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# The IMP Contribution to Understanding Business with China

## *Competitive paper*

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### **Abstract**

A cursory inspection of the output from IMP research will quickly show that issues to do with business in China are a reasonably common topic. Our purposes are to pull together all of the IMP papers concerning business in China in order to evaluate whether or not key themes can be identified in this research, and to evaluate the overall contribution to knowledge made by this work to the field of business-to-business relationships and networks in business with China. A systematic search of the online IMP database, augmented by a manual search of the proceedings of the IMP Asia conferences, generated a total of 58 relevant papers. Of these, 20 were directly concerned with Chinese cultural values, 27 were more broadly concerned with doing business in China, and 11 were more peripherally concerned with China, perhaps including China as a component of a wider Asian study. The 58 papers were analysed using three methods: conventional literature review, quantitative content analysis, and text mining. The key findings are that IMP research addressing business with China has largely adopted IMP conceptual frameworks, and only secondarily frameworks based on Chinese cultural values. Explicit consideration of Chinese cultural values is found in comparatively few IMP papers addressing business in China. Furthermore, there are few instances where IMP researchers adopt an integrative theoretical approach, using both core IMP concepts and key Chinese cultural business concepts. Although considerable attention has been paid to the concept of *guanxi* by IMP researchers, other key Chinese cultural business concepts are used comparatively infrequently.

Keywords: China, relationships, networks, *guanxi*

## Introduction

China's rise to hegemonic power has led to a plethora of books by China watchers (Ambler and Witzel 2003, Clissold 2004, Brahm 2004, Hutton 2008). Unsurprisingly, a key focus in many "business related" books on China is economic growth. The pace of growth has been nothing short of remarkable. For example, between 1979 and 2007, China's GDP registered an average annual growth rate of 9.8 per cent, while the figure for the period 2001 to 2007 is an even more impressive 10.2 per cent (China Statistical Yearbook, 2008). If it maintains this growth rate, many economists believe it will become the world's largest economy by the year 2020. For the last two centuries, one country has emerged as the dominant economic power. The 19<sup>th</sup> century belonged to the UK, the 20<sup>th</sup> century the US and it looks like the 21<sup>st</sup> century will belong to China. Economic growth is just one reason why China is viewed in many quarters as something of a "hot topic". Accession to the WTO in December 2001, the country's pivotal role in the Korea six-party talks, Beijing's hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games, and a reputation of being "the workshop of the world" are just some of the other contributory factors that lead to China being regularly featured across global media outlets. Post-WTO, the Chinese government has instigated a number of reforms. There are three fundamental reform processes that China's central government has adopted and is likely to continue: marketisation, decentralisation and privatisation (North 1990). First, marketisation has led to increased competition through the development of private enterprises and foreign firms accessing the Chinese market. Second, decentralisation relates to much of previous central government roles and responsibilities being transferred to provincial government. Finally, privatisation relates to the stress on the increasing privatisation of formerly state owned enterprises and the development of new private enterprises. Combined, these reform processes have contributed to China's economic development.

Although one cannot ignore China's social, political and economic development, much of existing business and management literature is still dominated by Western theories and empirical research. One example of this is internationalisation process (IP) literature (Child and Rodrigues 2005; Deng 2007a; Deng 2007b). A number of internal and external factors have resulted in many Chinese firms becoming involved in the internationalisation process. Increased domestic competition, along with an easing of regulations under WTO, has allowed Chinese firms to penetrate international markets. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in Chinese outward investment. However, Child and Rodrigues' (2005) article is one of the few studies that explore internationalisation from a purely Chinese perspective. The authors propose a theoretical extension of IP theory that considers a "Chinese perspective" as opposed to a purely "Western perspective". Interestingly, IMP Scholars have also paid little attention to China's outward investment. For example, Sandberg (2008) and Low et al (2008) appear to be the only IMP studies to examine the internationalisation of Chinese firms. Yet, with the rise of China, traditional Western theories in business-to-business markets, including much of the research conducted by IMP researchers, is likely to be challenged. The growing dominance of China on the global stage is justification for a better understanding of relationships and networks in a Chinese context. While stating that "China research" has received no attention from IMP researchers is wholly inaccurate (see, Brennan & Wilson 2001 and 2008, Fang et al 2004, Kriz and Fang 2003, Zolkiewski and Feng 2005), claiming that China has received extensive consideration would also be equally erroneous. To be sure, very little has been published in a

business-to-business context that distinguishes the nature and type of business relationships in China from those of Western countries (Ashnai et al 2007).

In this paper, the purpose is to pull together all of the IMP papers concerning business in China in order to evaluate whether or not key themes can be identified in this research, and to evaluate the overall contribution to knowledge made by this work to the field of business-to-business relationships and networks in business with China. In addition, our findings will be of interest to IMP researchers and China watchers in general as it will illustrate which areas of research have commanded the most attention and help to identify possible “gaps” in the IMP China literature. It is evident that business-to-business research on China is multifaceted. Thus, it is clear that a review of the literature is required in order to explore any gaps in the literature, key themes and contribution to date. We start by reviewing the IMP literature that features China research. Subsequently, quantitative content analysis and text mining are undertaken. Finally, we draw conclusions about the overall contribution to knowledge made by this work to the field of business-to-business relationships and networks in business with China.

## **A review of IMP China literature**

China based research features in a total of 58 IMP papers. When reviewing the China literature, it is clear that there are three broad themes in IMP studies: (1) Chinese cultural values, (2) China within the wider context of Asia and (3) Doing business in China. IMP research pays greatest attention to the latter. Consistent with typical Western discourse on doing business in China, the focus is often on outsourcing and case studies discussing the experiences of Western firms investing in China. However, one apparent distinction between IMP studies and those “typically” found in academic journals concerns the lack of attention to Chinese actors engaged in business-to-business relationships. Research is largely focused on the Western perspective of doing business in China, as opposed to the dyadic relationship between both Western and Chinese partners.

### ***Chinese cultural values***

In reality, Chinese culture is extremely complex, but understanding it is a vitally important factor for any foreign company considering investing in China. Firms that show an understanding of Chinese culture are more likely to display an appreciation and willingness to adapt to the local environment. Although a greater number of foreign firms than ever before now have a presence in China, cultural values remain an important part of conducting business with the Chinese. Perhaps the most well known aspect of Chinese culture is *guanxi*. Although there is no single definition of *guanxi*, it is typically translated into English as “personal connections”. Child (1994, p. 30) provides a more detailed description by referring to it as “the quality of a personal relationship outside an individual’s immediate family”. There are many prior studies of Chinese cultural values, the majority of which have concentrated on the conceptualisation of *guanxi* and on its significance for foreign firms doing business in China. Several authors have identified *guanxi* as a key factor for business success in China (Child, 1994; Davies, 1995; Abrahamson and Ai, 1997; Buttery and Wong, 1999). This view appears to be echoed by IMP scholars as the majority of papers on Chinese cultural values largely focus on the concept of *guanxi*.

The importance of Chinese cultural values and culture in general is argued by a number of IMP researchers. For example, several authors strongly advocate that the IMP paradigm should also feature culture (Kriz and Fang, 2000; Lowe, 2001), while Brennan and Wilson (2001) compare the interaction and networks and Chinese management literature. Other than *guanxi*, scant attention has been paid to other Chinese cultural values. For example, a keyword search of *guanxiwang* on the IMP database does not reveal any papers that address this significant concept. *Guanxiwang* has been defined as “connection networks” (Cheng and Ma, 2009) and “*guanxin*et” or the whole network of *guanxi* through which influence is brokered (McInnes, 1992). The importance of networks is a key feature of IMP research. The IMP approach to analysing business network's focuses on the actors-activities-resources (AAR) model (Araujo and Easton 1996). The AAR model describes a business relationship as consisting of three substance layers: activity links, actor bonds and resource ties (Håkansson and Snehota 1995). Actor bonds connect actors and influence how the two actors perceive each other, activity links concern technical, administrative and commercial and other activities of a company that can be connected in some way. Finally, resource ties connect resource elements of two companies (Ford, 1997). However, using the term “networks” in the context of *guanxi* may lead to a lack of clarity as to how the concept should be interpreted - the IMP interpretation or *guanxiwang*. The latter is of course emic or culturally specific to China. Emics are culture-specific aspects of a phenomenon that are necessary to an understanding of the culture's indigenous conception of the phenomenon (Berry, 1980).

Other examples of Chinese cultural values that have received little attention include: *xinyong* (trust), and *renqing* (favour-for-a-favour). This suggests that explicit, in-depth attention is lacking when it comes to addressing the multifacitated nature of *guanxi*. Kriz and Fang (2003) suggest that success in China is not built on *guanxi*, but interpersonal trust. They refer to this trust as ‘*xinren*’ loosely translated as ‘deep trust.’ They go on to suggest that *guanxi* opens the door, but it is *xinren* that will determine how well you are treated once you are in.

### ***China within the wider context of Asia***

When entering a key word search under “Abstract” on the IMP website, “Asia” produces 25 papers, while China produces 24. Interestingly, a key word search using the three leading states in East Asia – China, Japan and South Korea, produces 24, 12 and 10 papers respectively. The greater number of papers devoted to China might signal that IMP researchers recognise its hegemonic rise on the world stage. However, when searching “Chinese based” studies it is clear that an air of caution needs to be adopted. This is for the simple reason that “Chinese” does not always refer to mainland China. In addition, “Asia based” studies do not always go beyond one Asian state. For example, a study undertaken by Liu and Leach (2005) into the importance of product attributes in high context cultures makes reference to the word “Asia” in its title. Yet, their empirical research is based on US and Taiwanese students. Asian states analysed by IMP scholars include: the Philippines (Batt, 2005); Taiwan, (Shih 2009); large Asian city (sic) Miller and Kattiyapornpong (2009); and Vietnam (Ferne et al, 2002).

Agndal (2005) studied how Swedish SMEs meet their East Asian business partners. Although the author's study features a wide range of East Asian countries, the focal firm for the study is

Swedish selling firms. The author acknowledges that their study produces only a one sided explanation of internationalisation process formation. Other studies on Asia have also tended to focus on the Western, as opposed to the Asian or dyadic nature of buyer-seller relationships (Ramström, 2005; Beckitt, 2007).

### ***Doing business in China***

IMP researchers have looked at doing business in China from different perspectives. These include an in-depth case study approach that focuses on one particular Western company's experience of doing business in China (Low & Johnston 2009, Lee et al, 2001), the telecommunications sector (Vialle and Segard 2005), outsourcing (Salmi 2005, Fang et al 2004) and, foreign organisational or managerial perspective (Lee et al, 2001, Ramström and Nyström 2007, Biggemann, 2008).

In the IMP literature, when considering those papers that focus on doing business in China, what is clear is that there are few studies that adopt an integrative theoretical approach, using both core IMP concepts and key Chinese cultural business concepts. Moreover, IMP research addressing business with China has largely adopted IMP conceptual frameworks. This is certainly true in the case of networks. Ford et al (2002) define networks as "companies and their relationships between them". A review of IMP papers on relationships and networks in China indicates that consideration is largely paid to this "organisational view" of networks. However, in China, networks are typically considered from the personal, rather than the organisational perspective. Once again, this relates to a lack of attention being paid to *guanxiwang*. In some instances theories are combined, yet this is still largely applicable to the Western actor. For example, in their study into the role of relationship selling in technology start-up firms, Kowalkowski et al (2005) combine network and relationship marketing with entrepreneurship and social network theory. Although their study considers a Swedish and a Chinese start-up firm, the latter is owned by a non-Chinese founder.

Finally, it is worth reiterating that little attention is paid to the dyadic nature of business relationships between Western and Chinese companies. For example, Ramström and Nyström, (2007) examine how Northern European Managers interpret and perceive their role and position in relation to their local ethnic Chinese partners. Although the paper discusses Chinese business networks, again this is an example of a purely "Western perspective" of doing business in China. Given that China is now the world's largest recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI) and is of huge strategic importance to Western companies, there is a necessity to explore relationships from both a Western and a Chinese perspective.

## **Research Methods**

### ***Systematic search of IMP research database***

The goal was to extract from the IMP database all articles containing some relevance to the theme of Chinese management and cultural values. Initially, this was achieved by applying the

search terms in Table 1 to the online IMP database ([www.impgroup.org](http://www.impgroup.org), search conducted in February 2010, when the database contained 1,671 papers).

Table 1: Search Terms Employed in Systematic Search of IMP Database

Search term in ABSTRACT	Papers found	Search term in TITLE	Papers found
China	24	China	7
Chinese	23	Chinese	20
Asia	25	Asia	10
Asian	16	Asian	5
Eastern	4	Eastern	2
Taiwan	3	Taiwan	2
Hong Kong	2	Hong Kong	1

Clearly, this initial search process generated many duplicates – papers with the same term in their abstract and their title, and papers with more than one of the search terms in their abstract or title. Duplicate papers were manually eliminated from the list. Additionally, the automated search process identified a number of obviously irrelevant papers. For example, searching for ‘Eastern’ in the title found only two papers, both of which concerned Eastern Europe, rather than the Far East. Another curious example was that the search for ‘Asian’ in the article title produced one article about the ideas of the philosopher Levinas, since the authors had used the adjective *Levinasian*! Once these obvious anomalies had been removed from the list, 51 papers remained. All but a few of these papers were clearly related to our research theme and so were readily included in the analysis. The three papers over which doubts arose were papers pertaining to geographical and cultural contexts that were clearly not ‘Western’, but which were also clearly not specifically Chinese. These were papers addressing Sikh, Indonesian, and Thai business issues (Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Purchase & Theingi, 2009; Ruokolainen, 2003). The decision was made to exclude these papers from further analysis, since they were not directly related to the theme of Chinese management and cultural values. This process generated a list of 48 papers for inclusion in the analysis.

The search process was then expanded to include papers from the IMP Asia conferences 2 and 3. Papers from IMP Asia 1 are available at [www.impgroup.org](http://www.impgroup.org) and so were included in the first part of the search process, but IMP Asia 2 and 3 are not available at the IMP website. Consequently, the abstracts of the papers for IMP Asia 2 and 3 were obtained from the conference organisers, and these abstracts were searched manually for the search terms shown in Table 1. Ten papers were identified, which were added to the list of papers for analysis in this project, and the full text of these ten papers was obtained from the IMP Asia conference organisers. Consequently, the analysis reported here is primarily based on a total of 58 papers which have been identified systematically to represent the great majority of IMP research referring to business to, in or with China. In this process we have erred on the side of including papers that might be relevant, at the risk of including papers that are only of peripheral relevance,

so as to minimise the risk of excluding papers that are relevant. The complete sample of 58 papers is listed in the Appendix.

### **Analytical process**

The 58 papers identified through the process described above were subject to three forms of analysis: conventional literature review, quantitative content analysis, and text mining. The systematic search process had identified papers that varied in terms of their direct relevance to our research focus – the IMP contribution to understanding the role of Chinese cultural values in business-to-business relationships and networks. Consequently, prior to the analysis phase the papers were put into a threefold classification: (1) papers dealing directly with core issues to do with Chinese cultural values, (2) papers dealing more broadly with business in China (for example, reporting case studies of business in China without concentrating on issues to do with cultural values), and (3) papers dealing more broadly with issue concerning business in Asia. Of the 58 papers, 20 fell into the first category (core Chinese cultural values); 27 into the second (broader issues to do with business in China); and 11 into the third (business in Asia).

The quantitative content analysis was conducted using the WordStat module within the QDA Miner software package, while the text mining analysis was conducted using the Termine service provided by the UK's National Centre for Text Mining [NCTM] ([www.nactem.ac.uk](http://www.nactem.ac.uk)). The text mining analysis was carried out on a plain text version created from the complete text of the relevant papers, which was uploaded to the batch processing service provided by the NCTM.

### **Findings & discussion**

The quantitative content analysis provided considerable evidence for the proposition that the sampling procedure had effectively isolated a set of papers dealing with China, since the most frequently occurring term (overall frequency 1913 occurrences) was 'Chinese'. Table 2 shows the results of the quantitative content analysis of the sample of 58 IMP papers selected for their relevance to China. The 17 terms shown in Table 2 were selected manually from the complete list of words found in the document for their high degree of relevance to the central theme of culture and, in particular, Chinese cultural values. Column 1 shows the term itself, column 2 shows the frequency with which it occurred across all 58 papers, column 3 shows what percentage of occurrences it accounts for within the Table, and column 4 shows what percentage of cases (i.e. papers) the term appeared in. For example, '*guanxi*' occurred with an overall frequency of 809, accounts for 26.4 per cent of the occurrences in Table 2, and was found in 50 per cent of the papers analysed. The core IMP concepts of actors, activities and resources figure prominently in Table 2. The well-known Chinese concept of '*guanxi*' also figures prominently, but other Chinese cultural concepts, such as *xinren*, *renqing* and *xinyong* are less prominent, appearing in only around 10-15 per cent of the 58 papers.



Table 2: Frequency of Key Cultural Terms Identified from all 58 Papers

TERM	FREQUENCY	% SHOWN	% CASES
TRUST	809	26.4	73.2
GUANXI	628	20.5	50.0
ACTIVITIES	316	10.3	71.4
ACTORS	293	9.6	60.7
RESOURCES	258	8.4	71.4
NORMS	155	5.1	51.8
BONDS	150	4.9	33.9
TIES	108	3.5	44.6
XINREN	60	2.0	10.7
LINKS	57	1.9	42.9
INDIVIDUALISM	49	1.6	17.9
COLLECTIVISM	48	1.6	16.1
CONFUCIAN	41	1.3	30.4
AAR	27	0.9	14.3
RENQING	23	0.8	16.1
COLLECTIVIST	21	0.7	12.5
XINYONG	16	0.5	10.7

Table 3 shows a cross-tabulation of selected key terms from the content analysis of the 58 papers. In comparison to Table 1, the analysis has now been concentrated upon three key IMP concepts (Actors, Activities, Resources, plus the term AAR which links these three), and five key Chinese cultural concepts (Confucian, *guanxi*, *renqing*, *xinren* and *xinyong*).

Table 3: Cross-Tabulation of Selected Key Terms from the 58 Papers

	AAR	ACTIVITIES	ACTORS	CONFUCIAN	GUANXI	RENQING	RESOURCES	XINREN	XINYONG
AAR	125	60	174	41	609	19	149	62	29
ACTIVITIES	60	6178	2530	125	2361	183	2794	31	31
ACTORS	174	2530	5907	346	2708	166	1835	86	24
CONFUCIAN	41	125	346	271	795	29	84	49	64
GUANXI	609	2361	2708	795	45578	1249	2954	3022	910
RENQING	19	183	166	29	1249	87	99	14	18
RESOURCES	149	2794	1835	84	2954	99	7158	101	34
XINREN	62	31	86	49	3022	14	101	1448	50
XINYONG	29	31	24	64	910	18	34	50	62

What is enumerated in Table 3 is the number of co-occurrences of the cross-tabulated terms. A co-occurrence is said to happen every time two terms appear in the same document (each IMP paper in the analysis was treated as a separate document in the analysis). By reading across the rows (or, equivalently, down the columns) one can see the terms with which any given term co-occurs more often. Admittedly it is fairly difficult to discern meaning directly from Table 3. However, the general message that emerges from Table 3 is that the IMP concepts tend to co-occur more frequently with each other than with the Chinese cultural concepts, and the Chinese cultural concepts tend to co-occur more frequently with each other than with the IMP concepts. This can be illustrated most clearly by looking at the co-occurrences of ‘*guanxi*’ with the other terms, illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Co-occurrences of Guanxi with other Key Concepts

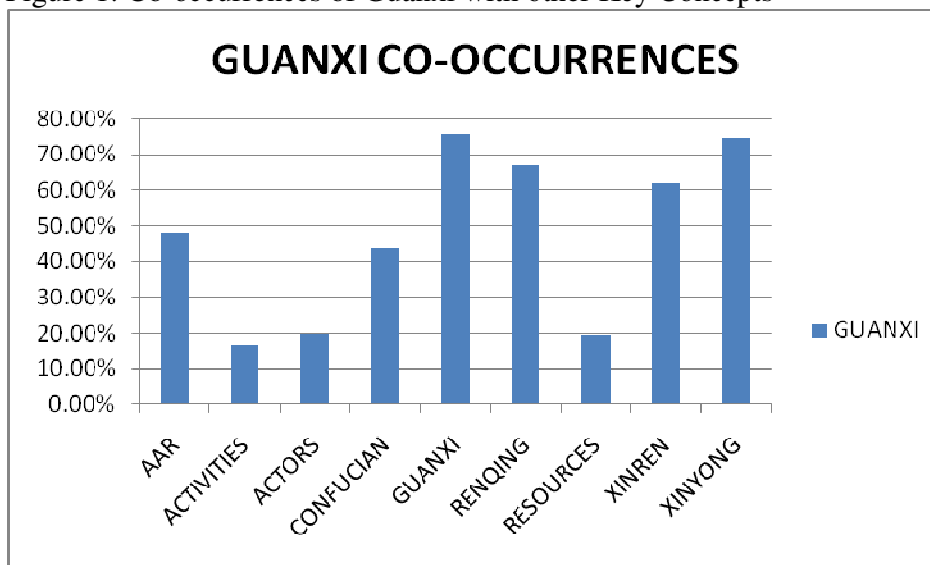


Figure 1 shows that *guanxi* co-occurs most frequently with itself, then with *xinyong*, *renqing* and *xinren*. There is substantial co-occurrence between *guanxi* and the term AAR, but much less co-occurrence between *guanxi* and the constituent terms of the AAR model, namely actors, activities and resources. This shows that the Chinese cultural concepts are fairly often used within the same paper, but that they are much less often used in papers that employ the core IMP concepts of actors, activities and resources. It suggests that IMP papers dealing with China tend to use either a ‘Chinese cultural values’ approach or an ‘IMP approach’, but seldom an integrative approach using both sets of concepts.

Tables 4 and 5 are based on the text-mining analysis of the complete set of 58 papers identified as being relevant to China. In Table 4 the top 25 terms from the analysis are presented. Column 1 shows the term itself; column 2 shows the C-value for the term, while in column 3 the term is classified into one of five categories: IMP general concept (10); general business concept (7); Chinese general concept (4); business culture concept (3); Chinese/IMP concept (1). The C-value method uses both linguistic and statistical information to extract technical terms from natural

text; the higher is the C-value, the greater is the likelihood that the extracted term will function as a technical expression in the associated scientific domain. Since we were specifically interested in terms/concepts relating to Chinese business culture, Table 5 shows candidate terms with lower C-values that were identified by TerMine and which concern business culture concepts (terms with C-values below 5 were excluded from the analysis).

Table 4: Top 25 Terms Generated from Text-Mining all 58 Selected IMP Papers

TERM	C-value	CATEGORY
1. Business relationship	361	IMP general concept
2. Business network	273	IMP general concept
3. Chinese business	242	Chinese general concept
4. International business	194	General business concept
5. Supply chain	145	General business concept
6. Chinese business network	133	Chinese/IMP concept
7. Relationship atmosphere	126	IMP general concept
8. Chinese context	114	Chinese general concept
9. Relationship marketing	99	General business concept
10. Buyer-seller relationship	98	IMP general concept
11. International marketing	95	General business concept
12. Chinese market	81	Chinese general concept
13. Personal relationship	75	IMP general concept
14. Chinese supplier	72	Chinese general concept
15. International business studies	70	General business concept
16. Business culture	69	Business culture concept
17. Relationship quality	67	IMP general concept
18. Social relationship	67	IMP general concept
19. Partner firm	65	IMP general concept

20. Strategic orientation	62	General business concept
21. Social bond	56	IMP general concept
22. Relationship development	55	IMP general concept
23. Western business	54	Business culture concept
24. Chinese culture	53	Business culture concept
25. Business partner	51	General business concept

Table 5: Text-Mining all 58 Papers: Business Culture Concepts with C-Values Between 51 and 5

TERM	C-value
Cultural dimension	49
Ethnic Chinese context	39
Cultural sensitivity	29
Guanxi network	20
Cultural distance	19
Emic approach	15
Etic approach	12
Chinese capitalism	9
Guanxi relationship	8
Chinese business negotiating style	8
Asian culture	8
Social harmony	6
Cross-cultural psychology	6
Chinese family business networks	6
Cultural perspective	5
Cultural norm	5
Cultural bias	5
Cross-cultural communication	5
Cultural diversity	5

The analysis presented in Table 4 provides evidence that even in this specially selected sample where IMP researchers address Chinese business explicitly, the core theoretical concerns originate from the IMP domain rather than from the knowledge domains of business culture, cross-cultural management or Chinese management studies. This suggests that, as a rule, when addressing China issues, IMP researchers are seeking to apply existing IMP conceptual frameworks to the Chinese context. There is little evidence from Table 4 of a balanced approach, seeking to draw upon and integrate multiple theoretical approaches.

The results in Table 5 approach the subject matter from a different angle. Having failed to find any prominent concepts from the domains of business culture, cross-cultural management or Chinese management in the top 25 terms, the question becomes: where are such terms to be found in this analysis? Table 5 demonstrates that such terms are in use in IMP research into China, but that they have far less prominence than the IMP conceptual frameworks. Hence, in Table 5, we find characteristic 'cultural' concepts such as cultural dimensions, cultural sensitivity, cultural distance, and the distinction between emic and etic approaches. However, Table 5 still contains a surprise, since there is comparatively little mention of characteristic *Chinese* cultural concepts. Indeed, beyond *guanxi* none of the characteristic Chinese cultural concepts mentioned in the literature (such as *mianzi*, *xinyong* and *renqing*) appears in this Table. Other characteristic Chinese concepts missing from Table 4 are any mention of Confucianism, or of Sun Tzu/The Art of War. This is consistent with the quantitative content analysis discussed earlier, in which the raw frequencies with which Chinese cultural concepts occur were found to be low. The concepts appear relatively infrequently even in a sample of IMP papers selected to focus on China; consequently, the text mining analysis fails to derive technical terms based on these concepts.

## Conclusion & implications for research

This paper has pulled together all of the IMP papers concerning business in China in order to evaluate whether or not key themes can be identified in this research, and to evaluate the overall contribution to knowledge made by this work to the field of business-to-business relationships and networks in business with China. Our results show that (1) IMP research addressing business with China has largely adopted IMP conceptual frameworks, and only secondarily frameworks based on Chinese cultural values; (2) Explicit consideration of Chinese cultural values is found in comparatively few IMP papers addressing business in China; (3) There are few instances where IMP researchers adopt an integrative theoretical approach, using both core IMP concepts and key Chinese cultural business concepts and (4) Although considerable attention has been paid to the concept of *guanxi* by IMP researchers, other key Chinese cultural business concepts are used comparatively infrequently.

What is clear is that IMP researchers recognise the strategic importance of China in the field of business-to-business relationships and networks. However, research to date has largely focused on the "Western" perspective of doing business in China, as opposed to dyadic relationships between Western and Chinese firms. Moreover, there is a dearth of papers that pay explicit attention to Chinese cultural values. Those that do, the overriding focus is on *guanxi*. Yet, the significance placed on *guanxi* by IMP scholars might not be in-keeping with how it is perceived and interpreted in contemporary terms. For example Anderson & Lee (2008) found that the majority of their respondents viewed a diminishing role for *guanxi* in the anticipation of increasing openness of Chinese markets and a better regulatory environment. Moreover, Davison and Ou (2008) argue that online business-business intermediaries are beginning to side step the *guanxi* thereby changing the relevance and significance of business related social networks. The author's cite Alibaba.com, the world's largest business-to-business e-commerce site with over 30

million registered users, as a contributor to the waning of *guanxi*. Therefore, IMP researchers need to look at Chinese cultural values “beyond *guanxi*”, in particular *guanxiwang*, and explore how these might integrate into existing IMP conceptual frameworks.

The difficulties in doing empirical research in China are well documented. It is perhaps not surprising that the overwhelming majority of papers that focus on China are analysed from a Western perspective or fail to integrate IMP concepts and Chinese cultural values. IMP is made up of predominantly Western researchers. Thus, it is perhaps understandable that the obvious limitations associated with China related research are a key factor in the dearth of studies that focus on Western and Chinese dyadic relationships, Chinese cultural values and an integrative approach using IMP concepts and Chinese cultural concepts. However, for IMP to be truly international, China’s rise in so many areas cannot be ignored.

Finally, it needs to be pointed out that this paper is only an early attempt to analyse the attention paid to China by IMP researchers. A logical next step is to conduct empirical research that explores whether or not similar key themes can be identified in papers published in leading business marketing peer-reviewed journals. This will of course provide a more “complete view” of the overall contribution to knowledge made by business marketing researchers to the field of business-to-business relationships and networks in China.

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## **Appendix: Sample of 58 Papers Used in the Study**

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