

# Chinese management studies: a systematic literature review

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this paper is to explore and synthesize empirical research on Chinese organizations since 2017, to contribute to the academic study of Chinese management, and to highlight the main variables through which researchers currently study Chinese corporate management. Furthermore, it aims to provide a comprehensive and culturally informed picture for both researchers and practitioners worldwide, particularly in the Central and Eastern European region, which has been steadily strengthening its economic ties with China over the past decade. The paper follows a systematic literature review approach. Following the steps of the SLR, the 150 most-cited empirical research papers published between 2017 and 2022 were selected from the Web of Science database. Deductive and inductive coding were applied consecutively on the 729 variables obtained from the studies to outline the major research themes. We found that organizational behavior has been the most studied dimension of Chinese organizations, with emphasis on individuals and HRM practices. The second largest stream addresses corporate strategy, dominated by innovation- and sustainability-oriented strategies. At the same time, organizational structure has received less attention recently. The originality of the paper lies in its comprehensive approach – a comprehensive review of Chinese Management Studies (CMS) literature has not been completed since the early 2000s.

**KEYWORDS:** Chinese management; literature review; external environment; strategy; structure; organizational behavior

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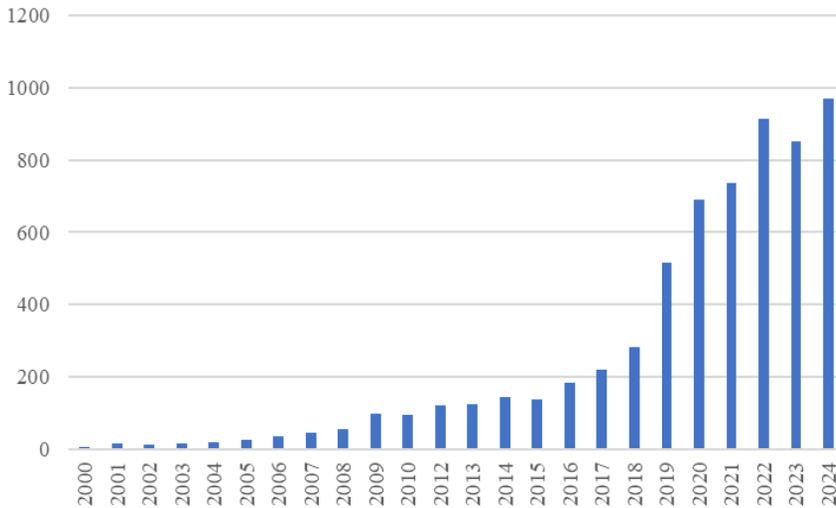
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## 1. Introduction

Scholarly literature on Chinese Management Studies (CMS) has gained confidence in recent decades (Liu et al. 2022). The quantity of academic work – both empirical (e.g., Liang and Gong 2017; Liu et al. 2017; Ren et al. 2021) and theoretical (e.g., Chuang et al. 2015; Li 2014) has shown an upward trend, indicating a surge in interest in China as a management context. This growing body of research is not only relevant within China but has significant implications for economies globally, particularly for emerging markets such as those in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region. Given China's expanding economic ties with CEE countries under frameworks like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the "16+1" cooperation format, understanding Chinese management practices is crucial for policymakers, business leaders, and scholars in the region (Pepermans 2018; Turcsányi – Qiaoan 2020).

In this study, we contribute to the CMS literature by conducting a comprehensive review of topics addressed in recently published empirical papers in the Chinese management context. Unlike previous reviews that focus on specific management subfields, our scope encompasses empirical studies that utilize data from mainland Chinese companies across various management disciplines. This holistic approach enables us to identify key themes in contemporary CMS research, the distribution of academic interest across different management domains, and the potential lessons applicable to CEE economies, where firms increasingly interact with Chinese counterparts through trade, investment, and joint ventures. To our knowledge, such a comprehensive review of Chinese management has not been completed since the early 2000s (Li – Tsui 2002; Peng et al. 2001). Our study differs from previous reviews by specifically focusing on mainland China and emphasizing the content of the studies rather than the contributors. Given the increasing economic interdependence between China and CEE countries, insights from this review can inform both theoretical advancements and practical applications in the CEE business environment.

The relevance of Chinese management is reflected by the increasing number of publications on the topic. Conducting a query in the Web of Science database to identify papers on Chinese management, we find that the steady increase in the number of relevant papers from the new millennium gained momentum at the end of the 2010s, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Distribution of articles published on Chinese management 2000–2024**

Source: Authors, based on Web of Science.

Simultaneously, CMS has emerged as an established research field, supported by dedicated academic outlets such as *Management and Organization Review* and *Chinese Management Studies*. Over the past few decades, China has not only become a dominant force in the global economy and international trade but has also cultivated distinct managerial practices that have attracted academic interest. This growing body of research is prompting discussions on how scholars should approach management studies in a rapidly developing country with a unique external environment (Cheng 2009; Child 2009; Liu – An 2021). While many researchers adopt a geographically neutral perspective (e.g., Kong et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2019), others advocate for incorporating more context-specific theories and variables (Fan et al. 2019; Jing – Van de Ven 2014).

For the CEE region, this debate is particularly relevant. As Chinese companies expand their presence in CEE through investments, acquisitions, and partnerships, understanding Chinese managerial practices becomes essential for fostering successful collaborations. Despite the increasing academic focus on CMS, literature reviews remain scarce, and most focus on specific management subdomains with distinct units of analysis. The only comprehensive reviews of the field (Li – Tsui, 2000; Peng et al. 2001) included not only mainland China but also Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian territories. Both reviews explore the main contributors, the most-cited articles and authors in the field, and the most important topics covered. Several more recent review papers address narrower topics within CMS, such as business ethics (He – Cai 2012; Yin – Quazi

2018), human resource management (Liang et al. 2010; 2012), or supply chain management (Jia – Zsidisin 2014; Li – Sarkis 2022). Another stream of review papers deals with general issues in Chinese management research (Liu – An 2021; Shenkar 1994). However, a holistic synthesis of the contemporary CMS literature that connects findings to economic contexts beyond China, particularly in emerging regions such as CEE, remains absent.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is twofold. First, we seek to collect and organize contemporary CMS research to identify the most frequently studied aspects of Chinese organizations. Second, we highlight underexplored areas of CMS research and propose directions for future studies, particularly those that can advance understanding of the dynamics between Chinese management practices and CEE economic interactions. By doing so, we aim to bridge the gap between CMS research and the practical realities of businesses and policymakers in the CEE region.

## **2. Theoretical background and research question development**

In the following, we introduce the research background and theoretical approach we take to China as a unique management context. First, we address what makes China a unique business environment and the current challenges facing the country and businesses operating within it. This is followed by the introduction of the theoretical approach we use to interpret management and organizations.

### **2.1. China as a business environment**

China's business environment is characterized by unique factors that influence how organizations are managed. Based on academic literature and World Bank country diagnostics, we identified a set of such factors across two major groups: traditional and modern.

#### ***2.1.1. Traditional factors***

Traditionally, the uniqueness of the Chinese business environment is determined by three major factors: politics, the economy, and cultural values. China is a country with a long history of centralization of power, acceptance of inequality, valuation of order and rigid structures, and governance by a one-party system. Even though rapid economic development since the country's opening

up in 1978 has brought about a transformation from a centralized, socialist economy to a market-oriented system, today's China is still a transition economy and still based on five-year plans. The value system conveyed by state politics is also underpinned by the philosophical background of Confucianism, which supports accepting authority and self-sacrifice to uphold the social order (Feng et al. 2019). The Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist ideological background creates a uniquely evolving value system (Froese et al. 2019), with China's unique cultural characteristics being highlighted by multiple value surveys, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1984), the GLOBE project (House, 2004), and the models developed by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012), and Schwartz and Bilsky (1987).

### ***2.1.2. Modern factors***

Even though the more conservative contextual factors of China still account for unique organizational phenomena, one should not forget about the country's more recent issues.

*Striving for sustainable growth: reducing inequalities, pollution, and climate impact.* Even though China is the second-largest economy globally by nominal GDP, many regions remain underdeveloped, resulting in large-scale inequalities. Fast economic growth, industrialization, and technological changes also have a huge impact on the environment, with China being one of the biggest polluters worldwide. Therefore, reducing poverty and inequalities, promoting green energy, and reducing pollution while maintaining sustainable economic growth is one of the main goals of the Chinese economy (World Bank Group 2022).

*Towards an innovation-oriented economy.* Innovation is one of the most effective tools for tackling challenges related to pollution and inequalities (World Bank Group 2019). Promoting innovation can also contribute to China moving ahead in global competition, becoming an innovation economy, and increasing income, while transitioning from the “made in China” to the “created” or “innovated in China” model (Wei et al. 2017). Governance support is crucial for such developments: while technological innovations enjoy governmental and regulatory support, the weak and fast-evolving regulatory environment and less transparent government procedures still pose a challenge, while favoritism toward domestic firms is leading to international trade disputes (Froese et al. 2019).

*Societal changes and HR challenges.* The aging of Chinese society poses a challenge not only to social services (Glinskaya – Feng 2018), but also to the HR of businesses. With foreign companies increasingly present in the country, adopting modern HR practices has become desirable for Chinese employees. In the shift from capital- to talent-oriented companies, attracting and retaining talent

is another major challenge, as turnover is high. To retain talented employees, pay rises are not sufficient: the latter also require careers, training, and autonomy (Froese 2019).

Based on the research goals and contextual background, we formulated the first research question as follows:

RQ1: Which contextual factors (politics, economy, cultural values, sustainability, innovation, societal changes) associated with the Chinese business environment are represented in the most-cited empirical research papers published since 2017?

## 2.2. Theoretical approach – management contingencies

Since it involves taking a comprehensive look at the firm and considering the environmental dimension as well, we build upon a contingency approach to management, which identifies six major dimensions of contingency variables that compose the organizational management system. Even though contingency theory originated in the 1960s (Burns – Stalker 1961; Lawrence – Lorsch 1967), it is still relevant for the research of modern organizations (Burton – Obel 2018; Volberda et al. 2012). Most importantly, alongside management areas within the organization, such as strategy (Burton et al. 2021), structure (Greenwood – Miller 2010; Lawrence – Lorsch 1967), organizational behavior (Drazin – Van de Ven 1985; Luthans – Stewart 1977) and performance (Burton et al. 2004; Burton – Obel 2018; Volberda et al. 2012), it incorporates contextual factors, both internal (Burton et al. 2021; Greenwood – Miller 2010; Volberda et al. 2012) and external (Burton et al. 2004; Burton – Obel 2018; Volberda et al. 2012) to the firm, which is a crucial aspect in this study. In Figure 1 below, we provide a summary of the six major dimensions and the contingency variables identified in the literature.

**Table 1. Contingency approach to management and organizations**

Dimension	Contingency variables
External environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• general environmental factors beyond the organization's boundaries</li> <li>• uncertainty, complexity, unpredictability, and turbulence of the external environment</li> </ul>
Intra-organizational context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organizational resources and internal attributes of the organization</li> <li>• size, ownership, geographical reach and applied technology of the firm</li> <li>• the capabilities and demographic attributes of the workforce and non-human resources possessed by the firm</li> </ul>

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Contingency variables</b>
Organizational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• structural configuration and its specificities</li> <li>• span of control and hierarchical attributes</li> <li>• level of formalization and centralization</li> <li>• devices of integration and coordination</li> </ul>
Organizational strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• long-term planning, goal setting</li> <li>• strategic decisions</li> <li>• strategic focus and general strategy</li> <li>• strategic and goal orientation</li> <li>• generic strategy</li> </ul>
Organizational behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• behavioral aspects of human resources</li> <li>• organizational culture and climate</li> <li>• management and leadership style</li> <li>• interpersonal orientation of members</li> </ul>
Organizational performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overall performance of firm: financial and</li> <li>• non-financial indicators</li> </ul>

Source: Authors.

Based on our research goals and theoretical approach, we formulated the second research question as follows:

RQ2: Which dimensions of the contingency approach (external environment, intra-organizational context, organizational behavior, strategy, structure, performance) are represented in the CMS literature, and what are the major issues within the dimensions?

### 3. Methodology

The goal of this review is to collect the knowledge on management in Chinese organizations. To this end, a systematic literature review (Tranfield et al. 2003) approach was taken. Following the steps of a systematic literature review defined by Bryman (2012), the review agenda comprises four main stages, as introduced below.

#### 3.1. Defining inclusion and exclusion criteria

We sought empirical studies on issues and phenomena within Chinese organizations. Our selection focused on quantitative research examining managerial and organizational practices in Chinese-owned companies based in the People's Republic of China, targeting topics related to any sub-system of general corporate management in the Chinese context. We excluded studies on organ-

izations outside China, research on Chinese-foreign joint ventures, MNEs, and public management issues (e.g., waste or risk management), as well as qualitative studies, as they were underrepresented and incompatible with our hypothesis-driven analytical approach.

### **3.2. Selecting the relevant articles based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria**

Article selection (Figure 2) was based on Web of Science core collection searches from 2017 to 2022. We chose Web of Science for its coverage of top journals, advanced search features suitable for comprehensive queries, and the ability to sort results by impact (citations). The 2017-2022 timeframe ensured the inclusion of recent research on Chinese management, typically using data from around 2010 or later.

### **3.3. Evaluation of selected studies**

The initial selection yielded 742 articles, each screened by title, keywords, and abstract using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Since full texts were not yet reviewed, some articles could later be excluded. After in-depth examination, we removed studies that were (1) non-empirical or non-quantitative, (2) published in non-peer-reviewed journals, or (3) focused on regions or topics beyond our inclusion criteria.

### **3.4. Analysis of the final pool of studies**

The analysis of the final study pool was an iterative process. Articles were grouped in batches of 50 by citation count, with data collection and analysis after each batch. Predefined data from each article were entered into standardized tables, including main and control variables, their descriptions, mean and standard deviation values, sample characteristics (region and industry), and identified variable relationships. After each phase, these tables were aggregated.

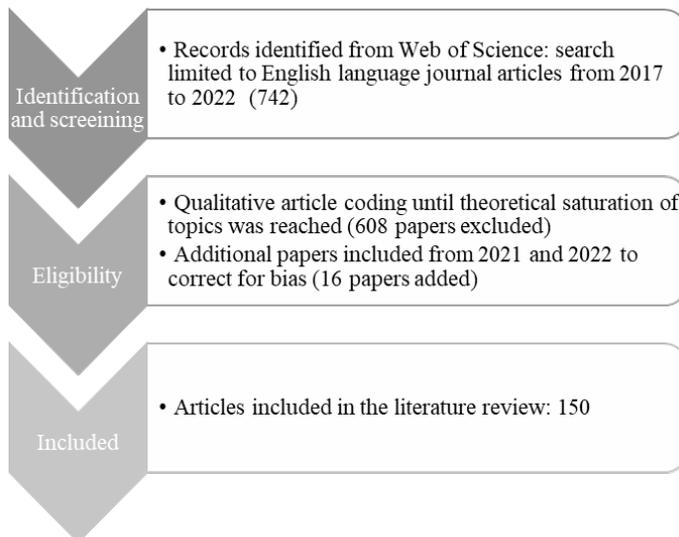
The analytical phase consisted of three main steps that combined deductive and inductive coding (Azungah 2018). We anticipated that the data would align with the core concepts of the contingency approach (deductive step), but that the contingency variables within the six main dimensions should be derived without any preconceptions (inductive step). Step 1 (deductive coding) involved initial coding of the variables based on a predefined start list: the six main dimen-

sions of the contingency approach served as first-level codes, as shown in Table 1 of section 2.2.

In Step 2, a second-level code (keyword) was assigned to each variable inductively to capture the main idea and the main organizational issue. Validation of the coding was carried out through member checking (Jonsen – Jehn 2009) – two researchers conducted the coding separately, then the results were compared, with approximately 80% consistency. The differing results were discussed and resolved with the involvement of a third researcher, with agreement reached in every instance.

During the analysis, we applied the theoretical saturation verification method (Low 2019) to the aggregated tables, based on the ratio of first-level codes and their content. Theoretical saturation was reached after the third round of analysis, as the ratio of first-level codes did not change significantly and no new contingencies emerged. At this point, the results yielded 134 papers, which we complemented with 16 further papers from 2021 and 2022, years underrepresented in the initial sample due to the search result items being sorted by citation numbers (to indicate impact), resulting in 150 papers in total.

## Figure 2. Overview of article selection process



Source: Authors.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Contextual factors represented in current CMS research

The political and cultural environment has traditionally been regarded as a major determinant of Chinese organizations' operations; however, while this still might be true, CMS literature since 2017 seems to focus on the recent economic agenda and social and environmental issues, such as the transition to a globally competitive, innovation-based economy with green, sustainable growth. Among the traditional factors, often referred to as major determinants of the Chinese context, such as political and economic traditions and cultural values, the latter two were barely present in recent empirical papers. Compared with the other variables, politics was also underrepresented. Research trends over recent years suggest that these factors may already have been widely investigated, thus empirical management research focuses on recent issues in the Chinese economy, mainly innovation (Zhang et al. 2017), sustainability (Yang, Li et al. 2019), and HRM issues (Zhang et al. 2020).

### 4.2. Contingency dimensions in the CMS field

Every variable was classified into one of the six dimensions, with each dimension containing several variables. This finding validates our contingency framework, as the six dimensions were sufficient to encompass all variables identified in the papers, and each variable could be paired with a dimension. Organizational behavior-related variables were investigated in most papers, whereas structure was examined in only a few. Table 2 summarizes the most frequently emerging contingency variables, grouped into the six dimensions.

**Table 2. Results of coding of variables based on the contingency dimensions**

Dimension	No. / % of variables	No. / % of articles	Main groups of contingency variables	No. / % of variables	No. / % of articles
External environment	58 / 8%	34 / 23%	industry competition	11 / 2%	10 / 7%
			market uncertainty	12 / 2%	8 / 5%
			environmental issues	13 / 2%	9 / 6%
			stakeholder relationships	14 / 2%	10 / 7%

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>No. / % of variables</b>	<b>No. / % of articles</b>	<b>Main groups of contingency variables</b>	<b>No. / % of variables</b>	<b>No. / % of articles</b>
Intra-organizational context	98 / 14%	51 / 34%	leadership's attributes	25 / 3%	12 / 8%
			firm-level abilities and capabilities	28 / 4%	20 / 13%
			members' abilities and capabilities	16 / 2%	14 / 9%
			ownership	22 / 3%	12 / 8%
Organizational behavior	341 / 48%	103 / 69%	individuals in the organization	117 / 16%	51 / 34%
			organizational culture	79 / 11%	51 / 34%
			HRM practices	55 / 8%	29 / 19%
			leader behavior	59 / 8%	32 / 21%
Performance	71 / 10%	42 / 28%	firm performance	42 / 6%	22 / 15%
			employee performance	19 / 3%	12 / 8%
Strategy	141 / 20%	69 / 46%	green strategy	44 / 6%	26 / 17%
			stakeholders – strategic orientation	26 / 4%	16 / 11%
			innovation – strategic orientation	35 / 5%	26 / 17%
			strategic orientation – generic strategy	14 / 2%	8 / 5%
Structure	19 / 3%	17 / 11%	no clear groups		

Note: the largest groups of contingency variables are included, which represent the majority of the given dimension. Source: Authors.

#### **4.2.1. External environment**

Regarding the industrial environment, the most important factor is the level of competition, typically measured by market share (Lin et al. 2019; Ren et al. 2021), and sometimes by managerial or employee perceptions about competitor pressure (Dai et al. 2018).

Market uncertainty mostly covers uncertainty originating from various stakeholders (e.g., demand and supply uncertainty) and technological changes. The degree of supply and demand uncertainty is a major influencing factor in organizations, which is often represented in CMS literature as well (Hou et al. 2019; Yang et al. 2017; Zhou et al. 2019). On the other hand, as innovation and the technological changes it leads to are national priorities, these factors make up a large

share of contingency variables used in recent studies (Chen, Yang, et al. 2018; Hu et al. 2018; Pan et al. 2021). Environmental issues emerge in multiple papers from different perspectives: industry characteristics (Jiang et al. 2020), political pressure or support (Zhang, Liang, et al. 2020), customer pressure (Dai et al. 2018) and the regulatory environment (Wang et al. 2018). The different stakeholders are also addressed: mostly political bodies (support perceived or received) and suppliers (e.g., quality of supplier relationships) (Shu et al. 2020; Yang et al. 2017). These findings are particularly relevant for CEE businesses operating in highly regulated environments and engaging with China through foreign direct investment (FDI) and joint ventures.

#### *4.2.2. Intra-organizational context*

The majority of the variables in this dimension can be grouped into four major themes. First, leadership attributes, such as the gender diversity of top management and the educational and professional backgrounds of top management, including their foreign experience and social networks (He – Jiang 2019). Second, firm-level abilities and capabilities, where most of the variables measure the financial capabilities to execute certain functions and strategies (Zou et al. 2019). Knowledge, innovation, and the protection of the environment are important variables as well (Yang, Jiang et al. 2019). Third, members' abilities and capabilities, including the level of employees' education, their professional background, such as tenure and work experience (Phong Ba Le – Le 2017; Shahab et al. 2018), and work-related skills and competences, including interpersonal skills (Zhao – Xia 2017). Given the growing trend of Chinese firms investing in the CEE region, local firms must understand the expectations and human resource strategies of their Chinese counterparts. Fourth, ownership, mainly distinguishing between family and state ownership (Xu et al. 2019; Ye – Li, 2021). Our review does not include foreign-owned companies or joint ventures, but these are highly relevant for CEE firms navigating Chinese investment and ownership models.

#### *4.2.3. Organizational behavior*

One of the largest sets of variables in this dimension addresses the individuals in the organizations and has two major themes: employee abilities (Cai – Du 2017; Cooke et al. 2019; Hu et al. 2018) and employee behavior (Huang et al. 2018; Tang, Wang, et al. 2017; Wattoo et al. 2020), which represents the majority of this category and includes variables related to employees' work-related and general workplace behavior (motivation, interpersonal, and emotional). Organizational

culture-related variables are used in the same number of papers as those about individuals. They include supervisor-employee relationships and employee-employee relationships (Chong et al. 2018; Liu – Shi, 2017), as well as common values and attitudes about innovation, change, and knowledge-sharing behaviors (Le et al. 2020; Song, Yang, et al. 2020), and behavioral variables, which are related to organizational structure (e.g., about formalization of rules) (Chong et al. 2018). Variables about leader behavior are rated by employees, based on their perceptions about their leaders' abilities, capabilities, behaviors, and leadership style (Chong et al. 2018; Newman et al. 2019), or by top management members about their own abilities and behaviors (Khan et al. 2020; Zhang et al. 2017). Variables related to HRM practices include the general perceptions of employees (Chen, Jiang, et al. 2018; Tang, Yu, et al. 2017) and the intentions of management (Ma et al. 2017; Wang – Xu 2017) about HR practices in general, the reward system, training, performance evaluation, appraisal, work scheduling, and career opportunities. Given that many Chinese firms are expanding into CEE, understanding these behavioral and cultural factors can help CEE businesses effectively collaborate with Chinese investors and employees.

#### *4.2.4. Performance*

Firm performance is measured by financial and non-financial indicators. Most often, it is measured by profit, sales, return on assets and investments, market share, cash flow, overall efficiency, growth rates, and from objective- (clearly quantified) (Zhang et al. 2017), subjective- (managerial perception) (Wei et al. 2021), or from relative- (compared to competitors) (Feng et al. 2018) points of view. Non-financial indicators include variables about employee performance (Tang et al. 2017; Yang et al. 2021), such as quality of work, task performance, punctuality, effectiveness, and efficiency, as rated by supervisors, highlighting the growing importance of employees in organizations. Performance-related variables are almost exclusively used as dependent variables, suggesting that they are mainly applied as an indicator of the impact of the other dimensions. This insight is useful for CEE firms seeking to benchmark themselves against Chinese competitors and partners.

#### *4.2.5. Strategy*

Variables related to corporate strategy fall into four major groups. Green strategy variables address issues related to sustainable management practices (e.g., reduced consumption of energy and materials, disclosure of environmental

data) (Shahab et al. 2020) and sustainability-related innovation (e.g., relevant R&D investments, number of green patents) (Song et al. 2020), as the main strategic orientation of the organization. Stakeholders as a strategic focus for firms is also a significant research direction (Choi et al. 2019; Jiang et al. 2020) and primarily addresses CSR issues for Chinese firms, such as engaging local communities and other stakeholders and applying fair business practices. Innovation is another important strategic orientation dealt with in empirical research (Chen, Yang, et al. 2018; Zhou et al. 2019), mainly using variables related to technological advancements and R&D investments in product and process development. A large body of research examines the generic strategies of firms, and while the low-cost strategy is still prominent, variables related to differentiation strategies appear more often. For CEE firms seeking partnerships or competition with Chinese businesses, understanding these strategic priorities can inform their own corporate strategies.

#### **4.2.6. Structure**

Eighteen variables were coded to this dimension, mostly dealing with different aspects of coordination (e.g., communication between different functional departments) (Yu et al. 2019) and configuration (e.g., organizational forms and decision-making patterns) (Hughes et al. 2019). This dimension is not only under-represented but also lacks clearly distinguishable groups of contingencies; the variables are diverse. This supports the notion that HR and strategy are the most important aspects in current organizational practices and research – as foreign companies and foreign HR practices become more popular and the growth pattern of the Chinese economy changes, these management areas clearly dominate the field.

Given the increasing integration of Chinese firms into the CEE economic landscape, understanding these structural dimensions can aid CEE businesses in managing joint ventures and foreign direct investment from China. Moreover, with China's evolving economic model and the increasing adoption of foreign management practices, these structural considerations will likely gain more prominence in future CMS research.

## **5. Limitations and future research directions**

While the scope of this review is substantial, it is shaped by several limitations. First, our dataset is restricted to the Web of Science and to the most-cited quantitative studies from 2017–2022. Expanding the database's scope (e.g., to Scopus

or Google Scholar) or including less-cited and qualitative research could capture emerging or fringe topics that are underrepresented but potentially influential.

Also, while the dispute over universal versus indigenous theoretical approaches is ongoing in the CMS field, we did not include the theoretical approaches used in the research papers in the sample, nor the relationships among the examined variables. Mapping theoretical trends—such as the adoption of Yin-Yang logic, paradox theory, or institutional logics—could bridge gaps between Western management paradigms and culturally embedded Chinese practices. Future empirical work could benefit from investigating how these variables interact across contexts. For example, how do changes in environmental regulation or generational workforce expectations influence leadership behavior and strategic outcomes? Addressing such questions would enrich both CMS theory and its practical application in emerging economies.

## 6. Conclusion and discussion

Compared to earlier syntheses of Chinese management studies (Li – Tsui 2002; Peng et al. 2001), this review highlights a clear evolution in empirical research since 2017. While earlier work emphasized transitional market reforms, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and cultural influences such as Confucianism and guanxi, recent studies show a marked shift toward understanding strategic innovation, sustainability, and individualized organizational behavior.

The most salient trend is the growing focus on human-centric variables, including employee behavior, leadership style, and HRM practices. These changes reflect China's transition from a production-centered model to a knowledge- and innovation-based economy. In parallel, corporate strategies increasingly address global sustainability concerns and technological competitiveness, aligning with national policies like “Made in China 2025.”

This evolution is highly relevant for CEE economies. As Chinese firms increase their investment in the CEE region, understanding these shifts will enable local companies to better engage with their Chinese counterparts. For instance, firms in CEE can benefit from recognizing the emphasis Chinese enterprises place on strategic HR practices and green innovation.

Our findings also reveal under-researched areas. Organizational structure remains sparsely examined, possibly indicating that digital coordination tools and agile management frameworks have outpaced traditional structural inquiries. Similarly, political and cultural variables, long central to CMS, are now addressed more indirectly—suggesting either theoretical saturation or a pivot toward addressing contemporary challenges such as environmental pressures and global competition.

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