

## Challenges and Solutions in Publishing Phenomenon-based Chinese Management Research in Top-tier Journals: My Journey

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## **Challenges and Solutions in Publishing Phenomenon-based Chinese Management Research in Top-tier Journals: My Journey**

### **ABSTRACT**

Phenomenon-based research involves uncovering context-specific mechanisms underlying complex organizational realities and, when applied to Chinese contexts, offers valuable potential to extend and refine global management theories. Drawing on three illustrative studies on person–environment fit (Chuang et al., 2015), CEO humility (Ou et al., 2014), and authoritarian leadership (Huang et al., 2015) respectively, the editorial highlights how each exemplifies different stages in the evolution of theories, from indigenous, middle-range insights to universal, general frameworks. In doing so, it addresses the challenges and potential solutions for publishing phenomenon-based Chinese management research in premier journals. Across these cases, several recurring challenges emerge, including difficulties in positioning context-specific findings within existing theoretical frameworks, translating culturally embedded constructs for international audiences, and balancing cultural authenticity with global understanding. The authors also reflect on practical challenges such as building research partnerships and gaining organizational support within Chinese contexts. By comparing experiences across these studies, the editorial offers guidance on how phenomenon-based research can deepen theoretical innovation while maintaining methodological rigor and practical relevance. Lastly, it argues that Chinese management research plays a vital role in advancing universal management knowledge and offers opportunities for future research.

*Keywords:* phenomenon-based research, evolution of theories, indigenous research, universal research

Phenomenon-based management research aims to “identify, capture, document, and conceptualize a specific phenomenon in order to facilitate the creation and advancement of knowledge” (Lumineau, Kong, & Dries, 2025). It produces insights that are directly applicable to real-world organizational challenges by revealing the intricate, context-specific mechanisms that shape complex phenomena. It can thus advance the creation of new perspectives and theories. However, conducting phenomenon-based research presents several challenges. One complexity arises in culture-based phenomenon-driven studies, where researchers often face common obstacles. These include theoretical challenges, such as identifying meaningful research questions that engage local phenomena; methodological challenges, such as accurately interpreting constructs within indigenous contexts; and practical challenges, such as obtaining relevant samples and demonstrating implications for managerial practice.

Despite the possible challenges, the management field has shown a growing interest in culture-related research from various parts of the world over the past several decades. A recent article published in *Management and Organization Review (MOR)* (You, Jia, Wang, Liu, & Yin, 2024) examined Chinese-context articles in six leading general management journals and found that, from 1985 to 2023, the total number of such publications per year increased steadily from 1 to 34. Moreover, *MOR* has consistently published an average of about 14 such articles per year since its inception in 2005, with a cumulative total of 894 China-related articles across these journals during this period.

The goal of this editorial is to identify key challenges and propose practical solutions for publishing phenomenon-based Chinese management research in top journals. We focus on phenomenon-based Chinese management research because China is playing an increasingly significant role in the global economy, exhibiting distinctive innovation dynamics shaped by its

unique economic, political, and cultural context. Understanding China-specific approaches to management is therefore essential, not only for enriching global management scholarship but also for providing insights to organizations navigating increasing geopolitical complexity worldwide (Chen, Friedman, & McAllister, 2017).<sup>1</sup>

One systematic way to understand the role of novel phenomena in theory building is through the framework of the *evolution of theories* (Chen, 2025). This framework distinguishes between two dimensions: explanatory scope, referring to the number of outcomes (Y) a theory explains, and contextual scope, referring to the number of contexts in which a theoretical prediction ( $X \rightarrow Y$ ) holds. Together, these dimensions form four quadrants: (1) indigenous, middle-range (one indigenous outcome); (2) indigenous, general (two or more indigenous outcomes); (3) universal, middle-range (one outcome across two or more contexts); and (4) universal, general (two or more outcomes across two or more contexts). Phenomenon-based Chinese management theory typically begins as an indigenous, middle-range theory with the potential to evolve into a universal, general theory as it expands the outcomes and contexts in which it is tested.

To provide insights into the challenges and solutions involved in publishing phenomenon-based Chinese management research, members of the *MOR* editorial team of three micro-field studies published in top journals that inform the evolution of theories, contribute to this editorial.<sup>2</sup> Chuang, Hsu, Wang, and Judge (2015) advanced an indigenous, middle-range theory by exploring person–environment fit in the Chinese context using a qualitative approach that integrates indigenous concepts such as Confucian relationalism, selfhood, and appropriateness.

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<sup>1</sup> This editorial distinguishes phenomenon-based Chinese management research from studies that merely employ Chinese data. The former aims to theorize unique Chinese phenomena by treating context as central, whereas the latter utilizes China as an empirical site to validate established general theories and may not have indigenous implications. The three studies illustrated in this editorial fit into the former category.

<sup>2</sup> We note that these studies were not originally designed to align with the trajectory described in the framework of the evolution of theories, nor did the authors make such theoretical claims. This specific conceptualization was provided solely by the editorial authors.

Ou and her colleagues' series of studies on CEO humility extended the once Western concept (i.e., initially an indigenous, middle-range theory) into a universal, general theory by testing it across both Western (e.g., the U.S.) and Eastern (e.g., China) contexts with expanded outcomes. Finally, Huang, Xu, Chiu, Lam, and Farh (2015) enriched a universal, general theory – authoritarian leadership – that also has Chinese relevance, by identifying boundary conditions of its effects on long-term revenue growth using data from Chinese firms. While these three studies are not indigenous in the strict sense of theorizing a uniquely Chinese phenomenon, they demonstrate how the interaction between contemporary theories and the cultural context can produce new management insights.

In the following sections, each study highlights the unique challenges encountered and the strategies the authors employed to address them when conducting and publishing their research.

#### **A JOURNEY ON DEVELOPING A CHINESE INDIGENOUS CONSTRUCT**

Does West “Fit” with East? In search of a Chinese model of person–environment fit, authored by Aichia Chuang, Ryan Shuwei Hsu, An-Chih Wang and Timothy Judge, published at the *Academy of Management Journal* in 2015.

Now, ten years after the original publication of the Chinese model of person-environment (PE) fit (Chuang et al., 2015), this editorial offers an opportunity for us to revisit our backstage narrative. We reflect on two major challenges we encountered, the resolutions we devised, and the insights this journey offers for phenomenon-based Chinese management research.

Our study contextualizes the concept of PE fit, originally theorized within Western cultural contexts, in a Chinese cultural setting. Western PE fit theory conceptualizes fit primarily in terms of *congruence*, a product of individualistic assumptions (Schneider, 2001). Drawing on an interview-based qualitative study, we argue that the Chinese conceptualization of PE fit is shaped

by Confucian relationalism, which emphasizes a sense of *appropriateness* rather than congruence. Our findings also reveal a unique phenomenon we term “incongruent-yet-fit,” in which individuals report a sense of fit despite observable incongruence. We theorize that this experience is made possible by the Confucian conception of selfhood, characterized by self-cultivation and self-transcendence.

**Challenge #1: How do we position context-specific insights in the context of the existing theory?**

This qualitative research unfolded with fewer obstacles than expected – this was evident in the fact that the core findings presented in our first draft were largely retained throughout the review process. Thus, we focused on streamlining ideas for clarity and coherence. The major challenge emerged during peer review was about how our research related to existing PE fit theory. This proved particularly challenging because given our novel use of both an inductive and culturally grounded approach, it was difficult to make a direct comparison with existing literature. We could present our results either as an inductive finding or as a cultural finding, with each framing a distinct yet meaningful contribution.

In the end, we decided to position our paper as an examination of a cultural framework of PE fit (Schneider, 2001) and to tell a story about how cultural orientations, such as individualism and relationalism, shape distinct ways of understanding the person, the environment, and their interconnection. One example of how we adopted this intersection was: a theme we identified as Chinese PE fit was cultivation, which could be mistaken for the Western notion of learning. We argued that, in Western contexts, learning typically refers to acquiring knowledge about the external world to enhance control or creativity (Li, 2012). In contrast, cultivation is rooted in Confucian thought and emphasizes self-transformation and moral self-perfection. We surmised

that in Confucian culture, individuals feel a sense of fit when engaging in this inner process of becoming. Another example was: another theme, competence at work, may resemble demands–abilities fit. However, we maintained that in the Chinese context, individuals do not perceive fit until their competence is recognized by others, meaning experiencing fit depends on fulfilling one’s role-based responsibilities to the satisfaction of relevant others. This reflects the relational nature of the self, which is defined in reference to others, and it departs from mere congruence between job demands and employee abilities.

***Takeaway #1:** While comparison with existing theories is typically expected, researchers may find no exact equivalent in the literature to serve as a point of contrast. Therefore, comparison may involve developing a culture-specific framework and highlighting the differences that stem from distinct cultural foundations underlying these frameworks.*

### **Challenge #2: How do we preserve culturally embedded concepts in translation?**

A major challenge in publishing Chinese management research in English-language journals is that conveying contextualized concepts involves more than translating words. This challenge is epistemological, as it concerns how knowledge is constructed, interpreted, and communicated through the use of cross-language (Outila, Piekkari, & Mihailova, 2019; Tietze & Dick, 2012) to international readers.

In the early stages of our inquiry, we chose to theorize in Mandarin, guided by the belief that using the native language of the cultural context is essential for achieving deep contextualization (Peterson & Pike, 2002). We recognized that translating concepts too early could constrain our conceptual thinking and risk erasing key cultural nuances. Therefore, we intentionally deferred translation until the later phases of our theorizing. Even then, we faced difficult choices. Should

we use Romanized pinyin to remain faithful to the original concept, or adopt English approximations to enhance accessibility? For example, should we present the Confucian foundational virtue as *rén* (仁), which may seem unfamiliar to many readers, or as *benevolence*, which only partially captures its essence (Chan, 1955)? Each choice carried trade-offs between cultural fidelity and cross-cultural accessibility (Barros & Alcadipani, 2022).

This dilemma surfaced repeatedly with key concepts in our study, including “appropriateness,” which we argue is central to the Chinese conceptualization of PE fit. During the review process, reviewers expressed confusion about this term. This stemmed from the fact that, although we had provided a definition, we had not yet offered the cultural context necessary to convey the concept’s full meaning. Over time, we learned that effective translation also requires providing contextual scaffolding, including the original Chinese character, its usage in classical texts, interpretations from relevant humanities scholarship, and how the concept functions within our framework of PE fit. For example, we explained that “appropriateness” is derived from the Confucian concept *yí* (宜), which refers to doing what is fitting. We then connected this concept to our empirical findings. This reflective process deepened our understanding of the concepts we were working with (see also, Outila et al., 2019; Peterson & Pike, 2002). We came to recognize that contextualization is not a one-time task midway through theorizing, but a continuous and evolving part of conceptual development.

***Takeaway #2:*** *Translating a concept requires more than conveying its literal meaning. It also involves communicating the cultural and contextual richness that gives the concept its depth and significance. Contextualization is not a one-time act but a continuous process in the meaningful development of theoretical constructs.*

## **MY REFLECTION ON CEO HUMILITY RESEARCH IN CHINA**

This section features the series of research Amy Y. Ou and colleagues conducted on the topic of CEO humility, published in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Science*, *Journal of Management* and *Leadership Quarterly*.

When invited to reflect on my CEO humility research in China as an example of “phenomenon-based Chinese management” research, I hesitated, unsure if my work truly fit that category. Sixteen years ago, when I began my dissertation, resources on humility were limited. I explored everything available, from psychology and management to philosophy and religion, including both Western and Chinese literature. Without explicit consideration of contexts, I then refined the current conceptualization of CEO humility and tested a couple of models in China. My research reveals that CEO humility embodies indigenous insights and demonstrates how this humility manifests in the Chinese context (Ou, Tsui, Kinicki, Waldman, Xiao, & Song, 2014; Zhang, Ou, Tsui, & Wang, 2017). Over the years, I extended my studies to samples collected from the West, replicating some findings from China and identifying new outcomes and boundary conditions (Ou, Waldman, & Peterson, 2018; Ou, Lu, Li, Chung, & Chen, 2024).

Therefore, I cannot claim that CEO humility is an indigenous construct or phenomenon in China, because it was first developed in the West. However, because humility is a deep-rooted virtue in Chinese culture, China served as an appropriate context for testing a potentially universal theory. Following Chen’s (2025) *Evolution of Theories* framework, my work helps advance humility, originally a Western concept, from the indigenous, middle-range stage (examining a limited set of outcomes within one context) to the universal, general stage (testing broader outcomes across multiple contexts). Here is my reflection on testing a potentially universal theory with strong relevance to China.

**Challenge #1: Gaining support for testing a universal theory in the Chinese context**

China offers both theoretical and practical advantages for testing my research models on CEO humility. Theoretically, China is an appropriate context, as my readings of the literature and my personal experience as a Chinese native reinforced my belief that humility is deeply embedded in traditional Chinese culture and philosophy, including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. In addition, China's pluralistic cultural norms and unique economic stage adds novelty to testing generalizable theories.

Practically, universities and organizations in China can offer unparalleled support for management research. Chinese business schools have thrived since the 2000s, creating rapidly growing MBA and EMBA alumni networks that serve as invaluable data sources. On the other hand, domestic organizations eagerly view collaborations with overseas researchers as opportunities to learn about Western management practices and address pressing challenges. The key question, however, is how to secure their support.

My project presented a level of complexity likely unfeasible elsewhere, as it involves a multilevel theory on how humility affects CEO's leadership behaviors (individual level), top management team dynamics (team level), organizational climate (organization level), and middle manager work attitudes and behaviors (individual level). The research design requires archival data on organizational characteristics and two-wave surveys involving CEOs, all top management team members, and their subordinating middle managers.

Initially, I doubted whether my theory could ever be tested, but my advisor Prof. Anne Tsui encouraged me, saying, "*Doors will open, and resources will flood in when you have a research question that people truly care about.*" With her help, I persuaded university partners and executives of the importance of my research questions, assured them of confidentiality, delivered customized corporate reports on CEO leadership, top management team dynamics, and strategic

ambidexterity, and organized a free workshop for all participating organizations. These efforts ensured the project's successful execution.

***Takeaway #1:** Raising research questions that combine theoretical value with important practical relevance to managers is essential for gaining support to test a universal theory in the Chinese context.*

**Challenge #2: Generating unexpected indigenous insights on a potentially universal theory**

Studying humility in China has yielded unexpected indigenous insights that significantly deepening my understanding of the construct. Initially, I assumed humility would be widely embraced as a leadership quality in China. However, deeper engagement with local managers in China and reflections on the Chinese context during the publication process, where reviewers pushed for justification of the research setting, revealed that this assumption could not be taken for granted. As Ou et al. (2014) noted, China's rapid economic growth and increasing global interactions have introduced Western cultural and business values that emphasize self-confidence and individualism. Additionally, traditional Chinese values impose varied expectations for leaders. While Confucianism and Taoism promote humility in leadership, China's high-power distance culture emphasizes authority and hierarchy.

I vividly recall sharing my findings with Chinese CEOs and referring to humility as “谦卑” (*qian bei*). To my surprise, some executives pushed back, arguing that the term was overly self-deprecating and incompatible with effective leadership in China. Instead, they suggested “谦虚” (*qian xu*), a term closer to modesty—an outward expression that may not necessarily reflect the intrinsic humility discussed in the English-language literature. This feedback compelled me to improve my conceptualization of humility by differentiating cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions of humility. I also revisited my memos from corporate visits and

interview transcripts, ultimately uncovering indigenous insights about the nuanced manifestation of CEO humility in the Chinese context. This experience is both humbling and generative, underscoring the importance of incorporating cultural context into the study of potentially universal theories and demonstrating how unexpected feedback can enrich theoretical understanding.

*Takeaway #2: Engaging deeply with local stakeholders and being open to unexpected feedback can uncover nuanced, indigenous insights that enrich the contextualized understanding of a potentially universal theory, ensuring that research is both contextually relevant and globally meaningful.*

## **TRANSFORMING CHINESE PHENOMENA INTO UNIVERSAL THEORIES**

When authoritarian leaders outperform transformational leaders: Firm performance in a harsh economic environment, authored by Xu Huang, Eric Xu, Warren Chiu, Catherine Lam, and Larry Farh, published at the *Academy of Management Discoveries* in 2015.

When Farh and Cheng (2000) developed the theory of paternalistic leadership—categorized into authoritarianism, benevolence, and morality—they framed it primarily as an indigenous construct. Early research on paternalistic leadership appeared mainly in Chinese-language journals. Over the last decade, however, a growing body of work on this topic has been published in internationally reputable journals (e.g., Schaubroeck, Shen, & Chong, 2016; Wang, Tsai, Wang, & Dai, 2023; Zhu et al., 2025), with most studies focusing on the authoritarian dimension.

My colleagues and I contributed to this discourse through our paper, “When Authoritarian Leaders Outperform Transformational Leaders,” in *Academy of Management Discoveries* (Huang, Xu, Chiu, Lam, & Farh, 2015). This study aimed to bridge context-specific paternalistic leadership with universal leadership theories. In this section, I detail how we: (1) developed

research questions from real-world observations; (2) empirically linked Chinese authoritarian leadership to the universal theory of transformational leadership, and (3) generated a novel theoretical perspective from our findings.

### **Challenge #1: How do we develop the research questions?**

In 2008, while teaching a leadership course to senior executives from China's leading telecommunications firms, one executive challenged the practical utility of transformational leadership. He argued that within his state-owned enterprise—one of China's largest telecom companies—authoritarian leadership was more effective for driving performance, given China's unique context and industry demands. Many peers in the class echoed this view, noting that transformational approaches felt "too soft," whereas employees in this traditional sector were accustomed to "strong" leadership. This critique sparked vigorous classroom debate. In response, I proposed collaborating with the executive on a research project to directly test his proposition: authoritarian leaders outperform transformational leaders in enhancing firm performance.

***Takeaway #1:** When experienced practical managers disagree with established universal theories, it opens up opportunities to refine existing theories or develop new ones.*

### **Challenge #2: How do we empirically test our ideas?**

We then launched our scientific expedition. The executive—serving as general manager of the firm's provincial-level company—oversaw 113 county-level subsidiaries and more than 10,000 employees. My co-authors and I first traveled thousands of miles to visit a dozen county subsidiaries across the province. During site visits, we interviewed employees at multiple levels to document their experiences under their subsidiary heads' leadership. This revealed substantial regional variation in how employees perceived and responded to "strong" versus "soft"

leadership approaches. We also compiled extensive data on specific leadership behaviors exhibited by these subsidiary heads.

Next, we developed a preliminary model comparing the relative impacts of subsidiary heads' authoritarian and transformational leadership on firm performance, with county-level economic development as a proposed boundary condition. A team of 13 research assistants was assembled to administer surveys. Within three days, we visited 17+ cities province-wide, collecting questionnaire data from 510 middle managers across 102 subsidiaries. These managers evaluated the authoritarian and transformational leadership styles of their direct supervisors (subsidiary heads). We further tracked subsidiary revenue growth at four-month and one-year intervals post-survey.

We found that subsidiary heads' transformational leadership was not associated with revenue growth in counties with either weak or strong economic development (i.e., GDP per capita, GDP growth, average population income, and retail sales per capita). Interestingly, authoritarian leadership was positively related to four-month and 12-month revenue growth in counties with weak economic development, but this link was not significant in counties with strong economic development.

***Takeaway #2:** Subjecting practical problems to rigorous scientific testing is the best way to address challenges to our theories.*

### **Challenge #3: How do we generate novel theoretical insights?**

Early manuscript versions were rejected by three major management journals, primarily due to the disconnect between the authoritarian leadership construct and mainstream theoretical paradigms. Notably, while our findings challenge established links between transformational leadership and firm performance (e.g., Ling, Simsek, Lubatkin, & Veiga, 2008), we initially

lacked an overarching theoretical explanation for authoritarian leadership's superior performance to transformational leadership's—particularly in nations with underdeveloped economies, such as China.

At a co-author's suggestion, we submitted our manuscript to *Academy of Management Discoveries* (AMD)—a journal prioritizing unique data and rigorous methodology over deductive hypotheses, encouraging novel theoretical insights from findings. In this AMD paper, rather than attributing results to "unique Chinese cultural context" or seeking culture-specific explanations, we attempted to draw from existing leadership theories to develop parsimonious and culture-free explanations based on our empirical findings in China.

Specifically, we advanced a theory of authoritarian leadership's functionality. Moving beyond Farh and Cheng's (2000) culture-bound proposition, we frame authoritarianism as a universal construct yielding instrumental benefits in harsh environments. We posit its efficacy in ensuring operational efficiency and securing compliance transcends cultural boundaries. Recent papers published in international journals corroborate this, demonstrating that authoritarian leadership deters employee deviance (Zheng, Huang, Graham, Redman, & Hu, 2020), motivates ethical voicing (Zheng, Graham, Farh, & Huang, 2021), elicits supervisor-directed citizenship when meeting follower expectations (Wang et al., 2023), and inspires employee awe and thus enhances their performance (Zhu et al., 2025). Our own research further shows authoritarian control activates challenge stressors to improve performance—a finding replicated in both China and the UK (Chen, Huang, Sun, Zheng, Graham, & Jiang, 2024).

Sixteen years ago, Leung (2009: 123-124) advocated translating China's indigenous insights into universal theories, noting: "Leadership theories developed in the West are shaped by its cultural and institutional forces, which tend to overlook any constructs and phenomena that are

salient in the Western context. While paternalistic leadership may not be salient in the West, elements of paternalistic leadership do exist”. He championed an integrated etic-emic approach to the formulation of universal theories—precisely what our work embodies.

*Takeaway #3: Developing indigenous theories is not the end of the scientific journey. We must further explore their universal applicability, which may yield novel theoretical insights.*

## DISCUSSION

Drawing on Chen’s (2025) *Evolution of Theories* framework, our collective reflections trace how phenomenon-based Chinese management research contributes to the progressive evolution of management theories: from indigenous concepts to middle-range theorizing, and ultimately to more universal, generalizable frameworks. Through our respective journeys, we have come to see that theoretical advancement in management research unfolds through an iterative process that is deeply contextual, shaped by continual dialogue between local phenomena and broader theoretical conversations. Each of our studies (whether introducing a novel construct based on a Chinese phenomenon, extending a potentially universal theory, or transforming a context-specific phenomenon into one of global relevance) illustrates how Chinese management research can simultaneously generate theoretical innovation and address pressing managerial challenges in a rapidly changing environment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> However, while we utilize the framework of the evolution of theories, we recognize that the trajectory from indigenous to universal status is often non-linear and asymmetric. Theoretical development does not always follow a set sequence from one stage to the next; rather, the process is frequently influenced by how different cultural contexts are valued within the global academic community.

Several shared challenges and solutions emerged across our experiences. We discuss these according to their implications for theory, methodology, and practice as well as offer future research directions.<sup>4</sup>

### **Theoretical Implications**

We each grappled with the difficulty of situating context-specific insights within existing theoretical frameworks. Chuang et al. (2015) wrestled with properly introducing culturally grounded, PE fit-related constructs, such as *appropriateness*, which are foreign to individuals from other cultures, to demonstrate how they can be aligned with the existing conceptualization of PE fit. Similarly, Ou's work on CEO humility faced difficulties in conceptualizing how humility is understood in China, where individuals are shaped by various cultural philosophies (e.g., Confucianism, Taoism) and notions of authority and hierarchy. Moreover, the Westernization of Chinese society poses an additional challenge for their research in differentiating between indigenous and modern manifestations of humility. Huang et al. (2015) encountered a slightly different challenge in framing authoritarian leadership (which has a deep connection with the Chinese way of leading) as a culturally transcending construct that demonstrates universal effects, such as efficiency and compliance. Through these experiences, we came to recognize that culturally relevant theories need extensive care during conceptualization, and that these theories hold the potential to enrich mainstream theoretical frameworks. This reframing resonates with calls by Tsui (2004) for high-quality indigenous research that contributes to global management knowledge.

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<sup>4</sup> We note that some challenges pertain to theorizing itself, whereas others stem from the structure and biases of the publication system (e.g., pressure to justify the use of a Chinese sample and the burden of employing translations embedded in Western theoretical vocabulary). However, we believe that the latter also carries theoretical significance, as these challenges prompt authors to reflect more deeply on the cultural context necessary for more effective scholarly communication.

### **Methodological Implications**

Our journeys also presented language challenges commonly encountered in translating culturally embedded constructs for an international audience. For example, translating Chinese concepts such as *ren* (仁) or *yi* (宜) and English concepts such as *humility* demands more than semantic equivalence; it requires deep cultural understanding. Both Chuang et al. (2015) and Ou and her colleagues emphasize that meaningful translation requires not only definitional clarity but also the articulation of a fully contextualized meaning as it is traditionally understood in Chinese culture. This process requires communicating the historical roots and philosophical meanings of these terms. By articulating the cultural logic underlying the constructs, we believe the research can resonate with international readers while preserving its indigenous integrity.

### **Practical Implications**

Our experiences reaffirm what Ryan, Bartunek and Daft (2001) proposed relating to the power of interaction between academics and practitioners that has the potential to generate new knowledge. Our interactions with executives in Chinese organizations solved some of the challenges that we faced regarding managerial realities and facilitated our development of new theories. These interactions also enhanced the managerial relevance of our research. Our approach followed Van de Ven and Johnson's (2006) notion of engaged scholarship and found that building trust and co-creating knowledge with practitioners not only helped with organizational and data access, but also generated insights that connect theory and practice. For example, our research on appropriateness, humility and authoritarian leadership helped us understand how these concepts operate differently in Chinese and global settings that may later impact organizational strategies and performance.

### **Future Research**

Although most of the challenges and solutions presented in this editorial persist over time, we acknowledge that the Chinese business and management landscape has evolved in the decade since the publication of the three featured studies. For example, China has rapidly adopted digital and AI-related technologies, which presents both challenges and opportunities to examine how phenomenon-based Chinese management research in these domains can inform not only management knowledge in China but also global understanding. In particular, such research can examine how China's distinctive digital landscape (e.g., advantages in scale, speed, and integration) generates novel management insights that existing Western theories cannot fully explain. As scholars have increasingly recognized, early findings generated in Anglo Western contexts are often assumed to be universal, while findings emerging from other contexts are framed as particularistic. Indigenous insights from the Chinese context thus represents a meaningful step toward redefining universality in management scholarship.

Whereas the three featured studies share common challenges, they arise from distinct motivations, theoretical aims, and methodological choices. We reason that a researcher's choice of any of these areas is contingent upon several factors, including the study's objectives, the nature of the phenomenon, its current standing within the global research community, and the strategic necessity of advancing to a subsequent stage of evolution. Future scholars can draw on the challenges and solutions discussed here to navigate these trade-offs and determine the most effective path for their own work.

Future research is recommended to continue to build on existing phenomenon-based Chinese management research to establish broader theoretical development and generalizability. The three studies illustrated in this editorial have guided subsequent work with implications for the theoretical evolution framework. For example, building on Chuang et al.'s (2015) individualism-

relationalism lens, subsequent PE fit research has increasingly used frameworks like individualism-collectivism to compare fit relationships across global settings (Astakhova, 2016; Glosenberg, Tracey, Behrend, Blustein, & Foster, 2019; Gul, Usman, Liu, Rehman, & Jebran, 2018; Treviño et al., 2020). This shift demonstrates the field's progress toward generalizing fit implications and seeking universal theoretical applications. In addition, as pioneering, rigorous empirical research on humble CEOs, Ou and colleagues' work on CEO humility has inspired more extensive investigation into humility at the CEO level across the US, Colombia, China, and India (Chaudhary, Karwasara, Gupta, Marino, & Batra, 2025; Cortes-Mejia, Cortes, & Herrmann, 2022; Lu, You, & Jia, 2025; Petrenko, Aime, Recendes, & Chandler, 2019). Recent scholarship also explores CEO humility in relation to modern challenges such as digital transformation, green innovation, and IPO pricing (Ademi, Schade, & Schuhmacher, 2025; Chandler, Petrenko, Hayes, Blake, & Aime, 2022; Sun, Zeng, Lin, Yu, & Wang, 2021). These studies confirm the global relevance of the construct. Finally, since its publication, Huang et al. (2015) has received 168 citations in international journals. The functional approach to authoritarian leadership has been incorporated into theoretical frameworks (Chen et al., 2024; Wang, Xie, & Xie, 2022; Zhang, Liu, & Du, 2021; Zhu et al., 2025), as well as discussed in research conducted beyond China and in various other disciplines, such as operational management (Salem, Van Quaquebeke, & Besiou, 2022), information management (Soluk & Kammerlander, 2021), public health management (Saygili, Özer, & Karakaya, 2020), and civil engineering management (Gorod, Hallo, Statsenko, Nguyen, & Chileshe, 2021). Significant opportunities exist to further contextualize authoritarian leadership within other settings.

## CONCLUSION

This editorial underscores that phenomenon-based Chinese management research is uniquely positioned to expand both the contextual and explanatory scope of management theories. We hope that our experiences exemplify how theoretical curiosity, methodological rigor, and cultural sensitivity can coexist to enrich both indigenous and global scholarship.

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