

Book reviews

International and Comparative Employment Relations: A Study of Industrialised Market Economies,

Greg J. Bamber and Russell D. Lansbury, eds, 3rd edn, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, London, 1998, paperback, ISBN 0-7619-5592-7.

Globalization has dramatically changed human systems management. The rise of MNEs has put industrial relations into a new perspective and it is time that student texts fully catch up with this. Most North American books and journal articles on the topic are far too parochial. As has been pointed out by more than a few scholars, US 'exceptionalism' rules the roost.

Its falls to two Australian-based scholars of comparative IR to provide one of the most useful maps to the new terrain available. Professors Greg Bamber and Russuell Lansbury, respectively teach at the Graduate School of Management, Griffith University, Queensland and the Department of IR at the University of Sydney. The third edition of their edited text is most timely as we move into the new Millenium.

They cover the main IR systems in the industrialized world, namely Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Sweden, and the USA. This is a wide spread of advanced economies and the contributors bravely contend with the variety of system characteristics found in each. The chapters are mostly well-written and clear but the problem of generalizing across them has given the editors many headaches.

The problems of finding similarities and differences is no small task, given the wealth of models available, whether adversarial or partnership. While the dominant paradigm in the post-war period was "convergence", if anything we now look to "divergence" in such systems, even though technology appears to be a great leveller in increasing ways. The task is daunting, given that the role of the State has declined in many systems, unionization is on the wane and HRM appears to be in the ascendant.

The introduction has been revised as well as the conclusions to take into account the changes since the second edition some time ago. Strategic choice theory is well-discussed, as well industry-based studies in IR and HRM. Globalization is reasonably analyzed and

its effect on unions discussed, as is the role of international labour bodies like the ILO (pp. 313–322).

But there is something missing in the debates contained in this volume. The former Communist economies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union hardly get a mention: surely worthy of note as the contrast to the market societies described in the text. Very little is said concerning the emerging industrial world. That half of man/womankind, namely the populations of China and India respectively are missing from this book should be noted and regretted; perhaps the next edition will fill this gap!

Hsing You-tien, Making Capitalism in China: the Taiwan Connection, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, hardback, ISBN 0-19-510324-6.

The title of Dr Hsing's book on Taiwanese firms in the PRC, "Making Capitalism in China", which is a detailed, informative study dealing of foreign firms in the PRC mostly involved in shoe-manufacturing, is fascinating. It indicates a sea-change in how business is done in a to-date Communist economy, of course very different from what we have been led to believe was typical of such models.

Why set up in China in the first place, we may ask? Since labour is very expensive in the Republic of China (ROC) as they call it, the Taiwanese have been increasingly keen to invest in and build factories on the Mainland. They have now to compete all the more vigorously in Asia, as recent devaluations by their neighbours, such as South Korea, have made their own exports less attractive.

What are the strong points of the monograph? This is a very detailed and useful monograph, with a sound understanding of both the technological as well the economic aspects of the shoe-industry. The author, who currently teaches and conducts research at the University of British Columbia, has a sound grasp of cross-cultural factors and carefully explores how the Taiwanese cousins are still regarded as outsiders in many respects by their local work-forces. Their labour discipline, often on military lines, is often negatively perceived by their employees and may lead to less than harmonious human relations in the workplace.

Although not cheap, this book is a “good buy”, as it is both scholarly and useful, especially to those doing business with China. As we may expect from an OUP publication, this is one of the better books in the sub-field in which it is found.

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