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IN SEARCH OF THE ROOTS OF 'HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT' IN THE CHINESE WORKPLACE

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WORKING PAPER

In Search of the Roots of ‘Human Resource Management’ in the Chinese Workplace.

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Abstract

The main thrust of this article is to trace the roots of US-driven ‘Human Resource Management’ (HRM) school of thought which now become widely institutionalized in China, up to the present day. It examines the diffusion of management knowledge over the period to Chinese business, which involved in turn, Scientific Management (SM), Human Relations (HR) and Human Resource Management (HRM) respectively, from the interwar years onwards, by using a bibliometric analysis of Chinese- language sources, searching a number of data-bases now available. We scanned the international, as well as Chinese, literature in order to support a conjecture of a HR route toward China and how it morphed into HRM and go on to conclude that there was by the end of the year 2015 still a significant output of academic publications with references to both HR and HRM respectively but that we must be cautious in putting forward a firm conclusion.

Keywords [6]: China, Human Relations, Human Resource Management, People-Management, Scientific Management, Workplace

1. Introduction

[i] Background

This study focusses on the *transfer of management knowledge* to the ‘Middle Kingdom’ from the West over the last century onwards to the present times, moving from initially *Scientific Management* (SM), via *Human Relations* (HR) to *Human Resource Management* (HRM), respectively (see Warner, 2014), by using a *bibliometric* analysis of the usage of these terms in Chinese language data-bases now available. This search for the roots of HRM in the Chinese workplace, we believe, has elements of an academic ‘detective story’ as we plot the intellectual history of the above concepts in their Chinese context.

The very fundament of the ‘Human Relations’ (HR) school of thought in the West, which in a number of respects remains influential up the presentⁱ, dates back to a decision of the Executive Board of the *Hawthorne Works* in Chicago in 1912 to promote the investigation of the ‘*social*’ dimensions of production (Adams and Butler, 1999). This act, that quasi-coincided with the work of the Philadelphia-born engineer, Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915) and his seminal *Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911, (later translated into Chinese in 1916 by Mu Xiangyue, its ‘first adopter’ on the Mainland), was implemented by an attempt to study the influence of framework conditions of work (for example, illumination, rest hours, wages etc.) on workers’ performance in the course of the ground-breaking ‘Hawthorne experiments’ (conducted from 1924 to 1933 at the aforementioned plant).

These were led by Australian-born psychologist [George] Elton Mayo (1880-1949) who was soon to be elected to a chair at Harvard University from 1926 onwards and who claimed to have identified the *very secret ingredient* that drives performance: namely, ‘managerial attention’. Taylor’s influence on Chinese management has been discussed extensively elsewhere (see Morgan 2003; 2004; 2006a and b), so we have concentrated on a possible Mayo contribution in the first instance.

However, as many critical Western articles have meanwhile argued (see especially Carey, 1967; Parsons, 1974; Wrege, 1976; Franke and Kaul, 1978; Bramel and Friend, 1981; Gillespie, 1991; Bruce and Nyland, 2011; Hassard, 2012), the series of Hawthorne experiments were never meant to study ‘hard facts’ *vis a vis* the impact on performance; instead, the researchers pursued their quest for a ‘psychological weapon’ in order to exercise moral control over workers’ minds (Bourke, 1982; Rose, 1998; Link, 2011; Bruce, 2013). In the social scientific community at the time, Elton Mayo and the Harvard Business School

(HBS) constituted a congenial and prestigious pair skilled in *manufacturing knowledge* for academic theory and managerial practice; in turn, psychology-related theory advancement was boosted through research on leadership (as by Lewin, Lippitt and White, 1939) and motivation (as by Maslow, 1943); and, in time, HR (as by Roethlisberger & Dickson 1939; Mayo, 1945; Drucker, 1954) and its eventual successor Human Resource Management (HRM) (as by Lawrence, 1985; Schuster, 1986) replaced Taylor’s Scientific Management (SM) (see Merkle, 1980) as the leading ideological wave in the West (see Kaufman, 2014 for a history of HRM). In their respective ways, these schools of thought were to make inroads into Chinese management theory and practice (see Table 1).

DATES/AUTHOR/SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT/ABBREVIATION/PINYIN/ACTIVITY
1911* -, Early 20C, F.W. TAYLOR, ‘Scientific Management’, SM, <i>kexue guanli</i> , measuring work efficiency, book translated into Chinese by Mu Xiangyue, 1916.
1924** -, Interwar period, E. MAYO, ‘Human Relations’, HR, <i>renji guanxi</i> , building social bonds in workplace, contacts with Fei Xiaotong in 1940s.
1985*** -, Late 20C, P. LAWRENCE, ‘Human Resource Management’, HRM, <i>renli ziyuan guanli</i> , maximizing employee performance, first textbook in Chinese by Shuming Zhao, 1992.

Table 1: Major Schools of Western People-Management Thought Imported into China.

[Source: * Date of major publication in English; ** Start of Hawthorne experiments;*** Start of main HRM publications.]

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

[ii] Search-Questions

Our search-questions in the article, following the above historical phenomena, are as follows:

- a. *What was the nature of the transfer of management ideas to China in modern times?*
- b. *What were the respective roles of Scientific Management (SM), Human Relations (HR) and Human Resource Management (HRM) in this transfer of knowledge to China?*
- c. *How far was Human Relations (HR) a major conjectured part of this process?*

[iii] Methodology

In posing these search-questions, we used the following eclectic research methods, combining both *qualitative* and *quantitative* approaches in the pursuit of our academic ‘detective story’.

First, we drew on our own first-hand empirical experience and expertise, mainly relating to nearly *three decades* of field-research on people-management, which two of the co-authors of this article have conducted in Chinese enterprises in the PRC, published in both Chinese and English, to date.

Second, we used a number of ‘web-metric’ search-engines, such as *Google*, *Google Scholar*, as well as the ‘bibliometric’ *Google Books Ngram Viewer* and online *WorldCat*, the World Catalogue of publications held in vast range of major university and public libraries around the globe. *We also employed the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) Scholar Engine*, (the largest one for scholarly studies written in Chinese), and *Baidu* (the Chinese language search-engine). *We must make it clear from the onset that we are aware of the limitations of the above methodology and have tried throughout to keep a critical distance in interpreting the data presented.*

2. Tracing US-driven influence on Chinese people-management thought and practice

In order to examine the diffusion of United States (US)-centred influences on the major pillars of such transfer of management knowledge in China, we conducted *bibliometric content-analysis searches* on people-management in the Chinese language. The methodology we used mines references from books, digitalized thus far in the *Google Books* data-base, originally dating from 1800-2008, although we narrowed this down to the period 1900-2008. The project had to date processed into the data-base approximately 15 million books in a wide range of languages published up to 2008, with an accessible corpus of five million works, *of which around 500,000 are in the Chinese language.*

The point of departure for the research was a publication by Michel et al (2011), a paper in the field of *computational linguistics*, which performed a *quantitative analysis* of works in the data-base, which is the largest digitalized one in existenceⁱⁱ. The tool used for searching operates if there are at least 40 books indexed in the language concerned for any given result. The *y-axis* shows the relative frequency, in percentage terms, of the text being searched, over the time-period being examined (in years) which is on the *x-axis*.

Our search was focussed on key terms involved in the management knowledge transfer to China from the West, looking at the major streams of thought noted above, *Scientific Management (SM)* (*kexue guanli*), as well as *Human Relations (HR)* (*renji guanxi*) and *Human Resource Management (HRM)* (*renli ziyuan guanli*), all of which have recognized *pinyin* terms in Chinese academic and official usage, amongst others. We are, however, aware that these are only approximate translations of the English expressions usedⁱⁱⁱ. We were able to map out the frequency of these terms, using a ten-year smoothing of the curve, as employed

in Chinese language books digitalized by the project. In Figure 1, we first looked at the frequency of the terms *Scientific Management (SM) + Taylor + China*. It is clear from the chart that SM *peaks* somewhat later than Taylor’s death in 1915 and rises to a high-point in the 1920s. It would not again reach such an apex in the course of the century. We can also see there are two low points in the mid-1950s as well as in early 1990s. However, these and other scores must only be interpreted as a *relative positioning* and not an absolute one.

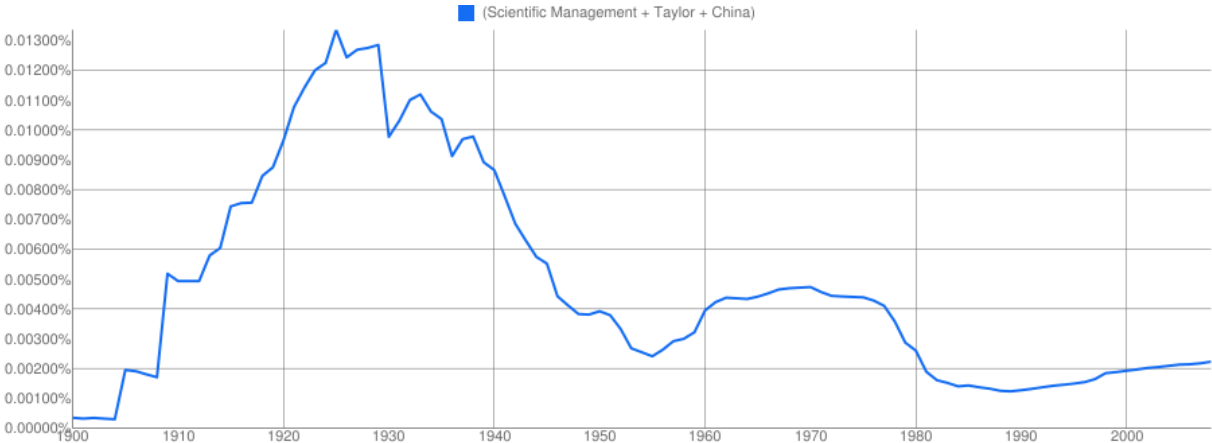


Figure 1: Chart of ‘Scientific Management’+ ‘Taylor’ + ‘China’

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

In Figure 2, we first looked at the term *Human Relations + China* in the same data-base for publications in Chinese over the last century and in which references were made to both books and articles cited in these books. It is clear from Figure 1 that such influence also *peaks* in the period from the mid-1920s onwards, as in the case of Taylor’s work. We may also note an initial nadir in the mid-1950s and one later in 1990, although its mention is still charted until present time. We will note from further evidence, examining articles published in China in recent decades that it retained something of its reputation, but of course is very much overshadowed by HRM, as we shall see later.

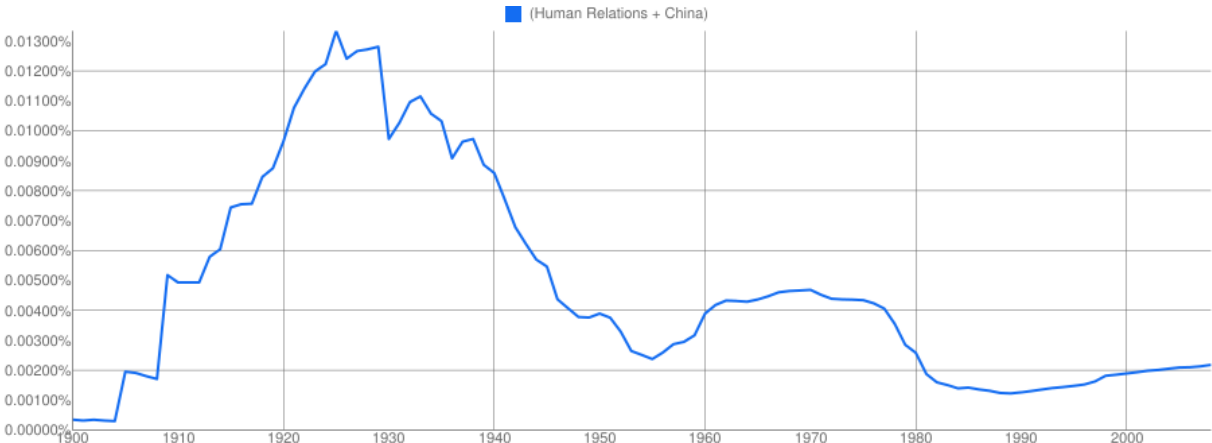


Figure 2: Chart of ‘Human Relations’ + ‘China’

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

We then looked for the influence of *Mayo + Human Relations + China* in the Chinese-language literature in the data-base, where Figure 3 reveals a *similar pattern* to that of Figure 2, possibly derived from the same monographs or text-books scanned, where they may have noted the name of the author and that of the school of thought as co-joined in the same text. Mayo and associated correlates also have a low-point in the mid-1950s (but it may have remained on the radar in non-PRC publications) and again was at a lower point in the early 1990s in this Chinese-language search. Reference to his name alone was in fact to peak in the mid-1950s for the whole century in a separate search of English-language books in the online *WorldCat (World Catalogue)* [not shown here] and all three terms reached an apex in the mid-1930s. In a search for pointers to Mayo in Chinese language journal articles which we carried out from the CKNI data-base (not shown here), there were scant references to his name, or to his work.

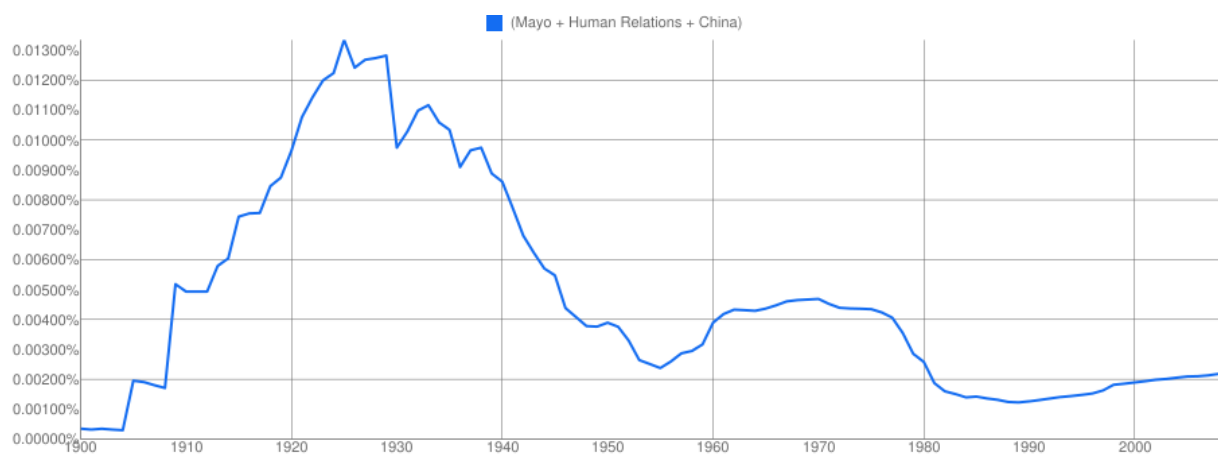


Figure 3: Chart of ‘Mayo’ + ‘Human Relations’ + ‘China’

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Looking for the predominantly American term ‘Human Relations’ in books in Chinese in the data-base, yielded a discernible pattern as *first* in the queue, peaking in the mid-1920s and to the mid-1940s, rising again in the 1970s and falling in the 1980s and after. The term, ‘Hawthorne experiment’, however, failed to yield a visible result. ‘Human Resources’, too, as a term, rises at the end of the 1970s then falls for a while, but then rises again beyond the end of the century. Mapping the American-inspired ‘Human Resource Management’, (itself a later phrase), as third-level in the sequence, *was indeed positive, starting in mid-1970s and continuing to rise to a peak in 2008, close to the top of the scale on the vertical y axis* (see Figure 4).

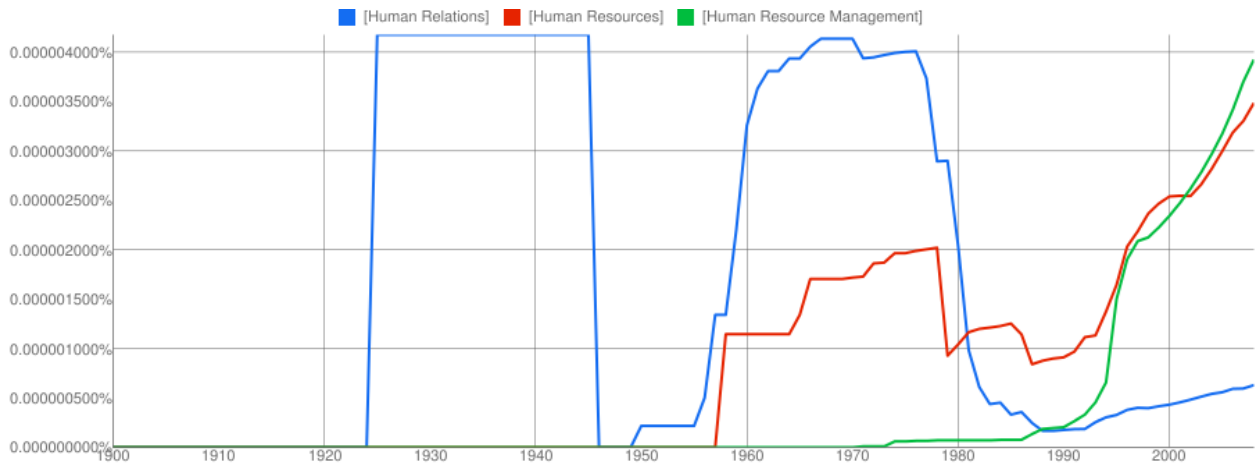


Figure 4: Chart of ‘Human Relations’, Human Resources’ and Human Resource Management’.

Key: from top to bottom, on left y axis, HRM, HRes, HR

INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

We then go on to examine the indigenous Confucian + Management, the local Marxist + Management, as well as exogenous Western + Management in Figure 5 below. Again, the Western version dominates the other two over the whole period, as in previous charts presented above. However, the Marxist model has the advantage over the Confucian one but only by a small margin. Republican China under the *Kuomintang/Guomindang* had placed Confucianism ‘in pride of place’ and promoted an indigenous school of management. It was also at this time, in the interwar years, that China saw the emergence of a professional managerial stratum. Large numbers of young men had gone abroad to the West and Japan to study. They saw ‘education as the saviour of the country’ (*kexue jiu guo*) and were determined to build a ‘new China’. The Western version, mainly consisting of imported US management such as SM, as well as HR and later HRM, has the advantage in terms of the chart throughout but it begins to slow down a little after the year 2000, while the Confucian one continues to somewhat ascend.

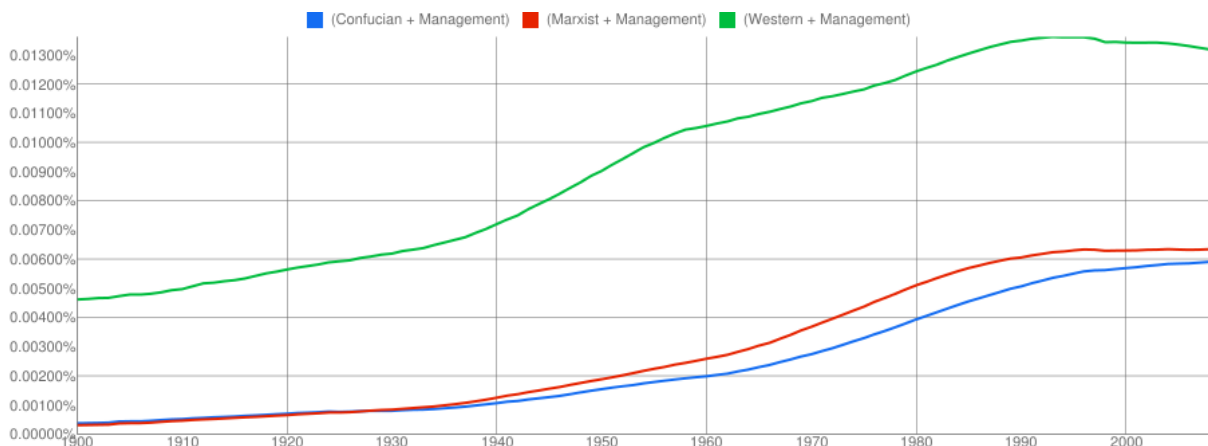


Figure 5: Confucian + Management, Marxist + Management and Western + Management

Key, from top down, on left y-axis: WM, MM, CM.

Insert FIGURE 5 about here

3.1 Period Pre-1949

What we argue is that what we *are* able to identify from Figure 1 (and from other sources) is a diffusion of US-driven Taylor's SM ideas in the 1920s and in later Figures a high-point of HR influence in Chinese-language publications around that time (see Warner, 2014). Here, a recent paper asked whether Chinese psychology had to some extent adopted a Western orientation in the Republican era. Generally speaking, it concluded: - 'Euro-American psychology (and the HR school of thought was predominantly a psychological one) has dominated the others due to the massive export of its products to virtually all parts of the globe' (Blowers, Cheung and Ru, 2009: 22)^{iv}.

Morgan (2003; 2004; 2006a and b) also describes Chinese publications in the 1930s containing psychology-oriented content combined with people-management-related topics in his major contribution to the field concerning the introduction of Taylorism (*taile zhuyi*) into China. In 1931, for example, the Chinese Ministry of Industry published a journal with a special issue on SM (*Gongshang ban yuekan: Kexue guanli zhuan hao*); the corresponding articles were partly (3 out of 6 articles) devoted to the technocratic side of SM, focusing on time-and-motion studies, while the other half were dedicated to HR-oriented affairs, like 'welfare' (*fuli*) and 'motivation' (*dong yin*) (written by Wang Yunwu), 'psychology of labor' (*laodong xinli xue*) (written by Guoheng Shih) and 'information about the attitudes (*taidu*) of workers' (written by Zhao Xiyu), all with an explicit US influence (Morgan, 2003).

In this context, the case of the Chinese social scientist, Guoheng Shih, is worth further consideration in the Second World War period. Thomas North Whitehead (1891-1969), another Harvard professor and co-founder of the HR paradigm, set up a meeting with George Elton Mayo, Fritz Jules Roethlisberger (1898-1974) and Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005) preparing the way for Shih to become one of four Chinese exchange-students to come to Harvard 'to become acquainted with our methods of studying the human (...) problems in industrial situations' (Baker Library Historical Collections (BLHC), HBS, Record of a meeting held on October 20, 1943)^v. Shih was a student of Fei, the eminent Chinese sociologist and a personal friend of Elton and Dorothea Mayo. This friendship might have been facilitated by the fact that Mayo's eminent Polish anthropologist friend Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) had supervised Fei's PhD thesis at the University of London. Even more obvious, however, the bonds between Fei and Mayo were primarily owed to a very close co-operation in the process of translating Shih's book entitled *China Enters The Machine Age*, which was published in 1944 by the Harvard University Press in English with Fei as the editor (see also Arkush 1981). In fact, the influence of Mayo went far beyond being the mere translating aid here, which can be clearly seen by Fei's emotional request towards Mayo to help finding a new

sub-title, as the publisher suggested a change after having informed Fei about the provisional acceptance of the book. On April 14, 1944, Fei wrote in a letter to Mayo (BLHC):

'The child is born but without a name. I am glad that my father gave me one. Otherwise, I would not be able to find one for myself. A name! I am trying to find something for the title: Chinese Workers in War Industry, Factory Workers and Chinese (War) Industry, Labour and Chinese Industrial Development, Industrial Works in China. Please help me (...).'

In the end, the 'child' was given the name *A Study of Labor in Chinese War Industry*. One can assume that Mayo has actually helped in finding the final sub-title. The other reason for an amicable relationship between Fei and Elton and Dorothea Mayo was the couple's regret for 'the inevitable general ignorance here in the United States of the intimate situation in China' (BLHC, editorial note without date from Elton and Dorothea Mayo). In the same editorial note, they emphasise that 'human co-operative capacity' outweighs technical skills. Fei himself hoped to establish a 'long-term academic cooperation in the social sciences between Americans and Chinese' (Arkush, 1981: 107). He was remarkably prescient in this aspiration but it was some decades before it would become a reality.

The 'big-names' in the field, Mayo, Roethlisberger and Whitehead, were all highly interested in obtaining research reports from Fei and assumed that these 'help us to understand the nature of his problems in China' (BLHC, Record of meeting held on October 20, 1943) In exchange, the HBS agreed in providing Fei with 'books and papers and so forth, which we thought would be of assistance to him and his research station in China' (ibid.). Apart, Fei and the participants of the meeting agreed to also take Jukang Tien, who contributed a chapter to *China Enters the Machine Age*, as a Harvard exchange-student.

One of the most interesting outcomes of the meeting indeed was that 'two or three Chinese executives' (ibid.) were meant to come to Harvard to learn about the practical relevance of industrial and labour relations (ILR) research. Here, Wallace B. Donham, Dean of the HBS at that time even agreed to personally write a letter to 'the Minister of Economic Affairs (*in China*, added), in order to get the necessary collaboration from that end' (ibid.). Moreover, Fei pro-actively requested the HBS Professors to participate in Chinese industrial research, 'in a consulting capacity' (ibid.). Mayo explicitly asked Alan Gregg from the Rockefeller Foundation in a personal letter, informing him about the decisions of the meeting arranged by Whitehead 'to give the various problems some attention' (BLHC, October 29, 1943). Finally, Robert Redfield, Chairman of the Social Science Research Council, came 'to China for a year to survey the various institutions carrying on social research and the possibilities for American help' (Arkush, 1981: 108) As the reader might already have supposed, the Rockefeller Foundation financed Redfield's China experience (ibid.). The Foundation played a major role in promoting Western, i.e. US-derived liberal and anti-communist ideas in China in the first half of the 20th century (Ninkovitch, 1984).

In the course of events, Fei had a close relationship not only to Mayo but also to Donham, who was designed chief advisor to Shih. The committee of supervisors were the well-known

academic, Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) from the Sociology Department for whom Fei had a deep respect for (Arkush, 1981), Roethlisberger from the HBS, and Clyde Kluckhohn (1905-1960) from the Anthropology Department. Mayo and Whitehead, who were ‘concerned that China avoid making the West’s mistake of neglecting the ‘human factor’ in industrializing’ (Arkush, 1981: 107), were asked to arrange that Shih obtains the formal status of a ‘research associate’ to increase the likeliness that the Chinese end will accept his wish to go abroad (BLHC, correspondence between Mayo, Whitehead and Fei, March 16, 1945). After the arrival of Shih, Mayo (in a letter to Fei on October 16, 1945; BLHC) openly refers to a concerted collaborative action disseminating the HR thought to China, when writing ‘that our pioneering efforts, ours here and yours in China, may be considered to have entered the second stage of development’. However, the inevitable retirement and subsequent death of Mayo might have handicapped the further development of a human concern in Chinese industry, at least regarded from the point of view that the North American influence might decrease - a fact that Fei seemed to have anticipated in his letter to Elton and Dorothea Mayo on January 2, 1947 (BLHC), when he states ‘that at this critical moment of human civilization, a man like you must not retire’.

For a comprehensive overview of personal inter-relations of Chinese politicians, researchers and company executives that were educated out of China between 1910 and 1930 and brought management knowledge to their homeland and here we may again refer to Morgan’s work (2006a, and b). Apart from this, we discovered a journal article on ‘*The Importance of Human Relations*’ by He Qingru (whose personal details remain obscure, no matter which search-engines we consulted^{vi}) which came out in 1934, who also published a book at Fudan University (He, 1935). He ran a journal, *Renshi guanli yuekan* [Personnel Management Monthly], the voice of the Chinese Personnel Management Association (*Zhongguo renshi guanli xuehui*) (see Morgan, 2004:13). Then, later, we also found a work cited by a well-known Chinese management psychologist - entitled ‘*Problems of Personnel Psychology*’ - written by Xiao Xiaorong (H. H. Hsiao) in 1944 (see Wang, 1994)^{vii}.

The Economics and Sociology disciplines in China, as well as other branches of study, received financial support from the American Rockefeller Foundation to promote their national empirical research activities (ibid.). It promoted major philanthropic activities in China for many decades. John D. Rockefeller Jr. (1875-1960) simultaneously ‘was his (Elton Mayo’s; *name added*) financial and professional benefactor’ (Bruce and Nyland, 2011: 388), using his ‘own personal funds’ (ibid.: 389). Rockefeller even convinced the trustees of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund of Mayo’s political neutrality (Bulmer and Bulmer, 1981), which consequently ‘assured him access to the ongoing Hawthorne studies’ (Bruce and Nyland, 2011: 390). A recent contribution to the field, (Godard, 2014), detects efforts for several decades to neutralize the subjects of Industrial and Labour Relations (ILR), Human Resource Management (HRM) and Organizational Behaviour (OB). He claims that they are (or already have been) taken over by a ‘psychologization’ of research and teaching stemming from ‘its main progenitor, the Human Relations school’ (ibid.: 2).

Notwithstanding Mayo’s early retirement (perhaps too early for what he might have been able to bring forth on its way to directly influence Chinese industrial thinking), Brady (2012: 198)

argues that Mayo's ideas on Organizational Behaviour and Industrial Psychology 'had become extremely influential on contemporary approaches to public administration and management in China'. In Mayo's Industrial Psychology-driven HR approach, the related disciplines Industrial Sociology (under the aforementioned Parsons) and Industrial Anthropology (under William Lloyd Warner, 1898-1970) were then all neglected as 'cow sociology' (Marshall, 1989: 289). Wood and Wood (2004) argue that Parsons' Sociology discipline had discovered the 'Social Man/Woman' in the workplace, whilst the anthropologist Warner *re-discovered* him/her in industry. Unfortunately, we have not been able to trace any China-connection for the latter. Apart from what we have already revealed about Parsons' effort in relation to China, further evidence is scarce; except for that he wrote a foreword to Levy's study about a 'family revolution' in China that was published in 1949 (Levy, 1949). Buxton and Nichols (2000) add that Parsons was involved into teaching in China during World War II. None of Mayo's or Roethlisberger's and Dickson's major *oeuvres* were, to our knowledge checking this on *WorldCat (World Catalogue data-base)*, translated into Chinese in this period but a few had been published in Japanese^{viii}.

The Sociology discipline in China, a natural ally in the quest for the appropriate consideration of the 'Human Factor', was however dominated by a North American influence. One commentator, Guldin (1994: 75), states that 'in 1947, of 143 faculty members teaching Sociology in all of China, 71 had studies in the United States, 27 in Western Europe, and 12 were Americans'. Another, Clausen (1989: 8) supplements this with the observation that 'America-returned students did dominate the institutions of higher learning from approximately 1920-1949', as indeed they also did in Economics (see Trescott, 2007). Fei went as far as describing Chinese Sociology, as well as its Anthropology, as mostly imported from the West (Guldin, 1994). But as we shall soon see, it suffered a reversal in the 1950s, although it recovered ground in the mid-to-late-1970s and beyond after the tumultuous years of the 'Cultural Revolution'.

3.2 Period 1949-1978

If after 1949, influences from management systems of the Soviet Union (Kaple, 1994) as well as from Japan (especially under the occupation of Manchuria) (see Warner, 1997), have been historically verified in the Chinese workplace, an American (namely, US) influence remains yet to be distinctly identified, as is evident by the declining curve of references to HR in the Figures presented earlier, as in the early days of the PRC.

The US-driven impact on Chinese people-management, although visible in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, was thus, by the 1950s and 1960s, largely in abeyance - according to many sources (see for example Arkush, 1981). There is little convincing evidence that Mayo or any of his followers had any impact on indigenous Chinese social science related studies. Indeed, hardly any non-Soviet textbooks or monographs in management or social sciences appear to have been translated in this period, although some Western works were translated such as Keynes's *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* in 1957 in Economics (see Warner, 2015)^{ix}.

The fate of Fei must also be noted as he was first recognized as a leading scholar but later the departments of Sociology in the PRC were closed down and in the anti-Rightist phase after 1957, he was downgraded and even more harshly treated during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. He published almost nothing over this period for over two decades and so could not put Mayo's ideas into publication or debate but was later able to visit the US in the 1970s and was eventually rehabilitated after 1980 (see Arkush, 1981). He was appointed Professor of Sociology at the prestigious Peking University (*Beida*) in later years and was in post at the time of his death on April 24, 2005 in Beijing at the ripe old age of 94.

One might also argue that an HR-related Psychology concern did not get beyond a mere *interest* of scholars even in the 1930s - as they were in fact lacking resources to design empirical settings in the sense of the Hawthorne experiments. What makes our attempt even harder is the fact that any possible US impact is overlaid by an obvious and powerful Soviet influence later in the day. In the early 1950s, a time, which many scholars argue, marks the beginning of the paternalist *danwei* system (Walder, 1986), the Chinese management model was to be regarded as a 'copy of a particular type of Stalinism' (Kaple 1994:5) but which paradoxically was to be accompanied by a Soviet adaptation of Taylorism (see Merkle, 1980:126ff). Schurmann (1971:226) sees this version as the 'expert' stream which was to contend with the 'red' one then in the running of Chinese industry. Soviet-inspired, 'socialist emulation' campaigns were also very common at that time and which had already shown a 'Mayo-effect' back in Russia (see *ibid*, 129ff). Industrial Psychology took *Marxism-Leninism* and *Mao Zedong Thought* as its underlying philosophical principles and 'Soviet psychology became the model of Chinese psychology' (Guan 2010:45).

A Chinese Psychology Society was set up by the followers of the new school of thought in 1955 and the journal *Acta Psychologica Sinica* which was launched in 1956, as well as *Psychological Information* and *Psychological Translations*, echoed the party-line. But many journals ceased publication altogether between 1949 and 1978. In our search of the CNKI data-bases, in looking at the main psychology journal of the day, *Acta Psychologica Sinica*, we found little trace of US-influenced research for this period. Although we were unable to find any references to 'Human Relations' or similar terms in the CNKI database we also consulted, for the period 1949 to 1978, we only uncovered a mere dozen relevant Personnel Psychology articles, using the search term 'workers' and other relevant terms.

3.3 Period 1978-present

A convincing 'bridge' from Personnel Management going beyond HR and on to HRM in China after Deng Xiaoping introduced his reforms in the late 1970s would appear to be the then innovative work on people-management by a newly-involved academic, *Shuming Zhao* (*Nanjing University Business School*), who gained his Ph.D. from the US, during the period 1987-1990 from *Claremont Graduate University, California, USA*. In 1992, he published his text, *International Business: Human Resource Management* (*guoji qiye: renli ziyuan guanli*)

(Zhao, 1992) - now in its 5th edition in January 2016. *It is probably the very first book specifically on HRM ever published in China.* The text introduced many Western HRM experts to Chinese readers, such as Wayne F. Cascio, Peter F. Drucker, Douglas McGregor, Theodore W. Schultz and Frederick E. Schuster, amongst others. Its sales rose to over 10,000 copies in the 1990s and over 40,000 across all editions although this may not be such a large number in the Chinese market (see source: email from the author in question). Another indigenous academic, Zhongming Wang, whose work on management psychology broke the mould (1985, 1988, 1994) should also be mentioned here.

After Deng launched the ‘Open-Door’ policy and economic reforms, including personnel innovations in China since 1978, the Chinese government started to phase-out the ‘Iron Rice Bowl’ system (*tie fan wan*) step by step which had been restricting managers ability to hire and fire (Deng, 1983; Warner, 1995; Ding et al, 2000; Zhao, 2001). By 1992, China had set up a socialist market system and all college students had to find their own jobs, instead of being assigned them. The new-style HRM system ‘with Chinese characteristics’ (*juyou Zhongguo tese*) was, however, slow to emerge and only first appeared in larger firms, such as joint ventures (JVs) and wholly-owned foreign enterprises (WOFEs), as well as in the more go-ahead SOEs about a decade after Deng’s reforms initiative (Warner, 2014).

4. Discussion

A major quandary vis a vis the search to identify a US-driven HR influence on Chinese management thought has been the *linguistic* issue, involving not just translation but the *meaning of words* used in management discourse in China. In the American English language setting, HR is quite unmistakably associated with its main denotation - the ‘soft’ side of the business in terms of a social concern - rather than a technocratic understanding of management. The term *renshi guanli* was used for Personnel Management in the interwar years and after 1949 (see Morgan, 2004:11). Another term *renshi dang’an* had been used for the personnel file used to control the movements of urban workers. However, in China the expression often used for the term ‘Human Resources’ namely, *renli ziyuan* which literally means ‘labour power resource’ may be used less precisely and might lead a commentator astray – much can be lost in translation’ as they say - as it also embraces a broader comprehension in the sense of ‘people (or interpersonal) affairs’ as such. *However, according to the usage accepted officially by academics, officialdom and publishers, ‘renji guanxi’ is most likely to be used for Western-style ‘Human Relations’ and we have followed the advice of the experts in the field we consulted on this matter.*

Another important issue is that our attempt to distinctly separate SM, HR and HRM might not fully reflect managerial reality in at least some Chinese enterprises. An example for that distinction problem is that HRM in China is still in a transition process (Zhao and Du 2012) morphing away from a taylorist stance towards a more people oriented HRM approach. However, the extent to which companies in the PRC have adopted modern management thinking differs as long as some firms are still stuck in operating the concept of SM, but yet labelling it as HRM. There is more research to be dedicated to this concern.

Interestingly, in extensive bibliometric research we have also carried out in a variety of search-engines, using *renji guanxi* as a term, we find that it appears less often in a *Baidu-search* (the largest Chinese language search-engine for lay-person use) for Chinese exemplifications than *Human Resource Management (renli ziyuan guanli)* in the Chinese language (6,700,000 vis a vis 7,910,000 search-results) but it still scores a large-ish total all the same at this date it seems. After 2000, the inclusions for HRM had already begun to significantly outnumber those in HR in this data-base. By the end of 2015, we found about 59,018 items [article-references] from the academic *China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) Scholar Engine*, the largest one for scholarly studies written in Chinese, referring to the period from 1978 onwards for the concept of HR for Chinese scholars, which is a substantial number. But as for HRM, we find 116,927 items for the period although only 17,020 for Scientific Management..

Before the 1980s, China was essentially based on a model of labour and personnel management under a planned economy system, with public ownership, radically different from a possible Western capitalist analogue (see Cooke, 2012). From the middle and late 1980s, the core-concepts of HR had, however, been gradually re-introduced to China from the West and Japan, but the practice of HRM as such was not applied on a large scale until much later (see Warner, 2014). By the onset of the 21st century, however, with dynamic changes in the external environment, HRM reform began to further deepen and develop on an global, market-oriented, professional, and better-educated level. A spectrum of HR and HRM practices thus became institutionalized in the Chinese context (see Nankervis et al, 2012; Zhao and Du, 2012; Warner, 2014). HRM citations began to outpace those of HR, as we have seen from the data-base evidence presented above.

5. Conclusions

Our main concern was tracing the North American influence on people-management in pre-1949 China, then the interim 1949-1978 Maoist period and last, post-1978 China, based on reliable historical evidence.

We scanned the *international*, as well as Chinese-language, literature using a number of search-engines, as we have noted, in order to support a conjecture of a HR route toward China and how it morphed into HRM. We also made clear from the onset that we were aware of the limitations of the above methodology and would try to keep a critical distance in interpreting the data presented.

Apart from explained linguistic problems, the widest gap we had to close was the issue of reference availability. It is not that there is no resilient body of literature - with few living witnesses notwithstanding - it is that the literature is scarce and only partly publically available. This has led us to evaluate personal and professional correspondence between the Harvard HR group, especially from Elton Mayo, and the Chinese scholar Fei Xiaotong by using the Mayo Papers in the Baker Library at Harvard University, in addition to our other

sources found in data-bases. By doing so, and by excavating further referenced sources, we had hoped to show that there was an active North American HR-rooted *attempt* to influence Chinese people-management thought, as well as a *de facto* Western (and predominantly US-driven) impact on the HR-related disciplines Sociology and Anthropology in China *but the links appear to weak in reality until after 1978*.

Again, looking at Figure 1, we are better able to see the early impact of Taylor's work. Figures 2, 3, and 4 also seem to confirm the rise and fall of references to HR and the rise of HRM. The CNKI scholarly data-base further suggests there was by the year 2015 still a significant output of academic literature with references to both HR and HRM respectively^x.

Thus, we argue that there is no firm conclusion to be made regarding our initial hypotheses that we can make here, although we can say that our search for the roots of HRM in the Chinese workplace may have revealed HR marking the beginning of what has undergone several processes of transition to an ever changing current state of Chinese HRM (Cooke 2012; Zhao and Du 2012; Warner 2014).

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[those in Chinese are marked with an asterisk *]

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END

ⁱ It is still to be found in many textbooks on management thought and people-management which are taught in undergraduate and post-graduate, say MBA, courses, in business schools and universities around the world.

ⁱⁱ This research was initially launched by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

ⁱⁱⁱ The translation of SM as *kexue guanli* seems straightforward enough; that of HR as *renjii guanxi* may raise some ambiguities but is widely used; and HRM as *renli ziyuan guanli* meaning 'labour force resources management', now *official parlance* is as close as Chinese academics have come to a reasonable rendering.

^{iv} Profesor Blowers, however, in private correspondence with the authors of this paper has suggested that the onset of civil war in China in the 1930s and the Japanese invasion prevented Chinese psychologists and others from developing their work on Human Relations.

^v The material presented in this section is based on documents retrieved from Elton Mayo Papers at the Baker Library at Harvard University.

^{vi} The array of search-engines we used only came up with this one publication and the name of the personnel management journal edited by the said individual and we were unable to find any others. Morgan (2004:13) notes he was unable to recover any copies of this journal.

^{vii} There is more information at hand about Xiao Xiaorong, namely H. H. Hsiao (1929, 1944) who carried out research in the interwar period and who set up a personnel research organization in 1941 onwards in other sources (see Baker, 2012:100; Wang, 1994:690)..

^{viii} Mayo's classic 'The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization' came out in Japanese in Tokyo in 1946.

^{ix} This translation of Keynes was widely circulated amongst economists in major universities then, although his work had been unofficially circulated much earlier just after it came out.

^x The search-terms we used here separately were in both Chinese and English languages.