NPM in Asian Countries

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Introduction

Since the 1990s, Asian countries had been increasingly riding on the global movement of public sector reforms. After the 1997 Asian economic crisis, which cast doubt on the ‘East Asian miracle’ (World Bank 1993), there had been calls for institutional reforms in some Asian countries in order to cope with the impact of globalization and to catch up with some recognized ‘best practices’. For those countries relying on the assistance of international organizations or developed donor-countries, such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, they were particularly prone to imposed conditions of aid in the form of requirements on specific reform targets and strategies. Broadly speaking, two dominant paradigms have the most impact on Asian institutional reforms: the New Public Management (NPM) and ‘good governance’ models. In addition to economic and fiscal pressures, domestic political changes and regime transition have also induced a new articulation of governance and institutional configurations. ‘Socialist’ countries like China and Vietnam have also embarked on major economic and administrative transformations as part of their journey of systemic reform and ideological reversion.

All this, however, does not occur in an historical vacuum. ‘History matters’, as path dependence theorists would say (for example Wilsford 1994, Greener 2000a, 2000b). Innate influence of national administrative traditions aside (such as the colonial, military or imperial legacies of some countries), Asian administrative reforms have also been closely linked to political evolutions arising from decolonization, democratization and nation building. They are as much influenced by the global trends of administrative reforms and government reinvention, as by regional and national institutional logics shaped by local history, culture, context and administrative thought, and motivated by domestic politics inasmuch as external inspirations and lessons (Cheung 2005). Behind some common rhetoric and external appearance lies a diversity of evolutionary tracks and reform pathways. To this extent, Asian NPM is not really the same as NPM in Western Europe, North America, or Australia, whose experiences have largely defined the
rationale and substance of the global NPM agenda, and set the prescriptions for ‘good governance’. What appears to be similar may merely be ‘fundamentally alike in all unimportant aspects’ (paraphrasing Wallace Sayre, quoted in Allison 1986a). With the recent outbreak of the global financial crisis, Anglo-American capitalism is at a crossroads. NPM, rooted in neo-liberal pro-market ideology, is facing a legitimacy crisis of its own as many nations (especially developing countries) begin to seek lessons from alternative developmental models. The rising challenge to the market paradigm will likely see a growing interest in ‘Asian NPM’ which is in effect a hybrid of Western and Eastern traditions, combining state-led development strategies and the instrumentalities of public administration.

Dominant Paradigms of Public Sector Reforms in Asia

New Public Management

NPM began as a reform trajectory of mainly Western liberal democracies seeking to use pro-market strategies and measures to cope with economic and political challenges since the 1980s, by seeking remedies from the market to deal with the many failures discovered in the bureaucracy as well as para-governmental outgrowths during the heyday of nationalization and the welfare state (Hoed 1991, OECD 1995, Lane 2000, McLaughlin, Osborne and Ferlie 2002). Much of the NPM reform agenda has to do with: streamlining the structure of the civil service; efficiency improvements especially in human and financial resource management; decentralization; and ultimately cultural transformation of public service organizations from their traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic modus operandi to one more aligned to the private sector principles of competition, performance rewards and customer orientation. Many of the reform experiences and theorizations found in the international literature are based on those initiatives and their impact in Europe, North America, and Australia and New Zealand, where such reforms were first pioneered. NPM has since informed public sector reforms in many developed OECD countries (Manning 1997: 5) but other parts of the world have also been exposed to its influence (Turner 1998, 2000, Haque 2001, McCourt and Minogue 2001). Asian nations, and many other developing countries, are seemingly at the learning end of the policy diffusion and policy transfer process (Common 2001).

Good Governance

The ‘good governance’ goals have been advocated by regional and international organizations – such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank – for less developed nations, sometimes modelled on Western pro-market instruments and sometimes with greater emphasis on equity and development. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), in its paper What is Good Governance? (2006), sets out eight characteristics of good governance, namely: accountable, consensus-oriented, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, participatory, following the rule of law, responsive, and transparent. The World Bank’s World Governance Indicators measure six aspects, namely: control of corruption, voice and accountability, rule of law, regulatory quality, political stability and absence of violence, and government effectiveness (World Bank 2010). In Asia, the Asian Development Bank (1998) sees accountability, transparency, predictability and participation as the principal qualities that governments should aim to attain. In the post-Cold War era, with the concomitant rise of neo-liberalism, the ‘good governance’ drive is often associated with an ideological drive from international organizations to promote convergence to a global economic order supportive of a neo-liberal agenda. Such a drive is sometimes referred to as the Washington Consensus.1 To that extent, there is a shared impact of the NPM and ‘good governance’ paradigms.

Asia is a huge land mass with long and diverse histories and traditions, civilizations and cultures, and social, political, administrative and economic systems. There exist developed economies in East Asia and Southeast Asia (represented by Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore), as well as developing ones, amongst which China and India have become two of the fastest-growth economies of the world in the twenty-first century. Within Asia, different countries or sub-regions display different domestic political, social and economic conditions, and face different challenges to their governance. The Asian Development Bank (1999: 18, Table 1), for example, has identified different sets of governance problems faced by different subgroups of Asian countries at the turn of the century, ranging from an overextended and over-centralized state, weak administration and rigid regulation, to outright cronyism. Such diversities determine their reform actions and trajectories amid the global NPM trends and international reform models.

Putting Asian Public Sector Reforms in Regional Context

The Political Economy

Some commonalities can be observed of public sector reform experiences in different Asian countries (Cheung 2005). Inheriting legacies of colonial rule, military rule,  

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1 The term ‘Washington Consensus’ was initially coined by John Williamson (1989) to describe a set of specific economic policy prescriptions constituting the ‘standard’ reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries by Washington D.C.-based institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the US Treasury Department. The term has since been used as a synonym for market fundamentalism, and become associated with neo-liberal policies in general.
or one-party authoritarianism or dictatorship, they have shared a strong tradition of bureaucratic rule and hierarchical values. A paternalistic, authoritarian and centralized brand of bureaucratic culture thus defines the nature and features of public administration. Nation building, economic planning, and the predominant status and role of the bureaucracy (playing as the modernizers and reformers) have been key to administrative organization and reform. As newly decolonized, independent and emergent states in the last century, many Asian countries have sought to strengthen the state as part of their ‘nation building’ enterprise. Their historical and cultural traditions have tended to favour statist solutions to solve social and economic problems and to cope with political challenges. China and Vietnam – previously state-planned – are now state-directed marketized/marketing economies. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia are well-known examples of developmental states. Hong Kong, though seen as an East Asian exception and long cherished as the last bastion of classical market capitalism (Friedman 1981), has been actively engaged in regulatory controls and social policy interventions (Schiffer 1983). Even India had for a long time operated a highly regulated economy through bureaucratic licensing controls.

The economic objectives of the ‘developmental state’ require centralized systems with centralized power to mobilize and direct resources, in order to drive state-directed industrialization through state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and an active industrial policy. The interlocking state/economy/society systems and interlocking elites have for a long time underpinned the core of governance in East and Southeast Asia (notably the communist party-states of China and Vietnam; former one-party or military authoritarian states in South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Indonesia; and ‘illiberal’ democratic regimes like Singapore and Malaysia). Unlike Western countries, the relatively weak market and weak civil society in many parts of Asia have rendered it impossible for society-driven or market-driven reform forces to bear upon the state. Since the market is also a socially-embedded institution, the impact of marketization or privatization is not exactly creating the same result as in Western market economies. In some cases, the market is largely created and regulated by the state and still needs the latter’s support and patronage (such as in China and Vietnam), whereas the private sector is weak and not really independent of the state.

The Reform Logic

Administrative reforms in Asian countries thus seek to empower rather than denigrate the bureaucracy. NPM-like reforms have been adopted not to erode bureaucratic power, but instead to cement or reinvigorate it as a modernizing and developmental bureaucracy, so as to enhance the state’s capacity in economic development and nation building. The fact that there exists a dual agenda of bureaucratic improvement and economic development implies a reform logic quite the reverse of NPM. Instead of decoupling the state and market, and using the market to drive all things including the state’s performance, the logic is inverted to enable a capacitated state to drive the economy. While the bureaucratic elites are largely looked upon to drive reform and modernization, they are often also the cause of problems of governance (such as patronage, corruption and government-business collusion) that administrative reforms are supposed to deal with, thus becoming at the same time the main countervailing force to fundamental change when it comes to upsetting their fundamental interests. Coalitions of interlocking interests have remained intact under a state-managed economic strategy, and reform policies like privatization have often been adopted not to confine the role and scope of the state, but rather to strengthen state capacity in alternative ways via political agents and power brokers.

The Western NPM logic is characterized by a market-led, private sector-oriented ideology of administrative change or reinvention, involving rolling back the frontier of the state, and seeking solutions from the lessons and precepts of private sector management. In comparison, the East and Southeast Asian experiences have pointed to rather contrasting values and orientations: state-led; public sector-led; building state capacity; newly acquired governance values in democratic transition; and solutions from strong and ‘competent’ state institutions in some cases. The East Asian growth model – to denote the impressive economic performance of Japan and the four NICs (newly industrialized countries, namely South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong) during the 1990s – was driven by an alternative logic of what Wade (1990) described as ‘governing the market’. There is, of course, no singular Asian NPM ‘face’. However, prominent Asian countries (like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, China and Vietnam in terms of the chronological sequence of their economic development) have tended to adopt a state-planned, state-led or state-managed approach to economic and social development, whether in a capitalist or socialist setting, resulting in the proliferation of the para-governmental public sector, interlocking with businesses and major social elites, and in some cases involving networks of government (including military) patronage and public employment for social-distribution purposes. The private sector-oriented and neo-liberal rhetoric commonly taken to characterize the global NPM logic does not square with the inherent statist and bureaucratic nature of many Asian administrative systems. The ‘old’ administrative regime of Asia has continued to be firmly entrenched, despite the ‘new’ public management wrappings and techniques.

The Domestic Politics of Reform

The politics of Asian administrative reform was once diagnosed by Moon and Ingraham (1998) within the context of a tripartite framework between politics, bureaucracy and society, depicted as a ‘political nexus triad’ (PNT). In Western NPM, apart from party politics and ideological shifts, popular/electoral sentiments and pressures from the private sector often provided part of the impetus for reform – the social habitat factors according to Hood (1996a). However, such ‘societal’ factors have not featured prominently in the Asian scene, where the
growth of a strong free market and an autonomous civil society, to form the pillars of governance along with the state, has yet to be realized in many countries. The paternalistic and centralizing traditions of Asian administration mean that central agencies are reluctant to devolve power, particularly to non-state institutions or those institutions that the state finds difficult to reach and control in some way. Despite all the rhetoric about devolution, partnership and power-sharing, the actual extent of decentralization and power-shedding is limited (Cheung and Scott 2003: 13). Governance reforms are mostly bureaucracy-led rather than market-led or civil society-led.

The role of the bureaucracy in any public sector reform is well recognized in the academic literature. For example, Hood (2002a) has pointed to the importance of ‘public service bargain’ in terms of politicians—bureaucrats negotiation over the agenda and pace of reform. PNT in Asia is significant more in terms of the inconspicuousness than intervention of either an active civil society or influential private economic sector. The bureaucracy is synonymous with the state; it is both the ‘problem’ and the ‘solution’ of governance. To reform the state and state-society and state-economy relationships through the agency of the state constitutes the main paradox of governance reform, so that ‘the answer must also lie in the problem’ (Cheung and Scott 2003: 17). Because of the close intermingling between the state and economy, and between the state and society, with the state being the dominating force, it is impossible to talk of economic reform without state reform, or of state-society partnerships when the society is still largely dependent on or subservient to state power. The dilemma is: bureaucrats have to be ‘reformed’ in order for reform to be successful, and yet they have to be ‘relied upon’ for driving the reform; but reforms may be easily ‘captured’ by the bureaucracy for rent-seeking purposes. The politics of reform has to strike a delicate balance between the forces for regime change and the forces for stability and authority, otherwise regime capacity would become so weakened that it is unable to direct anything.

Impact of Globalization and Learning from the West

In this era of globalization and cross-national policy transfers, Asian institutional reforms just cannot be immune to the global waves of public sector reforms. However, being exposed to a general environment of global reforms displaying a dominant ideological direction or agenda does not necessarily mean that national and local reforms will conform to the same institutional logic. Even among advanced nations pioneering the global wave of reforms, clear diversities have been detected (Cheung 1997, Christensen and Lægreid 2001a, Common 2001). Path dependence explanations fit public management reforms rather well (Pollitt 2000: 185), as these countries do not share the same uniform past in terms of administrative structures, traditions and instruments, but operate in political and legal frameworks that condition their policy choices in responding to change, as well as their political motives and calculations behind reforms (Kettl 2000).

Comparing Public Sector Reforms across Asian Countries

Typology of Reform Patterns

There exists a diversity of motives, imperatives and constraints pertaining to public sector reforms among Asian countries. It is impossible to pack these reforms into a single paradigm. Still, at least several significant clusters of Asian reform countries
can be identified, based on the administrative traditions and legacies, political economy, state role and capacity, salience of administrative reform, and forces and progress of change (see Table 9.1). In terms of agenda setting and the speed of reforms, at least four reform types can be distinguished, namely: (a) an essentially bureaucrats-led modernization agenda (in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, even though politics have featured more prominently in the past decade in some of them as explained in the next section) – with generally a slow pace (except in Singapore, and to some extent Hong Kong); (b) a politics-led political agenda (in developing countries in Southeast Asia like Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines) – with a slow or mixed pace; (c) a party-state-led legitimacy and capacity building agenda (in socialist transition states like China and Vietnam) – with a mixed pace; and (d) a politics-led politicians—bureaucrats bargain agenda (in sub-continent countries like India) – generally with a slow pace.

Reviewing the adaptation of the NPM menu by Southeast Asian countries at the beginning of this decade, Turner (2002) identified three sets of countries with a different degree of enthusiasm for reform: the ‘enthusiastic’ diners (namely Singapore and Malaysia), the ‘cautious’ diners (namely the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia) and the rest who knew little of NPM (such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). Things might have changed since then. In the case of Vietnam, there has been a more ambitious Public Administration Reform programme, partly driven by the party-state’s desire to institutionalize and legitimize the transition to a socialist market economy within a centralized state-management framework, and partly upon the advice of international aid organizations and donor countries urging an

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Source: Cheung (2005)
The accelerated liberalization programme (Painter 2002, 2003). Samarutunge, Alam and Teicher (2008: 42) observe that South Asian countries, represented by Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, have opted for selected reform programmes which suit the short-term interests of the ruling elites. The policy prescriptions of international development agencies have influenced changes, but narrow partisan politics have acted as a force against comprehensive reforms. Although South Asian countries had introduced some major pro-market public sector reforms in order to improve performance, it was found that such reforms had not succeeded in improving performance but had even led to more adverse consequences on equity and citizenship rights, favouring the vested interests of political and business elites (Haque 2003).

The East Asian Pioneers and Enthusiasts of NPM Reforms

Hong Kong and Singapore

Hong Kong and Singapore are arguably the pioneers of NPM in Asia. Indeed they have undertaken similar public sector reforms since the 1990s. Being a former British colony before 1997, Hong Kong had a longstanding tradition of pursuing administrative reforms as substitutes for political reforms. A Public Sector Reform programme was launched in 1989, embracing an NPM-like agenda. Apart from managerial initiatives such as budgetary devolution, contracting out, self-accounting trading funds, customer-oriented initiatives and performance pledges, this reform was also significant in reconstituting the centre of policy management, redefining the policy management-delivery relationships between the policy secretaries (the equivalents of ministers) and various executive agencies. After reunification with China in 1997, major initiatives have been introduced in the areas of civil service reform, efficiency enhancement, performance management, contracting out and outsourcing, one-line budgets and financial devolution, and the introduction of political appointments (at Secretary, Undersecretary and Assistant levels). Economic restructuring, the challenges of globalization and regional competition, regime transition, and the need to meet rising public expectations for better responsiveness within a partial democracy have together shaped the public sector reform agenda (Cheung 2009).

Singapore's administrative reforms can be traced to its post-colonial efforts to rebuild a new civil service in the 1960s. Since the 1990s, the government has sought to bring the best into the civil service by linking the salaries of ministers and top civil servants to the highest paid professionals and corporate executives. In 1995, the Public Service for the 21st Century programme (PS21) was launched to nurture an attitude of service excellence, and to foster an environment for greater efficiency and effectiveness (Quah 2007a). Accompanying reforms included: budget reforms and devolution, the establishment of autonomous agencies and client orientation (Quah 2007b). Despite public sector divestment in the late 1980s, the government has been keen to reinvigorate 'Singapore Inc' (that is, the government plus government-linked corporations, together forming a formidable political-economic foundation of the developmental state) through an ambitious regionalization strategy, in order to meet the challenges of globalization. In the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis, it has focused on economic restructuring and the 'Remaking Singapore' initiatives in political, social and cultural aspects, underscoring a paradigm shift towards community development and cohesion.

Comparing the two city states, Lee and Haque (2006; Table 2) found that Singapore had attained a greater extent of reform (in terms of scale and effectiveness) in the areas of economic and administrative governance, whereas Hong Kong had achieved a greater extent of reform in the area of social governance, such difference being explained by domestic political and civil society conditions, and social policy philosophy and traditions. Still there are important similarities. Both Singapore and Hong Kong are administrative states essentially enjoying fiscal surplus and economic boom (except in the aftermath of the Asian finance crisis), unlike Western NPM reform countries, and have largely embraced a pro-civil service reform agenda. Public sector bodies have remained efficient, thus privatization and corporatization have been pursued more for non-efficiency-related reasons (Cheung 2002). Public sector reforms have been largely bureaucrats-driven though there is a more prominent politicians–bureaucrats coalition – or 'public service bargain' (Hood 2002a) – in Singapore than in Hong Kong.

Japan, South Korea and Taiwan

The three East/Northeast Asian states – Japan, Korea and Taiwan (dubbed by some as 'Jakota') – share some common administrative heritage, with the latter two being former Japanese colonies until the end of the Second World War. They were initially laggards in public sector reform because of their unduly rigid administrative and organizational culture. Since the late 1990s, thanks to democratization and regime change (in Taiwan and South Korea), but more importantly due to globalization, economic pressure and the impact of the Asian financial crisis, these states have undertaken more wide-ranging reforms in the fashion of the American 'reinvention' movement.

Japan is a developmental state (Johnson 1995). The motives of public sector reform can be linked to its economic and fiscal crisis which has continued for two decades. As early as the 1980s, an Administrative Reform Council was established as the vehicle of reform. However, given the nature of a strong politicians–bureaucrats alliance under the former Liberal Democratic Party rule, administrative reforms were essentially top-down, slow-paced and designed with bureaucratic consent. The pace of reform has quickened since the Asian financial crisis. Over the last decade, major reforms pursued include: privatization of public enterprises; devolution, decentralization and deregulation; fiscal and budgetary reforms; and, most crucial, central-government restructuring and downsizing (Nakamura 1998, Masujima 2003). More recently there have been moves to curb the power and influence of national bureaucrats – such as changing the longstanding political culture where ministers merely confirm policies formulated by their ministry bureaucrats, and ending the practices of amakudari (golden parachuting,
that is, placement of national civil servants in post-retirement jobs with entities supervised by their former ministries) and autari (movement between such jobs) among national civil servants.

Like Japan, South Korea is also a developmental state with a competitive party system since democratization in 1997. The Korean administrative culture as inherited from over half a century of Japanese colonial rule and another three decades of military dictatorship has been a rather closed and top-down one. The Asian financial crisis of 1997–98 and the resulting IMF pressure for deregulation and fiscal reforms, as well as the challenges of globalization, had together induced a strong impetus to a reassessment of the Korean public sector and its management structures and policies. This, in tandem with the newly elected democratic administration of President Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) put administrative and governance reforms at the forefront of the political agenda at the turn of the century, especially in revamping government–business relations and the civil service system. Reforms since then have been more wide-ranging: the breakup of the monopoly powers of chaebols (the business conglomerates previously associated with and groomed by the former military governments as strategic corporate partners to drive industrialization and economic development); privatization of public enterprises; central and local government restructuring and downsizing; agencification; introduction of a new Senior Civil Service; performance management reform; budgetary and financial management reforms; anti-corruption reforms; citizen convenience initiatives; and deregulation and simplification of procedures (Cho and Kim 2000, Ha 2004, Kim 2007).

Taiwan, another newly industrialized and democratized state and former Japanese colony, only ended half a century of Kuomintang (KMT, Nationalist Party) authoritarian rule in 2000, when the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) came to power, which in turn was replaced by the KMT in 2008. It is still in the process of regime transition from one-party authoritarianism to a competitive party system. The bureaucratic culture has inherited the legacy of half-a-century Japanese colonial rule as well as authoritarian traditions brought from the KMT’s rule in mainland China before it fled to Taiwan after defeat by the Communists in 1949. Anti-KMT activism over the years, especially after the lifting of martial law in 1987 and the tolerance of opposition political parties and a free press since then, had led to political liberalization and a democratic political culture in the 1990s. These undercurrents in the society and polity, together with the challenge of globalization and the need for Taiwan to remain competitive, have together induced the government in power (whether KMT or DPP) to pursue public sector reforms (Cheung 2003). Since the 1990s, ‘government reinvention’—emulating the US administrative reform slogan—has been put at the forefront of the policy agenda by successive administrations, supported by rounds of government reinvention programmes aimed at reorganization, restructuring and downsizing, deregulation and privatization of SOEs, and citizen convenience initiatives. Despite enthusiasm and rising expectations in society for change, the actual pace of reforms has been slow due to the political gridlock between the two main political camps and legislative delay, causing uncertainties and anxieties in the bureaucracy which used to dominate the administrative agenda. Sun (2008) describes this as a mismatch between the supply and demand of administrative reform.

Concluding Discussion

Asian responses to change remain to be shaped by domestic conditions and institutional dynamics. Asian public sector reforms, even if donning imported NPM or ‘good governance’ clothing, or subscribing to the language and rhetoric of global reform fashions, are still essentially policy instruments to shore up and sustain the existing pro-state, and very often also pro-bureaucracy, regime. The lack of a major ideological or paradigm break with the past means that governance reform or the reinvention of public administration is pursued only to the extent of preserving pre-existing interests and institutions. This is observed not only in market-socialist states but also in more developed and newly industrialized countries. Granted, reforms have often turned out to be the means for political objectives, whether of the old or new political elites, or of the bureaucracy.

The conventional wisdom under the neo-liberal agenda has it that improved governance is conducive to economic growth, a goal much treasured by Asian and other developing countries, with the corollary that economically more affluent nations are in turn able to afford the costs associated with a competent bureaucracy and better entrenched institutions of good governance, thereby inducing a virtuous circle. However, such causal relationship is more ambivalent on the ground. Kaufmann and Kraay (2002, 2003) found out from empirical studies that there was actually negative feedback from per-capita incomes to governance. Firstly, when the institutions of the state are ‘captured’ by vested interests (as is the case in some Asian developing countries), those entrenched elites could benefit from a worsening status quo of mis-governance and could successfully resist demands for change even as income rises. Secondly, economic growth could sometimes be achieved despite the lack of what neo-liberals define as elements of good or democratic governance—some would point to China and Singapore as examples; hence Kaufman and Kraay’s (2002) suggestion of the possibility of ‘growth without governance’, which directly challenges the ‘good governance’ paradigm. The post-Cold War enthusiasm for a singular route towards good governance grounded in neo-liberalism has come to its demise partly because of the diverse experience of reforms across the globe, contrary to the one-size-fits-all prescription, and partly because the recent global financial crisis emanating from the most advanced economies in the United States and Europe has exposed the intellectual and practical vulnerabilities of the NPM doctrine.

The tide of opinion is now fast changing, calling for more critical reflections. Andrews (2010), for example, argues that ‘good government means different things in different countries’, and that effective governments are actually more likely to display better practice characteristics than implied in one-best-way models. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the superpower domination of US capitalism
has been seriously eroded, leading to the questioning of not just its economic might, not also its cultural superiority. As The Economist (2009a: 9) remarked, while globalization and economic interdependence will continue to be fundamental forces of development, at the same time cultural differences and economic nationalism will likely form the basis of rivalry and conflict. The globalization discourse previously dominated by neo-liberalism is being challenged on two fronts – the emerging post-neo-liberal debates which advocate emancipatory, inclusive and re-regulatory roles for the state (Brand and Sekler 2009), and the critics of the 'Washington Consensus' championing an alternative 'Beijing Consensus' based on the Chinese path of pragmatic developmentalism (Ramo 2004). This is not the place to explore and debate such rival paths and claims. Suffice it to say that a culturally diverse public administration scene at the global level is increasingly recognized to be the norm rather than the exception, and the Asian countries' distinct and varied NPM reform experiences and trajectories attest to such diversity.