

## Treasures in the China house

### A review of management and organizational research on Greater China

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#### Abstract

Management and organizational research on Greater China, which not only includes mainland China but also Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, has experienced rapid growth in the past 2 decades. Yet there is no comprehensive review of this literature mapping out the contributions and guiding future research. Intending to fill this gap, this article first examines publications in top-tier, academic journals during the period of 1978–1997 to identify leading individual and institutional contributors to this literature. Then we briefly review substantive research in organizational behavior, strategic management, and international management, highlighting key findings and pointing out future directions. The article concludes with a call for more sustained research in this area attempting to make larger contributions to the mainstream literature. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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As a new term largely coined in the past decade, “Greater China” has emerged to account for a dynamic area in Asia encompassing mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao (Stewart et al., 1992; Harding, 1993). Some writers also include Singapore, a predominately Chinese society, in this group, and still others include the overseas Chinese living in Southeast Asia and elsewhere (Brick, 1992; Kao, 1993; Seagrave, 1995; Weidenbaum and Hughes, 1996). Despite its loosely defined nature, “Greater China” as a term has become increasingly accepted by scholars and practitioners worldwide.

In the past, social science inquiry on these countries was largely relegated to the domain of area studies and set apart from mainstream, discipline-based research. Recently, mostly as a result of the dramatic rise of the mainland Chinese economy, the strong economic performance of Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Southeast Asia (until the financial crisis of 1997), and their increased integration with the global economy, many researchers have found that they cannot afford to ignore the dynamics of Greater China,

whose combined GDP may be at par with that of the US and Western Europe in the early 21st century (Lardy, 1994; Overholt, 1993). As a result, the new scholarship on Greater China has often appeared in mainstream, disciplinary journals rather than area studies outlets.

Management and organizational research in the past 2 decades has followed this general trend in social science research. An increasing number of articles on Greater China has appeared in mainstream journals. As a body of literature develops, it is useful to take inventory of what has been done, and identify new directions and challenges for the future. This reflective process is essential in order to derive the maximum benefits from existing research, and to propel current work into a new stage. However, there is no comprehensive review of this literature. Previous reviews tend to deal with mainland China (Child, 1994; Shenkar, 1994; Shenkar and von Glinow, 1994) or focus on overseas Chinese areas (Redding, 1990) separately. Given the increased integration among these economies and the wide acceptance of the term “Greater China,” we believe that time is ripe to review this literature as a whole. Therefore, in this article, we aim to both map out the key contributions to this literature, and to link them with the broader literature on global management and organization. Specifically, we first

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examine publications in top-tier, English-language, academic journals during the period of 1978–1997 to identify leading contributors to this literature, and then review substantive research in organizational behavior, strategic management, and international management, highlighting key findings and pointing out future directions.

To avoid confusion, we will use the term “mainland Chinese” to refer to individuals and firms in the People’s Republic of China, and “overseas Chinese” to refer to those outside of the mainland. The generic term “Chinese” will be used in a historical sense and a global sense, when we refer to the far-flung international Chinese community that is the essence of “Greater China.”

## 1. Mapping the contributions

### 1.1. Overview

A “contribution-based” approach is used by examining publications in leading journals in the past 2 decades, i.e., the period of 1978–1997. The year 1978 marked the beginning of economic reforms in mainland China, which stimulated the economic integration of the region and the emergence of Greater China. The same year also saw the first publications on Chinese management in major Western journals (Deyo, 1978; Sterba, 1978). On the other hand, the hand-over of Hong Kong in 1997 closed one chapter in the evolution of Greater China and marked the beginning of a new era. Overall, the 2 decades between 1978 and 1997 are a historically critical period for the coming of age of Greater China (Brick, 1992; Harding, 1993).

During this period, research interest on Great China has greatly expanded. Instead of attempting to cover every branch of this rapidly increasing literature, we will focus on publications in a select set of *top-tier, English-language, academic journals* in management and organization. The benefits of such an approach are (a) a clear and manageable focus, (b) relative objectivity, and (c) consistency with previous reviews using similar methods (e.g., Inkpen and Beamish, 1994; Lohrke and Bruton, 1997). The drawbacks are the inability to completely account for the interdisciplinary nature of research on Greater China. As a result, this review does not comprehensively cover the contributions from other disciplines. These include (a) traditional social science disciplines such as economics (Gordon and Li, 1991), sociology (Guthrie, 1997), psychology (Miner et al., 1991), geography (Yeung, 1997a), and law (Clarke, 1991); (b) area studies (Walder, 1989; Kirby, 1995); and (c) other business administration disciplines such as entrepreneurship (McGrath et al., 1992) and marketing (Tse et al., 1988). Nor are we able to adequately account for numerous contributions found in practitioner outlets (Shenkar, 1990; Kao, 1993; Tung, 1994; Redding, 1995; Peng, 1997b).

A further limitation is that this review is limited to contributions published in English. While local researchers

in the region who publish in Chinese have made numerous contributions (see White et al., 1998 for a review), management research has a relatively short history in these countries. Our select reading of a number of Chinese-language articles, as well as conversations with a large number of colleagues in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, found that articles published in Chinese-language outlets are not directly comparable with those published in English-language journals, mostly due to their different intellectual traditions and methodological approaches. In addition, time, resources, and journal space constraints necessitate our focus on English-language journals in this initial step to map out the contributions.

### 1.2. Contributions in 10 leading journals

In Table 1, we focus on the seven journals published in North America, which represent the “mainstream” for global research (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991). These seven journals, namely, the *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)*, *Academy of Management Review (AMR)*, *Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)*, *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)*, *Management Science (MS)*, *Organization Science (OSc)*, and *Strategic Management Journal (SMJ)*, have been consistently rated as premium outlets in the field (MacMillan, 1991; Lohrke and Bruton, 1997). For the period of 1978–1997, a total of 37 articles are identified, with 1 in the 1970s, 8 in the 1980s, and 28 in the 1990s. We further place different articles into three groups: (a) those primarily dealing with mainland China (68%), (b) those dealing with other areas of Greater China (8%), and (c) those with a comparative focus (24%). Among these seven journals, *JIBS* showed the strongest interest in this research and published 16 of the 37 articles (43%).

In Table 2, we survey the contributions found in two leading European journals, the *JMS* and *OSt*, which have also been widely regarded as high-quality outlets (MacMillan, 1991). A total of 22 articles have been published in these two journals, with a similar trend of increase found in US journals (1 in the 1970s, 5 in the 1980s, and 16 in the 1990s). Among them, 46% are on the mainland China, 27% on other areas of Greater China such as Hong Kong and Singapore, and 27% on comparative research. Among these 22 articles, 18 were published by *OSt*.

Given the Asia Pacific focus of the research on Greater China, we also aim to examine research published in the region. Our own reading of the literature, as well as conversations with a number of scholars active in the field, leads us to focus on the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management (APJM)*, which has the longest history among Asian journals of similar nature and is also the most prestigious among them (Ang, 1997). Published in Singapore since 1983, this journal is widely available in North American and European university libraries. Shown in Table 3, for the period of 1983–1997, a total of 24 articles have been

Table 1  
Contributions in seven Leading North American Journals (1978–1997)<sup>a</sup>

	1970s	1980s	1990s
<i>Research on mainland China</i>		Tung (1981, AMR) Tung (1982b, JIBS) Shenkar and Ronen (1987, AMJ) Boisot and Child (1988, ASQ) Adler et al. (1989, JIBS) Earley (1989, ASQ)	McGuinness et al. (1991, JIBS) Shan (1991, JIBS) Nee (1992, ASQ) Earley (1993, AMJ) Schroath et al. (1993, JIBS) Yan and Gray (1994, AMJ) Shenkar and von Glinow (1994, MS) Tan and Litschert (1994, SMJ) Chen (1995, AMJ) Boisot and Child (1996, ASQ) Child and Lu (1996a, OSc) Leung et al. (1996, JIBS) Pan (1996, JIBS) Pan and Tse (1996, JIBS) Xie (1996, AMJ) Xin and Pearce (1996, AMJ) Luo (1997, OSc) Pan (1997, SMJ) Tse et al. (1997, JIBS)
<i>Research on other Greater China areas</i>		Bimbaum-More and Wong (1985, ASQ) Farh et al. (1987, JIBS)	Farh et al. (1997, ASQ)
<i>Comparative research</i>	Sterba (1978, AMR)		Adler et al. (1992, SMJ) Ralston et al. (1993, JIBS) Tse et al. (1994, JIBS) Yeh and Lawrence (1995, JIBS) Peng and Heath (1996, AMR) Smith et al. (1996, JIBS) Bailey et al. (1997, JIBS) Ralston et al. (1997, JIBS)
Total (37)	1	8	28

<sup>a</sup> The seven journals are the *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)*, *Academy of Management Review (AMR)*, *Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)*, *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)*, *Management Science (MS)*, *Organization Science (OSc)*, and *Strategic Management Journal (SMJ)*. For articles published in the same year, the order is alphabetically organized by the leading author's last name.

identified. Given the journal's Southeast Asian base, it is not surprising that it contains a large number of articles (50%) on non-mainland areas of Greater China. Comparative research comes second, with 29% of the articles, and mainland China-related articles represent 21% of the total. The increase of articles from the 1980s to the 1990s, i.e., from 9 to 15 articles, is not as dramatic as that found in American and European journals during the same period.

### 1.3. Individual and institutional contributions

In order to assess the individual and institutional contributions to this literature, we focus on the seven North American and two European journals reviewed above. This selection is driven by two considerations. First, there is a substantial overlap between authors who have published on both sides of the Atlantic, while very few *APJM* authors, who are mostly based in Asia, have published in North American and/or European journals. Second, these nine Western journals are widely acknowledged as top-tier outlets, which count significantly in tenure and promotion decisions at Western universities. Recently, leading Asian

universities also require that their faculty publish in these journals, thus indicating these journals' global reputation in the field.

Following similar reviews (Inkpen and Beamish, 1994; Lohrke and Bruton, 1997; Shane, 1997), we examine both "total" and "adjusted" appearances of authors and their institutional affiliations. Using this method, an article published by one author counts as a full credit for the author and university, an article published by two authors counts as one-half credit for each author and university (if different), and so forth. As shown in Table 4, 22 individuals and 23 institutions had at least one adjusted appearance in these nine journals during the period of 1978–1997, respectively.

Two observations emerge from this table. First, there is significant diversity among individual and institutional contributors. Articles are authored by North Americans, Europeans, and Asians, with no particular dominant group. Among the leading institutions, while American (12) and British (4) universities dominate the list, three Hong Kong universities also make the list. Globally, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, University of Cambridge, and University of Hong Kong are the top three contributors (in

Table 2  
Contributions in two leading European journals (1978–1997)<sup>a</sup>

	1970s	1980s	1990s
<i>Research on mainland China</i>		Shenkar (1984, OSt) Henley and Nyaw (1986, JMS) Lockett (1988, OSt)	Child and Lu (1990, OSt) Boisot and Liang (1992, OSt) Chen and Faure (1995, OSt) Lu and Heard (1995, OSt) Jiang and Hall (1996, OSt) Shenkar (1996 OSt) Peng (1997a, OSt)
<i>Research on other Greater China areas</i>	Deyo (1978, JMS)	Redding (1980, JMS) Redding and Ng (1982, OSt)	Kirkbride et al. (1991, OSt) Wong and Birnbaum-More (1994, OSt) Westwood (1997, OSt)
<i>Comparative research</i>			Hall and Xu (1991, OSt) Whitley (1990, OSt) Whitley (1991, OSt) Child and Markoczy (1993, JMS) Boisot (1996, OSt) Wilkinson (1996, OSt)
Total (22)	1	5	16

<sup>a</sup> The two journals are the *Journal of Management Science (JMS)* and *Organization Studies (OSt)*.

descending order) to this literature, measured by total and/or adjusted appearances.

Second, the number of articles published by these authors is low. Oded Shenkar, the leading contributor in terms of *adjusted* appearances, had 4 total appearances and 2.5 adjusted appearances. John Child, the leader in terms of *total* appearances, published a total of 5 articles. In comparison, the leading contributor in international strategic management during 1986–1995, which is only half the time that we examine, had total and adjusted appearances of 11 and 6.3, respectively (Lohrke and Bruton, 1997, 39). Another example is research published in *JIBS* during 1970–1994,

whereby the leading contributor had 14 and 6.78 total and adjusted appearances, respectively (Inkpen and Beamish, 1994, 708). Thomas et al. (1994, 678–679) surveyed all articles published in *JIBS* for the period of 1970–1993, and found that there were 12 articles on mainland China (2% of the total articles), 11 on Hong Kong (1.8%), 11 on Taiwan (1.8%), and 13 on Singapore (2.2%). In comparison, Japan had 93 articles (15.4%) and Korea had 27 articles (4.5%). Great Britain and West Germany had 84 (14%) and 66 (11%) articles, respectively. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that, despite the rapid growth in the 1990s, the overall number and, therefore, impact, of articles on Greater

Table 3  
Contributions in a leading Asia Pacific journal (1983–1997)<sup>a</sup>

	1980s	1990s
<i>Research on mainland China</i>		Wagner (1990) Wu (1990) Cheung and Xing (1994) Ralston et al. (1995) Luo and Chen (1997)
<i>Research on other Greater China areas</i>	Mushkat and Roberts (1986) Redding and Richardson (1986) Hsu (1987) Redding (1987) Thong (1987) Lasserre (1988) Yeh (1988)	Huo and Randall (1991) Hong and May (1993) Tang (1992) Lau (1995) Yeh (1996)
<i>Comparative research</i>	Chow et al. (1987) Xu (1987)	Yeh (1991) Okechuku and Man (1991) Schermerhorn and Bond (1992) Perrewe et al. (1995) Westwood and Posner (1997)
Total (24)	9	15

<sup>a</sup> The *APJM* has been published in Singapore since 1983.

Table 4  
Individual and institutional contributions to nine leading journals (1978–1997)<sup>a</sup>

<i>Individuals</i>		Total	Adjusted	<i>Institutions</i>		Total	Adjusted
(1)	Oded Shenkar <sup>b</sup>	4	3	(1)	Chinese University of Hong Kong	8	4.16
(2)	Yigang Pan	4	2.83	(2)	University of Cambridge	6	4
(3)	John Child <sup>b</sup>	5	2.5	(3)	University of Hong Kong	4	3
	Max Boisot <sup>b</sup>	4	2.5		University of Manchester	4	3
(5)	P. Christopher Earley	3	2.33		University of Pennsylvania	3	3
(6)	Rosalie Tung	2	2	(6)	University of Hawaii	5	2.75
	Richard Whitley	2	2	(7)	Tel Aviv University	4	2.25
(8)	Yuan Lu <sup>b</sup>	3	1.5	(8)	University of California Irvine	3	2.17
	Mike W. Peng <sup>b</sup>	2	1.5	(9)	Rutgers University	2	1.67
	S. Gordon Redding	2	1.5	(10)	University of Oregon	4	1.58
(11)	Chao C. Chen	2	1.33	(11)	City University of Hong Kong	4	1.5
	Robert Westwood	2	1.33		University of Southern California	3	1.5
(13)	David K. Tse	3	1.17		CEMI, Beijing	2	1.5
(14)	P. Birnbaum-More <sup>b</sup>	2	1		State University of New York	2	1.5
	Richard Hall	2	1	(15)	DePaul University	3	1.25
	Gilbert Wong <sup>b</sup>	2	1	(16)	ESADE, Barcelona	3	1
	M. Lockett	1	1		Cornell University	1	1
	Yadong Luo	1	1		University of Bath	1	1
	Victor Nee	1	1		University of Houston	1	1
	Weijian Shan	1	1		University of Minnesota	1	1
	Barry Wilkinson	1	1		University of Oxford	1	1
	Jia Lin Xie	1	1		University of Toronto	1	1
					Virginia Polytechnic Institute	1	1

*N* = 22 individuals and 23 institutions with at least one adjusted appearance

<sup>a</sup> See notes for Tables 1 and 2 for a list of the seven North American and two European journals. “Total” is the total number of articles carrying a particular author and institution’s name. “Adjusted” is the result of giving partial credit to an individual and institution for all co-authored papers. For individual rankings, an example of computing “total” and “adjusted” appearances for Oded Shenkar is as follows:

“Total” = 4	“Adjusted” = 3
Shenkar (1984, <i>OST</i> )	1
Shenkar and Ronen (1987, <i>AMJ</i> )	0.5
Shenkar and von Glinow (1994, <i>MS</i> )	0.5
Shenkar (1996, <i>OST</i> )	1

For institutional rankings, only authors’ affiliation at the time of publication would count as credit for a given institution. An example for The Chinese University of Hong Kong is as follows.

“Total” = 8	“Adjusted” = 4.16
Henley and Nyaw (1986, <i>JMS</i> )	0.5 (Nyaw)
Kirkbride et al. (1991, <i>OST</i> )	0.33 (Westwood)
Ralston et al. (1993, <i>JIBS</i> )	0.5 (Cheung and Terpstra)
Yeh and Lawrence (1995, <i>JIBS</i> )	0.5 (Yeh)
Leung et al. (1996, <i>JIBS</i> )	0.5 (Leung and Sun)
Peng (1997a, <i>OST</i> )	0.5 (Peng had a joint appointment elsewhere)
Tse et al. (1997, <i>JIBS</i> )	0.33 (Au)
Westwood (1997, <i>OST</i> )	1

<sup>b</sup> These authors have published in at least one American journal and one European journal.

China is still limited. This may be explained in part by the well-documented bias against international research at most leading Western journals (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991). For example, Mowday (1997, 1404) reported that between 1978 and 1994, *AMJ* only published 3% to 4% international articles. Pierce and Garven (1995) found that *AMJ* and *AMR* had only 7% and 5% international content, respectively. During the 20-year period that we examine, *AMJ*, *ASQ*, and *AMR* only published 6, 5, and 4 Greater China-related articles, respectively (Table 1). Given the global scope of international research, authors of Greater China-related articles may have an even smaller chance of publishing

their work in these leading outlets. On the other hand, *JIBS* and *OST* have been more receptive to this research, and attracted and published a relatively large number of articles.

In sum, the 83 articles published in 10 leading journals, including 59 published in the 1990s, give us a “snapshot” of global management and organizational research on Greater China published in English during the past 2 decades. This literature has grown from virtually non-existent to a burgeoning one, with contributions from a wide variety of authors and institutions. However, there is still substantial room for expansion, given the overall small amount of publications in leading journals. With this overall review

as a background, next we discuss substantive areas of research within this broad literature.

## 2. A note on substantive reviews of research

In the following three sections, “Organizational Behavior” and “Strategic Management” will focus on micro and macro work in *a single country* in Greater China, respectively, and “International Management” will survey these two areas of research involving *at least two countries*. Given the integrated nature of many studies, the distinction among these areas is somewhat arbitrary. However, we believe that such an intuitive organizing framework, mostly along the widely accepted micro/macro and single country/comparative lines, allows us to capture the essence of this literature. Attempting to expand from the relatively narrow set of journals reviewed above, we will draw upon the interdisciplinary research not necessarily limited to these 10 journals. The tables above only include articles published by the end of 1997, mostly for the sake of completeness during the 20-year period (1978–1997). Taking advantage of our network of colleagues active in research, the substantive reviews will incorporate the most recent works published since 1998 and still in press. We will also include certain contributions in books and business press. Given the expanding amount of research in recent years and the limited journal space, the following reviews, of necessity, have to be brief (and, perhaps, superficial). Our hope is to sketch the broad contours of the literature and highlight the “treasures in the china house,” which will be helpful to scholars, students, and practitioners interested in management and organization in Greater China.

## 3. Organizational behavior

The Chinese organization has long intrigued researchers (Shenkar, 1984, 1991; Child, 1994). Hamilton (1996, 9) suggested that, analytically, scholars need to “contrast between Chinese and non-Chinese systems of economic organization.” Research in organizational behavior in this area can be broadly categorized into two schools of thought, namely, a cultural school and an institutional school, which will be discussed below.

### 3.1. The Chinese organization as a cultural product

The cultural school has been stimulated by Hofstede’s (1980) ground-breaking work. Many organizations in Greater China seem to share an important cultural similarity embodied in Confucius values and norms (Hall and Xu, 1991). This cultural influence can also be found in other Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia (Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Whitley, 1990, 1991, 1992). Such an intuitive observation was validated by an influential

study (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). A survey instrument based on Chinese values was developed and administered to subjects in 22 countries (including three in Greater China: Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan; and three others in East Asia: Japan, South Korea, and Thailand). The study found that three of the factors correlated significantly with three of Hofstede’s (1980) four cultural dimensions, namely, individualism, power distance, and masculinity. A unique factor, termed as “Confucian dynamism,” was found to be unrelated to any of Hofstede’s, but correlated 0.70 with economic growth from 1965 to 1984 (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987).

According to the cultural school, the Chinese culture, embodied in the Confucian values such as the respect for authority, family/group orientation, and preference for personal relations (*guanxi*), fundamentally influences organizational behavior (Redding, 1980, 1987; Redding and Ng, 1982). When compared with Western societies, the family is more likely to be the basic unit of social organizations, including business firms, in Greater China (Bond, 1986; Hwang, 1987). Since most overseas Chinese firms are organized as family firms, the family influence asserts itself in many aspects of organizational life (Earley, 1989, 1993). As a result, the stylized Chinese organization prefers a centralized structure in which decisions are made at the top (Lockett, 1988; Lu, 1996). Like the head in a family, a manager is supposed to play a father-like role and preserve the “face” of subordinates (Bond, 1986, 1991; Redding and Ng, 1982). A direct and authoritarian leadership style is expected and participative management is not valued (Redding and Richardson, 1986; Xu 1987). Westwood (1997) even suggested that the term “leadership” might be plausibly replaced by a new word “headship” when describing Chinese organizations. In addition, interaction among individuals and/or organizations is built upon trustworthy relationships that tend to be usually highly personalized. Such relations are embedded either in family ties and personal relations (Schermerhorn and Bond, 1992; Tsui and Farh, 1997). As a result, economic exchanges are more likely to be reinforced through social exchanges that stress reciprocity rather than “rational,” arms-length transactions typically found in the West (Yang, 1994; Yeung, 1997a,b; Yeung and Tung, 1996).

Advocates of the cultural school argued that the competitiveness of firms in Greater China may be attributed to their unique social structures (Franke et al., 1991). For example, an emphasis on harmonious human relations may avoid conflicts between an employer and employees (Chow et al., 1987). When a firm is perceived as an extended family, employees are encouraged to develop a strong sense of belonging, which may boost productivity (Hall and Xu, 1991). Outside the firm, close personal ties between families and linkages among top executives across organizations may form an exclusionary community that eventually gives rise to heightened entry barriers for other competitors (Redding, 1995; Seagrave, 1995).

While influential, the cultural school also has a number of limitations. First, it seems to neglect cultural differences within Greater China. Even within mainland China, there are substantial regional differences (Huo and Randall, 1991; Ralston et al., 1996). Huo and Randall (1991, 164) noted that “the variance of value scores within China is not always smaller than the ones between China and other countries.” By focusing on cultural similarities, the cultural school seems to be unable to account for the significant organizational diversity found in the region, ranging from gigantic, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in mainland China run by risk-averse political appointees to small trading companies in Hong Kong operated by risk-taking entrepreneurs.

Second, the cultural school may lack a dynamic view on contemporary changes (Nee, 1996). In several decades, communism transformed mainland China into a stagnant Soviet-style economy, only to be transformed again into a rapidly growing economic powerhouse since 1978 (Tung, 1982a; Laaksonen, 1988; Lardy, 1994). In a short span of a few years, mainland Chinese managers’ values were found to have changed as a result of the Tiananmen incident in 1989 (Ralston et al., 1995). Outside the mainland, significant economic, social, and organizational changes further push the boundaries of the cultural school (Redding, 1990; Lau, 1995; Westwood and Posner, 1997). For example, Farh et al. (1997, 439) found that while women in Taiwan tend to be traditionalists, Taiwanese men are far less bounded by traditional culture. Such a difference was used by Farh et al. (1997) to explain the variations in organizational citizenship behavior.

Finally, the cultural school may have overemphasized the role of culture in explaining economic growth. Yeh and Lawrence (1996) challenged the cultural school by suggesting (1) that, methodologically, Confucian dynamism should not be treated as an independent dimension separated from individualism, and (2) that, logically, culture is not a sufficient condition to explain economic growth and is related to other factors such as institutions and technologies. Biggart (1991, 213–214) argued that cultural studies “are so particularistic that generalization of features, and hence comparison, are problematic.” As a result, many scholars have searched for other explanations that can help uncover the workings of Chinese organizations (Hamilton, 1996; Wilkinson, 1996). These efforts have resulted in what we refer to as the “institutional school.”

### *3.2. The Chinese organization as an outcome of institutionalization*

Compared with the cultural school, the institutional school introduces a broader range of variables to explain relations between organizations and environments (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). “Both what organizations come into existence and how they evolve are fundamentally influenced by the institutional framework” (North, 1990, 5). These ideas have important implications for understanding man-

agement and organization in Greater China, since they emphasize the path-dependent nature due to the different interaction between institutions and organizations (Peng and Heath, 1996). Exploring such a dynamic interaction, Hamilton (1996), Hamilton and Biggart (1988), and Orru et al. (1997) used an institutional perspective to explain organizational behavior in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia.

Focusing on mainland China, Shenkar (1996) suggested that the SOE, especially its stylized version during the Maoist era, can be regarded as a “total institution.” As a result, the SOE is not only a place to work but also the area where individuals conduct social and political activities and where the state asserts control over people. Thus, reforming SOEs becomes very challenging since any change at the organizational level may meet resistance from other institutions such as the communist party. Lu (1996) compared differences of official ideologies prior to and during the reform era in the 1980s and noted the significant impact of such changes in relations between the government and enterprises. Walder (1995) suggested that while the central government has gradually loosened its control over mainland Chinese firms, local governments have emerged as a major force involved in economic activities. In fact, local governments behave not only as regulatory authorities but also as participants (Li, 1996). They assert institutional pressures on the firms through their control of key resources and administrative hierarchies strengthened by the power to appoint and dismiss managers (Groves et al., 1995; Lu, 1996). Boisot and Child (1988, 1996) developed an institutional framework by arguing that the traditional “markets versus hierarchies” typology found in the West (Williamson, 1985) needs to be expanded to incorporate concepts such as “fiefs,” “clans,” and “networks” in order to account for organizational behavior in China’s transition economy. In a series of articles, Peng (1994, 1996, 1997a) and his colleagues (Peng and Heath, 1996; Peng and Luo, 1998; Peng and Tan, 1998) argued and demonstrated that the institutional environment during mainland China’s reform era has created incentives for organizations to “blur” their boundaries, through relationship building based on managers’ personal trust and informal agreements, in order to achieve necessary growth and expansion.

Compared with the relatively mature cultural school, research based on the institutional school is still in its “adolescence,” which is consistent with the general development of institutional theory (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). While most studies have focused on organizational levels, few have examined the institutional impact on individuals’ cognitive systems. For example, the resistance to reform by mainland Chinese managers may come from prevailing cognitive systems that had been shaped by norms taken from the pre-reform period (Lu, 1996). As a result, when competition heats up, managers may cry for more government protection instead of attempting to craft competitive strategies. In addition to the need for more institutional studies focusing on the individual level, there is also a

need for more multiple level analyses using an institutional framework (Peng, 1996, 2000a). Moreover, since organizations assert reciprocal influence on institutions, it will also be interesting to examine how certain organizational behavior, such as boundary blurring and relationship building, affects institution-building efforts, especially in the area of creating and strengthening a legal framework (Clarke, 1991; Kirby, 1995).

#### 4. Strategic management

China is the home of Sun Tzu, the world's first acknowledged strategist. Not surprisingly, firms in Greater China have exhibited distinctive business strategies that dazzle and bewilder the outside world (Tung, 1994). Two types of firms which dominate the economic landscape in this region, namely, family firms and SOEs, are widely regarded as inefficient by mainstream Western theories (Chen, 1995b). Yet, for several decades, Greater China economies exhibited enviable economic growth. Since the growth of the economy ultimately boils down to the growth of the firm (Peng, 1997a, 2000a), it is evident that firms in this region must have employed strategies that have led to such performance.

##### 4.1. Business strategies of the overseas Chinese firm

Overseas Chinese firms are major players throughout Southeast Asia. Most of them have roots in the families that migrated from coastal provinces such as Guangdong and Fujian around 100 years ago (Seagrave, 1995). As with the Jewish diaspora, family ties have been strengthened by the harsh environment surrounding them. It is only 30 years since Chinese immigrants were massacred in Indonesia. During the turmoil in Indonesia in 1998, many ethnic Chinese, despite their Indonesian citizenship, were singled out by rioting mobs. Malaysia continues to practice government-sponsored discrimination against ethnic Chinese. As a result, the overseas Chinese tend to first rely on family members and next on fellow clan members when expanding their firms, since these people are believed to be more trustworthy (Sin, 1987).

A hallmark of these firms' strategies is their reliance on loose, entrepreneurial networks based around "trust" linking different business groups (Lasserre, 1988; Kao, 1993). Most groups are run by heads of the family, who make key decisions, change directions, and exhibit aggressive entrepreneurship (Redding, 1990). These family-based networks have historically transcended national boundaries in Southeast Asia (Yeung, 1997a,b). More recently, these networks have been transferred to mainland China, representing the chunk of "foreign" direct investment that has fueled its growth in recent decades (Brick, 1992; Weidenbaum and Hughes, 1996).

A second major characteristics of these family firms is diversification. Research in the West has suggested that only

related diversification may add value and that unrelated diversification often backfires (Hoskisson and Hitt, 1994). In contrast, large overseas Chinese firms tend to have highly diversified holdings pursuing economies of scope in order to minimize their risks (Lasserre, 1988; Chen, 1995). The recent financial crisis sweeping Southeast Asia seems to have made a lot of these firms rethink about their diversification strategies (Business Week, 1998). There is, however, very little rigorous research examining the relationship between their diversification strategies and performance (Au et al., 2000).

Since business strategies are the product of interaction between environments and organizations (North, 1990), it is easy to understand why family-based decision structures, extended business networks, and conglomerate-style diversification emerge as predominant strategies of overseas Chinese firms operating in an uncertain environment. However, these strategies are associated with at least three problems. The first problem is the pitfalls associated with a centralized strategy-making structure (Tai and Tai, 1986). Respect for authority and age too often rules out criticism of the boss and depresses creativity (Chen, 1995).

Second, the inability to allow professional managers to become top leaders, i.e., the "glass ceiling," creates a constraint to the growth of these firms (Peng, 1998). Few managers aspiring for top posts will be satisfied with an organization which will never allow them a role in business strategies. One survey found that the majority of Hong Kong professionals prefer to work for Western or Japanese firms — in fact any non-Chinese ones (Economist, 1996, 11). Another survey of 1000 executives worldwide reported that Hong Kong respondents felt more out of line with their companies' strategy than anyone else (Economist, 1996, 11).

Finally, the lack of creativity and professionalization outlined above may lead to an inability to create and sustain world-class competitive advantage (Peng, 1998). Although many overseas Chinese firms are strong regional players, with few exceptions such as Acer from Taiwan, most of them have yet to create products and/or services that are globally known. Instead, they seem to be more interested in obtaining service franchises and/or in producing as contractors for original equipment manufacturers in the West. As both their home and overseas markets become more competitive, these firms may have to give up their diversification and specialize in a few core areas. This may be especially urgent in light of the ongoing financial crisis sweeping much of Southeast Asia (Business Week, 1998). Such transitions provide fertile grounds for strategy and organizational researchers (Chen, 1997).

##### 4.2. Business strategies of the mainland Chinese firm

Since SOEs dominated the mainland Chinese economy for a long time, they have been regarded as stylized firms that attract a lot of research attention (Davies, 1995; Boisot, 1996; Peng and Heath, 1996). Fundamentally different

from Western firms that researchers typically encounter (Henley and Nyaw, 1986; Jackson, 1992), SOEs in mainland China exhibit a number of strategic behaviors that are similar to their counterparts in the former Soviet Union and the pre-1989 Eastern Europe, such as extensive bargaining between their managers and the government (Chen and Faure, 1995; Lu and Heard, 1995) and the lack of concern for efficiency due to the “soft budget constraints” (Boisot and Child, 1988; Lu, 1996). Before the reform, most of their input would come from government sources and output would be purchased by state agencies. As a result, the notion of “competitive strategy” was very alien to most SOE managers, who tended to be political appointees with little motivation to perform (Tung, 1981; Walder, 1989; Wang, 1992).

The transition from a planned economy to a market-based one “changes fundamental managerial assumptions, criteria, and decision making, and represents a genuine transformation of the business” (Tan and Litschert, 1994, 3; Guthrie, 1997; Warner, 1987, 1992). Although most SOEs are newcomers to the game of competition, they are nevertheless under stress to learn the game fast for three reasons (Peng, 2000a, Chap. 4). First, the government becomes increasingly impatient with their lackluster performance and has gradually relinquished its financial responsibility, thus creating pressure for managers to perform (Perkins, 1994; Groves et al., 1995). Second, a great number of foreign firms have penetrated the China market and created pressures for local firms (Stross, 1990; Kelley and Shenkar, 1993). Third, the new environment has also introduced a new class of private and collective firms, which are more entrepreneurial than their SOE counterparts (Tan, 1996). As a result, SOEs “can no longer afford to be passive now but have to join the competition” (Peng and Heath, 1996, 507).

However, SOEs typically have neither the managerial expertise nor the financial resources that are necessary to compete in a market-based economy (Jefferson and Rawski, 1994). Moreover, because of the government’s continuous intervention and the underdevelopment of financial markets, firm growth through mergers and acquisitions has been difficult for most SOEs interested in expansion (Peng et al., 1999). As a result, they resort to network-based strategies, building on strategic alliances and enterprise networks based on interpersonal (*guanxi*) networks cultivated by their managers (Peng, 1994, 1997a, 2000a; Peng and Heath, 1996; Peng and Luo, 1998; Peng and Tan, 1998; Luo and Chen, 1997; Wu, 1990).

While research on mainland Chinese firms initially focused on SOEs (Granick, 1990), more recently, scholars have increasingly paid attention to other types of firms, such as private firms (Chang and MacMillan, 1991; Tsang, 1994, 1996; Tan, 1996; Tan and Li, 1996; Xin and Pearce, 1996), collective firms (Nee, 1992; Peng, 1997a), and township and village enterprises (Walder, 1995; Jiang and Hall, 1996; Luo et al., 1998). Interestingly, strategies that these firms

adopt are found to be similar to those of SOEs, namely, the extensive use of networks involving managers and government officials. Peng (1997a), Peng and Luo (1998), Peng and Tan (1998), Tan (1996), and Xin and Pearce (1996) argued that managers at non-SOEs have a strong incentive to cultivate relationships with government officials in fear of state exploitation. Nee (1992) focused on the networks between managers and local officials, which he called “collective hybrids.” He suggested that for newly founded firms, a “collective hybrid” strategy may lead to better institutional protection, which can be provided by local officials and, hence, to better performance.

As mainland Chinese firms confront challenges unleashed by the economic transition, their search for competitive strategies present new research opportunities (Kelley and Luo, 1999). Three areas that have not received much research attention are worth paying attention to: (1) Mergers, acquisitions, restructuring, and diversification strategies that are emerging as economic reforms deepen (Peng, 2000a; Peng et al., 1999). (2) Corporate governance issues such as ownership and control that become more salient as privatization of SOEs becomes politically possible (Business Week, 1997a). (3) International strategies of these firms, which may first become “red chips” through listing abroad such as Hong Kong (Au et al., 2000) and then evolve into multinational enterprises (Young et al., 1996).

## 5. International management

Research reviewed in the two previous sections typically focuses on individuals and firms in one particular country within Greater China. Another substantial body of research takes an international perspective involving at least two countries. This work can be further divided along the micro/macro lines, which will be reviewed below.

### 5.1. Comparative organizational behavior

Within the domain of micro organizational research, managerial values (Leung and Park, 1986; Earley, 1989, 1993; Wang, 1992; Ralston et al., 1993, 1996, 1997; Chen, 1995; Smith et al., 1996; Bailey et al., 1997; Holt, 1997; Westwood and Posner, 1997), organizational commitment (Perrewe et al., 1995), and negotiation behavior (Leung, 1988; Kirkbride et al., 1991; Adler et al., 1992; Tse et al., 1994) have received substantial attention. In terms of the samples, comparison of mainland Chinese and American subjects appears to be popular (Earley, 1989, 1993; Adler et al., 1992; Chen, 1995; Holt, 1997; Smith et al., 1996). This may be attributed to the fact that organizational behavior in mainland China is radically different from that observed in the West, thus generating challenging comparative studies with interesting results (Shenkar and Ronen, 1987; Shenkar and von Glinow, 1994; Xie, 1996). Since subjects in Hong Kong are relatively easier to access, several studies com-

pared and contrasted Hong Kong samples with US (Ralston et al., 1993; Schermerhorn and Bond, 1992; Perrewe et al., 1995; Westwood and Posner, 1997) and Canadian samples (Okechuka and Man, 1991).

Many studies in this area confirmed the importance of culture. For instance, Leung (1988) showed that compared with US subjects, Chinese subjects showed a stronger preference for negotiation and mediation and a weaker preference for adjudication. The culturally derived explanation was that animosity reduction is a major goal in dispute resolution in a collectivist culture (Triandis, 1995; Chen et al., 1998). However, several studies found empirical anomalies that challenged existing theories. For example, Chen (1995) hypothesized that mainland Chinese employees, because of their presumed preference in collectivism, would prefer more equity-based compensation when compared with their US counterparts. However, he found that mainland Chinese employees in reform-oriented companies actually favor more merit-based pay; US managers behaved exactly the opposite. In another study involving US, Japanese, and Chinese subjects, Bailey et al. (1997, 605) found that the Chinese “consistently departed from predictions” hypothesizing the impact of collectivism on their preference of performance feedback. Citing Schwartz (1994), they argued that the Chinese may “depart from collectivist values in ways that resemble Americans more than Japanese” (Bailey et al., 1997, 620).

Since organizational behavior is influenced by both cultural and institutional forces, results from a Chinese–Western comparison may be confounded by these two forces which are difficult to separate. As a result, several researchers called for investigation of “partially similar” cases to compare institutional variables whereby the impact of culture is controlled (Shenkar and von Glinow, 1994, 69). A small group of studies pursued comparison within Greater China, such as between Singapore and Taiwan (Hsu, 1987) and between Hong Kong and Singapore (Redding and Richardson, 1986; Hong and May, 1993). Shenkar and Ronen (1987, 1990) compared mainland China with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. They showed that organizational members all shared such values as cooperation, which are strongly ingrained in the traditional culture, but sharply differed in their appreciation of promotion, which in mainland China does not provide the same rewards as in the other societies.

Micro comparative researchers have confronted substantial challenges, since most Western models and instruments do not adequately measure the constraints within which Chinese employees operate (Adler et al., 1989; Xie, 1996; Farh et al., 1997, 1998). As a result, instruments developed from indigenous Chinese values may be necessary, such as the Chinese Culture Connection (1987) and the Chinese organizational citizenship behavior measure (Farh et al., 1997). However, such efforts are difficult, because, in addition to being costly, they may render the results incomparable with the rest of the literature based on Western

instruments. Clearly, innovative approaches that can generate plausible, comparable, and cumulative results will be necessary in this area.

## 5.2. Strategic alliances and joint ventures

During the past 2 decades, mainland China experienced rapid growth in foreign direct investment, which made it the world's second largest recipient of such investment behind only the US by the early 1990s. As a result, many macro researchers have focused on strategic alliances and joint ventures involving Chinese and foreign partners (Beamish, 1993). These studies can be divided into three groups. The first group is descriptive accounts of joint venture activities by investor country, industry, and the like. It is found that, as noted earlier, overseas Chinese contributed the bulk of such investment. While Hong Kong investment took the lead throughout the 1980s, by 1991, Taiwanese investment began to replace that from Hong Kong for the leading position (Business Week, 1997b). These findings suggest that the origin of the foreign partner for most mainland Chinese joint ventures is “one that is not particularly foreign” (Beamish, 1993, 37). Foreign firms from various countries exhibit different preferences in partner selection and risk taking (Shroath et al., 1993). For example, Japanese firms, being more risk averse, tend to choose SOEs owned by central or provincial governments as partners, while US and overseas Chinese firms are more willing to team with SOEs owned by local governments (Pan, 1997). Concentrated foreign investment activities started in a few industries such as electronics and light manufacturing along the coastal area, and are now extended to a wide variety of industries such as automobiles, infrastructures, and services in many parts of the country (Mann, 1989; Pearson, 1991; Child and Lu, 1996b).

A second group of studies consist of inquiries based on a few key cases (Daniels et al., 1986; Pye, 1986; Davidson, 1987; Osland and Cavusgil, 1996). For example, Shenkar (1990) used three joint venture cases to draw out lessons of “dos” and “don'ts” for foreign investors. Child and Markoczy (1993) compared and contrasted organizational learning in Chinese and Hungarian joint ventures. Yan and Gray (1994) focused on the bargaining and management of four US–Chinese joint ventures and highlighted the changing bargaining power of partners along the life course of the venture. Peng (2000b) adopted a principal–agent framework to investigate how the Chinese government tried to control the joint ventures.

The third group of studies are large-sample studies on strategic issues, such as entry modes (Tse et al., 1997), partner selection (Luo, 1995, 1997), ownership structure (Shan, 1991; Pan, 1996), investment timing (Luo and Peng, 1998), standardization versus localization (Lu and Bjorkman, 1997), technological leadership (Chow and Fung, 1997), and organizational learning (Luo and Peng, 1999). While the first and second groups of studies highlighted the

uniqueness of operating in mainland China, the third group attempted to link this research with the mainstream literature on global strategic alliances and joint ventures. Therefore, the topics selected to study, such as entry modes, partner selection, and organizational learning, are of broader interest. While this type of research is challenging given the difficulties of obtaining reliable, large-sample data from mainland China, it has become increasingly common. Given mainstream journals' preference for this type of research, it is reasonable to expect that more studies in the future will fall into this category.

Research in this area has been popular for two reasons. First, it is more appealing to multinational enterprises that are in need for critical information about how to enter and operate in mainland China. Also, it resonates well with the development of the mainstream literature on strategic alliances and joint ventures in the past 2 decades (Contractor and Lorange, 1988). While these studies have enriched our knowledge on strategic alliances and joint ventures in general, and these activities in mainland China in particular, they also have certain problems. The primary problem is that most of them have exclusively taken the perspective of the foreign parent firm. While this is understandable, the result is a substantially biased account of an event that is participated by at least two parties. There is clearly a need for more research from the perspective of the mainland Chinese partners (Shenkar and Li, 1999). A second problem is that some of these studies may become obsolete, as more and more foreign firms restructure their holdings and convert joint ventures into wholly owned subsidiaries (Peng, 1997b; Vanhonacker, 1997). The longer a particular foreign investor is involved with a joint venture, the less its need for local knowledge contributed by local partners (Inkpen and Beamish, 1997). Therefore, new research on how foreign firms compete in the region with wholly owned subsidiaries, instead of joint ventures, will be necessary (Peng, 2000a, Chap. 7).

## 6. Conclusion: where do we go from here?

Over 20 years of global interest in management and organization in Greater China has created an expanding and cumulative knowledge base. Rather than being viewed as a parochial area studies interest, research on Greater China increasingly appears in leading disciplinary journals, thus starting to disseminate this knowledge and assert its influence in the mainstream literature. While substantial progress has been achieved in articulating the uniqueness of the Chinese culture and its influence on organizational behavior, a significant amount of future work needs to focus on (1) the evolution of institutions and organizations in Greater China; (2) business strategies of overseas and mainland Chinese firms; (3) comparative micro work taking better control of cultural and institutional forces; and (4) foreign firm strategies in the region evolving from joint ventures to wholly

owned subsidiaries. These substantive areas appear to be able to yield large dividends in future research.

A short review article such as the present one is hardly able to do justice to this growing literature. While our coverage of the publications in the 10 leading journals during the period of 1978–1997 is complete, our review of three substantive areas of research only touches the “tip of an iceberg” or “treasures in the china house.” This article is both a celebration of the achievements in the past 2 decades and a call for more sustained and rigorous research efforts in the coming years. Having overcome substantial difficulties in the past 20 years, researchers will continue to confront substantial challenges. To put these challenges in perspective, Pye (1992, 1162) wrote:

The fundamental problem . . . is that the concepts and theories favored in the disciplines were developed out of assumption about systems which operate quite differently from China, which is more a civilization pretending to be a nation-state. In fact the very concept of “system,” that is, a set of interacting variables in which there is a close fit or matching of cause and effect, has to be greatly modified in the case of China.

On one hand, Greater China represents challenges to most of our theories that are largely derived from research in the West. On the other hand, such research offers fascinating grounds to test and refine the boundaries of existing theories and develop new ones. Methodologically, instrument adjustment and access to organizations and records will continue to pose difficulties to conduct and especially publish research in leading journals, which generally prefer transparency and rigor. Because of our focus on journal publications and substantive areas of research, theoretical and methodological issues are beyond the scope of the present article (see Shenkar, 1994; Shenkar and von Glinow, 1994). Nevertheless, given the increased integration of Greater China within the global economy, it is only natural that research on this region be further integrated with the mainstream literature, thus calling for scholars working in this area to attempt to make larger theoretical and methodological contributions to the global science of management and organization (Peng, 2000a).

While being the first in the literature, our efforts are not without limitations. First, some scholars may disagree with our selection of the 10 journals in the first part of the article, despite our aim to be fair and comprehensive. An alternative method would be to survey active researchers in the field and ask them to nominate the journals to be included (MacMillan, 1991). However, deciding which researchers to survey would inherently be a subjective exercise. Based on informal discussions with a large number of colleagues, we believe that the 10 journals we selected, by and large, capture the outlets in which researchers in this area aim to publish their work. Moreover, in substantive reviews, we

have expanded our coverage beyond the relatively narrow set of 10 journals and noted contributions in numerous other outlets. A second weakness is our failure to review any of the Chinese language contributions. While the goal of this article is to comprehensively cover English language contributions (including those published in Asia in *APJM*), it is important to note that local researchers publishing in Chinese outlets have significantly contributed to the body of knowledge in recent decades. Journals such as *Guan Li Shi Jie (Management World, Beijing)*, *Zhong Guo Gong Ye Jin Li Yan Jiu (China Industrial Economics Research, Beijing)*, and *Guan Li Ke Xue Xue Bao (Journal of Management Science, Taipei)* have emerged to become influential outlets for this research. Unfortunately, time, resources, and journal space constraints have prevented us from undertaking such a bilingual review in this article. Some scholars such as White et al. (1998) have already started to systematically bring Chinese language research into English language journals for wider dissemination. We believe that this will be a worthwhile direction in future attempts to comprehensively map this literature.

In the past 2 centuries, social, economic, and organizational transitions presented golden opportunities for the growth of social sciences such as economics and sociology. At the dawn of the 21st century whereby Greater China is in a state of flux with rapid transitions, management and organization as a discipline may have such an opportunity. As a result, researchers should be there to witness these changes, document them, and, if feasible, lend a helping hand. At the same time, these endeavors hold the potential to greatly enrich the development of the discipline in the new millennium.

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