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# Issues and Difficulties in Doing Participative Research in China: Lessons Learned from a Survey in Information Systems Research

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**Abstract:** Contextual, cultural and political differences between China and the West determine that research issues and difficulties, that may not generally be experienced and reported in the West, can occur during participative research processes in China. Disregarding these context specific issues can lead to either a complete failure of the research project or insignificant research findings (e.g. lack of response or meaningless responses to questionnaires). This paper reviews and discusses issues that obstruct researchers carrying out participative survey research in China. These include problems related with identifying an appropriate research sample, translating the survey instrument, retrieving an accurate company list, getting sufficient responses and finally getting earnest responses from participants. The causes for these potential problems are discussed in relation to the political, economic, social, historical and cultural conditions in China. This paper proposes and illustrates a set of heuristics to overcome these problems, based on the lessons learned from a questionnaire survey conducted in an ongoing PhD research project. The project aims to investigate the barriers and risks associated with the post-implementation of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Systems in Chinese companies. This paper is particularly meaningful for researchers and research project supervisors, who already engage or are interested in doing research in China but are relatively unfamiliar with the research context there.

**Keywords:** Participative Research in China, Questionnaire Surveys, Information System, Cultural Differences, Political Differences

## 1. Introduction

*"2008: the year a new superpower is born"*  
The Independent (2008)

On the New Year's Day of 2008, the popular UK national newspaper, the Independent, used the above title on the front page of its daily release. The 'superpower' mentioned in the title refers to China, which is widely predicted to overtake Germany as the world's third largest economy in 2008 (The Independent, 2008). This exemplification proves that the emergence of China as an economic superpower has attracted increasing interest from the Western world than ever before. In the academic environment in particular, China's rapid economic growth has captured substantial attention from Western researchers, especially economists and management scholars (Roy et al, 2001). Economists (e.g. Perkins, 1997) are mostly interested in exploring and identifying the nature of China's economic transition and the reasons behind China's continued rapid economic growth. On the other hand, management scholars focus more on studying operation issues of modern Chinese firms (e.g. Lee, 1997), as well as, on exploring how the unique Chinese context affects the way people do business there (e.g. Graham and Lam, 2004).

However due to contextual, cultural and political differences between China and the West, fundamental research issues and difficulties, that may not be experienced and reported in the West, arise when researchers conduct participative social science research in China. For example, Manion (1994) reports that "sampling is not the only serious obstacle to survey research in the PRC [People's Republic of China], many other problems [e.g. gaining respondents' trust, getting earnest responses] greatly challenge the ingenuity of social scientists in adapting standard methods to distinctly non-standard conditions [in China]". Disregarding these issues can lead to either a complete failure of the research project or insignificant and flawed research findings (e.g. lack of response or meaningless responses to questionnaires).

This view is confirmed by Roy et al (2001) who points out that research methodologies developed in the West may often 'not be applicable or viable when studying many managerial and other issues in China'. Practical experiences of a number of other scholars (e.g. Gamble, 2003; Alon, 2006) also reinforce that, it may be extremely difficult to

conduct successful participative research in China and generate meaningful findings by using routine research methods developed in the West, without adapting it for cultural differences. In order to devise an appropriate research design to increase the likelihood of project success, Roy et al (2001) conclude that 'it is necessary for scholars [who engaged in research in China] to make every effort to anticipate likely problems' at the initial stage of their research.

The need for this paper thus emerged from the increasing global research interest in investigating China but a lack of studies that aim at reporting and resolving the issues and difficulties for doing research there. This paper aims at highlighting and discussing potential problems that are likely to be encountered by research projects in China. It illustrates and discusses these problems with lessons learnt from a recent cross-sectional survey research. The survey aimed at investigating the barriers and risks associated with the post-implementation of ERP systems in Chinese companies. This paper is organised into three main sections. An overview of issues and difficulties in doing research in China is presented first, followed by a description of the ERP research in China. Subsequently, problems experienced in the survey and solutions elaborated to address these problems are presented and discussed.

## 2. An overview of potential issues in doing research in China

Anecdotal experience and a review of literature indicated a set of significant issues preventing researchers from successfully carrying out research projects in China.

Among these, identifying a representative and reasonable sample in China is probably the most significant problem that is frequently mentioned. This difficulty does not only follow from China's large size and number of potential respondents (Roy et al, 2001), but is also attributed to the fact that China is by no means a homogeneous country. As stated by Liu (2004) since China started the transition to a market economy in the early 1980s, "ordinary Chinese people experience increased material comfort, greater freedoms and more diverse lifestyles", while the country itself is in the midst of socio-political transitions characterised by the co-existence of rival cultural, ideological, political and economic systems of Confucianism, Marxism and Capitalism. These may be found across provinces or even within the same province. Consequently, Manion (1994) states that "for most researchers, obtaining a nation-wide probability sample [representative ... of] the Chinese population [as a whole] is both impossible and impractical". In order to resolve this, many scholars in the management field (e.g. Manion, 1994) tend to focus on developing regional and more homogeneous samples when conducting survey research in China. It is however apparent that, findings derived from such regional samples may often not be generalisable to China as a whole, due to significant regional differences in the economic and cultural context in the country, plus variations in local government policy (Roy et al, 2001).

Moreover, even if an appropriate sample is identified, obtaining an accurate contact detail list for the selected sample represents a second problem to be carefully addressed. Specifically, Roy et al (2001) state that "although it is relatively easy to obtain business and telephone directories and household lists in many urban centers in China", such lists may often not be accurate, up-to-date or even complete. In certain cases, when a needed contact list is held by local government bureaus, local officials often consider it to be restricted information and obstruct its disclosure. In fact, comparatively low paid bureaucrats may often have few incentives to co-operate with researchers (Manion, 1994). Faced with these difficulties, many management studies conducted in China are in fact based on convenience and non-probability samples (Manion, 1994; Roy et al, 2001). Such samples however may often lead to response bias and risk not being representative of either a regional or the entire Chinese contexts.

A third problem faced by Western researchers (or even Chinese researchers based at Western research institutions) is the crucial translation of the data collection instruments. This is a further issue that should be carefully handled. Carlson (2000) points out that it is always a difficult task to translate a questionnaire instrument from one language into another language due to cultural and linguistic differences. Carlson (2000) particularly raises the issue of 'emic' and 'etic' problems. These two terms are neologisms that emerged from an analogy with the terms 'phonemic' and 'phonetic' and were coined by the linguistic anthropologist Pike (1954). 'Emic' concepts refer to terms that are specifically defined under a particular culture. They may or may not hold any relevance in any other cultures. 'Etic' concepts are concepts that are held universally. Carlson (2000) argued that many Western 'emic' concepts may have little relevance to other cultures, and thus cause difficulty when translating them into other languages. This is particularly true when translating English instruments into Chinese, as many terms, concepts and expressions used in English may not make sense in the Chinese context. As exemplified in a research study of Pratt (1991), some 'emic' Western terms, such as 'self-concept' and 'individual differences', can often cause confusion in the Chinese context and thus are difficult to translate into appropriate Chinese phrasing. Carlson (2000) stresses that an inappropriately translated instrument may have low reliability and validity, and data obtained with instruments that are poorly translated are meaningless.

Finally, a fourth general problem relates to non-response or unreliable response to surveys. This issue can be attributed to a number of reasons. Due to a long history of bureaucratic intervention and control, Chinese people are often reluctant to offer their views on questions that may be sensitive (Roy et al, 2001). When a clear definition about what is restricted and sensitive information is often missing, many Chinese respondents tend to limit their co-operation and even refuse to participate in surveys (Roy et al, 2001). Furthermore, although researchers will often provide assurances about confidentiality at the beginning of the survey, Chinese respondents may not believe their anonymity can be protected (Manion, 1994) and thus may, either decline to participate in the study or provide ambiguous responses in order to avoid potential personal risks under the bureaucratic environment. It is apparent that such ambiguous responses are often unreliable and meaningless.

Moreover, in the period of China's Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, the country's education system has been completely broken down (Perkins, 1997:32-34). All research activities have been restricted and suspended (Perkins, 1997:32-34), and numerous scholars and scientists were persecuted and arrested during this turbulent period. Despite the substantial effort in rebuilding and recovering its education system after the Cultural Revolution, it is widely acknowledged that the research system in China is still at the developing stage and is thereby fraught with problems and shortcomings at this present moment. For example, Zhang (2001) points out that, under the current research system, Chinese scholars often fail to develop sufficient critical thinking and research skills. As a consequence, many of them often tend to adopt Western theories in studying and explaining specific Chinese phenomena. This approach however may often be inappropriate due to cultural and political differences between China and the West (Zhang, 2001). It can thus be argued that poor academic research in China at the moment, leads to poor and inapplicable research findings, which in turn reduce willingness and interest of potential Chinese respondents to participate in further research projects. This is probably one of the most important reasons why many scholars (e.g. Manion, 1994) found that Chinese people often do not understand or trust scholarly objectives and values and show an unwillingness to be disrupted.

All of these problems were encountered during the research project described in the next section. This paper aims at discussing the solutions designed to address them and propose a set of methods, based on lessons learnt, to ease participative research in China.

### **3. A survey research of ERP in China**

The project aimed to identify and investigate the barriers and risks associated with the post-implementation of ERP systems in Chinese companies. It also attempted to explore the causes, impacts, probability of occurrence and frequency of occurrence of identified risk events, and investigate the causal relationships between barriers and risks identified through the research project.

The survey was carried out as the first stage of a mixed-method research design, and is to be followed by a multi-case study component. The questionnaire was sent to managers of 118 selected State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in the electronic and telecommunication manufacturing sector in Guangdong province in China. 42 valid and usable responses were received and analysed, which represented a response rate of 35.6%. In order to overcome the research issues embedded in the Chinese context, a set of elaborated processes was conducted in the PhD study, namely narrowing the research context and thus select a proper research sample to base the study on, adopting a decentring approach in translating questionnaire instruments and utilising a network of personal relationships in obtaining an accurate company list as well as maximising the response rate.

The actual findings of the survey are of no major importance for the purpose of this paper and are going to be presented at the IADIS IS 2008 and EMCIS 2008 conference.

## **4. A summary of lessons learnt from the ERP survey research**

### **4.1 Identifying an appropriate set of case companies**

At the initial stage of the research, the first temptation of the PhD student was to undertake a national study of the whole of China. This however soon proved to be virtually impossible. Apart from the sampling difficulties discussed earlier, it was identified that the situation in China is complicated and fluid. Specifically, there are important changes occurring in coastal regions, whereas other parts of the country are still traditionally led by the central government. Moreover, there are significant variances in uptake of technology, IS and of ERP in different industry sectors. There are also significant differences in organisational culture and information sharing in different types of organisations,

namely between state-owned companies and newly created private and foreign-invested organisations. Therefore, it is virtually impossible for a single study to cover all these variances and complexities (Peng and Nunes, 2007).

Faced with the necessity of focusing the research, the researchers adopted a Political, Economic, Social and Technological (PEST) analysis and a set of Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analyses as a combination to narrow the scope of the study, as well as to identify a type of Chinese company, an appropriate industry sector and a region on which to base the study.

As described in detail by Peng and Nunes (2007), through the PEST analysis, the researchers developed an in-depth understanding of China's current context in terms of political, economic, social and technological dimensions. Based on this analysis, the researchers identified Guangdong (a southern province in China) as an ideal context for the study of ERP post-implementation. Guangdong is one of the pioneer regions of China's economic reform and one of the most important and fast-growing economic regions in the country. Consequently, the region has achieved high levels of ICT and IS uptake and presents itself as an ideal context where to study a phenomenon such as post-implementation of ERP. A second important conclusion of the PEST analysis was the realisation that SOEs hold more than 50% of the total industrial assets in China. SOEs still play at the present moment a crucial role in sustaining the continuous development of China's national economy, in contrast with other types of companies (e.g. private companies and foreign companies) in the country. Therefore, Guangdong and SOEs were selected as ideal contexts for carrying out the project

Finally, a set of SWOT analyses was conducted after the PEST to analyse the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of various key industrial sectors in Guangdong. The idea was to be able to select a significant sector of Guangdong's economy, where ERPs are routinely used and are expected to have impact both in the productivity and efficiency of the companies. As a result of the comparative examination of these SWOT analyses, the electronic and telecommunication manufacturing sector was selected as the main target of the study.

As a consequence, rather than focusing on all companies in China, the approach of PEST and SWOT analysis allowed the researchers to identify and select a reasonable and feasible set of Chinese firms for carrying out the research, namely SOEs in the electronic and telecommunication manufacturing sector in Guangdong in China.

However, it should be stressed that the very effort of narrowing and focusing the research, means that generalisation of findings is now only possible for similar regions, company types and sectors as the ones studied. This was deemed particularly appropriate due to the complexity that characterises Chinese economy at the moment. A study that focuses on producing generalisable statements about a specific regional context is more likely to result in meaningful and significant findings than one that focuses on China as a whole. In truth, findings derived from a regional sample cannot be applied to the entire country, but can often be used as the basis for social scientists to carry out further research on contemporary China (Manion, 1994).

## 4.2 Retrieving an accurate contact list

As a result from the PEST and SWOT analysis, the researchers selected the SOEs in the electronic and telecommunication sector in Guangdong in China as the target companies to study. According to the statistics provided by the Guangdong Statistical Bureau (GSB), the number of this type of company in Guangdong is 118. However, retrieving a contact list for these 118 target SOEs was not as straightforward as initially thought. This figure of 118 companies was found in the Guangdong Statistical Yearbook Online ([http://www.gdstats.gov.cn/tjnj/ml\\_e.htm](http://www.gdstats.gov.cn/tjnj/ml_e.htm)). This site only provides the actual number, not a list of companies and respective contacts.

Although a number of Chinese company directory databases were identified (e.g. China Yellowpages Online, China Telecom Yellow Pages, etc), none of them actually provided a complete contact list for the selected companies. This situation confirms the difficulties reported by Roy et al (2001), that information contained in business and telephone directories in China are always inaccurate and incomplete. After some despair and further investigation, the researchers concluded that the GSB is currently the only possible source of a complete and accurate list for the 118 SOEs. However, in the first attempt by telephone, staff in the GSB refused to provide such a list to the researchers. This should not have been a surprise, since as stated by Manion (1994), local authorities in China typically have few incentives to co-operate and are reluctant to allow access to official materials. Fortunately, an internal officer of the GSB was contacted by using family relationship (a very common stratagem in China). With the help of this internal contact, the researchers eventually retrieved the needed company list from GSB. From this anecdotal evidence, it is clear that personal relationships or *guanxi* are critical to the success of research in China at this present moment. *Guanxi*, a Chinese term, is defined as the special personal relationships/connections between two or more people (e.g. friends, superiors and subordinates, business partners, etc), where one needs something and the others have the ability to offer it (Su et al, 2003). People in China are connected by extensive *guanxi* networks, which are used to exchange favours and reciprocally share resources (Su et al, 2003). This has been a prevalent social custom in

China in all areas of life: in family, as well as in dealing with political authorities, social institutions and business people (Steidlmeier, 1999). This phenomenon is widely acknowledged and personal *guanxi* is "seen as a prerequisite for most information and business exchanges" (Björkman and Kock, 1995).

### 4.3 Translation of survey instrument

The questionnaire used in the survey was originally developed in English and then translated into Chinese. The questionnaire could actually have been directly designed in Chinese, but since the literature review was undertaken in English as based mostly (90%) on English sources, the initial script was written in that language using its terminology. Furthermore, the study is based at an UK university and the entire research group uses English, so if the questionnaire was to be discussed and validated by both supervisor and colleagues, then the language would have to be English.

As discussed earlier, translating a research instrument is always a difficult task and should receive substantial attention from researchers, as a poorly translated instrument may often have low reliability and validity and can result in collecting meaningless data (Carlson, 2000). This issue can be particularly serious in a questionnaire survey because any ambiguities and problems, which respondents may encounter when filling it in, cannot be further clarified and explained.

A review of literature suggested that a literal word-by-word translation can often result in awkward sentence structure and incomprehensible meaning in the target-language version. As a consequence, experienced translators always strive to adapt their translation to achieve conceptual equivalence rather than literal equivalence when translating instruments (Carlson, 2000; Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg, 1998). The term 'conceptual equivalence' means that the meanings of the text in both versions of the instrument are conceptually the same despite the text not being literally translated. In order to ensure a conceptually equivalent instrument, careful attention must be paid to the translation process (Carlson, 2000). According to Carlson (2000) and Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg (1998), four approaches may be used in translating questionnaire instruments:

- *One-way translation.* One-way translation involves the use of a single translator to translate the instrument from the original version to the target version in one go.
- *Back translation.* Back translation, also called as double- or two-way translation, involves at least two translators. The first translator translates the instrument from the original language to the target language. Then, the second translator, who has no contact with the first translator and has no knowledge about the original instrument, translates it from the target version back to the original language. The two instruments in the original language are then compared for accuracy and consistency.
- *Committee translation.* This approach requires two or more translators (the committee) to translate the instrument from the original version into the target version, working either independently or in collaboration. The committee will then either combine the translations to produce a consensus version or have an independent observer to select the most appropriate translated version for use.
- *Decentering translation.* The above approaches require that the instrument in the original language should be fully developed and validated before translation starts. In contrast, decentering translation assumes that the instrument developed in the original language is not considered finalised until the translation to the target language is completed. In other words, the instrument in the original language is just a first draft. As the translation process reveals problems in the original version, modifications can be made to the original version. Both versions of the instrument should be revised during the translation process until achieving conceptual equivalence.

One-way translation approach was rejected immediately for the project, because as argued by Carlson (2000), despite the fact that this method is the simplest and cheapest approach to implement, it often results in low validity and reliability for the translated instrument.

Both back- and committee-translation approaches require the use of more than one translator. These two approaches thus prove to be infeasible for this PhD project, which has insufficient resources to recruit multiple translators. Moreover, since the PhD student himself is fluent in both English and Chinese and has working experience in translation, it was unnecessary to employ alternative translators. As a consequence, neither back-translation nor committee-translation was adopted.

In contrast with the other three approaches, the decentering translation method presented itself to be a more feasible and suitable approach to be used for this study. Carlson (2000) points out that the development of both language versions simultaneously is considered as the optimal method in translating instruments. Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg (1998) reinforce that many translation problems related to the original version of the instrument only become apparent after the translation is started. It is therefore better to keep the original version 'open' and enable it

to be reviewed and revised repetitively as translation is in progress (Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg, 1998). Previous translation experience of the PhD student of this survey also suggested that, by developing and revising both language versions simultaneously, it is easier for translators to ensure that the text in both versions were conceptually equivalent and reflected the intended meanings of the questions, and therefore ensuring high validity of the instrument. Nevertheless, for many studies of which researchers are not fluent in both languages, it is impossible for them to develop the original and target versions simultaneously. Researchers of these studies thus often design the original version first and recruit expert translators to handle translation, and adopt back or committee translation rather than decentering translation in the study. Due to these reasons, the decentering translation approach was adopted as the ideal method for translating the script of the survey reported in this paper. By drawing on the principle of the decentering approach, the researchers developed and translated the questionnaire script through a set of rigorous processes:

- Step 1. Constructed the draft questionnaire in English based on the predefined theoretical ontology.
- Step 2. Initially validated the English version by consulting with the PhD supervisor and other colleagues in the research group (especially regarding its content, format, layout and structure as well as the relevance of the English questions).
- Step 3. Translated the English version into the Chinese version (there is a need to check a number of Chinese textbooks and articles to identify proper Chinese terms and phrasings to represent the original English text).
- Step 4. Iteratively revised both language versions until it was assured that both versions were conceptually equivalent and reflected the intended meanings of questions.

In order to further improve its validity, the Chinese version of questionnaire was pilot tested with a group of Chinese postgraduate students and researchers in the authors' department as well as a few Chinese managers in a SOE. A number of corrections to the questionnaire were made according to the feedback received from the pilot test.

#### 4.4 Getting sufficient and earnest responses

Getting sufficient and earnest responses was the most significant challenge experienced in this survey research. One month after the original questionnaire a reminder was sent out. Two months after this reminder only three replies were returned and one of these replies was inadequately completed (i.e. most questions were left blank and a big 'DON'T KNOW' was written by hand over many of the remaining questions).

It is apparent that the researchers of this survey are not the only ones who experienced this research difficulty in China. Apart from the argumentation made above from the literature review, concerning the use of social networks (*guanxi*) in research, the researchers sought advices of Chinese academics, at the ICM 2007 conference and directly through conversation with a Professor in Management School in the Sun Yat-sen University in China. Both contacts revealed that there is a prevalent impression that Chinese managers would rarely fill in a questionnaire for someone who they did not know or did not have a relationship with. This may be attributed to a lack of understanding on the scholarly objectives of research, but also to a pragmatic unwillingness to be disrupted (Manion, 1994). Additionally, it was confirmed that it may stem from a lack of trust and the fear that any sensitive answers provided might be used as evidences to threaten their career in the future under the centrally controlled bureaucratic environment, as also put forward by Roy et al (2001). In fact, as discussed above and confirmed by authors such as Alon (2006:215), "the process of doing research in China is different from the process followed in the West, and reveals some of the intricacies of doing business there". In particular, practical experiences of many researchers (e.g. Gamble, 2003; Alon, 2006:215) show that, one may never successfully conduct a research in China by using routine data collection process without building and utilizing a local personal *guanxi* networks.

Consequently and facing the failure of routine survey procedures, the researchers sought to use their own personal *guanxi* and relationships in order to get access to and gain trust from the prospective respondents, and thus increase the response rate, as well as ensure that the data obtained was of better quality and more earnest. Additionally, the PhD student requested his family and friends in China to use their personal *guanxi* networks to seek internal contacts in as many target SOEs as possible. When an internal contact of a particular SOE was found, he/she was asked to forward the questionnaire to appropriate managers in the company to fill it in. With such efforts, the researchers successfully obtained valid and usable responses from a total of 42 out of 118 companies, which represents a relatively high response rate of 35.6%.

Practical experience gained from this survey research echoed that personal *guanxi* network was an essential tool to ensure success in collecting research data in China under the current circumstances in the country. Researchers who do not possess an extensive *guanxi* network in China will certainly be at a disadvantage and may experience substantial difficulty in data collection when doing research (questionnaire survey in particular) there.

The use of personal *guanxi* to get access to target companies in China may be associated with a set of ethical problems, as well as advantages and disadvantages. The use of this type of social network may seem questionable and even abusive by Western standards. It could be argued that the sample obtained is neither random nor self-selected. Ultimately, it could be argued that the respondents may be put under pressure to respond, by the very *guanxi* network that was used to reach them, and that such pressure may influence responses. However, the choices that had to be made were between no responses or understand the business environment and play by its rules.

From the result of this survey study, it was apparent that this approach helped increase the response rate substantially and thus increase the external validity of the respondent sample. Since most respondents of the survey were contacted through personal *guanxi*, it was possible for the researcher to trace back to the respondents for any questions that were not answered properly. The respondents also seemed to fill in the questionnaire patiently and earnestly because all returned questionnaires were fully completed and the answers provided were in high quality. The major disadvantage of this approach was that, although the researchers attempted to use personal relationships to approach as many target SOEs as possible, it was of course impossible to reach all target SOEs through the use of personal contacts. This was the reason why it was thought necessary and important to perform the routine data collection process first in order to ensure that each target SOE had the opportunity and possibility to participate in the study. Also, due to its inherent deficiency, personal *guanxi* network should only be seen as a supplement tool to use for increasing the response rate rather than seeing it as the primary approach for collecting research data in China.

## 5. Conclusions

Doing participative social science research in China raises problems that go far beyond the simple translation of data collection tools. There is the need to fully understand the social, cultural and political contexts, as well as the business culture. Failure in acquiring this understanding may result in failure of the research process altogether, by either failing to recruit participants or failure to understand their perspectives, motivations and behaviours. This paper highlights and discusses a set of issues and difficulties that are very likely to be encountered by survey research projects in China and provides tested solutions on how to address them. It provides early insights into these issues in order to enable decision making and support to researchers engaged in project with China.

In conclusion, researchers who engage in participative research in China should make every effort to predict and overcome potential problems and challenges when devising their research strategy and design. Extra attention should be paid to the four main challenges that are often experienced in survey research in China, namely: identifying an appropriate research sample; translating the survey instrument; retrieving an accurate contact list; and finally, getting sufficient and earnest responses from participants. A set of elaborated solutions recommended in this paper prove to be valuable tools to address these problems. Specifically, the combination of PEST and SWOT analysis can allow researchers to refine the research context and select a proper research sample in China to base the study on. When translation of the instrument is required, three rigorous approaches can be considered to use, namely back-translation, committee-translation and decentering-translation. Researchers should select a proper translation approach to use in relation to specific conditions of the study, such as resource and time available, and language skills of researchers, etc. Finally, a network of personal relationships can be used as a supplementary tool in obtaining accurate and complete contact lists as well as maximising the response rate and gaining earnest responses.

Nevertheless, challenges and difficulties associated with research projects in China are not limited to the problems presented and discussed in this paper. As China becomes increasingly important as a research context, it is important that more issues and practical difficulties can be identified and shared by researchers in the field. Further reports and discussions on these issues are therefore strongly recommended, especially for issues related to qualitative research which are not covered in this paper.

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