

Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship (CIE) in South Asia

Over the past three decades, academic and popular interest in CIE has increased tremendously. There is now widespread consensus among researchers and policy makers that the solution(s) to some of the most critical “grand challenges” of our times will require CIE, or some combination thereof (Shepherd, 2015, p. 489). The phrase “grand challenge” is credited to German Mathematician David Hilbert who listed important unsolved problems that have motivated mathematics research for more than 100 years. Several fields in the natural sciences, medicine and engineering have embraced the idea of grand challenges (Colquitt and George, 2011). Most organizational scholars would agree that research that addresses grand challenges requires the pursuit of bold ideas and the adoption of less conventional approaches to tackling large, unresolved problems (Ferraro *et al.*, 2015, p. 363). These efforts are likely to be more effective when they take into account the local context (that is, culture, values and traditions), making indigenous solutions more salient to the study of grand challenges.

This special section (SS) is devoted to examining CIE in South Asia, the most populous geographic region in the world. Geographically, Southern Asia extends from “Pakistan and Afghanistan to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea” (Lawrence and Lelieveld, 2010, p. 11017). For the GLOBE scholars, South Asia comprises the countries of India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand (Gupta *et al.*, 2002). Henderson (2009) considers Southern Asia to be a vast region with Afghanistan as its western boundary and Thailand as its eastern boundary. Clearly, Southern Asia may be defined in many ways. Following the lead of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), this journal considers Southern Asia to comprise of the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This definition is broader than that of Bruton *et al.*'s (2015, p. 6) conception of South Asia as comprising of “India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.” Taken together, the eight countries we consider as falling within South Asia have about a fifth of the world's population, with rich representation of all major world religions.

For some, South Asia – at least per SAARC's definition of the eight countries noted above – is “another name for the Indian subcontinent” (Subrahmanyam, 2014, p. 3). The Indian behemoth has an outsized presence in South Asia (both in terms of history and population). At its height, the Mughal rule in India stretched from Kabul and Kandahar in the northwest to Chittagong Hills and Brahmaputra Valley in the east, and from Kashmir in the far north to Tanjavur and Mysore in the extreme south (Edwardes and Garrett, 1995). Notably, at least two countries of present-day South Asia, Sri Lanka and Maldives clearly fell outside of the Mughal ambit. Interestingly, the name “Maldives” is believed to derive from the Sanskrit word *maladvīpa*, meaning “garden of islands” (Hogendorn and Johnson, 1986). The historical (perhaps, mythological) connection between India and Sri Lanka is too well known to repeat here. Consequently, and in appreciation of the Indian behemoth, the South Asia region is also sometimes referred to as “Greater India,” although such a name is generally not politically acceptable. One may also think of South Asia as a region with “strong natural boundaries,” with Himalayas on the one hand and Indian Ocean on the other hand (Subrahmanyam, 2014, p. 4).

While academic interest in CIE of recent vintage, the practice of CIE is probably as old as human civilization itself (Gupta *et al.*, 2002). Many scholars view South Asia as a fertile

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ground – perhaps even the birthplace – for the practice of CIE. The ancient silk route, the medieval spice trade and the historic recognition of the important role traders and business-owners in Indian society (as described in the *Vedas*), all point to the rich heritage of CIE in South Asia. As every school student knows, Christopher Columbus set sail for South Asia seeking commercial opportunities when he accidentally landed in the Americas. Unfortunately, the systematic plundering of South Asia by the British undermined the entrepreneurial culture, and instead fostered a dependence on government largesse. Things have begun to change over the last few decades. Almost all South Asian countries face the problem of unemployment, which in conjunction with the historical debt is motivating them toward entrepreneurship as a means to stimulate their economies and provide employment to restore populations. The research inspired by the work of Joseph Schumpeter and other scholars like him (e.g. Werner Sombart) holds that entrepreneurship and innovation are central to economic development and poverty reduction (Ahlstrom, 2010; George *et al.*, 2012; Yu *et al.*, 2014).

The growing appreciation of CIE in South Asia is reflected in a recent experience of a member of this editorial team. During the writing of this editorial, the first Editor (Gupta) had the opportunity to be part of a judges' panel at an agro-based business plan competition organized by the Foundation for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development of the Indian Institute of Management at Kashipur. It was hard not to be impressed by the rich variety of business ideas presented at the competition, some of them by graduates of top engineering schools in the country who had foregone lucrative salaried careers to embark on an entrepreneurial path. Two of the innovative ideas seem worth mentioning here. An engineering graduate and his former professor (who quit his public-sector faculty job to found the venture with his student) presented their revolutionary farm utility vehicle for funding and support of their venture IndusTill FarmTech. Another young entrepreneur running her business named Organiko presented samples and growth plans for her innovative beauty soap made of donkey's milk for beauty-conscious customers in the premium segments.

Compared to the central role of CIE as an engine of economic growth, CIE research in South Asia is still in its infancy. Our quick back-of-the-envelope calculations show that CIE research on South Asia lags far behind similar research in China, particularly when it comes to work appearing in quality journals. Table I summarizes empirical CIE papers published in seven journals over the 2001–2018 time-period and compares it to Yang and Li's (2008) findings for entrepreneurship-related research in China across the 1980–2005 time-period. While the time periods are different across the two studies, and the search criteria of the two studies are also different, it is worth noting what our quick comparison reveals: 1.24 articles per annum for China compared to 0.78 per annum for South Asia. Despite a more recent time period, these figures suggest a significant vacuum in research on South Asia. We hope future scholarship will provide an in-depth examination of the state of CIE research in South Asia and conduct a more systematic comparison with the scholarship about China. For our purpose here, the relevant argument is that CIE in South Asia has not received the academic

Table I.
Comparing South Asia- and China-related CIE research: survey of seven leading academic journals in management and entrepreneurship

S. No.	Journal name	South Asia	China
1	<i>Organization Science</i>	1	8
2	<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	2	8
3	<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	0	6
4	<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	2	3
5	<i>Journal of Management</i>	1	2
6	<i>Management Science</i>	1	2
7	<i>Asia-Pacific Journal of Management</i>	7	2
	Total	14	31

consideration it merits, a glaring problem we hope the current SI – as well as others in the (near) future – will help address.

The opportunities for research on CIE are particularly visible once we acknowledge the contextual terrains in South Asia. Many scholars believe that a large proportion of CIE happening in South Asia can be characterized as “frugal, flexible and inclusive” (Prabhu and Jain, 2015, p. 843), also known as *jugaad*. The idea of *jugaad* – making ingenious use of existing resources and technologies driven by a mindset combining improvisation with pragmatism to develop solutions for traditionally underserved communities – is gaining considerable traction in the literature. Prior research suggests *jugaad* as a popular CIE approach not only in much of South Asia, but also in other countries (Shepherd *et al.*, 2017). However, as is characteristic of much of the extant South Asian CIE literature, academic understanding of *jugaad* remains cursory. Researchers are yet to grapple with important relevant questions, such as whether all *jugaad* is actually useful. Or, is some *jugaad* productive, but others is unproductive, and perhaps even destructive? Our goal here is not to single out *jugaad* literature as problematic, but to simply use it to illustrate the lack of depth in CIE research from and about South Asia. This SI, we believe, reinvigorates the conversation surrounding greater research and understanding of innovations specific to, tailored for, and more widely accepted in South Asia.

Response to the call

To help obtain novel contributions for research on CIE in South Asia, we developed a Call for Papers (CfP) to solicit submissions that engaged creatively with the extant literature in order to develop a more robust and rigorous knowledge base in the area. The CfP highlighted that we were “interested in both quantitative and qualitative submissions, as well as conceptual or empirical contributions.” We were mindful of the “limited quality research” that existed on CIE in South Asia, and encouraged contributors to “cast a wide net” in order to develop a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the field.

The CfP was first formally announced in November 2017. Consistent with the spirit of an “open call” (as opposed to a “closed call” where SI editors limit the CfP to selected scholars), we also circulated it to conferences (e.g. Indian Academy of Management), online postings and newsletters (such as that for the Academy of Management’s International Division and Entrepreneurship Division). We were happy to receive a total of 28 submissions, which speaks to the growing interest around CIE in South Asia. Given the limited number of publications around CIE in South Asia (as discussed above), such a response level is particularly notable.

As Table II shows, the submission of the SI came from a total of 52 authors located in 10 different countries. As is common in organizational research, some submissions came from the USA and the UK, but it was especially encouraging to see interest also from other countries not usually seen in the academic literature (e.g. Indonesia and Oman). All submitted articles were first scanned for fit with the SI. Articles that fit the scope of the SI

Number of submissions	28
Number of authors	52
Number of countries of authors	10
<i>Countries of submission</i>	
Bangladesh	Oman
China	Pakistan
India	Sri Lanka
Indonesia	UK
Nepal	USA

Table II.
Description of submissions

were then read by the editors to decide whether they merit sending out for peer review. Of the original 28 submissions, 17 manuscripts were sent out to at least two reviewers with expertise in this area. After an in-depth review process, involving numerous revise-resubmit-review-feedback process, we accepted four articles for this SS. The reviewers were quite generous with their time, sharing their insights and experiences, with the goal of helping develop and strengthen the submitted papers (see reviewers for the SS at the end of this editorial).

We believe that the four SS articles all do a commendable job of illustrating the intriguing questions that CIE research in South Asia covers. Pradhan and Jena (2019) examine the relationship between abusive supervision of the owner-manager and subordinates' workplace deviance in small businesses in an Eastern Indian state (namely, Odisha). Tepper (2000, p. 178) defined abusive supervision as the "extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact." There is now a growing body of research showing that abusive supervision can have negative consequences for the organization as a whole (Rousseau and Aubé, 2018). Pradhan and Jena found that abusive supervision had a positive effect on organizational deviance (directed at supervisor) and interpersonal deviance (directed at other members of the organization), and this relationship was stronger when intention to quit was high rather than low.

Paudel (2019) examines the effects of entrepreneurial leadership (EL) and organizational innovation (OI) on business performance. In effect, the focus is on a mediated moderated model where OI mediates the relationship between EL and performance, with environmental dynamism deployed as a moderator. Data collected from firms registered with Pokhara Chamber of Commerce and Industry were used to test the hypotheses. Located about 120 miles (or 200 km) from the capital city of Kathmandu, Pokhara is the largest city in Nepal in terms of area and second largest in terms of population.

Chaudhary (2019) is interested in the role of (potential) absorptive capacity and entrepreneurial orientation in affecting the relationship between strategic flexibility and firm performance. Defined simply as "the ability to handle change" (Brozovic, 2018, p. 3), strategic flexibility is considered a critical organizational attribute that allows firms to survive in complex and uncertain environments. The research model was tested using data obtained from small firms in the Indian automotive ancillary sector in the state of Punjab.

Batra and Dey (2019) examine the relationship between Transactive Memory Systems (TMS) and firm performance in small- and medium-sized firms in the Indian hospitality sector. Previous research defines TMS as "a collective system for encoding, storing, and retrieving information" (Bachrach *et al.*, 2019, p. 464). Several studies have found that TMS explains team performance in laboratory conditions (Lewis, 2003), but research in organizational teams under real-world conditions remains low, and almost nothing has been done in this regard outside of western, educated, industrialized, rich and developed nations. Batra and Dey (2019) help fill this gap by examining the TMS–performance link in small- and medium-sized hotels in the Indian state of Uttarakhand.

Where do we go from here?

Readers of this SS will draw their own conclusions as to whether CIE research in South Asia has developed in interesting directions as a result of this volume. We certainly feel intense interest from the contributing authors (as evident from the numbers of submissions we received, and the willingness of selected authors to work through multiple review rounds). Of course, much work remains to be done. As we worked on this SS over the last two years, several concerning things became salient, both from the submissions we received and the informal interactions we had with various stakeholders during the time this CFP was in circulation. First, the overall quality of academic research in South Asia in general seems to be quite weak. Most scholars there are not well trained, whether in empirical analysis or in

theoretical logic development. This problem becomes especially concerning when one considers that South Asia may be the largest producer of management PhDs in the world with a very high rate of journal start-ups. Indeed, with every other South Asian B-school starting its own journal (particularly, in India), it is likely that South Asia may have the world's highest rate of new journal start-ups. Unfortunately, quantity does not equate with quality, and so journals like *SA/BS* that want to publish rigorous research about South Asia end up with a very shallow pool to find good articles.

Second, there seems to be a sort of “gray market” for academic publications in South Asia. It is well known that a large part of entrepreneurial innovative activity in South Asia occurs in the informal economy (Bruton *et al.*, 2015), which involves businesses that neither register with the government nor establish property rights. Some prior research suggests that business activity occurs informally to avoid taxes or regulation (Webb *et al.*, 2013), but informal firms generally sell legal products and provide legal services. Building on this idea, we use the term “gray market” here to refer to informal firms that sell prohibited things. Consequently, our interest here is in informal entrepreneurship pertaining to selling items or servicing products that are not truly legal. For example, during the circulation of this CfP, the first editor was shared a promotional pamphlet for an Indian company that specialized in providing fully written dissertation to PhD business students, even going as far as to promise them documented participation in conferences and publications in journals appearing on state-approved lists. For good measure, this entrepreneur also included extra charges for “plagiarism detection avoidance” in the price-list. It is possible that some of these papers are targeted at predatory journals (Bartholomew, 2014), defined as “publications taking large fees without providing robust editorial or publishing services” (Clark and Smith, 2015), but these would be relatively easy to identify. The problem lies with the vast majority of articles appearing in free, but desperate to publish, journals operated by B-schools for the sole purpose of providing the growing numbers of faculty with publishing opportunities that appear legitimate on surface. One may consider such businesses a *jugaad* innovation (as some local academics seem to do when this issue was informally discussed with them), but at best, it is destructive *jugaad* that undermines the pursuit of academic achievement for everyone, from the individual to the nation. Perhaps, even more alarmingly, such *jugaad* brings disrepute to academic scholarship from the entire South Asian region, and ultimately lowers the prestige and status associated with obtaining a PhD degree there.

Third, while governments across South Asia are emphasizing research and publications in assessment of universities and faculties, there is little actual mentoring and support for researchers interested in doing quality research. People are graduating from PhD programs without adequate training to articulate theoretical logic or conduct empirical analysis, which leaves them unprepared for research-focused academic jobs. Few institutions have access to good quality journals, even fewer institutions provide quality data resources, and almost none have a culture of faculty presenting ideas to each other for critique. Of course, there are islands of quality (e.g. The Indian Institutes of Management, particularly those at Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Calcutta – often collectively referred to as ABC), but even scholars at these institutions are not publishing much research related to South Asia at top journals (as discussed earlier). Furthermore, B-schools in the USA and other western countries (such as the UK and Australia) also have many scholars from South Asia, but these researchers too are not engaging much in scholarship that either uses indigenous South Asian concepts and variables (e.g. Chanakya's leadership framework; Pillai, 2010) or relies on data collected locally in South Asia (e.g. Damaraju and Makhija, 2018).

Why is the condition of academic scholarship so primitive, perhaps even pitiful, in South Asia? After all, South Asia was home to several universities of repute in ancient times: Nalanda and Taxila, to name just a couple. Modern South Asia is home to several institutions with arguably the toughest entrance requirements in the world: Indian Institutes of

Management and Indian Institutes of Technology, to name just two. So, what explains the sorry state of organizational research from and about South Asia? Some would argue that the colonial policies of the British imperialists were responsible for undermining the culture of independent inquiry that existed in Southern Asia prior to the onset of western imperialism. To our knowledge, there is no systematic research on why South Asian research is at such an un-developed stage, which is not befitting of the region's history, population and economic growth. In editing this SS, we have become all the more aware of the need to promote CIE research in and about South Asia. Hopefully, the future will see more good quality scholarship from and about South Asia. We hope the present SS will help motivate and strengthen research that takes into account the uniqueness and the opportunities of CIE in South Asia.

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