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The world of global business 1965–2015: Perspectives on the 50th anniversary issue of the Journal of World Business: Introduction to the special issue



ABSTRACT

The field of international business (IB) has evolved considerably since 1965 and the *Journal of World Business* has evolved along with it. In the 50th anniversary special issue, established and emerging scholars reflect on the changing contexts, environments, and phenomenon of IB and how these changes are reflected in the literature. In this introductory article, we summarize and synthesize these contributions, as well as offer our own perspective on the journal, the field, and the interactions between the two.

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1. CWJB and JWB: Past and present

In 1996, when we (Luthans and Slocum) were approached by Herb Johnson, head of JAI Press and a publishing legend in the field, to take over as Editors-in-Chief of the *Journal of World Business* (JWB), we did not hesitate. JAI Press had recently acquired CJWB from Columbia University and after we took over as editors, Elsevier subsequently acquired the journal from JAI. Although we were both extremely busy with our own research, writing, and editing, we welcomed the opportunity to build upon the fine reputation enjoyed by the *Columbia Journal of World Business* (CJWB) and get more involved with the IB field. We believed that the IB domain was still in its infancy and that we could provide some direction and evidenced-based solutions to the accompanying challenges facing international management. As part of this transition, the “Columbia” was dropped from the name and the journal became, simply, *Journal of World Business*. In the Editorial Note in our inaugural issue (Luthans & Slocum, 1997), we stated that our vision was to build upon and contribute to the better understanding and effective practice of global management strategy, human resources, and marketing.

Although CJWB had become a widely recognized and greatly respected first generation international business journal over the thirty plus years before we took over, we soon learned there were some challenges facing the journal. As noted last year in a reflective piece we authored when stepping down as editors (Luthans & Slocum, 2014), when we began there was a dearth of high quality submissions, especially from scholars outside the U.S. When we took over, it was a struggle to publish more than 32 articles a year and maintain an acceptance rate reflecting a quality journal. Second, the impact factor of the journal was relatively low and the major competitors, such as *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS) and *Management International Review*, were attracting highly credentialed scholars to their editorial review

boards and were publishing seminal works. In addition, CJWB was not being published on a timely basis.

To help address these issues, we immediately established a group of Senior Editors with whom we had close working relationships and who were widely recognized in the key areas of International Human Resource Management (Randy Schuler), International Strategic Management (Dick Osborn), and International Marketing (Mike Harvey). To have more appeal and exposure outside the U.S., we also established a Pacific Rim Editor (Dexter Dunphy, Australia) and a Europe Editor (Pat Joynt, U.K.). Then, largely from our own personal contacts, we assembled a truly world class editorial review board with renowned scholars Nancy Adler, Jay Barney, Paul Beamish, Chris Brester, Chris Earley, Don Hambrick, Mike Hitt, Bob House, Sheila Puffer, Mary Ann Von Glinow, and many others. After a reasonable period of time and hard work by all involved, as well as the publication of some seminal special issues, the challenges we faced coming in were largely resolved.

Over the next 20 years, we strove to continually improve the journal and to ensure that it reflected the current state of knowledge in the field. As we rotated the terms of our Senior Editors, we were able to attract another class of renowned international scholars such as Yadong Luo, Mansour Javidan, Dean Tjosvold, Snezhina Michailova, Wayne Cascio, Rick Steers, Rosalie Tung, Peter Liesch, among others. Similarly, we replenished our editorial review board with well-known, talented and experienced reviewers. These appointments sent strong signals to active international researchers that JWB was continually raising its standards and seeking to publish only the best international work. We were also able to secure cutting-edge subject experts to edit special issues. These efforts enabled JWB to maintain and grow its reputation as a premier journal in which scholars would be able to publish their best international business research.

Our publisher Elsevier served as a strong and effective steward of the journal. Our individual publishers, currently Vicki Wetherell, have been consistently supportive of our efforts. Elsevier has allowed JWB to gain worldwide exposure through its top-of-the-line information systems, networks, and journal packages. With this support and with the submission of high quality papers further developed by our review team, JWB's impact factor has risen (3.53 5-year impact factor) to be competitive with other top tier journals. Also, the acceptance rate (<10%) mirrors that of its competitors, and it is publishing more than 600 pages annually. And notably, the number of downloaded manuscripts has risen from less than 100,000 when we took over, to more than 556,000 in 2014. This objective data indicates JWB is being read and that IB scholars are citing its articles and submitting their highest caliber of research.

The careful thinking that was behind the launch of JWB almost 20 years ago has carried through to today, with the transition to the new Editor-in-Chief. The new editorship of JWB is in the hands of our close working colleague and friend, Jonathan Doh, who has taken the lead on this special issue.

2. The origins of the special issue

When I (Doh, 2015) was appointed editor-in-chief of the journal in 2014, I did some quick math and realized that 2015 would mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of CJWB, the predecessor journal to JWB. Although CJWB had a different focus and format than JWB, it seemed only appropriate to celebrate this 50th anniversary with a special issue of JWB.

Beginning in early 2014, I (Doh, 2015) reached out to a number of senior scholars, some of whom had long histories with the journal and its predecessor, as well as to emerging scholars who were at the vanguard of their respective areas of research. From these individuals I solicited integrative reviews that would focus on the interplay of real-world developments in the global business environment with the scholarly international business literature that had explored them, with particular emphasis on JWB's contribution to that literature. Each author was asked to consider how the changing contexts, environments, and phenomena of IB have influenced the literature; to highlight important trends, eras or periods over the 50 years in which specific topics came under particular attention; and to identify research gaps and areas for future inquiry.

In the ensuing months, I and several of our Senior Editors worked diligently with these authors to refine their contributions. Most papers were assigned to Senior Editors who then circulated them for review. In this regard I would like to offer a special thanks to David Ahlstrom, Bjorn Ambos, Siah Hwee Ang, David Collings, John Cullen, Ajai Gaur, Mike Peng, Christian Schwens, and Lena Zander, each of whom shepherded one or more papers from submission to final acceptance and publication. Several of those above (Ambos, Schwens, Collings) handled up to three papers and I am especially grateful to them for taking on this task in addition to their regular editorial work for the journal. I also want to thank the authors and author teams who rose to the challenges of developing a new, original article that reflected the orientation of the special issue.

3. Contributions to the special issue

In structuring the contributions of this special issue, we focused on four broad areas: Environmental, Policy and Stakeholders; Strategy, Growth, and Expansion; Culture, Leadership, and Talent; and Governance, Alliances, and Technology. These categorizations, while neither wholly discrete nor comprehensive, appear to capture the bulk of IB and international management research,

past and present. We then reached out to renowned IB scholars, asking them to consider contributing. Nearly all of those we invited agreed.

These contributions address the roles, activities, and operations of multinational enterprise (MNEs) and their management in the global economy, although some focus more upon smaller firms and even nongovernmental organizations. Beyond this, there is wide diversity and breadth in the specific topics, insights and findings. Here we offer a short, integrative summary of these contributions.

We began by asking two JWB "insiders" to offer their perspectives on the overall trends in IB research as reflected in JWB over its lifespan and that of its predecessor. In their contribution, Michael G. Harvey and Miriam Moeller, both of whom have served JWB in various editorial capacities and contributed numerous articles to the journal, provide a review of the past 50 years of CJWB/JWB. They comment from their roles as contributors and advocates for the journal and discuss important trends that reflect changes in the global business environment and the field of IB.

Harvey and Moeller look at specific themes that have appeared throughout the 50 years and how those themes and patterns impact the study of IB. The themes they have identified are: (1) Strategic Management; (2) International Management (including Leadership and Human Resource Management), (3) Ethics; (4) Global Environmental Issues and Sustainability; (5) International/Multinational/Global Business; and (6) 'Other' (i.e. Finance, Economics, Geography and Demographic-related topics). They document the ebb and flow of these themes by identifying articles in the journal under each of them. Their Figure 1 shows the somewhat pronounced changes in the thematic focus of articles appearing under JWB over this period. These changes may reflect "demand" side factors (e.g. editorial and/or reviewer/reader preference and emphasis or both) and/or "supply" side factors (e.g. the interests of authors and the broader international business community). Of note is the sharp decline in the 'other' category (Finance, Economics, Geography and Demography), perhaps reflecting greater specialization between and among fields and journals, and the more modest decline and recovery of articles in the general International Business, International Management, and Strategic Management categories. Harvey and Moeller use their reflection to identify some potential themes that may gain prominence in the coming decades.

3.1. Environment, policy and stakeholders

In the first major section of the special issue, four authors explore different aspects of the global business environment, the interaction of business and governments (Boddewyn & Brewer, 1994), and the emergent role of non-business stakeholders as important actors (Teegen, Doh, & Vachani, 2004). In his contribution, Jean Boddewyn, a legend in international business scholarship generally and a major contributor to scholarship at the intersection of global business and public policy, reviews 50 years of research on international business-government relations (IBGR). He focuses on the evolving concepts, typologies, theories and methodologies that reflect what he terms three post-WWII periods of interaction among businesses and governments in the global economy: Confrontation, Accommodation and Competition. He explores the relationship between these concepts and IBGR practice during these periods, suggesting that each of these eras has brought with it new actors, issues and ideologies. Boddewyn tracks the expansion and broadening of research that encapsulates important global trends, such as the emergence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as important global actors. He concludes with some speculation about future trends and developments and the research thrusts that will be needed to evaluate them, suggesting that this future will be marked

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