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# Global Business Management for Multinational Enterprises: Navigating Political Risk, Ethics, and International Human Resource Management

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**Abstract:** With the rapid advancement of globalization, numerous companies are expanding abroad and developing their international businesses. This essay analyzes three critical issues that multinational enterprises (MNEs) face in managing international business: political risks, ethics, and international human resource management (IHRM). Through case studies of MNEs like Zoom and Huawei for political risk management, Unilever, Apple and Google for ethical practices, and L’Oreal and Google for IHRM strategies, the essay highlights various strategies for navigating challenges. Issues about women expatriates and new trends are also discussed in the IHRM part. Chinese MNEs seeking to expand business overseas could learn from their experiences. It is suggested that they could adopt context-specific approach to political risks, develop dynamic ethical frameworks that balance stakeholder interests, and implement flexible IHRM practices.

**Keywords:** Multinational Enterprises; Political Risks; Ethics; International Human Resource Management

## 1. Introduction

With favorable policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the continuous improvement of competitiveness, more and more Chinese companies are going abroad and developing their international business. However, some of them have already met many challenges when managing international business. This essay argues that the difficulties they face can be summarized into three key issues: political risks, ethics, and IHRM. By reviewing different approaches MNEs have adopted in the past when facing these problems, this essay aims to provide references and inspiration for Chinese companies going overseas. By successfully managing these issues, Chinese MNEs can enhance their ability to tackle other complex economic, political, and social circumstances. Political risk management

will be discussed first in the essay, followed by ethics and IHRM. Relationships between these three topics will also be analyzed, and new patterns and trends of MNEs' actions will be covered.

## **2. Political Risks Management**

Political risks are the political forces, decisions, and events that can adversely impact business. Managing political risk can be a competitive differentiating factor that enables companies to access new markets and business environments. Companies can derive significant benefits from effective management of political risk. However, the failure of managing political risk can lead to a huge loss, supply chain disruption, and even bankruptcy. According to De Villa et al., two main categories of managing political risk are defensive methods and integrative methods. Defensive approaches aim to deter host government interference and reduce integration in the market. In contrast, integrative approaches aim to launch close ties with the government by contributing to the country.

### **2.1 Zoom's Different Approaches in China and US**

Companies may take different approaches to manage political risks. And sometimes a company can take completely different approaches simultaneously in two countries. Take Zoom's strategy in 2020 as an example. Due to the trade war and tense relationship between China and US, the US government imposed stricter censorship on technology companies with a Chinese background. Zoom is criticized for its safety issues because it stores data about American users on servers in China. Employees in NASA and Google are banned from using Zoom. However, Zoom takes prompt actions to manage these issues caused by political risk. It formed a political lobbying team by hiring a former Trump adviser and an experienced government relations adviser. Meanwhile, Zoom announced that two new R&D centers would be established, and 500 engineers would be recruited to make contributions to the technology development and employment in America. Eventually, federal government agencies and contractors are authorized to use Zoom for videoconferencing, and Zoom manages the political risk successfully.

In China, however, Zoom takes defensive approaches. As Zoom hires more American employees and relocates its data center to America, it becomes more America. However, companies that provide network services must store data in China. So Zoom announced that it would not sell products directly in China, and new products would be sold through its local partner. This approach reduces Zoom's engagement in China market. As local partners can store data in China, Zoom avoids the problems caused by relocating its data center to America.

Zoom's integrative approaches in America aim to build strong relationships with the government. While its defensive approaches in China aim to comply with the law and reduce its exposure to the government. This is because 74.9% of its revenues come from North America and therefore compared to China, America is still the most crucial market Zoom should focus on.

## **2.2 Huawei's Approaches to Different Types of Political Risks**

Different types of political risk will also affect the company's approaches. For example, after the civil war in Libya erupted, Huawei took defensive approaches to manage this political risk. It stopped its operation and evacuated its employees. It also asked China Credit Insurance Corporation for insurance settlement. Nevertheless, Huawei took a mixed approach in Libya after the war. Although the post-war situation in Libya was still unstable, Huawei came back to Libya to help with the post-war rebuilding. It actively provided telecommunicating services and infrastructure and rebuilt the telecommunication system. It also recruited more local employees and paid them high wages. These are the integrative approaches. At the same time, Huawei also took defensive approaches. It conducted evacuation drills periodically and bought political risk insurance to reduce the loss if any risk happened.

Huawei does this because the country was out of order during the civil war, and the employees suffered attacks and armed robberies. If Huawei keeps operating in Libya, they disregard employees' lives and will face higher losses if any employee gets hurt in the war. Therefore, they use defensive approaches. After the war, however, the political risk of Libya changed from civil war to social instability. The reason behind social instability is that the war badly damages the cities, and people's basic needs are not well-guaranteed. In this circumstance, Huawei's integrative approaches to help the locals rebuild infrastructure can create jobs, increase people's income and enable them to access the internet. This help increases the happiness of Libyan and can solve the root cause of instability to some extent. Meanwhile, the conflicts were still happening sometimes, so defensive approaches were also necessary. Evacuation drills can enable workers to better cope with anything unexpected happened. Furthermore, Huawei has a 'Wolf Culture', which means it will not shrink from adversities. Therefore, instead of passively taking a defensive approach and losing opportunities, Huawei tends to integrate into the market proactively and overcome difficulties.

## **2.3 Discussion**

From the analysis above, it can be seen that a defensive approach of risk insurance is reasonable for political risks like war. Although social instability is risky, it can be an opportunity for MNEs. It is good to take a defensive approach, but companies can lose opportunities from doing that. A mixed approach is better in this circumstance if a company wants to occupy the market quickly. For political risks like the tense relationship between countries, MNEs could decide whether to integrate into the market or not based on their customers and aims. However, there is no simple answer to approaches to managing political risks. A company can take different approaches in one country at different times due to the type of political risks. A company may also take completely different approaches to deal with the same type of political risk in two countries. And company's strategy and corporate culture will also affect its approaches. Companies should make a comprehensive consideration based on the situation of themselves and the countries and make decisions on political risk management approach.

Furthermore, companies nowadays have started to use the political risk analysis model to help them make decisions when facing political risk. Consultation firms like Accenture are developing mathematic frameworks to quantify political risks. Based on different countries data of political and legal environment, it can calculate the degree of political risk for an international company and give suggestions. Hopefully, with the aid of a mathematical model, companies can make a better decision.

### **3. Managing Ethics**

Apart from political risk management, ethics is also essential for MNEs. By adopting some moral principles or ethical codes, MNEs can not only avoid legal risks and reduce disputes with stakeholders caused by misconduct but also enhances their social credibility and brand image. Through behaviors like respecting local cultures, protecting consumer rights, ensuring labor interests, and promoting environmentally sustainable development, MNEs can build trust between companies and communities. The trust, in turn, serves as a cornerstone for their long-term sustainability and corporate social responsibility. MNEs use different ethical theories and guidelines in managing business, including consequential ethics which focus on the outcomes of actions rather than intentions. Egoism and utilitarianism are two important consequential ethics. Egoism states that each individual has the moral right to live for his/her own interests, and one should not sacrifice own interests for others. Utilitarianism thinks that an action is morally right if it leads to the majority's happiness while sacrificing the happiness of minorities. There are also two branches of utilitarianism: act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism. Act utilitarianism argues that one should always act for the greatest benefit of most people. While rule utilitarianism regards some rules as central and upholds them, it is believed that obeying those rules can maximize social benefits.

#### **3.1 Adoption of Egoism**

Take Unilever as an example, it adopts egoism in its Magnum ice-cream. According to Yan, different ingredients are used in Magnum ice-cream for China and Europe, with concentrated milk in Europe and reconstituted milk in China. As China has a relatively broad standard for ice-cream compared to Europe, Unilever uses cheaper materials in China. However, its action was found by internet users and caused public outrage. Chinese customers felt they were unfairly treated, and some even said that they would not buy Unilever ice-cream anymore. Both the sales and reputation of Unilever were negatively influenced by this event. From the perspective of egoism, Unilever's purpose is to save costs and increase the benefits of itself. Because Chinese standards are broader than European standards, it reduces its product quality with cheaper materials and saves great costs. It seemed that Unilever did not hurt anyone in this case because it obeyed the rules in both China and Europe. And it was morally right to itself as the interests of the company are maximized. However, Unilever is only concerned with its own benefits while it did not care for others, which hurts customers' feelings. This could reduce company's long-term benefits and sales in the end.

Therefore, the egoism that not care for others could jeopardize others and undermine self-interests in long term. So, there is another type of egoism to deal with this issue, called enlightened egoism. This theory argues that individuals can care about other people's interests because that is related to one's own interests. Helping others can also benefit individuals themselves. The actions of Apple in its early stage can be explained with enlightened egoism. Apple ended all charity programs in 1997 because Steve Jobs thought Apple have not make profits and it is pointless to donate money. Apple aims at inventing greater products so that it can derive more benefits from selling it. Ultimately, Apple successfully develop iPhone and gained huge benefits from it, with a global net sale of \$383.29 billion in 2023. Objectively speaking, Apple's invention brings conveniences to customers. Hence, enlighten egoism can be beneficial to others and increase self-interests through helping others, which creates a win-win situation.

### **3.2 Adoption of Utilitarianism**

However, the ethics a company follow is not unchanged. After the success of iPhone, Apple took act utilitarianism. It started to work on CSR practices such as making products more eco-friendly and reducing carbon emission of production. Apple's aim is to create a greener environment. Although those behaviors reduce Apple's profits, they will generate long term benefits to the majorities. Apple can get good reputation as a responsible enterprise, customers can use more eco-friendly products, and shareholders can gain more dividends and all people around the world can enjoy a clean environment. Nevertheless, utilitarianism treats individuals as means not as ends and could sacrifice the minorities. Apple's supplier in China called Pegatron is criticized for using student labor and having poor working conditions. Although Apple's act utilitarianism increases the happiness of most people and is ethical based on act utilitarianism, those workers in factory were unequally treated by Apple's actions. Because the utilitarianism concern more about the outcome, the unethical issues in the process are neglected. Furthermore, it is also difficult to measure happiness with utilitarianism as the pains of those workers can be greater than the happiness Apple takes to other people.

To tackle the issues taken by act utilitarianism, rule utilitarianism is found. A representative of rule utilitarianism is Google. Google have codes of conduct centered on 'Don't be evil'. It tries to be honest and just in its operation. Its search engine increases the benefits for the majorities. As users can find information they want conveniently on search engine, companies can make advertisements on this platform, Google itself get revenues from search engine. At the same time, it follows related rules of 'Don't be evil'. It refuses to let marketers buy the top of query result and do not send spam ads to people. Based on act utilitarianism, if Google sell the top of search result it can be ethical. Because Google can gain profits from this and marketers can let more people know their products. The majorities gain the benefits. However, it is unethical based on rule utilitarianism, as this action could negatively influence users. They may fail to find the best results because of being distracted by the advertisement. Google think this behavior harm the users and is inconsistent with their code of conduct. Therefore, they do not

do this to hurt their users. And let the algorithm to decide who will be on the top because algorithm is just and can make judgements fairly and objectively.

### **3.3 Discussion**

Based on the analysis above, there is no best ethical theories. If Apple did not take enlightened-egoism before, it will not have enough money to invest in R&D and therefore iPhone will not be invented and bring benefits to people. Company's own situations will also affect the ethical approach it takes. It may think more about itself and use egoism in the early stage and think more about the happiness of people and adopt utilitarianism after it make profits. Rule utilitarianism seems to be acceptable in many situations. As it offset the disadvantages taken by act utilitarianism which only focus on the outcome and it considers the benefits of most people and follow some central rules at the same time. Overall, it is recommended that companies should follow some rules when it is pursuing a good outcome and they should also consider the interests of different stakeholders like customers and workers, and adopt an ethical approach which can reach consensus between the interests of different stakeholders.

## **4. International Human Resource Management**

International staffing plays a vital role in the operations of MNEs. Reasonable staffing methods can enhance employee morale, optimize global resource allocation, and strengthen team cohesion, which contribute to the success of international assignments. According to Collings and Scullion, there are three approaches to staffing, including ethnocentric approach (company mainly use people of home country), polycentric approach (company mainly use people of host country), and geocentric approach (company use people in other countries regardless of their nationality).

### **4.1 International Staffing Approaches of Different MNEs**

According to Franko, MNE enters the country through export trade in the early stage of a host country's internationalization. At this time, many host country nationals are employed. When MNE starts to produce in the country, people from home countries are sent to this country due to the demand for technology and management knowledge. With the growth of the host country's economy and the standardization of production, MNE would localize the company and hire more local employees. This can be seen in L'Oréal. When L'Oréal first entered China and built a cosmetics plant in Suzhou in 1997, it took an ethnocentric model, and the management was mainly from France. Since Chinese employees do not have experience in producing cosmetics at that time, L'Oréal must transfer relevant knowledge to them. With ethnocentric approach, parent country nationals (PCNs) can impart knowledge and skills and ensure local employees understand L'Oréal's culture better. Moreover, as China had just opened its market in the 1990s, there were many uncertainties in the Chinese market, and it was not easy to find qualified local managers. L'Oréal can control and monitor the Chinese market better with PCNs. After 20 years of development in China, it changed its ethnocentric staffing approach to polycentric. Hence,

more Chinese managers are hired. This is because Chinese employees are now equipped with the skills transferred by PCNs and can manage workers and the market well.

Meanwhile, a growing number of technology multinational companies are using geocentric approach. A representative example of them is Google. Google recruits people from diverse countries and races in its office around the globe. In this approach, Google will hire people worldwide through competitive recruitment and selection processes. Emphasis would be put on people's own abilities rather than their nationality. By adopting this approach, Google can build a multinational team with top talents from diverse backgrounds. Such a vibrant team is also conducive to innovation.

Although implementing geocentric staffing can be costly due to the relocation costs, Google has qualified staff with cross-cultural communication skills worldwide. Hence, it would not be too expensive for Google to use this approach. Nevertheless, the disadvantage of geocentric approach cannot be overlooked. Some host countries may refuse the entry of Third-country nationals (TCNs) because of the political disputes between the host country and third-country. This approach is suitable for technology companies like Google which needs to create new ideas continually and have a global strategy.

Influenced by the parent company, overseas branches of Chinese banks also blindly expand their assets and liabilities. Many scholars also believe that the deposit-loan ratio of Chinese banks is on the high side in the process of overseas expansion. This will cause these banks to face high liquidity risk and compliance risk. The high proportion of deposits and loans means that there is a big gap between deposits and loans, and these gaps are likely to bring high liquidity risks and form a run-on crisis. Especially under the stricter liquidity supervision index of overseas financial industry, it faces higher compliance risk.

Therefore, if Chinese banks want to further expand their overseas business, they must improve their business philosophy to make it consistent with their international development.

## **4.2 Issues about Women Expatriates**

No matter what staffing approach companies take, they have to send some expatriates abroad to do international assignments. However, male occupied 75% of expatriates as Brookfield have found. This under-representation of women in expatriates is mainly caused by two reasons. First, the companies simply think that women are not willing to go on international assignments because of concerns of children and family. Second, companies believe that the discriminations against women in some host countries and the poor conditions in some developing countries can affect women mentally and physically. This not only represents the inequalities in workplace but also shows that MNEs fail to use their talent pool efficiently. As female have their advantages to finish the assignments than male. Women have higher abilities in adjusting to local culture and are more amiable than man and hence they can interact and communicate with people better to facilitate the success of assignments. Some companies have realized this and take some approaches to deal with women under-representation. Like



L'Oréal, it encourages women workers to actively participate in international assignments and give them support and training in the preparation of assignments. As a result, 47% percent of its expatriates in 2020 are woman. Those female expatriates also create a good role model for local woman. With the increase of female expatriates, they can share their successful experiences with local female employees. Local female will learn necessary skills in the workplace, which consequently help them get advancement and promote the gender equalities. This benign cycle has been found in China, as there are increasing number of female managers get promoted by L'Oréal.

Nevertheless, some company's measures are not very effective due to political risk and ethical reasons. As mentioned before, Huawei operates in African countries like Libya. Huawei provides a package of compensation to motivate female employees to go there, including an annual salary of around 500 thousand RMB, cost of living allowance, career advancement and bonus. A hardship pay is also given to compensate employees for anything negative taken by political risk. Despite the great benefits for female, Huawei's expatriates are still mainly male. Three reasons can explain this phenomenon. First, unlike L'Oréal, Huawei is a technology company which have many male employees, so there is a lack of talent women in the recruitment pool. Second, Libya has a Masculinity of 66 according to Hofstede's culture framework, which means it is a man-culture dominated country and female would be biased. Third, the host country has poor living conditions than China and is politically unstable. Managers will think that it is unethical to send female expatriates from the views of utilitarianism. Libya has social instabilities, the safety of women are more at risk than men. Moreover, if female expatriates are hurt, it will also be costly for companies. Therefore, sending female expatriates is unsafe for women and may cost the company and it leads to the disadvantaged of both the company and female employees. And company will then decide send fewer female expatriates. To improve this condition, Huawei starts to hold Women Empowerment Programs in Africa. This program will help increase the gender equalities in local technology company and stabilize the society and that will consequently make the local market more suitable for female expatriates to go.

### **4.3 New Trends in IHRM**

There are also two new trends in IHRM. One is that there is a new approach gaining popularity, called the regiocentric approach. Under this approach, regions like Asia, North America, and the Middle East could use the same staffing, training and HRM practices. This approach is more flexible than polycentric staffing while making up for the shortcomings of ethnocentric. The theoretical bases of this approach can also be found on Hofstede's culture distance. As the culture distance of two neighboring countries can sometimes be close and is possible to use the same HRM practices. Another trend is that MNEs have started reducing the number of traditional expatriates and using more short-term expatriates. According to Suutari et al., over 70% of MNEs have short-term ex-pats whose assignments last for several months. Using short-term expatriates is less expensive than traditional expatriates. In short term assignments, the relationship between expatriates and local employees is not as important as in



traditional assignments. Korean MNEs like Samsung have made some attempts on these two trends. It divided its global market into several regions as America, Europe, Middle East and Africa, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Therefore, China and Korea are categorized into the same region. And they sent short-term expatriates to China and achieved some success in international assignments.

#### **4.4 Discussion**

In sum, the staffing approach is not unchanged. Companies should weigh the pros and cons of different approaches and take the approach that best fit itself. Combining regiocentric approach with short-term expatriates be helpful to the company because it is less expensive and expatriates can adjust better due to the closeness in cultural distance. The situations of female under-representation in fashion and beauty industry have been improved, but in technology industry the situation is still severe. Through holding woman empowerment programs can help promote gender equality locally in the long run and may solve the under-representation in female managers.

#### **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, MNEs will face challenge issues such as political risks, ethics and IHRM. This essay explored these challenges through the lens of various MNEs and their strategies, providing valuable insights for Chinese enterprises who want to expand overseas market. Political risk management, as demonstrated by Zoom and Huawei, requires a context-specific strategy that balances defensive and integrative approaches. Zoom's establishment of a political lobbying team in the U.S. and Huawei's mixed strategies in conflict zones underscore the necessity of such tailored approach to different political landscapes. In terms of ethical issues management, the cases of Unilever, Apple, and Google illustrate that adherence to a singular ethical theory is insufficient. Instead, companies must adopt a dynamic ethical framework that considers the diverse interests of stakeholders while maintaining a principled stance. This balance between egoism and utilitarianism can help companies navigate ethical dilemmas without compromising their integrity or stakeholder trust. The varied approaches of L'Oreal and Google highlight the importance of adopting flexible IHRM that can adapt to different cultural and organizational contexts. Addressing gender disparities in expatriate assignments and embracing emerging trends like regiocentric strategies and short-term assignments can further enhance organizational effectiveness and inclusivity.

With the development of the technology and society, more new approaches will emerge and fit to different situations companies face. Hopefully, company can find approaches that best fit themselves in international business. For Chinese enterprises, the key point is the importance of strategic adaptability. By learning from the experiences of established MNEs and continuously refining their own strategies, Chinese enterprises can navigate the complexities of international business more effectively, achieving sustainable growth and competitive advantage on the global stage.

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### **Author Contributions**

Jiahong Chen: Writing, Original draft, Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, analysis and interpretation of results. Yang Yang: Writing, review & editing, Supervision. Chenxu Lin: Investigation, Funding acquisition. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

### **Availability of Data and Materials**

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study.

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