

Frontiers of Business Research in China
Call for papers on
Social Issues of Doing Business in China

Doing business in China is fascinating partly because of its dynamically changing social environment and the social issues deeply involved in business and strategic management. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been playing an important role of promoting social welfare and fulfilling positive social impact (Jones et al., 2016). Existing framework provides an access to evaluate CSR activities' social impact systematically (Luo & Kaul, 2019) and reveals the relative efficiency disparity among firms of different organizational forms (Lee, Adbi & Singh, 2019). However, it still lacks research in the dimension of CSR's social impact in different markets. Analyzing the social impact of CSR activities, especially CSR activities that have the edge of scale economies in markets at different stage of development could be a complementation to this framework.

Indeed, the Chinese economy is associated with different social objectives in different development stages, which necessitates the corporations to shoulder their social responsibilities dynamically (Ma & Bu, 2021). An on-going high-profile national initiative in China is the poverty alleviation. At the end of 2020, China achieved the goal of eliminating extreme poverty by improving the life standard and securing the income of nearly 100 million people in rural areas who had lived below the poverty line since 2012. Millions of corporations, state- or privately-owned, large- or small-sized, have participated in this national mega project.

Relatedly, a firm's nonmarket strategy focuses on actions to improve its competitive positions and performance by managing its societal context, defined as societal actors such as the government, non-profit organizations (NGOs), and the public. Business firms in China have been engaging in vigorous interactions with their nonmarket stakeholders through strategic CSR (Luo, Wang & Zhang, 2017; Zheng, Singh & Mitchell, 2015). Managing the nonmarket environment has become one of the top priorities in modern Chinese businesses given the unprecedented salience of socio-economic issues in China.

Going beyond the national borders, various countries have faced difficulties in the participation of global value chains under the unprecedented COVID-19 circumstances, which underscores the value of undertaking social responsibilities in the host markets. The overseas subsidiaries of MNEs have to overcome more liabilities of foreignness by taking more CSR activities as a non-market strategy. Governments call for large local firms and MNEs for economic recovery. Dimensions of the competitive environment of a business will influence the development of a proactive corporate strategy (Aragon-Correa & Sharma 2003). However, the faultiness of emerging market system necessitates MNEs taking CSR as proactive strategy to push the advancement of institutions. Meanwhile, investors, consumers and other stakeholders in host country have high expectations on MNEs to improve social welfare (Zhao, Park & Zhou, 2014), which pressures MNEs to take more CSR and using CSR as an edge over domestic companies. MNEs are transforming from being socially responsible to socially impactful (Kaul & Luo, 2019), particularly in this turbulent pandemic era.

Another surging force reshaping the social structure and business landscape is the disruptive innovations in the digital technologies. New technologies featured with artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, and big data have been fundamentally improving the business and social efficiency. Nonetheless, new forms of business monopoly and deceptive behaviors

have been rampant across the digital platforms (Deng et al., 2021), which have shaken the social trust on the business integrity. Corporations in this digital era need to seek for pro-society ways to develop business agenda.

In the next several decades, more corporations will probably be involved in an even grander global campaign on carbon neutrality, given the international calls for curbing the climate change. Indeed, the global community has exhibited grave concerns regarding the highest global temperatures on record, rampant bushfires, the faster rates of sea level rise, and the extinction of some species in the recent decade. As the largest developing country, China has been endeavoring to address the carbon issues together with the other major economies, which will involve many difficult decisions in balancing the economic objectives and sustainable development. The foreign and indigenous corporations in China must take actions to face the eminent challenges and perhaps opportunities in industrial restructuring for a low-carbon society.

In response to so many grand social challenges, China is undergoing transformations across boundaries associated with organizational forms, social sectors, or institutional logics. For-profit companies, nonprofit organizations (NPOs), and government agencies adopt new approaches and engage with one another in new ways, generating social innovation that requires new theoretical and empirical insights to understand.

For example, explaining the emergence, development, and performance of organizations that pursue hybrid social and business organizational goals in China is intriguing. Social enterprise community in China has experienced fast growth in the past decade. Other hybrid organizational forms such as B Corps, revenue-making NPOs, and for-profit companies engaging in strategic CSR are growing as well. Research that contributes to a systemic understanding of antecedents, processes, and impact of hybrid organization development in China will be interesting. For example, how do hybrid organizations emerge in the background of institutional changes in different social sectors? How do individual, organizational and environmental factors influence hybrid organizations' capability to continuously balance the social and the business goal in China?

In a growing number of cases, innovations for addressing social problems in China involve cross-sectoral partnerships. Research that explains antecedents and outcomes of interactions between organizations in the business, nonprofit and public sectors is lacking (Olsen, Sofka & Grimpe, 2016; Zheng, Ni & Crilly, 2019). For example, why do for-profit companies engage with non-market stakeholders and pursue the resolution of social issues in China? How does a partnership with NPOs or social enterprises influence the process and performance of for-profit companies' CSR activities? How do for-profit companies, NPOs, or social enterprises work with government agencies to develop new models and policies in China?

Understanding corporate social intrapreneurs (CSI) in China is a promising topic too. CSIs refer to entrepreneurial employees in for-profit companies who develop a profitable new product, service, or business model that creates value for society and for the company. A CSI meets the following criteria. First, a CSI plays a key role in the development and implementation of a company initiative that uses business means to solve a social problem. Second, this initiative generates revenues via the commercialization of a company's essential products or services. Third, the initiative is closely related to a company's supply or value chains and thus its core capabilities or business development areas. Fourth, a CSI can

implement this initiative in an internal business unit or a standalone entity. To explore advances in cross-boundary social innovation, we look for insights that outline or examine CSI dynamics as a new phenomenon in China. Research may provide a comprehensive description of a CSI landscape in China in terms of individual backgrounds, business models, industry features, or initiative characteristics and progresses. Research may also examine individual, organizational and environmental factors that influence the emergence and performance of CSI activities in a company.

We seek research that focuses on the topic of how firms exploit cross-boundary social activities as an approach not only to gain financial benefits but also to ameliorate social welfare. The range of possible research topics is as follows (but are not limited to):

- ✧ What are the grand social challenges and opportunities to business in China?
- ✧ What is the interplay between strategic CSR and corporate nonmarket strategy? How does one influence the other? Corporations frequently need to configure their efforts across various types of nonmarket strategies; what are the antecedents and consequences of their configuration?
- ✧ What are the antecedents and outcomes of firms' cross-sector collaborations (with government or/and NGOs) in addressing social issues?
- ✧ How do firms strategically respond to diverging or competing institutional pressures from various stakeholder groups in addressing social issues?
- ✧ What are the differences between indigenous and foreign firms in the poverty alleviation projects in China? What are the similarities and differences between the poverty alleviation initiatives of firms in China and other countries?
- ✧ What is the potential "dark side" of firm nonmarket strategy? Would certain strategic CSR and non-market strategy have negative implications to firms, stakeholders and society?
- ✧ What are the challenges and opportunities of carbon neutrality facing corporations in China? What can MNEs and local firms do, jointly and independently?
- ✧ What are the emergence, development, and performance of organizations that pursue hybrid social and business organizational goals in China?
- ✧ What are the pro-society business strategies in the era of digital economy featured with artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, and big data?
- ✧ What are the antecedents and outcomes of interactions between organizations in the business, nonprofit and public sectors?
- ✧ What are the individual, organizational and environmental factors that influence the emergence and performance of corporate social intrapreneurs activities in a company?
- ✧ Emerging markets expose higher volatility. How can firms exploit CSR as a non-market strategy to acclimate to the volatility? Will MNEs take more opportunities for

advancement and even perform better in improving social welfare compared to domestic companies?

- ✧ How does the difference in institutions, stakeholders' pressure or even public supervision form host country and home country determine MNEs' CSR activities?
- ✧ While prior research has explained that a firm decides its reactions to local regulations depending on its home country's institutional setting (Cuervo-Cazurra & Genc, 2008), will MNEs originated from emerging markets and MNEs originated from mature markets take different potential liabilities of foreignness?
- ✧ The social impact of CSR activities has been relatively neglected and largely unexamined by management scholars (Ballesteros, Useem & Wry, 2017; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). What's the transmission mechanism that CSR activities ultimately impact the overall social welfare? And how to value this social impact?

About the editors

Maoliang Bu is an Associate Professor at Nanjing University. He has published in leading academic journals, among others, *NATURE Sustainability*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Strategic Management Journal*. He has served as Guest Editor for *Journal of Business Ethics*, and as Senior Editor for *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*. Dr. Bu has been awarded fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. He is also an Adjunct Professor at Hopkins-Nanjing Center (Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies), and an affiliated researcher at Copenhagen Business School.

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Schedule

We welcome submissions in the format of original research article, theoretical perspective or review, with approximately 10,000 words per submission. The window of full paper

submission is **1–31 August, 2021**. The journal will run a fast-track peer review process. Submissions will be reviewed and accepted for publication on a rolling basis. The journal will fully sponsor all accepted papers to be published in Open Access, which enables the paper to be accessible anytime, anywhere in the world.

Please submit your manuscript at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/fbrc/>.

Should you have any queries regarding this special call for papers, please contact Dr. Mandy Y. Wang at the editorial office at fbr@rmba.ruc.edu.cn.

About the journal

Frontiers of Business Research in China (FBR) is a double-blind refereed quarterly journal in business research. FBR offers a multidisciplinary forum for academics, practitioners, and policy makers that focuses on business administration, and encourages interdisciplinary studies and interactions between Chinese and international researchers. FBR publishes original academic and practical research articles that extend, test, or build management theories, as well as contributions to business administration practice, either in the Greater China region or beyond. It has been indexed by ESCI and SCOPUS, among others.

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