

Chinese-style Management and Human Resource Development in the Process of Modernization

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Abstract

Since the reform and opening-up, China's economy has grown rapidly. China has become the world's second-largest economy and the most attractive domestic and international markets. China also has strong local demand, and its supply chains and production have skyrocketed in recent years. This success has been achieved through Chinese-style management (CSM), modernization, and organizational human resources management (HRM). As an Asian country, China is culturally, politically, and economically very different from Western countries. Chinese organizations with contrasting management styles are partially able to follow the Western style of modernization.

CSM is considered to have gained its popularity influenced by Chinese culture and customs with Confucian principles over a long period of time. Chinese traditional cultural values remain influential in workplace relationships, affecting not only the configuration of CSM practices but also how they are perceived by the workforce. In fact, the CSM environment has been undergoing significant changes due to institutional, demographic and technological changes and heightened domestic and international business competition. The goal of CSM is the transformation from an agricultural society to an industrial society and an advanced information society or knowledge-based economy. Applying the modernization of Chinese-style training systems, the study analyzed performance management practice, talent management, and other practices in companies.

Key words: Chinese-style management; Confucian philosophy; culture; modernization, human resources management (HRM)

1. Introduction

The People's Republic of China (China hereinafter) replaced Japan as the world's second-largest economy in dollar terms in 2010; Japan's nominal gross domestic product was \$5,474 billion compared with China's \$5,879 billion. (Financial Times February 15, 2011). China's continuous economic growth is due to shifting from a largely agrarian society to a manufacturing and advanced information society or knowledge-based economy. In the process it has seen sharp increases in productivity and wages vis-à-vis

the quantity and quality of human resources (HRs)¹⁾, and social, physical and natural resources. HRs are an important factor in utilizing and organizing the Chinese-style management (CSM) system.

China's economic development over the past 75 years, from 1949 to 2024, exhibits three phases of development: the first phase was the 30 years from 1949 to 1979; the second phase was from 1979 to 2019; and the third phase is from 2019 to 2023. In the third phase following the COVID-19 pandemic, China has experienced essential changes in traditional application, especially in cross-cultural conflict management.

In the first decades after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the Chinese economy was centrally controlled, with little room for initiative or independent decision-making by economic enterprises and their managers (Xiang, 1999). The government of China has implemented its economic plans since the First Five-Year Plan (1953–1957) and policies. At present, China is implementing the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) for National Economic and Social Development of China. The First Five-Year Plan, which had “6,000 Soviet advisers helped establish and operate the 156 large-scale capital-intensive Soviet-assisted projects,” significantly increasing the pace and quality (productivity) of industrialization in the country. It was followed by the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), which undid many of the gains through the worsening of incentives by banning material incentives and restricting markets (The World Economic Forum, 2015).

The government began industrializing China and adopted the Soviet Union's central planning model. However, during the 30 years of the first phase from 1949 to 1979, the goal was not achieved. According to the statistical yearbook, there were several years that had negative economic growth, such as in 1961, –27%; in 1962, –5.58%; in 1967, –5.77%; and in 1968, –4.1% (China's National Bureau of Statistics, Website). As a result, China essentially remained in the same Malthusian poverty trap, with per capita income not significantly different from what it was around the Second Opium War (1856–1860) (Yi, 2016). Until 1979, government authorities were responsible for employment policy and planning in such institutions and their implementation. Over the past four decades (1980s–2020s), the Chinese economy has sustained rapid growth and cemented its global status as a major growth contributor. Table 1 shows China's gross domestic product reached \$17.963 trillion in 2022, with income per capita reaching more than \$12,720 in the same year, doubling from the figure recorded in 2012.

This paper draws upon research carried out in the context of CSM practices and how companies deal with their human resources. However, this study examines the business operations of associated state-owned and nonstate-owned companies. The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 gives an overview CSM and its basic concepts. Section 3 examines human resources management (HRM) practices in China. Section 4 presents the process of modernization in the context of Chinese organizations. Finally, Section

1) China has a vast number of skilled and semi-skilled worker and cheap labor; China's average monthly wages (converted into U.S. dollars) in 1990 were \$55 compared with \$32 for Vietnam and \$221 for Mexico. AmCham China, 2018 Business Climate Survey Report, January 2017, <http://www.amchamchina.org/>.

5 gives concluding remarks, deliberating on and summarizing the successful strategies to overcome the problems resulting from the pandemic with particular reference to previous crisis management techniques/ strategies and highlighting the modernization and success of Chinese industry.

Table 1: GDP, Per Capita Income, and Economic growth in China

Year	GDP Billion US\$	Per Capita US \$	Growth Rate
1960	59.71	89.52	n.a.
1961	50.05	75.80	-27.27
1965	70.43	98.48	16.95
1970	92.60	113.16	19.3
1975	163.42	178.33	8.72
1980	306.16	312.02	7.83
1985	309.83	294.78	13.43
1990	394.56	347.57	3.92
1995	734.48	609.60	10.95
2000	1211.33	959.36	8.49
2005	2285.96	1753.41	11.39
2010	6087.19	4550.47	10.63
2011	7551.54	5614.38	9.55
2012	8532.18	6300.58	7.86
2013	9570.47	7020.38	7.76
2014	10475.62	7636.07	7.42
2015	11061.57	8016.44	7.04
2016	11233.31	8094.39	6.84
2017	12310.49	8817.04	6.94
2018	13894.91	9905.40	6.74
2019	14279.97	10143.86	5.95
2020	14687.74	10408.72	2.23
2021	17820.46	12617.51	8.44
2022	17881.78	12662.60	2.98
2023	17794.78	12614.10	5.3

Note: n.a. (data not available)

Source: World Bank, website

2. Chinese Style Management (CSM) and Its Basic Concepts

CSM practices have received growing research attention in the global arena, especially for Chinese and Asian scholars. Zeng Shiqiang²⁾, the best-known and the CSM science. This section will review and analyze Zeng's studies in-depth in industrial organizations. CSM practices have two perspectives: traditional management practices, in which ancient Chinese philosophy is firmly entrenched in Chinese leadership, with a strong focus on improving employees through personal development; and contemporary

2) Zeng Shiqiang was a Chinese-born Taiwanese sinologist. Zeng is acclaimed as having been the "Father of the Chinese Style of Management." He served as president of Hsing Kuo University of Management (HKU) and professor at National Chiao Tung University (NCTU)." Cambridge scholars. <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/64086>, retrieved 4 January 2024.

CSM that employs modern management practices.

1) Traditional Concepts of CSM

Traditional Chinese management styles impact on Chinese beliefs, values and cultural norms. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, in the first phase of economic development from 1949 to 1979, industrial development has been given considerable attention. For the 1st Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party and founder of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong, protectionism and top-down planning led to a focus on developing heavy industry under state ownership. These heavy industries, such as mining, iron and steel, power, machinery, electrical, and chemical industries, aimed to build a foundation for the nation's industrialization.

Organizational management practices are considered a kind of a culture that has gained popularity as influenced by traditional Chinese culture and customs. The traditional management practices include Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. These are the three philosophies and religions of Chinese culture from ancient times to the present. Confucianism deals with human relationships, Taoism deals with life in harmony with nature, and Buddhism deals with people's immortal world. For the Chinese, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are philosophies rather than religions. According to scholars and researchers, Confucianism started about 2,000 years ago and has seen progressive development ranging from Classical Confucianism, Neo Confucianism, reformist Confucianism to Modern Confucianism (Lam, 2003). Liu and Stening (2015) argued that Chinese culture lies within the teachings of Confucianism, Taoism and the concept of morality. According to Tian (2007), Confucian values encompass moral cultivation, family and interpersonal relationships, respect for age and hierarchy, harmony and face. Moreover, the moral cultivation of Confucianism emphasizes that people should discipline themselves by internal moral power rather than by external power, such as laws and regulations, as moral cultivation is considered the main discipline of people's attitudes and behavior (Tian, 2007).

Organizational management believes in *feng shui* or geomancy, a divination that attributes people's fate and fortune (Li, *et al.* 2017). There are some others concepts, *guanxi*, *renqing*, *mianzi*, *wulun*, *ren*, and *Kung Fu*, that have been followed by Chinese companies. The concept of *guanxi* (social network) has gained increasing attention. *Guanxi* is more complex than the English equivalents of relationships and networks, in the sense that *guanxi* symbolizes not only interpersonal relations but also semifamily ethics, which is responsible for coworkers and the community identity embedded in the workplace (Luo, Cheng, & Zhang, 2016).

The Chinese employment system, known as the "iron rice bowl" (*tie fan wan*), ensured "jobs for life" and "cradle to grave" mostly for state-owned enterprise (SOE) employees (Lu and Perry, 1997). In this system, companies provide their employees with wages, housing, welfare and other benefits. According to Lu (2019), the prereform employment system was characterized by the so-called three irons: iron bowl (*tiefanwan*, lifetime employment), iron wage (*tiegongzi*, fixed wage) and iron chair (*tiejiaoyi*, permanent

position). There was also a rule called replacement (*dingti*), which meant children were entitled to replace their parents at work when the parents retired. In this system, employees received increasing pay and benefits, welfare and housing, job security was guaranteed, medical care, children's schooling, and other social services, a residual of which is still in the SOE sector. Zeng's research identified CSM as having three major characteristics: (i) people oriented, (ii) like-minded people working together, and (iii) making reasoning adjustments to adapt to constantly changing circumstances, with people as the key to the success of the administration (Li, *et. al.* 2019). The next section will briefly review the three characteristics of CSM practices.

(1) People oriented

In a people-oriented management system, employees are allowed to express their beliefs freely, which may provide a platform for people to argue ceaselessly and lead to a chaotic state where it is difficult to reach any decisions (Li, *et al.*, 2017). Zeng believes there is a great difference between Western-style and Chinese-style management. Western-style management tends to be achievement-oriented, and, consequently, emphasizes the successful implementation of plans and the desired results. CSM focuses its attention on people due to the belief that human effort is the most important factor in handling affairs. Employees are company members and are also like members of a family. Under this perspective, employee efforts can create unified power in realizing the purpose of bringing peace and comfort to people (Li, *et.al.* 2017). Zeng further mentioned that Chinese conventional wisdom in taking the path of "self-cultivation, regulating family, administering the state, and achieving universal harmony" is essentially the pursuit of individual, family, national, and world peace.

Everyone knows that people in high positions have rules to follow, since promotion attracts the attention of all the staff in a company. Promotion cannot be handled in the dark with no transparency or rules. Due to its importance in people's lives, the leader must have a very serious attitude toward staff promotions, and does not tackle it casually or abuse the power by promoting his own peers without reason (Li, *et.al.* 2017). Zeng puts forward three suggestions on effective ways of being promoted. First, do your job well and find time to share your superior's responsibilities, such as helping him or her solve problems. Second, subordinates must be good at understanding their superiors' intentions and help them make the right decisions in everything they do. Third, give enough opportunities to their employees to let them show their abilities (Guo, *et.al.* 2021, 86).

Zeng mentioned that human conflicts must be kept to a minimum to realize peace and harmony for oneself and others. Although sharing the same blood, Chinese people have their own minds and actions. Because of this, sometimes Chinese people are not able to make compromises with others, tiny problems escalate into large ones, and there will be no chance to maintain long-term favorable cooperation within the organization.

(2) Like-minded people working together

China is a collectivistic culture; people work together, since making reasonable changes depends on people who can think and judge before taking action. In organization management, Chinese people take their “face,” namely their pride, as the top consideration. Zeng emphasizes that one of the most important things Chinese people care about most is “face.” If employees have the “face,” everything is okay; even if they receive a small bonus and are criticized privately, they will readily accept it. If they are treated fairly, the employees still feel they have been wronged, and it is unjust (Zhang and He, 2019). Zeng further explained that Chinese people often call those who get promoted “King’s men,” which means “you are the leader’s friends, so you get promoted more quickly.” Confucius advocates that “a gentleman is not a tool to be used at anyone’s will,” and the subordinates who are blindly obedient to orders from the superior will be looked down upon and be called “willing slaves” or “yes-men.” Confucius once remarked that “if you serve your master with too much courtesy, you will be called a brown-noser” (Zhang and He, 2019). However, a good leader should respect individual differences and try to achieve harmony through compromise, which can help reconcile contradictions, resolve conflicts, assimilate differences and bridge them. Zeng makes some suggestions, such as encouraging self-introspection to save face, paying equal attention to private performance.

(3) Making rational adjustments based upon changing circumstance

CSM attaches great importance to adjusting to various changing circumstances, so this problem is worthy of a lifetime pursuit and practice. CSM advocates “reasonable change,” and if changing is based upon reasoning, then it is appropriate. The Chinese prefer to tread a middle course, and believe that both “changing” and “stabilization” exist simultaneously in a complementary manner (Li *et.al.*, 2019). According to Zeng, reasonable change according to the constantly changing situations is the highest wisdom of Chinese management; however, in CSM, every change must be based upon reasoning rather than passion or arbitrariness. Both change and stability exist simultaneously in a complementary manner. There is no fixed model; as long as change is rational, whatever type of change is acceptable (Zhang and He, 2019).

The Chinese people’s tolerance has been inspired and developed through their growing understanding of each other. The Chinese respect peaceful and tolerant natures because they love peace more than anything else, and they know that peace can only be achieved through mutual understanding and tolerant inclusiveness. Companies also realize and accept different lifestyles and cultures to arrive at mutually beneficial cooperation and joint development of other countries. Faure and Fang (2008) pointed out that China has undergone significant cultural changes, and contemporary Chinese culture encompasses new elements, such as individualism, short-term orientation, materialism, and others. At present, Chinese people are less concerned with religion. They follow different philosophical teachings and pursue “a wonderful way of life,” which makes the Chinese “intensely practical” (Fung, 1966, Lee, 1995).

2) Contemporary concept of CSM

Contemporary management practices in China include quantitative management, organizational behavior, system theory, and the contingency perspective. Contemporary management also introduces profit incentives for rural collective enterprises, which are owned by local governments but are guided by market principles, family farms, small private businesses, and foreign investors and traders. Prior to the reform of 1978, SOE categories were (a) national enterprises, (b) controlled directly through the industrial ministries of the central government in Peking, and (c) local enterprises, controlled through various industrial departments of the local governments.

Despite the low efficiency of SOEs, Deng Xiaoping (former leader) implemented the economic reforms in 1978. Under this reform, the country was transformed from an agrarian society into an industrializing one, which started in the second phase from 1979 to 2019. China adopted its Open-Door policy and the so-called “four modernizations” of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense as an economic policy through reforms. Even though a move toward privatization was officially embraced in 1978, many of the policies and institutions supporting this change did not come into being until the 1990s. (Chow, *et. al.*, 2007).

The economic reforms have encouraged the formation of rural enterprises and private businesses, liberalized foreign trade and investment, relaxed state control over some prices, and investment in industrial production and workforce education. The government granted greater autonomy to enterprise managers under these reforms. As a result, the industrial organization became more free to set their own production goals, sell products in the private market at competitive prices, grant bonuses to good workers and fire bad ones, and retain some portion of the firm’s earnings for future investment (Hu and Khan, 1997).

Postreform regulations and rules apply to all local businesses and organizational types such as SOEs, privately owned enterprises (POEs)³⁾, hybrid, limited liability companies, partnerships, sole proprietorships, foreign-invested enterprises, and joint venture businesses between foreign shareholder and Chinese partnerships (JV). The economic reform initiatives gradually led to a hybrid combining important elements of planning, state ownership, and official direction with a revival of the open for foreign enterprises and a private, market-based system. Private firms are usually family businesses or partnerships and are considered the main driver of China’s accelerated economic growth. SOEs in industries considered strategically important to China’s development and security are wholly owned by the state (Naughton, 2007). Hybrid companies behave similarly as private ones; although the state can be involved in capital holdings.

3) Privately owned enterprises were officially accepted in 1988. The Constitution Amendment in 1999 explicitly recognized private ownership for the first time since 1949, the National People’s Congress (NPC, 1999), China’s parliament. The official recognition of private ownership and private property were important steps and landmarks in the development of a market economy (Lu, 2019).

Those organizations where labor received most employment protection, SOEs rapidly declined in number and workforce size from the 1990s, including bankruptcies, plant closures, privatizations and job shedding. SOEs employees decreased from 80 million in 1980 to 50 million in 2022 in the past four decades (Table 2). Large SOEs help bear a heavier share of the burden from retirement pensions, other social-welfare costs, and redundant workers. (Lin, *et al.*, 1998, 425) Under these circumstances, the government supported a total of 300 large SOEs to alleviate the unemployment problem in 1996, and 57 conglomerate groups. By the end of 1998, there was increased support to 512 large SOEs and 120 conglomerates (Chen, 1998, 29). Although, the concept of management underwent a radical change as the culture of “iron rice bowls” gave way to “golden rice bowls” (*jin fan wan*). With the beginnings of reform, the guarantees of the “iron rice-bowl” began to erode (Chan, 1995). Many SOE employees are still promoted according to seniority and connections rather than merit, and permanent staff still enjoy the “iron rice bowl” advantage. Warner (1996) argued that, overall, decentralization in SOEs and the development of joint ventures with Western companies have given organizations increasing freedom to control their human and financial resources, and, on the surface, many managers appear to be adopting Western HRM models.

Table 2: Number of Employed Persons in China (unit: 10,000)

Year	Employee in Various Units	State-Owned Units	Urban Collective Owned	Join Ownership	Foreign Funded Units
1980	10,444	8,019	2,425	n.a.	n.a.
1985	12,358	8,990	3,324	38	n.a.
1990	14,059	10,346	3,549	96	62
1995	15,301	11,261	3,147	53	241
2000	11,612	8,102	1,499	42	332
2005	11,404	6,488	810	45	688
2010	13,052	6,516	597	156	1053
2011	14,413	6,704	603	149	1217
2012	15,236	6,839	590	149	1246
2013	18,108	6,365	566	108	1566
2014	18,278	6,312	537	103	1562
2015	18,062	6,208	481	92	1446
2016	17,886	6,170	453	86	1361
2017	17,644	6,064	406	77	1291
2018	17,588	5,740	347	66	1212
2019	17,162	5,473	296	60	1203
2020	17,039	5,563	271	69	1216
2021	17,015	5,633	262	62	1220
2022	16,701	5,612	235	58	1164

Note: (n.a.) data not available

Source: The China Statistical Yearbook 2023, <https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsj/2023/indexeh.htm>

In contrast, the government has adopted a “let go” strategy for small SOEs. The head of a World Bank Mission in China commented as follows on the SOE reforms launched at the 15th Party Congress in

1997: “(M)any of the smaller enterprises are ending up as non-state operations or cooperatives or are being taken over by the managers or workers in some form which is close to privatization SOEs were undergoing massive restructuring. Under the pressure of survival in the market, they began to seek efficiency. Not only did they have to reduce their workforces, but they also had to shut down unprofitable enterprises. However, there was a significant increase in production by enterprises sponsored by local governments, especially townships and villages, increasingly, by private entrepreneurs and foreign investors, and the employed persons also increased from 620 thousand in 1990 to 11.64 million in 2022” (Table 2).

3. Human Resources Management (HRM) Practices in China

Over the last several decades, as China has moved away from a planned to a market-oriented economy, numerous changes in human resources management (HRM) practices are considered. The government has launched a set of institutional policies to accelerate the marketization and privatization of SOEs. The HRM scheme has gradually been transformed from the traditional egalitarian approach to a more Westernized approach that manages employees as a resource. The transition to HRM practices and focusing on individual contributions have raised awareness in organizations and society.

The management style and the HRM contemporary practices are due to institutional, demographic, and technological changes as well as heightened business competition domestically and internationally. At the same time, traditional cultural values remain influential in workplace relationships, affecting not only the configuration of human resource practices but also the way they are perceived by the workforce. However, most Chinese firms have adopted a decentralized organizational structure that has otherwise enhanced HRM, performance base job benefits, recruitment, selection, decision-making and trade unions. These will be briefly discussed as follows.

1) Employment, Wage, and Promotion System

China employment law basically involves such issues as employment contracts, workplace safety, working hours, and protection from discrimination. In addition, in terms of remuneration or salary, procedures for negotiations, labor disputes, compensation or wage regulations, training, social insurance, and other legal responsibilities, the employer must follow the law. The Employment Promotion Law of the People’s Republic of China and the Labor Law of the People’s Republic of China, include provisions that ensure basic principles of employment equality. The influence of seniority wage increases the probability of implementing mandatory retirement and employing older workers in Chinese manufacturing firms.

China’s labor-management system has been in effect since China embarked on its economic reforms in 1978. The system was, from the 1950s onward, characterized by what was called the “three old irons,” i.e., lifetime employment (the “iron rice bowl”), centrally administered wages (the “iron wage”), and

state-controlled appointment and promotion of managerial staff (the “iron chair”). The reform process has changed the three old irons, replacing them with a “hybrid” HRM model, albeit with “Chinese characteristics,” reflecting the influence of foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) that have invested in China.

Since China enacted its first minimum wage law in 1994, the magnitude and frequency of changes in the minimum wage have been substantial, both over time and across jurisdictions. Prior to 1994, China had no minimum wage law. In 1984, the country started the “Minimum Wage Treaty.” Not until the eruption of private enterprises in 1992, when labor disputes became frequent, did the Chinese Central Government begin to consider minimum wage legislation (Yang, 2006). China’s Minimum Wage Regulations, implemented by the then Ministry of Labor and Social Security in March 2004, stipulated that regional governments should adjust the minimum wage promptly and at least once every two years.

The minimum wage varies by region and has risen gradually over the last ten years. Minimum wage rates in China are determined by regional governments based on local living costs, local wages, and the overall supply and demand for labor. As a result, there is considerable variation in minimum wage levels across major cities and in poorer rural areas. The highest monthly minimum wage as of February 2023 was in Shanghai (2,590 yuan), roughly double the minimum wage in smaller cities in provinces such as Guangxi, Hubei, Xinjiang, Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang. Employers still find ways to avoid paying the minimum wage (China Labor Bulletin, May 15, 2023). China’s working-age population (16–59 years) has been shrinking since 2012, with the country’s overall labor force reaching a peak of 807 million in 2016. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (website), China’s total labor force at the end of 2021 had declined by just over a million to 780.2 million. The total number of employed persons has remained steady at around 750 million for the last three years, although there was a slight decline starting in 2016, according to official statistics. Over the past three years (2020–2023), the COVID-19 pandemic and the government’s response have resulted in companies cutting production and staff. For example, the government’s intervention in big tech, real estate, and education has led to a downturn in sectors that previously absorbed large numbers of workers.

In recent years, the competition among young graduates has become increasingly fierce, not just for jobs in private companies but also the civil service, public institutions and SOEs. Private companies previously recruited many workers, particularly young graduates. Millions of workers in traditional industries have been laid off and many of the new jobs created in the service sector are insecure, poorly paid, and leave workers without social security or employment contracts. Although wages across all sectors, industries, and sub-economies have various trends, there are two major sets of trends when considering some of the largest and highest-profile industries in recent years. In terms of wage performance over the past decade regarding skill differences, while wage growth has been slowing for those workers in low-skilled industries, wage growth has been increasing for high-skilled workers.

2) Industrial Relations and Trade Union

China has been modernizing its economy, and workers have begun to agitate more strongly for increased wages, improved labor standards, and a voice in decision-making (Catherine, 2017). The trade union includes Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management in the People's Republic of China, particularly in forming a distinctly "Chinese" version. Chinese unions have four basic functions: protecting employee rights, participating in firm management, educating employees, and directing organizational efforts toward central government's economic goals. Influenced by socialist ideology, the Chinese government's interpretation of labor rights protection is not the same as its Western counterparts (Zhao, 2008).

The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is involved in promoting economic development and maintaining social stability (White, 1996). The trade union in an enterprise is now empowered by law to sign collective employment contracts with the employer on behalf of employees. The trade union can also interfere in cases of inappropriate termination of labor contracts and labor disputes. In addition, the trade union is the executive agency of the workers' congress, which is legally entitled to supervise enterprise management and to represent workforce interests.

Although the trade unions' traditional structure and function are products of China's Communist history, with increasing economic prosperity and growing awareness of workers' rights, they are embracing both strategic and organizational change to respond effectively to today's economic, social and political context (Child, 2009). New trends include developing union membership among migrant workers, direct election of union leaders, participating in and promoting unions, and developing new labor regulations. The much-criticized "top-down" approach associated with the ACFTU⁴⁾, however, has led to growing pressure "from below," as evidenced by the recent increase in the number of strikes. From January to May 1993, there were 194 strikes in 17 provinces in China involving about 30,000 workers (Cleiton, 2023, 16). Due to the Employment Contract Law in 2008, employers of privately-owned firms have also responded to pressures to accept enterprise unions, (Zhu, *et al.*, 2011). As the country's sole labor union, the ACFTU is recognized by many as an appendage of the Communist Party and, at the plant level, submissive to management (Catherine, 2017). Indeed, Lee, *et al.* (2016) suggested that, Nowadays, enterprises are expected to have trade unions, collective bargaining and workers' congresses among institutions' and these are expected to also behave more effectively. One of the weaknesses of Chinese trade unionism is that unions at the enterprise level are less than independent from management because many "grassroots union leaders" have traditionally been nominated by higher-level union authorities or enterprise leaders (Chan, 2010). According to the Labor Law, trade unions shall represent and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of employees and carry out their activities independently in accordance with the law. The status, legal obligation and rights of trade unions are stipulated in more detail in the Trade Union Law of

4) ACFTU founded on May 1, 1925, the National Federation of Trade Unions of China is the largest trade union organization in the world with 169 million members, (Cleiton, 2023, 30.)

the People's Republic of China (PRC) ("Trade Union Law"), which was enacted in 1992 and revised three times in 2001, 2009 and 2021. The newly revised Trade Union Law further clarifies the status of trade unions, which are voluntary organizations formed by employees. Employers are not required to establish trade unions for their employees.

4. Process of Modernization in the Context of Chinese Organizations

Modernization in China has been pursued for more than a century, with unremitting efforts to "Revitalize China" according to the four modernizations slogan launched after the founding of New China in 1949, referring to agriculture, industry, defense and science⁵⁾ (China Daily, March 2nd, 2021). China's modernization began at a very low level due to chronic stagnation in Old China (Zheng, 2023). It has already been 75 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China; the Communist Party of China (CPC) has also been fighting poverty, controlling epidemics, avoiding major disasters, responding to situations, and resolving crises. In this process, the "four modernizations" goal adopted in the 1950s gave way to a vision for building a prosperous, democratic, advanced, and harmonious modern socialist country in the early stage of the reform and opening-up in 1978 (Figure 1). Since the economic reform and opening-up policy was adopted in 1978, General Secretary Deng Xiaoping stressed that all policymaking should be judged by whether it contributes to China's overall national strengths as a socialist nation (Deng, 1993). Deng Xiaoping spoke highly of China's "Two Bombs, One Satellite" achievement, reaffirming its strategic significance to China's growing strengths. As Deng Xiaoping said "If China had not developed the atomic bomb and the hydrogen bomb and launched its first man-made satellite it would not have been called an influential country or able to enjoy the international status that it does nowadays. These achievements signify a nation's capability and symbolize the prosperity and sophistication of a nation and its people" (Deng, 1993). China took strategic steps to strengthen its national leverage with major achievements in each stage.

China has explained the characteristics and logic of "an alternative model of modernization" to the world with its unique practices, from poverty alleviation to pandemic response measures (China Daily, March 2nd, 2021). The national effort has achieved some results and historic changes, successfully promoting and expanding the stages of modernization since the third plenary session of the 11th CPC Central Committee in 1978, which introduced reform and opening up that would launch the nation on a new journey to build a modern socialist country.

5) The country successfully tested its first atomic and hydrogen bombs in 1964 and 1967, respectively, and launched its first man-made satellite in 1970, which became known as the "Two Bombs, One Satellite" project.



Figure 1: Chinese-Style Modernization and Evolving Strategic Goals

Source: Shi (2024)

1) Chinese Style of Modernization

The process of modernization involves evolving from a traditional agricultural society to a modern industrial society. This modernization process has advanced to an information society or knowledge-based economy, which has led the Chinese people on a new path to modernization. Chinese modernization is quite different from Western modernization. The former general secretary of the CPC and Chinese communist leader Deng Xiaoping emphasized two ideas: first, each nation has a unique road to development which they must explore and practice for themselves based on their specific national conditions; and second, Chinese-style modernization is a novel road to socialist modernization pioneered by the Chinese people under the leadership of the CPC.

During Deng Xiaoping's period, Chinese-style modernization took the form of industrial development, paving the way for improving living standards from subsistence to moderate prosperity in all aspects. In implementing the industrialization strategy before the economic reform and opening-up policy, the Chinese government struck a balance between short- and long-term priorities and regional and overall development.

Industrialization was first tabled at the 2002 Sixteenth Party Congress, where former general secretary and Chinese communist leader Jiang Zemin called on the state to take "the road toward new industrialization" by cultivating advanced manufacturing, integrating industrial processes with emerging information technologies, developing a skilled talent pool, investing in scientific education, and reducing industrial pollution.

However, China is progressing simultaneously on the new four modernizations of industrialization, informatization, urbanization, and agricultural modernization. The new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation are developing rapidly, offering opportunities to hasten constructing the digital China and promoting Chinese-style modernization. At the 18th CPC National Congress (November

14th, 2012), the general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC, Hu Jintao, called for “embarking upon a path of industrialization, informatization, urbanization, and agriculture modernization with Chinese characteristics, giving play to the synergy between industrialization, informatization, urbanization, and agriculture modernization” (Party Literature Research Center, 2014).

Chinese people, under the leadership of the CPC, have taken a difficult and exploratory road to modernization with Chinese characteristics since the beginning of the 20th century. China-style modernization has strong ties developed by social interactions that assist innovators in the search for inspiration, sponsorship, and support within the workplace. Under these circumstances, the critical goal of CSM and HR in Chinese-style modernization is to strengthen the integration of HRM and organizational management practices in the new era.

Under the guidance of the general secretary of the CPC and the president of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Xi Jinping’s *Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era*, China has implemented new development concepts, focused on meeting people’s aspirations for a better life, and initiated a new leap forward toward higher quality of economic development in its modernization drive (Xi, 2022). Xi made it clear in the 19th Party Congress (October 18, 2017) report that the task in the new era and on the new journey is to “comprehensively advance the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation with Chinese-style modernization.” Chinese leader Xi proclaimed the superiority of China’s own approach.

In the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China⁶), the term “Chinese-style Modernization” “appeared for the first time. Chinese modernization has been frequently mentioned by Xi as an important keyword in many foreign affairs activities and inspection tours at home. Modernization with Chinese characteristics was called by Xi the “Five Characteristics,” namely modernization of a huge population, common prosperity for all, material and cultural-ethnic advancement, harmony between humanity, and nature and peaceful development (Modern Diplomacy, 2023). In addition, Xi added nine basic requirements: upholding the leadership of the Communist Party and Socialism with Chinese characteristics; pursuing high-quality development; developing whole-process people’s democracy; enriching the people’s cultural lives; achieving common prosperity for all; promoting harmony between humanity and nature; building a human community with a shared future; and creating a new form of human advancement. All these characteristics push forward to the Chinese New Model of Modernization (Jiang, 2023).

2) Process of Modernization in Chinese Organizations

Chinese-style modernization, including Chinese management paradigm and innovation, enterprise digital transformation, technology development, and HR development, among other issues. Before the economic reform and opening-up policy, China’s national industrial strategy prioritized heavy industries

6) The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in Beijing from October 16th to 23rd, 2022 has attracted unprecedented attention from the domestic and international community.

over light industries. The country's underdeveloped light industries allowed commune and brigade enterprises, as well as the succeeding township enterprises, to flourish. "There are many commune industries and small-town industries. There is a reason for those industries to develop, and that reason is to create jobs and raise living standards," (Chen, 1995). More recently, as Chinese president Xi Jinping stressed, new industrialization has been adopted with Chinese-style modernization. It expressly proposed achieving new industrialization by 2035, stressing the need to focus economic development on the real economy, advance new industrialization, and accelerate transforming China into a manufacturing superpower (Zheng, 2023).

The goal of Chinese modernization in the industrial and business sectors has a change mindset involving large, medium and small scale SOEs as well as private enterprises. Modernization of Chinese organizations through HR development entails upgrading technologies, innovation, adapting employee work-life balance for physical and mental well-being, organizational management and others. The ultimate result is improving quality production, expanding service lines, improving customer service, and responding to law and policy to make operations more efficient and effective.

(1) Human Resources Development (HRD)

Human resource development (HRD) in China has changed the traditional organizational culture and management behavior in organizations. In addition, it has modernized technology and upgraded human resource skills and management capabilities of workers and talent. China, as one of the fastest-growing economies and populations in the world, has made unprecedented growth during the past few decades. The "iron rice bowl model" has emerged with various drawbacks, notably over-staffing, low job enthusiasm, inefficiency and inequities. Nevertheless, with a rapidly aging population, migrant workers demanding better pay, rising numbers of college graduates entering the job market, and exacerbating the shortage of technical, managerial talents, China is facing serious new HR challenges. Therefore, there was an urgent need for HRD. HRD consists of the education, training, knowledge, skills, and health that people invest in and accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society. In the last 70 years, China dramatically expanded the reach of its education system, increasing the national literacy rate from about 20% in 1949 to nearly 100% in 2021 (Geoffrey and Yuhai, 2021). China's Ministry of Education increased spending on higher education from \$24 billion in 2012 to \$47 billion in 2021. As result, Chinese universities have risen in global rankings in the last decade (Jack, and Simon, 2022).

Companies can improve HR processes, enhance employee experiences, and gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace by adopting new technologies. Talent management is a critical aspect of HR in China, where competition for top talent is fierce. Along with increasing investment in the country's higher education system, policymakers are instituting targeted programs to create university talent pipelines for specific skill sets such as cybersecurity, semiconductor manufacturing, and AI expertise. For

example, Beijing launched a program to certify World-Class Cybersecurity Schools in 2017, which sets standards across certified schools for cybersecurity training and allows government bodies to direct the coursework and skill development that are integrated into university coursework (Dakota, 2021).

(2) Adaptations of Work–Life Balanced

Chinese culture and companies are increasingly realizing the benefits of investing in their employees' physical and mental well-being. To promote employee wellness, China's companies also encourage a healthy work–life balance by offering flexible work arrangements and paid time off for personal and family needs. By promoting a healthy and balanced lifestyle, companies can boost employee morale, reduce absenteeism, and improve overall productivity. Many companies in China recognize the importance of employee wellness and are implementing various wellness programs to promote the health and well-being of their employees. Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei, BMW China, and Ping An are examples of companies implementing wellness programs. China's modernization efforts emphasize the need for continual reform and innovation. Innovation that helps to improve the national economic and technological improvement of all aspects of industrial organization and management. In the postreform era, adoption of any new things or technology in Chinese organizations is highly sensitive to recent significant changes in organizations.

(3) Development of New Technology and Innovation

New technology and innovation are the lifeblood of any modern economy, and the resolution significantly emphasizes supporting all-around innovation. While innovative technologies have modernized people's lives, from smart homes to mobile payments and healthcare technologies, people can find almost everything they need online, making people's lives much more convenient. Companies can improve HR processes, enhance employee experiences, and gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace by adopting new technologies. From 2018 to 2023, China's research and development expenditure increased by nearly 70%, making a global impact by continuously advancing cutting-edge technologies (China Daily, June 25, 2024).

In the context of Chinese modernization and innovation, the literature has tended not to problematize the process of implementing innovation, paying more attention to organizational capabilities, innovation systems, and processes. Throughout the 45 years of reform and opening up, China's economic development, as far as the relationship between innovation and economic development is concerned, has pursued innovation-driven development. At the end of 2012, President Hu Jintao pointed out that it should accelerate the construction of an innovation-oriented country and a national innovation system with Chinese characteristics, relying on innovation-driven development (Zhang, 2020). The modernization journey is the modernization of common prosperity for all, thus, making an essential contribution to global development. Developing new productive forces lies in technological innovation. More efforts should be

made to build an innovative and safe technological ecosystem, improve an open scientific and technological innovation system, and promote the emergence of original innovation results. New quality productivity is an advanced productivity quality reflecting the new development concept of high technology, high efficiency, and high quality.

With the development of technology and the digital economy, remote work has become increasingly feasible and practical for many industries in China. Indeed, the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which arrived in late 2019 without warning, altered the whole world in unprecedented ways. Almost overnight, organizations were required to retool their organizational structures and processes and develop alternative work models. The remote work trend has gained traction in China in recent years, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the development of technology and the rise of the digital economy, remote work has become increasingly feasible and practical for many industries in China. Where possible, employees were allowed to work from home—universities switched to online classes, consulting firms switched to online consulting from home, and people struggled to set up their homes for the new reality of working remotely (Zhang & Varma, 2020). However, not all jobs lend themselves to the work-from-home model, and many essential workers continued going to their workplaces. At the World Economic Forum's 15th Annual Meeting in 2024, the New Champions will explore the next frontiers for growth, unleashing its potential to build a sustainable future through innovation. By leveraging its strength in R&D, China has become a new driver of innovation. In addition, Chinese-made electric vehicles (EVs) are sold in China and exported to many other countries. China exported 1.20 million EVs in 2023, accounting for more than 60% of the global EV sales (The World Economic Forum's, 2024, website).

(4) Managerial autonomy decentralized management

The Chinese management system is centralized, and most organizations are SOEs. As the name suggest, SOEs belong to or are controlled by Chinese government bodies. As mentioned above, the ownership types of organizations in China are SOEs, private enterprises, and foreign-invested firms. The management system has been centralized where most organizations are SOEs. The market economy is focused on principles such as individual freedom, equal contribution, and division of labor. Organizational modernization has shifted gradually from a centralized management model to a self-managed decentralized model.

In contrast to the centralized system, the market economy believes in privatizing enterprises for the betterment of the industries. The Chinese government introduced the concept of “modern enterprises,” giving managerial autonomy to organizations and decreasing the state government's interference in business affairs. As management changes, worker freedoms become more of a focus. Some Western companies have given workers more freedom and less control, but this way of doing things often does not consider the role that technology and digital platforms can play, losing sight of business goals and metrics.

However, an independent director is a person capable of exercising his control in an organization's

decision-making process. While making those decisions, an independent director works exclusively for the benefit of the organization. The concept of independent directors first was introduced in China by the China Securities Regulatory Commission in 1997, and it later proved successful by improving organizations' performance.

(5) Changing Organizational Culture and Leadership

Organizational culture is defined as the process, practice, behavior, and discipline exhibited by the individuals working in an organization. The shift from a planned economy to a market economy in China has brought into existence three different kinds of organizations in China (Jan, 2023): SOEs, private enterprises, and foreign-invested firms. Unlike Western countries, China had always been a cut above the rest. The Chinese culture focuses more on a social relationship than a professional one. Loyalty is expected from a person toward an individual, not to the organization. In a Chinese organization, if a boss assigns a job, the individual considers it to be done as a personal favor to the boss and expects it to be reciprocated in the future. The relationship is not businesslike but rather friendly and social. The venture of foreign countries in the Chinese market is making them move slowly toward Western practices while maintaining traditional principles.

Chinese leadership style focuses more on personal feelings and emotions than motivation and recognition. Humanity comes first and then business. The primary role of a leader is to look after the wellbeing of a team and its members. For example, disputes or misunderstandings among employees may lead to a situation where one might feel like quitting. In Chinese management practice, the leader should resolve the conflict and establish peace among team members.

Chinese managers have the best retention record because they focus on collectivism and long-term commitment rather than individualism and short-term employment. Their employee turnover is less and retention is high (Tang and Anthony, 2003). Seniority is given more importance than fresh candidates. The Chinese are, by nature, self-motivated and hardworking individuals. Therefore, organizations do not take extra pains to motivate employees; they reward and recognize them based on their commitment to the organization.

5. Conclusion

CSM proves that it is indeed possible to build business enterprises while keeping human relationships at the center. Chinese people have built their business organizations on the principals of collectivist culture, teamwork and Confucian ethics. As for the impact on Chinese-style modernization and the changes in the traditional culture that have deeply affected people's minds and social behavior, CSM and modernization have the critical goal of strengthening the integration of management and HRM practices in the new era. China has created a miracle in macro-material production; at the grassroots level, the

people's material living standards are gradually improving, contributing to the management paradigm innovation, enterprise digital transformation, technology development, and HRM. Although, Chinese organizations have significant modernization capabilities. Therefore, the unexpected pandemic reality has prompted many companies to change their approaches to business management and focus on adapting new technology as well as modernizing CSM and HRD by employees.

Chinese-style modernization and industrial development paved the way for improving living standards from subsistence to moderate prosperity in all aspects. Chinese-style modernization have brought new possibilities for HRMs in future development; however, there are also many problems and difficulties of dogmatism, formalism and bureaucracy in grassroots governance and cultural compromises in China. Chinese-style modernization must do more to further enhance the gain and trust among shop-level workers, in addition to pursuing the aim of raising the overall strength of SOEs and non-SOEs. The remaining issues of this research will be presented in the next research.

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