changes and the dynamics, both locally and globally, that propel the current flux of culture in China remains a challenge for future study.

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In the literature on Chinese enterprise, two opposing points of view have clearly emerged. The first camp can be referred to as representing what has come to be known as an “essentialist” view of Chinese capital. The opposing camp, according to one reviewer, presents a “revisionist” view of the “essentialist” argument.

A good number of the literature with an “essentialist” bent would argue that Chinese enterprises display an “ethnic style” characterized primarily in the form of family firms and intra-ethnic business networks. These two modes of business and social organization are central to the “Confucian ethic”, a perennial theme of those analysts who believe that culture matters, to the point of using it as the key explanatory tool when analyzing the growth of Chinese capital.

The editors and contributors to this volume have been associated with a culturalist perspective on ethnic Chinese enterprise in Asia. Although there is an attempt by the editors to acknowledge and grapple with the points raised by critics of culturally-based arguments, they do not provide sufficient evidence to substantiate their own arguments. This weak empirical foundation is one of the major shortcomings of this book. Probably because the research underlying this volume is still ongoing, as the editors point out, the book provides no new insights yet into the lessons that the recent crisis has taught us about the entrepreneurial capabilities of ethnic Chinese businessmen in Asia. The book is also hastily written and poorly edited.

Moreover, while the title suggests that the focus of the volume is on the impact of the Asian crisis on Chinese firms in Asia, a substantial portion of the book analyzes the crisis itself—an unnecessary endeavor since this has already been done much more thoroughly elsewhere. A whole chapter is even devoted to “The Irrelevance of Japan”, while most readers would probably be more interested in the relevance of China to Chinese businesses in Asia in the post-crisis period. One contributor, Cen Huang, does provide an interesting article on investments in Guangdong, but the conclusion does little to draw out the implications to China of falling investments by Chinese businessmen of the diaspora.

One common argument running through the articles is that Chinese diaspora capitalism is in particular characterized by networks which are presumably “linked transnationally through long-term personal relationships of reputation-
based trust," (p. 71). Interestingly, this contention is challenged to some degree in another chapter, on "Networks and Strategies in Taiwanese Businesses" (pp. 114-30), where it is recognized that these ties reflect the development of commodity and subcontracting chains in the production of a certain merchandise. Some of these production lines have been transplanted abroad and do not remain in place for a protracted period. When more suitable or profitable alternatives emerge, these networks, or commodity chains, are disbanded and new ones created. Similar networking production or subcontracting ties are to be found among small and medium-scale enterprises—and between them and large enterprises—in other parts of the world, for example in Europe. Since the focus of this chapter is the "moral" aspects of these networks, the evidence here, unfortunately, is not used to question the basis on which these networks are formed—i.e. that common ethnic identity and trust inform the creation of these production lines—and the manner in which they evolve.

Other issues raised by the editors can also be questioned. One example is the argument that Chinese firms with well-diversified businesses as well as heavy investments abroad have been the most successful in weathering the storm of the crisis. Most post-crisis analyses adopt the opposite view, i.e. that firms that have a more focused approach have been better able to cope with the crisis. The evidence provided by the contributors to substantiate their argument is not convincing. Another example is the argument that many Chinese enterprises, especially those in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, which have moved into the IT sector have shown entrepreneurial innovativeness which will enable them to emerge as leading firms in this new millennium. This proposition is now under review as Taiwan and Singapore move into a recession and many of these same IT companies struggle to survive.

There is, undoubtedly, merit to some arguments in this volume about Chinese entrepreneurship and of the sustainability of these firms following the crisis. These arguments, however, provide neither deep nor new insights into the entrepreneurial capacities of these companies. They also do not explain very well why these Chinese firms are expected to continue to thrive in the post-crisis period.

(Edmund Terence Gomez, University of Malaya)


Aside from his gifts as a scholar, Lothar Ledderose is one of those inspiring teachers who invites his students to do most of the talking. The ideas and style of his latest book work a similar effect. In classrooms, Ten Thousand Things pro-