback).

This book combines what is generally thought of as three heterogeneous disciplines namely anthropology, sociology and business studies. During the last couple of decades, however, there have been several attempts to integrate the three, prompted not only by a growing rapprochement between the disciplines but also by external circumstances that deeply impact on each of them individually owing to their common subject matter, viz. human interaction in all its diversity. Political and economic globalization feature as the most important of these influences, transforming the societal environments in which human action takes place.

One of the prime sites where anthropology, sociology and business studies merge is in the study of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in South-east Asia. Here questions of identity and ethnicity coalesce with studies of business strategies and economic performance.

In a similar vein, Brian Moeran focuses on the relationship between social networking and business strategies in a Japanese context, in which pottery production and its commodification constitute the core of his research interests. Moeran states rather surprisingly that culture does not play a significant role in the relationship between pottery production, distribution and sale and that a greater influence is exerted by social networking, fashion trends and rates of profitability. From this basis he sets out to analyse the association between what is thought of as 'traditional' pottery production and the personal relationships found among producers, market agents, advertising companies and sale outlets in the form of exhibitions in major warehouses and galleries.

Based on an intriguing combination of first-person accounts of his own fieldwork experience dating back a couple of decades, together with theories on the relationship between frames, networking and fields (as defined by Erving Goffman, Ulf Hannerz and Pierre Bourdieu among others), he shows how such an approach can serve as an analytical tool when applied to traditional Japanese pottery making, state of the art advertisement and sales in a highly competitive contemporary business environment. In this he skilfully combines micro and macro levels of sociological analysis with anthropological fieldwork methodology and applies it to the commodification of Japanese pottery production.

Through this approach Moeran provides us with the very important insight that professional networking, both among fellow potters and between the latter and pertinent agents within the distribution and advertising sector, is always based on interpersonal relations, that is, social relationships and not on institutionalized links between producers and companies or between companies themselves. According to Moeran, institutionalized links are somewhat vulnerable compared to the flexible, open-endedness and personalistic nature of the former. For example, institutional linkages only last as long as the people managing them are employed in the companies involved. As soon as they move on to another company, the institutional network has lost a player and has thus become weakened. It is on the basis of such insights that the approach Brian Moeran offers us gains its legitimacy in a field that is otherwise dominated by more or less static and primordial oriented management studies and other related business readings of like sectors.

There are, however, a couple of critical points to which I should like to draw attention. The most important is the rather stuffy atmosphere surrounding the theories that Moeran employs in his otherwise very inspiring and individualistic way of presenting his data. For example, most of the theories on frames, networking and fields that he uses were at their height from the mid 1970s to early 1990s. It would have been interesting if these theories had been compared to or updated in the light of more contemporary readings on these same issues. The somewhat stuffy framework becomes more pronounced in Moeran's discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's early 1990s work on the various forms of capital – symbolic, cultural or social – which we as human beings are constantly in the process of exchanging. This is, however, not to say that the theories employed, and especially those of Bourdieu, have little to teach us today – on the contrary. For example, the way in which Moeran situates Bourdieu's concepts within a contemporary context injects new life and meaning into the theories. Moeran thereby provides us with a powerful analysis of the forces that drive human actors within the world of Japanese pottery making, distribution and marketing. It would however have been interesting to see whether new approaches in this field of inquiry might have brought to light new and alternative insights. Having said this, I would recommend that as many people as possible read this book. Not only does it give a fascinating insight into the world of Japanese pottery production, but also reveals a deep-felt understanding of how we as human beings relate to one another in terms of interpersonal networking. Because of this Brian Moeran's

book is a must for the social scientist and socially inclined business theorist interested in debunking the relationship between business and ethnography.

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