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Foreword

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FOREWORD

The Journal of International Business Ethics (JIBE) opens a platform for scholars, business practitioners, and government officials to share research, perspectives and action proposals on the topic of international business ethics with a special focus on the Asian context. JIBE attempts to clarify crucial concepts and principles as well as to bring to light realities in the field of business ethics. Ethics by its very nature pervades every facet of business life: finance, accounting, human rights, labor conditions, consumer relations, environmental protection, and anti-corruption efforts. We welcome contributions in all these areas as well as the whole range of sociological, philosophical, and economical perspectives related to ethical issues.



Business ethics as an academic subject originated in the United States some forty years ago in an attempt to instill more decency and honesty within business as well as within political life. Some business schools in other countries followed suit but it never became a required subject in all business schools, even in the U.S. It is also significant to note that some ethics scholars gave up teaching in the discipline as they felt that values and other main issues of the field could not be communicated with academic precision and rigor.

In China, despite significant attempts to popularize business ethics and integrate it within the curriculum of various business schools, this subject remains marginal in these institutions, with the mere payment of lip service to business ethics. Leading figures in the area of management education are either unconvinced of the need to teach ethics, or they assume that it is substitutable by the current compulsory political courses. As a result, ethics is ultimately detruncated as “the practice of soft skills” and a hindrance in the pursuit of wealth and economic growth. In order to demonstrate the relevance and urgency of international business ethics, JIBE is commissioned to continuously explore the economic, philosophical, sociological, and cultural foundations of its subject. Business ethics needs to critically evaluate concepts that simultaneously relate to a Western frame of mind while including a broader view, especially Asian perspectives.

JIBE’s constant challenge will be to bring into play the vast array of different and nuanced perspectives from varied cultural and social perspectives. JIBE will pay special attention to the classic wisdom and philosophies in the Chinese and Indian streams of thought. JIBE will have a special focus on the Chinese and Indian context given the fact that the economies of these most-populous countries continue to take an increasingly central place in the world. It is a most-urgent task to analyze and further develop value systems needed to make the tremendous economic growth sustainable.

Besides the analysis of value systems, JIBE hopes to contribute to the development of the rule of law by linking ethics and law, especially in the Chinese context. Ethics has to spell out and critically analyze all the underpinnings of moral reasoning necessary to understand the law. An exclusive focus on legal compliance tends to overlook the "gray areas" in the decision-making process. In cases where the law is far from clear, a foundation of solid moral and ethical reasoning becomes even more necessary. Business ethics provides the vocabulary and platform to clarify and contribute to the setting of the rule of law.

The business-ethics movement will gain greater momentum when perceived as an interdisciplinary dialogue, while rigorously emphasizing specific ethical analysis of situations. A constant reference for the ethical analysis of situations must be a close link to case studies, especially focusing on recent scandals such as the recall of toys, poisoned food, slave labor in kiln mines, and the constant flow of reports on corruption. It is a special challenge to give the necessary overview of the relevant facts of a given case while making sure that the account reflects reliability, truthfulness, and objectivity. Since the Harvard case model came into use about a hundred years ago, the constant use and update of relevant case studies stimulates teaching and research.

As the Journal mainly targets scholars, business people, practitioners and government officials who have taken a keen interest in ethical issues, especially in the Asian context, the close link between theoretical analysis and practical implementation creates a relevant context in order to engage in discussions from a more thorough and multipronged approach.

Contribution and constructive criticism are always welcome on this platform.

Stephan Rothlin, Ph.D
CIBE
Secretary General
Beijing, August 17, 2008