

should ever be contemplated, it will have to frontally address issues raised by Chang and Halliday.

RICHARD BAUM

Managers and Mandarins in Contemporary China: The Building of an International Business Alliance. By JIE TANG [London and New York: Routledge, 2005. viii + 175 pp. \$65.00. ISBN 0-415-36363-2.]

In the book, the author attempts to analyse whether business conflicts in China are resolved in much the same way as elsewhere or if they are handled altogether differently. To those who are familiar with Chinese management literature, such as the author, the answer is self-evident, for Chinese conflict management is rooted in Chinese cultural traditions that have proved to be strikingly different from those in the West, and in the recent Chinese experience in establishing socialism with Chinese characteristics that has no parallel in history. Nevertheless, very little effort has been made to examine empirically conflict management in China. The present book fills in the vacuum.

To support the argument for a Chinese way of conflict management, the author chooses to take an ethnographic approach, observing on the spot the daily operations of an international business alliance – a joint construction project between Chinese and German partners in a large city of China. The author spent nearly a year on the construction site in China, following the progress of the construction project from tendering to completion, and observing intensively how conflicts between partners in the project emerged, developed and were resolved. The author won the trust from all partners involved by serving voluntarily as a neutral interpreter, and managed to gain access to first-hand data and materials on the evolution of various events over that period. As a result, the author is able to provide a vivid account.

Through the ethnographic approach, the author reveals some particulars of the Chinese business environment in which conflicts occurred, including the red tape, paternalism and nepotism, limits on contract, involvement of local government officials in business activities, and the Chinese way of thinking about quality, time and management style. The author demonstrates how these particulars have caused tension and conflicts between the Chinese and German staff in the construction project. Jie Tang concludes that China's own history and the circumstances it confronts both domestically and internationally will continue to ensure that whatever business system it fashions will be one with Chinese characteristics, and that Westerners expecting to find in China either now or in the future a system that is a replica of their own are set for a disappointment. They are advised to learn to understand the Chinese business environment in which conflicts may occur, particularly the conflicting pressures to which Chinese managers are exposed, and not to dismiss all practices that fail to comply with the norms of western

business. The conclusion is not surprising to many, but it does strengthen empirically the view of a unique style of Chinese management.

Like many studies that take an ethnographic approach, this book suffers from a lack of theoretical analysis. While much attention is paid to describing the evolution of events, little effort is made to use the empirical case to address important theoretical issues on conflict management of international business alliances, including partner selection, control structure of the alliance, and conflict resolution strategies. Students of international business are left wondering to what extent a Western business partner may adopt a problem-solving approach, a compromising approach, a forcing approach or a legalistic approach proposed in the literature to deal with conflicts in international business alliances in China, and what are the specific conditions under which each of these conflict resolution strategies may work. They are also left wondering what a Western business partner can do in selecting Chinese partners and designing control structures for international business alliances in order to minimize the risks of serious conflicts with Chinese partners. Anecdotal evidence from China suggests that conflicts between business partners are not always as serious as they are in the case presented in the book, and can be avoided or handled very well through, for instance, proper selection of partners and careful design of control structure. Issues like these are as important as issues about the uniqueness of Chinese business environment and Chinese way of conflict management. Unfortunately, the author does not go a step further to develop insights into these important issues.

Despite these shortcomings, this book is an important contribution to the study of international business alliance and Chinese management. Used together with carefully designed questions for discussion and references for further reading, the book can serve as a valuable case study for classroom teaching in business schools.

XIAOWEN TIAN

State and Laid-off Workers in Reform China: The Silence and Collective Action of the Retrenched. By YONGSHUN CAI [London and New York: Routledge, 2006. 193 pp. £65.00; \$113.00. ISBN 0-415-36888-X.]

As the first scholarly monograph in English on the politics of Chinese laid-off (*xiagang*) workers, this is a solid book that adds much to our understanding of key aspects of this important topic. Specialist libraries at China research centres will clearly want to purchase it. Although it touches briefly on other dimensions of the politics of lay-offs (mostly in chapters two and three), the book's primary objectives are to advance an explanation of observed patterns of laid-off workers' collective action and to contribute to a refinement of broader theories of social movements and contentious politics in socialist and authoritarian contexts. Cai's