

**Human Resource Management in Mainland China:
Mainstream or Alternative Research?**

Connie Zheng*

School of Management

RMIT University

Melbourne, Australia

Email: connie.zheng@rmit.edu.au

and

David Lamond

Nottingham Business School

Nottingham Trent University

Nottingham, UK

Email: david.lamond@ntu.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

Our paper presents a summary of the existing literature on human resource management (HRM) studies in mainland China published in the 25 leading international journals over the last 30 years. The aim is to take stock of what is known and what is yet to be known about HRM in China. We argue that what is known is comparative rather than definitive, with HRM in China treated as a subset of international HRM, rather than as a mainstream issue. With a quarter of the world's population affected by an understanding of what constitutes better HRM in China, we call for a more inclusive, collaborative approach by researchers inside and outside China.

Key words: *China, human resource management, international, comparative, review.*

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, scholars around the world have contributed to a significant increase in the body of knowledge related to the organisational and management practices of companies operating in China. This growth, quite properly, has been reflected in a series of “taking stock” reviews of the literature (see, for example, Li & Tsui 2002; Peng, Lu, Shenkar & Wang 2001; Quer, Claver and Rienda 2007; Shenkar 1994; Tsui, Schoonhoven, Meyer, Lau & Milkovich 2004). In the same way, recognising HRM in China as an emerging discipline, Zhu C, Thomson and De Cieri (2008) have presented their review of HRM research in China.

These reviews have provided a valuable series of insights into the management and organisation of firms operating in China. At the same time however, all these review efforts have included articles relating both to organisational behaviour (OB) and HRM. Whilst HRM and OB are closely interwoven (*cf* Burnes 2000; Guest 1989; Legge 1995; Storey 1992), as disciplines, they focus on different aspects and levels within the organisation, and answer different questions. A HRM approach operates at the macro-level of the organisation and aims to examine the “what” questions and identify the effectiveness of HRM practices in achieving organisational objectives. An OB approach, on the other hand, examines the “how” and “why” questions and aims to identify the reasons for the

effectiveness (or lack of it) from the micro- and meso- organisational levels. Accordingly, we argue that it is necessary to separate the literatures, and that a focus on HRM empirical studies in China *only*, will yield valuable results in terms of better formulating a research agenda for the future.

We begin the paper by providing a context based on an appreciation of the previous reviews that have been undertaken. We then move to a critical review of the empirical studies of HRM practices in China over the last three decades, to answer questions of what we know and what we need to know about HRM in China. One central issue arising from our review is the identification of the extent to which research about HRM in China has been relegated to the “margins” of HRM research, as a subset of various combinations of international, comparative and cross-cultural literatures. Noting that China constitutes over one quarter of the world’s population, and its workforce is a similar proportion of the world’s workforce, we conclude by arguing that HRM research in China must be seen as a mainstream issue in its own right.

A SUMMARY OF PAST REVIEWS

Our review intends to recount what has taken place in terms of HRM practices among enterprises in China since the major economic reform started in 1978. Notwithstanding, Schurmann (1960) was acknowledged to have provided the earliest account of the organisation and management principles of the Chinese Communist Party since the establishment of the new China in 1949. These macro-level principles have affected Chinese enterprise management in one way or another even after the widespread economic reform across the country, and despite many changes to management practices since (Jones 1984). Shirk (1981) provided an account and critique of the new labour policies concerning the hiring, payment and rewarding of industrial labour that were introduced immediately following Deng Xiaoping’s accession to power; whilst Manion (1985) discussed the influence of selection and appointment of the Party leadership team both at the governmental and enterprise levels.

The possibility of transferring the western HRM technology to those joint ventures operating in China was posited (Von Glinow & Teagarden 1988). In addition, the possibility of effective reform of the compensation (Shenkar & Chow 1989) and management education and training systems (Warner

1986; Borgonjon & Vanhonacker 1994) during the reform period was evaluated; and the impacts of the Chinese state planning on overall staffing practices were assessed (Holton 1990). Researchers at the time speculated about what would happen to HRM in China as a result of the deepening economic reforms (Cyr & Frost 1991; Tsang 1994; Warner 1996a, 1996b; Croll 1999; Zhu C & Dowling 2000) (see Appendix 1 for a summary of past reviews of HRM in China in the period of 1981-2008).

As knowledge about management practices in China developed, particularly after 2000, the development of specific human resource system and general industrial relations framework underpinning Chinese HR management practices was examined. For instance, Ding and Warner (2001) focused on evaluating the Chinese labour management system and its effectiveness of breaking “the three irons” (iron bowl, iron wage and iron position). Similarly, Morris, Sheehan and Hassard (2001) speculated on the changes of work-unit relationships among state-owned enterprises as a result of the shift from the lifetime employment (iron bowl) arrangement to state-worker contracts. Smith (2003) examined the source and development of the dormitory labour system as it relates to what were seen as paternalistic management practices in China, seen to be shared by those firms operating in Japan and Korea. The comparison of labour control and provision of other material support for factories operating in three countries as a way of dismantling organised labour or trade unions was examined by Nichols *et al.* (2004). The potential of new developments and future work forms in China were speculated on by Hassard, Morris and Sheehan (2004).

By and large, scholars were also concerned about the different approaches to corporate governance (Kimber, Lipton & O'Neill 2005); HRM models (Chen & Wilson 2003; Rowley, Benson & Warner 2004), and the comparative influence of trade unions and IR systems in China and other countries (Clarke 2005; Frenkel 2001; Frenkel & Peetz 1998; Frenkel & Kuruvilla 2002; Kuruvilla & Erickson 2002; Westwood, Chan & Linstead 2004). In terms of understanding specific combinations of Chinese HRM practices, Cooke (2004a) provided a chronicle of the evolution of the public-sector pay systems in China from 1949-2001. Other scholars discussed the potential impact of the WTO access

(Zhu Y & Warner 2004), the new initiative-social protection scheme (Zhu C & Nyland 2004), and even SARS (Lee & Warner 2006) on overall HRM in China.

Zhu Y and Warner (2004) have argued that the role of HRM in Chinese enterprises will continue to be even more important following the 2001 WTO access. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to predict that the influence of contemporary Chinese people management practices in the global arena may come to be seen as equivalent to their Japanese counterparts in the late 1970s and 1980s (Tsui *et al.* 2004: 141). Further exploring and theorising the China HRM model may lead to establish a truly global HRM system, which is currently lacking. It is necessary to review what have been done empirically in order to draw a broader theoretical framework on which future studies of HRM in China can be based.

A SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF HRM PRACTICES IN CHINA

A total of 107 empirical studies about HRM in China, published in 25 leading international journals during our period of inquiry, were selected for analysis in this review. The selection of these 25 journals and the use of empirical studies are consistent with earlier reviews conducted by Peng *et al* (2001), Li and Tsui (2002) and Quer *et al* (2007). Table 1 summarises the 17 themes of HRM studies in China that have emerged.

The largest single category of studies, representing about 20 percent of the sample, focused on examining the employment relations/industrial relations framework as well as the general HRM context in China. This is likely to be due to two reasons. First, the operational role of trade unions in China is quite different to that in other industrialised countries in the world. Trade unions often serve as the Chinese Communist Party's spokesperson in assisting its implementation of the economic reform agenda (see Tsang 1994), rather than directly representing the workers'/employees' interests, as they are perceived to do in the West. This spokesperson role, quite different from the operation of trade unions in the West, appears to have stimulated interest amongst scholars outside, and prompted them to conduct more investigations (Helburn & Shearer 1984).

Secondly, from an institutional perspective, HRM perhaps represents the most fluid concept when it is operating in a high uncertainty environment such as China. Hence, management and organisation scholars and researchers may focus most on examining how organisations respond to the uncertain environmental conditions and make strategic HRM choices (Goodstein 1994). The unusual, and sometimes even bizarre, institutional framework underpinning HRM practices in China may have peaked researchers' interest. For example, contractual labour relations were introduced when the economic reforms first started in the 1970s, yet the draft of the Labour Contract Law was not made effective until 2007 (Shen 2007). It is not surprising then, that the studies of the context of HRM and the management of labour and employment relations in China's uncertain frameworks dominated the empirical studies for the past two to three decades.

High-performance and high-commitment HRM practices have been explored in the field of HRM for some time in the West. This line of investigation has also been picked up by enterprises operating in China, as a result of pressing demands from business for value-added, effective HRM functions in contributing to organisational performance (Boudreau & Ramstad 2007; Lawler, Boudreau & Mohrman 2006). Consequently, researchers also have focused on examining the influence of various strategic HRM practices on firm performance in the China context (Sun, Aryee & Law 2007). A total of 16 studies were devoted to this type of research, representing the second largest category of research on HRM in China. Among these studies, the moderation effects of social institution (Law, Tse & Zhou 2003), relationship (*guanxi*) networks (Sun *et al.* 2007) and different ownership (eg. Bjorkman & Fan 2002; Gong *et al.* 2005; Wang *et al.* 2007; Zheng *et al.* 2006) on high performance HRM practices were predominant, suggesting that the main concern of researchers is still with the context of HRM practices in China.

Although China claims to have had personnel administrative systems long before the introduction of the western concept of HRM (Zhu C & Dowling 1994), a central concern for researchers appears to have been the compatibility of Chinese personnel management systems with western HRM practices. Therefore, there has been a relatively strong focus on comparing HRM practices among companies owned by foreigners or joint ventured entities and by those state agencies or home-grown domestic

Chinese (e.g., Ding, Goodall & Warner 2000; Zhu C & Dowling 2002). In addition to the comparison of different HRM practices with different firm ownership, there is also some interest in comparing HRM practices according to different enterprise size (e.g. Cooke 2005). This category, comparing general HRM functions according to firm size and ownership, represents the third main area of research (about 12 percent of the studies in our sample).

Researchers from outside China also appear to be concerned with how successfully the western concept of HRM could be transferred to China, in particular via international joint ventures or independent foreign firms. Ten studies were devoted to examine the possibility of localising and standardising global HRM strategy in China. The conclusion drawn from these studies is often, however, that this is not possible in the context of China (Walsh & Zhu Y 2007; Wilson, Chen & Erakovic 2006), in part because of the many complex institutional factors mentioned earlier.

Whilst the above-mentioned studies largely focused on bundles of HRM practices in China, specific HR functions, such as compensation and rewards (9 studies); recruitment and selection (5 studies); training and development (4 studies), performance evaluation (3 studies); employee participation and HR planning (one study in each category) were also examined. Overlapping with some of the work in OB, a number of studies focus on examining psychological contracts, the effect of HRM and/or provision of family friendly-work-life balance (WLB) programs in enhancing job satisfaction, employee motivation and organisational commitment (see Table 1). Overall though, the main focus has been on examining the institutional framework and contexts of HRM practices in China. The impact of ownership, along with the effective transfer of HRM from the West to China, also has been a dominant concern of researchers studying HRM in China.

RESEARCH METHODS USED IN EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Research methods used in the period 1978-1999 were predominantly qualitative; whilst in the period of 2000-2007 the studies published were largely based on quantitative data. For instance, 15 of the 18 studies on Chinese firms and employees in the period of 1978-1999 were case studies. In contrast, during the period 2000-2007, 27 of the 40 studies on Chinese firms and employees relied on analysis

of quantitative data gathered from multiple firms. This was also true for the majority of studies on foreign firms operating in China. For example, while 50% of studies examining HRM practices in multinational companies in China during 1978-1999 were case studies; no case studies appeared in the period 2000-2007. Two observations can be made here.

The first is that, perhaps with increasing access to data from the firms based in China (both local and multinational), studies are able to adopt more sophisticated research methodologies based on large quantitative datasets commonly used in social science research. The second observation is in relation to the apparent greater need for researchers in the field of HRM in China to collect quantitative data based on large sample sizes in order to publish their work. It seems the so-called “top tier” journals in the field are no longer publishing qualitative case studies, unless the case study is unique and significant (e.g. Ngai & Smith 2007; Yeung 2006). Beyond the restriction of triangulation opportunities provided by a multi-method approach, collection of large datasets in China is more than challenging for researchers, and sometimes even restricted by various state agencies (see He 2004; Jacobson 1991; Shenkar 1994). Shenkar (1994) has commented on the limitations placed by the Chinese government on research activities conducted by foreign nationals (pp.10-11). He (2004) was even more critical in regard to recent research outputs published by those researchers from outside China. In particular she issued a warning about the appropriateness of using survey instruments to collect quantitative data inside China, as any population polls and survey questionnaires carried out by foreigners are strictly subject to the approval and control by the National Bureau of Statistics. This implies that further publication of works on HRM in China in the top-tier journals may be quite difficult, if not impossible for researchers working in the field.

WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT HRM STUDIES IN CHINA?

Despite the rapid growth of the literature in the field, it would appear that there still remains a ‘well-documented bias against international research at most leading western journals’ (Peng *et al.* 2001: 99), with 6 out of 25 journals investigated publishing no China HRM empirical research outputs. The bulk of the papers (65 articles in total) were published in the *International Journal of HRM*, which was ranked by the 25 worldwide HRM experts as the best journal to publish papers relating to

international HRM (Caligiuri 1999: 518). It seems that academics writing in this area treat HRM in China as a sub-field of international HRM and have chosen the journal as an outlet suitable for publishing their works accordingly. This is especially worthy of note, *en passant*, given that the majority of studies were carried out on firms operating within China, suggesting that the notion of “international” may well be very much a perspective of researchers from outside of China (De Cieri, Cox, and Fenwick 2007). Over the past 30 years, only 30 papers relating to HRM in China were published in the 13 top-tier mainstream journals that formed part of our list of 25. We examined the nature of study, research design and topics covered in these 30 papers as compared with the other 77 articles. The following three characteristics stand out as the key approaches in studying HRM in China.

Comparative studies

The single largest group of studies were comparative in nature. Why comparative studies? Several explanations can be made here. First, as discussed earlier, the social and institutional framework underpinning HRM practices in China is quite different from those in the West; differences perhaps can be highlighted by way of comparison and contrast. The second is to do with addressing the issue of equivalent research instruments (Shenkar 1994). Although done without testing the appropriateness of research instruments, it might be easier for researchers, via a comparative study, to identify theoretical gaps, measure and control explanatory variables such as those relating cultural and institutional forces (Peng *et al.* 2001; Shenkar 1994). Thirdly, since most mainstream journals are US-based, it is not unreasonable for these journals to publish more comparison studies that would build significant knowledge about how the US companies and people are perceived as compared to others in international business research (Shenkar 1994; De Cieri *et al.* 2007)

However, comparative studies in the China context encounter two pitfalls. One is that when a country is as “unique” as China, outside researchers tend to take a ‘premature leap to causal paradigm’ (Shenkar 1994: 26) without sufficient examination of all factors leading to the differences. The obvious examples are many claims of cultural and institutional differences [*cf* the results derived from Peng *et al.*’s (2001) review about Chinese organisation and management studies], rather than in-depth

analysis of organisational structural complexity and decision-making processes that may have produced the differences (Shenkar 1994; Daft 2007). The second related issue is that of the direct application of instruments in comparison, which may be inherently non-comparable. For instance, both Adler *et al.* (1989) and Shenkar (1994) addressed how differently the Chinese respond to survey questionnaires, with a very high proportion of Chinese respondents giving what was regarded as “ideal” rather than “real” answers. Adler *et al.* (1989: 73) commented on such results being “far too inadequate and premature” to compare behaviour between Chinese, European and American managers and felt totally unconvinced to use the western instrument in explaining the differences because of “the great amount of within-country variance”. Little has been subsequently to effectively address this issue.

Clear theory application

Both comparative and non-comparative papers published in the top-tier journals were strongly theory-based, with sophisticated quantitative analysis. Well-established theories such as high performance HRM theory (Sun *et al.* 2007; Law *et al.* 2003), social network theory (Bian, 1994), organisational structural configuration (Chen, Meindl, and Hunt 1997), and role models (Chan, Feng, Redman and Snape 2006; Lee, Hui, Tinsley and Niu 2006) were applied in the research design and testing of theories in the context of Chinese firms, even though concerns have been expressed by researchers (eg. Adler *et al.* 1989; Shenkar 1994) about directly applying the western theories and models to the China context. Given that well-trained western scholars seek to uphold “a healthy theoretical development for the advancement of the knowledge” (Pye 1992:1162), when acting to safeguard the quality journals, they might be expected to demand, even for the specific disciplinary study of HRM in China, the scholarship to also demonstrate theoretical and analytical rigour.

Reading the 77 papers published in the less prestigious journals, description of obvious phenomena in China appears dominant, with common reference to the effect of political, cultural and institutional factors on the revolutionary change of management practices, instead of economic, structural and organisational elements (Andors 1977). A significant number of these empirical studies also applied some western theories and models to test the findings, but the contribution to the theoretical

development in the field of China HRM tends to be weak. Case study has been advocated to conduct management research in China (Warner 1986; Adler *et al.* 1989), with aims to build grounded theory. However, the theory building emerging from a number of case studies presented in this review is also not significantly substantial as to actually develop a special HRM theory for China such as in the case for Europe (Brewster 1995; 2007).

After reviewing these works, it appears that we may be trapped at two polar ends. One emphasises comparative studies but with too much focus on the relevance of HRM practices in the West, especially in the US, putting China simply as an illumination point for the uniqueness of American HRM (Guest 1989; De Cieri *et al.* 2007). At the other end, China is placed at the centre for studying HRM, but most studies fail to pass the “so what” test of relevance (Pye 1992: 1170). This leads us to a quite incomplete picture of what constitutes the “real” HRM in China. Cooke (2004b) argued that there might be a “third way” in which good HRM practices may be adopted in the China context through FDI (foreign direct investment) companies. Indeed, Cooke’s (2004b) view of focusing on examining HRM practices in the joint-ventured and foreign firms in China has been echoed by the acceptance of the top-tiered journals of these kinds of papers, in some cases by seemingly overlooking the apparent lack of theoretical application.

Focus on international joint ventured and foreign firms

Six out of 30 top-tier journal papers focused on examining various HR and employee/labour relations in the joint venture and foreign firms operating in China. An additional 21 papers published in the other journal outlets have also contributed to this line of research since 2000, compared to only two studies during the period 1978-1999. This trend represents a strong increase in interest to take “a more nuanced approach” in the study of “the HR and employment practices of FDI firms” in China (Cooke 2004b:31). This growing interest seems likely to be due to the ineffective people management encountered by many multinational companies and their desire to search for solutions to address this key issue of international management (Dowling & Welch 2004; Nankervis, Chatterjee & Coffey 2006). A number of empirical studies in the current review provide evidence for addressing HRM issues among multinational companies in China (eg. Frenkel 2001; Gamble 2006; Gong *et al.* 2005).

Additionally, this line of research tends to emphasise the possibility of localising and standardising global HRM practices in China, using a well-established ethnocentric approach to international HRM (eg. Law *et al.* 2004; Wilson *et al.* 2006; Zeira, Yeheskel & Newburry 2004). At the same time, it is now well acknowledged that such an ethnocentric research emphasis in IHRM, also in the context of China, is likely to promote the “dominance of naïve empiricism” and lead to “the neglect of diverse voices” (De Cieri *et al.* 2007: 282). Suffice it to say, the greater emphasis on studying HRM practices among incoming FDI firms may have led to further neglect of examining the possible transfer of home-grown Chinese HRM practices of those increasingly outbound FDI Chinese firms (Liu, Buck & Shu 2005; Zhang 2003). Although the study of HRM challenges of Chinese multinational companies has expanded in recent years (eg. Selmer, Ebrahimi & Li 2000; Shen 2004; 2006; Shen & Edwards 2004), the development of home-grown international HRM theory to guide this line of research is not possible without taking an imitation of the western approach (De Cieri *et al.* 2007). As a result, one is likely to pose the question as to what actually constitutes a genuine China HRM model.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn here is that, via the many comparative studies reviewed in this paper, we now know more about the unique HRM practices of the Western (especially US) companies than we do about HRM in China. It is also perhaps well known now that research on HRM practices among Chinese firms tend to be largely descriptive, using little more than raw data, generally lacking in analytical rigor, not to mention weakness of HRM theory building. There is an increasing number of empirical studies designed to test the generalisability of HRM theory developed in Western contexts to firms and employees in China, notwithstanding the possible incompatibility or inaccuracy of such testing as a result of likely misunderstanding by Chinese participants of the research paradigm familiar to the West. At the same time, the recent focus on examining HRM practices of inbound FDI firms has helped enhance our understanding of the diversity in the patterns of FDI companies operating in China and their management practices. However, the ethnocentric approach used in research inquiry may have created the unexplored challenge of identifying potentially similar diverse

patterns of the outbound FDI of Chinese firms, leaving further gaps in building China HRM models to suit both domestic and international business environments.

There have been many calls for the refinement of existing organisation and management theories and the development of new theories by way of conducting indigenous management research in China in order to contribute to global management and organisation knowledge (eg. De Cieri *et al.* 2007; Li & Tsui 2002; Tsui *et al.* 2004; Tsui 2004; 2007). The current review of 107 empirical studies, as well as the more than 30 overview and conceptual papers (see Appendix 1), suggests that there has been an endeavour to answer the calls in the field for building and refining HRM theory inside *and* outside China. However, we find that, despite the obvious relevance of how a quarter of the world's population might be more effectively managed in an organisational context, HRM in China is not treated as a mainstream subject of study. Rather it is seen from non-Chinese eyes as a matter for comparative examination and a subset of international HRM. Indeed, the clear conclusion drawn from this review is that a specific model of HRM in China is yet to be fully developed. It requires researchers outside to 'plunge in' (Tsui 2006), working closely with local Chinese scholars in local languages in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of what is "really" going on in China. To take a leaf out of Legge's (1995) book, we need the kind of extensive examination of HRM practices in organisations in China that enables us to separate the rhetoric from the reality. Following this kind of approach, researchers outside and inside China, working together, can build a wealth of knowledge about actual HRM practices in China.

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APPENDIX 1

A list of review/conceptual papers on China HRM Studies: 1981-2008

Authors	Journal outlets	Topics	Comparative/ China alone
Shirk (1981)	CQ	Chinese labour policies	China
Manion (1985)	CQ	The cadre management system after Mao	China
Warner (1986b)	CQ	Account of management education in China from 1977-1984	China
Von Glinow & Teagarden (1988)	HRM	Transfer of HRM technology to IJVEs in China	Sino-US joint ventures
Shenkar & Chow (1989)	HRM	Reforming compensation systems in China	China
Holton (1990)	MIR	Impacts of state planning on staffing practices in China	IJVEs in China
Cyr & Frost (1991)	HRM	Future perspective of HRM	China
Borgonjon & Vanhonacker (1994)	IJHRM	Management training and education	China
Shenkar (1994)	ISMO	International management research	China
Zhao (1994)	APJHR	General comments on change of HRM contexts	China
Warner (1996a)	IRJ	Overall impacts of economic reforms on IR and HR in China	China
Warner (1996b)	HRMJ	Implications of 'three systems' to strategic alliances and JVEs	China
Frenkel & Peetz (1998)	IR	A 3-country comparison of globalisation impact on IR system	China, Malaysia & South Korea
Croll (1999)	CQ	Social welfare reform in China	China
Zhu & Dowling (2000)	APJHR	General discussion of HRM development	China
Ding & Warner (2001)	APJM	Labour-management system: breaking three old irons'	China
Morris, Sheehan & Hassard (2001)	JMS	Redundancies in SOEs and implications	China
Warner (2001)	IJHRM	Chinese workers: Review of 9 books relating to China topics	China
Peng, Lu, Shenkar & Wang (2001)	JBR	Management and organisation research	Greater China*
Frenkel & Kuruvilla (2002)	ILRR	Changing employment systems	China, India, Malaysia, and the Philippines
Kuruvilla and Erickson (2002)	IR	Comparison of Industrial relations systems in Asian countries (China, Japan, S Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, India)	China and other countries
Li & Tsui (2002)	APJM	Citation analysis of management and organisation studies in China: 1984-1999	Greater China*
Chen & Wilson (2003)	APJM	Localisation and standardisation of HRM in IJVEs	Sino-foreign joint ventures
Smith (2003)	APJM	Dormitory labour system	China
Nichols, Cam, Chou, Chun, & et al. (2004)	WES	Factory regimes and labour management	China, Taiwan and South Korea
Cooke (2004a)	IJHRM	Public-sector pay: 1949-2001	China
Hassard, Morris and Sheehan (2004)	IJHRM	Review of 8 studies and speculate future work and organisation in China	China
Rowley, Benson & Warner (2004)	IJHRM	Asian HRM model	China, Japan and South Korea
Tsui et al (2004)	OS	Overall organisation and management studies: summary of the 9 papers included in the issue	China
Westwood, Chan & Linstead (2004)	APJM	General discussion on the different employment relations systems in China context and the West	China and the Western countries
Zhu C & Nyland (2004)	IJHRM	Influence of social protection on HRM	China
Zhu, Y & Warner (2004)	IRJ	Changed pattern of HRM as a result of WTO access	China
Clarke (2005)	IRJ	Trade unions	China and Russia
Kimber, Lipton & O'Neill (2005)	APJHR	Corporate governance in Australia, China, India and Singapore	China and others
Lee & Warner (2006)	IJHRM	Impact of SARS on HRM in three cities: Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai	China
Quer, Claver & Rienda (2007)	APJM	General business and management studies	Greater China*
Zhu, Thomson & De Cieri (2008)	HRM	Review of general HRM research in Chinese firms	China

Notes: Greater China encompasses mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao and Singapore (Peng et al, 2001, p. 95). However, in the current review, we only include those empirical studies solely carried out inside China as well as Hong Kong, China after 1997.

APPENDIX 2
25 journals investigated in the current study

1. Academy of Management Journal (AOM)
2. Academy of Management Review (AMR)
3. Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)
4. Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources (APJHR)
5. Asia Pacific Journal of Management (APJM)
6. China Quarterly (CQ)
7. Human Relations (HR)
8. Human Resource Management (US) (HRM)
9. Human Resource Management Journal (UK) (HRMJ)
10. Industrial & Labor Relations Review (ILRR)
11. Industrial Relations (US) (IR)
12. Industrial Relations Journal (UK) (IRJ)
13. International Journal of Human Resource Management (IJHRM)
14. Journal of Applied Psychology (JAP)
15. Journal of Cross - Cultural Psychology (JCCP)
16. Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)
17. Journal of International Management (JIM)
18. Journal of Management Studies (JMS)
19. Management International Review (MIR)
20. Management Science (MS)
21. Organization Science (OS)
22. Organization Studies (OSt)
23. Personnel Psychology (PP)
24. Strategic Management Journal (SMJ)
25. Work, Employment & Society (WES)

TABLE 1
Research Topics on China HRM –gathering from 107 studies

Research Topics	Authors	No of studies
ER/IR, unions and contexts of HRM	(Helburn & Shearer, 1984); (Warner, 1986); (Warner, 1991); (Warner, 1997); (Frenkel & Peetz, 1998); (Ding & Warner, 1999); (Verburg, Drenth, Koopman, Van Muijen, & Wang, 1999), (Sheehan, Morris, & Hassard, 2000); (Benson, Debroux, Yuasa, & Zhu, 2000); (Frenkel, 2001); (Bjorkman & Lu, 2001); (Ding, Lan, & Warner, 2001); (Ding, Goodall, & Warner, 2002); (Mok, Wong, & Lee, 2002); (Price & Fang, 2002); (Cooke, 2003); (Ding, Ge, & Warner, 2004); (Chan, Feng, Redman, & Snape, 2006); (Cooke, 2006); (Hassard, Morris, Sheehan, & Xiao, 2006); (Smith & Pun, 2006); (Ngai & Smith, 2007)	22
High-performance and Strategic HRM	(Taormina, 1999); (Bjorkman & Fan, 2002); (Li, 2003); (Law, Tse, & Zhou, 2003); (Norihiro, Mitsuru, & Ziguang, 2003); (Jaw & Liu, 2004); (Gong, Shenkar, Luo, & Nyaw, 2005); (Wei & Lau, 2005); (Zhu, Cooper, De Cieri, & Dowling, 2005); (Lee, Hui, Tinsley, & Niu, 2006); (Zheng, Moorison & O'Neill, 2006); (Chiang, & Birtch, 2007); (Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007); (Wang, Bruning, & Peng, 2007)	14
General HRM functions	(Ip, 1995); (Brown & Branine, 1995); (Ding, Fields, & Akhtar, 1997); (Goodall & Warner, 1997); (Benson & Zhu, 1999); (Warner, 1999); (Ding, Goodall, & Warner, 2000); (Chow & Fu, 2000); (Ding & Akhtar, 2001); (Zhu & Dowling, 2002); (Chow, 2004); (Cooke, 2005)	12
Transfer of HRM/IHRM	(Lu & Bjorkman, 1997); (Gamble, 2000; 2003); (Taylor, 2001); (Farley, Hoenig, & Yang, 2004); (Law, Wong, & Wang, 2004); (Liu, Tjosvold, & Wong, 2004); (Wilson, Chen, & Erakovic, 2006); (Walsh & Zhu, 2007); (Yan, Child, & Chong, 2007)	10
Compensation, rewards, wages, pay	(Wong, 1989); (Child, 1995); (Easterby-Smith, Malina, & Yuan, 1995), (Chen, Meindl, & Hunt, 1997); (Fisher & Yuan, 1998), (Zhou & Martocchio, 2001); (Baruch, Wheeler, & Zhao, 2004); (Chiang, & Birtch, 2006); (Chiu, Hui, & Lai, 2007); (Bozionelos & Wang, 2007)	10
Employee motivation, commitment	(Lam, 1989); (Chow, Fung, & Yue, 1999); (Snell & Tseng, 2003); (Yao & Wang, 2006); (Wang, 2004); (Wu & Chiang, 2007)	6
Recruitment & selection	(Hildebrandt & Liu, 1988); (Bian, 1994) (Law, Mobley, & Wong, 2002); (Chiu & Babcock, 2002); (Shen & Edwards, 2004); (Cheung & Gui, 2006)	6
Career development	(Hildebrandt & Liu, 1988); (Wong & Slater, 2002); (Cooke, 2003); (Chen, Wakabayashi, & Takeuchi, 2004); (Bozionelos & Wang, 2006)	5
Training & development	(Earley, 1994); (Xiao & Tsang, 1999); (Wong & Slater, 2002); (Ng & Siu, 2004); (Gamble, 2006)	5
International HRM (outbound Chinese expatriates, FDI/MNEs)	(Selmer, Ebrahimi, & Li, 2000); (Shen & Edwards, 2004); (Shen, 2006); (Tung, 2007)	4
Quality/effectiveness of HRM	(Glover & Siu, 2000); (Mitsuhashi, Park, Wright, & Chua, 2000); (Wilkinson, Eberhardt, McLaren, & Millington, 2005); (Yeung, 2006)	4
Performance evaluation	(Bailey, Chen, & Dou, 1997); (Zeira, Yeheskel, & Newburry, 2004); (Brutus, Derayah, Fletcher, Bailey, & et al., 2006)	3
Work-life balance/family friendly practices	(Spector, Cooper, Poelmans, Allen, & et al., 2004); (Wang & Walumbwa, 2007)	2
Empowerment/employee participation	(Hui, Au, & Fock, 2004)	1
Managerial behaviour	(Adler, Campbell, & Laurent, 1989)	1
Manpower/HR planning	(Cooke, 2000)	1
Psychological contracts	(King & Bu, 2005)	1
17 topics	TOTAL	107

Notes: Bold are those published in high impact journals other than the selected journals in this review. Not all these studies were referenced in the paper. For a complete list of these studies, please contact the authors.