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PERSPECTIVES

Compressing, Cyclic, and Continuing: Rethinking Time in Chinese Management

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Abstract
Time has long been recognized as a foundational lens in management research, yet most theories draw on Western linear assumptions that overlook alternative temporal logics. This introduction to the special issue on Advancing Temporal Research in Chinese Management situates China as a unique context where rapid economic transformation intersects with enduring cultural traditions. We develop a 3C framework, compressing, cyclic, and continuing, that captures an understudied Chinese temporal lens. Compressing reflects the urgency of accelerated growth and time scarcity; cyclic emphasizes recurring rhythms rooted in agrarian heritage, cultural practices, and institutional cycles; continuing highlights persistence and long-term orientation embedded in Confucian values and historical endurance. By applying this framework, we synthesize insights from the eight accepted articles and demonstrate how temporal dynamics shape organizational identity, entrepreneurial reentry, innovation, ESG strategies, and performance persistence. The 3C framework not only enriches the two dominant streams of temporal research, activity mapping and actors' temporal orientations, but also broadens their global relevance by integrating culturally infused perspectives. In doing so, this special issue advances comparative temporal research and positions time as a central construct for understanding Chinese management and its wider implications.

摘要
时间长期以来被视为管理研究中的一个基础性分析视角，但现有理论大多建立在西方线性时间假设之上，忽视了其他可能的时间逻辑。作为'与时俱进的中国管理研究'特刊的导论，本文将中国置于一个独特情境之中：快速的经济转型与持久的文化传统在此交汇。我们提出'3C'时间框架——压缩 (compressing)、循环 (cyclic) 与延续 (continuing), 以刻画一种尚未得到充分研究的中国时间观。其中, 压缩反映了高速发展背景下的紧迫感与时间稀缺; 循环强调根植于农耕传统、文化实践与制度周期的重复节律; 延续则突出植根于儒家价值观与历史延续性的持久性与长期导向。基于该框架, 本文综合分析了本专题收录的八篇论文, 展示了时间动态如何影响组织认同、创业再进入、创新、ESG 战略以及绩效持续性。'3C'框架不仅丰富了时间研究中的两条主流路径——活动映射与行动者时间取向, 也通过融入具有文化内涵的视角拓展了其全球适用性。由此, 本专题推动了比较时间研究, 并将时间确立为理解中国管理及其更广泛启示的核心构念。

Keywords: 3C model; Chinese context; rhythm; temporal perception; temporal research
关键词: 时间研究; 3C 模型; 中国情境; 节律

Introduction

Time has long been a foundational theme in management research (Ancona, Okhuysen, & Perlow, 2001). It dates back to Taylor's (1911) pioneering time and motion studies that helped establish management as a scientific discipline. As a critical dimension of managerial activities, time provides a

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powerful lens for understanding organizational phenomena. In recent decades, research on temporal dynamics in management has expanded rapidly, giving rise to at least two notable streams. One stream examines how activities are structured in relation to time, focusing on temporal patterns, pacing, and rhythms of action (e.g., Blagoev, Hernes, Kunisch, & Schultz, 2024; Jiang, Yin, & Liu, 2019; Pérez-Nordtvedt, Payne, Short, & Kedia, 2008; Zhang, Priem, Wang, & Li, 2023). The other stream explores how actors perceive and interpret time, such as how individuals' orientation toward the past, present, or future shapes decision-making (e.g., Bansal, Kim, & Wood, 2018; Chen & Nadkarni, 2017; Gamache & McNamara, 2019). Together, these lines of inquiry highlight how both the temporal organization of activities and the temporal orientation of actors matter for understanding managerial and organizational processes.

While the momentum of temporal research has greatly influenced Chinese management studies, most studies are developed based on the same set of temporal assumptions as those originated from Western traditions and phenomena. This is not surprising as some assumptions, such as a linear, clock view of time, have strong roots in market-based economies (Reinecke & Ansari, 2015). Applying theories consistent with the Western view of time also indicates relatively fewer challenges when submitting to other top-tier management journals. However, the failure to account for the unique time perception and value in China may prevent us from advancing the understanding of time in the Chinese management context.

China offers an especially fertile ground for advancing temporal research (Chan & Du, 2021). On one hand, 'China speed' has become synonymous with rapid market entry, fast-paced growth, and accelerated technology adoption. On the other hand, traditional culture emphasizes long horizons and cyclical rhythms, reflected in the lunar calendar, annual festivals, and enduring practices. Language further encodes time differently: Chinese speakers often perceive the future as temporally closer than English speakers, shaping more future-focused decisions (Chen, 2013). Combined with policy-driven rhythms such as the central government's Five-Year Plans, these dynamics foster a temporal orientation that oscillates between speed and patience, urgency and endurance (Zheng, Shen, Zhong, & Lu, 2020).

Against this backdrop, a call for papers was launched at *Management and Organization Review* (MOR) entitled 'Advancing Temporal Research on Chinese Management'. The response was highly encouraging, attracting wide interest from scholars across multiple disciplines, resulting in 46 proposals. Of these, eight were ultimately developed into full papers and were accepted. Collectively, these articles explore time-related variables important or unique to the context of Chinese management.

This introductory article develops and presents a 3C framework of Chinese conceptions of time – compressing, cyclic, and continuing – that not only synthesizes insights from the accepted articles but points out future research directions. Under compressing, firms and individuals respond to accelerated development and time scarcity; under cyclic, they adapt through recurring rhythms and iterative learning; and under continuing, they prioritize long-term orientation and persistence. The framework highlights how China's hybrid temporal orientations, which reflect both the accelerated transformation during recent decades and the long-standing traditions rooted in millennia of history, shape organizational behaviors and performance.

Importantly, these 3C conceptions of time (i.e., compressing, cyclic, and continuing) not only connect to the two broad streams of temporal research but also extend them in meaningful ways. For the stream on how activities are structured in relation to time, the compressing and cyclic orientations offer insights into how accelerated growth pressures and institutionalized rhythms alter the sequencing and pacing of routines in ways that earlier studies have overlooked. For the stream examining how actors perceive time, the continuing orientation highlights the role of enduring commitments, cultural traditions, and persistent future focus, all of which remain underdeveloped in prior work. In this sense, the 3C framework not only builds on but also redirects these streams, opening avenues to study temporal dynamics that have so far remained at the margins of management research. Applying

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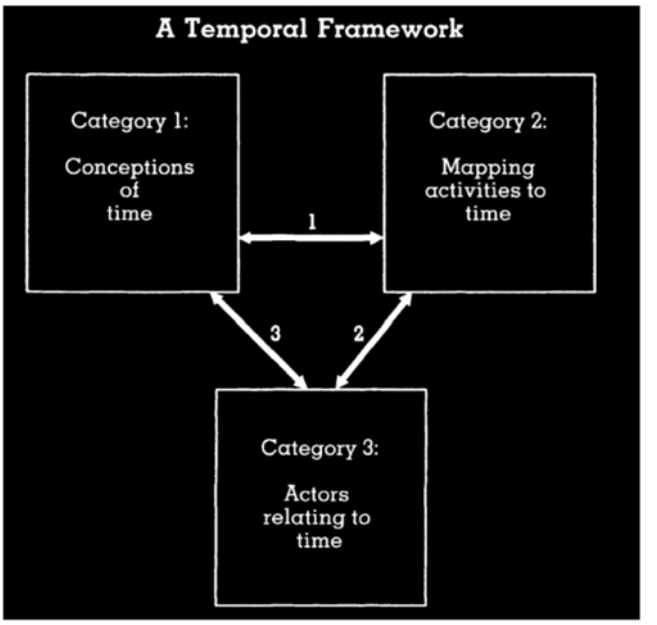


Figure 1. A foundational temporal framework excerpted from Ancona et al. (2001)

this framework, we show how the papers in this special issue extend temporal research in important ways.

Overall, this special issue demonstrates the importance of theorizing time in context. By grounding the temporal lens in Chinese management, the collected articles move beyond Western linear assumptions and open new pathways for comparative temporal research. The remainder of this introduction elaborates the 3C framework, summarizes the contributions of the eight articles through this lens, and outlines a future research agenda that positions time as a central construct in understanding Chinese organizations and their global significance.

A Foundational Framework of Extant Temporal Research

Temporal research has advanced markedly, since Ancona et al.'s (2001) foundational framework (see Fig. 1), which synthesized disparate studies on time. They identified three categories: *conceptions of time* (underlying assumptions like clock time vs. event time, shaped by cultural and social factors; Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988); *mapping activities to time* (scheduling, pacing, and sequencing activities with constructs like rhythms and entrainment; Zerubavel, 1985); and *actors relating to time* (how the temporal orientation of individuals and groups shape their decision-making and behaviors; Barley, 1988). Conceptions of time mostly serve as the foundational pillar, influencing how activities are mapped onto temporal dimensions and how actors perceive, interpret, and engage with those mappings. This tripartite model clusters temporal variables for a unified view, bridging fragmented research to inform management literature.

Since Ancona et al.'s (2001) framework, scholars have systematically extended temporal research by conceptualizing time as a resource, structure, and process (Blagoev et al., 2024), revealing how assumptions about time can expose blind spots in areas like strategy (Kunisch, Bartunek, Mueller, & Huy, 2017). Work on mapping activities to time has shown how rhythms and sequencing of actions (Zhang et al., 2023), whether in acquisitions, innovation, or alignment with environmental change, can sustain competitive advantage. Additionally, research on actors relating to time has demonstrated

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how temporal orientation shapes cognition and behavior, from individuals' subjective experiences (Shipp & Jansen, 2021) to executives' strategic choices (Chen & Nadkarni, 2017). Taken together, these developments advance Ancona et al.'s tripartite model by enriching both the study of how activities are coordinated in time and how actors interpret and respond to temporal cues.

Despite these advances, most of the development in temporal research has been grounded in a widely shared but rarely questioned assumption in management research, what many refer to as the Western view of time. This view has deep historical roots in Judeo–Christian traditions, which imagine time as a linear path with a clear beginning (creation) and a definitive end (apocalypse). As a result, Western thought tends to divide past, present, and future into separate blocks and treats progress as a steady movement from one stage to the next (Adam, 1994; Gupta, 1992). Over centuries, this worldview encouraged scholars and practitioners to see organizations as sets of stable entities moving through discrete phases, rather than as continuously unfolding processes (George & Jones, 2000; Schultz & Hernes, 2013). Even before management became a formal discipline, this linear and segmented way of thinking shaped how people conceptualized change, decision-making, and organizational outcomes.

With industrialization, these cultural assumptions merged with the rise of clock time – a view of time as standardized, measurable, and independent of social context. Clock time makes it possible to coordinate activities through schedules, deadlines, fiscal quarters, and performance cycles, and it heavily influenced tools ranging from Taylor's time–motion studies to modern project management systems (Taylor, 1911; Thompson, 1967; Zerubavel, 1985). While these tools support efficiency, they also encourage organizations and researchers to focus on short-term results, fixed deliverables, and observable endpoints (Bluedorn, 2002; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015). As a consequence, many temporal assumptions in Western management research privilege what can be measured in linear, clock-based units. This makes it harder to notice alternative temporal experiences – such as the sense of urgency created by rapid societal change, the importance of recurring cycles in social and institutional life, or the centrality of long-term continuity across generations – that often shape Chinese management practice.

However, the Western temporal lens (see Table 1 for details), with its emphasis on clock-time, linear progression, and fixed stages, does not fully capture how time is experienced and acted upon in Chinese organizational contexts. Many of its underlying assumptions encourage scholars to focus on short-term results, discrete temporal events, and clearly defined endpoints. This orientation obscures forms of temporality that are more accelerated, more rhythmic, or more enduring than standard Western temporal logics typically acknowledge. Recent work in the AMR special issue on 'Theorizing Time in Management and Organizations' similarly argues for diversifying temporal assumptions in management research (Bansal, Shipp, Crilly, Jansen, & Okhuysen, 2025). Parallel efforts to articulate alternative temporal ontologies, such as Blagoev and Schreyögg's (2025) notion of *Eigenzeit*, further underscore the value of expanding beyond linear, clock-based models. In China, for example, traditions of cyclical rhythms, long horizons, and culturally embedded practices suggest alternative ways of perceiving and valuing time. Without incorporating these perspectives, the current framework remains incomplete and its global relevance limited. To fully advance temporal research, we need deeper insight into how a Chinese temporal lens reshapes the existing understanding of temporal frameworks – a gap this special issue seeks to address.

A Chinese Temporal Lens: The 3C Framework

To advance the temporal lens in Chinese management, we introduce a culturally grounded framework that enriches all three temporal categories identified by Ancona et al. (2001), conceptions of time, mapping activities to time, and actors' temporal orientations. We propose that a Chinese temporal lens constitutes three interrelated dimensions, compressing, cyclic, and continuing (see Table 2),

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Table 1. The Western view

Western	Conceptions of time	Mapping activities to time	Actors relating to time
Even	Time is clock-based, measurable, and standardized; experienced through uniform clock and calendar units independent of events. Time 'passes' even when nothing occurs.	Activities are scheduled through deadlines, hourly units, work shifts, fiscal cycles, and standardized pacing systems; coordination relies on precise temporal synchronization.	Actors emphasize punctuality, efficiency, and adherence to schedules; strong preference for temporal control and predictability.
Linear	Time is understood as a linear sequence with distinct past–present–future segments; progress is conceived as forward movement through stages.	Activities follow linear development (planning → execution → evaluation); project management relies on stage gates and stepwise progression; learning is often framed as movement along a developmental trajectory.	Actors relate to time by prioritizing growth, advancement, and movement toward 'the next stage'; comfort with stable trajectories and discomfort with nonlinearity or circularity.
Endpoint	Time is oriented toward fixed endpoints, deliverables, or goals that mark completion and closure; emphasis on final results over processes.	Activities are mapped toward achieving measurable outcomes within specified timeframes (e.g., quarterly results, performance targets); emphasis on deliverables and milestone completion.	Actors adopt short-term performance orientations; focus on hitting targets, producing visible results, and demonstrating timely completion; strong attention to outputs over ongoing processes.

Table 2. The 3C framework

The 3Cs	Conceptions of time	Mapping activities to time	Actors relating to time
Compressing	Time is event-based and accelerated due to rapid development ('China speed'); emphasis on urgency and short windows of opportunity.	Compressed pacing; shortened innovation cycles; fast scaling; reactive sequencing aligned with policy pushes.	High urgency orientation; polychronicity; stress-driven multitasking; rapid decision-making.
Cyclic	Time is perceived as recurring, aligned with lunar traditions, agrarian cycles, and institutional rhythms.	Iterative activity rhythms; cycle-based learning; entrainment with seasonal or policy cycles; recurring market rhythms.	Past-focused orientation; rhythm entrainment; preference for iterative learning; comfort with recurrent patterns.
Continuing	Time is enduring and long-horizon, emphasizing persistence, continuity, and intergenerational orientation.	Long-term sequencing; cumulative capability building; sustaining performance trajectories; continuity-focused strategy pacing.	Future-focused or persistence-oriented temporal dispositions; emphasis on endurance, stability, long-term commitment.

which draw simultaneously from ancient cultural traditions and contemporary economic transformations. While these 3Cs reflect culturally embedded assumptions about time, their theoretical relevance extends far beyond temporal conceptions. Each C systematically influences how organizations structure and pace activities, as well as how actors perceive, interpret, and respond to temporal cues. Accordingly, the 3C framework should be viewed as a holistic, culturally informed extension of the full temporal model, rather than a set of constructs confined to the first category of conceptions of time.

Each of the three dimensions emerges from distinct historical and cultural conditions and can be understood as a response to the limitations of the Western temporal lens (see Table 3). Whereas

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Table 3. Comparing the 3C framework with the Western view of time

Temporal dimensions	*Western temporal lens*	*Chinese 3C temporal lens*
Time pacing	Even, clock-based	Compressing, event-based
Time trajectory	Linear progression	Cyclic
Time horizon	Fixed endpoints	Continuing

the Western view emphasizes clock time, linear progression, and fixed endpoints, Chinese temporality places greater weight on events, rhythms, and long arcs of continuity. First, the compressing dimension reflects the extraordinary acceleration of China's economic development over the past several decades, during which industrialization and urbanization unfolded at unprecedented speed, compressing processes that took centuries in Western economies into mere decades (Sturgeon & Whittaker, 2019). Because time is experienced less as an abstract chronological flow and more as a sequence of events that must be completed, the rapid accumulation of such events creates a pervasive sense that time is scarce and opportunities are fleeting. This results in managerial practices oriented toward fast decision-making and rapid execution. Rather than the steady, clock-driven pacing assumed in Western models, compressing temporality highlights contexts where speed is not simply a choice but a cultural and institutional expectation tied to event-driven urgency.

The cyclic dimension, by contrast, offers a parallel alternative to Western linear progression. Rooted in China's agrarian heritage and philosophical traditions, it emphasizes patterned recurrence rather than forward movement toward a fixed end-state. Time is understood through recurring rhythms – seasons, festivals, agricultural cycles, and dynastic patterns – that have historically guided social and economic life (Needham, 1977). Confucian thought reinforces the importance of aligning action with natural and social cycles rather than with standardized clock units (Bodde, 1991). In place of the Western assumption that processes unfold through discrete stages toward predetermined outcomes, cyclic temporality recognizes that many Chinese organizational practices evolve through iterative rounds of adjustment, that relationships deepen through repeated exchanges, and that institutional change follows recognizable waves rather than linear trajectories.

The continuing dimension contrasts most directly with the Western emphasis on fixed endpoints and short performance cycles. Drawing from China's long civilizational horizon, where historical continuity stretches across millennia, continuing temporality valorizes endurance and long-term development over short-term results. This perspective manifests in persistent commitment, long-range planning, and an inclination to evaluate success across extended periods, aligning with Hofstede's characterization of Confucian long-term orientation (Fang, 2003; Hofstede, 1991). Rather than prioritizing immediate outcomes or quarter-by-quarter metrics, continuing temporality foregrounds patience, accumulation, and transgenerational continuity – temporal qualities that Western, end-state–oriented models often overlook or undervalue.

Rooted in China's rapid growth and Confucian traditions, these temporal dimensions highlight alternatives to the Western view. At the same time, they are not unique to China: compressing is common in emerging economies, cyclic views in agrarian societies, and continuing in Confucian-influenced cultures. Thus, the 3C framework both advances research on Chinese management and provides a lens with broader relevance for understanding temporal dynamics across contexts.

Applying the 3C Framework to Papers from the Special Issue

To clarify how the special issue papers align with the 3C framework, we classify each study according to the dominant temporal emphasis reflected in its core mechanism (see Table 4). Papers are grouped under compressing when they examine phenomena driven by urgency, time scarcity, or accelerated pacing (e.g., Liu et al. on identity reconstruction under rapid environmental change;

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Table 4. Summary of Special Issue papers using the 3C framework

Authors	3C	Fit to 3C	Temporal constructs	Sample & setting	Core findings
Liu, Lin, & Huo	Compressing	Examines identity construction under compressed, fast-changing environments	Accelerated transformation pacing; urgency-induced sequencing	Comparative case study of two Chinese firms	Compressed temporal pressures induce temporal rigidities and rapid identity reconstruction
Ye, Song, Li, & Qiao	Compressing	Polychronicity as a response to time scarcity and overlapping demands	Urgency orientation; multitasking; polychronic time use	Survey of 129 Chinese women entrepreneurs	Polychronicity enhances resilience under compressed temporal conditions
Li, Xi, Yi, Li, & Liu	Cyclic	Focuses on past-oriented signals and iterative learning	Past temporal focus; recursive sensemaking; iterative learning cycles	1017 Chinese innovation funding projects	Past-focused signals strengthen perceived learning credibility; gender moderates evaluations
Yu, Liu, Cao, Zhou, & Li	Cyclic	Reentry after failure conceptualized as a repeated temporal rhythm	Repeated reentry rhythms; temporal momentum; experience cycles	Panel data on 368 Chinese entrepreneurs	Longer firm lifespan reduces reentry; past focus amplifies this effect
Shaheer, Yi, & He	Cyclic	Innovation pacing adapts to recurring institutional rhythms	Institutional cycles; iterative design rhythms; entrainment	4,619 digital firms in 50 countries	Uncertainty produces U-shaped innovation responses; design iteration enables rhythmic adaptation
Zhao, Wang, & Yao	Continuing	Examines persistent ESG commitment shaped by temporal focus	Future focus; long-term orientation; persistence	Chinese listed firms, 2009–2021	Future-focused CEOs increase ESG investment; past/present focus biases toward governance
Ding, Noorderhaven, & Guo	Continuing	Language-based temporal biases shape long-term strategic responses	Future-time reference; long-horizon decision bias	12,309 listed firms in 12 countries	Strong-FTR languages reduce acquisition likelihood during underperformance
Yang, Chen, Wei, & Liu	Continuing	Sustained performance persistence in platform markets	Network persistence; cumulative performance rhythms	Cross-country data on social platforms	Network effects drive long-term performance persistence moderated by country contexts

Ye et al. on polychronicity as a response to compressed time). Papers are categorized as cyclic when they focus on iterative, recurring, or rhythm-based temporal processes (e.g., Li et al. on past-focused learning signals; Yu et al. on entrepreneurial reentry rhythms; Yi et al. on innovation patterns entrained with institutional cycles). Finally, papers are placed under continuing when they

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highlight long-term persistence, endurance, or future-oriented temporal horizons (e.g., Zhao et al. on sustained ESG commitments; Ding et al. on long-horizon responses shaped by future-time reference [FTR]; Yang et al. on persistent performance trajectories). These concise explanations reflect the dominant temporal construct driving each study, rather than methodological or topical similarities, thereby clarifying how the 3C framework meaningfully differentiates and integrates the empirical contributions in this special issue. Because the contributions in this special issue are predominantly empirical rather than purely theoretical, we also report their empirical setting and main findings in Table 4.

Compressing

The compressing dimension advances research by highlighting how time scarcity in China's rapid development trajectory drives accelerated activity mappings and urgent actor orientations, prioritizing speed and efficiency amid change. This lens reveals opportunities to study phenomena like organizational transformations and polychronic behaviors in high-pressure contexts.

For instance, due to the rapid growth of Chinese companies, they often face the challenge of transforming their organizational identity from followers to leaders, making this a valuable exploration at the intersection of identity and temporal studies. Liu, Lin, and Huo (2025) conduct a comparative case study of two Chinese firms transitioning from follower to leader positions in emerging markets. Through the compressing lens, the study reveals how unstable environments impose temporal rigidities, prompting activity mapping via single activity transformations – such as radical 'break and (re)build' logic or progressive layer-by-layer evolution in identity structures. Actors relate to time through past-oriented urgency, enabling high-position leaps and enriching insights into temporal dynamics for organizational identity construction in compressed growth contexts. In so doing, this paper extends the compression dimension by showing how rapid market and organizational shifts produce temporal rigidities that force abrupt identity transformations.

Because of compressed time where entrepreneurs do not have enough time resources, particularly for women who also need to manage family life, this makes the temporal orientation of polychronicity important to study. Ye, Song, Li, and Qiao (2025), grounded in role accumulation theory, surveyed 129 Chinese women entrepreneurs to explore polychronicity amid gender-specific challenges. The compressing dimension frames role conflicts and interruptions as environmental challenges, fostering actors relating to time through polychronic orientations – favoring simultaneous task management to handle venture capital barriers, work-life conflicts, and caregiving demands. Moderators like emotional intelligence and experience amplify polychronic orientations' resilience-building effects. As such, this study highlights how compressed temporal preferences enable women entrepreneurs to navigate adversity and offers practical strategies for multitasking in China's fast-paced entrepreneurial landscape. These compressing assumptions not only define the conception of time in contemporary Chinese management but also shape activity mapping – through accelerated pacing and shortened sequencing – and influence actor orientations such as urgency, polychronicity, and rapid decision-making.

Cyclic

The cyclic dimension advances research by emphasizing iterative processes and repeated learning episodes rooted in traditional recurring patterns. Within this dynamic context, temporal constructs like past-focused orientations and adaptive rhythms may be important to study (Blagoev et al., 2024).

Because of the importance of continuous learning from past events in iterative innovation cycles, past-focused temporal orientation can be a credible signal of learning capacity, influencing funding decisions under uncertainty. Consistent with this point, Li, Xi, Yi, Li, and Liu (2025) draw on signaling

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theory and gender expectations to examine how past-focused temporal orientation affects innovation evaluations. They argue that narratives emphasizing prior events signal stronger learning among innovators. Gender further moderates the relationship such that female-dominated teams gain more credibility from past-focused signals, and female evaluators respond to the past-focused signals more positively. This result indicates that past-focused signals can reduce funding gaps between genders, advancing innovation research on temporal rhetorics and genders. We find it also extending the cyclic dimension of a Chinese temporal lens by showing how past-oriented temporal cues signal iterative learning capabilities in innovation evaluation.

Because entrepreneurial journey may feature failure and reentry as part of a cyclical trajectory for serial entrepreneurs, Yu, Liu, Cao, Zhou, and Li (2025) examine entrepreneurs' reentry rhythms. By analyzing 368 Chinese entrepreneurs, this paper explores how firms' lifespan affects post-failure reentries. Particularly, they find that longer lifespans hinder the follow-up reentry of the entrepreneur, revealing a temporal driver of serial entrepreneurs. They further show that past-focused temporal orientation amplifies this negative effect, providing insights into time's objective (lifespan) and subjective (focus) roles in entrepreneurial recovery and resilience. This study illustrates the cyclic dimension through the repeated rhythm of entrepreneurial reentry, revealing how previous cycles of experience shape future attempts.

Fast-changing digital innovation allows for iterative adaptations to recurring and unpredictable institutional shifts. Within this context, Shaheer, Yi, and He (2026) examine how innovation rhythms adapt to institutional rhythms via design iteration, using data from 4,619 firms across 50 countries in the mobile app industry. Viewed through a temporal lens, regulatory changes function as environmental rhythms that shape firms' innovation rhythms. Their results reveal a U-shaped pattern: low uncertainty suppresses innovation, moderate uncertainty enables innovation, but high uncertainty again overwhelms innovative activity. Design iteration serves as a temporally distributed mechanism for resilient synchronization, offering a time-sensitive view on innovation in nascent industries like China's emerging markets. These cyclic assumptions not only characterize a culturally rooted conception of recurring time but also shape activity mapping, through iterative rhythms, recurring learning cycles, and entrainment with institutional or seasonal patterns, and influence actor orientations, such as past-focused sensemaking, comfort with repetition, and alignment with collective temporal rhythms. Therefore, this paper highlights how the cyclic dimension of a Chinese temporal lens structures strategic adaptation.

Continuing

The continuing dimension advances research by prioritizing long-term orientations and persistence drawn from China's historical endurance, leading to temporal constructs like future-focused biases and sustained performance rhythms that favor ongoing stability over short-term gains. This facilitates studies on strategic decisions that have long-horizon outcomes, such as environmental protection and social equity, both of which are important topics in China. Accordingly, Zhao, Wang, and Yao (2025) examine CEOs' temporal focus and firm ESG using data from Chinese listed firms between 2009 and 2021. They show that past- or present-focused CEOs suppress environmental and social investments but enhance governance; future-focused CEOs boost sustainability initiatives, moderated by green experience and wealth sensitivity, illuminating executive perceptions' role in long-term corporate heterogeneity.

Because the topic of continuing organizational performance is important, not only in China but globally, where we often sacrifice long-term returns for short-run gains, Ding, Noorderhaven, and Guo (2025) examine how the way languages encode FTR shapes firms' strategic responses to performance feedback. Grounded in the behavioral theory of the firm, it argues that managers' interpretations of performance shortfalls are not neutral but are filtered through temporal orientations. By analyzing 12,309 firms from 12 countries between 2007 and 2019, this paper finds that firms in

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strong-FTR language contexts (where the future is linguistically marked) are less likely to engage in acquisitions in response to sustained underperformance. Slack resources strengthen this relationship, while political stability weakens it. As such, this study offers insights into how temporal biases shape long-term strategic adjustments amid persistent shortfalls. This paper extends our understanding of the continuing dimension by shedding light on linguistic structures that encode future orientation.

Further, Yang, Chen, Wei, and Liu (2026) focus on performance persistence of platform companies from the lens of continuance. They investigate why some social platforms are able to sustain superior performance in international markets. Instead of emphasizing imitation barriers, it highlights network effects as the key mechanism behind performance persistence. The study argues that persistence varies across countries depending on contextual factors: intellectual property rights protection can dampen network effects by restricting information flows, while demand heterogeneity amplifies the value of large networks for information consumption. As such, this paper contributes to strategy research on geographic variations in sustaining long-term performance superiority. These continuing assumptions not only reflect a conception of time grounded in endurance and long-term horizons but also shape activity mapping – through extended sequencing, cumulative capability building, and sustained strategic pacing – and influence actor orientations such as persistence, future-focused commitment, and an emphasis on stability across temporal spans.

Discussion and Future Research Directions

Collectively, the papers in this special issue illustrate the richness of applying a temporal lens to Chinese management, revealing how culturally infused temporality influences organizational behaviors and strategies. By grounding our analysis in the 3C framework – compressing, cyclic, and continuing – we uncover patterns that extend beyond Western linear views, offering nuanced insights into phenomena like innovation funding, entrepreneurial reentry, and ESG investments. These studies not only affirm the foundational role of time in management but also highlight the interplay between temporal rigidities – such as institutional uncertainty or gender biases – and adaptive mechanisms that enable firms to thrive in China's dynamic landscape. Overall, this special issue advances the temporal perspective by demonstrating its applicability to real-world challenges, encouraging scholars to consider time not as a neutral backdrop but as a strategic resource shaped by cultural and economic forces.

Exploring More Chinese Conceptions of Time

One avenue for future research involves exploring more complex Chinese conceptions of time, particularly as multiple generations coexist with divergent temporal views in this unique setting. China serves as a compelling context where ancient cyclical traditions intersect with modern compressing urgencies and continuing endurance, fostering hybrid conceptions that may be ambivalent or multifaceted. For instance, younger generations influenced by global digital cultures might blend polychronic multitasking with traditional rhythms, requiring new temporal orientations that accommodate ambiguity, such as being comfortable with overlapping time frames. This complexity could shape activity mapping in innovative ways, like meshing rhythms from diverse activities – e.g., integrating state-driven policy cycles with entrepreneurial innovation sequences – or actor relations that involve negotiating conflicting temporal priorities in teams. Digging deeper into Chinese-specific phenomena, such as the temporal implications of the '996' work culture or the rhythmic patterns in e-commerce platforms like Taobao, could reveal how these blended conceptions affect phenomena like work-life integration or supply chain agility, extending the 3C framework to capture intergenerational dynamics.

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Bridging Activity Mapping and Actors Relating to Time

Another critical direction is bridging activity mapping with actors relating to time, as these streams, while robust individually, rarely engage with each other, representing a significant opportunity for integration. Temporal orientations of actors often determine how activities are mapped, sequenced, or paced, and conversely, the same orientation might yield varying effects under different activity patterns. For example, a past-focused orientation could enhance learning in cyclic rhythms but hinder adaptation in compressed mappings. In this special issue, only one paper, Yu et al. (2025), touches upon this linkage by showing how temporal focus moderates the impact of firm lifespan on reentry sequencing. We encourage much more research in this vein, such as examining how CEO future orientation influences the pacing of ESG initiatives or how polychronic actor traits interact with institutional rhythms in digital innovation, potentially using mixed-methods to unpack these interdependencies and enrich theoretical models.

Influence of 3C on Multiple Activity Rhythms

Future studies should investigate how the 3C framework influences multiple activity rhythms, such as the meshing or entrainment between organizational and environmental rhythms, to better understand synchronization in complex systems. For example, the compressing dimension might accelerate meshing in fast-paced industries like tech, while cyclic elements could facilitate entrainment with seasonal policy cycles, and the continuing orientation ensures long-term alignment with institutional evolutions. In the Chinese context, this could manifest in state-owned enterprises harmonizing internal innovation rhythms with 5-year plans or private firms entraining supply chain activities with global market fluctuations. While the papers by Shaheer et al. (2026) and Liu et al. (2025) illustrate how organizations in China adjust their single activity rhythms, important opportunities reside in studying multiple activity rhythms. Empirical work using longitudinal data could test these interactions, revealing how misalignments lead to inefficiencies or how successful entrainment enhances resilience, extending theoretical models to capture multi-level temporal interdependencies.

Addressing Overlooked Temporal Perceptions

Temporal perceptions in the Chinese context are mostly overlooked in current research, and we do not fully know how individuals really feel about time compression, polychronicity, or long-term horizons in high-pressure environments like China. Across the special issue, several papers, such as Ye et al.'s (2025) work on polychronicity, Li et al.'s (2025) study on past-focused signaling, and Ding et al.'s (2025) analysis of FTR, indicate that subjective temporal perceptions meaningfully shape evaluations and decision-making in China. This distinction aligns with Shipp and Cole's (2015) call for more explicit theorization of how individuals experience, interpret, and act on time, as well as with Shipp and Jansen's (2021) review highlighting the centrality of subjective temporal experience in organizational life. Future directions should directly focus on subjective experiences, such as employees' emotional responses to 'China speed' in compressing contexts, or how generational differences in cyclic perceptions affect team cohesion. Qualitative studies, like ethnographies in e-commerce firms, might uncover feelings of exhaustion from constant urgency or fulfillment from enduring commitments, informing interventions for well-being. Integrating surveys with neuroscientific tools could measure perceptual variances, linking them to outcomes like creativity or turnover, thus bridging micro-level feelings with macro-level temporal strategies in the 3C framework.

A Dynamic 3C Framework

A promising direction for future research lies in examining the dynamic interplay among the 3Cs. Although the 3Cs are analytically distinct, organizations may shift their temporal emphases as they move through different strategic or environmental phases. For instance, firms often operate

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under time compression during periods of rapid growth or intense competition, when event-driven urgency dominates decision-making. As organizations stabilize, they may transition toward a continuing trajectory, emphasizing endurance, long-horizon investments, and process accumulation. Understanding how organizations oscillate among these temporal logics, what triggers these transitions, and how conflicting temporal demands are reconciled represents a rich opportunity for advancing temporal theory. Such work could illuminate how firms navigate temporal complexity and how shifts in temporal orientation shape organizational adaptation, innovation, and strategic behavior.

Methodological and Interdisciplinary Innovations

Broader calls for future research include methodological innovations and interdisciplinary integrations to deepen the temporal lens. For instance, fusing insights from psychology could map individual bias dynamics, such as cognitive reframing of temporal foci, while sociology might analyze cultural cycle influences on organizational inertia, adopting multi-method approaches to temporal conflicts. This agenda encourages addressing grand challenges like climate adaptation in China, where reshaping environmental rigidities, such as policy volatility, supports sustainable continuing orientations, perhaps through mixed-methods studies combining network analysis with qualitative narratives. Additionally, exploring how activity mapping and actors' temporal orientations shape the conceptions of time fundamentally could reveal feedback loops, such as how polychronic orientations in teams redefine the cyclic dimension in multicultural firms. This would enrich the 3C framework by examining reverse causality in temporal dynamics.

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