

ASIAN BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Special Issue Call for Papers:

Multinational Enterprises, SDGs, and Asia: Opportunities and Challenges for Firms and Countries

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Multinational and UN's SDGs

The United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The agenda is "a plan of action for people, the planet and for prosperity... All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan" (UN, 2015, p. 1). The SDGs present a new development paradigm in which sustainable development is the responsibility of different stakeholders, such as governments, multinational enterprises (MNEs) and civil society. To respond to this call, business and management scholars increasingly integrate concepts related to the SDGs into their research, adding to existing debates that originated in the areas of development economics and sustainability studies (Oldekop et al. 2016). Earlier work from the 1980s and 1990s related to the SDGs emphasized macro-level developments and economic considerations; more recently, business and management research has focused more on the firm level (Kolk et al., 2017), with greater focus on social and environmental impact of firms in host and home countries. MNEs are key drivers of change because they drive the global economy through trade, investment and value chain activities. Asia is host and home to a significant share of global foreign direct investment (UNCTAD, 2022), and the role of MNEs has been significant in explaining many of Asian countries' remarkable growth over the past few decades.

Through their activities in and across Asian countries, MNEs – both in and from Asia - can and *do* help countries achieve their SDGs. But a large body of knowledge explains how MNEs contributes to Asian countries' economic development (both as host and home to MNEs), the SDGs act as an incentives to better understand and conceptualise how MNEs also contribute to inclusive development and human well-being (Kourula et al., 2017), and to the natural environment. This special issue asks the following question: To what extent do MNEs in and from Asia contribute to SDGs in Asia?

Existing literature has shown that MNEs can contribute to the SDGs through various trade and investment strategies and operations in home and host countries, either through their own activities or by cooperating with various private, public or civil stakeholders (Ghauri et al., 2017; Rygh et al., 2021; van Tulder et al., 2021). International trade and FDI are discussed under the categories of trade and inequality and MNE operations in emerging and developing countries. The social and environmental impacts of multinationals have attracted increasing

attention, with an emphasis on how these firms can contribute positively or negatively to numerous societal challenges, such as local income distribution, health and education, gender equality (Eden & Wagstaff, 2021), poverty reduction (Kolk, 2016), human rights (Wettstein et al., 2019), or renewable energy (Patala et al., 2021), within or across countries in which they operate.

Indeed, as part of their sustainability efforts, MNEs are increasingly incorporating the SDGs into their corporate strategies, rethinking their objectives and shifting from profit to social and environmental value creation (Camilleri, 2017) or shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2011), for instance by developing novel social innovation practices (Sinkovics et al., 2014). As such, MNEs have a strategic role to play in the SDGs (Mio et al., 2020). However, numerous scholars remain critical as to whether this is sufficient. For instance, van Zanten & van Tulder (2018) suggest that MNEs generally limit actions to reducing negative impacts rather than integrating sustainability within their core strategies. Many question whether firms' CSR strategies are sufficient (Kolk, 2016). To enhance the debate, scholars such as Montiel et al. (2021) call for more research on how MNEs can look at their sustainability practices and integrate positive and negative externalities to translate country-level SDGs into firm-level actions. Others call for more research on collaboration and partnership, one of the core SDGs, arguing that cross-sector and multi-stakeholder collaborative efforts may result in greater sustainable impact (Kolk et al., 2017).

There are numerous reasons why this Special Issue focuses on MNEs, SDGs, and Asia. The Asian region is diverse and heterogeneous, with over 40 countries grouped into five subregions, including Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia, Southern Asia, Central Asia, and Western Asia. The region has shown exponential growth over the past two decades, particularly among developing countries. For example, UNCTAD (2022) data shows that foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows increased by 19% to an all-time high of \$619 billion in 2021. Despite the COVID-19 epidemic, which caused a 35% decline in worldwide FDI in 2020, investment flows to the region increased for the third year in a row, reflecting the resilient characteristics of developing economies in Asia, despite a high concentration of FDI into a small number of countries. However, the current deteriorating global economic conditions are said to bring about a general deceleration in Asia in the coming years, and UNCTAD suggests an economic slowdown in Asia may set back the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Within Asia, the literature has explored in depth how MNEs contribute to local host environments through linkages and spillovers (Giroud, 2007), or to the innovative potential of MNEs (Zhao, 2021). Yet, we still lack a concise understanding of the role played by MNEs in Asian countries' potential to achieve the SDGs.

Given the importance of MNEs in Asia, and countries' imperative to achieve the SDGs, in this special issue, we aim to offer state-of-the-art research on the crucial role of MNEs in achieving the SDGs in the context of Asian countries. This special issue will provide a forum to enhance knowledge on the role of MNEs in the SDGs in Asia, encouraging integration of factors rooted in Asian culture, Asian business systems and institutional environments (Pananond & Giroud, 2016), or comparing SDGs related actions by MNEs originating from within or outside Asia. We invite contributions that focus on MNEs themselves and how their operations and strategies are shifting in line with the SDGs, on multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaboration in the

process of achieving the SDGs, on key opportunities and challenges by the SDGs for MNEs, on how business and policy interact in Asia towards the achievement of the SDGs, on specialized SDG themes (in alignment with one of the 17 proposed SDGs), or on papers answer broad questions about sustainability in the Asian business and management context. We are also interested in experiences on the particular importance of SDG initiatives for MNEs originating from Asia.

We are looking for a range of papers that offer empirical and theoretical contributions through quantitative and qualitative studies to inform and enrich the theoretical advances in MNEs, SDGs and Asian business and management research. We provide an indicative list of possible topics below:

- How do MNEs from within and/or outside the region contribute to the SDGs?
- How do MNEs contribute to inclusive and sustainable development in Asia?
- Which trade and investment strategies do multinational firms adopt in Asia that support SDGs?
- Which market and non-market strategies do MNEs adopt to support SDGs in Asia?
- What are the social and environmental impacts of MNEs in Asia?
- How do formal and informal institutions in Asia influence MNEs' potential contribution to the SDGs?
- Do MNEs engage in multi-stakeholder strategies to support the SDGs in Asia?
- What type of sustainable supply-chain strategies do MNEs implement in Asia?
- Do Asian MNEs implement sustainable strategies towards achieving SDGs within the region or globally?
- How can existing theories be usefully applied/extended to examining MNEs and SDGs in the context of Asia? What theories are useful in unravelling regional characteristics and intra-regional heterogeneities?
- To what extent are theories and concepts such as 'global factory', 'guanxi', and digitalization useful in shedding new light on MNEs and SDGs in Asia?
- What new theories or concepts can be particularly relevant when studying the impact of MNEs on SDGs in the Asian context?

Submission Process

To be considered for this special issue, final manuscripts must be submitted by **30 May 2023** via <https://www.editorialmanager.com/JABM/default.aspx>. The submission system will be open from **1st April 2023**. To ensure that all manuscripts are correctly identified as being submitted for this special issue, please select '**SI: Multinational Enterprises and SDGs**' when you reach the "Article Type" step in the online submission process. Authors should prepare their manuscript according to the guidelines of **Asian Business & Management**, see: <http://www.palgrave.com/gp/journal/41291/authors/presentation-formatting>.

Submitted papers will be reviewed through a double-blind peer review process. We welcome your submissions. If you have questions about a potential submission, please contact Chie Iguchi at iguchi@keio.jp, Axèle Giroud at Axele.Giroud@manchester.ac.uk, or Shasha Zhao at shasha.zhao@surrey.ac.uk.

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