

Human Resource Management

Special Issue on Human Resource Management in Multinational Corporations in and from China

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With the country's forest of factories becoming home to sizable shares of global manufacturing and Chinese businesses rapidly expanding their operation and service offerings overseas, China's rise has transformed – and continues to transform – the nature of work and employment for many, and how firms are managed. At the center of the global economic integration, China provides an important entry point to a debate on transnational trends of human resource management (HRM) and industrial relations (IR). A particularly helpful lens to look at these trends is operations of multinational corporations (MNCs) in and from China. As intercultural and interinstitutional agents, MNCs have long been the focus of international HRM and IR studies (e.g. Wilkinson et al., 2014). Thanks to the growth of foreign direct investment (FDI) in China, HRM and IR in MNCs in China have attracted substantial research attention since the early 1990s (e.g. Björkman & Fan, 2002; Smith & Pun, 2006; Chan, 2010; Zheng, 2014). However, research interest in HRM and IR in Chinese MNCs overseas has only emerged, albeit is growing rapidly, in recent years (e.g. Tung, 2007; Lee, 2009; Cooke, 2014; Jackson, 2014; Zhu et al., 2014; Kamoche & Siebers, 2015).

Advancing research on HRM and IR in MNCs in and from China has both theoretical and practical rationales. Theoretically, this approach may allow us to make a unique contribution to the core debate in the field of international HRM and IR about the extent to which MNCs can or should standardize their policies globally versus their need to respond to local peculiarities (e.g. Berry et al., 2014; Edwards & Kuruvilla, 2005; Schuler et al., 1993; Prahalad & Doz, 1987). First of all, to date the debate has been largely based on empirical evidence collected from MNCs originating from advanced economies. As MNCs from emerging market economies, particularly China, may have different motivations and strategies of internationalization from their counterparts in advanced economies, whether or the extent to which various arguments developed in this debate hold true warrants closer examination. Moreover, with major goals of acquiring strategic assets, be it natural resources or managerial and technical know-how, Chinese MNCs' HRM and IR practices may have distinct features that may provide fresh insights on this debate. Second, although there is already a body of literature on HRM and IR of MNCs operating in China, this has been heavily oriented in the manufacturing sector. It is important to broaden the research domain to include other growing sectors and to update our knowledge as the Chinese financial, product and labor market, and other institutions have been constantly changing which may

significantly affect firms' HRM and IR strategies and practices. Finally, through comparing and contrasting MNCs in and from China, we may gain a better understanding of convergence and divergence of MNCs' HRM and IR practices and the role of the underlying institutional and cultural factors.

Practically, knowledge on HRM and IR in Chinese MNCs overseas will meet the urgent demands of various stakeholders. While China has become a major source of FDI in many countries, Chinese MNCs' knowledge of international operation, particularly with regard to HRM and IR practices that are highly context sensitive, dramatically lags behind. Meanwhile, there are substantial and growing interest, concerns, and controversies about the impacts of Chinese investment on host countries' national security, economy, laws, business, and labor. A deeper understanding of Chinese MNCs' management and employment practices and their broad economic and political impacts, therefore, is of tremendous value for policy makers, business, labor, and other organizations. In addition, recent changes in China's politico-economic landscapes, such as the end of various preferential treatments of foreign firms and policy support for industrial upgrading and innovation, the implementation of new labor laws, growing labor shortage and rising labor cost, and the increasing competitiveness of Chinese domestic firms have posted new challenges as well as opportunities for foreign MNCs in China. More recently, there has been growing signs of withdrawal of FDI from the country. Research findings of HRM and IR in MNCs in China will have the potential of informing policy and management decisions both in and outside of China.

This special issue seeks to examine issues related to a range of strategic and functional areas of HRM and IR. In particular, empirical studies that straddle HRM and IR issues are welcomed. The objective is to advance the theoretical and empirical knowledge of effective people management in MNCs in and from China. Key research areas that contributors may address include:

- What are the key features of HRM and IR practices in MNCs in or from China? How have these features evolved and how do they confirm, improve, or challenge conventional wisdom in international HRM and IR?
- To what extent and in what areas do MNCs in or from China adopt host country HRM and IR practices, transfer their home practices to host countries, or develop hybridized practices to reconcile the tension between global integration and local differentiation? Further, how do host and home country institutions and culture shape HRM and IR practices of these MNCs respectively?
- How do these MNCs adapt their HRM and IR practices to various demographic, economic, social, or political changes arising in host countries, such as aging population, increasing urbanization, rising income gaps, growing regional differences, and emerging political and social turmoil? What might be some promises and perils?
- Are there significant similarities/variations *across* Chinese MNCs operating overseas or *across* foreign MNCs in China with respect to their HRM and IR practices? How might individual, organizational, national/regional, and global factors explain these similarities/variations?

- What are the impacts of these MNCs' HRM and IR practices on firm performance and outcomes of both expatriates and host country employees such as wages, benefits, and labor rights? And what are their impacts on host country economies and labor market institutions such as labor laws and labor unions?
- How do these MNCs use and manage their expatriates? To what extent, and if so, how are expatriates and host country employees treated differently (e.g., compensation)? And what are the organizational and individual consequences of any differential treatment?
- How do expatriates and host country stakeholders such as government, workers, and labor unions respond to HRM and IR practices of these MNCs? Are these responses able to reshape the HRM and IR practices, and if so, how?
- Where do these MNCs discover learning opportunities for intercultural or interinstitutional integration of HRM and IR practices? Do MNCs transfer what they learned from a host country back to the home country operations? If so, what and how?
- How does a diverse demographic of global workforce (i.e. immigrants, diaspora, and multiculturals) influence MNCs' diversity management practices and shape the workforce's identification with the MNC? Are there best practice cases or major lessons learned from unsuccessful handling of these HR issues?
- What are the impacts of various supranational institutions, such as the International Labor Organization, global labor unions, bi-lateral or multi-lateral trade agreements, and codes of conduct in global production networks, on MNCs' HRM and IR practices? And what are the boundary conditions of these impacts?
- How do HRM and IR practices in MNCs in or from China compare with those in MNCs in or from other emerging markets respectively such as India, Latin America, and Africa? Are there any similarities and differences? How do organizational (e.g. ownership), market, cultural, or social factors determine the similarities and differences?

The above list of questions is not intended to be exhaustive. The guest editors of the special issue encourage authors to contribute papers that address issues consistent with the themes outlined in this call for papers. Papers can be from different theoretical perspectives, as can be the use of different empirical methodologies (e.g. quantitative, qualitative, case-oriented or mixed). Works presented must be original studies that contribute to the advancement of existing knowledge and debates on the topic.

Special Issue Conference:

Those interested in submitting papers for the conference are asked to submit an abstract of 500-1,000 words to HRM by **December 31, 2015** via email to hrmchinasi@gmail.com. The organizers aim to advise the authors if their abstracts have been accepted by January 7, 2016. Invited authors are expected to submit full papers (formatted to HRM standards) via email to hrmchinasi@gmail.com by **7 March 2016**. This will ensure that the papers can be distributed

to other participants to read prior to the conference. Invited authors will present their papers at a conference to be held at Rutgers University-New Brunswick, USA on **17-18 March 2016**. Following the conference, authors will be encouraged to submit their revised papers for consideration to a special issue of HRM (see below).

Special issue:

Submissions to the special issue of HRM must be submitted no later than **August 31, 2016**. Authors should submit their manuscripts for review by following the submission guideline of HRM. We encourage authors to submit their papers to the conference prior to submitting them to the special issue. In our experience participation in such a conference would be helpful for paper development. However, this is not conditional for submitting to the special issue. All papers for the special issue will go through the standard peer review process of HRM without guarantee of final acceptance.

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