

Book Review

QUAH, JON S. T. (ED.). (2013). DIFFERENT PATHS TO CURBING CORRUPTION: LESSONS FROM DENMARK, FINLAND HONG KONG, NEW ZEALAND AND SINGAPORE. BINGLEY, UK: EMERALD GROUP PUBLISHING.

Adam Graycar

The point I stress again and again to my students is that not all corruption is the same and that some places are more corrupt than others. The corruption described for the most part in this book, is different to that in much of the corruption literature. This excellent book is about different paths to reducing corruption, and it deals primarily with five countries that are renowned for their low corruption, and India which is so complex and has so much corruption woven through its cultures and institutions.

The low corruption countries, Denmark, Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand all have demonstrated that corruption need not be a manifestation of everyday life. Citizens do not live with the irritation of having to pay bribes for things to which they are entitled, do not live in fear of having their rights and liberties corruptly curtailed, nor live with kleptocratic political leaders who use the state as their personal bank. This is not to say that they are corruption free. In these countries there are examples of manipulation, extortion, patronage, conflict of interest, misuse of information and so on. Activists in these countries seize on every scandal, and use it to argue that the reputation as a low corruption country is not at all deserved. But whichever way we look at it, and notwithstanding the various scandals that surface from time to time these countries are a world away from Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, and others at the bottom of the Transparency International scales.

The book has chapters on each of the countries, and these tell about the institutions and processes that put them at the top of the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index. Of course, the CPI is a perceptions index and not a measure of the incidence or prevalence of corruption, and as such is a proxy measure only.

Denmark's low corruption is attributed to its quality of government and its political competition; Finland has a variety of watchdog agencies, and a sense of public integrity; New Zealand prides itself on its egalitarian nature and political transparency. Both Hong Kong and Singapore became less corrupt as a reaction to endemic corruption dec-

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ades ago, severe corruption that was focussed in, but not exclusively located within the police forces. Both established anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) that have proven to be very effective in curbing corruption, and have been at the vanguard of a nation-wide experience of building integrity. The Hong Kong Independent Commission against Corruption has invested in public education and community engagement as well as strong enforcement, while Singapore is characterised by strong political will to reduce corruption, virtual zero tolerance of offenders, expertise in enforcement, and overall, operation within the rule of law.

In contrast Krishna Tummala writes a chapter on India, a chapter that is tinged with despair as he writes about how corruption is woven through the cultures of acquisitiveness, ostentatious highlighting of material possessions, and the demonstration of status. Although he describes the turgid institutions and what he calls “multiple organ failure”, a most striking observation is that in Denmark politicians and senior civil servants go to work on the bus or by bicycle, whereas in India it would be unthinkable for the same sorts of people to be seen anywhere without a driver and a shiny car. The other point he makes is about diversity. India is ethnically and culturally very diverse, whereas most of the other five countries in the book are quite homogenous.

They are homogenous, they are rich, and they are small. Between them, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand Hong Kong and Singapore have fewer people than Canada, and not many more than Australia. Geographically all would fit easily into a single province or state in Canada or Australia. All are politically stable, have high rule of law and have high GDP per capita. So what makes them less corrupt?

While the specific country chapters are most informative, the strengths of this book are the opening and closing chapters by Jon Quah, and the analysis of success by Gerald Caiden. Quah pulls the threads together and provides comparative data and looks for the lessons that can be transmitted. Caiden’s thoughtful chapter is about the structure of the societies and the things that make societies work well. One old adage is that you don’t fight corruption by fighting corruption. Caiden lists and discusses a number of hallmarks: a country at peace with itself; trusted governance; respect for human rights; strict application of the rule of law; protecting the commons; tackling the divide. He draws on his enormous knowledge and experience to illustrate these, identify success stories, and attack the new public management which could signal “a more ruthless riding roughshod over traditional public values”. Where the market determines the price of things rather than the value of things there are opportunities for corruption.

Quah focuses more on fighting corruption, and analyses the watchdog and anti-corruption agencies. Finland, Denmark and New Zealand get to the top of the tree without having a national anti-corruption agency (ACA), while both Hong Kong and Singapore have legendary ACAs. As he says, watchdog agencies, whether they be a formal ACA or an Ombudsman, or a supreme audit authority can only work if there is political will, independence, and a culture of integrity. But if there is to be an ACA it is better to

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have a single ACA rather than many. He weaves these thoughts and others, including the thought that we should never relax vigilance, into his final set of five lessons that we can take away from the excellent case studies in this useful book.

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