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Special Issue Editor(s)

Nuttawuth Muenjohn, *Murdoch Business School, Murdoch University, Australia*
nuttawuth.muenjohn@murdoch.edu.au

Chris Rowley, *Kellogg College, University of Oxford; Bayes Business School, City St George's, University of London; and Head of the Research Group, King's Business School, United Arab Emirates*
chris.rowley@kellogg.ox.ac.uk

Nirma Jayawardena, *Bradford University, UK*
n.jayawardena@bradford.ac.uk

Amy Huang, *Murdoch Business School, Murdoch University, Australia*
A.Huang@murdoch.edu.au

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Sustainability and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) in the Asia-Pacific Businesses: Global Pressures, Local Responses, and Institutional Governance

Special Issue Background

Sustainability and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) practices have become a one multi-disciplinary arena where different business functions are intertwined (Martiny, Tagliatalata, Testa & Iraldo, 2024; Lee et al., 2025; Kara et al., 2026). Research has found that the coordinated approach is indicative of how ESG incorporates different functions to enable sustainable and ethical business operations to be mutually reinforced (Han & Song, 2025; Park, Lee & You, 2025). Nevertheless, despite the significance of a coordinated approach, the literature has not yet succeeded in fully combining these different perspectives in ESG research. Existing evidence demonstrates that the effects of ESG vary according to the lens being studied, and the fragmented character of the research on the topic has led to the emergence of country-specific disparities (Lee et al., 2025). How ESG is adopted and its results vary greatly across Asia-Pacific (APAC), heavily influenced by local institutions, politics, and governance (e.g. Han & Song, 2025; Park, Lee & You, 2025).

APAC economies have unique features such as developmental and regulatory states, government-linked companies, family-owned businesses, concentrated ownership, informal rules, and varied enforcement of regulations (e.g., Peng, Wang & Jiang, 2008; Carney & Gedajlovic, 2002). These factors both help and hinder sustainability efforts and lead to ESG practices that often differ from Western models (Sahasranamam, Nandakumar & Batsakis, 2020; Yoon, Oh & Kim, 2024).

Yet, most ESG frameworks are based on Western ideas, usually ignoring APAC's governance systems, ownership patterns, and development paths (Singhania et al., 2023; Singhania et al., 2024). A Western ESG model which may focus on shareholder activism and high board independence but in an Asian family-owned conglomerate, family leadership and legacy issues may play a bigger role in decision-making (Steier, 2009; Lee et al., 2025). This creates gaps in understanding and policy. This special issue explores how global ESG pressures interact with local institutions and governance in APAC, providing insights that are academically meaningful, relevant for policy, and aligned with the goals of Asia Pacific Business Review.

The issue aims to promote research that considers the local context in APAC's sustainability and ESG efforts. It examines how global pressures are interpreted, challenged, and managed in different APAC settings. By bringing together business studies, institutional theory, governance, and political economy, the special issue supports the journal's mission to publish detailed, policy-relevant research rooted in the region.

Themes and Questions

Submissions may address, but are not limited to, the following themes and questions:

Global ESG Pressures and Local Institutional Translation

- How do firms in Asia-Pacific economies interpret and translate global ESG norms within their local institutional environments?
- To what extent do national institutional systems shape organisational responses to global ESG pressures?
- How do firms reconcile global sustainability expectations with local regulatory and cultural contexts?

Adaptation of Global ESG Standards and Reporting Frameworks in APAC

- How are global ESG reporting frameworks (e.g., GRI, TCFD, ISSB) adapted by firms operating in different Asia-Pacific institutional contexts?

- What factors influence the depth and credibility of ESG disclosures among APAC firms?
- Do firms in emerging APAC economies adopt global ESG standards symbolically or substantively?

Investor, Multinational, and Supply-Chain Pressures

- How do foreign investors and multinational buyers influence ESG adoption among local firms in Asia–Pacific economies?
- To what extent do global supply-chain sustainability requirements reshape environmental and labour practices among APAC suppliers?
- How do firms balance external stakeholder pressures with domestic institutional constraints?

Institutions, Governance, and State–Business Relations

- How do state–business relationships influence corporate sustainability strategies in Asia–Pacific economies?
- To what extent do institutional arrangements shape ESG governance and corporate accountability?
- How do variations in institutional development affect ESG outcomes across APAC economies?

Developmental States and Sustainability Practices

- How do developmental states in Asia (e.g., Singapore, South Korea, China) shape corporate ESG practices?
- What role do industrial policies and state-led sustainability initiatives play in promoting ESG adoption among firms?
- Do state-led sustainability policies generate genuine environmental and social outcomes or primarily symbolic compliance?

Ownership Structures and Corporate Governance

- How do different ownership structures influence ESG adoption and sustainability performance in Asia–Pacific firms?
- To what extent does ownership concentration shape long-term sustainability strategies?
- How do governance mechanisms influence ESG accountability in APAC corporations?

ESG in State-Owned and State-Linked Enterprises

- How do ESG practices differ between state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and privately owned firms in Asia–Pacific economies?
- To what extent do political objectives influence ESG disclosure and sustainability performance in SOEs?
- How does government ownership affect corporate accountability for environmental and social impacts?

ESG in Family-Owned Firms and Business Groups

- How do family-controlled firms approach ESG practices compared with non-family firms in Asia–Pacific economies?
- Do family ownership structures promote long-term sustainability orientation or entrench resistance to ESG reforms?
- How do diversified business groups integrate sustainability across multiple affiliated firms?

Business Contributions to Decent Work and Social Sustainability

- How do ESG practices influence labour conditions and decent work outcomes in Asia–Pacific firms?
- To what extent do corporate sustainability initiatives improve employee wellbeing and job quality?
- How do multinational supply chains shape labour standards in developing APAC economies?

Environmental Sustainability and Regional Development

- How do corporate environmental strategies influence regional sustainability outcomes in Asia–Pacific economies?
- What role do firms play in advancing low-carbon transitions in emerging Asian markets?
- How do industrial clusters and regional ecosystems shape corporate environmental performance?

Business Strategy and Organisational Responses

- How do firms strategically integrate ESG considerations into their core business models?
- What organisational capabilities enable firms to move beyond compliance-driven ESG strategies?
- How do firms in Asia–Pacific markets build sustainability capabilities under institutional constraints?

Contact Details

Dr Amy Huang

Murdoch Business School

Murdoch University, Australia

A.Huang@murdoch.edu.au

Conference:

This Special Issue is organised in conjunction with The International Conference: *Leading Sustainable Futures: Global Business Transformation in an Era of Complexity*, hosted by the University of Bradford from 25–27 November 2026. The conference is co-hosted by the University of Bradford, the University of Greater Manchester, and Murdoch University.

A dedicated conference session will be allocated to the Special Issue, where prospective authors are encouraged to present their work and receive constructive feedback. This session is intended to facilitate scholarly exchange, foster networking among researchers, and support the development of high-quality submissions. The Special Issue editors will provide feedback on presented papers to help guide authors in strengthening their manuscripts for potential submission.

Please note that participation in this conference session is entirely voluntary and not a prerequisite for submission to the Special Issue. Authors who are unable to attend will still be welcome to submit their manuscripts, and their submissions will be evaluated through the standard peer-review process.

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Submission Instructions

The Special Issue welcomes a wide range of methodological approaches, including:

- Qualitative, quantitative and comparative case studies
- Multi-country and cross-regional analyses
- Mixed-methods research
- Policy-oriented and interdisciplinary studies
- Conceptual and review papers

Submission and Review Process

All submissions must adhere to the standard Asia Pacific Business Review submission requirements to be considered for publication. Crucially, every manuscript must include the target country or countries within the article title. Furthermore, authors are required to provide distinct implications sections that separately address both theory or theory development and business and management practice. Additionally, the manuscript must end with a dedicated conclusion section.

All submissions will undergo the journal's standard double-blind peer review process

Authors will be asked to indicate that their manuscript is submitted to this Special Issue

Please see the journal's instructions for authors for more details.