

**SOME COMMON STEREOTYPES AND MISCONCEPTIONS
SCANDINAVIAN MANAGERS EXPERIENCE IN ASIA**

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ABSTRACT

While collecting data for my on-going research project earlier this year, where I held 28 long interviews with top level Scandinavian managers working in Asia (most of whom were based in Singapore), what inevitably came up over and over again was prevalent stereotypes and misconceptions between Scandinavian managers and their local counterparts in Asia.

While stereotypes can be helpful when it comes to understanding a foreign environment and its people, it can also be dangerous. What might be true of a people or a group as a whole is almost always incorrect / inaccurate on an individual level. And while a general representation for the Chinese may hold true for the Chinese in China this might be untrue for the Chinese of Southeast Asia, the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia for example.

The various stereotypes that Scandinavian managers have of Asians - and vice versa – both help and cause problems. This paper will look into some such stereotypes, and discuss how true and far-reaching those stereotypes are for both the Scandinavians and their Asian counterparts. We will also look into how Southeast Asian Chinese view themselves in relation to Mainland Chinese, and to what effect their cultural and ideological values shape their evolving business practices.

It is also not unlikely that Scandinavian practices organizations and managers in Asia have brought with them Scandinavian values and implemented a Scandinavian management style. As such, closer working relationships between these countries will eventually render not just a juxtaposition of the Scandinavian management style over the various and currently evolving Asian management styles, but a merging of management styles in future.

SOME COMMON STEREOTYPES AND MISCONCEPTIONS SCANDINAVIAN MANAGERS EXPERIENCE IN ASIA

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I would like to present some active constructions of Scandinavian-Asian cultural stereotypes that Scandinavian and Asian managers construct for themselves in order to understand their working environment and their foreign colleagues better. I choose to look at cultural stereotypes and personal world views at the work place because apart from its influence on communication within the organization, for example, the manner in which you phrase your sentences is in part affected by how you perceive your audience, it is also these that influence cross-cultural working relationships and in turn, organizational culture and management styles.

I would also like to present a comparison of points of view between Southeast-Asian Chinese (SEAC) and Mainland Chinese (MC). While most would see the Chinese as a single ethnic group with similar cultural values, ideologies and thus business practices, it is interesting to note that SEAC, (mainly those in Singapore and Malaysia), see many differences in their world points of view between themselves and their Mainland cousins. These socio-cultural and political differences often result in different business practices and management styles.

Using a framework of critical discourse analysis, I hope to show how stereotypes are actively constructed in cross-cultural business relationships and to share the differences in points of view as reflected in the language of the interviews, culminating in how these two aspects come together on a broader scale in reflecting and influencing the evolving management styles in Asia.

DATA & FRAMEWORK

The data and abstracts in this paper come from over 50 hours of long interview with a total of 28 Scandinavian and Asian managers who work together throughout Asia but mostly based in Singapore as their organizations have their headquarters in Singapore. All interviewees have wide experiences working in Asia where the Scandinavians usually have a contract of between 3 to 5 years

working in Asia. Some interviewees have been working in Asia for more than 15 years.

The chosen method of analysis in the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA) renders qualitative rather than quantitative results, meaning that the results of the analyses cannot be a basis for generalizations but is meant to give an understanding of how and why for example, people construct cultural stereotypes, what assumptions are made when people express their points of views and how those underlying assumptions in themselves can be deconstructed if one practices consciousness raising.

I found long interviews to be most effective for CDA analyses since the interviews in themselves often turned out to be interesting narratives in which many stories unfolded from the interviewee's point of view.

Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA as a practical framework allows for a qualitative analysis of language, 'denaturalizing' ideological social norms and traditions that have over the years been made natural through everyday interaction, education and institutionalization (Faiclough, 1985). The terms *critical linguistics* emerged from Fowler et al. (1979) in their book, 'Language and Control'. As with Fowler et al., the tools of analysis in this paper is eclectically selected to suit the purposes of this paper, designed to "get at the ideology implicitly coded behind the overt propositions" (Fowler, 1991:481) to examine the contexts in which cross-cultural business practices and communication take place between Scandinavians and Asians and to filter out intrinsic knowledge from language in use. When applied to interviews and conversations, phrases, sentences and meanings are interpreted against a 'norm' or as much a 'neutral' point of view as possible since no point of view is absolutely neutral. For example, if a person has a constant need to say, "I'm telling you *honestly*", the constant use of the word "honestly" paradoxically undermines and questions their character since if they were so honest, why would there be subconscious need to highlight that they *are* honest?

Since all things need to be done through the process of communication and through language where language both creates and reflects reality:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of

solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.

~ Edward Sapir (in Whorf 1941)

A close attention to and the analysis of the use of language in these interviews will render interesting insights into the psychology and behaviour of people.

But while CDA has its advantages, it has been generally noted that CDA does not provide a standard framework within which their practitioners can manoeuvre and that one has to bear in mind that interpretations and analyses, as with most written works including scientific work, are never purely objective. Nevertheless, such analyses does set out to begin work in the perspective field and be seen as one step in the direction of understanding how business practices work across cultures and how management styles evolve and change over time.

The CDA method adopted in this paper runs as a critical commentary on the abstracts with the intention of raising the consciousness of readers through the foregrounding of assumptions and presuppositions in the interviewees’ discourse, making explicit to the reader what the interviewees themselves do not when speaking about their cross-cultural work experiences or perceptions of their Scandinavian or Asian counterparts. Lexical choices and phrasing of words are also analysed in the abstracts to help uncover or make explicit the subconscious or ‘hidden’ points of views of the interviewees, where qualifications such as the use of “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure” act to moderate what is said before, so that the surety of a sentence such “I find Swedes jealous, I don’t know” for example, is moderated and the negative connotations of the sentence somewhat alleviated. Thus what can be revealed through CDA is a greater understanding of how deep underlying ideologies are intricately entwined in one’s everyday relations and workings thus reflected in the manner in which one functions at the work place.

This paper is a theory generating effort that can be used in support of and in the building of new theories towards management practices and is intended to be part of a larger study. The data and analyses thus presents a preliminary overview of a larger piece of work undertaken, as such, not all topics of debate will be fully presented here.

SCANDINAVIAN-ASIAN CULTURAL STEREOTYPES

Cultural stereotypes, for the purposes of this paper is defined as “a stable set of beliefs or pre-conceived ideas which the members of a group share about the characteristics of other groups” (Guirdham, 1999:161). While stereotypes can have some grounding in reality and be a helpful simplification, it can also contain distorted connotations marked with prejudice and bias.

Stereotyping is a much addressed topic (Pickering, 2001; Scollon and Scollon, 2001; Hinton, 2000; Kovach, 1996) and it would presumably be the first issue any in-house preparatory cross-cultural training program would entail when an organization prepares to send their managers overseas either to run an overseas base or to set up a new base overseas. But in my meetings and interviews with both top-level Scandinavian and Asian managers who worked together, cultural stereotypes and misrepresentations from both sides peppered the conversation over and above the comfort zone.

One difficulty that arose from my interviews was seeing how differently the word ‘Asian’ was defined since many organizations had a number of wide reaching offices situated in the Indian subcontinent to the mainland regions of Southeast Asia including Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, the maritime regions of Southeast- Asia including Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and the far east of China and Japan. In most interviews however, the definition of ‘Asian’ fell closer to that of referring to the Chinese (sometimes Japanese and Koreans included) rather than any other ethnicity since the Thais were referred to as Thais, the Indonesians, Indonesians, the Indians as Indians and so on. Most Scandinavians who end up in Asia also end up working most of the time with the Chinese, whether they are SEAC or MC.

Swedes are Jealous and the Chinese are Immoral

Abstract 1 (and subsequent abstracts) shows a conversation between two Asians, one who was a previous Managing Director (MD) for a Swedish company (speaker \$K) and the other, a current MD (speaker \$P) working in a previously Swedish, now Finnish owned company. Both interviewees have been working with Swedes for more than 20 years and one of whom actually spent 2 years working in Gothenburg as Director of the company’s far east operations. The conversation between them circled around how \$K was heavily interrogated by the Swedish Board of Directors for apparently paying his sales managers a year-end bonus that rivalled the company President’s income.

Abstract 1

\$K: by then you are running way up above everybody else already / so what {i}s the problem / we give him 10% of the profit right / when he grosses a certain target / you double it which is 20 / the company keeps 80 / so what {i}s the problem /

In Abstract 1, \$K's makes several presuppositions by his argument, the first of which is that \$K speaks from a capitalist / entrepreneurialistic point of view in doing business where he encourages his workers to work for themselves too and not just for the company, in fact, \$K structured his sales people's salary system to reflect their own motivation in their work for both themselves and the company. \$K has also been brought up in a continuously growing and globalizing economy of Singapore, a country that has no other natural resources than its people i.e. human resource; a country that also does not have substantial social welfare support for those who are out of work for example, as such, it is not *how much* his sales people make for themselves that count per se but the guiding principle behind how much they make renders \$K happy with the results and declare "So what's the problem?" since the company still keeps the bulk of their profits.

But having uncovered \$K's point of view, one notices too that \$K does not precisely point out what it is that the Swedes do not understand when he mentions, "So this was very difficult because they don't understand this", the specific deictic pointer and anaphoric reference of *this* could refer to several things outside of the spoken context, from the Swedes not understanding the capitalist / entrepreneurial spirit of business, or if they did not understand his salary policies, in which case, this misunderstanding could have been addressed and possibly resolved by \$K asking the Board of Directors, "What is it that you don't understand" or "Why does this seem unreasonable to you?" to if it really was just the salary package that they disagreed on.

Abstracts 1 and 2 are also interesting in how it shows the active construction of a cultural stereotype by both \$K and \$P. Since people do tend to draw their conclusions of the world through the events and happenings in and around them, it is not surprising for \$P, who is a good friend and close colleague of \$K and who also has extensive working experiences with Swedes, to conclude:

Abstract 2

\$P: that {i}s correct that aspect i find swedish people somewhat / i find i do n{o}t know what you call that / here we call green eye lah you know

Although \$P concludes that Swedes are “green eyed”, he does so hesitatingly, saying “I don’t know...” which indicates that he is not all that ready to classify Swedes into a certain category of people. In the end, \$P categorises what he perceives the Swedes behaviour to be as “green-eyed” or jealous. That \$P can only phrase \$K’s experience in terms familiar to the local Singaporean context i.e. to \$P’s social background and world knowledge is interesting since \$P needs to communicate what he sees, thinks and feels about the whole incident, thereby placing the Swedes into the category of “a people of a jealous nature”. A few lines down from the given abstract above, \$P acknowledges, “they want you to be more or less the same” thus alluding to Swedish socialistic state of mind and philosophy of life, yet \$P does not credit the socialist state of mind for the Swede’s disagreement with \$K in \$K’s salary policies, but rather classifies Swedes as “green-eyed”.

But with the socialist state of mind comes also a certain truth about how Swedes may view the Asian salary package with a 13 months annual salary and as much as 8 months bonus a year if the company does well, as a certain immorality. The Asian system allows for people to accumulate wealth in a very short amount of time and why pay 13 months salary when the year only has 12? The result for both \$K and \$P is that when interacting with Swedes, they are made to feel immoral, as in Abstract 3 below.

Abstract 3

\$K: so if you make too much money you are immoral as far as they know
\$P: yah / you make more money you {a}re like immoral to them you know

If one were to consider the Swedish socio-cultural and historical background, the Protestant religion in Sweden hails modesty, where one is assumed to do one’s best if and when hired to do a job, without additional economical incitements. To a certain extent the post WWII economic development in Sweden made asking for a raise unnecessary on the worker’s part since workers were granted a good share of the increased national income. This eventually ended perhaps after 1970s, after which the society has been debating

in several camps over the issue of top management being the first to follow the 'foreign system' with bonuses that eventually led to a number of public scandals as in ABB and Skandia.

Back in the Asian context, both \$P and \$K's Swedish counterparts making them feel immoral goes against their logic since in the Asian context, the people work hard and legitimately for their money, sometimes working overtime. In fact, \$K's salary scheme was formulated with the intent of a built-in motivation for his staff – the harder they worked, the higher the commission possibilities for them. Again, in their conversation, there was no direct mention of how they were made to feel immoral by their Swedish counterparts and colleagues.

Swedes Run Social Clubs at Work, Asians Run Sweat-shops

Stereotypes, to a large extent are built on biased dispositions and a lack of understanding / knowledge for the stereotyped party (it could also be true the other way around, where stereotypes are built on very thorough understandings of the party being stereotyped) which is why stereotypes are said to be both helpful and not at the same time when it comes to understanding the Other. But stereotypes, like good narratives, can be delved into and unfolded, where an investigation and understanding of the social background upon which the stereotype was built is a good place to start.

The following abstracts illustrate how the ant-hill is a function of the ant, i.e. that the working dispositions and values of Swedes and Asians are functions of the kinds of socio-cultural and political systems from which they come. To the Asians, the Swedes lack a sense of urgency, which carry a heavy sense of negative connotations for the highly competitive Asians as Asia as a whole, whether Southeast-Asia, China or India are fighting competitively with the West to globalize their countries, services and resources. Most Asians (and some Scandinavian interviewees as well) find the welfare system of the Scandinavian countries a burden rather than boon to business practices since in the case above, the Asian counterparts, find a "lack of urgency" in their working styles, which in turn renders a less effective, less competitive mode of conduct for their business in Asia, where working half days on Saturday as official working hours is not uncommon in Singapore.

The presumption made is also that Swedes do not work at "full-speed", taken by the Asians as not because they cannot work faster but that they don't need to as their socio-political system provides a comfortable safety net in which to fall back on when things are financially difficult. It can be observed that whether the assumption is true or not, the welfare system is looked upon as

something that can explain the lack of haste and ambition in the behaviour of their Scandinavian counterparts; something that is weighted in as a drawback in working with Scandinavians / Swedes as compared to other nationalities. Thus the implication for the Asians is that this system weighs down operations on the Asian side as well as an indirect consequence. Swedes come across to their Asian counterparts as not being goal oriented, having been provided for by their government and Swedes are slow in decision making due to their “humanistic approach” as \$P mentions with negative connotations.

Abstract 4 below illustrates the two different ways in which the Swede and the Asian provide for the family, where the “they” in the first line refers to the Swedes \$P works with:

Abstract 4

\$P: ...then they ask / are the people happy / of course people are happy / you must treat them well / you pay them well / our workers are like that / if work is there / it needs to be done / it needs to be done / so in a way / we are a bit more like the japanese / we are more goal oriented and we believe that basically / the europeans or swedes look at family like a key part or activity i mean / for example / like if your daughter has a birthday / wah / it {i}s like an all important thing / must make sure you go back no matter how demanding the customer is / to us asians is / it {i}s crazy / i think the work / i think the work place is the important one because it {i}s the place where you get the bread and the butter / so you have to tell your family / without work / there {i}s no money to buy cake let alone celebrating the birthday / so you know / i find the life there very strange and of course why / because they have social protection system / to them the concept of losing the job means losing everything is not true because the government will pay them after they do n{o}t have a job / for us here / if we lose our jobs / who pays you

\$K: yah / here you do n{o}t work / you do n{o}t eat today

In the Asian socio-cultural context, there is too the assumption that workers are hired to do their best on the job, as with the Swedish ideology, however, there is on the Asian side, another working ideology tied to what it means to ‘treat a person well’. In Asian societies, treating a person well equates mostly in monetary terms i.e. \$P would treat his staff well if he paid them a better salary since even a small difference in pay for his staff can improve their quality of life in terms of what they can use that extra money for in daily expenses. So continued overtime and hard work is rewarded with a reciprocal raise in salary or monetary compensation. In the Asian context, getting work done is equated with being goal

oriented since the goal *is* to complete the task and maximize profitability for the company (and thus oneself if work is on commission basis).

While it is true that the Chinese as an ethnic group are heavily influenced in part by Confucianism, where one's definition of self is done in relation to their family and then society, at first glance, it may seem surprising to find \$P placing work before the family, "you have to tell your family, without work, there is no money to buy cake let alone celebrating the birthday", but at another level, \$P is and does place family as first priority since what concerns him is not the quality time he misses from his family because of work but rather to have a job that allows him to place food on the table for his family.

The Swede on the other hand appears to view quality time spent with the family as a more important part of how they provide for and care for the family. The way in which the Asian and Scandinavian both want to provide for the family but do it in different ways runs parallel to Hofstede's Masculinity Indexes (1980) where both Scandinavians and Asians provide for the family, but the *manner* in which this is done differs for both cultures, the Scandinavian countries tending to show more 'feminine' traits such as paying more attention to details, to the household and to a certain extent, the men showing more concern for the emotional side of things rather than pure rhetorics and logic (Hofstede, 1980).

Astract 5 below also shows a similar manner in which a Chinese national (henceforth known as \$C) had spent the time over Chinese New Year, a significant celebration and 'family time' to be with his Scandinavian counterpart. The background context to the conversation is that the Chinese national is stationed in Beijing, his wife, also a Chinese national, is stationed in Singapore. Being Chinese New Year, speaker \$M who is Scandinavian made several assumptions based on his cultural values and world view (as \$M says, "if I had gone to Beijing and my wife was there..."), the first was that, being Chinese New Year, \$C would and should spend time with his family, the second was that having been away from his wife for months, that \$C would spend the most of his time in Singapore with his wife instead of with \$M who, in \$M's point of view, a secondary priority as a working partner or contact for \$C.

Abstract 5

\$M: ...over chinese new year / i was here / and one of my contact person works in <1 x >1 in Beijing / his wife / lives here / she {i}s chinese also but she works here {be}cause i know him / but he called me on wednesday right / late wednesday and said / hey <2 x >2 i {a}m going to singapore / so i said / oh that {i}s great / that {i}s nice to hear / then we should meet / then he calls me two hours later / hey i

got the tickets now / oh that {i}s real good and at 8:10am next morning / he calls me again from the airport / hey i {a}m here in singapore and i was thinking / are n{o}t you gonna see your wife

@ <1 name of banking organization >1

@ <2 name of speaker >2

\$M: yeah chinese from china / you have n{o}t seen your wife now for i do n{o}t now how many months / i mean / do n{o}t you want to spend your five days or few days you have here with your wife / we ended up being together thursday / friday / sunday / night / monday for lunch ... / if i had gone to beijing and my wife was there / i would {ha}ve spent half an hour with him and spend the rest with my wife right / but that {i}s a big difference / that this was quite important for him also

On one hand, one could argue that both of \$M's assumptions came across as incorrect since \$C seemed more intent on keeping up good contact relations with \$M rather than putting his own wife at the centre of his one week activities in Singapore. \$C also seemed to have spent some part of almost everyday of that one week with \$M which in \$M's point of view, is time away from \$C's wife and perhaps even \$M's family life. On the other hand, one can see how \$C, as reflected in \$P's ideologies previously, puts work and work contacts at the centre of his activities since without work, the family will not survive and without work, \$C will not be able to afford the material, emotional and mental comfort for his family, so that by taking care of work and by keeping in touch with his work contacts, he is taking care of his family in a much more indirect way manner than how the Scandinavians would perceive spending 'quality' time with the family as providing for and taking care of them. Thus from the Asian point of view, the idea of a 'sweatshop' or the metaphoric use of it to describe one's work is not conceivable since if this, as it were, 'sweatshop' did not exist, then all material comforts, the quality of life they would like to provide for their family cannot exist either. From the Scandinavian point of view, social activity such as interaction and keeping up social relationships during and outside of work is the quality of life they seek. So while work, recreation and family are separate entities that need not affect one another for the Scandinavian, work and family are closely intertwined entities for the Asian since without one, the other cannot exist.

Scandinavians Love Saying No and Asians Never Say No

Abstract 6

\$S: they do n{o}t tell you what they mean or do they speak quite directly /
\$M: no / no erm / i think now after three and a half years / i probably get more
straight answers / definitely than i get in the past / but i {a}m also getting better in
this thing i think / that sometimes i would ask about something and i can hear that
sometimes the answer i get is just like blah loh loh loh loh because they do n{o}t
want to say no to me / so they {wi}ll say / maybe blah blah blah / even though
they know that there {i}s absolutely no chance /
\$S: is that specifically china / or is it vietnam and india and cambodia or / is it
asians that they do n{o}t say no directly /
\$M: yah, you probably could to some extent / generalize it and say that it {i}s
very difficult for asians to say no / this loss of face and all that
\$S: not the same in scandinavia though /
\$M: no / then people love to say no

The point made by \$M in Abstract 6 (where speaker \$S is the interviewer) above does not only pertain to Asians not being able to say 'no' but rather, how they never seem to be able to give a direct or straight forward answer. This situation and what may be a communicative peculiarity of Asians can thus come across as frustrating and confusing for the Scandinavians or most other foreigners unfamiliar to working in Asia.

Brown and Levinson (1978), who developed an elaborate theory on positive and negative face, where the former refers to the claim over one's projected self-image to be appreciated and approved by others and the latter refers to one's claim to territories, personal reserves and rights to non-distraction etc, maintains that adult members of society have the capacity to achieve positive and negative face for themselves and others, but the manner in which they do so differ from culture to culture.

Later studies by Shimanoff (1985, 1987) introduced four suprastrategies that can be applied in the understanding of the situation encountered in Abstract 6, including (i) face-honouring (FH) type, (ii) face-compensating (FC) type, (iii) face-neutral (FN) type and (iv) face threatening (FT) type. While the first three types of face-negotiation strategies represent a respect for keeping the face of others, including the Other in cross-cultural situations and thus expect that Asians

would tend to use more of such strategies when communicating, the last strategy represents a negative face-confronting strategy which a Scandinavian is more inclined to and have no reserves using when needed.

If we considered Hall's (1976, 1983) low-context culture and high-context culture (LCC-HCC) dimensions, Asians tend to communicate from a point of view in high-context backgrounds where the Self is defined in relation to family, friends and others belonging in the same society. The sense of belonging to the community for the Asian is far more important than standing out in the crowd. This is not to say that Asians do not have individual opinions and that they do not disagree with each other, but that when they do, their disagreements are managed in a different way as illustrated by \$P in Abstract 7:

Abstract 7

\$P: swedish / a worker will tell the boss / i think your policy at the workplace / for example / how to do these things / no you can {no}t tell me because i {a}m better than you / he will tell the boss like that / but for our malaysian culture or our singaporean worker / we are halfway there / halfway between india and the west / ... we do n{o}t think you {a}re right / you do n{o}t think the boss is right / but we know we cannot speak up / although they can actually / but they feel that way / so they do n{o}t speak up / but they go by the quiet way / they go behind the back and then they talk to the local manager / for example / this person from sweden / he come and tell me to do this / but i think it cannot work and then blah blah blah and then the local manager will go and talk to the other side / so they both go through another way
\$K: they use the informal channel

As Abstract 7 shows, it is socially recognised that Asians *can* use an FT type of strategy in communication and put forth their differing opinions, an opinion that goes against that of a superior at work for example, but they choose not to because of the socio-cultural structure of the society. So they would practice FH or FN types of strategy in handling conflicts or disagreements and as \$K mentions, go through an "informal channel". But while the Asian may view this as an FH or FN type of strategy, used to keep social peace and harmony, the Scandinavians may interpret the same FH or FN type of act as back-stabbing or a serious FT strategy on the part of the Asian because why would their Asian counterpart not them directly but go behind their backs and speak to another about a problem that should, by right, be solved between themselves? So that in the end, a problem that could be solved between two persons now involves three or more

persons depending on who has / have been approached in the situation. It is also a point to note that while \$M in Abstract 6 mentions that Asians are concerned about 'the loss of face', so too are Scandinavians, but the manner in which they preserve their face differs in strategy from the Asians. To the Scandinavian, it perhaps is a 'loss of face' on their part if they do not practice FT strategies in protecting their prerogatives.

In Abstract 6, where \$M finds that Asians tend not to say 'no' directly, apart from noticing that Asians generally use FC or FN strategies when they really mean 'no', a deeper analysis shows that reading body language and paralinguistic features, learning to view the Asian in their socio-cultural and political context and understand them from their world view enables \$M to make better judgements about what they really *are* saying to him and what they really mean even when he is confronted with an FC or an FN strategy by his Asian counterparts.

MAINLAND CHINESE & SOUTHEAST-ASIAN CHINESE

While a general all encompassing categorizing of cultural values of people may be easier to work with when working in a large region such as the Middle-East, Latin America, Scandinavia and in this case, Asia, an understanding of the nuances between groups of people who are apparently similar can lead to smoother communication patterns in future.

This section presents some insights into how the Chinese themselves view each other within Asia and abstracts of conversations that reflect the differing ideologies of MCs and SEACs. The analysis in this section however is in no way attempting to polarise the two groups of people, though it may come across as such. The aim here is to highlight some differing points of view between the two groups of people.

Due to China's growing economy, it is currently in the process of rapidly developing and evolving business / management practices. China, like the Southeast-Asian countries of Singapore and Malaysia have similar strongly motivated individuals, so that both the SEAC and MC would share similar ideologies as reflected in Abstracts 4 and 5 above, where they have an equivalence in spirit, comparable determination, motivation and entrepreneurialism in doing business; work first and play later (or perhaps even never).

But while internationalizing China's economy would put into action a standardization of practices in their organizations, something already much reflected in its more economically open neighbours such as Singapore, what still remains very different between an MC and the Chinese of Singapore for example, is the mind-set of the people, which includes socio-cultural values reflected in business protocols and business practices.

Abstract 8

\$K: ... china is just about evolving its own style of management / china is a completely different thing / you know / we started travelling in china twenty years ago / you look at this guy mister wang / he is factory manager then you look at mister lee is also factory manager / you really have a problem trying to figure out who {i}s the boss / and they {a}re all bosses

\$P: yup / that {i}s correct

\$K: that {i}s why it {i}s real tricky doing business with the chinese / you do n{o}t know how they do / so over time you will have to find them who amongst them is in charge of what portfolio and who basically is the more influential among the few and then you have to slowly work your way in /

Abstract 8 above demonstrates \$K and \$P's need to understand working with the Chinese, just as Scandinavians would need to understand the MC. While both \$K and \$P are ethnically Chinese, \$K's point of view is that "you have a problem..." and "it is tricky doing business with the Chinese" show that working with MCs do not get easier just because one belongs to the same ethnic group, as some may assume but that doing business in China for a Southeast-Asian, needs to be a learning process as well. When talking about the Chinese from China, both \$K and \$P also use "they" or the definitive article "the" as in "the Chinese" in order to differentiate themselves from the MC, thus showing a lack of identification with them, since if \$K and \$P really felt as if they belonged to the same group of people, they would have used more of the words, "we" and "us" to identify themselves as belonging with the MC group.

Abstract 9 goes back to face negotiation tactics and shows that face negotiation tactics takes some understanding even within a single ethnic group as the SEACs and the MCs try to understand each other in their organizational hierarchy and various personnel portfolios. In the case of \$P who is Singaporean, he too seems not to understand why his Chinese counterpart cannot tell him certain things directly and attributes that to a "loss of face". \$P's words, "so *eventually*..." indicates that he needed to do some figuring out or understanding on his part on how his Chinese counterpart went about doing their jobs and their

communication style before realizing that he needed to spend time interacting with them at a more social level, outside of work to find out who had the power to make decisions in the organization he was interested in working with.

Abstract 9

\$P: sometimes even / i wo{uld} n{o}t say sometimes/ in fact most of the time i find the one who makes decisions is not the one who carries a title ... yah sometimes i deal with the factory general manager / the general manager is number one / generally / and i find that a lot of things he was saying that / i think can / i think no problem but at the end you find things not moving and you think can / but things not moving and he will not tell you he cannot make decision because he will lose face / so eventually you will have to go by a very social kind of interaction and finally ask him how to get things done and then he will say i will arrange for you to meet somebody and then you {wi}ll meet and then okay and i think we met a secretary / a party secretary and at the end of it / he took out a name card for you and you take about one hour in the room and then < ke yi / mei wen ti > he tell the general manager / okay / and then things get moving because it {i}s the party secretary who controls

@ < mandarin, translated to mean: can do, no problems >

Apart from having to learn and understand how a person from China communicates, the Southeast-Asian Chinese also see themselves as having a different world point of view or socio-cultural and political backgrounds from their Mainland cousins. So with the globalizing of China and working towards a standardization and making more efficient business practices that is a pattern already reflected in Singapore and Malaysia, what remains different is still the cultural mind-set of the people which \$P and \$K in Abstract 11 point to with the use of “us” to refer to Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese, who are “supposed to be Chinese”, with the implication that the Southeast-Asian Chinese really are not ‘Chinese’ not only because of their different historic socio-political backgrounds in the manner in which Singapore was founded by a British, Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819 and had immigrants from other Asian countries, to how the Singaporean and Malaysian economies are currently more global with English as Singapore’s official working language. So Singaporean Chinese may grow up as English, Chinese, Malay or Tamil as their mother tongues. Since bilingualism is a policy in Singapore, those who grow up with English as their mother tongue will take one of the following of Malay, Chinese (Mandarin) or Tamil as their second language, of which Mandarin is currently the most popular choice.

Since English is a colonial language and seeing that language both creates and reflects one's reality, the language situation in Singapore for example, means that its people have been growing up with a differing world point of view, from their Mainland cousins. Abstract 11 also shows that while \$P speaks with Singapore Colloquial English, a more informal type of English that blends Chinese or Malay words and Chinese grammatical structure into the English language, he nonetheless still feels 'modified' and distinct from thought, behaviour and expression from the Mainlanders in part because they do not speak the same language.

Abstract 11

\$P: ...even for companies like in Singapore / even for us / we are supposed to be chinese / but when we go to china there / you are not actually ... chinese because you do n{o}t behave like they behave / they feel that way / so for singaporean chinese / when they go there they still want to find a chinese counterpart or your success chance is lesser / ...because for singapore chinese / we speak mandarin / we are also brought up on chinese and malay and we know quite a lot of chinese but when we go there / we still find we can {no}t / of course in part we are the modified chinese so to say you know / we have western influence / cultural influence / so we are the modified type /

\$P is not alone in his point of view on how Singaporean Chinese for example need to understand their Mainland cousins if they want to succeed in doing successful business with China. A recent news article in the Singapore broadsheet, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Lee Hsien Loong addressed a similar issue on how Singapore needs to understand "China's culture and history and how its society works" (Chia, 2004) seeing that Singapore needs to relate to China who is a growing economic force. DPM Lee also admitted that it would not be an easy task but it was something that Singapore needed to do and that an indepth understanding of China could begin with an understanding and the more frequent use of the language in Singapore.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ANALYSES

What was employed as a CDA method in the analyses is a broad uncovering of the socio-political ideologies of the interviewees and the type of presuppositions they make when speaking of / about their Scandinavian or Asian counterparts, that is, to not take what is said at face value but to look behind what is said into the social, historical and political backgrounds of the people that contribute in shaping their world points of view in order for the interviewees to see things in a specific light.

But even when they want to say something negative, they hesitate, ie. The Asians, show that they are not altogether against the Scandinavians and that the Scandinavian may not agree with the Chinese but still keep company shows a certain acceptance / tolerance of the values that do not belong to them.

Because management styles are a product of practical circumstances and institutionalised expectations, the Scandinavians and the Chinese in a closed environment of an organization, will in time develop their own management style that is not completely Swedish nor Chinese but rather an in-between, a meeting halfway of each other's expectations.

TOWARDS A SCANDINAVIAN-ASIAN MERGING OF MANAGEMENT STYLES?

For the past few decades, Scandinavian organizations having been steadily setting up headquarters in Singapore and Malaysia, bringing with them a part of their cultural values, business practices and management styles. Today, it is not only management styles that are juxtaposed over the local management styles of the country but Scandinavian ideology is also reflected in office architecture where offices in Swedish owned companies in Singapore for example are furnished with light wood, light furniture and an 'open-space' concept, instead of the traditional grey working cubicle in Singapore owned companies, still reflected in Singapore's governmental organizations.

While Scandinavians who first move out to Southeast-Asia to work may find many similarities with the 'Chinese way' of doing things and thus largely group 'the Chinese' together as one, whether they come from Southeast-Asia or China, there seems to be a trend in Singapore pointing towards a merging of the Scandinavian and Asian management styles rather than an outright assimilation of the Scandinavians to Asian ways of doing business or a complete imposition of a

Scandinavian management style over the locals, with more diffused sources of power as compared to the Asian way of having a single power source and decision maker in organizations. Given Singapore's global positioning of itself and of its encouraging invite to foreign owned companies, this merging of management styles is more likely to happen in Singapore sooner than it will in China or the rest of Southeast-Asia. For example, almost all Swedish or Scandinavian organizations in Singapore celebrate local festivities such as the Chinese New Year with the giving away of oranges and red packets as symbols of good luck for the workers.

With Singapore having made a conscious decision and effort since its IT2000 (Information Technology 2000) plan for it to be a multi- and international hub for business, science and technology, the country has been fairly open to western influence so that when asked what kind of management style Singaporeans think they have, they believe themselves to have a more 'western' management style in that they expect their workers to speak up if they do not agree with policies or procedures. Hierarchies in organizations are also flattening out, the middle management level is being done away with and responsibility transferred to individuals instead with more centres of power / decision making capacities rather than one single head of department for example. Most interviewees who have worked with Scandinavians also prefer a more direct manner of communicating i.e. to raise doubts and disagreements to the person concerned rather than by going through what is known in Asia as the 'informal channel'.

Singaporeans and Malaysians for example, have the point of view that Scandinavian management styles are more 'democratic' with the Chinese style of management as more autocratic where the boss can seldom be wrong or the decisions questioned.

Singapore, as a small country with a population of 4.5 million and a land area of about 660 square kilometres, has the capacity to adapt and assimilate new technology, ideas and new procedures faster than its larger, neighbouring countries. It is thus not surprising to see a movement towards a Scandinavian-Asian management style in future.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the beginning, this paper has been mostly about the presentation of stereotypes that Scandinavian and Asian managers not only encounter during their work but also create for themselves in a bid to understand the different realities around them. We have also seen that despite belonging to a similar ethnic group, the Chinese in Southeast-Asia view themselves as both similar yet different in relation to Mainland Chinese and that cultural and ideological differences between themselves can still be perceived. Such cultural differences, mainly language, political and historical differences, are reflected in their everyday activities including that of work and business practices, thus rendering their management systems, business protocols and procedures similar in some ways, but also very different in various other dimensions.

Scandinavian Management as a field of study is relatively new with initiatives by Jönsson (1996) and Johannesson & Svanberg (1985). While an outline of a nordic management style has already been proposed and studied (Lindell & Arvonen, 1996; Furusten & Kinch, 1996 and Gustavsson & Melin, 1996), a comparison of the Nordic management style to other types of management styles around the world is the next natural progress in this field.

With the differences of socio-cultural and political values between the Chinese in China and those in Southeast-Asia, one can then reflect on the evolving management styles of Southeast-Asia, in particular, that of Singapore, whose small population and good infrastructure allows for its people to implement and adapt to new ideas, procedures and technology so that there exists today, a blend of Asian management practices in family-owned and perhaps governmental organizations and a less hierarchic (or a different hierarchic organization) western style of management.

Being aggressively competitive and absorbing of new ideas, Scandinavian organizations in Asia will no doubt be closely studied for new concepts and ideas and most probably be used as a basis for an evolving Scandinavian-Asian management style. It is my firm belief that management studies here in Scandinavia will benefit from following this process closely.

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