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**Abstract:** Purpose -€ This paper presents the results of an analysis of 137 articles concerning accounting in the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) published in 25 of the mainstream English language accounting journals from 1999 to 2008. Design -€ Within the tradition of bibliometric evaluation of literature in scholarly accounting journals, a content analysis was undertaken of the journal articles to identify and evaluate a range of features and trends in relation to publication outlets, authorship, research design and methods, and subject matter. Findings -€ While prior studies have suggested the literature on accounting in the PRC was relatively immature, our analysis revealed an increased sophistication in relation to the subject matter, research paradigms and methods, and characteristics of authorship of this literature within mainstream accounting journals. Research limitations -€ Since a sample of only 25 mainstream international accounting journals was utilised, there remains obvious potential for examining the literature published in other types and other rankings of journals. Practical implications -€ Results of the analysis reveal apparent scope for researchers of accounting in China to investigate a broader range of topics, utilise an extended panoply of research perspectives and methods, and encourage new and emerging researchers to the area. Originality/value -€ The paper represents a follow-up to an earlier study on the topic, providing comparisons and contrasts with that earlier work. Further, the current review also explores significant issues arising from the analysis and provides several suggestions for furthering the research effort in this field.

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# **Making the mainstream: An analysis of the scholarly literature on accounting in China, 1999-2008**

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# **Making the mainstream: An analysis of the scholarly literature on accounting in China, 1999-2008**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This paper presents the results of an analysis of 137 articles concerning accounting in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) published in 25 of the mainstream English language accounting journals from 1999 to 2008.

**Design** – Within the tradition of bibliometric evaluation of literature in scholarly accounting journals, a content analysis was undertaken of the journal articles to identify and evaluate a range of features and trends in relation to publication outlets, authorship, research design and methods, and subject matter.

**Findings** – While prior studies have suggested the literature on accounting in the PRC was relatively immature, our analysis revealed an increased sophistication in relation to the subject matter, research paradigms and methods, and characteristics of authorship of this literature within mainstream accounting journals.

**Research limitations** – Since a sample of only 25 mainstream international accounting journals was utilised, there remains obvious potential for examining the literature published in other types and other rankings of journals.

**Practical implications** – Results of the analysis reveal apparent scope for researchers of accounting in China to investigate a broader range of topics, utilise an extended panoply of research perspectives and methods, and encourage new and emerging researchers to the area.

**Originality/value** – The paper represents a follow-up to an earlier study on the topic, providing comparisons and contrasts with that earlier work. Further, the current review also explores significant issues arising from the analysis and provides several suggestions for furthering the research effort in this field.

**Keywords** Accounting literature, Literature analysis, People’s Republic of China, Research methods, Journal articles, Journal rankings

**Paper type** Research paper

## **1. Introduction**

While the scholarly accounting literature concerning westernised nations has been well established for decades, the expansion of the accounting literature to include developing countries has been more recent, particularly so in that subset of the literature which is written in English. Internationally, researchers have increasingly recognised the importance of accounting in developing countries as a result of rapid and ongoing changes in regulatory, social and political environments and the emergence of the global economy.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is one of the most economically significant developing nations. Factors contributing to the acceleration of development in the PRC have included dramatic economic reform, the transition to a market oriented economy, China's securing of a membership position on the World Trade Organisation, and the transfer of the business hub of Hong Kong to the PRC in 1997. Concomitant with these changes have been developments in accounting reflected by the PRC's admission to the International Accounting Standards Board, the nation's work on developing new accounting systems and reporting practices, and affirmation of its commitment to international accounting standards harmonisation.

The ability of the PRC to maintain an increasing rate of economic growth and continued success in realising export opportunities and attracting foreign investment is contingent, to an extent, on the usefulness, reliability and international comparability of the accounting systems and financial reporting protocols and disclosures of its organisations. Awareness in the PRC of the need to revamp accounting practices, and to harmonise these practices with those of the international community, led to the production and promulgation in 1993 of a range of new Accounting Standards for Business Enterprises (ASBE) and 13 industry-specific accounting regulations (see Chen and Tran, 1995). The perceived benefits of adopting these revised practices included

improvements to the comparability and understandability of accounting information (Lin *et al.*, 2001). Following this trend, and in cooperation with a range of interested parties, the government of the PRC then developed a series of practical accounting standards during the latter part of the 1990s (Lin *et al.*, 2001). Across the 2002 to 2006 period enhancements were made to Chinese accounting standards to bring about greater levels of convergence with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). The latest set of Chinese accounting standards (CAS) became mandatory for publicly listed companies from the beginning of 2007 (Otto, 2007).

With the PRC's expanding profile in international business and markets, there is a growing audience interested in how accounting measures, reports, shapes and reflects the performance of the PRC's state-owned enterprises and commercial ventures (see Faux, 2007). Accounting academics are claimed to be catalysts for the internationalisation and modernisation of the PRC's accounting systems (Tang, 2000) and, therefore, published academic research on accounting issues in the PRC is of significant scholarly interest and practical relevance to a range of stakeholders. Further, within academic circles:

“Faculty and administrators are called upon to evaluate international accounting researchers' performance, which requires knowledge of international accounting research journal outlets, journal rankings, topics, methods, and authorship. Both seasoned and novice international researchers are faced with the need to know the placement, turnaround review time, rankings, topics, methods, and authorship of potential international accounting research outlets” (Prather-Kinsey and Rueschhoff, 2004, p.63).

In line with these priorities, this paper presents the results of an analysis of recently published scholarly studies of accounting in the PRC. It serves to furnish information on current developments in both practice and research, acts as a primer for those wishing to familiarise

themselves with this literature, and addresses a lacuna in the existing literature by providing an update and extension to prior studies on the topic. Given these underlying motivations, we collected and analysed 137 articles from 25 leading accounting journals which published articles concerning accounting in the PRC within the 1999 to 2008 period. We focused on publications in the English language since the leading accounting journals are published in English and this language is the most widely used for the academic literature in accounting, reaching a broad international assembly. Our intent was to examine publication patterns and the extent to which research concerning accounting in the PRC has infiltrated or made inroads into the *mainstream* of accounting journal outlets which are internationally focused, and thus to utilise a journal set enabling appropriate comparisons to be made with relevant prior studies (particularly Ji, 2000). Given the PRC's significant economic profile and the associated importance of accounting issues in respect to this nation, the investigation sought to determine if (and how) the mainstream accounting journals were increasingly recognising and reporting on Chinese accounting developments.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a discussion of the prior research which appraises aspects of journal publications in accounting. This is followed by a section outlining the methods used in the current study to select relevant journals and journal articles, and describes the procedures applied in the analysis of these articles. The results section follows, and the paper concludes with a discussion of the findings of the study, some tentative explanations for these findings, and several suggestions for furthering both the research agenda and the study of the literature on accounting concerning the PRC.

## 2. Prior research

Beginning primarily with papers written in the 1980s (see Brown and Gardner, 1985; Dyckman and Zeff, 1984; Nobes, 1985), there is an extensive body of work connected with the review, analysis and evaluation of journals and journal articles in accounting which has been documented in successive publications on the theme (for example see Bonner *et al.*, 2006). A considerable body of the prior research functions to rate or rank accounting journals according to various criteria, to debate rankings and ranking systems (see Ballas and Theoharakis, 2003; Beattie and Goodacre, 2006; Reinstein and Calderon, 2006), and to analyse publishing patterns, citations and impact factors (see Carmona, 2006; Jones and Roberts, 2005; Mathews, 2007). Often this corpus of literature provides assessments of the research productivity of the academy, geographically or regionally (see Brown *et al.*, 2007; Chan *et al.*, 2005; Mathieu and McConomy, 2003), by academic departments or individuals (see Borokhovich *et al.*, 1995; Hasselback *et al.*, 2003), or in reference to articles within a particular journal (see Hutchison *et al.*, 2004; Krogstad and Smith, 2003; Meyer *et al.*, 2005; Williams and Wines, 2006; Faux, 2008). Still other researchers have focused on the analysis of accounting journal publications in specific sub-discipline areas such as international accounting (see Prather-Kinsey and Rueschhoff 2004), accounting history (see Carnegie and Potter, 2000), or auditing (see Smith and Dombrowski, 1998). Aligning more closely with our paper are works which have investigated accounting research set within a particular geographic domain, such as prior studies of accounting research pertaining to Europe (see Carmona *et al.*, 1999), German-speaking nations (see Schäffer and Binder, 2008), and the United States (US) (see Williams *et al.*, 2006). Our paper marries with this tradition of analysis of scholarly journal articles in the accounting discipline, building on the prior work, but specifically examining that subset of the research which is positioned within the context of the PRC.

Two prior studies of the literature (Needles, 1997, Ji, 2000) were particularly important in informing our research. Needles (1997) analysed 768 articles published in *The International Journal of Accounting* from 1965 to 1996. A range of categorisations were utilised in that analysis, including country studied, subject of the paper, region/location of the author/s, and research methodology. Given the sample size of the Needles (1997) study and the number of categorisation bases used, the study provided us with a relatively comprehensive picture of developments in international accounting research during the time period examined. Specifically, the study showed that, across the 32 years covered, there was increasing attention being given to research on accounting in the PRC.

The other principal study underpinning our work was Ji's (2000) evaluation of research on accounting issues in the PRC and which entailed the review of 91 articles appearing in edited books [1] and accounting journals published in English from 1966 to 1998. This study, drawing on the classifications used in Needles (1997), identified that the most popular subject matter for accounting research on the PRC was financial accounting and reporting, closely followed by accounting standards. The predominance of financial accounting research reported in Ji (2000) is unsurprising given that distinctions between management and financial accounting in the PRC have not been clear in the past since, under the Chinese Uniform Accounting System, there was little difference between aspects of internal and external reporting or in the frequency of that reporting (Xiao, 1999). Further, the prior research traditions in studying Chinese accounting issues have been highly ideological and abstract, with the purpose of undertaking research being to justify and confirm government accounting policies and regulations (Tang, 2000). Ji (2000) concluded that the most popular approach applied in Chinese accounting research was descriptive, since scientific and empirical research methods were new to Chinese researchers. He also found that even in articles co-authored with western scholars, usage of scientific research methods was

limited. Our study specifically covers the ten-year period immediately following Ji's (2000) study and we contrast our results with findings concerning journal publications in the 1993-1998 period highlighted in Ji (2000).

Aligning with these analyses of the literature on accounting in the PRC, we sought to determine the characteristics of the more recent literature and to compare and contrast these features with those identified in the prior research. Further, the focus of our analysis was on the proliferation of accounting research on the PRC within the broader context of the leading, broadly international-orientated accounting journals, rather than in books, or in those journals which specifically aim to publish accounting research of a particular regional flavour.

### **3. Method**

We collected and analysed 137 scholarly articles reporting research on accounting in the PRC published in 25 leading accounting journals from 1999 to 2008. We used a two-stage process in deriving the sample, consisting of a journal selection stage and an article selection stage.

### 3.1 Journal selection

A range of criteria related to journal quality ratings, international focus, diversity, and maturity was applied in selecting the journals. To develop our list of journals we utilised published journal quality ratings, such as the *Thomson-ISI Web of Knowledge Journal Citation Reports* (2006), the United Kingdom (UK) Association of Business Schools (ABS) Academic Journal Quality Guide (Harvey *et al.*, 2007), Harzing's (2008) Journal Quality List (derived from 18 international journal ranking sources in the US, UK, Hong Kong, Europe and Australia), and the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) (2008) Journal Ratings List. Using these international rankings yielded a comprehensive listing of 25 journals perceived to be of good quality in the English-speaking world. All of the selected journals (see Table I) appear in both the ABS and ABDC lists, with 18 (72%) of the journals rated in the top two of four tiers (being the top 25% of all accounting and finance journals) in the ABDC list.

On the second criterion for journal selection, that of international focus, we followed Weetman (2006, p.351) in choosing ranked journals with "broad editorial policies that have the potential to attract contributions from any country". This matches the core consideration in our study to provide an assessment and evaluation of the proliferation and type of accounting research concerning the PRC which has been published in international accounting journals in general, and thus we excluded regionally-specific journals such as *Asian Review of Accounting*, the bilingual *China Accounting and Finance Review*, *Pacific Accounting Review*, and *Asia-Pacific Journal of Accounting & Economics*.

A third criterion for journal selection was maturity of the journal. Following Zeff (1996), we reviewed the establishment dates of the selected journals, adding a further measure of robustness to existing quality criteria (see Brinn *et al.*, 1996). At the start of the publication period analysed

(1999), 40% of the 25 journals had been published for at least 20 years. Another ten journals had been published for ten to 19 years by 1999 [2], and while the remaining five journals had been established for less than ten years, no journal had been in existence for less than five years based on the publication dates of the articles we analysed. We excluded relatively new journals which were in publication only for part of the period studied, such as *Journal of International Accounting Research* (est. 2002), *International Journal of Accounting, Auditing and Performance Evaluation* (est. 2004), *Journal of Contemporary Accounting and Economics* (est. 2005), and *Afro-Asian Journal of Finance and Accounting* (est. 2008).

On the diversity criterion set for journal selection, heterogeneity and maximum variation played a part in ensuring that the scope of selected journals covered major sub-discipline areas such as financial accounting, management accounting, auditing, and accounting history. While we did not include the numerous purely finance oriented journals [3] in the sample, *Managerial Finance* was subsumed, not only because of its record in publishing research related to the PRC, but also in recognition of the range of broader accounting, auditing, and financial reporting papers which featured in the journal.

### **3.2 Article selection**

Articles in the identified journals were sourced from relevant online databases and hardcopy periodicals collections. The titles, abstracts and key word listings of all retrieved papers were scanned for matches with the study requirements. Excluded from the search were articles presenting an editorial comment, a commentary or critique on another article in the selected journal, teaching cases, and book reviews. Articles that provided comparisons of accounting in the PRC and another country were included, although comparative studies involving multiple

nations were generally excluded as much of the content concerned countries other than the PRC (for exception see Street and Gray, 2002).

### **3.3 Analysis**

In probing the article set we employed categorisations derived from existing analyses of the accounting literature. Seminal early work (see Brown *et al.*, 1989) suggests that key attributes of articles include accounting area, research method, school of thought, and geographical focus. To this list we added aspects of publication outlet, authorship, and author/s institutional affiliations and geographic locations, utilising data classifications comparable with the key prior studies of Needles (1997) and Ji (2000). We also measured the weighted number of articles by author/s geographic location, based on institutional affiliation. A weighting of one was assigned to each paper, consistent with the method employed in Chan, Chen, and Cheng (2007). For example, an article by Chen and Wang (2004), which is included in our study, lists Chen's institutional affiliation as Lingnan University, Hong Kong, while Wang's was Nanjing University, China. In this case the weighting for the article is calculated as 0.5 for Hong Kong and 0.5 for mainland China, being one paper divided by two authors. An additional aspect featured in the analysis of authorship, as illustrated in this example, is that authors with Hong Kong institutional affiliations were distinguished from authors from elsewhere in the PRC. This distinction was applied in recognition of the differing business, economic and social histories of Hong Kong and mainland China, and the relatively wider use of the English language in Hong Kong.

## **4. Results**

An approximate mean of 14 articles was published annually across the journal set, however there was a considerable degree of variability in the actual number of articles published per annum. Figure 1 provides a graphical depiction of the publication dates for the 137 articles studied,

revealing peaks of 20 and 22 articles published in the selected journals in 2000 and 2008, respectively. While the superimposed linear regression trend line on the graph indicates a general stability in the number of publications over the ten-year period, removing the spike in 2008 (by treating it as an outlier) reveals an otherwise downward trend.

“Take in Figure 1”

#### 4.1 Publication outlets

Table I summarises the number of articles related to accounting in the PRC in the 25 journals examined. Data were classified into two five-year ranges, 1999-2003 and 2004-2008, to provide a further indicator of changes over time.

Journal	No. articles (n = 137)	Percentage of articles %
<i>The International Journal of Accounting</i>	20	14.6
<i>Journal of International Financial Management &amp; Accounting</i>	20	14.6
<i>Managerial Finance</i>	14	10.2
<i>Journal of International Accounting, Auditing and Taxation</i>	13	9.5
<i>Journal of Accounting and Public Policy</i>	10	7.3
<i>Accounting, Organizations and Society</i>	8	5.8
<i>International Journal of Auditing</i>	7	5.1
<i>Accounting, Business and Financial History</i>	5	3.6
<i>Journal of Accounting, Auditing &amp; Finance</i>	5	3.6
<i>Accounting Horizons</i>	4	2.9
<i>ABACUS</i>	3	2.2
<i>Accounting, Auditing &amp; Accountability Journal</i>	3	2.2
<i>Accounting and Business Research</i>	3	2.2
<i>Accounting &amp; Finance</i>	3	2.2
<i>British Accounting Review</i>	3	2.2
<i>Accounting Historians Journal</i>	2	1.5
<i>The Accounting Review</i>	2	1.5
<i>Contemporary Accounting Research</i>	2	1.5
<i>Issues in Accounting Education</i>	2	1.5
<i>Journal of Accounting and Economics</i>	2	1.5
<i>Management Accounting Research</i>	2	1.5
<i>Accounting History</i>	1	0.7
<i>Journal of Accounting Research</i>	1	0.7
<i>Journal of Management Accounting Research</i>	1	0.7
<i>Review of Accounting Studies</i>	1	0.7
Totals	137	100%

**Table I.** Summary statistics for journals and journal articles

As shown in Table I, over the course of the ten years studied, *The International Journal of Accounting* and *Journal of International Financial Management & Accounting* each featured almost 15% of the total papers analysed and were the most active of the journals in publishing accounting research on the PRC. The *Journal of International Accounting, Auditing and Taxation* and *Managerial Finance* collectively published around 20% of articles analysed. Thus, four of the 25 journals were responsible for publishing almost 50% of the relevant research output. Five other journals published five or more papers over the period, while the remaining journals each published a relatively insignificant proportion of the papers, indicating limited submissions of papers about the PRC, or limited interest in publishing articles concerning accounting in the PRC for these journals.

#### 4.2 Authorship

Table II reports the weighted number of articles by the geographic location of author/s according to primary institutional affiliation [4].

Rank	Country	Weighted articles (n = 137)	Weighted articles %
1	Hong Kong	59.6	43.5
2	United States	30.1	22.0
3	China (mainland)	17.5	12.8
4	United Kingdom	11.5	8.4
5	Australia	10.2	7.4
6	Taiwan	1.9	1.4
7	New Zealand	1.5	1.0
8	Singapore	1.4	1.0
9	France	1.0	0.7
10	Canada	0.9	0.7
11 (eq.)	Thailand	0.5	0.4
11 (eq.)	United Arab Emirates	0.5	0.4
12	Israel	0.4	0.3

**Table II.** Number of articles by author/s geographic location

Considerably more than 40% of the total weighted journal articles were authored by academics located in Hong Kong (Table II), which is almost 3.5 times the number of articles for authors located in other regions of the PRC. Academics located in the US also authored almost twice as many weighted articles as their colleagues in the PRC (excluding Hong Kong). The only other major contributors to the literature were from researchers with UK and Australian institutional affiliations, collectively authoring around 16% of total weighted research output. These results were also largely consistent on an annualised basis across the ten years studied.

Only 26 of the 137 papers were sole-authored and thus over 80% of the articles were the products of collaborative research efforts. Of these 111 joint-authored papers, 45 (around 41%) resulted from collaborations by authors in the same geographic location, principally within Hong Kong, and the remaining 59% (66 articles) were Hong Kong-mainland China or cross-border collaborations. Co-author works produced exclusively by researchers in Hong Kong and other regions of the PRC represented around 11.7% of such collaborative works, although cooperative studies by researchers in the US and Hong Kong and/or mainland China were significantly more frequent, accounting for 21.6% of all joint-authored papers. Other geographically defined forms of international collaboration were comparatively sparse.

In examining the range of authors it is apparent that a relatively limited set of researchers are actively engaged in studying accounting in the PRC and in publishing that work in well respected mainstream journals. Combining sole- and co-authored works, the most prolific researchers within the sampled article set are detailed in Table III. In addition to these researchers, a further 45 individuals sole- or co-authored between two and five of the 137 articles.

Author	Institutional affiliation	Number of articles
Z. Jun Lin	Hong Kong Baptist University	11
Bikki Jaggi	Rutgers University, US	8
Jason Zezhong Xiao	Cardiff University, Wales	8
Xijia Su	City University of Hong Kong	7
Qingliang Tang	University of Western Sydney, Australia	7
K. Hung Chan	Lingnan University, Hong Kong	6
Charles J.P. Chen	City University of Hong Kong	6
Judy S.L. Tsui	City University of Hong Kong/Hong Kong Polytechnic University	6

**Table III.** Prolific authors

### 4.3 Research methodology and research approach

Using basic research methodology as a preliminary indicator of approaches to research design, the papers were divided into quantitative and qualitative groupings. Figure 2 displays the methodological approaches applied for the journal article sample, showing that quantitative methodologies were predominant, having been applied in the research underlying more than 70% of the articles.

“Take in Figure 2”

In addition to classifying papers according to this qualitative-quantitative dichotomy, and in order to provide more insight into the paradigmatic underpinning of each article, the papers were further analysed according to the primary research approaches applied by the authors. The categories used are generally consistent with those developed by Needles (1997) and subsequently used in Ji (2000).

“Take in Figure 3”

Over 41% of papers were classified as empirical statistical (see Figure 3), featuring various forms of inferential statistics (such as *t*-tests, correlation, regression and factor analyses, as well as structural equation techniques) applied to empirical data in testing hypotheses and models,

consistent with a positivist ontology. Data analysed within this category of articles were most often sourced from annual reports or survey questionnaires.

Capital markets research, involving the study of associations between accounting information and share prices or stock returns (see Brown, 1994; Kothari, 2001), represented 29.2% of the articles. These papers were quantitative inferential in nature and focused on market reactions and the value relevance and information content of accounting data and reporting disclosures. The articles were strongly reflective of the research tradition founded upon positive accounting theory.

All other categories of research accounted for only a small proportion of the published output. For example, 10.9% were historical articles, and an equivalent number were deductive descriptive works encompassing qualitative, essay-style papers presenting conceptual and comparative discourses on Chinese accounting practices. However, both the historical and deductive descriptive categories were inflated due to special issues on Chinese accounting of *Accounting, Business & Financial History* (Vol. 13 No. 1, 2003) and *Managerial Finance* (Vol. 26 No. 5, 2000). Empirical descriptive articles accounted for a little over 7% (10) of the 137 papers in the sample and authors of these articles tended to use qualitative methods, such as case studies, although some of these papers contain basic descriptive statistics.

The bar chart depicted in Figure 3 also contrasts the results for our sample of 137 articles from the 1999-2008 period with Ji's (2000) study of 52 articles on Chinese accounting issues from the earlier 1993-1998 period. There are, however, some possible differences in the interpretation of the categorisation schema, given that Ji (2000, following Needles, 1997) classified empirical descriptive works as including those articles which made use of a survey or questionnaire, while we made classifications in our study based on the methods used in analysing (as well as

collecting) such data. Consequently, we determined that most of the survey research was best described as empirical statistical due to the nature and sophistication of the statistical significance testing employed in the analysis of results. An outstanding aspect of the comparative results depicted in Figure 3 is the shift from deductive descriptive articles to empirical statistical and capital markets articles. This is particularly significant considering the degree of commonality of the journal sets, noting that our study included 13 of the 17 journals (76%) examined by Ji (2000).

#### 4.4 Subject matter

The subject matter of articles in our sample was analysed using a two-step approach, initially involving the identification of the accounting sub-discipline area, followed by a more detailed thematic analysis of topics. Table IV displays the results for the broad sub-discipline area of the papers examined, utilising a classification system similar to that applied in Needles (1997) and Ji (2000).

Subject matter	No. articles (n =137)	Percentage of articles %
Financial Accounting & Reporting	45	32.9
Auditing	30	21.9
Management Accounting	17	12.4
Accounting Standards	13	9.5
Accounting History	11	8.0
Taxation	6	4.4
Accounting Profession	5	3.6
Miscellaneous (e.g. Accounting & Corporate Governance, Accounting Education, Accounting Research)	10	7.3

**Table IV.** Articles by sub-discipline area

As shown in Table IV, financial accounting and reporting research, followed by auditing studies, were the most popular sub-disciplinary areas of the papers. With few exceptions, the financial accounting and reporting studies, which included most of the capital markets research, were

empirical in nature, adopting quantitative inferential methodologies. Other than the particular focus of the capital markets articles, as previously outlined, the most common threads apparent in the financial accounting and reporting papers concerned various types and levels of reporting disclosures. The auditing articles, constituting approximately 22% of papers, represented a mix of empirical statistical, deductive descriptive and empirical descriptive works, with a trend towards the production of a greater proportion of empirical statistical research towards the latter years of the 10-year sample. At the core of most of these papers were issues related to audit opinions, audit quality, auditor independence, and audit committees.

In respect to other sub-discipline areas, slightly more than 12% of the papers considered topics in management accounting. These articles were generally empirical statistical, with a common theme being the impact of cultural variables on the adoption of western management accounting practices in the PRC. Among the 9.5% of papers which looked at accounting standards, the leading themes were harmonisation and comparative accounting standards. The accounting history sub-discipline area supplied 8% of the sampled papers, comprised of largely qualitative interpretive research focused on the roles of Chinese political and cultural variables in understanding accounting practices of the past, or narratives about the professionalisation of accounting in China. As detailed in Table IV, sub-discipline areas such as taxation and the accounting profession, as well as a range of sundry other areas, each accounted for only a very small number of papers.

However, what is not readily observable based on the categorisations and analyses previously provided in these results, is the number of papers reporting on investigations with a particular focus on public sector organisations, such as local governments and Chinese state-owned enterprises. The public sector was a significant research setting across many of the sub-

disciplinary categories. Given the nature of the PRC's economic and political systems, this observation is not an unexpected result, although it is a potential point of contrast with the accounting literature concerning other nations where private sector organisations often constitute the dominant research context.

## **5. Discussion and conclusions**

Growing investment and commercial interest in the PRC, brought about by the nation's expanding economic and global profile, would be anticipated to promote an increasing quantum of research on accounting issues in the PRC. However, contrary to this supposition, the number of articles in the 25 journals we examined peaked in 2000, following a declining trend through to 2007, and then enjoying a resurgence in 2008. This result provides some evidence for concluding that despite profound economic and accounting developments in China across the 1999 to 2008 period, there has been no significant impact of these changes reflected in the content and coverage of mainstream, internationally focused accounting journals. Such journals appear to remain concentrated on accounting issues in western economies and developed nations, and continue to lack particular relevance for scholars interested in accounting in developing and emerging economies and markets. Consequently, alternative journal outlets have developed during the 1990s and 2000s to better cater for the need for research and discourse on Chinese accounting issues.

There appears to be a very limited spread of authors researching accounting issues in reference to the PRC and who are publishing in the major mainstream journals. Many of the same authors featured in a significant number of the articles we examined. One possible explanation for this finding is that there are relatively few authors writing about accounting in the PRC and who are targeting the publication outlets we investigated. An alternative interpretation is that the observed

author concentration may be a manifestation of an elite effect (see Chan, Chen, and Cheng, 2005, 2007; Glover *et al.*, 2006; Smith and Dombrowski, 1998), such that publication opportunities in highly ranked and long-established journals are related to author-editor connections, the accounting programs from which authors graduated, or the institutional affiliations and publications track records of authors.

Collectively, these observations suggest that it would be useful to extend or follow-up our study by varying or expanding the journal list to more broadly assess if the number of articles on accounting in the PRC is in ascendancy or decline, and to determine if the publication outlets for this work are changing. There is certainly some evidence (see Jones *et al.*, 1996) to indicate that, outside the US, networking into a particular academic environment and working on material of a particular national interest can “present a barrier to achieving publications in US journals”, with such US journals being those generally accorded the highest quality ratings (see Brown *et al.*, 2007, p.125). Thus, a direction for future research is to enlarge or diversify the journal sample to include journals of other ranks, which are more recently established, or which specialise in publishing research dedicated to relevant regional concerns. A recent study by Chow *et al.* (2007, p.411) concluded that journal articles need to be evaluated on their own merits “rather than abdicating this responsibility by using journal ranking as a proxy for an article’s value or contribution”. Consequently, we recommend follow-up studies which go beyond the so-called mainstream international accounting journals and which examine the literature on accounting in the PRC which is being published in regionally specific or emerging journals such as *Asian Review of Accounting*, *Pacific Accounting Review*, *Journal of International Accounting Research*, and *China Accounting and Finance Review*.

Studies of the content of the literature on accounting in the PRC written in Chinese languages is a further area for future research, since works published in English represent only a subset of the total literature. As Carmona, Gutierrez, and Camara (1999, p.463) found in studying the diffusion of accounting research concerning European countries, “there exists limited mobility of non-English written accounting research”. Elucidation of the nature, topics and methods of the non-English language literature on Chinese accounting issues may add to the research agenda and aid in the recognition of gaps in the body of English language writings, providing potential to improve the insight yield of future research. Language may also present a barrier in terms of the authorship patterns noted in our analysis. For example, we found that the number of weighted articles authored or co-authored by academics with Hong Kong institutional affiliations was far greater than that for authors located in all other regions of the PRC. In Hong Kong many academics have had English language education at the school level and possess overseas academic qualifications, evidenced perhaps in part by the extent of collaborative research undertaken by Hong Kong authors with US, UK and Australian academics. Also having the potential to affect the extent of research output from the PRC (other than Hong Kong) is unfamiliarity with the scientific research methodologies (see Ji, 2000; Tang 2000) required to secure publication in highly ranked English language accounting journals, as well as a history of lack of opportunities, funding, support and encouragement of accounting research by faculty located in the PRC (see Chow *et al.*, 1997; Tang 2000).

In relation to methodology and methods, our analysis showed that the most popular approaches used by authors in undertaking accounting research concerning the PRC had changed significantly in recent years. While empirical statistical and capital markets research collectively comprised only 3.8% of articles on accounting in the PRC published in a similar set of journals in the 1993 to 1998 period (Ji, 2000), for the 1999 to 2008 period we found that that an abundant

majority of the literature (70.8%) was based on these research approaches. In a consistent contrast with Ji's (2000) finding that almost 76.9% of the literature was deductive descriptive, only 10.9% of the literature could be similarly classified in our study. A likely principal explanation for this change in the sophistication of research methodology and methods is increasing availability of data about Chinese organisations as a result of the development of securities, financial, taxation and corporate datasets, such as the Taiwan Economic Journal (TEJ) and Pacific-Basin Capital Markets (PACAP) databases. These databases provide for the utilisation of more advanced quantitative approaches to research and featured as a primary data source in a large number of the studies analysed.

In terms of specific research methods, there was particularly common use of various financial, market and taxation databases, mailed survey questionnaires and standardised survey instruments, and annual report or financial statement analyses. Less than 7% of journal articles revealed the use of interview techniques as primary or corroboratory data gathering methods, with application of these methods concentrated in the management accounting sub-discipline area. A similar paucity of studies utilising case study methods was also apparent, while experimental designs were used in only four studies, and the action research approach applied in only one study. There was also a marked absence of research situated within the critical interpretive paradigm, except for two accounting history papers (being Auyeung and Ivory, 2003, and Xu and Xu, 2008), despite the burgeoning of this genre in the accounting literature. These observations may be indicative of a need to consider further exploration of accounting issues in the PRC from alternative perspectives which transcend functional views on accounting information. While not included in our journal set, a review across the 1999 to 2008 period of the highly ranked journal *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* revealed only one paper (Ding and Graham, 2007) concerned with accounting issues in the PRC [5] and this is perhaps equally suggestive of the

need to explore accounting in China using a more liberal array of research philosophies and methods. However, it needs to be acknowledged that our findings concerning the dominant research approaches reflected in the literature may well be the result of the biasing effects of the particular journals that were selected for analysis. Such ‘mainstream’ journals, as we chose to study, have historically reflected positivistic, empirical methodologies with a dearth of articles based on action research, critical interpretive or qualitative approaches (see Baker and Bettner, 1997; Baker, 2000).

In reference to sub-disciplinary focus, papers on financial accounting and reporting were predominant in our sample. This finding is in accord with the results of Ji’s (2000) study and also mirrors more general observations about publication patterns in the most notable accounting journals. In examining influential journals in accounting, for the top five journals (all of which were included in our sample), Bonner *et al.* (2006, p.663) concluded that:

“Financial accounting articles appear in disproportionately high numbers for all journals except Accounting, Organizations and Society, whereas management accounting articles appear in disproportionately low numbers for all journals except Accounting, Organizations and Society”.

The prevalence of financial accounting and reporting research concerning the PRC may also be in response to the prominence of accounting standards development and harmonisation activities within the Chinese accounting reform process over the time period studied. Growing maturity of the principal Chinese stock markets since their establishment in the early 1990s, together with increasing availability of data about these markets, may also be fuelling this area of research.

In a recent examination of publishing patterns in the financial and reporting literature internationally, Parker (2007) highlights several issues that are of equal relevance in the context of our study, and which point to the need for improved diversity in accounting research on the PRC. Parker (2007, p.39) noted that:

“The findings reveal a strong North American economics and finance-based positivist influence, a largely uncritical acceptance of accounting’s subservience to the demands of the market, a reluctance to engage major policy questions and broader reporting constituencies. These appear to be conditioned to a large degree by internal features and pressures within the academic research community. Evidence is presented for greater attention to major environmental shifts impacting accounting and communities globally, a reinvigoration of researchers’ direct engagement with reporting constituents in the field, a revisiting of major business, accounting, social and environmental policy questions, and a preparedness to address today’s major ... concerns of communities and governments”.

On the basis of our findings, taken together with Parker’s criticisms of the accounting literature more generally, our suggestions for furthering the accounting research agenda concerning the PRC include the needs to: (1) consider broader perspectives on accounting issues; (2) traverse a more expansive field of topic areas; (3) explore issues by employing a more comprehensive range of research methodologies and methods, and; (4) address possible exclusivity issues in the promulgation of studies, and encourage new researchers to the area.

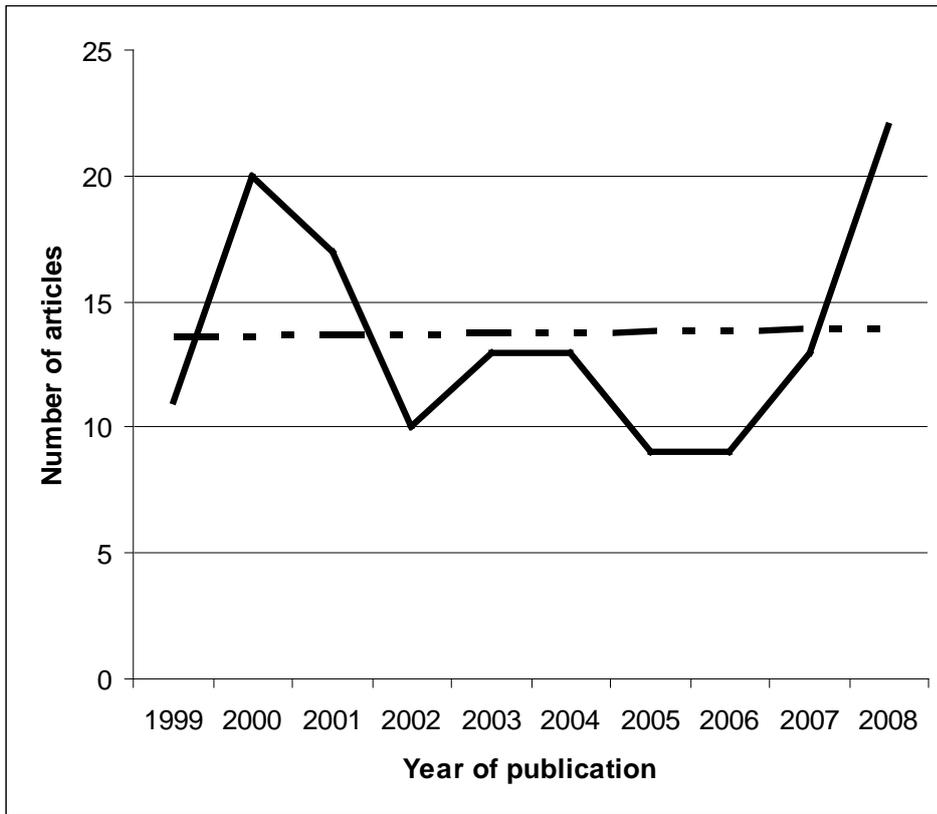
1. However, we excluded books from our analysis in accord with the general “international convention that assesses scientific merit primarily on the basis of publications in recognized journals” (Schäffer and Binder, 2008, p.41; also see Schwartz *et al.*, 2005).
2. *Accounting History* was renumbered beginning at Vol. 1 No. 1 in 1996, but has been in existence since 1989 (see Carnegie and Wolnizer, 1996).
3. We distinguished finance-focused journals from those which are accounting-focused or accounting *and* finance-focused.
4. The analysis excludes other, secondary institutional affiliations (generally a visiting scholarship) of a number of authors.
5. While five papers published in *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* in 2008 (Vol. 19, No. 2) concerned Chinese learners, the research settings were not the PRC and so these papers have been excluded from our count.

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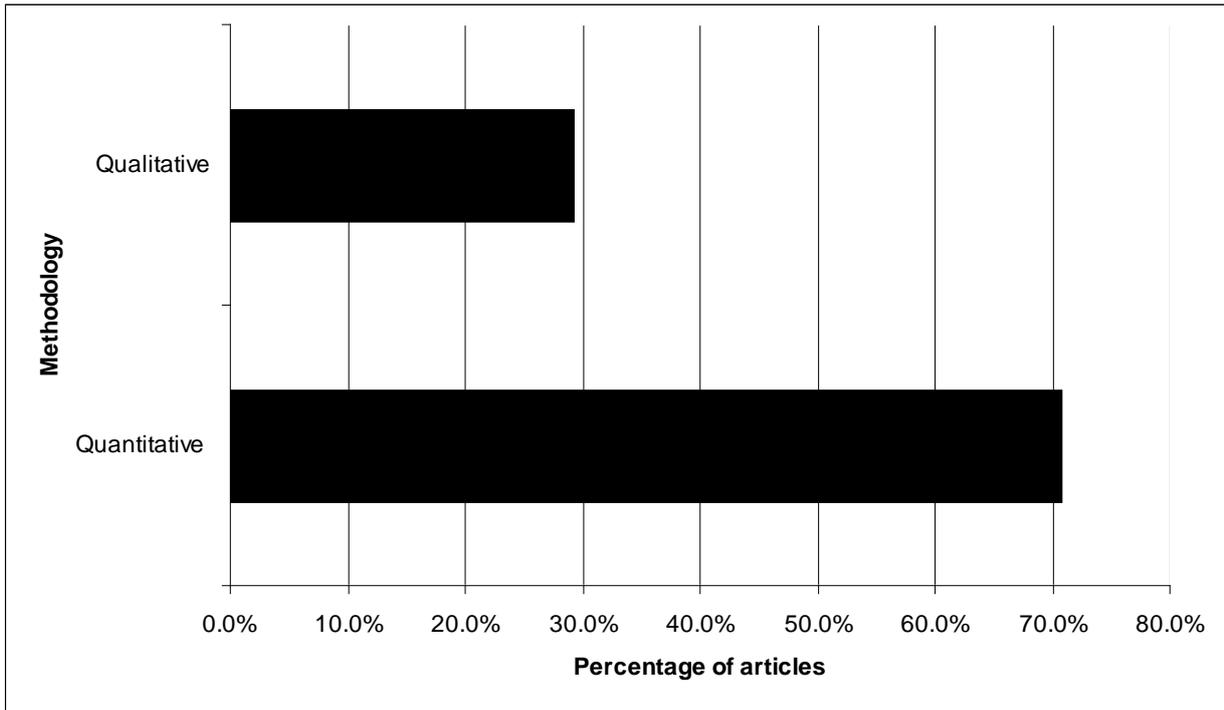
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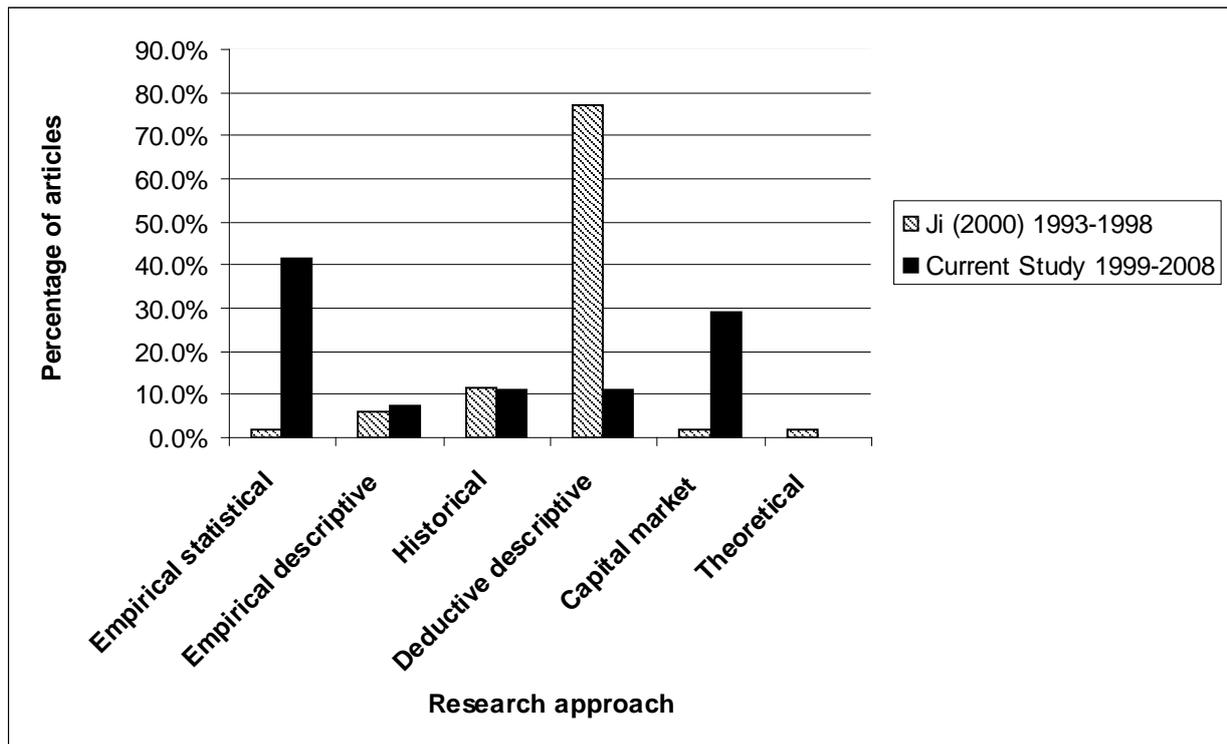
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**Figure 1.** Publications by year



**Figure 2.** Research methodology



**Figure 3.** Research approach