Collaborating to Develop: A Perspective on Current Chinese Social Partnership Development

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. vii

1 Chapter One: Introduction ................................................................................................................ 1
1.1 Contextual Background .................................................................................................................. 1
1.2 Problem Orientation ...................................................................................................................... 3
1.3 Structure of the thesis .................................................................................................................... 5
1.4 Contribution .................................................................................................................................. 6

2 Chapter Two: Literature review: CSR and SP .............................................................................. 7
2.1 Overview ....................................................................................................................................... 7
2.2 Corporate social responsibility ..................................................................................................... 7
  2.2.1 Definition of CSR .................................................................................................................. 7
2.3 Key benefits from CSR conduct ................................................................................................... 9
  2.3.1 Connecting business conduct with society ............................................................................ 9
  2.3.2 Develop legitimate business model ...................................................................................... 10
  2.3.3 Enhance business performance ............................................................................................ 12
2.4 Social Partnership ........................................................................................................................ 14
  2.4.1 Background ............................................................................................................................ 14
  2.4.2 SP: Definition ........................................................................................................................ 15
2.5 Key attributes in SP practice ........................................................................................................ 15
  2.5.1 Motivational factor during formation .................................................................................... 15
  2.5.2 Collaborative problem solving ventures .............................................................................. 17
  2.5.3 Social capital gain .................................................................................................................. 18
  2.5.4 Sustainable business model .................................................................................................. 19
2.6 Conducting CSR via SP ................................................................................................................. 19
2.7 Value creation via Social Partnership .......................................................................................... 21
  2.7.1 Overview ................................................................................................................................ 21
  2.7.2 Association value .................................................................................................................... 22
  2.7.3 Transferred value .................................................................................................................... 23
  2.7.4 Interaction value ..................................................................................................................... 23
  2.7.5 Synergistic value .................................................................................................................... 24
2.8 Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 24

3 Chapter Three: CSR and NPO in China ....................................................................................... 27
3.1 Overview ...................................................................................................................................... 27
3.2 Part One: CSR practice in China ................................................................................................ 27
3.3 Confucianism - Key influential factors for CSR in China ......................... 28
3.4 CSR practice: Past and Present ................................................................. 30
  3.4.1 Past-day facts ...................................................................................... 30
  3.4.2 CSR practice: Present .......................................................................... 30
  3.4.3 Social partnership in mainland China .................................................. 32
3.5 Environmental issues and related CSR/SP practice in China .................... 33
  3.5.1 Aftermath of economic reform .............................................................. 33
  3.5.2 Environmental concerns in SP practice .............................................. 33
3.6 Summary: CSR .......................................................................................... 36
3.7 NPOs: Western and China .......................................................................... 36
  3.7.1 Western NPO ...................................................................................... 36
  3.7.2 NPOs in China ...................................................................................... 38
  3.7.3 Current varieties of Chinese NPOs ...................................................... 42
3.8 Summary: Western and Chinese NPOs ..................................................... 45
3.9 Chapter Summary ...................................................................................... 46
4 Chapter Four: Methodology .......................................................................... 47
  4.1 Overview .................................................................................................. 47
  4.2 Research Design ...................................................................................... 47
    4.2.1 Justification of research method ......................................................... 47
    4.2.2 Case study design .............................................................................. 49
    4.2.3 Multiple-case design .......................................................................... 49
    4.2.4 Case selection criteria ....................................................................... 50
    4.2.5 Unit of analysis .................................................................................. 51
    4.2.6 Data collection methods ..................................................................... 51
    4.2.7 Analytical procedures ........................................................................ 54
  4.3 Validity and reliability ............................................................................ 57
  4.4 Ethical considerations ............................................................................. 58
5 Chapter Five: Single Case Studies ................................................................ 60
  5.1 Overview .................................................................................................. 60
  5.2 Introduction to the Cases .......................................................................... 60
  5.3 Case One: Kaimi ..................................................................................... 63
    5.3.1 Introduction ....................................................................................... 63
    5.3.2 Background – Focal Firm (Kaimi) ...................................................... 63
5.8.6 Partnership with Luohe Charity General Federation (LCGF) ............ 148

5.8.7 Single Case Study Summary................................................................. 153

6 Chapter Six: Cross-case Analysis .......................................................... 154
  6.1 Overview ......................................................................................... 154
  6.2 Themes ......................................................................................... 154
  6.3 Theme One: A business’s initial perceptions of SP prior to the formation of partnership will affect later satisfaction with their SP decision. ...................... 155
  6.4 Theme Two: A clearly defined partnership objective will contribute to the co-creation of value in a SP ................................................................. 164
  6.5 Theme Three: Strategic integration of SP activity will enhance the value perceived by the focal firm and promote a healthy, sustainable partnership. .... 175
  6.6 Cross-Case Analysis Summary ......................................................... 185

7 Chapter Seven: Conclusion ................................................................. 188
  7.1 Overview ......................................................................................... 188
  7.2 Focus of this study ........................................................................... 188
  7.3 Developing a Theory of Social Partnership ....................................... 189
  7.4 Summary of Managerial Implications ............................................. 190
  7.5 Limitations ..................................................................................... 192
  7.6 Future Research .............................................................................. 192
  7.7 Conclusion Recap ........................................................................... 193

8 Appendix ............................................................................................ 194

9 References .......................................................................................... 196
Table of Tables

Table 1 Focal Firm Summary ................................................................. 61
Table 2 Kaimi CSR Activity ................................................................. 65
Table 3 Kaimi case summary ............................................................... 73
Table 4 CQEP Achievements Summary ............................................... 76
Table 5 Notable CSR Activities of Haier ............................................. 85
Table 6 Haier Case Summary ............................................................. 89
Table 7 Current Social Partners of Alibaba ........................................ 93
Table 8 Alibaba Case Summary ........................................................ 103
Table 9 HTH Case Summary ............................................................. 113
Table 10 Li-Ning CSR Major Events 1994-2008 ................................. 115
Table 11 Lifeline Express Recived Awards .......................................... 118
Table 12 Li-Ning Case Summary 1 .................................................... 123
Table 13 Li-Ning Case Summary 2 .................................................... 128
Table 14 Li-Ning Case Summary 3 .................................................... 133
Table 15 Li-Ning Case Summary ....................................................... 134
Table 16 Shuanghui CSR Event Log 2006-2010 ............................... 136
Table 17 Shuanghui Case Summary 1 ................................................. 144
Table 18 Shuanghui Case Summary 2 ................................................. 148
Table 19 Shuanghui Case Summary 3 ................................................. 152
Table 20 Shuanghui Case Summary .................................................. 153

Table of Figures

Figure 1 CSR Development in China ................................................... 3
Figure 2 Summary of Literature ........................................................ 26
Figure 3 Key Elements of Confucianism ............................................ 29
Figure 4 Environmental SP in China .................................................. 35
Figure 5 Types of NPOs in China ....................................................... 43
Figure 6 Coding Start List ............................................................... 55
Figure 7 Kaimi Product Range ........................................................ 64
Figure 8 Haier Group Original Brand Structure ............................... 74
Figure 9 Haier’s Core Values ............................................................ 78
Figure 10 Alibaba Group Structure ................................................... 91
Figure 11 Alibaba CSR Perspective .................................................. 92
Figure 12 HTH Structure ............................................................... 104
Figure 13 HTH CSR Partners ........................................................ 105
Figure 14 Key Finding Summary 1 .................................................... 186
Figure 15 Key Finding Summary 2 .................................................... 186
Figure 16 Key Finding Summary 3 .................................................... 187
Abstract

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of social partnership practices among businesses that are designed to carry out corporate social responsibility. As one of the fastest growing economic regions, domestic Chinese business practitioners have begun to adapt their approach, in order to handle increased concerns about their business conduct from relevant stakeholders. Under the influence of a globalised trading environment, Chinese practitioners have started to experiment with different approaches to deliver highly regarded corporate social responsibility and consequently social partnerships have begun to gain popularity among local firms due to their mutually beneficial features.

This research studies the increasingly popular social partnership (SP) between businesses (focal firms) and non-profit organisations (NPO) in a Chinese context. The study examines the selected social partnerships from mainland China and analyses them under the lenses of corporate social responsibility (CSR) theories in conjunction with cross-sector partnership research. The objective of this study was to explore and identify the performance attributes that impact social partnership conduct in the Chinese business practice context, and therefore, progress CSR theory development in Chinese context.

It is essential to have an extensive understanding of the extent of collaboration in general in order to conduct effective social partnerships, and based on the findings from six selected focal firms and their associated SPs, the following points have been deduced. Specifically, both the focal firm and NPO need to share similar values prior to the formation of the partnership. Then, organisations need to have fair expectations about the achievements throughout the conduct, which could be improved by setting up realistic partnership objectives in a mutually agreed fashion. For the focal firm, strategic integration of SP facilitates improvements with interactions with the NPO partner, but would also enhance the productivity of the SP accordingly, due to a greater level of engagement during the value creation process.
The three themes which emerge from this study provide the framework for further studies. These themes focus on the satisfaction of partnership, co-creation of value, and sustainability of partnership.