What Are We Reading?

As we start the new year we would like to repeat our invitation of having readers send us short summaries of the books they read in order to share their impressions with others. This time we have two reviews. One prepared by Professor Malcolm Warner (University of Cambridge, UK) and the other by John P. van Gigch (California State University, USA).


The extraordinary growth of the Chinese economy since Deng Xiaoping’s reforms were introduced in the later 1970s, with the “Four Modernizations” (sige xiandaihuа) and the “Open Door” (kaifang) policies set to transform a wide range of hide-bound institutions, was to establish a solid platform for job-creation. This concise book, written by Dr. Fang Lee Cooke (of the Manchester Business School), entitled “HRM, Work and Employment in China” (2005), deals with how China has nurtured human resources over the period and has many merits as a text on how human resource management (renli ziyuan guanli) – or HRM for short – evolved, is developing and where it may be going. With no independent trade unions, China has had no Western-style collective bargaining for many years, although this may be slowly changing. Once upon a time, “personnel management” (renshi guanli) was the dominant mode in Chinese people management. Now, HRM with “Chinese characteristics”, has become more evident in larger firms, both MNC or state-owned, or so it is claimed. Cooke deals with all this in ten crisply written chapters and does it very well indeed.

While the PRC remains relatively downstream in the value-added chain, this is now rapidly changing; it is educating many millions of scientists and technologists in its expanding higher education sector, for instance: “If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people (shinian shumen)” says an old Chinese proverb (cited in The Economist, 30 July 2005: 14).

Even so, the pace of rapid economic growth in the “Middle Kingdom” has been achieved at a weighty human cost vis a vis a deficit of civil rights, labour rights and so on, at least in the view of its critics. Income inequality has now doubled over the last two decades – to a Gini Coefficient of 44.7, one of the highest in Asia. Redundancies galore characterize the old state firms that have let go over ten per cent of the urban labour force. Unemployment (shiye) has jumped to over 4.5 per cent officially but is probably a multiple of this in reality, mainly due to economic restructuring and consequent downsizing. Some may conclude that this is the price the PRC has to pay for becoming a “global player” but it will not be a painless journey!

Cooke has nonetheless produced a readable text for both undergraduate and graduate readerships. Many MBAs keen to immerse themselves in Chinese management will find the paperback version most affordable.

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Peter Singer published *Animal Liberation* in 1975 and he has trumpeted the cause of animals ever since.

We also remember Singer for his trailblazing books on Ethics such as *A Companion To Ethics* which was published in 1991 and *A Companion to Bioethics* which was published in 1998 (with Helga Kuhse), both with Blackwell.

In this new text, Singer has gathered the writing of a dozen or more animal activists. The book includes
an enlightening Introduction by Singer in which he de-
bunks the idea of Speciesism – the view that there is
something special about humans. In other words, ac-
cording to the animal Liberation movement, animals –
like humans – also deserve to be protected and are also
"something special".

Before the reader decides that these arguments are
not worth his attention, It is important to remind
him/her that Singer is primarily an ethicist and his
views on Ethics – whether applied to animals or people
are worthy reading.

Who else than Singer articulates the view of Ethics
and Morality as cogently as he does? Singer’s new
book is called a “survey of the new wave of philoso-
phy, science and action in the cause of animals”. (From
the back cover).

Whereas, Singer has been called “controversial”.
this reviewer, finds him cogent, articulate and always
well documented. We may not always agree with the
views of his collaborators but what is important is to
understand how Singer’s arguments are organized and
how the subject of ethics is used as a practical tool in
actual situations instead of proffering abstract theories
which do not always reach the average reader.

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