



A 25 year review of Guanxi research in the leading management journals

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Introduction

Since the 1980s, the concept of Chinese guanxi has attracted considerable scholarly attention. This surge in academic interest is partly attributable to the growing economic and political prominence of China and East Asia, regions where informal and personal networks are deeply embedded in social and business practices (Miao et al., 2020). Researchers across various disciplines have sought to examine and elucidate the impact of guanxi on multiple dimensions of Chinese society. Broadly defined, guanxi refers to the system of relationships and connections that permeate everyday life (Nolan & Rowley, 2020). A nuanced understanding of guanxi and its cultural underpinnings is essential for scholars and practitioners in international business, as it shapes cross-border negotiations, market entry decisions, and global partnership strategies (Zhao & Castka, 2021). Such understanding is increasingly important not only for engaging effectively in the Chinese business environment but also for responding strategically to China's expanding influence in international markets.

Guanxi, the Chinese system of building personal networks, plays a central role in international business involving Chinese partners by prioritizing relationships over contracts (Abosag et al., 2021), relying on trusted intermediaries, and emphasizing long-term mutual benefit (Ceyhan et al., 2018). It helps foreign companies navigate local bureaucracy, gain market access, and reduce uncertainty, but also requires sensitivity to cultural norms like face-saving, indirect communication, and ongoing reciprocity (Zhang et al., 2021). As China's global influence grows, guanxi has become a strategic competency for global firms, shaping negotiations, partnerships, and cross-cultural management in ways that differ significantly from Western contract-driven business practices.

Over the past three decades, there has been a marked increase in the number of studies that apply, measure, operationalize, and reconceptualize guanxi, reflecting the concept's richness and relevance across a diverse array of research fields. This growing

body of literature has motivated the present bibliometric analysis and review, which examines guanxi as a form of informal personal network that plays a critical role in both domestic and international business interactions. Employing paper citations as the primary unit of analysis, this approach moves beyond simple publication counts to identify centers of excellence and to map the interrelationships among articles within the field, including those that explore the strategic implications of guanxi for multinational enterprises, cross-border partnerships, and global value chains. The following figure (figure 1) illustrates the proliferation of guanxi research over time and highlights its increasing integration into international business scholarship.

Insert Figure 1 about here

While guanxi as a personal or social practice is not unique to China (Puffer & McCarthy, 2011), its structure and intensity vary across cultures, influencing relationship formation (Berger et al., 2023). Guanxi is deeply embedded in Chinese business culture (Gu et al., 2008), making contextual awareness crucial for successful business operations in China and for foreign firms seeking to enter or expand in the Chinese market. Culture, defined as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes societies (Hofstede, 2001), can significantly impact business transactions, particularly when cultural distance is substantial (Farh et al., 1998). As a key component of Chinese cultural heritage, guanxi functions as a critical element within the Chinese business system and shapes how international firms negotiate, build trust, and manage partnerships. Understanding guanxi is thus vital for navigating China's complex business and legal environment (Yen et al., 2011) and for aligning global business strategies with local expectations.

Many Asian societies, rooted in Confucianism, emphasize relationships, viewing individuals as relational beings (Barkema et al., 2015). Confucius' codification of societal rules, values, and hierarchical structures in the 6th century BC (Park & Luo, 2001) has led to the development of clan-like networks in Chinese culture, fostering loyalty within and a degree of distrust towards outsiders (Wang et al., 2008). Consequently, guanxi is often

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3 characterized as a personal rather than a social network. Unlike open and general social
4 networks (e.g., Facebook), personal networks are thematic and relatively exclusive (Horak
5 & Paik, 2023). Collaboration within these networks is maintained through reputational
6 incentives and ethical commitments that discourage opportunism (Badi et al., 2017). **These**
7 **factors can significantly influence foreign firms' credibility, access to information, and**
8 **ability to secure reliable local partners in international business contexts.**
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14 Personal social networks shape societal norms in Asia (Horak & Paik, 2023),
15 emphasizing trust-building, social capital building, and reciprocity (Berger et al., 2015).
16 Many emerging Asian economies share cultural roots such as Confucianism in China, that
17 prioritize relationships and social harmony. Like China in its earlier stages of development,
18 many emerging markets have institutional voids, including weak legal systems, selective
19 enforcement of laws, and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Burt, 2004). These voids create
20 opportunities for informal networks to thrive. The specific norms and practices associated
21 with guanxi may vary across cultures. While the underlying principles of relationship-
22 building and reciprocity may be similar, the way these principles are expressed and enacted
23 may differ. While guanxi, as a specific construct, is rooted in Chinese culture, the
24 underlying principles of relationship-based business practices are relevant to other
25 emerging Asian markets. The repercussions of these practices can be significant,
26 influencing economic growth, social equity, and institutional development. Success in
27 these markets requires a nuanced understanding of the local context, a commitment to
28 ethical conduct, and a focus on building long-term relationships, **capabilities that**
29 **multinational enterprises must develop to operate effectively in Asia's diverse institutional**
30 **environments.** Most academic research on personal networking was focused on China but
31 one can find some work on Japan (e.g., Gong & Suzuki, 2013; Laage-Hellman, 1997) and
32 South Korea (e.g., Horak, 2014; Kim & Lee, 2018), **indicating broader relevance for**
33 **comparative international business research.**
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49 In contrast to Western management's emphasis on individualism and openness
50 (Birce, 2020), Chinese management culture is largely collectivist, stressing familial
51 importance and hierarchical acceptance, which promotes a paternalistic approach (Horak
52 & Paik, 2023). In China, social relationships frequently precede business interactions, a
53 contrast to Western norms, and are essential for building successful business relationships
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(Fisman et al., 2020). Rooted in Chinese Daoist philosophy's emphasis on harmony (Styles & Ambler, 2003), managers seek equilibrium among renqing (reciprocity), ganqing (emotion), and xinren (utilitarian benefits) to cultivate guanxi (Yang et al., 2018), which forms the foundation for measuring and developing these relationships and serves as a framework for international firms navigating Chinese managerial expectations and negotiation styles (Zhao & Castka, 2021).

Unlike developed nations with robust legal systems, China's historical context as a Communist/Leninist state led to an initial dismantling of the legal system based on Marxist principles (Guthrie, 1998). The subsequent establishment of the People's Court, staffed by politically reliable judges, focused on implementing the Communist Party's directives. While Western economies rely on transparent, impartial contracts, China has historically emphasized personal relationships over contractual practices (Gu et al., 2008), resulting in a more opaque and complex business environment that requires foreign firms to navigate hybrid governance mechanisms blending formal contracts with informal, relationship-based assurances (Berger et al., 2018).

Additionally, guanxi can be both an asset and a source of risk in international business. While strong relationships can open doors and accelerate opportunities, they can also create dependence on specific individuals whose departure may weaken the partnership (Liu & Chen, 2025). Companies must balance the benefits of guanxi with compliance requirements, transparency, and formal governance structures to avoid misunderstandings or ethical issues. By combining genuine relationship-building with clear legal safeguards, firms can leverage guanxi effectively while maintaining stability, integrity, and long-term strategic alignment (Lin, 2020).

Guthrie (1998) notes that guanxi was essential in the command economy for accessing distribution networks. Currently, guanxi emphasizes building relationships to bypass bureaucracy and gain a competitive advantage (Nolan & Rowley, 2020), with a focus on strong ties rather than weak ties (Li et al., 2008). Guanxi practices stem from a weak institutional environment, including selective judicial implementation. Trust in social networks based on Confucianism and Daoism often outweighs trust in the legal system, which is sometimes viewed as an impediment. Ethical implications of guanxi remain

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3 debated (Warren & Dunfee, 2004). Guanxi can be considered unethical when it benefits a
4 few at the expense of the community. Conversely, it may be viewed positively if it
5 expedites growth and bypasses bureaucracy. The ethical disposition of a firm using guanxi
6 reflects individual managerial values and becomes particularly relevant in international
7 business settings, where foreign firms must balance local expectations with global
8 compliance standards and corporate governance norms.
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14 Relationship-centered interactions shape societal norms in Asia, emphasizing trust-
15 building, social capital, informal networks, relational governance, and reciprocity (Yen et
16 al., 2011). Individuals from low-context cultures focus on task motivation and clear
17 communication, while those from high-context cultures (e.g., China) prioritize
18 relationships and indirect communication (Hofstede, 1980, 2001). Particularistic guanxi
19 networks foster exclusivity based on expressive ties (Wang, 2007). Research indicates that
20 Chinese individuals exhibit a stronger tendency to differentiate among groups compared to
21 westerners (Chen et al., 2009), driven by environmental uncertainties and cultural values
22 (Dunfee & Warren, 2001). Trust plays a significant role where legal implementation is
23 inconsistent, facilitating smoother transactions and reducing opportunism (Horak & Paik,
24 2023). It is seen as a dynamic that directly affects how multinational enterprises negotiate,
25 manage risk, form alliances, and adapt their governance mechanisms when operating in
26 China and similar emerging markets (Berger et al., 2014).
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37 Furthermore, cultivating guanxi requires patience, cultural sensitivity, and
38 consistent engagement, especially for foreign businesses unfamiliar with its nuances.
39 Effective guanxi-building often happens outside formal meetings through shared meals,
40 social events, and demonstrations of respect, which help establish trust on a personal level
41 before business can progress (Chen et al., 2013). Firms that invest in these relational
42 practices signal commitment and reliability, making partners more willing to collaborate,
43 share information, and adapt to challenges together. Over time, this relational foundation
44 can become a competitive advantage, strengthen cooperation and fostering smoother
45 operations in complex or unfamiliar markets (Wang & Chen, 2018).
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53 While substantial research has explored guanxi across various disciplines, few
54 studies synthesize these findings from an international business perspective or clarify their
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3 implications for global management practice (Zhao & Castka, 2021). This paper aims to
4 map these research streams, offering a comprehensive picture of guanxi research from 1998
5 to 2023 and highlighting how the concept has evolved alongside China's growing
6 integration into the global economy. The subsequent sections will discuss guanxi's
7 theoretical underpinnings, methodology, bibliometric and content analyses, research
8 clusters, and interconnections, concluding with findings and directions for future research
9 that are particularly relevant for multinational enterprises, cross-cultural management
10 scholars, and practitioners operating in China and other relationship-based markets
11 (Ceyhan et al., 2018).
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22 **Literature review**

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24 Over the past two decades, academic interest in the impact of guanxi on business has
25 grown. Initial studies focused on qualitative, interpretive theorizing (e.g., Yeung & Tung,
26 1996; Yang, 1994), while more recent research employs systematic, quantitative empirical
27 testing (e.g., Yen et al., 2011; Berger et al., 2015). Guanxi, deeply rooted in Chinese
28 culture, is considered a prevalent model for enhancing business productivity and
29 effectiveness (Chen et al., 2010).
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35 A debate exists among Chinese researchers regarding the future of guanxi. Some
36 argue that its importance will decline as the Chinese economy matures (Guthrie, 1998; Gu
37 et al., 2008). Others contend that guanxi will persist due to its integral role in Chinese
38 culture and heritage (Yeung & Tung, 1996; Xin & Pearce, 1996; Warren et al., 2004). Some
39 researchers emphasize guanxi's deep roots in Confucianism and its entrenchment in
40 Chinese life (Lovett et al., 1999). Unlike readily changeable regulations, belief systems are
41 resilient (Lin, 2020), socially constructed over time, and perceived as objective and
42 external (Badi et al., 2017). If guanxi is fundamentally linked to Chinese culture, economic
43 forces alone may not significantly alter its practice, ensuring its persistence despite
44 evolving economic and political institutions (Berger et al., 2025).
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53 Conversely, Yang (1994) and Guthrie (1998) suggest that the development of
54 guanxi practices is linked to the social disruption of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and
55 the consequences of unsystematic economic reform. These arguments are based on
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3 neoclassical models, which suggest that the maturation of markets and legal systems
4 diminishes the importance of personal networks. As China's economy advances and formal
5 institutions develop, reliance on informal relations should decrease. Guthrie (1998) posited
6 that China's integration into the global economy would rationalize its market economy,
7 reducing the need for guanxi. However, recent economic and political changes in China
8 suggest that guanxi persists as an ingrained cultural phenomenon rather than a temporary
9 necessity that diminishes with economic evolution. Furthermore, the scope and scale of the
10 use of guanxi may change as a result of external factors such as the level of GDP, the
11 strength of the legal system, and the level of internationalization in the province (Berger et
12 al., 2025).
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21 Fei et al., (1992) claims that traditional Chinese society is fundamentally rooted in an
22 agrarian lifestyle ("from the soil"), with social structures, ethics, and interpersonal dynamics shaped
23 by rural kinship networks and localized relationships. This illustrates that guanxi practice contrasts
24 with western societies, which are characterizes as organized around abstract, formal institutions
25 and individual-centered legal frameworks. Guanxi primarily operates within the circles of close
26 family, extended kin, and acquaintances. Trust and reciprocal obligations are strongest within the
27 inner circles and gradually diminish as one moves outwards. Membership is based on personal
28 connections, shared history, and reciprocal obligations. This exclusivity creates barriers to
29 entry, making guanxi valuable for those within the network. Guanxi serves as a mechanism
30 for extending trust beyond the immediate family circle. By cultivating guanxi, individuals
31 can transform "strangers" into "acquaintances", thereby expanding their circle of trust and
32 potential collaboration.
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41 Technological advancements are transforming the practice of guanxi in China,
42 creating new opportunities for building and leveraging relationships. While technology
43 enhances the efficiency and reach of guanxi networks, it also raises questions how guanxi,
44 which is based on face - to - face interactions may evolve. Social media platforms such as
45 WeChat have become essential tools for cultivating relationships, sharing information, and
46 exchanging favors (Yang et al., 2018). Furthermore, the rise of e-commerce in China has
47 been significantly influenced by guanxi. Consumers are more likely to purchase from
48 vendors recommended through their guanxi networks, highlighting the transference of trust
49 from offline relationships to online interactions (Xiaojuan et al., 2014). This type of guanxi
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3 is called swift guanxi or e-guanxi. Digital platforms facilitate the maintenance and
4 extension of guanxi networks. While technology offers new avenues for building and
5 leveraging guanxi, it also presents challenges. The use of digital platforms for guanxi
6 practices raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding transparency and fairness and
7 privacy.
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12 The theoretical foundations of guanxi are diverse, with researchers employing
13 various approaches. This section reviews both social and economic theories of guanxi to
14 provide clarity. Common theoretical frameworks include networking theory (Granovetter,
15 1985), the resource-based view of the firm (North, 1990), social network theory (Coleman,
16 1993; Putnam, 2000), and institutional theory (Xin & Pearce, 1996; Chen et al., 2009).
17 Guanxi practices often arise as strategic responses to bureaucratic obstacles and selective
18 law enforcement (Opper et al., 2017). At the institutional level, guanxi is used to create
19 barriers to entry (Yeung & Tung, 1996), benefiting from their insider status. Firms with
20 strong guanxi ties are better informed about the business environment, including
21 government policy and competitive activity (Chung, 2011), facilitating access to assets,
22 services, and economic and market advantages (Opper et al., 2017).
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34 *Main theories used in guanxi research*

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36 **Networking theory:** This theory posits that economic activity is embedded in
37 interpersonal networks (Granovetter, 1985; Li et al., 2008), emphasizing social capital
38 derived from strong community ties, which are valued in cultures like China (Hofstede,
39 1980). Social networking, often used instrumentally, is most effective when based on weak
40 ties (Granovetter, 1985). It aims to build strong stakeholder relationships through effective
41 communication, mutual commitment, trust, and mutually beneficial exchanges (Badi et al.,
42 2017). Guanxi networks provide a structured model for obligations and reciprocity
43 (Coleman, 1993) and are considered a form of social capital (Berger et al., 2015).
44 Individuals with strong networking capabilities have greater access to knowledge,
45 information, and opportunities for value creation (Park & Luo, 2001). These ties provide
46 advantages through association with specific networks or communities.
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3 It's important to distinguish between social networks and informal networks within
4 networking theory. Social networks are typically open online communities (e.g., Facebook,
5 LinkedIn), while informal networks are embedded in culture and based on shared
6 backgrounds. Informal networks help navigate formal institutional constraints, benefiting
7 insiders, often without explicit awareness. The value of informal networks is linked to
8 network capital and assessed through social network or social capital frameworks. Guanxi
9 is an informal, personal form of social capital, distinct from impersonal, "open" social
10 capital. Researchers such as Badi et al. (2017), Karhunen et al. (2018), and Nolan and
11 Rowley (2020) have applied this theory to guanxi research.
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19 **Transactional theory:** This perspective suggests that interactions are governed by
20 a cost-benefit analysis, with individuals seeking to maximize benefits and minimize costs
21 (Granovetter, 1985; Arndt, 1983; Blau, 1964). In emerging markets with underdeveloped
22 formal institutions, institutional voids lead to high transaction costs and market
23 inefficiencies (Chen et al., 2009). This encourages the formation of informal exchange
24 models to reduce transaction costs, improve information flow, and increase efficiency.
25 Institutional uncertainty in China increases the cost of market transactions (Barnes et al.,
26 2011). Transaction cost theory explains the rise of socially based business models that rely
27 on social capital to economize on transaction costs (Williamson, 1991).
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35 Informal networks, such as guanxi, reduce transaction costs and the risk of free-
36 riding through mutual trust and peer pressure (Burt, 2004), addressing common problems
37 in Chinese interfirm relationships (Wang et al., 2008). Berger et al. (2015), Barnes et al.
38 (2011), and Yen et al. (2017) are among the researchers who have used this theory to study
39 guanxi.
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44 **Resource-Based View (RBV):** This view asserts that a firm's competitiveness is
45 based on valuable tangible and intangible resources (Horak & Piak, 2023). Success
46 depends on how firms create, leverage, and configure these resources (Yang et al., 2018).
47 To maintain a competitive advantage, firms need valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-
48 substitutable resources, including guanxi (Berger et al., 2018). Tangible capital is a well-
49 established source of competitive advantage in stable environments, while social capital
50 allows firms to manage internal and external interpersonal resources (Yeung & Tung,
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1996), influencing resource distribution and shaping economic activity in uncertain situations (Granovetter, 1985). These relationships are valuable resources for achieving competitive advantage (Chen & Wu, 2011; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Researchers such as Horak and Paik (2023), Fisman et al. (2020), and Chen and Chen (2004) have applied this theory in guanxi research.

Institutional theory: In international management literature, institutional theory is a common framework for understanding cross-national differences in business organizations (Chen et al., 2009). Institutional structures are human-designed systems that facilitate exchange (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). North (1990) distinguishes between formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions are maintained through regulations based on laws, rules, and sanctions, enforced by courts and bureaucracies. Scott (2014) defines institutions as the 'rules of the game' shaping human interactions. Informal institutions are unwritten, shared constraints enforced outside official channels, forming the normative and cultural-cognitive pillars of society (Uzzi, 1997). In environments with institutional voids, firms must develop strategies to manage uncertainty (Berger et al., 2015). Informal institutions are more important in societies where formal institutions are ineffective or underdeveloped (Chen et al., 2009), as in China (Berger et al., 2018). Researchers using this theory argue that guanxi can be explained by weak institutional structures during China's transition to a market-based economy (Opper et al., 2017). Yang et al. (2018), Park and Luo (2001), Nolan and Rowley (2020), and Karhunen et al. (2018) have used this theory to investigate guanxi.

How does guanxi practice affects societal issues

Guanxi exacerbates income inequality by privileging those with robust networks as well as regional disparities (Du et al., 2013). It further blurs the line between legitimate networking and corrupt practices where the selective Chinese legal frameworks push private firms to depend on guanxi for protection and resource access, often involving unreciprocated gifts or favors. Research has shown that practices like gift-giving, while culturally rooted, can institutionalize bribery when networks prioritize loyalty over legality (Abosag et al., 2021; Badi et al., 2017). Chinese firms rely on guanxi to navigate bureaucratic ambiguity, with

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3 executives prioritizing government ties over legal safeguards. Despite market reforms,
4 guanxi thrives in "institutional holes" caused by nontransparent policies, fostering
5 networks that resist meritocratic norms (Berger and Herstein, 2012). Guanxi's Confucian
6 roots ensure its resilience, shaping social trust, moral values, and economic behavior even
7 as institutions modernize. Guanxi acts as both a social lubricant and a structural barrier,
8 reflecting China's tension between tradition and institutional reform. Its influence on
9 equality, corruption, and institutional development underscores the complexity of
10 balancing cultural practices with modern governance.
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17 Foreign businesses must first recognize guanxi as a socially embedded practice
18 rooted in reciprocity, not inherently corrupt. Western firms should avoid framing it as
19 unethical outright, which risks alienating local partners (Barnes et al., 2011). They must set
20 clear monetary thresholds for gifts and mandate transparency to align with anti-bribery
21 laws and encourage reporting of dubious practices. By educating staff on what is culturally
22 appropriate guanxi practices (e.g., hosting dinners) versus illegal acts (e.g., cash
23 payments), possible corruption can be reduced. In order to succeed in the Chinese markets,
24 foreign firms should consider partnering with reputable Chinese firms to access networks,
25 but avoid over-reliance (Birce, 2020). Ethical guanxi implementation requires balancing
26 respect for cultural norms with proactive compliance to the law and ethical standards. By
27 institutionalizing clear boundaries and prioritizing relationship quality over short-term
28 gains, foreign firms can navigate China's business landscape.
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39 Researchers have claimed that to better address guanxi's dual role as a cultural asset
40 and systemic risk, policymakers should prioritize reforms that harmonize traditional
41 networks with modern governance (Karhunen et al., 2018). For instance, policy makers
42 should explicitly prohibit quid pro quo exchanges (e.g., bribes disguised as gifts) while
43 exempting culturally symbolic gestures (e.g., small festival gifts). This has been
44 implemented to an extent by strengthen enforcement of the 2020 Foreign Investment
45 Law that penalizes intermediaries monetizing bureaucratic connections. Increased
46 institutional transparency will reduce reliance on personal networks by expanding e-
47 governance platforms for permits, licenses, and approvals and decrease nepotism.
48 Government should promote narratives distinguishing guanxi (social capital) from
49 corruption (illegal practices). To further increase transparency firms should be mandated
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3 to publish annual reports detailing relationship-building expenditures (e.g., gifts,
4 entertainment) as part of social accounting global directives and align with OECD Anti-
5 Bribery Convention standards. Policy solutions must acknowledge guanxi's cultural
6 embeddedness while systematically addressing its corrosive effects. A hybrid approach-
7 modernizing institutions without erasing social capital-can foster equitable growth in
8 China's evolving political economy.
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14 Asian cultural traditions create distinctive institutional environments not fully
15 explained by neoclassical models. To overcome market information distortions and
16 opportunistic behavior, social networking theorists suggest that managers use business ties
17 to transfer trustworthy information (Uzzi, 1997). Sociologists like Granovetter (1985),
18 Coleman (1993), and Putnam (2000) emphasize the central role of social network theory
19 in building trust and facilitating exchange. Institutional theorists argue that guanxi
20 substitutes for formal institutional provisions when safeguards are unreliable (Xin &
21 Pierce, 1996). Transaction cost theorists believe that institutional voids necessitate
22 mechanisms to support information transfer, reduce transaction costs, and enhance
23 efficiency. Resource-based theorists view social capital, defined as 'privileged access to
24 rare resources' (Adler & Kwon, 2002), as crucial for firm success in China. Many
25 researchers integrate informal networks into institutional and social capital theory. This
26 paper presents informal networks as a distinct research domain under the umbrella term
27 'social network', which is utilitarian rather than emotional (Luo & Chen, 1997).
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41 *Guanxi and its constructs*

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43 Guanxi, viewed as a personal network with an informal structure (Barnes et al., 2011),
44 involves specific bonds among individuals based on shared connections. These
45 connections can stem from affiliations with educational institutions, group based ties, or
46 regional origins. Guanxi represents an exclusive informal network rooted in predefined
47 personal relationships, grounded in mutual interests, shared responsibilities, and the
48 exchange of favors (Yang, 1994). The term guanxi originates from two Chinese characters:
49 "guan", signifying a gate or hurdle, and "xi", meaning a tie (Ambler, 1994). Yen et al.
50 (2011) define guanxi as connections of a particular nature between two parties, reflecting
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3 mutual functions and impacts. Due to its complexity and cultural significance,
4 encompassing multiple layers (Dunfee & Warren, 2001), a single sentence cannot easily
5 define guanxi.
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9 Guanxi differs from Western personal relationships in its emphasis on the exchange
10 of favors, often to an unequal extent (Yi & Ellis, 2000). Its structure distinguishes it from
11 broader social networks by focusing on interpersonal relationships determined by closeness
12 (strong ties) or distance (weak ties). Guanxi involves using personal and informal networks
13 to accomplish objectives and is a vital aspect of Chinese society. Highly personal and not
14 easily transferable (Berger et al., 2015), guanxi is embedded in informal relationships
15 leveraging a hierarchy of social influence (Gu et al., 2008) and cultivated through mutual
16 interdependencies. Guanxi relationships with influential individuals allow those with less
17 power to seek support and resolve conflicts (Yang, 1994), with each transaction adjusting
18 the balance of favors owed (Badi et al., 2017). To facilitate understanding of guanxi for
19 those unfamiliar with Chinese culture, it can be broken down into its core components:
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30 31 *Core constructs of guanxi*

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33 **Xinren (trust):** Often described as the cognitive component, xinren refers to
34 trustworthiness, encompassing reliability, credibility, and sincerity (Yen et al., 2017).
35 Xinren is fundamental for building strong relationships, particularly under challenging
36 conditions (Liang et al., 2018), signaling reliability and credibility (Chen & Chen, 2004).
37 It serves as a mechanism to manage uncertainty, simplify complexity, and reduce
38 transaction costs. In Chinese culture, xinren operates at two levels: (1) Jiangyiqi -
39 willingness to sacrifice personal interests to assist others; and Xinyong (Deep Trust)
40 - commitment to honoring unwritten promises (Tsang, 1998; Wang, 2007).
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48 **Renqing (reciprocity):** As the conative component, emphasizes human
49 commitment through actions such as exchanging favors to cultivate relationships and foster
50 social exchange (Yen et al., 2011). It outlines the principles governing favor exchanges
51 (Badi et al., 2017). Unlike immediate exchanges in financial markets (Wang et al., 2008),
52 renqing involves trust that reciprocation will occur later. Different from the western
53 concept of reciprocity, which emphasizes immediate and equal exchange, renqing involves
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3 escalating value and unspecified timing (Xie et al., 2016). This interdependence can create
4 reliance and, in some cases, "hostage-taking," forming bonds based on obligation rather
5 than personal affinity.
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9 **Ganqing (feeling):** This affective component reflects feelings, including affection,
10 sentiment, and emotion (Yen et al., 2017). As a form of social capital, it influences inter-
11 organizational and interpersonal favor exchanges (Yang, 1994), reflecting emotional
12 understanding, connections, and shared feelings. It aligns with rightness (yi), compassion
13 (ren), and social reciprocity (shu), fostering emotional and lasting obligations through long-
14 term social bonds. Ganqing develops through collaboration and positive interactions (Yen
15 et al., 2011), with qingqing representing the most intimate form, typically found among
16 very close in-group based members.
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23 **Mianzi (face):** Representing an individual's prestige in society, it is earned through
24 social interactions (Lin, 2020) and serves as a feedback loop within guanxi (Yeung & Tung,
25 1996). It functions as a social asset that can be exchanged for favors (Barnes et al., 2011).
26 If guanxi provides the infrastructure for relationships, then mianzi serves as the lubricant,
27 facilitating dynamics within that network. Mianzi has two dimensions (Leung & Chan,
28 2003): (1) Lien (Vertical Face) - reflects society's confidence in a person's moral character
29 (Park & Luo, 2001), an internalized moral compass that can be lost through misbehavior;
30 and (2) Mianzi (Horizontal Face) - represents prestige and standing achieved through
31 accomplishments (Berger et al., 2018).
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39 Furthermore, the traditional research conducted has found additional minor
40 constructs that were used to measure guanxi practice as depicted in the following table
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3 Research indicates that guanxi influences satisfaction with business transactions, which, in
4 turn, improves business performance. Satisfaction is determined by how well the
5 transaction fulfills the expectations set by both parties (Yen et al., 2017). It serves as an
6 indicator of how pleased the parties are with the exchange. In the Chinese context,
7 satisfaction reflects more than just the value of the business transaction; it signifies a
8 positive relationship (Berger et al., 2021). Existing research views satisfaction as a positive
9 factor that enhances relationship performance (Xie et al., 2016), where performance is
10 measured by profitability, sales growth, and asset turnover (Barnes et al., 2016).
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20 *Modeling the main guanxi constructs*

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22 Research has shown that many countries rely more on business models based on personal
23 relations to conduct business than other countries (Berger et al., 2020; Li et al., 2004). The
24 significance of investing in personal business relationships has long been acknowledged as
25 an effective business model for leveraging performance benefits (Horak et al., 2020).
26
27 Understanding and contextualizing the constructs of guanxi is crucial for both practitioners
28 and academics to grasp how they form a cohesive model. The proposed model, known as
29 the GRX scale (Yen et al., 2011), aims to define how guanxi creates, delivers, and captures
30 value (Barnes et al., 2011) in an international business setting. While particularly relevant
31 in Chinese culture, the constructs and model of guanxi have universal applications, with
32 parallels in other cultures like "Blat/Sviazi" in Russia (Puffer et al., 2010), "Jaan Pechaan"
33 in India, "Wasta" in Arab countries (Berger et al., 2023), "Ubuntu" in South Africa
34 (Konadu-Osei et al., 2023), and "Yongo" in Korea (Horak & Taube, 2016; Zhang et al.,
35 2021). Guanxi modeling offers a systematic approach for academics and practitioners to
36 understand, build, and leverage these relationships. This structured approach enables
37 businesses to strategically develop their guanxi network, transforming informal
38 connections into a managed asset that fosters long-term growth. The GRX model is
39 illustrated in Figure 2.
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Insert figure 2 about here

In this model, Xinren, or interpersonal trust, is a prerequisite for relationship building, especially in environments with weak legal frameworks (Yen & Barnes, 2011). Without it, business relationships cannot develop. Ganqing represents the emotional aspect of relationship building, emphasizing the need for friendship, built on trust, to foster business connections. Mutually enjoyable social activities can nurture ganqing and improve understanding between parties (Yang & Wang, 2011). Initiating ganqing can be as simple as sharing meals or participating in social and business events (Berger & Herstein, 2012). Renqing, rooted in Chinese Confucian culture, embodies sympathy and reciprocity, promoting long-term relationships (Shi et al., 2011). In the Chinese context, exchanging gifts and favors significantly contributes to building guanxi (Herstein et al., 2018). These constructs of xinren, ganqing and renqing lead to increased satisfaction and improved business performance.

It is important to note that the GRX scale was the only comprehensive and implemented quantitative guanxi measurement scale found in my literature review. Its strengths include its Confucian roots, it is empirically validated, it has some cross cultural context (e.g. Taiwan, India, and Russia), and its dimensions are clear and measurable. On the other hand, I found its dimensions narrow in scope as it focuses solely on a relatively small number of constructs. I found references for a more robust scale that incorporates more criteria, but all were founded on the GRX scale, and hence I chose to present it in the paper. Furthermore, its Confucian roots may limit generalizability to other cultures. **Current studies of culture in international business have used an etic approach, attempting to find universal features across cultures. While these frameworks have different names, they were engendered by comparable economic and social conditions and are intended to achieve similar results. The following table summarizes the different names given to the different constructs based on the same GRX models but implemented in different countries:**

Insert Table 2 about here

Methodology

For this study, I conducted a search for guanxi-related papers using the Web of Science (WoS) database. I selected WoS because it contains over 170 million records and includes journals that adhere to a rigorous peer-review process, ensuring the inclusion of high-quality research. WoS offers a comprehensive collection of bibliographic data and references, making it a valuable resource for analyzing scientific output and conducting bibliometric analyses.

The research methodology was based on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology as the founding framework for the bibliometric analysis conducted. It involves a structured and transparent approach to conducting and reporting the bibliometric systematic review. First, I created a research protocol that specified the time period covered (1998–2023) and the types of journals included in this paper. Then the paper selection process began with the application of predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to screen and select relevant studies, with discussion of the screening process and explicit reasons for exclusion at each stage. Data extraction was then implemented using a standardized method to ensure consistency, capturing key information. The data synthesis phase involved both narrative and quantitative methods, adhering to established statistical guidelines for pooling results (Alon & McIntyre, 2008). This rigorous approach ensured that the review is comprehensive, systematic, and transparent, thereby increasing the reliability and impact of the research findings.

To build the research database, I extracted data on guanxi from 1998 - when WoS was first launched - through 2023. The review focused on peer-reviewed, English-language journal articles. An initial search for "guanxi" across all fields yielded 2,590 articles. Narrowing the search to titles and author keywords reduced the count to 1,181 articles, and further restricting it to academic peer-reviewed articles resulted in 1,107 articles. To ensure

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3 comprehensive coverage across relevant disciplines, I included only articles published in
4 English-language journals in business, management, and business ethics. This final
5 selection comprised 950 articles, which formed the foundation of this review. Despite
6 efforts to be thorough and inclusive, it is possible that some relevant articles were
7 inadvertently missed.
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12 For the bibliometric analysis, I used HistCite software to evaluate citation networks
13 among highly cited articles to create a co-citation map. HistCite provides a timeline view
14 of citations, tracks their subsequent influence, and identifies the most-cited papers (Donthu
15 et al., 2021). In bibliometric co-citation studies, the basic premise is that academic papers
16 build upon previously published research (Raut et al., 2023). A co-citation map is a visual
17 representation used in bibliometric analysis to illustrate how often pairs of documents,
18 authors, or journals are cited together within a body of academic literature.
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25 The co-citation map helped identify the intellectual structure of the guanxi research
26 by revealing clusters of closely related research and highlighting influential works and
27 authors. By analyzing which articles were frequently cited together, the map uncovered
28 key research themes, theoretical frameworks, and the relationships between different
29 research streams. This allowed to see how guanxi research has evolved, pinpoint
30 foundational studies, and understand the connections and boundaries between various
31 subtopics within guanxi research. Ultimately, a co-citation map provided valuable insights
32 into the development, fragmentation, or integration of scholarly discourse on guanxi,
33 guiding future research directions and helping to identify gaps or emerging trends in the
34 literature.
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43 To complement the HistCite analysis, I also conducted a cartographic analysis
44 using VOSviewer. This tool analyzes keywords to track the development and popularity of
45 guanxi research streams from 1998 to 2023. I mapped 950 guanxi-related articles, each
46 with more than 10 citations. Setting the citation threshold at 10 strikes a balance between
47 clarity and depth, as using too many or too few citations can respectively obscure or
48 oversimplify the analysis. This approach aligns with methodologies used in similar
49 bibliometric studies (Alon & McIntyre, 2008). Cartographic analysis helped identify
50 understudied research streams by highlighting areas with fewer articles. VOSviewer
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grouped the main keywords into distinct clusters, with closely situated clusters indicating frequent co-occurrence in research papers, and more distant clusters indicating less frequent overlap. Each keyword cluster represents a specific research stream within guanxi studies. By calculating keyword co-occurrences across all 950 articles, a clearer understanding of the various research streams was achieved.

To deepen the understanding a traditional content analysis of the leading articles in each research stream was conducted using cartographic analysis to identify the various research streams. This qualitative review added context and depth to the quantitative bibliometric findings, enriching the discussion and conclusions of this paper.

It is important to note that bibliometric analysis offers a powerful suite of tools for objectively evaluating research output, identifying trends, improving information retrieval, and supporting strategic decisions in academia. Its quantitative approach, scalability, and ability to map the research landscape make it invaluable for researchers, institutions, and policymakers alike. Bibliometric analysis, while valuable for understanding research trends, has inherent biases. It struggles with quality assessment and disciplinary biases, which was negated through the traditional article analysis. Furthermore, the analysis is limited to the databases used and the publications not indexed. The WoS database used has a language bias where the English-language publications are overrepresented, potentially overlooking relevant research published in other languages. Highly cited articles, authors, and publications can disproportionately influence results, even if their impact may be limited.

Findings

Co-citation mapping visually represents how guanxi-related articles are cited and co-cited together over time, enabling the identification of research streams and the analysis of their origins and development. In Figure 3, each node represents an article, with the size of the node indicating the article's influence based on total citations. These influential papers were analyzed through traditional reading methods.

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3 The cartographic analysis revealed three primary research streams. Nodes that are
4 positioned closer to each other indicate stronger relationships between articles, while more
5 distant nodes indicate greater distinction between streams. A content analysis of the articles
6 confirmed the existence of these three research streams, categorized as: (1) a
7 macroeconomic stream; (2) a microeconomic stream; and (3) a social/human resource-
8 based stream. Each stream encompasses a distinct yet interrelated cluster of papers.
9 Articles within the same cluster share similarities in topic, unit of analysis, and/or research
10 context.
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17 Bibliometric co-citation mapping connects related papers to a specific foundational
18 body of work (Alon & McIntyre, 2008). These core papers serve as a basis for further
19 research streams, contributing to the overall growth of the field (Donthu et al., 2021). After
20 identifying clusters through co-citation mapping, they were labeled by examining their
21 content and categorizing their area of research. Additional papers linked by co-citation
22 were also analyzed to validate each research stream. By using bibliometric co-citation
23 exploration, the methodology ensured that each cluster was internally consistent and
24 distinct from others, minimizing potential overlap.
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31 Further the findings were supplemented by utilizing cluster analysis based on
32 PageRank to identify the key themes driving the intellectual structure of guanxi literature.
33 PageRank is a valuable bibliometric measure due to its ability to assess article quality.
34 High-quality articles are those deemed essential or "must-cite" among highly cited papers
35 (Donthu et al., 2021). In other words, papers with a higher degree of centrality are cited
36 more frequently, reflecting their significant contribution to the literature. Clustering based
37 on PageRank helped further identify the main themes across the guanxi literature and
38 pinpoint influential articles within each theme.
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46 While guanxi is the central focus of all three streams, there are notable differences
47 among them in terms of perspectives, theoretical underpinnings, and methodologies
48 employed. A brief discussion of each stream follows.
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5 The first research stream centers on traditional theories regarding the state's role in
6 economic activity, primarily using institutional theory. This perspective emphasizes inter-
7 organizational relationships and the enforcement mechanisms sanctioned by the state
8 (North, 1990). Economists have found it challenging to apply western neoclassical models
9 of markets and firms to emerging economies where institutional environments are in
10 constant flux. Consequently, this stream investigates how organizations respond to
11 institutional transitions, strategic choices, and boundary-spanning activities. Key questions
12 include how organizations operate in transitional markets with incomplete rules and how
13 to achieve strategic alignment for improved performance.
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21 The second research stream analyzes guanxi at the organizational level, focusing
22 on firm-to-firm and firm-to-government relationships. It primarily examines guanxi's
23 impact on firm performance and other financial and social outcomes. This stream utilizes
24 resource-based theory, which focuses on firm-specific capabilities. For example, how
25 resources like ganqing, renqing, xinren, and mianzi contribute to economic value and
26 enhanced performance. Much of the research involves modeling the effects of internal and
27 external factors on guanxi practices. Further discussions, based on social capital theory,
28 explore whether networks possessed by individuals can transfer to the organizational level.
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35 The third research stream takes a social perspective on guanxi, focusing on
36 individual and interpersonal relationships. It examines intra-firm strategy under the
37 umbrella of human relations management and ethics. This stream emphasizes social
38 perspective theory, particularly human inter-relations. Many researchers argue that
39 successful guanxi transactions require skillful management of resources,
40 interdependencies, and hierarchical structures within the organization. It studies
41 management-employee relations by measuring supervisor-subordinate guanxi quality and
42 their ethical practices. It examines the strength of social ties and structural holes in social
43 network management, such as securing employment and advancing one's career. There is
44 significant discussion on the distinction between information and influence networks and
45 the ethical challenges arising from self-interest. Issues are raised regarding the negative
46 externalities inherent in guanxi practices that affect the collective interests of society and
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3 organizations. The mixing of organizational, public, and personal resources in guanxi
4 exchanges raises complex ethical questions.
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7 One of the principal concerns associated with the use of guanxi is nepotism. Guanxi
8 practices can become unethical when they serve to benefit a select few at the expense of
9 the broader community (Warren & Dunfee, 2004). Such practices may give rise to
10 corruption, cronyism, and preferential treatment based on personal relationships rather than
11 merit (Luo, 2008). This, in turn, can create significant barriers to entry for firms and
12 individuals lacking strong connections, thereby reinforcing existing social and economic
13 inequalities (Yeung & Tung, 1996). Guanxi is often employed to circumvent bureaucratic
14 procedures and secure competitive advantages, which can undermine the development and
15 effectiveness of formal institutions (Nolan & Rowley, 2020).
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23 Rooted in Confucian traditions, guanxi networks foster loyalty within the group but
24 may simultaneously engender distrust towards outsiders (Wang et al., 2008). The
25 prioritization of personal relationships over contractual agreements can result in a more
26 opaque and complex business environment, lacking the transparency typically associated
27 with systems governed by formal rules and regulations (Gu et al., 2008). Moreover,
28 reliance on guanxi can facilitate corrupt practices, as individuals may exploit their
29 connections to obtain unfair advantages or engage in illicit activities, thereby restricting
30 the pool of potential trade partners. In essence, excessive dependence on guanxi may
31 impede the development of a rules-based system and introduce uncertainty, as outcomes
32 become contingent on personal relationships rather than the consistent application of laws
33 and regulations.
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43 One of the main concerns in guanxi use is nepotism. Guanxi can be unethical when
44 it benefits a few at the expense of the community (Warren & Dunfee, 2004). It can lead to
45 corruption, cronyism, and preferential treatment based on relationships rather than merit.
46 It can create barriers to entry for firms and individuals without strong connections,
47 reinforcing existing inequalities (Yeung & Tung, 1996). It can be is used to bypass
48 bureaucracy and gain a competitive advantage, which undermines the development and
49 effectiveness of formal institutions (Nolan & Rowley, 2020). Guanxi networks, rooted in
50 Confucianism, can foster loyalty within the network but also create distrust toward those
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3 outside (Wang et al., 2008). The emphasis on personal relationships over contracts can lead
4 to a more opaque and complex business environment, lacking the transparency of systems
5 based on formal rules and regulations (Gu et al., 2008). The reliance on guanxi can facilitate
6 corruption, as individuals may use their connections to gain unfair advantages or engage
7 in illicit activities and limit the potential trade partners. In other words, over-reliance on
8 guanxi can hinder the development of a rules-based system and create uncertainty, as
9 outcomes depend on personal connections rather than consistent application of laws and
10 regulations.
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18 Guanxi exacerbates income inequality by privileging those with robust networks as
19 well as regional disparities (Du et al., 2013). It further blurs the line between legitimate
20 networking and corrupt practices where the selective Chinese legal frameworks push
21 private firms to depend on guanxi for protection and resource access, often involving
22 unreciprocated gifts or favors. Research has shown that practices like gift-giving, while
23 culturally rooted, can institutionalize bribery when networks prioritize loyalty over legality
24 (Lin, 2020). Chinese firms rely on guanxi to navigate bureaucratic ambiguity, with
25 executives prioritizing government ties over legal safeguards. Despite market reforms,
26 guanxi thrives in "institutional holes" caused by nontransparent policies, fostering
27 networks that resist meritocratic norms (Dunree and Warren, 2001). Guanxi's Confucian
28 roots ensure its resilience, shaping social trust, moral values, and economic behavior even
29 as institutions modernize. Guanxi acts as both a social lubricant and a structural barrier,
30 reflecting China's tension between tradition and institutional reform. Its influence on
31 equality, corruption, and institutional development underscores the complexity of
32 balancing cultural practices with modern governance.
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44 Both guanxi and nepotism involve favoring individuals based on relationships
45 rather than merit. This can lead to preferential treatment in hiring, promotions, and business
46 deals. They involve creating exclusive networks that benefit insiders, often at the expense
47 of outsiders. This can limit opportunities for those who are not part of the network. Both
48 guanxi and nepotism leverage social connections to gain advantages. These connections
49 provide access to resources, information, and opportunities that might not otherwise be
50 available. Both can reduce transaction costs by creating trust and suppressing opportunistic
51 behaviors.
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3 As opposed to the west, guanxi is deeply embedded in Chinese culture, rooted in
4 Confucianism, Daoism, and a history of weak institutional frameworks. Guanxi is
5 motivated by a lack of trust in legal frameworks. Nepotism in the west lacks this deep
6 cultural and philosophical foundation. While both can be seen as unethical, guanxi is
7 sometimes viewed positively in China if it expedites growth and bypasses bureaucracy.
8 Guanxi often arises in environments with selective legal systems and judicial
9 implementation, where trust in personal networks outweighs trust in formal institutions.
10 Guanxi is associated with collectivist values that prioritize relationships and group
11 harmony. Nepotism in the west often clashes with individualistic values and the emphasis
12 on merit-based achievement. Guanxi emphasizes strong ties and long-term relationships,
13 while nepotism may involve more transactional exchanges.
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23 When used unethically, guanxi reflects negative managerial values promoting
24 meritocracy by favoring individuals based on relationships rather than qualifications.
25 Especially in international business, guanxi can lead to exclusivity and discrimination,
26 limiting opportunities for those outside the network and for those inside the network by
27 limiting with whom they can trade with. In other words it creates particularistic
28 networks fostering exclusivity and a degree of distrust towards outsiders.
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33 To summarize, it is important to acknowledge the articles that have most
34 significantly impacted guanxi literature and understand how the three main research
35 streams have evolved. Table 2 summarizes pioneering articles, including their citation
36 counts and Normalized Total Citations, which assess the citation impact of scholarly
37 articles over time (Alon & McIntyre, 2008). Guanxi literature is primarily concentrated in
38 10 main journals with the highest impact (see Table 3). The journals are evaluated based
39 on the h-index, g-index, and m-index, which measure the journal's impact and quality based
40 on its published articles, citation patterns, and the age of the articles. The table also presents
41 the total citations, number of publications on guanxi, and the general journal ranking.
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Insert Table 4 about here

Citation counts, co-occurrence frequencies, and PageRank systematically help to map the intellectual landscape and identify its most influential contributions. Citation counts served as a primary metric for scholarly impact, enabling the identification of foundational works and leading scholars. For example, the review highlights that highly cited articles—such as Guthrie (1998), Yeung & Tung (1996), and Berger et al. (2015) have played pivotal roles in shaping research trajectories and theoretical developments in guanxi studies. The annual scientific production graph (Figure 1) visually demonstrates the growing volume and citation activity in the field, underscoring periods of heightened scholarly engagement.

The Co-occurrence frequencies were employed to uncover the thematic structure and conceptual evolution of guanxi research. By analyzing how often specific keywords, topics, or author names appeared together within the same articles, the authors were able to map the interrelationships between dominant research themes and theoretical frameworks. For instance, the manuscript discusses the prevalence of networking theory, resource-based view, and institutional theory, as well as their intersections with topics like digitalization and ethics. This co-occurrence analysis facilitated the identification of research clusters, revealing both established and emerging areas of inquiry. Such mapping is crucial for understanding how guanxi research has diversified and which topics are gaining momentum.

The PageRank was applied to the citation network to provide a more nuanced measure of influence, accounting not only for the frequency of citations but also for the prestige of the citing sources. This approach enabled the identification of articles and authors that occupy structurally central positions within the guanxi research network. For example, even if an article did not have the highest citation count, a high PageRank score indicated its pivotal role in connecting different research clusters and facilitating knowledge diffusion. This metric uncovered “hidden hubs” of intellectual influence, works that are central to the scholarly conversation and have shaped the direction of research across subfields.

Collectively, these quantitative metrics helped provide a robust, multidimensional framework for evaluating the guanxi literature. Citation counts highlighted the most impactful works and scholars; co-occurrence frequencies mapped the thematic and conceptual structure of the field; and PageRank identified central nodes in the scholarly network. The integration of these metrics, as visualized in the figures and tables allows for a systematic synthesis of past research and the identification of promising avenues for future investigation. This approach not only demonstrated the evolution and current state of guanxi research but also offers actionable insights for scholars seeking to build on the field's most influential ideas and emerging trends.

Figure 4 presents a three-field plot, using a Sankey diagram, to illustrate the relationships between countries, keywords, and journals in the guanxi literature. The size of each box corresponds to the frequency of its occurrence, indicating that China has the highest number of publications in this domain, with Chinese scholars contributing the most to guanxi research. Furthermore, in figure 5 we see China, the UK, and the US as the main countries researching guanxi.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Insert Figure 5 about here

To visualize and analyze complex relationships, the study employs a Sankey diagram—a flow-based visualization tool that represents the magnitude of connections between different entities. Understanding which countries contribute most significantly to guanxi scholarship not only highlights centers of research excellence but also reveals how the concept is interpreted and operationalized across different cultural and institutional environments. This is particularly relevant for guanxi, a phenomenon deeply rooted in Chinese culture but increasingly studied in comparative and international contexts.

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3 In this research, the Sankey diagram is used to illustrate the flow of scholarly output
4 between countries, research themes, or collaborating institutions, thereby making visible
5 the patterns of knowledge production and the interconnections among geographic regions.
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7 The primary purpose of using a Sankey diagram was to provide an intuitive and
8 comprehensive overview of how research activity and thematic focus are distributed across
9 countries, facilitating the identification of dominant research hubs, collaborative networks,
10 and potential gaps in the literature. By mapping these flows, the diagram supports a
11 nuanced understanding of the internationalization of guanxi research and helps guide future
12 scholarly inquiries towards underexplored regions or emerging collaborations.
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21 **Discussion and conclusions**

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23 Given China's growing global economic influence, understanding its business
24 culture, particularly the concept of guanxi, is crucial for practitioners and researchers. Over
25 the past two decades, guanxi has received considerable scholarly attention. However,
26 research in this area has been fragmented due to inconsistencies in how guanxi is defined,
27 theorized, and studied concerning its development, antecedents, outcomes, and limitations.
28 This paper provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature through analysis,
29 synthesis, and integration. The primary objective is to methodically analyze existing
30 literature to map the current understanding of guanxi and identify areas for further
31 exploration. A sample of 950 articles published between 1998 and 2023 was used to
32 investigate the intellectual and conceptual structure of the field, resulting in a
33 comprehensive framework.
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43 China's emerging market economy often faces uncertainties because of intervention
44 by the Communist party-state and corruption. Companies often depend on guanxi-oriented
45 governance, leading to close ties between local officials and managers. While
46 neither guanxi favoritism nor market rationality operates in isolation, research indicates
47 that a blend of both influences the behavior of interconnected and economically rational
48 actors in the market. From institutional and cultural perspectives, guanxi can be seen as
49 part of a broader network capitalism in China and other Confucian-influenced societies.
50 Yang, S. and Stening (2013) found that socialist ideology positively correlates with
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3 traditional values (e.g., Confucian hierarchy) and Deng's philosophy (pragmatic market
4 reforms); capitalist values (e.g., individualism, profit-seeking) are negatively linked to
5 socialist ideology but positively associated with Deng's philosophy; and that Deng's
6 philosophy acts as a bridge, reconciling market pragmatism with socialist principles.
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11 When looking at justice, guanxi can be considered unethical when it benefits a few
12 at the expense of the community. In other words, it foster exclusivity. Chinese exhibit a
13 stronger tendency to differentiate among groups compared to westerners, driven by
14 environmental uncertainties and cultural values. Guanxi practices stem from a selective
15 institutional environment where social networks often outweighs trust in the legal system,
16 which is sometimes viewed as an impediment. Historically, China has emphasized personal
17 relationships over contractual practices, resulting in a more opaque and complex business
18 environment. Guanxi may be viewed positively if it expedites growth and bypasses
19 bureaucracy, but the ethical implications remain debated.
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27 Guanxi emphasizes building relationships to bypass bureaucracy and gain a
28 competitive advantage when it was essential in the command economy for accessing
29 distribution networks where formal institutions are weak or selectively implemented. From
30 the literature review conducted, it seems that guanxi continues to be a significant area of
31 study, this suggests that understanding and managing guanxi is crucial for academics,
32 businesses, and policymakers. Given guanxi's cultural embeddedness, foreign businesses
33 must develop a nuanced understanding of Chinese culture and adapt their management
34 practices accordingly. The personal and exclusive nature of guanxi networks means that
35 building trust and strong relationships is paramount.
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43 Policymakers should focus on creating a more transparent and equitable business
44 environment. Companies should invest in long-term relationship-building efforts rather
45 than focusing solely on short-term transactions (Lin, 2020). The ethical debates
46 surrounding guanxi highlight the need for businesses to develop clear ethical guidelines
47 and compliance programs. Companies must ensure that their guanxi practices align with
48 their values and do not contribute to corruption or unfair competition. The reliance on
49 multiple theoretical perspectives indicates that guanxi is a complex phenomenon that
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3 requires a multi-disciplinary approach. Researchers should continue to integrate insights
4 from various fields to develop a more comprehensive understanding of guanxi practice.
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7 Guanxi is widely recognized as a culturally distinct form of personal networking
8 rooted in Confucianism. While it is the central focus of these research streams, there are
9 notable differences in perspectives, theoretical foundations, and methodologies.
10 Chinese guanxi networks, developed in situations of resource scarcity, are characterized
11 by strong ties and few weak ties, evolving into a system to enhance profitability by
12 bypassing bureaucracy. Since the 1990s, scholarly interest in guanxi has surged due to its
13 increasing financial and political importance. However, research in this area has been
14 heterogeneous in its theorizing and operationalization. This paper seeks to provide a
15 scientific review by analyzing, synthesizing, and integrating this extensive literature.
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23 This paper contextualizes existing research on guanxi through bibliometric analysis
24 and content analysis. It clarifies the contributions of guanxi literature to various theoretical
25 fields, enabling scholars to gain a comprehensive view, identify research gaps, and develop
26 new ideas. This study contributes to the literature by providing a broad exploration of the
27 methodological, theoretical, and empirical aspects of guanxi; presenting and discussing the
28 underlying theories; illustrating how articles are grouped based on topic similarity; and
29 identifying the most influential journals, articles, and countries in guanxi research.
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36 This paper represents the first bibliometric analysis of guanxi and identifies several
37 significant research gaps in the existing academic literature that it aims to highlight and
38 address. Despite the substantial body of research on guanxi across various disciplines, there
39 remains a lack of synthesis that integrates these findings into a comprehensive overview.
40 The literature is notably fragmented, with limited cross-disciplinary integration. This paper
41 seeks to bridge that gap by consolidating the core business literature into a cohesive
42 synthesis, providing a more unified perspective on guanxi. A further issue is the theoretical
43 ambiguity present in guanxi research. The field lacks clearly established theoretical
44 foundations, as studies often employ diverse frameworks such as networking theory, the
45 resource-based view, social network theory, and institutional theory. This diversity has led
46 to a lack of consensus and clarity regarding the theoretical underpinnings of guanxi. In
47 response, this paper introduces and contextualizes the various theoretical approaches that
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3 inform guanxi research, thereby clarifying the conceptual landscape. The following section
4 summarizes the various research streams and specific future research avenues:
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9 ***Institutional Theory and Guanxi***

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11 The first research stream is based on institutional theory, which examines the
12 impact of formal and informal rules on organizational behavior, particularly
13 how guanxi functions in evolving institutional environments. As China's regulatory
14 environment modernizes, further research could explore how these changes affect the role
15 of guanxi in business, addressing the management of tensions between traditional practices
16 and formal expectations. Future studies might also examine the cross-cultural application
17 of guanxi, focusing on how non-Chinese firms adapt their strategies when partnering with
18 Chinese organizations (Berger et al., 2023) and how Chinese firms interact with non-
19 Chinese firms that use arm's length exchange models. Additionally, research could explore
20 how guanxi contributes to relational capital and organizational legitimacy in diverse
21 cultural markets, providing insights into balancing local practices with international
22 standards (Hitt, et al., 2016).
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35 ***Guanxi, Social Capital, and Firm Performance***

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37 The second research stream concentrates on how guanxi, as a relational concept
38 emphasizing personal networks and social capital, creates value. There is growing interest
39 in how guanxi affects firm outcomes such as profitability, growth, innovation, and
40 competitive advantage (Yeung et al., 1996). Future research could investigate the variable
41 impact of guanxi on performance based on firm characteristics like size and ownership.
42 For example, smaller firms or private companies may benefit more from guanxi due to
43 their lack of institutional support (Li & Zhang, 2007). Research could also analyze
44 how guanxi affects innovation performance, as it can facilitate knowledge exchange and
45 resource sharing but may also limit firm openness due to reliance on closed networks (Su,
46 et al., 2009). Further development of the GRX scale could examine factors that moderate
47 the relationship between guanxi and firm performance and how it is structured in different
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3 cultural contexts. The effects of guanxi may vary across regions, with firms in highly
4 competitive or less regulated environments relying more on it for resources and market
5 access (Tsang, 1998). Cross-cultural research can assess how foreign firms
6 leverage guanxi in partnerships with Chinese firms, highlighting differences in its impact
7 within and outside of China (Park & Luo, 2001).
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12 Guanxi facilitates access to new clients, projects, and partnerships, directly
13 boosting revenue (Xie et al., 2016). Studies show it helps firms secure contracts and expand
14 market share, particularly in industries like construction and manufacturing (Luo & Chen,
15 1997). However, this growth doesn't always translate to higher net profits due to associated
16 costs (e.g., relationship maintenance). Strong guanxi networks may lower negotiation costs
17 with insiders, accelerate approvals, and improve supply chain reliability, enhancing
18 operational efficiency (Farh et al., 1998). Guanxi facilitates smoother negotiations, faster
19 decision-making, and access to critical resources (Berger et al., 2015). For instance, guanxi
20 provides firms with financial support, technical expertise, and government approvals that
21 might otherwise be inaccessible, enabling cost-effective operations. On the other hand, it
22 limits one to transact with a limited insider network (Chen, 2013). Guanxi acts as a business
23 enabler in China by unlocking opportunities and reducing friction, but its effectiveness
24 depends on strategic implementation and industry dynamics.
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36 Additionally, there is an insufficient understanding of guanxi's evolution in
37 response to changes in China's economic, legal, and political institutions. The literature
38 provides insight into the historical and social foundations of guanxi and does not fully
39 explain the mechanisms by which guanxi adapts or persists amid modernization and
40 globalization. With the rise of digital platforms and social media, the nature of personal
41 networks is undergoing significant transformation. This paper highlights the need for
42 research into how guanxi is being reshaped by digitalization and new communication
43 technologies, specifically calling for studies on electronic guanxi (e-guanxi) and the
44 distinction between online and offline practices.
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Guanxi and Human Resource Management (HRM)

The third research stream focuses on the effect of guanxi on human resource management (HRM). Future research can explore the impact of guanxi HRM on employee well-being and occupational outcomes, considering that guanxi-driven practices can create both positive and negative dynamics (Horak & Paik, 2023; Liu & Chen, 2025). Recent studies suggest that while guanxi HRM can increase loyalty within a collectivist culture, it may also increase stress due to perceived favoritism and reduced job satisfaction (Mia et al., 2020). This understanding can help organizations balance relationship-based practices with objective HRM standards to support healthier work environments and assist Chinese firms in their internationalization activities. Examining the cross-cultural adaptability of guanxi HRM outside of Chinese organizations is important for multinational corporations navigating cultural complexities. As technology reshapes interpersonal relationships, it may disrupt traditional guanxi-based practices by emphasizing transparency and accountability (Badi et al., 2017), helping firms refine HRM approaches that leverage the strengths of guanxi while minimizing its downsides.

Looking at additional future research avenues, boundary between legitimate relationship-building and unethical practices, such as favoritism or corruption, is still debated and insufficiently addressed in empirical research (Ren et al, 2024). This paper points out the ongoing debates regarding the ethicality of guanxi and calls for deeper analysis of when and why guanxi is perceived as ethical or unethical, as well as its implications for corporate governance and anti-corruption efforts.

Building on the findings and limitations of this review, several further avenues for future research are identified. First, future studies should expand the scope of bibliometric analysis to include additional databases (e.g., Scopus, CNKI) and non-English language journals to capture a more diverse and comprehensive picture of guanxi research, particularly from Chinese and other East Asian perspectives. Second, future research should further explore the ethical dimensions of guanxi, especially in the context of digitalization, privacy, and transparency, as well as the interplay between traditional relational norms and emerging regulatory frameworks. Finally, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from sociology, psychology, information systems, and

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3 political science could yield a deeper understanding of guanxi's multifaceted role in
4 business and society. By addressing these directions, future scholarship can enhance
5 theoretical development, inform managerial practice, and contribute to a more nuanced
6 understanding of guanxi in an increasingly interconnected and digitalized world.
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10 11 12 ***Limitations***

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15 Despite providing a comprehensive bibliometric and content analysis of guanxi
16 research over the past 25 years, this paper is subject to several limitations. First, the analysis
17 is restricted to articles indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database and leading
18 management journals, which may result in the exclusion of relevant studies published in
19 other databases, regional journals, or in languages other than English. This selection bias
20 potentially limits the generalizability and completeness of the findings, particularly given
21 the global and interdisciplinary nature of guanxi research.
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28 Second, the reliance on citation counts and related bibliometric indicators, while
29 useful for identifying influential works, may not fully capture the qualitative impact or
30 theoretical nuance of individual studies, especially recent publications that have not yet
31 accumulated substantial citations.
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36 Third, the co-occurrence and network analyses are inherently dependent on the
37 accuracy and consistency of keyword assignment and author affiliations, which can vary
38 across publications and over time. Additionally, the study's focus on quantitative metrics
39 may underrepresent the significance of qualitative, ethnographic, or context-rich research
40 that is crucial for understanding the evolving nature of guanxi in practice. Finally, the
41 rapidly changing business and technological environment in China, including the rise of
42 digital platforms and e-guanxi, may render some findings less applicable as new dynamics
43 emerge.
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50 Finally, methodological approaches to guanxi research are underdeveloped. Most
51 studies have relied on either qualitative interpretative methods or quantitative empirical
52 testing. There is a need for more robust, mixed-methods approaches and innovative
53 methodologies that can capture the complexity of guanxi networks. This paper attempts to
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3 address this gap by integrating both traditional and bibliometric analysis tools, and it
4 encourages the adoption of more sophisticated approaches, such as longitudinal and mixed-
5 methods research, to provide both qualitative depth and quantitative breadth.
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5 *Management*, 56:156–166.

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7 Xin, R.K. and Pearce, L.J. (1996). "Guanxi: Connections as substitutes for formal
8 institutional support", *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(6):1641-1658.

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10 Zhang, M., Hartley, L.J., AL-Husan, B.F., ALHussan, F.B. (2021). "Informal
11 interorganizational business relationships and customer loyalty: Comparing Guanxi,
12 Yongo, and Wasta", *International Business Review*, 30:1-13

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14 Zhao, X and Castka, P. (2021). "Unravelling the role of guanxi in the formation and
15 management of international joint ventures – a systematic review of the literature", *Review*
16 *of International Business and Strategy*, 31(1):103-126.

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18 Zhou, L., Wei-ping, W., and Xueming, L. (2007). "Internationalization and the
19 performance of born-global SMEs: The mediating role of social networks", *Journal of*
20 *International Business Studies*, 38(4):673-690.

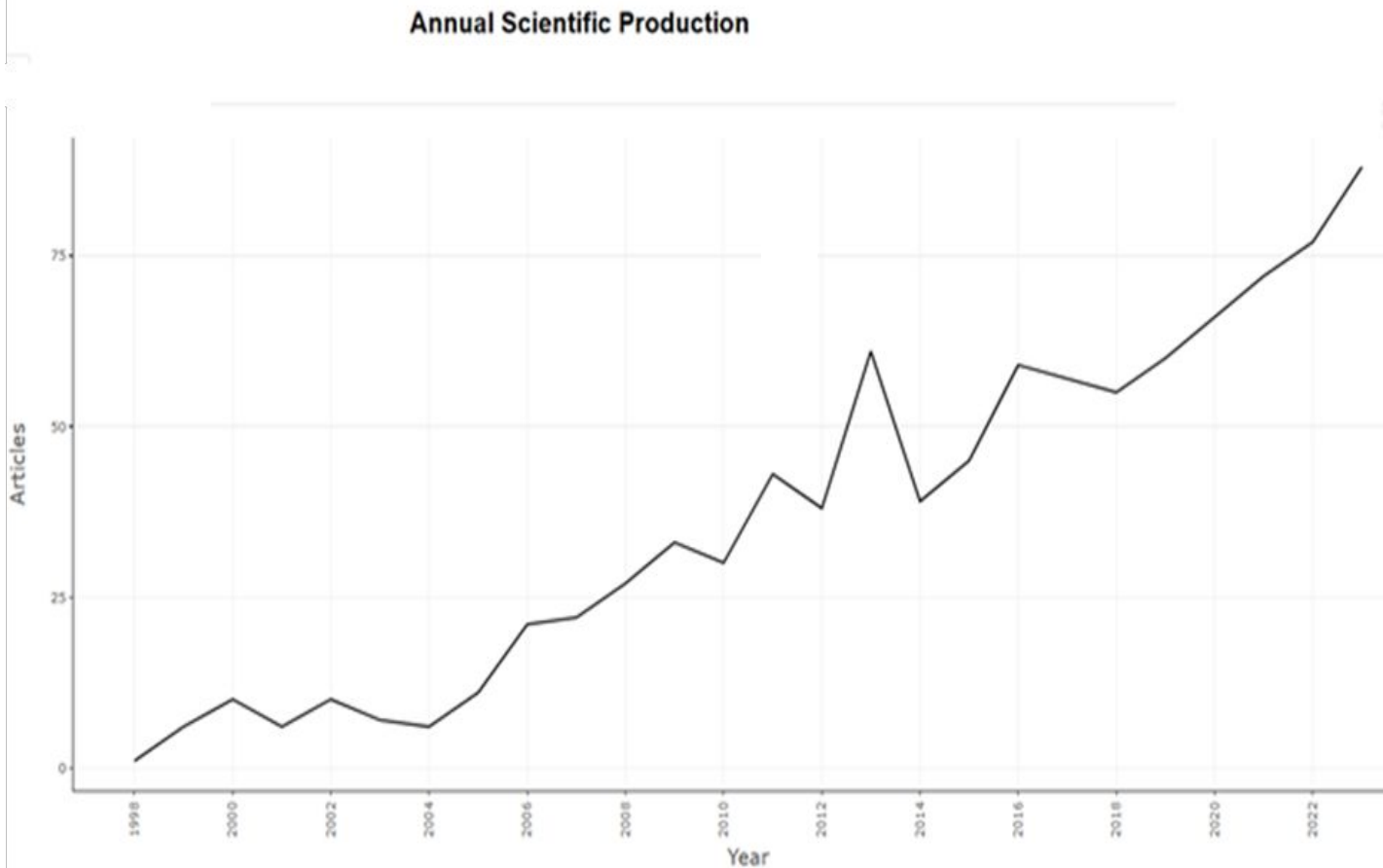


Figure 1: Annual Scientific production (1998-2023)
Based on the World of Science (WoS) data base

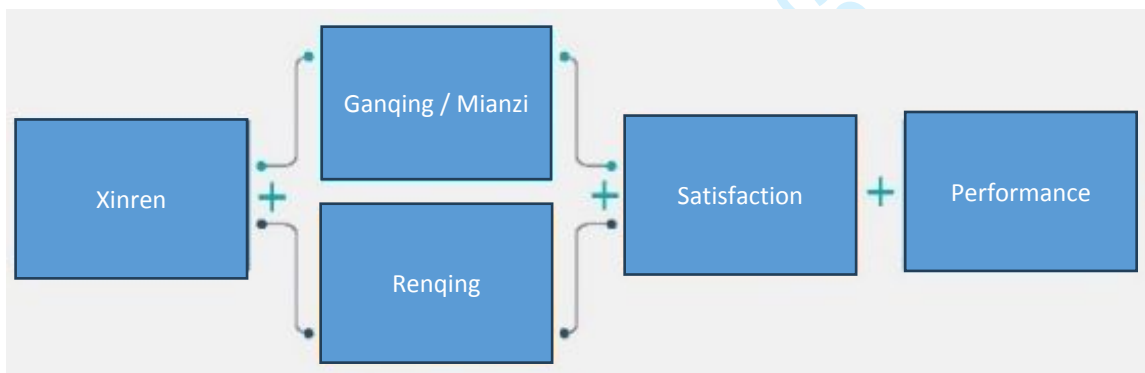


Figure 2: The GRX model

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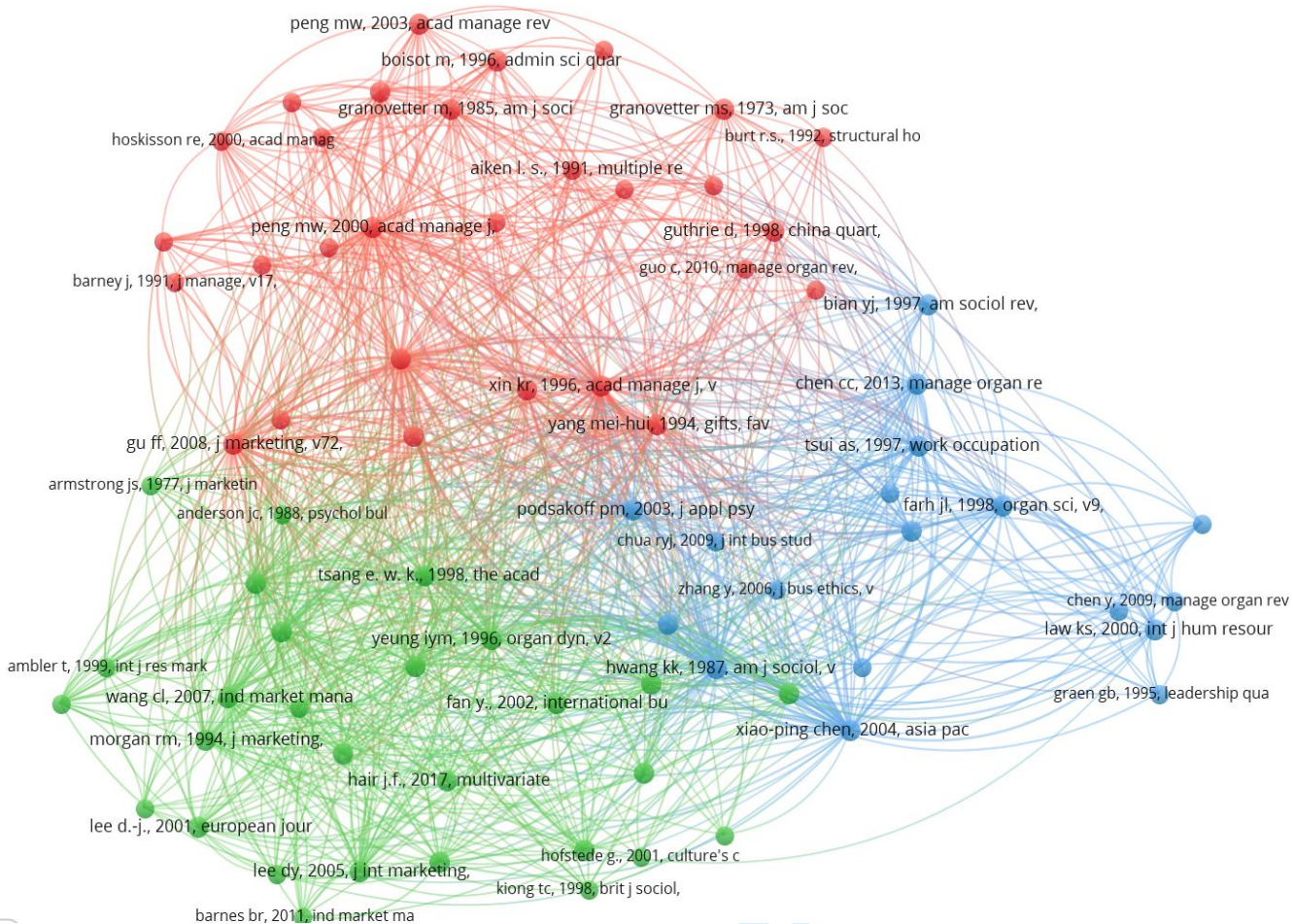


Figure 3: The three research streams

Review of International Business and Strategy

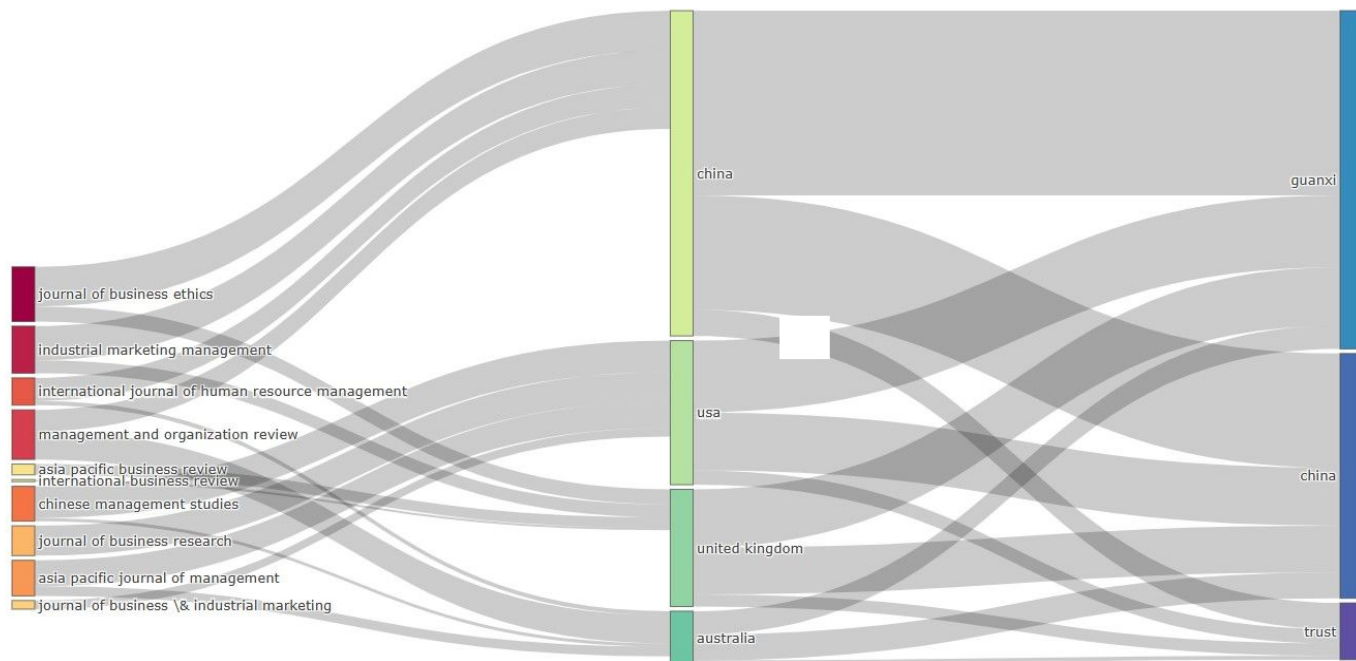


Figure 4: Sankey diagram

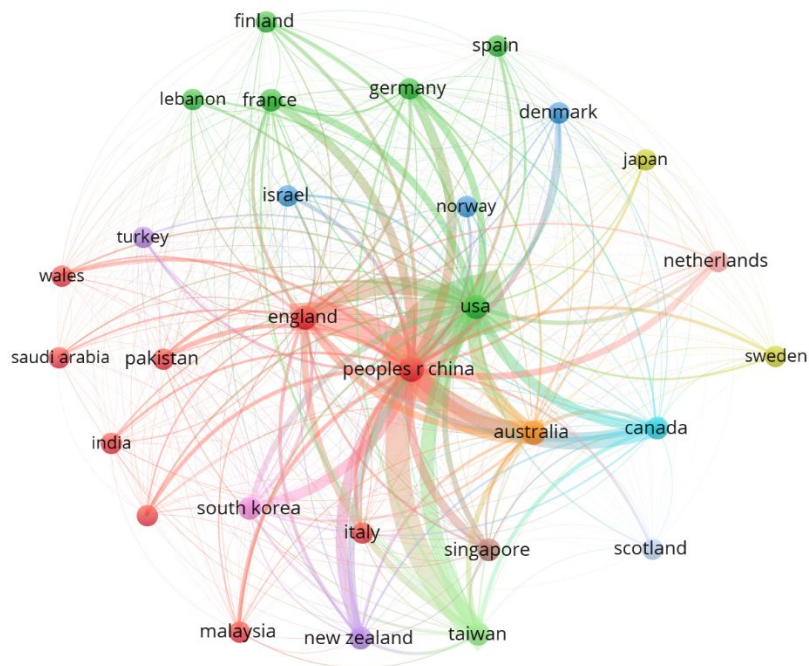


Figure 5: Main countries

Construct	Summary	References
Commitment	It indicates an implicit or explicit expectation that the exchange between parties will continue. This commitment involves both a rational assessment of the benefits of maintaining the relationship and an emotional aspect based on liking and emotional connection.	Dwyer et al., 1987;
Communication	It acts as the bond connecting parties involved in an exchange. It encompasses the consistent and accurate sharing of information, both formally and informally, among those parties.	Mohr and Nevin, 1990;
Cooperation	Reflects the coordinated actions between interdependent parties pursuing shared or individual goals. It highlights the importance of collaboration, teamwork, and unified effort.	Leonidou, et al., 2002;
Coordination	Reflects the synchronization of activities and resource flows among parties in a business relationship. It describes situations where channel members collaborate to achieve common objectives.	Mohr and Nevin, 1990; Anderson and Narus, 1990.
Dependence	Reflects the power imbalance between parties in a business relationship. A buyer who is highly dependent on a particular supplier may feel secure, knowing that the supplier is not easily replaceable.	Wetzels et al., 1998;

Table 1: Summary of minor constructs of guanxi

	India	China	Russia	Arab Countries	"Western" countries
Component	Jaan-pehchaan	Guanxi	Blat / Sviazi	Wasta	Networking
Affective / Emotional	Pehchaan	Ganqing	Najti obzhij yazik	Mojamala (مجاملة)	Social / Affective bond
Reciprocity / Conative	Len-den	Renqing	Podmazivanie	Hamola (حمولة)	Obligation – reciprocity orientation
Cognitive / Trust	Bharosa	Xinren	Doverat's zakritimi glazami	Somah (سمعة)	Trust – built over time

Table 2: Component summary

Paper	Summary	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
Park, S.H. and Luo, Y. (2001). <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> .	Examines the role of guanxi networks in Chinese firms, particularly how they influence organizational dynamics and performance.	1280	53.33	2.80
Sheng et al., (2011). <i>Journal of Marketing</i> .	Examines how <i>guanxi</i> impacts marketing effectiveness and firm performance in China.	850	60.71	9.27
Zhou L.X. et al., (2007). <i>International Journal of Business Studies</i> .	Examine the critical role of social networks, particularly <i>guanxi</i> , in influencing the internationalization and performance of small and medium-sized firms.	687	38.17	4.86
LI JJ, and Zhou, K.Z. (2008). <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> .	Examine how <i>guanxi</i> influences the performance of Chinese firms by moderating the relationship between market orientation and firm success.	599	35.24	3.88
Farh, J.L. et al., (1998). <i>Organizational Science</i> .	Examine how relational culture—defined by trust, cooperation, and interpersonal relationships— affects organizational performance in Chinese contexts.	515	19.07	1.00
Gu F.F. and Zhao, M. (2008). <i>Journal of Marketing</i> .	Examine how <i>guanxi</i> affects customer satisfaction and loyalty in business contexts.	505	29.71	3.27
Chen C.C. (2013). <i>Management Organizational Review</i> .	Examines how <i>guanxi</i> influences the effectiveness of teamwork and its subsequent impact on organizational performance in the Chinese context.	427	35.58	9.75

Table 3: Most impactful articles in the guanxi literature

Element	ABS Ranking	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP
Journal of Business Ethics	4*	39	65	1.56	4361	77
Industrial Marketing Management	3*	34	58	1.619	3405	62
Management Organizational Review	3*	25	49	1.563	2452	53
Academy of Management Review	4*	5	5	0.208	2445	5
Journal of International Business Studies	4*	12	16	0.48	2416	16
Strategic Management Journal	4*	4	4	0.174	2271	4
International Journal of Resource Management	3*	25	42	1.042	1769	46
Journal of business Research	3*	24	38	0.96	1590	38
Asian Pacific Journal of Management	3*	23	38	1.438	1474	40
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	4*	3	3	0.158	1440	3

Table 4: The most impactful journals on guanxi research

23rd of November, 2025

Prof. Hussain Rammal

Professor Elizabeth Rose

RE: "A 25 year review of Guanxi research in the leading management journals"

Many thanks for providing me with the opportunity to revise my manuscript and move it forward towards publication in the Review of International Business and Strategy. I have carefully considered each and every one of the review team's comments and worked meticulously to address such concerns in this revision in a timely manner. I have highlighted each of the reviewers' comments in bold and then illustrated our response as follows. In the text I have highlighted the changes made in red.

I wish to thank Reviewer 1 & 2 for such very positive feedback and yourself for managing the review process.

Yours sincerely,

Reviewer 1 comments

Reviewer 1 comments:

The Introduction is quite weak. It makes the paper read like it is about Guanxi in general and less about its use in International Business.

Response:

The whole introduction was re-written to better align it with international business theory. Please see changes made in red in the main text.

Reviewer 1 comments:

Pg. 1, Figure 1 is not legible. Kindly make it clear and increase the font and quality of the graph.

Response:

I have moved all the tables and figures to the appendix and increased their resolution and size for increased readability. I will let the journal typesetter to put them in the right place and in the right configuration for maximum readability. Thank you for highlighting this important point.

Reviewer 1 comments:

Would be better to include any trends in guanxi studies in recent literature, if the author has identified any trends.

Response:

Thank you for highlighting this point. I have highlighted the three streams/trends in guanxi research in greater detail in the findings section. You can see the three trends introduced in figure 3 – red, green, blue and then elaborated upon. The following is a summary of the three trends found and discussed:

The first research trend examines the state's role in guanxi related economic activity through the lens of institutional theory, focusing on how organizations interact with one another and rely on enforcement mechanisms established by the state. Because western neoclassical models often fail to capture the realities of emerging economies, where institutional environments are unstable and rules are incomplete, this perspective emphasizes how firms adapt to ongoing transitions. It explores organizational responses such as strategic decision-making and boundary-spanning activities, with central concerns revolving around how

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3 companies operate effectively in transitional markets and how they can align their
4 strategies to enhance performance.
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8 The second research trend explores guanxi at the organizational level,
9 emphasizing relationships between firms and between firms and government
10 entities. It investigates how guanxi influences firm performance as well as broader
11 financial and social outcomes, drawing on resource-based theory to highlight the
12 role of firm-specific capabilities. Key resources such as ganqing (emotional bonds),
13 renqing (reciprocal favors), xinren (trust), and mianzi (social face) are examined
14 for their contributions to economic value and improved performance. Much of this
15 work involves modeling how internal and external factors shape guanxi practices,
16 while further discussions rooted in social capital theory consider whether individual
17 networks can be transferred and leveraged at the organizational level.
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20 The third research trend adopts a social perspective on guanxi, concentrating on
21 individual and interpersonal relationships within organizations. It explores intra-firm
22 strategies through the lens of human relations management and ethics,
23 emphasizing the importance of managing resources, interdependencies, and
24 hierarchical structures to ensure successful guanxi transactions. This stream
25 examines supervisor-subordinate relationships, the quality of guanxi, and
26 associated ethical practices, while also analyzing the role of social ties and
27 structural holes in career advancement and employment opportunities.
28 Researchers highlight the distinction between information and influence networks,
29 as well as the ethical dilemmas that arise from self-interest and the blending of
30 organizational, public, and personal resources. Ultimately, this perspective raises
31 concerns about the negative externalities of guanxi practices, which can
32 undermine collective interests and pose complex ethical challenges for both
33 organizations and society.
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40 **Reviewer 1 comments:**

41 ***There is no explanation or reference to Figure 5 in the manuscript. Please***
42 ***explain Figure 5.***
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45 **Response:**

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47 Thank you for raising this point. This point was fixed by adding a reference to
48 figure 5 in the main text (highlighted in red).
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5 **Reviewer 1 comments:**

6 ***Most of the diagrams are too small to read, a better legible image be added***
7 ***for ease of reader.***
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11 **Response:**

12 I tried to fit the figures to fit the overall structure and view of the paper. In order to
13 address your comment, I have moved all the tables and figures to the appendix
14 and increased their resolution and size for increased readability. I will let the journal
15 typesetter to put them in the right place and in the right configuration for maximum
16 readability. Thank you for highlighting this important point.
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22 **Reviewer 1 comments:**

23 ***Following articles seems relevant and may be included:***
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26 ***Chen, C. C., Chen, X.-P., & Huang, S. (2013). Chinese Guanxi: An integrative***
27 ***review and new directions for future research. Management and***
28 ***Organization Review, 9(1), 167–207. <https://doi.org/10.1111/more.12010>***
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32 ***Ren, S., Wang, Z., Usman, M., & Chadee, D. (2024). Double-edged sword at***
33 ***work: Impacts of guanxi human resource management on employee***
34 ***innovative behavior. Personnel Review. Advance online publication.***
35 **<https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-11-2021-0826>**
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40 ***Liu, D., & Chen, C. C. (2025). Rectifying guanxi favoritism: Towards a theory***
41 ***of guanxi inclusive leadership. Asia Pacific Journal of Management.***
42 ***Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-025-10050-4>***
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46 ***Park, S. H., & Luo, Y. (2001). Guanxi and organizational dynamics:***
47 ***Organizational networking in Chinese firms. Strategic Management***
48 ***Journal, 22(5), 455–477. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.167>***
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Response:

I have added the recommended papers into the paper. See the added articles in the main text marked in red. Thank you for helping to update my literature review and pointing out relevant articles to help enhance the points made in the paper.

Many thanks to Reviewer 1 for providing me with excellent guidance for further helping me to advance my work.

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Reviewer 2 comments:

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Reviewer 2 comments:

Guanxi and other social networks are important topics to study in international business. While I like the way you have approached the topic, my issue is what is missing rather than what is included. You have included many papers from broad management journals, but missed out on guanxi-related paper published in international business journals include International Business Review, which I know for a fact has published on guanxi.

I encourage you to include more of these studies and make it more relevant to international business.

Response:

Thank you for this comment. I included the following articles from both International Business Review Journal and Review of International Business and Strategy to better position the paper in the International Business discipline:

Abosag I., Yen, D., Barnes, R.B., and Gadalla, E. (2021). "Rethinking guanxi and performance: Understanding the dark side of Sino–U.S. business relationships", *International Business Review*, 30:358-373.

Ceyhan, S., Dogan, C.I., Yildiz, M., and Barca, M. (2018). "Boundary conditions for the emergence of relational trust among exporters and importers", *Review of International Business and Strategy*, 28(3/4):358-372.

Luo, Y. (2008). "The changing Chinese culture and business behavior: The perspective of intertwinement between guanxi and corruption", *International Business Review*, 17:188–193.

Wang, C-H. and Chen, K-L. (2018). "Guanxi: competitive advantage or necessary evil? Evidence from high-tech firms in Taiwan science parks", *Review of International Business and Strategy*, 28(1):110-127.

Zhang, M., Hartley, L.J., AL-Husan, B.F., ALHussan, F.B. (2021). "Informal interorganizational business relationships and customer loyalty: Comparing Guanxi, Yongo, and Wasta", *International Business Review*, 30:1-13

Zhao, X and Castka, P. (2021). "Unravelling the role of guanxi in the formation and management of international joint ventures – a systematic review of the literature", *Review of International Business and Strategy*, 31(1):103-126.

The following are some of the articles on international business quoted in the original paper:

Berger, R., Barnes, R.B., Rachamim, M., and Silbiger, A. (2025). "Is guanxi prevalent across China? Evidence from seventeen provinces", *European Journal of International Management*, DOI: 10.1504/EJIM.2022.10054675

Berger, R., Drori, N., Rachamim, M., and Alon, I. (2023). "Towards an emic model of business culture", *Competitiveness Review: An International Business Journal*, 33(6):1161-1178

Horak, S. and Paik, Y. (2023). "Informal network context: deepening the knowledge and extending the boundaries of social network research in international human resource management", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(12):2367-2403.

Leonidou, L.C., Katsikeas, C.S., and Hadjimarcou, J. (2002). "Executive insights: Building successful export business relationships: A behavioural perspective", *Journal of International Marketing*, 10(3):96-115.

Lovett, S.S.L. and Kali, R. (1999). "Guanxi versus the market: Ethics and efficiency", *Journal of International Business Studies*, 30(2):231-248.

Raut, K.S., Alon, I., and Rana, S. (2023). "A review of the contribution of Yair Aharoni to the foreign investment decision process: A bibliometric analysis", *European Journal of International Management*, 20(1):8-42.

Su, C., Yang, Z., Zhuang, G., Zhou, N., and Dou, W. (2009). "Interpersonal influence as an alternative channel communication behavior in emerging markets: The role of *guanxi* in China", *Journal of International Business Studies*, 40(5):882-900.

Yang, S. and Stening, B.W. (2013). "Mao meets the market: Reconciling ideology and pragmatism in China". *Management International Review* 53:419-448.

Zhou, L., Wei-ping, W., and Xueming, L. (2007). "Internationalization and the performance of born-global SMEs: The mediating role of social networks", *Journal of International Business Studies*, 38(4):673-690.

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4 **Reviewer 2 comments:**
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6 ***You should also consider comparing guanxi with other forms like blat and***
7 ***wasta.***
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10 **Response:**
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12 Thank you for this important point. I do agree with your view that there is a need
13 to compare Guanxi with other similar personal networks (which is the core of my
14 research area). On the other hand, this is a Guanxi focused paper and not a
15 comparison paper. Furthermore, the paper needs to adhere to a certain word limit.
16 In order to address your comment and abide by the journal limitations, I added a
17 paragraph on personal networking models in different countries and summarized
18 it in a table format. I hope that this answers your concerns. You can see the
19 additions marked in red in the literature review section.
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26 **Many thanks to Reviewer 2 for providing us with excellent guidance for**
27 **further helping me to advance my work.**
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