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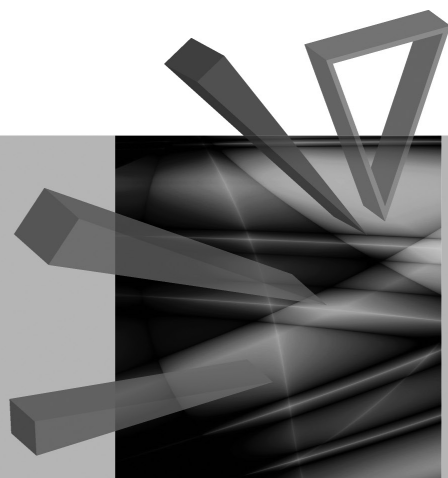
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Clusters, Networks and Markets in the Asia-Pacific Region



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Contents

Introduction	7
Ken-ichi Ando: The dynamics of the industrial cluster facing the foreign expansion of the home multinationals, the changes of the automotive sector in Aichi and their reasons.....	9
Sebastian Bobowski: Knowledge cluster initiatives by MEXT – case of Tokai Region Nanotechnology Manufacturing Cluster in Japan.....	27
Anna H. Jankowiak: Micro, small and medium enterprises clusters and the regional development – case of India.....	41
Szymon Mazurek: Clusters in India as an instrument for enhancing the innovation, productivity and competitiveness of micro and small enterprises.....	50
Tomasz Bieliński: Development of internet social networks in China as a chance for European software developers.....	61
Günter Heiduk, Agnieszka McCaleb: Production, innovation, information networks in Asia: The role of institutions.....	72
Marta Najda-Janoszka, Karolina Nessel: Has the economic liberalization changed Filipino business networks? A case study of a small travel agency.....	83
Chris Weston: North Korea and its special economic zones: Re-establishing networks with the world economy?.....	93
Marta Wincewicz-Bosy: Networks of economic entities related to horse racing exemplified by the Japan Racing Association (JRA).....	109
Anna Żyła: The international production networks as a factor of growing investment attractiveness of ASEAN countries.....	119
Marcin Jałowicki: China’s luxury products market.....	130
Karolina Klupś-Orłowska: People’s Republic of China as a new direction for luxury goods brands producers based on the example of activity of Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy.....	140
Karolina Łopacińska: The Chinese management model regarding enterprise competitiveness on the international market.....	150
Thanh Nguyen: Vietnamese fishing communities: Which solution between geographic advantage and conflicts over territorial sovereignty?.....	161

Streszczenia

Ken-ichi Ando: Klastry przemysłowe w kraju macierzystym korporacji transnarodowych na przykładzie japońskiego sektora motoryzacyjnego.....	26
Sebastian Bobowski: Inicjatywa klastra wiedzy MEXT – przykład klastra nanotechnologicznego regionu Tokai w Japonii.....	40
Anna H. Jankowiak: Klastry mikro, małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw a rozwój regionalny – przypadek Indii.....	49
Szymon Mazurek: Klastry w Indiach jako instrument wspierania innowacyjności i konkurencyjności małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw.....	60
Tomasz Bieliński: Rozwój internetowych sieci społecznościowych w Chinach jako możliwość rozwoju dla europejskich producentów oprogramowania.....	71
Günter Heiduk, Agnieszka McCaleb: Sieci produkcji, innowacji i informacji w Azji: rola instytucji.....	81
Marta Najda-Janoszka, Karolina Nessel: Czy liberalizacja ekonomiczna zmieniła filipińskie sieci biznesowe? Studium przypadku małego biura podróży	92
Chris Weston: Korea Północna i jej specjalne strefy ekonomiczne: nowe sieci powiązań z globalną ekonomią?.....	108
Marta Wincewicz-Bosy: Sieci podmiotów gospodarczych wyścigów konnych na przykładzie Japan Racing Association (JRA)	118
Anna Żyła: Międzynarodowe sieci produkcji jako czynnik wzrostu atrakcyjności inwestycyjnej krajów należących do ASEAN.....	129
Marcin Jałowiecki: Rynek dóbr luksusowych w Chinach.....	139
Karolina Klupś-Orłowska: Chiny jako nowy kierunek ekspansji producentów dóbr luksusowych na przykładzie działań Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy	149
Karolina Łopacińska: Chiński model zarządzania w aspekcie konkurencyjności przedsiębiorstw na rynku międzynarodowym.....	160
Thanh Nguyen: Wietnamskie społeczności rybackie: przewagi geograficzne i konflikty czy suwerenność terytorialna?	168

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THE CHINESE MANAGEMENT MODEL REGARDING ENTERPRISE COMPETITIVENESS ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET

Abstract: Along with the development of Chinese enterprises and expansion of their activities to foreign markets, Chinese managers try to depart from imitating other people's ideas and create their own innovations as part of the development policy. Running businesses in accordance with this knowledge, with the regard for cultural differences, the application of appropriately modified management models and networks of relations built based on the Chinese *guanxi* permits Chinese enterprises to improve their competitive capacity. The aim of this paper is to analyse the Chinese management model regarding the competitiveness achieved by Chinese enterprises on the international market. The paper presents the expansion scale of Chinese enterprises on the global market.

Keywords: Chinese management model, competitiveness, investments, expansion, intercultural management, Chinese business culture, *guanxi*.

1. The expansion scale of Chinese enterprises on the global market

Foreign expansion of Chinese enterprises has become a phenomenon of a global significance by contributing to the success of Chinese enterprises on the international market. The directions and scale of this expansion is presented in Figure 1.

China has become a global investor which handles the development of diverse industries. In the period 2005–2011 it invested 443 billion dollars worldwide. South America, where roads and power stations are being built and the whole infrastructure is being developed, has become an area of intensive investments of Chinese enterprises in the recent years. China has gained versatility, which allows them to operate in various environments all over the world. Mergers and takeovers in different countries, including their increasingly greater number in Europe, are a predominant form of China's expansion. What can be noticed in Figure 1 is a precise distribution of funds devoted by Chinese enterprises to investments in selected countries.

The major factor facilitating the growing expansion of Chinese enterprises is undoubtedly the transformations of the past 30 years in the Chinese economy which

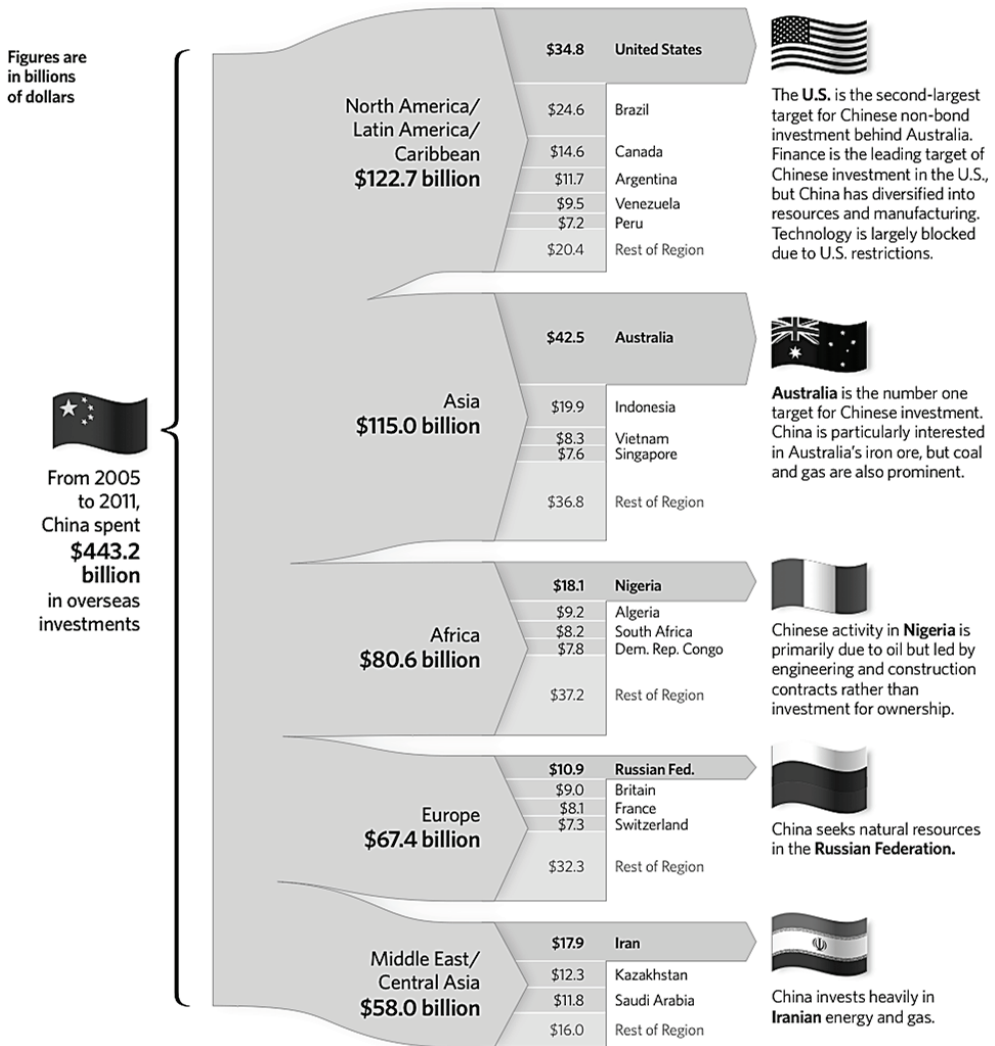


Figure 1. The expansion of Chinese enterprises in the world

Source: D. Scissors, *China Global Investment Tracker Interactive Map*, The Heritage Foundation, <http://www.heritage.org/> (retrieved 29.02.2012).

occurred as a result of the state policy promoting the development of the domestic market, liberalisation and technological modernisation. The Chinese government used the globalisation phenomenon and the global expansion of foreign transnational corporations, which were allowed to enter the Chinese market on specified terms and conditions, in the process of introducing economic reforms. The inflow of foreign goods, capital and technologies as well as the increasingly stronger relations between

domestic and foreign enterprises contribute to the development of the market and, by stimulating competition, consistently lead to the improvement of international competitiveness of Chinese enterprises and their products. This facilitates faster development of export and foreign investments as well as transformations of Chinese enterprises into transnational corporations.

What is a big challenge to such corporations is cultural differences between the target markets on which they operate, especially if corporations are established as a result of merger with or takeover of other enterprises. Culture is a factor that strongly affects the management style since it influences styles of thinking, feeling and behaviour thus shaping the achieved performance and overall efficiency of an enterprise. The effectiveness of managing a multinational enterprise depends on the adopted intercultural management model from among: cultural dominance, coexistence and intercultural cooperation models. The intercultural cooperation model is considered the most effective in international management.¹ It permits an exchange of different points of view and ideas with people from other cultural circles, thus increasing creativity and becoming the basis for mutual understanding that is necessary for achieving goals of an organisation and competitive advantage on the market. Applying this model decreases the probability of conflicts inside the organisation and facilitates their resolution. It is particularly important when completely different cultures collide, which happens e.g. in the case of merger of enterprises coming from distinct cultures such as Asian and European circles. Such situations took place in numerous instances of investments of enterprises with partial Chinese capital, e.g. when Geely Automobile took over the Swedish Volvo group, when China National Bluestar purchased the Norwegian Elkom, when Guanxi LiuGong Machinery took over the construction machine manufacturing department of Huta Stalowa Wola, when Cheung Kong purchased 50% of Northumbrian Water Group's shares, etc.

2. The value of the Chinese business culture

The history of China reaches back over 5,000 years, and it can boast about creating hundreds of philosophical schools. The Chinese culture is strongly rooted in Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, the values and principles of which have been of special significance to date. Confucianism teaches morality, order and harmony. Daoism emphasises the natural course of events in the world. Contrary to Confucianism, it is not composed of rules of conduct but it only describes or outlines the path you ought to follow. The well-known *yin* and *yang* concept comes from Daoism. Buddhism, in turn, teaches reflection and self-awareness with respect to one's emotions, needs, thoughts, capabilities and limitations. The most important feature of the Chinese philosophy is the assumption that a human being is an integral

¹ M. Kostera, Zarządzanie międzykulturowe, [in:] A. Koźmiński (ed.), *Zarządzanie. Teoria i praktyka*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2005.

part of the nature, which means that human actions should be based on a comprehensive analysis of a situation rather than on a temporary profit. Therefore, the past, the present and the future need to be taken into account. Due to the collective character of the Chinese culture and the high hierarchisation in its interpersonal orientation, relations between people are a relatively sensitive issue. A manifestation of the specific character of interpersonal relations is the term *guanxi* used in China.

Developing and maintaining *guanxi* is a typical feature of the Chinese culture and the Chinese management style. *Guanxi* is not only relations with others but, most of all, a long-term bond based on friendship, trust and win-win situation. No matter if it is between a superior and a subordinate or between business partners, *guanxi* is present all the time in both professional and private life. The relations established as part of *guanxi* are so strong that straining them in one of the groups, whether it is family, friends or professional circles, will affect the remaining ones and result in a failure.²

3. Features of the Chinese management model

Among the most characteristic features of the Chinese management style the following deserve mentioning: high centralisation of the management system, low level of formalisation, strong entrepreneurship and existence of close relations between enterprises. The Chinese management system slightly reminds the owner-manager dictatorship towards employees. This is because managers make all important decisions since they have much power and exert a great impact on their subordinates. Hence, they should have a strong and charismatic personality not to give in to any challenge. Another significant feature of the Chinese management style is a low level of bureaucracy, which is reflected in a relatively narrow scope of formal means of control to be applied as opposed to personal control by managers aiming at direct interaction with employees, customers and suppliers. In this system, employees are faced with numerous new challenges but the multitude of the tasks assigned by the chief executive officer allows them to develop quickly.

It is worth emphasising that Chinese enterprises try to pursue a proactive and aggressive strategy by adopting a flexible management style and an entrepreneurial decision-making model. Owing to that, the chief executive officer quickly discerns new development opportunities, which enables a quick and efficient response.

The principles in the area of labour division and employees' responsibility for taking on commitments are clearly defined. This helps managers to control work processes and outcomes because everyone is accountable for their tasks. This type of division of work and responsibility makes it easier for managers to control work processes and results. Due to the hierarchisation of the Chinese culture, managers play a significant role in Chinese corporations. The conviction that it is impossible to

² L. Duo, *Guanxi and its influence on Chinese business practices*, *Harvard China Review* 2005.

create a competitive enterprise without a strong manager is popular in Chinese organisations. One of Chinese proverbs says that people who are loved and supported by others will win the world and therefore Chinese managers focus so much on building *guanxi* with their employees. *Qing*, i.e. feelings, friendship, trust and relationship, is the most significant aspect for proper motivation of employees and maintaining a good *guanxi* with them, which makes *Qing* even more important than authoritatively imposed rules.³ To sum up, the major features characteristic of the Chinese management style include:

- a clear specification of tasks and division of work,
- high hierarchisation of organisational structures,
- developing *guanxi* is fundamental in business relations,
- an important role of the manager in creating the organisation's success,
- the manager strives for achieving *Qing* between employees in order to increase their motivation,
- willingness to establish relations with people who show respect for those who deserve it, and the basis of this respect is features such as seniority, experience and education,
- a close relation between senior managers and officials of a local party (which is common),
- loyalty of employees towards the enterprise in exchange for superiors' interest in all aspects of their lives,
- it is inadvisable to express a contrary standpoint in a given matter openly,
- a fear of “losing face” before the group,
- it is desirable to do as many favours as possible,
- long meetings (often just to reinforce the process of building relations with subordinates rather than to achieve a specific business goal),
- interest in long-term cooperation,
- a long decision-making process,
- diplomacy is more important than excessive openness,
- Confucianism, *I Ching* — a traditional culture deeply rooted in the Chinese management style.⁴

4. The effectiveness of the Chinese management system – qualitative analysis

The assessment of the effectiveness of the Chinese management system is quite a complicated process and it requires an analysis of both the expenditures incurred for creating this system and the benefits which it brings to the enterprise. First of all,

³ X. Li, *Swedish Management Style Perceived by Chinese Employees*, University of Borås, School of Business and Informatics, Borås 2011, pp. 17–19.

⁴ B. Bjerke, *Kultura a style przywództwa. Zarządzanie w warunkach globalizacji*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2004, pp. 145–188.

benefits leading to the achievement of high performance need to be indicated. Extremely strong commitment and loyalty as well as close bonds in Chinese families, which are the bases of organisations, are a powerful source of motivation and a factor of efficiency growth. A perfect example here is private enterprises which are leaders in managing financial and human capital and which gain high profits owing to that. For the good of the family, the Chinese devote to learning and working long hours and make more effort than anyone from outside the family would be able to make. Due to their own capital contributions to the enterprise and responsibility for spin-off⁵ activities, family members have intensive stimuli motivating them to entrepreneurial behaviours and hard work. The family network of relations, in turn, causes diversification of risk among individual members at a level ensuring a certain security against a potential failure. Owing to the loyalty which family members demonstrate towards the enterprise, they usually stay with it for better or for worse, even when offered more attractive opportunities for development that occur at this time or at least support the enterprise remotely. Such a level of trust in the family facilitates the maintenance of a high level of discretion, *yinbixing*, in particularly sensitive areas. The probability that a conflict with the boss will occur is reduced thanks to the culturally established structure of authorities in the enterprise, which is often a reflection of positions taken in the family.

Such an untypical organisational structure, which is based on centralised power, allows private Chinese enterprises to make flexible and prompt decisions. The chief executive officer enjoys full independence and uses this enormous power and freedom to make decisions efficiently without the application of special instruments or support from staff. Enterprises have access to rare resources, business opportunities and knowledge, which additionally permits them to adapt quickly to changing market conditions. If accounting also for an extensive network of relations, the sensitivity of Chinese enterprises to the environment and the changes occurring in it is relatively higher. It needs to be emphasised that the enterprises relying on internal private capital rather than on external financing sources are normally more aware of the potential costs and highly effective in their activities since they have stronger stimuli for saving resources. Apart from that, trust inside an organisation decreases the need of devising complex incentive systems and applying monitoring equipment, which generate high transactional costs. The individual network constructed in this manner is ideal for sectors with a high degree of uncertainty and quickly changing consumer tastes. This is why the Chinese enterprises which expand their activities to foreign markets usually aim at industries characterised by a dynamic pace of changes, i.e. such as textiles, clothes, household goods, products made of metal, wood, plastic, furniture, paper products, toys, computer products, etc.

Apart from positive aspects of the Chinese management style, one cannot forget about negative sides of structures organised in this manner. What needs to be

⁵ Spin-off enterprise – an enterprise established as a result of separating from the parent entity aimed at commercialising scientific knowledge and technology.

indicated in the first place is barriers to the enterprise growth resulting from the following factors: restricted capacities to collect capital, lack of integration of professionals from the outside and the phenomenon of nepotism. The patrilinear descent system, according to which the entire family property is divided equally between all its sons, restricts the potential accumulation of capital in the enterprise, which affects its operation by hampering the possibility of growth. Moreover, as a consequence of such a strong attachment to family and almost closing within it, Chinese entrepreneurs display less trust to people from the outside, as a result of which they rarely use the potential available on the market in full. Without professional and reasonable structures developed in Western enterprises and transparent forms of management it is difficult for enterprises to obtain external funds and, what follows, this limits their development capacities. Another problem faced by Chinese enterprises is the fact that ordinary employees who do not belong to the family do not aim, unlike family members, to stay in the enterprise for a lifetime but seek various development paths, trying to establish their own business activity. An extremely significant problem in Chinese enterprises is nepotism, which is a consequence of the Chinese culture. The major criticism of nepotism refers to employing family members even if they do not have suitable qualifications but in the case of Chinese enterprises the situation is different. From early childhood family descendants are carefully prepared to take specific functions in the family business. Those who do not satisfy the requirements with which they are faced are excluded from the enterprise and can develop in a different profession. Therefore, the level of employee qualifications is not a problem; it is an insufficient number of qualified employees in the enterprise, which results from the reluctance to employ people from the outside that is problematic.

5. Sources of success of Chinese enterprises

The growing pace and scale of mergers and takeovers, interregional joint venture agreements in which Chinese enterprises take part are a manifestation of the increase in the international competitiveness of Chinese enterprises.

Currently, Chinese mergers, which used to be based on financial benefits, have changed into mergers focused on strategic benefits. It is reflected in the increasing number of mergers, perceiving merger by strong enterprises as their development path, as well as tendencies to internationalise such agreements. Simple mergers have changed into ones with a strategic significance that are based on industrial integration and expansion to new markets. Global trends prove that the major motive for concluding this type of agreements is no longer only achieving profit growth but rather building a strategic position on the market towards competitors.⁶

⁶ X. Zhou, X. Zhang, *Strategic Analysis of Synergetic Effect on M&A of Volvo Car Corporation by Geely Automobile*, Scientific Research, China, 2010.

At present, Chinese enterprises are oriented towards departing from the imitation of other enterprises' ideas and engage in creating their own knowledge and innovations, which is strongly supported by the Chinese government. Owing to that Chinese enterprises are becoming more and more significant players on the global arena by pursuing effective development policy.

It needs to be stressed that the success of such undertakings largely depends on the ability to adjust to cultural differences between enterprises, which requires the application of properly modified management systems. It is particularly important because cultural differences might lead to adverse effects, such as decrease in work effectiveness, level of employee engagement and their trust for the enterprise. Hence, cultural compatibility is a fundamental factor in the success of the discussed form of integration between enterprises. What is a challenge for Chinese managers is adjusting the management style and methods to the habits typical of employees of enterprises from different cultural circles. The basis for the effectiveness of actions with this respect is, above all, learning and comprehending cultural differences and developing features of organisational culture that will facilitate triggering synergy effects in the operation of the established corporation. The point is to create conditions for cooperation between representatives of different cultures on principles which allow respecting the specificity of each of them and triggering their best features. However, cooperation between enterprises originating from diverse cultural circles is a demanding challenge. The arising problem is which strategy to apply when managing a multicultural team. From the viewpoint of intercultural management, the adaptation strategy is the best as it permits the team to solve problems independently with the smallest possible participation of management staff. Adaptation is possible to apply when team members are capable of acknowledging and naming cultural differences and assuming responsibility for learning them. Apart from that, team members learn on their own during the process. Adaptation can lead to full understanding of causes of problems and avoiding their occurrence in the future. What is crucial about it is openness of team members' minds and a creative approach to cultural problems. This strategy is also most educating.⁷ However, there is no single and proven method of solving a given problem in the intercultural environment. Determining a solution requires specifying the challenge faced in the first place, and next, and more importantly, assessing the circumstances in which the team operates since only after analysing situational considerations properly can the team leader choose an appropriate manner of response.

In the case of merger of enterprises from different cultural circles, it is necessary to think first whether its aim is the coexistence of two independent brands based on cooperation while striving for mutual benefits or the creation of one culturally diverse organism. This is because the success of international merger requires careful

⁷ J. Brett, K. Behfar, M.C. Kern, Zarządzanie zespołami wielokulturowymi, *Harvard Business Review* 2010, pp. 115–125.

planning of the entire process based on an objective analysis of the enterprise's strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats in the market environment.⁸ In spite of that, the vast majority of such agreements end up in failure for many reasons, including: share value decrease as a result of merger, lower profitability in comparison to the level achieved prior to the conclusion of the agreement, and significantly lower synergy level than expected. One of the major causes of this state of affairs is devoting too little attention to the enterprises integration phase, without accounting for the existing cultural differences between them.⁹ Chinese employers, when looking for a leader among their employees, pay attention to typical desired features of a good manager, i.e. intelligence, empathy, courage to take up new challenges, or the ability to gain trust and motivate subordinates. It is also important to develop features that are typical of the Chinese culture, which consists in taking into consideration components such as: *wu* (the ability to look at a matter thoroughly), *zhong yong* (avoiding extreme moves in management), patriotism, indirectness, and striving for the the best possible combination of the best Western practices with the Chinese wisdom.

Wu, which is based on Buddhism, refers to the ability to comprehend a problem by reaching its core. *Wu* assumes that the only way to understand a situation in full is to use not only all five senses but also heart to do it. Using heart in management is a fundamental ability that was admired in Chinese leaders in the past. Nowadays, however, the dominance of destructive features, such as seeking approval from others, avoiding certain problems, demonstrating power, or fierce competition, have dominated the Chinese management style. While *wu* originates from Buddhism, *zhong yong* is a typically Confucianist concept. Literally, it means "to be in the middle" but in the business world it refers to the Chinese practice of avoiding extreme behaviours. At the same time, it emphasises features that are typical of Chinese managers, who prefer seeking consensus since they perceive it as a safer solution. This concept, apart from Confucianism, refers also to Daoist ideas of looking for equilibrium and harmony. Maintaining a competitive position is becoming increasingly difficult. Although in this year's Global Competitiveness Index, China continues to take leading, 29th position of the BRICS countries, however, has dropped from 26th place comparing to 2012.¹⁰ China's GDP has been below 8%. The Chinese government has set a target to achieve 7.5% growth in 2013, which would mean, however, the lowest level of economic growth rate since more than 20 years. The slowdown in economic activity in China has a negative impact not only on domestic companies, but also on foreign companies, that have so far achieved significant profits from cooperation with Asian partners. The planned reform of the Chinese

⁸ H. Nguyen, B. Kleiner, The effective management of mergers, *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* 2003, p. 447.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 400.

¹⁰ K. Schwab, *Global Competitiveness Report 2012–2013*, World Economic Forum, Geneva 2012.

economy must be taken into account as an important social and cultural factor. Success depends on starting an incentive mechanisms adjusted adequately to the level of mentality and socio-economic situation of Chinese.¹¹

6. Conclusion

The successes of Chinese enterprises on the global market are conditioned on a complex set of factors including, along with the general state policy and factors such as low labour costs, high level of foreign reserves enabling China to support countries which are in debt, the factor of technology and knowledge exchange as well as a specific management style based on a close network of relations which is compliant with the Chinese *guanxi*.

Attitudes towards the Chinese capital and cultural factors, which affect the necessity to apply appropriate management models, are becoming a significant problem. The effects of a collision of cultures are observable in many areas of enterprise management, from the contract conclusion process to motivating employees, assessing them and shaping relations with the enterprise.

In order to increase competitiveness on the global market, Chinese enterprises must apply criteria of achieving enterprise efficiency that are recognised on the international scale. This is what will let them improve reputation when it comes to the quality of the implemented projects by accelerating the global approval and increasing market share and the level of sales and achieved profits. The recent slowdown of the Chinese economy forces implementation of necessary reforms, even at the cost of export restrictions and termination of employment policy taken by indebted companies. China must be ready for reduction in GDP growth and continue running skilful urbanization policy, heading to development and strengthen the services sector.¹²

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¹¹ *China's Economy Slows for Second Straight Quarter, Testing Reforms*, <http://www.nbcnews.com/>; *China's Economic Growth at 7.5% in April to June Period*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>; *China Confirms Economy Is Slowing Down after Second Quarter Weaker Expansion*, <http://en.mercopress.com/>.

¹² J. Winiewski, *Sztuka zwalniania*, *Polityka* 2013, nr 31 (2918), pp. 41–43.

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CHIŃSKI MODEL ZARZĄDZANIA W ASPEKcie KONKURENCYJNOŚCI PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW NA RYNKU MIĘDZYNARODOWYM

Streszczenie: W miarę rozwoju chińskich przedsiębiorstw i rozszerzania ich działalności na rynki zagraniczne chińscy menedżerowie starają się odchodzić od imitacji pomysłów innych i tworzyć własne innowacje, w ramach polityki rozwojowej. Prowadzenie firm w oparciu o tę wiedzę, z uwzględnieniem różnic kulturowych, ze stosowaniem odpowiednio zmodyfikowanych modeli zarządzania oraz sieci relacji zbudowanych w ramach chińskiego *guanxi* pozwala chińskim menedżerom poprawić ich siłę konkurencyjną. Celem artykułu jest analiza chińskiego modelu zarządzania w aspekcie konkurencyjności osiągniętej przez chińskie przedsiębiorstwa na rynku międzynarodowym. W artykule przedstawiono więc skalę ekspansji chińskich przedsiębiorstw na rynku globalnym.

Słowa kluczowe: chiński model zarządzania, konkurencyjność, inwestycje, ekspansja, zarządzanie międzykulturowe, chińska kultura biznesu, *guanxi*.