

Cross-cultural Management and Organizational Knowledge in Africa: Postcolonial Theory in the Wake of China's Presence

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Abstract

Mired in a positivist paradigm, cross-cultural management scholarship seems inappropriate to the growing interest in management and organization in sub-Saharan Africa, providing only blunt tools in a context that is geopolitically complex in the levels of cultural interaction, and the nature of the dynamic aspects of power relations at these different levels. At a time when Postcolonial Theory appears appropriate as a new departure for cross-cultural management in enabling it to live up to its original promise in critically appraising the appropriateness of endogenous knowledge to local contexts, China's presence in Africa appears to be changing all that. This article outlines why Postcolonial Theory may have been important to critical developments in cross-cultural scholarship, why this may now have been superseded, and how, through theory building, we might now understand management and organizational knowledge in this new global dynamic, finally asking if bringing in methodologies incorporating less powerful voices through developments in discourse ethics may help.

Key Word

China in Africa, cross-cultural management, Postcolonial Theory, management and organizational knowledge,

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The shortcomings in cross-cultural management theory are particularly marked when one attempts to apply extant theory in this area to studies of management and organization in Africa. Very real issues of cultural crossvergence, cultural hybrid organizational forms amid North-South power dynamics are paramount. Cross-cultural management studies have been mired in a positivist paradigm, and for many years have substituted simple cross-national comparison for serious scholarship. From initially flagging the difficulties of transferring management knowledge across national boundaries in the early years, it has largely failed to live up to its potential as an area of critical studies and one which is able to incorporate local voices despite discussion over the years on *emic* and *etic* knowledge (Peterson and Pike 2002)

It is little wonder this fledgling sub-discipline has been largely ignored as the interest and numbers of studies on management and organization in sub-Saharan Africa have grown in recent years, yet paradoxically these studies have been the poorer for not including a critical cross-cultural perspective. More worthy of application, has been the growing interest in Postcolonial Theory in International Management studies (Jack, Calás, Nkomo & Peltonen, 2008; Frenkel, 2008; Özkazanç-Pan, 2008). Yet despite its relevance to understanding the power dynamic of cultural crossvergence in Africa, little application in the literature exists in that area.

The main importance of Postcolonial Theory to the current work is its critical perception that indigenous knowledge is somewhat elusive given the historical circumstances of colonialism, decolonization, and neocolonialism and the associated power relationships in constituting resultant hybrid forms of knowledge. Despite the difficulties of operationalizing this theory in empirical management research, it appears to offer a more relevant and critical reappraisal

of real-life issues in Africa (e.g. Ahluwalia, 2001). Yet this critique is premised on a North-South (or West-East) interface, which still continues to be a dominant feature of international relations, and has become even more prominent in a post 9/11 world where Postcolonial critique appears as relevant as it was when Edward Said penned his treatise on *Orientalism* in the 1970s.

However, it appears this North-South dynamic is being superseded by a new South-South, or even South-North-South dynamic, which requires further analysis, further theory generation, and again a major updating and overhauling of extant cross-cultural management theory.

This conceptual paper is not so concerned about covering older ground of the many shortcomings of cross-cultural management theory. This ‘deconstruction’ has taken place over the last decade or so, and points to mainly the conceptual and methodological weaknesses of Hofstede’s (1980) seminal work (e.g. Ailon, 2008), but with implications for more contemporary studies such as GLOBE (House et al, 2004). The current work is particularly concerned about the need for a critical cross-cultural theory in studying management and organizational knowledge in Africa (with implications for other regions that have been designated ‘developing’ by the ‘developed’ nations, and been accepted as such by much of the ‘developing’ elite, including managers and scholars): as managing in sub-Saharan Africa is mainly about managing across cultures, working in multicultural environments and managing the numerous cultural influences contributing organizational outcomes in numerous effective or ineffective, appropriate or inappropriate, hybrid organizational forms.

It is also concerned that extant cross-cultural management theory is not up to the job, and therefore seen by those with an interest in management in Africa as largely irrelevant. It is concerned that cross-cultural management scholarship should be based on the premise that wider geopolitical dynamics have a major impact on the nature of knowledge, the way knowledge is transferred internationally, and the nature of local knowledge resulting from

and contributing to this dynamic. This includes scholarly and management knowledge, as well as concepts such as organizing and managing people.

Hence its ultimate aim is to begin to develop relevant and operational theory in view of historic and current developments in geopolitical dynamics; and to explain why, just when Postcolonial Theory was starting to offer some hope for new developments in cross-cultural management theory relevant for Africa, China's presence in Africa has changed all that.

The Problem with Cross-cultural Management for sub-Saharan Africa

There is no doubt that Hofstede (1980) has made a major contributions to management scholarship in introducing a cross-cultural critique of the transferability of Western, or mainly American management knowledge to non-Western countries. It challenged not just the effectiveness of management, but also its appropriateness within a particular cultural context. However, the connection that this theory then missed was that appropriateness implies relationships of power: what is appropriate for foreign shareholders of a multinational corporation operating in an African country might not be appropriate for local employees or the local community within which the subsidiary is located. 'Effectiveness' for a Western firm operating in Africa implies that it is operating appropriately for its shareholders in making profits. This implies power dynamics operating across a set of stakeholders, as well as those power dynamics that have historically given Western nations dominance in a North-South relationship.

Power relations

However, the issue of power relationships and the dominance of the West was not really taken up in the management literature until over ten years later in another landmark publication, and then only obliquely by Boyacigiller and Adler (1991). They outlined the ascendancy of American management around the world as a result of the economic

dominance of the United States after World War II. Yet these two authors attribute this to parochialism on the part of American managers, rather than anything more. They hinted at power relations without developing this. Sadly this has not been taken up generally in the subsequent cross-cultural literature. Although Hofstede (1980) provided the basis for a critique of transferability of concepts such as leadership and participatory management, such concepts have been extensively propagated in Africa through MBA programmes and management textbooks (Jackson, 2004). This only appears to have attracted criticism among scholars working in ‘developing’ country contexts such as in sub-Saharan Africa where, for example Blunt and Jones (1997: 11) had noted that:

‘Current theories of leadership....in the West place high value...on teamwork, empowerment [and]... is more a construct of the rhetoric of management consultants than it is the reality of management practice. ... and this helps to disguise its discordance with most of the cultures in which its tenets are applied’

What Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) appeared to be pointing towards was a geopolitical context, which historically has led to the dominance of the United States in world affairs, following on the withdrawal of the previous European colonial powers’ direct political influence in Africa and many other parts of the world. This context, only hinted at by these two authors, is one that to this day is largely ignored by cross-cultural management scholars. Taylor (2002) tackles this more head on, again in a critique of the imposition of participatory management:

‘...participatory discourse and practices are part of a wider attempt to obscure the relations of power and influence between elite interests and less powerful groups... (p.122).I would argue, however, that participatory discourses are utilized in both the development and managerial contexts because they serve essentially the same purpose of giving the “sense” and warm emotional pull of participation without its

substance, and are thus an attempt to placate those without power and obscure the real levers of power inherent in the social relations of global capitalism (p.125).’

It is likely that power relations within a geopolitical context have been largely ignored in mainstream cross-cultural management studies because of the focus on ‘developed’ countries which constitute probably less than 20 per cent of the globe. For those working in Africa, and studying organization in Africa these dynamics are a constant and visible challenge that cannot be ignored. I will return later to the way Postcolonial Theory may provide a critique and explanation of those dynamics to academic and management production and transfer of knowledge and the relevance to cross-cultural management and Africa.

Convergence, divergence and crossvergence

International management theory has tended to polarize around two distinct streams of theory: convergence and divergence. The former suggests that management and organization principles and practices are becoming universally uniformed (from Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison and Myers, 1960), predominantly taking an Anglo-American model as the standard. The almost universal adoption of HRM as a concept (that is of people as an organizational ‘resource’) and practice appears to support this thesis, despite the apparent contradictions between a predominant instrumental attitude to people in organizations in many Western societies, and a fundamental humanism in many local community cultures in the South (Jackson, 2002: MBA programmes appear not to teach managers how to manage people in such a context). A number of texts written by African scholars in the diaspora appear to support this convergence thesis by assuming a dominance of Western management knowledge with reference to small ‘African’ variations (e.g. Waiguchu, Tiagha & Mwaura, 1999; Ugwuegbu, 2001). Post-Hofstedian cross-cultural management theory over the last three decades has championed a divergence view, where national ‘cultures’ are seen to be persisting internationally, and influencing local organizational and management models or methods. Both convergence and divergence theories have credence, yet both, again, tend to

largely ignore wider geopolitical power dynamics. The convergence thesis appears to assume this, while the divergence thesis, although raising implicit issues about the problem of transferring knowledge across borders, appears ostensibly to deny power dynamics.

The nature of such international geopolitical dynamics appears to have been given little exposure in the cross-cultural management literature, yet is fundamental to understanding the nature of management and organization in Africa, its appropriateness and effectiveness, as well as the new dynamic of China's involvement in Africa, and indeed the nature of Chinese management involvement at organizational level. For example, if the convergence thesis has credibility, we could assume that Western management models have had a major influence on China, and there is evidence for this (Jackson and Bak, 1998; Jackson, 2002). If the divergence thesis holds true, it could be assumed that China has developed its own models of managing organizations up to and throughout its path to industrialization, developing a market economy, integrating with the global economy, and entering global markets. Again there is evidence for this (Ip, 2009; Jackson 2011).

Perhaps it is no accident that theories that international processes involve cultural crossvergence, as a challenge to purely divergence and convergence theories and a synthesis of these theories, began to arise in Hong Kong and in literature related to Hong Kong (Ralston, Gaicalone & Terpstra, 1994; Priem et al, 2000), a society in which it is difficult to untangle the indigenous from historical and modern-day foreign influences. Again, within this literature there is an absence of reference to power dynamics, and little explanation of how crossvergence works. If crossvergence as a theory is going to be useful in analysing and understanding the generation of management and organizational knowledge, and unpicking the relationships between local and foreign influences in a globalized world, both the processes and content of cultural crossvergence have to be understood.

That cross-cultural management theory has not seriously grasped crossvergence theory, again makes it a weak contender to provide critical analytical scholarship for Africa. A theory of

divergence leads mainly to, and is fuelled by, comparative studies, rather than a focus on processes and its products. It is necessary to provide some explanation to this assertion, and to further explain the relevance of cultural crossvergence to studying management and organization in Africa, and the difficulty of identifying local knowledge, and disengaging it from global discourse.

Cultural complexity in sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is of course culturally complex, with managers faced with managing this complexity every day. Jackson (2004) identified at least three levels of cultural interaction: inter-continental (North-South, or West-nonWest), inter-national (across African borders) and inter-ethnic (among ethno-linguistic groups normally within a country). The first of these levels has already been alluded to above, and the associated power dynamics involved which largely cross-cultural management theory has failed to incorporate. Cross-border interactions have also been driven by North-South power dynamics, where colonial powers discouraged such interaction while encouraging interaction between the colonized and the colonizing country. Despite this, large quantities of informal trade are estimated to have taken place across borders, and are still doing so often along ethnic and kinship lines (Barratt Brown, 1995). New regional trading alliances are also encouraging inter-border operations and interactions within the formal economy. Again, this may raise issues of power relations, for example with the dominance of South Africa within southern Africa and beyond. It is also noteworthy that few comparative studies exist of differences among sub-Saharan African countries in the mainstream cross-cultural management literature, despite attempts through such as the GLOBE studies to incorporate more countries from this sub-continent. Explanations of this may include the lack of interest from Western scholars in Africa and 'developing' countries alluded to above, and an inherent view from the North that sub-Saharan countries are very similar in culture: a view perhaps that would be opposed if Southern scholars took the same view of European countries.

Inter-ethnic interactions do not lend themselves easily to simple comparative studies, and for example Jackson (2004) was critical of such studies that tried to emulate Hofstede's method among ethnic groups in South Africa (e.g. Thomas & Bendixen, 2000). Ethnic identity is far more fluid with processes of inter-marriages, urbanizations and what Jackson and Nana Nzepa (2004) in Cameroon described as phagocytosis or the tendency of people for employment gain to adopt the identity of a more dominant ethnic group. Jackson (2004) also noted a tendency within organizations in Africa (notably in interviews in Cameroon, Kenya and South Africa) for a dominant ethnic group to provide the accepted story of organizational effectiveness, with minority ethnic group interviewees often debunking this accepted view. The dominance of ethnic groups is often also connected with historical circumstances of colonization and decolonization, where for example certain ethnic groups were created and/or adopted by colonial powers to serve the ends of the colonizers (for example, Thomson, 2000, discusses how the Yoruba 'tribe' was a convenient creation for missionaries and colonial administrators in Nigeria). Also with extensive cross-continental migration in Africa over the last few centuries, as well as extra-continental settler groups such as white Afrikaans speakers in South Africa who have no other home land, Jackson, Amaeshi & Yavuz (2008) note that it is difficult to identify who are the indigenes (for example in South Africa the original inhabitants, the Khoisan peoples, have been all but obliterated), and hence to untangle the indigenous from the non-indigenous.

Given this complexity of cross-cultural and multicultural interaction, often driven or fuelled by geopolitical power dynamics, often filtered down to local level, and affecting the way varying cultural influences combine and transform at organizational and individual level through a process of crossvergence, extant cross-cultural management theory provides very blunt (and perhaps inappropriate) tools for trying to understand these dynamics and their effects, and their implications. Yet even where theories of crossvergence are incorporated into cross-cultural analysis, as noted above, this often does not reflect the complexities involved, nor an understanding of power dynamics. The way Postcolonial Theory may help elucidate cultural crossvergence is next discussed.

How Postcolonial Theory Could Have Been Relevant

I have so far drawn attention to two connected areas of weakness in cross-cultural management studies which provide little confidence in applying extant theory to understanding management and organizational knowledge in sub-Saharan Africa: issues of power relations, and crossvergence dynamics. I have associated these issues with predominantly North-South relations. It is unlikely that this sub-discipline of management can advance without a thorough understanding and incorporation of its geopolitical context: how its own theory is generated and understood, and how its subject matter is actually interpreted, how theory is developed, and how this is applied to organization and management in Africa.

Postcolonial Theory could have helped in this theory development, although I will later express doubts of its suitability for operationizing empirical research in this area, and indeed whether it is still applicable to the rapidly emerging new geopolitical dynamic of China in Africa.

Postcolonial Theory is useful in understanding the more subtle implications of power in international relations mainly through cultural transmission and the way knowledge is transferred internationally. Postcolonial Theory (Said, 1978/1995; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1996) proposes that the 'developing' world is represented in the eyes of the 'developed' world. Western imperialism, through Western culture has developed a systematic 'body of theory and practice' that constructs or represents the 'Orient' (in Said's, 1978/1995: 49, terms). In colonial times, this has portrayed images of the 'noble savage', the 'wily oriental', where Westerners are regarded as 'rational, peaceful, liberal, logical...without natural suspicion and Easterners as irrational, degenerate, primitive, mystical, suspicious, sexually depraved....'. These representations are carried over to Western intellectual and cultural

production including research, and management studies (for example Jackson, 2004, points to the derogatory light in which ‘African’ management is seen in the literature). The acceptance and internalization of such representations by the developing world itself can mean, firstly, there is both an acceptance and challenging of these representations that constitute hybrid forms of presentation of the nature of people of the Third World. Secondly, because this challenging itself grows out of the cultural and intellectual representations of Western discourse, this ‘contamination’ of the colonized means that they can never refer back to an ‘authentic’ identity of pre-colonial times. Any conceptualization of this identity would be by definition seen through the eyes of the colonizer’s representations (Kapoor, 2002).

What we end up with may be a lack of articulation of a local view. Hybridity, through a process of cultural crossvergence is not the result of a cosy dialogue, or a reasoned and equal negotiation. It occurs through a process involving ‘..the epistemic violence of Eurocentric discourses of the non-West..’ (Mohan, 2002: 157).

The concept of cultural crossvergence is implicit within Postcolonial theory. Bhabha’s (1994) elucidation of ‘mimicry’ applies predominantly to a colonizing power’s ability to get the colonized to mimic the colonizer, in order better to control the unfamiliar, and to gain acceptance of transferred-in knowledge. In Bhabha’s (1994) view the process of mimicry leads to hybrid cultures as an ongoing process of colonial imposition and resistance from the colonized. It is never possible therefore to speak about an authentic or innate culture, and is an ongoing product of a conflictual process between the powerful, and less powerful. For Bhabha (1994) the result is the Third Space. Frenker (2008: 928) puts it well, as follows:

‘With the change of the centuries, argues Bhabha, we are all located on intercultural boundaries and are exposed to a wide range of cultures that are perpetually created in the innumerable intercultural encounters that are themselves occasioned by an ongoing historical process. Within this metaphoric space we construct our identities in relation to these varied and often contradictory systems of meaning.’

Hence Postcolonial Theory can further elucidate our understanding of power and crossvergence. It tells us that not only the West's representations of 'the other' influence how we see, and research, and manage people and organizations in 'developing' countries, but that 'the other' adopts and internalizes such representations. This leads to the apparent unquestioning of the superiority of Western knowledge, and to the wholesale adoption of Western education, knowledge and technology. The resultant disparaging of local, and more appropriate solutions (Briggs and Sharp, 2004), is only half the issue. This also leads to a kind of 'false consciousness' in the Marxian sense, so that local people have lost their authentic voice (in Spivak's 1988, terms they cannot speak, as such). This has implications for the way scholars research these 'subjects', in the projection of Western representations of 'the other', and the way these representations are reflected back to Western researchers. It is this aspect of understanding, representation and identity that makes Postcolonial Theory difficult to operationalize: if the non-West has internalized the way the West has represented it, on behalf of the other, and if Spivak (1996) is right that the non-West cannot then speak for itself, the self-representation by the other is going to reflect the representation constructed by the West.

There is another way of looking at this. What you see is what you get: hence, the concept of the Third Space (Bhabha, 1994). Through historical and ongoing geopolitical interactions involving power dynamics, cultural spaces are constructed and reconstructed. The representations of self, or 'culture' within these spaces is simply what we have ended up with at any point in time. Power dynamics allows for an element of protest and opposition to the dominant view, but these cultural Third Spaces, which have occurred through cultural crossvergence and the emergence of hybrid cultural forms, are discoverable, and can form the subject of social scientific enquiry

Postcolonial Theory may lead to a better critical understanding of North-South relations, and indeed provides the basis for a more critical and informed cross-cultural management studies

that is relevant to Africa. Its strength, in understanding the nature of knowledge as a product of a dominant Western discourse, is also its weakness. In practical terms: how is it possible to research one of the key issues in cross-cultural management studies, the issue of appropriateness of transferred knowledge, if a disparaging of local approaches and the wisdom of Western approaches has been inculcated and internalized into the psyche of generations of Africans?

There may be two keys to unlocking local knowledge and ‘authentic’ voices. First, a more practical issue of effectiveness: the imported knowledge (management practice, skills) may not work. Secondly, on a more theoretical level: the concept of ‘resistance’ inherent within Postcolonial Theory implies that not all people will accept blindly the ideological impositions of the colonizers. As we saw above, a process of colonial imposition and resistance will lead not to an unquestioning ‘mimicry’ of the colonizer, but a hybrid outcome (Bhabha, 1994). Yet we still end up with the loss of a pure ‘authentic’ local voice, and a difficulty of speaking about such a voice in the first place. For Bhabha (1994), this process leads to the construction of a ‘Third Space’ as we saw above. This in itself is useful as an analytical concept, and one that we can take forward in looking at China’s presence in Africa and its implications for building critical cross-cultural management theory for understanding management and organizational knowledge.

Postcolonial Theory has been used as a critique of Modernization Theory in Development Studies: one that takes a ‘culturalist’ approach to challenging the accepted trajectory of ‘developing’ countries as moving towards the ‘developed’ world. This has been contrasted with the more economic approach of Dependency Theory (Frank, 1969) which explains how the continued underdevelopment of the Third World has fuelled the First World, and indeed enabled it to become ‘developed’ (Schech and Haggis, 2000). Yet this theory also has had little impact on the way international management has been studied. Rather, Modernization Theory appears to have had an implicit influence on the way ‘developing’ countries in general (e.g. Kanungo and Jaeger, 1990) and Africa in particular (e.g. Blunt & Jones, 1992)

have been studied by management scholars. In part these theories have been applied to an understanding of China's development, and this is my starting point in now focusing on the role of China, and why this makes a difference to developing cross-cultural management theory in Africa.

Why China's Presence in Africa Makes a Difference to Critical Theory Building

Dependency Theory may apply directly to those countries previously colonized by the West, and to neocolonial involvement of, for example, the United States. There is ample evidence of the United States contributing to Africa's underdevelopment since the 1960s (e.g. the now well understood involvement of the CIA in countries such as DRC: Hochschild, 1998), yet Dependency Theory may be only indirectly useful in understanding the relationship of the West with China. Certainly, like Africa, China's resources have been exploited by the West to the detriment of China (for example, following the Opium Wars), and this may have contributed indirectly to China's previous underdevelopment. Yet it is not likely that we can base an analysis of China's new relationship with Africa on Dependency Theory, nor on the more traditional Modernization Theory (which is challenged by Dependency Theory) that has driven much of Western governments' international development policy (Schlegg and Haggis, 2000): assuming that 'developing' countries should follow the same modernizing trajectory as Western countries. China itself has recently gone through an industrialization and modernization process, which in some ways may be seen as a model for Africa, but it is unlikely that China's intent is to impose a modernizing trajectory on Africa, or for China to develop on the back of further contributing to Africa's underdevelopment in an exploitative way (MOFA, 2006). Yet this may still be disputed.

Both Western and Chinese scholars appear to support the idea that Chinese investment in Africa is directed towards resources that can meet the needs of Chinese economic

development particularly in terms of energy and mineral security and to attribute China's investment and construction in Africa to China's resource dependence on African countries (Kurlantzick, 2006). Gill, Huang and Morrison (2007) believe that China needs Africa for resources to fuel China's development goals, for markets to sustain its growing economy and for political alliances to support its aspirations to be a global influence. Yet there appears a genuine desire to provide other resources for Africa, and to do so on the basis of cooperation and friendship (Shaw, Cooper, & Antkiewicz, 2007).

There is also a view that China's involvement in Africa has a political content (Gill and Reilly, 2007) that may have implications for a consideration of the difficulty of applying Postcolonial Theory in this context. Along with investment, cultural communication between Africa and other countries has also been a feature, with China appearing to celebrate Africa's culture and achievements, while these are implicitly denigrated in the West (King, 2006). When Africa is discussed in the West by governments and international development agencies, it is normally poverty, conflicts, wars, corruption, poor governance and hopelessness that are mostly tabled for deliberation (Marafa, 2007), with such images being propagated by, and supportive of a \$US100 billion international aid industry (OECD, 2008). Reactions to this type of relationship may be summed up by the president of Botswana remarking: 'I find that the Chinese treat us as equals; the West treat us as former subjects' (Kaplinsky, 2008).

There is also the perspective that from the experience of transformation in China, there are lessons to be applied in Africa. Evidence appears to exist of a sense of 'Third World Solidarity' in China's relations, drawing on its socialist heritage and anti-imperialist discourse, and as a reaction to the IMF's neoliberal policies and government alignment with the United States (Kapinsky, 2008; CCS, 2008). It is therefore unlikely that Postcolonial Theory, as indeed Dependency Theory, can adequately explain the geopolitical dynamics of China in Africa, and this again has implications for the way we might conceptualize and study cross-cultural management at organizational level. These theories may help us to

understand the West's relations with China, and indeed one of the reasons why China's involvement in Africa is much denigrated by Western commentators.

Table 1 summarizes the possible implications of assuming any of three ways of understanding South-North-South interaction and power relations in Africa, together with possible assumptions about a new South-South dynamic.

Table 1 about here

Table 1 suggests firstly that Modernisation Theory has set the tone of South-North relations based on the nature of the presence of Western powers in Africa, and that both Dependency Theory and Postcolonial Theory are a reaction to and critique of Modernization assumptions. Secondly, it can be seen that the nature of China's involvement in Africa is ambivalent. If knowledge creation in this context is a function of the reasons why the West and Africa have been interacting, and give rise to scholarly theories about this interaction and ensuing knowledge creation such as Modernization Theory and consequently its critical counterparts, Postcolonial Theory and Dependency Theory, then similarly knowledge creation (and our theories about that) must also be a function of the nature of China's interaction with Africa (and possibly how this challenges Western interaction). Yet, at the moment we have a large and growing literature on the possible motivation of China's presence in Africa (for example, based on resource-seeking, market-seeking and political-seeking: Gelb, 2005; Kurlantzick, 2006; Gill, Huang and Morrison, 2007; Gill and Reilly, 2007; Marafa, 2007) yet little of its nature at organization and management level, and similarly little on the perceptions of this interaction at community and local level (although anecdotally, for example: 'There is at times a stark contrast between the Chinese rhetoric of brotherhood with African people, and some of the criticism coming from African citizens.' CCS, 2008).

We are still only left with hypotheses about the nature of that knowledge creation which assumes certain motives on the part of both Chinese and African partners and how this manifests at organization and communities levels. If the ‘disconnect’ hypothesis of Dia (1996) suggests that Western institutions were tacked onto African communities during colonial times, and if Jackson (2004) alludes to African workers (and managers) stepping outside their own culture when going into work in the morning and stepping back into it when returning home at night, what of the nature of Chinese-led organization among African communities? Table 1 points to a number of hypothesized positions with as yet little foundation in empirical research. I now begin to look at how we might go about building critical theory that can be operationalized through empirical investigation, and which can bring in both endogenous and exogenous influences on management and organizational knowledge in sub-Saharan Africa.

Developing a New South-North-South Cross-cultural Management Theory

It is not my intention here to completely abandon recent developments in international and cross-cultural management theory, and the application of Postcolonial Theory. It is rather to look at developing ways of examining what Bhabha (1994) has referred to as the ‘Third Space’, through a consideration of power dynamics. This stems from an understanding that cross-cultural interaction results in, and results from, the production of hybrid forms of organization and management knowledge that can be analyzed through focusing on the cultural influences and the dynamics that contribute to and constitute a Third Space.

For example, Jackson (2004) provides three principal ‘ideal types’ (post-colonial; post-instrumental or modern Western, and; African Renaissance or humanistic) that can be conceptualized as influencing organization and management in Africa, from both exogenous and endogenous sources. These influences, in perhaps adapted form (e.g. statist, Western,

humanistic) may also apply to influences on organization in China (Figure 1, which also suggested other possible ideal types). We have already seen above that there is evidence in China for both exogenous influences from Western sources and endogenous influences. The latter may be through both a retention of central planning or statist influences ('Iron rice bowl': Warner, 1996), or through more deep rooted collectivistic and humanistic sources. Hence Ip's (2009) suggestions for an ideal type 'Confucian' organization, also overlaps with humanistic influences, as well as forming its own ideal type. These ideal types provide analytical categories that can be identified in empirical research in Chinese-led organizations in Africa (Table 2). We can begin to understand what cultural Third Spaces are being socially constructed given a tripartite interaction among the West, Africa and China, and through what type of power dynamics (tentatively represented in Figure 1, suggesting Western influences from USA, UK, France and Belgium as examples, but not to the exclusion of other country influences, and not wishing to appear to generalize).

Figure 1 about here

Yet Figure 1 is a poor vehicle for capturing what was referred to above as the 'epistemic violence of Eurocentric discourses' (Mohan 2002). Zhang and Edwards (2007) argue that 'reverse diffusion' may take place where Chinese MNCs are operating in Western countries: Chinese organizations take 'advanced' practices back to China, thus impacting on the 'development' of Chinese organizations. It is very unlikely that such reverse diffusion takes place when Western companies operate in sub-Saharan Africa, and Postcolonial Theory provides an explanation for why this is unlikely to be the case. The extent to which reverse diffusion happens when Chinese companies operate in Africa, in the spirit of 'learning from each other and seeking common development' (MOFA, 2006), should be the subject of empirical investigation. Famously, when the Chinese emperor announced to a British envoy in 1793 that because his 'celestial empire' had everything in prolific abundance he had no

need for ‘the manufactures of outside barbarians’ he may have set the tone for what Dobbs-Higginson (1993: 86) called the arrogance of the Middle Kingdom that even ‘outshines that of the British and French’. Although he does add that this arrogance has not saved them from the last two centuries of humiliation from the Western barbarian.

Yet what this may all mean in practice is that the ‘South-South’ dynamic between China and Africa is likely to be qualitatively different from Africa’s experience with the West. It is likely to be considerably prejudiced by Western influence on both China and Africa, and to be part of a global dynamic that is not to the liking of the Western powers. Yet given this global dynamic, how can we now investigate and understand management and organizational knowledge in sub-Saharan Africa?

Conceptualizing the new Third Space

‘Ideal type’ construction (from Weber’s original concept of an ideal type to mean an hypothetical analytical construct formed by the synthesis of concepts about a phenomenon purely for research purposes, and necessarily selected via the researcher’s value-orientation: Freund, 1966) is a useful way of conceptualizing the inputs into and influences on knowledge creation, which might contribute to our understanding of any cultural Third Space.

Table 2 about here

There are likely to be an infinite number of ‘ideal types’ that can be constructed, which might be useful as analytical categories in the understanding of the exogenous and endogenous influences contributing to any Third Space. From previous literature I have suggested four that may be useful in initially understanding how a Third Space may be constituted, given the power dynamics that appear to predominate in a tripartite relationship among Western (a

generalization), Chinese and sub-Saharan African (also a generalization) influences. In particular, it is likely that a Western/instrumental influence is likely to be strong, while African voices remain relatively weak. Despite the popularization of *ubuntu* management in South Africa, as a humanistic approach to management, Jackson (2004) really only found one organization outside South Africa, Afriland First Bank in Cameroon, which could be described as trying to adhere to indigenous values and practices. Whether or not such African voices will be further weakened by Chinese influence is again a matter for empirical investigation. It is important in this regard to therefore clarify and refine ideal types that can be used to first articulate local/indigenous values and practice against other endogenous and exogenous influences represented by well defined and articulated ideal types. Once articulated, these ideal types can be then used to investigate the relative strength of each influence in any Third Space created by the dynamics discussed above. Table 2 represents merely suggestions and a starting point. A two-pronged approach may involve further investigation and refining of these ideal types, as well as the identification of others generated from different methods.

Any methods have to overcome one of the key issues alluded to in Postcolonial Theory: the difficulty of articulating indigenous voices so not to represent identities projected from the West. This may apply to both African and Chinese parties. I do not believe that proposing to articulate ideal types is in any way an attempt at essentialization. Ideal types are not universals, they are ways of trying to make (often negotiated) sense of phenomena (not noumena), through constructing analytical categories through different perceptions, which can be used to analyse influences contributing to cultural Third Spaces, in order to identify relative strengths of influences of exogenous and endogenous management and organizational knowledge, compatibility and fit with local communities and appropriateness of actions and outcomes, as well as agreement in perceptions of these aspects, the consequences of lack of agreement, and indicative actions to gain agreement where this is appropriate. The whole point is that such Third Spaces are likely to have infinite variety through dynamic processes, rather than it being possible to encapsulate such a 'culture' (i.e. a

Third Space) by reference to such as Hofstede's or GLOBE constructs (which are attempts at essentialization).

Such ideal types may be the creation of one author, perhaps interpreting other's perceptions from literature or research (as in Table 2), or, and this is what I am advocating, a result of a discursive process whereby the less powerful can speak with the more powerful, in articulating what types of phenomena to look out for. In one sense they are a wished for; an ideal.

Mimicry (Bhabha, 1994), reflecting the dominant ideology in geopolitical relations, may well get in the way of what Bird (1996) has called 'good conversation' (referring to discourse ethics: '...a procedural moral theory of interactionism that attempts to develop normative orientations for practical purposes based on the idea of fair dialogs: Beschoner, 2006: 127) in discourse between, for example, Western and Africa co-researchers, or co-managers. Yet what of the discourse dynamics between African and Chinese voices. Certainly, it could be hypothesized, that China and much of sub-Saharan Africa share a common collectivism/communalism and possibly humanism, whereas there appears to be a differentiation between the instrumental values placed on people in organizations predominantly in the West, and the humanistic values of communities in sub-Saharan Africa (Jackson, 2002), and that China and sub-Saharan Africa do share the experience of an exploitative history, but not of one to the other.

I agree with Flyvbjerg (2001) when he berates the weakness of social science in attempting to construct universal, predictive sciences, and states rather that its strength is in handling value-rationality and 'what out to be'. Certainly in Africa, and other 'developing' regions 'what is' (say, institutions imposed by a colonial power) may come into conflict with 'what ought to be' (say, the social values of local communities). Good social science may provide answers to bridging the divide between the two, and indeed providing some agreement on 'what ought to be'. Discourse ethics has begun to address this within a broader question 'How can we

organize a society that enables power-free, open debates among equal citizens as the precondition for just practices?’ (Beschoner, 2006:129) to which Habermas’s (1984-7) theory of communicative action was largely addressed. Yet Jurgen Habermas’s well known dictum that ‘in discourse the unforced force of the better argument prevails’ may be challenged by Postcolonial Theory which indicates that despite one’s attempt to neutralize power relations within dialogue, the products of ‘mimicry’ in Bhabha’s (1994) terms may still reflect the dominant ideology in geopolitical relations. It may be possible to rationale the neutralization of power in an immediate dialogue, but the overarching geopolitical and historical relations at the macro level may neutralize this neutralization. In the research sphere, ‘good conversation’ is likely to be achieved through the involvement and inputs of key participants such as business leaders/policy makers, staff, community leaders, from different partner groups, defining, disagreeing and redefining ideal types (‘what ought to be’) and ‘what is’; investigating ‘what is’ against ‘what ought to be’, and gaining agreement on what to do. In many ways this conforms to Flyvbjerg (2001) elucidation of a phronetic (from Aristotle’s *phronesis*) social science with its key questions: Where are we going? Is this desirable? And, What should be done?, supplemented by who gains and who loses; by what mechanisms of power?

Concluding Remarks

Although this theory still has some way to go, it may provide important inputs into the way cross-cultural management theory is developed. Rather than focusing on Hofstedian type cross-border comparisons (no matter how sophisticated these types of study appear to have become), cross-cultural interaction can be placed into its geopolitical context in terms of the way scholarly and management knowledge is generated and transferred. It is no longer appropriate to talk about ‘a culture’ in a concrete sense, in a globalized world. More appropriately we can speak about the dynamics that contribute to cultural spaces that are constantly adapting and transforming at multiples levels of interaction, and about the cultural

interfaces this entails. In Africa this is 'business as usual', yet these realities of cross-cultural management appear to have escaped the notice of much of what is passed off as cross-cultural management studies, rendering it impotent in the face of changing global dynamics and the understanding of management and organizational knowledge in Africa.

It is therefore perhaps ironic that just as cross-cultural management studies is becoming more aware of 'developing countries' and indeed more aware of developments over the last twenty years in critical management studies, and more recently Postcolonial Theory, the goal posts appear to be shifting again, leaving this fledgling sub-discipline standing. Yet it may be an opportunity for the discipline to make an impact, as it once did through Hofstede's pioneering work, by developing theory that incorporates the new geopolitical dynamics. China in Africa is just a start. Both China and India are operating widely in the world, developing new South on South relationships, and having implications for the development of South-North-South relations. For cross-cultural management scholarship to be relevant to our understanding of management and organization knowledge in Africa, it must develop theories that incorporate these dynamics, rather than ignoring them.

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Table 1. Conceptualizing South-North-South Relations

Theoretical assumptions	General implications	Hypothesized implication for organization and management Knowledge in Africa
<i>Modernization Theory</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dichotomizes the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ world. • Sees the ‘developing’ world in need of development along same trajectory as ‘developed’ world. • Transfer of knowledge is from ‘developed’ world to ‘developing’ world, and such knowledge is seen as universal. • Provides main justification for North-South power relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African partners are in a subordinate position. • The North provides aid to the South to assist in this development • ‘Modernization’ is achieved through Western knowledge and expertise • Local cultural traditions and local knowledge is primitive and needs updating/modernizing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power dynamics in organizations assume dominance of Western partner • Technology and managerial expertise flows from Western to African partner or subsidiary • ‘Modern’ management and concept of people as ‘resource’ imposed on organizations operating locally • Little importance attached to local management knowledge; ‘empowerment’ may not involve taking account of staffs’ local knowledge and culture.
<i>Dependency Theory</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide critique of Modernization Theory suggesting that today’s Third World underdevelopment is the underside of the same globalizing conditions that led to the First World being developed. • The prime mover in this is capital seeking profits and this is easiest in countries where labour and resources are cheap and governments are weak. • The structural consequence of this is to reproduce the process, and to block local initiatives pursuing their own development paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African partners are in a subordinate position because they are being economically exploited, and kept in conditions of subordination, serving interests of the First World • Western partners, often colluding with African governments, keep economic conditions and costs down • Local cultural traditions and local knowledge are consequentially denigrated and/or ignored 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power dynamics in organizations reflect the economic necessity to keep Third World in subordination to needs of First World • Management practice based on financial need to keep wages and conditions to minimum standards, sometimes infringing what may be regarded in the West as human rights • Rhetoric of participation and empowerment in the Modernization approach may belie the ignoring of local approaches and knowledge
<i>Postcolonial Theory</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides critique of Modernization Theory by proposing that the ‘developing’ world is represented in the eye’s of the ‘developed’ world, and this is accepted and internalized by the developing world itself • There is also a challenging of these representations of the identity of people of the Third World • Because this challenging itself grows out of the cultural and intellectual representations of Western discourse, this ‘contamination’ of the colonized means that they can never refer back to an ‘authentic’ identity in pre-colonial times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an acceptance by African partners of a knowledge and cultural subordinations through internalizing the projected identity from the West, often reinforced through Western education • Sometimes this is challenged by the development of local approaches such as <i>ubuntu</i>. • Yet local knowledge development and innovation is often tempered by combining with Western approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power dynamics in organizations reflect the cultural dominance of the West, and these are reflected in management practices such as HRM, and other beliefs about superiority of Western knowledge • There is scope for a real challenge to the lack of appropriateness of Western approaches through such as <i>ubuntu</i> management, • But these are often watered down or incorporated with Western approaches

Table 1. (cont.)

Theoretical assumptions	General implications	Hypothesized implication for organization and management in Africa
<p><i>Possible assumptions about South-South relations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China is interested in what resources it can get from Africa in the cheapest possibly way • This may not be in an exploitative way, but in a spirit of cooperation and mutual learning • China itself, as a ‘Third World’ country in a subordinate position may have adopted some of the assumptions of Western superior knowledge • China itself may assume a superior position of the ‘Middle Kingdom’ against the underdevelopment of African partners. • China shares many of the development issues of African countries, and its own modernization trajectory may serve as a model for Africa, with Chinese cultural values such as humanism may be held in common with Africa cultures • China is not interested in imposing economic and political conditions on Africa in exchange for aid or economic partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Africa partners look to China as another source of development and technical aid in exchange for natural resources • Africa and China partnerships learn from each other, with elements of reverse diffusion of knowledge • China is simply re-exporting knowledge gained from working with Western partners and through Western education • Chinese look down on African partners as possessing inferior knowledge and skills • African partner looks to China as different and more appropriate development trajectory than that provided by the West with Chinese cultural imports into Africa being more appropriate than those of the West. • Lack of conditionality may be seen as not bothering with African human rights issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management practices may be based on employment conditions and wages being kept to a minimum • Cross-cultural teams work in organizations for mutual benefits and learning • Western methods are introduced into organizations by Chinese managers • A lack of participation and empowerment in organizations, with technical expertise and management from Chinese managers and technicians • Alternate forms of organization seen by African partners as more appropriate • Human rights issues may have implications for such as employment conditions in organizations

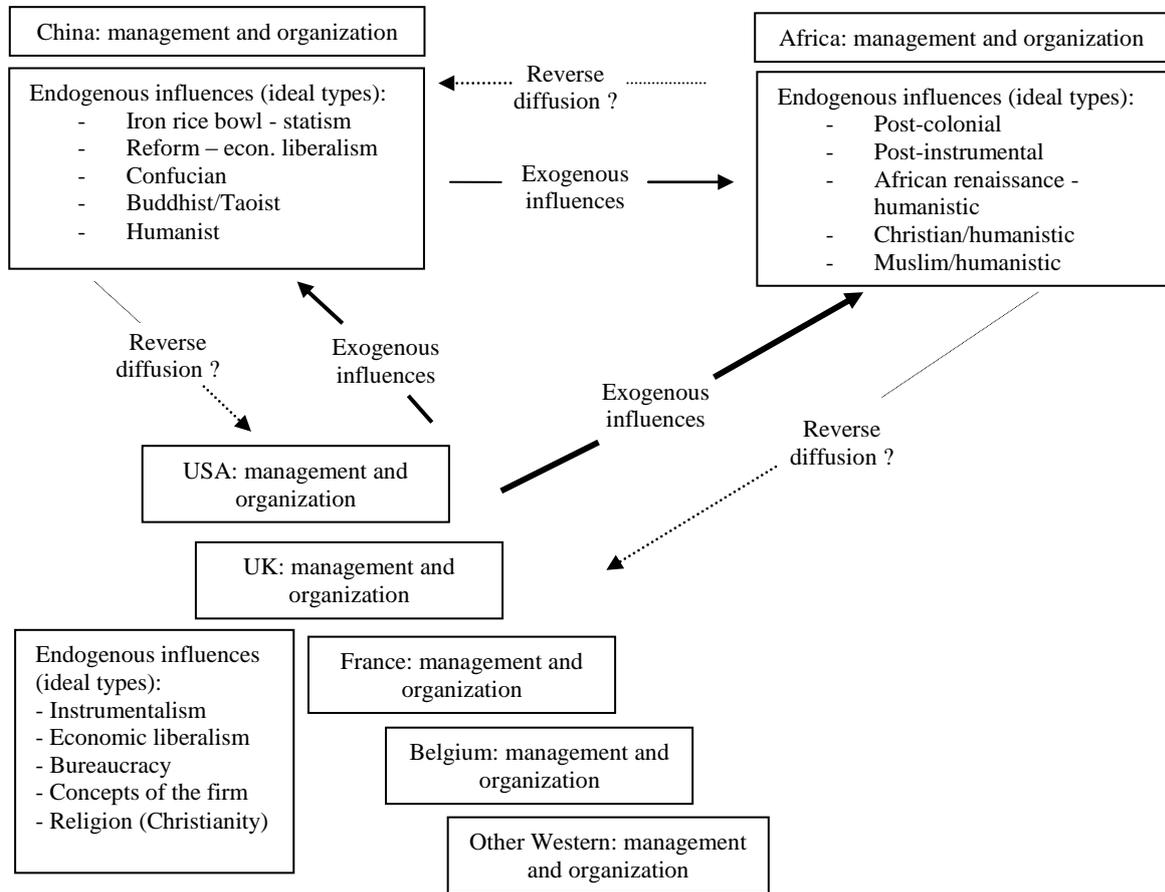
Table 2. Possible ‘Ideal Type’ Management and Organization in Africa

Ideal Type	Post-colonial	Western/ instrumental	African/ humanist	Confucian Firm
<i>Analytical category</i>	(<i>Post-colonial:</i> Jackson , 2002)	(<i>Post-instrumental:</i> Jackson, 2002)	(<i>African renaissance:</i> Jackson, 2002)	(<i>Confucian firm:</i> Ip, 2009; Jackson 2011).
<i>General principles</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory x • Western/post-independent Africa • Instrumental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory Y and X • Western/modern • Instrumental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanistic • <i>Ubuntu</i> (humanity) • Communalistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paternalistic hierarchy • Familial collectivism, • Humanistic • <i>Ren-yi-li</i> (humanity-rightness-conventions)and <i>zhong shu</i> (compassion)
<i>Strategy (including stakeholder and ‘character’</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inputs and process orientation • Lack of results and objectives • Risk averse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results and market oriented • Clear objectives • Calculated risk taking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder orientation • Community involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profit motive morally constrained and consistent with ren-yi-li • Doing good for the community and society
<i>Structure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchical • Centralized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flatter hierarchy • Often decentralized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flatter hierarchy • Decentralized and closer to stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchical • Collectivist
<i>Governance/ decision making</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian • Non-consultative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often consultative • Increasing emphasis on ‘empowerment’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participative, consensus seeking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paternalistic
<i>Management control (including people orientation)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rule bound • Lack of flexibility • Outside influence or control (family, government) often seen as negative • Theory X/control orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear rules of action • Flexible • Outside government influence decreasing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benign rules of action • Outside influence (government, family) may be seen as more benign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treating people with fairness and humanity • <i>De</i> (people’s moral virtues) driving people’s actions rather than rules and regulations
<i>Internal policies (people)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discriminatory • Employee policies aimed at duties rather than rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-discriminatory • Access to equal opportunities and clear employee policies on responsibilities and rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder interests • Access to equal opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing fair wages and safe working environment
<i>Internal climate (people)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee alienation common • Weak trade unions • Inter-ethnic friction • Discourages diversity of opinions • Promotion by ascription 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on employee motivation • Weak or co-operative unions • Move towards inter-ethnic harmony • Diverse opinions often encouraged • Promotion based on achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation through participation important • Unions protect rights • Inter-ethnic harmony taken into consideration • Everyone should be able to state their opinions • Promotion based on legitimization of status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating through fairness, and providing fair working conditions and wages

Table 2. (Cont.)

Ideal Type	Post-colonial	Western/ instrumental	African/ humanist	Confucian Firm
<i>Analytical category</i>	(<i>Post-colonial:</i> Jackson , 2002)	(<i>Post-instrumental:</i> Jackson, 2002)	(<i>African renaissance:</i> Jackson, 2002)	(<i>Confucian firm:</i> Ip, 2009; Jackson 2011).
<i>External policies (stakeholders)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of customer/client policies • Lack or results orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear policies on customers/clients • Results orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear awareness of and articulation of stakeholder interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair dealing with customers • Providing benefits to the community, • Being a good corporate citizen • Promoting social good generally • Protecting the environment
<i>Management expertise</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educated management elite with low managerial expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High, results oriented managerial expertise is aimed for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management expertise based on people orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Junzi</i> (moral person), but also paternalistic use of management expertise
<i>Management motivators</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic security • Control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing uncertainty • Self enhancement • Autonomy • Independence • Achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belonging • Development of person and group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belonging, as part of social group • <i>zhong shu</i>, and striving for <i>Junzi</i>
<i>Management commitment orientation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To business objectives • To relatives • To organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To self • To results • To ethical principles • To work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To group • To people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To group/collective • To fairness (for wider stakeholders)
<i>Management principles (incl. main orientation)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External locus of control • Deontology • Theory X • Mistrust of human nature • Status orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal locus of control • Teleology • Theory Y • Conditional trust of human nature • Achievement orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal and external locus of control • Trust of human nature • Status and achievement orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal and external locus of control • Fairness and humanity • Social hierarchy and paternalism
<i>Management practices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on hierarchy • Use of rank • Low egalitarianism • Lack of open communication • Lack of open information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participation • Mostly communicating openly • Providing open information when necessary • Confrontational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Egalitarianism • Communicating openly • Providing open communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • humanistic, obligation-based and collectivistic • puts collective values and interests above individual ones • harmonious social relationships are paramount • obligation-based • moral capacity for compassion (<i>ren</i>) and sense of rightness (<i>yi</i>), and reciprocity (<i>shu</i>) • hierarchy of social relationships

Figure 1. Exogenous and endogenous influences in a new power dynamic creating cultural Third Spaces



Note: Arrow thickness represents hypothesized relative power relationship