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Chinese Corporate Culture Research: Frontiers and Challenges

RECHERCHE DE LA CULTURE COMMUNAUTAIRE CHINOISE : FRONTIÈRES ET DEFIES

Nie Qingkai[1]   **Xia Jianming[2]**

Abstracts: Chinese corporate culture has aroused interests of many scholars from both abroad and home in the past decade. It is an appropriate time to examine the current achievements and the potential of Chinese corporate culture research in shaping the body of corporate culture knowledge. This paper examines the theoretical development and conceptualization of Chinese corporate culture research and identifies promising areas for future research. This paper summarizes key research trends in several corporate culture areas and provides a critical analysis of what has been achieved, what is lacking, and what can be done in future studies. We argue that it is fruitful to address some Chinese phenomenon and generate theory for global-relevant issues. It is also meaningful to use Chinese-developed constructs to study local and global issues. However, there are urgent needs for the development and validation of new constructs, designing measures and innovative methodology for conducting empirical studies, and linking the Chinese-based issue and concepts to current scholarly conversations.
Key words: Corporate culture, Chinese, Scholarship, Global impact

Résumé: La culture communautaire chinoise a attiré l'attention de beaucoup de savants aussi bien à l'intérieur du pays qu'à l'étranger dans la dernière décennie . Il est temps d'examiner la réalisation actuelle et la potentialité de la recherche de la culture communautaire chinoise en divisant le corps de la connaissance de la culture communautaire . Ce texte examine le développement théorique et la conceptualisation de la culture communautaire chinoise , identifie les domaines prometteurs pour la future recherche . Il récapitule les tendances des recherches capitales dans plusieurs domaines de la culture communautaire , et offre une analyse de critique sur la réalisation , l'insuffisance , et l'objectif des futures études . On se discute sur le fait qu'il est fructueux d'adresser quelques phénomènes chinois et de donner une théorie pour les problèmes globale-révélants . Il est aussi significatif de se servir de théorie développée en Chine pour étudier les problèmes locaux et globaux . De toute façon , il y a des besoins d'urgence pour le développement , la validation de ces nouvelles théories , les mesures conçus , la méthodologie d'innovation pour conduire aux études empirifiques , et pour lier les problèmes basés sur la Chine et des concepts des conversations actuelles des érudits .
Mots-clés: culture communautaire, chinois, bourse, impact global

1. INTRODUCTION

The global economy has led corporate culture researchers to explore new research questions and to look beyond traditional research settings, which are primarily North America, Western Europe and Japan. The recent development of China, South America and Eastern European countries provides many research opportunities around the theme of corporate culture issues in emerging economies, and offers the potential to contribute to the extant body of knowledge. Although the number of studies from and about these countries and regions is not small, the quality of these studies has not always been of a sufficient standard to influence mainstream research. Most of these studies are explorative, descriptive, and comparative in nature, and do not make substantial theoretical contributions. In some cases, methodological rigor is less than satisfactory. As a consequence, the impact of research conduct in or on emerging economies has been limited.

As the corporate culture research community is getting more internationalized, more and more studies are conducted at the international level, both in terms of topics and researchers. We have witnessed a phenomenal growth of publications with international (or non-U.S.) samples and Chinese authors, and large-scale cross-nation project in the past decade. Some of these studies are well-crafted and published in top-tier management and international business journals. At this juncture, it is timely to take stock of what they have done, and what can be done in future to contribute to the body of knowledge of corporate culture research. This paper "Chinese Corporate Culture Research: Frontiers and Challenges" focuses on the current achievements and the potential of Chinese corporate culture research in shaping the body of knowledge.

There are lots of researches on the issue of Chinese corporate culture. These researches can be broadly classified into two groups. The first group of researches examines the conceptualization of issues related to Chinese corporate culture research. The second group focuses on the theoretical development and promising areas for future research. To bridge these groups, we have a paper that reviews the literature on Chinese corporate culture over the past decade. This collection of researches summarizes key research trends in several corporate culture areas (concept, theory, model and methodology) and provides a critical analysis of what has been achieved, and what is lacking. The researches also suggest research areas and issues that future studies can address. Although the themes and topics covered in this issue are not exhaustive, they nevertheless represent important research issues and avenues relevant to global researchers, not only to scholars interested in Chinese corporate culture research.

2. REPRESENTATIVE RESEARCHES IN CHINESE CORPORATE CULTURE

At present the discussion on the corporate culture is aboil in china. Many Chinese scholars define the concept of corporate culture from different point of view. These researches offer new theoretical insights that researchers can take to examine corporate culture issues. These researches represent not only an integrative and paradoxical approach to the study of corporate culture, but also a framework developed from indigenous Chinese thinking. Guangyuan Yu (1997) suggests that corporate culture is integration of material and immaterial culture in a business organization. Qunhui Huang (1998) analyses three existing corporate cultures, which are material culture, institutional culture and spirit culture, and assess their applicability in corporate management. Tianshi Han (1998) points out that corporate culture is formed through a long period and is a community culture which includes factors of environment, institution, goal, visualization and ethic of a corporation. Zhanxiang Gao (2000) argues that corporate culture is an important component of social culture and reflects synthetically nationality and modern consciousness in a corporate. Jie Wei (2002) suggests that corporate culture is a point of value embraced and fulfilled in a corporate, which is an invisible institution directing the behavior of employees. Guangming Liu (2002) divides the corporate culture into broad and narrow senses. The former is made of material, behavior, institution and spirit cultures and the later is the corporate ideology based on the corporate point of value. De Zhang (2003) points out through empirical research on 200 Chinese enterprises that corporate culture is one of important factors constructing the core competence of a corporation.

These representative researches emphasize on the material and spiritual nature of corporate culture, which is a major characteristic of concepts and constructs developed from non-western lenses. These perspectives derived from the Chinese context present challenges to existing "western" corporate culture theories, which are often analytical and dichotomized. The holistic nature of corporate culture concepts has often been overlooked in existing research. Changhai Luo and Jian Lin (2003), scholars from Tsinghua University sum up the prevenient indigenous researches and viewpoints and conclude three levels of corporate culture as figure 1.

Some Chinese scholars modify existing theoretical perspectives and apply them in the Chinese context. They also propose new research avenues that researchers can consider to enhance the contribution of Chinese research in the corporate culture literature. Collectively, they suggest areas in which research on Chinese corporate inform and influence existing theory of corporate culture. Guangming Liu (2002) reviews Chinese-based corporate culture publications in a number of journals. Instead of examining the who's who

and rankings in the literature, he focuses on identifying the under-achievements of Chinese corporate research, which has been substantial. The call is for more rigorous and relevant studies. As a research to this call, Qun Li (2003) focuses on specific areas that Chinese corporate culture research can inform the global research community. He introduces several key constructs, developed within Asia, or borrowed from existing literature, and examines how they can impact the literature. Methodology related aspect of conducting cross-cultural studies is also examined.
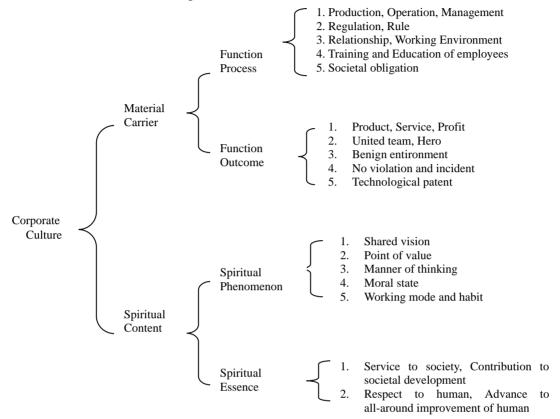
Corporate Culture
- Material Carrier
  - Function Process
    1. Production, Operation, Management
    2. Regulation, Rule
    3. Relationship, Working Environment
    4. Training and Education of employees
    5. Societal obligation
  - Function Outcome
    1. Product, Service, Profit
    2. United team, Hero
    3. Benign entironment
    4. No violation and incident
    5. Technological patent
- Spiritual Content
  - Spiritual Phenomenon
    1. Shared vision
    2. Point of value
    3. Manner of thinking
    4. Moral state
    5. Working mode and habit
  - Spiritual Essence
    1. Service to society, Contribution to societal development
    2. Respect to human, Advance to all-around improvement of human

Figure 1.Three levels of corporate culture

FanChi Meng and Chaoyi Wang focus on social capital, reflecting the importance of networks and relationships in Chinese corporate culture. A comprehensive treatment of this construct is timely. Qisan Hong and Dong Qiao focus on the use of upward influence, another type of network behavior, in cross-culture research. Both social capital and upward influence are germane to Chinese corporate culture, though no new constructs to the field. They examine the role of social capital and upward influences in the existing literature and discuss their usefulness in future Chinese corporate culture research. The applicability of their propositions is not limited to Chinese-only studies, but cross-cultural as well as Western studies. These researches demonstrate that there are unique phenomenon and constructs that originate from or are dominant in China, and which can be used to explore issues within or outside Chinese.

De Zhang addresses corporate responses to liberalization and globalization, a growing phenomenon in China. The lessons we learn from Indian firms will certainly help researchers to model firm culture in an emerging economy context, which also has implications for multinational firms operating in other emerging economies. This will also enrich the existing literature on cultural responses to institutional environment (Oliver, 1994). Again, insights from the Chinese context would inform global researchers on how corporate culture research could be advanced. Jie Wei also makes a contribution by linking research on India with research located in East Asia, a link that is remarkably weak in the corporate culture literature.

Finally, Bing Sun investigates how cross-cultural organizational research could be studied over time. Chuanbo Yue raises several important issues in cross-cultural studies, especially regarding measurement equivalence. Ping Hu provides a methodological solution to study this complex phenomenon, which captures the change dynamics at temporal and cultural levels.

3. CHALLENGES OF CHINESE CORPORATE CULTURE RESEARCH

These researches introduce new and Chinese-derived perspectives in researching Chinese corporate culture issues. As suggested by the scholars, these researches can be applied in settings beyond China. They also refine existing or develop new constructs and proposed promising avenues to apply them in the Chinese contexts and other areas. Based on observations and studies from several regional contexts (India, Japan, and China) and existing literature, the researches develop excellent propositions and guidelines for future investigation. It is anticipated that future studies will incorporate many of the concepts and perspectives discussed in these researches.

The coverage of these researches is by no means exhaustive. There are many other corporate culture topics and perspectives that can be investigated. Nevertheless, the perspectives presented by the scholars here are informative and insightful; some are even provocative. For example, 'Middle Way' perspective suggests a holistic treatment of many constructs and phenomenon. How are we going to delineate the different impacts of the two sides (and perhaps more than two sides) of the construct? What is the most appropriate and effective way to measure and analyze the two complementary but opposite effects? This indicates the need for further development of constructs and methodology. If we follow the conventional route, a parsimonious and nomological development of each construct has to be established first, before we can conduct future investigations.

Take another example, the 'Four Levels' construct proposed by Siwei Cheng is often regarded as an organizational and individual level construct, it could also be a societal level measure. Different people in different cultures (or even within the same culture) have different ideas about the levels of corporate levels. Different disciplines may have contradictory interpretations of the construct as well. Should we interpret it as a ladder or as a parcel, or both? The variations within and between groups of this construct could be much larger than other well researched constructs, such as organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, social capital, and strategic orientations. This requires more thorough treatment of construct validity and reliability, as well as measurement and analytical methods.

Another research issue is related to measurement. For example, if we adopt the 'institution-based' view, then the next question would be on what these institutions are. How can we measure these institutions? Will these institutions change over time? How do these institutions differ across nations and culture contexts? In other words, we need to establish a defined set of 'institutions' such that comparisons are meaningful at temporal and cross-national levels. Most of the researches in this issue suggest important ideas to study timely issues, but there is a lack of discussion of appropriate research methods. We are able to identify the 'what' of Chinese corporate culture research, but not so in terms of 'how' yet. De Zhang's research on methodology is a starting point, and it focuses on some aspects of measurement only. There are other methodological issues remain to be explored. These are the challenges brought about by these researches; they also represent opportunities for future research.

4. LIMITATION OF CHINESE CORPORATE CULTURE RESEARCH

Although many Chinese scholars clearly believe that corporate culture research in China has something to offer to the broader body of knowledge, the work done so far is inadequate. As Yining Li points out, there has been a lack of theory development and contribution to conceptual discourse beyond an audience specifically interested in China. Our understanding of and contributions from Chinese corporate culture is still very limited. Chinese research is therefore treated more like 'area studies' rather than as basic research. This is a situation that researchers examining aspects of corporate culture research in China must redress. Illustrated graphically, a majority of the body of knowledge in corporate culture research today is developed by non-Chinese and the issues studies are mostly global in nature (see figure 2). Well-developed mainstream studies are based on non-Chinese theories and constructs and address mostly U.S. or Japanese issues. Universality is often assumed. Despite the repeated calls for more international research (e.g. Weiying Zhang, 2002), actual achievement have been inadequate. There are signs, however, that more Chinese contributions are appearing in mainstream studies, both in terms of theories with contextualized constructs and variables and topics and issues under study. Hence, there is a larger share of the literature on issues specific to this regional context, through studied from established paradigms. Nevertheless, work done with Chinese-developed theories focusing on or applicable to issues of global interests accounts for a relatively small portion of corporate culture studies.

In the past, many regional studies were narrowly focused, with most being replications with new data and samples only. In some cases, there was an extension of theories. Although not necessary at the leading edge of mainstream studies, they nevertheless contributed to theory development (Tsang and Kwan, 2001). Several reviews of Asian and Chinese corporate culture studies have suggested that the work in general has lower originality and methodological rigor (Li and Tsui, 2002). The common problem is inadequate attention to uniqueness of countries studied, and not critically analyzing the theoretical constraints or validity of

Western theories. Some comparative work however, has been done, but this work is fragmented. Although some work on China has been published in mainstream journals, the attention received is relatively low.

THEORIES AND CONSTRUCTS

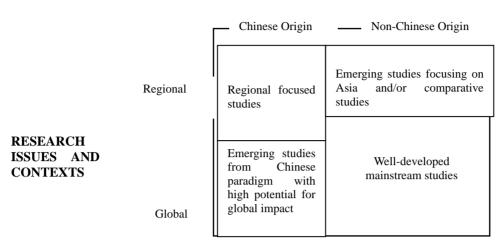|	Chinese Origin	Non-Chinese Origin
Regional	Regional focused studies	Emerging studies focusing on Asia and/or comparative studies
Global	Emerging studies from Chinese paradigm with high potential for global impact	Well-developed mainstream studies

RESEARCH ISSUES AND CONTEXTS

Figure2. Current contributions to corporate studies literature

Several reasons have been suggested to explain this phenomenon. Most of the explanations are contextual. On one hand, the research culture in Chinese business and management institutions has not yet been established, with reward systems not well linked to research output. Many institutions are teaching oriented and accord a second priority to scholarly research, especially in business schools. The number of research-trained faculty members is not large enough to create a critical mass for working on similar research issues. Research links between Chinese business schools are weak, with most having stronger links to North American institutions. On the other hand, the broader community and funding agencies do not have much appreciation of academic research since many are primarily concerned with practical applications. Industrial partnerships in corporate culture research also received limited support, unlike those in applied technological research. Thus, not many Chinese institutions are committed to advance corporate culture research.

Though in general Chinese institutions are still developing, there are some fruitful and meaningful studies done by researchers in these Chinese institutions, sometimes together with non-Chinese collaborators. As Li and Tsui (2002) noted, some of these efforts have resulted in top-tier publications. We have seen more indigenous constructs and issues being examined and are accepted in mainstream studies. For example, studies on organizational citizenship behavior (Xiaolin Zhang and Zhenjiang Qi, 2004), emotional intelligence (Shuren Wang and Bolin Yu, 2003), employment relations (Zeming Huang et al., 2002), and organizational culture (Qun Li, 2003) at the micro level, and decision making at the organizational level (Ruxiang Zhang, 2003) have been published in top journals, and have potential to have significant impact. Further, new theories and explanations are being developed, such as culture and justice judgment (Sheng Ye, 2004), technological acquisition (Fengyan Huang, 2003), foreign direct investment (Qianjin Hao, 2003), and international joint venture management groups (Chaoxian Guo, 2003). These studies may or may not take into account Chinese culture and societal factors in their theories. There are also comparative studies that examine specific effects of cultural values (Jian lv, 2002) or focus on competing theoretical explanations (Bei Jin, 2003). The dominant studies are however, those using established theories, although there are some extensions and adaptation with greater relevance and rigor.

With more research-oriental scholars engaged in high-quality research and the changing academic institutional environment in China, as well as a globalized academic community, more contributions from China and about China can be expected.

5. FUTURE OF CHINESE CORPORATE CULTURE RESEARCH

As indicated by these researches, it is fruitful to address some Chinese phenomenon and generate theory for global-relevant issue. It is also meaningful to use Chinese-developed constructs to study local and global issues. However, there is a need for innovative methodology to conduct more empirical studies.

At the same time, more international work has to be conducted. International work includes not only comparative studies, but also constructs and issues that cut across different contexts, for example, corporate culture issues in multinational firms, international joint

ventures, inter-cultural teams, etc. . The search for new theories originating from unique Chinese societal and culture factors is a variable way to start. As illustrated by (Guangming Liu, 2003), a mainstream line of research can be developed from a Chinese-based paradigm. At the same time, there is a need to guard against uncritical acceptance of all ideas originating from China as being unique, without examining their broader existence and applicability.

Nevertheless, institutionalizing scholarly pursuit

requires dedicated researchers and a nurturing environment. It is a global endeavor that goes beyond the reward systems of individual institutions. Corporate culture research in particular, needs excellent craftsmanship. It is also a good study that scholars and practitioners would like to share and learn. Thus, a compelling Chinese story is needed. It is a story that can join the scholarly 'conversations '. We expect that more such research will follow.

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THE AUTHORS

Nie Qingkai, School of International Administration and Management, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, Shanghai, 200439, P. R. China.

Xia Jianming, School of International Administration and Management, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, Shanghai, 200439, P. R. China.