Foreword

There are several reasons for which this book is an important book, a book that deserves the utmost attention by scholars and practitioners.

A first reason is that it is a well-planned, well-written research on family capitalism. Despite a now relatively long and consolidated tradition of research on family firms, evidence and theoretical synthesis is still much needed in order to understand more in depth both similarities and differences in this particular management model, across different countries, cultures, political and institutional frameworks.

A second reason is connected to the approach that the editors have chosen. Everyone familiar with family business research knows that the family/kinship dimension and its relationship with the business sphere are crucial for understanding such a particular form of business organization. The decision to have the chapters written jointly by management scholars and social scientists, and in particular historians has been a crucial choice in providing a well-rounded approach to the subject. Family firms are in fact the inextricable result of the interaction of aspects that are better understood through the synthesis proper of management, and other elements that are understandable only through the approach that characterizes social sciences, oriented towards the use of historical analysis in order to understand the basic components, origins and dynamics of complex phenomena. In this respect, the book is a courageous attempt to put into practice what several historians have suggested about the necessity of (re)introducing a long-term approach in economics and business. The main focus of historical analysis is, in fact, not the past per se but the dynamics of change and evolution, in the case of the business history of organizations and more in general of economic actors.

A third reason is that – beyond these more general aspects – this book is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to have an inclusive and truly comparative analysis of the private enterprise sector in Latin America and Spain, inclusive of smaller and larger countries. This is for sure a big step forward towards a better understanding of the peculiarities of the development of the industrial enterprise in Central and Southern American countries – apart from Spain. Scholars familiar with family business studies know well that comparative studies at a continental or supra-national level are
Famous comparative analysis such as *Big Business and the Wealth of Nations* (edited by Alfred Chandler, Franco Amatori and Takashi Hikino in 1997), for instance, focus only on big business and have a very limited focus on family firms. Other research such as the Proceedings of the tenth Fuji Conference held in 1985, *Family Business in the Era of Industrial Growth*, are good examples but now dating quite far back in the past. We are still waiting (hopefully for not too long) for some comparative research on Europe and/or the US family business, and maybe, in the future, on family business on a global scale. In the meantime, luckily, we can have access to books like this, which have certainly a path-breaking role.

This is directly connected to the fourth reason behind the relevance of this book. The comprehensive and longitudinal analysis of the family business enterprise in Latin America provides a precious contribution to the interdisciplinary field of research going under the label ‘variety of capitals’. Through, in fact, the comparative analysis of different contexts in which family firms develop in Latin America and Spain, the book provides generalizations useful for understanding the characteristics of the capitalist enterprise in that area of the world in comparison with other models of capitalist development. The book is also a key contribution for understanding the relations between particular, national institutional environments and the development of specific forms of business enterprises, including the relationships with the respective governments. One non-trivial contribution of the book in this respect is that through the longitudinal and comparative approach, it moves a step beyond the usual stereotypes concerning the role of family business in countries characterized by widespread familism, corruption and the presence of extractive institutions. The book provides, instead, a much less clear-cut, unidirectional image of the role and perspectives of family firms in Latin American and Spanish contexts, showing how family businesses have tended to co-evolve dynamically with the local context, of course influencing it but also adapting creatively to the changes in the environment.

Last but not least, the book is fundamental for a better understanding of a phenomenon that is today of paramount interest in a variety of research domains, from strategy to organization sciences, to international business. Diversified business groups actively involved in intense processes of internationalization are, in fact, one of the relevant aspects of the most recent process of development and growth of Spain and Latin America’s economies. And, as available research makes clear, most of these ‘Global Latinas’ are multigenerational, family-controlled enterprises that have been developing during the last decades into key components of local economic development.

These – and a series of other reasons that I do not have the space to
highlight in this brief Foreword – make this book one seminal and important contribution to the field both of business history and management analysis of family business, at the same time contributing to the concrete cooperation among different fields of research interested in the analysis of business actors. As scholars in the field of family business studies, all of us should be grateful to the authors and to the editors for this fundamental piece of research.

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