

NAVIGATING TO GREENER FIRMS: HOW ENTREPRENEURS' INSTITUTIONAL IMPRINTS INFLUENCE CORPORATE ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The early-career institutional experiences of corporate decision-makers can create enduring imprints that shape cognition and capabilities, yet their impact on corporate environmental responsibility (CER) remains underexplored. Drawing on upper echelons theory and imprinting theory, we examine how Chinese private entrepreneurs' experiences in the state-led Danwei system influence CER by shaping institutional imprints. Using a unique dataset of 17,252 firm-year observations from 2008 to 2018, we find that Danwei system experience significantly enhances CER. This effect is strengthened by party organization embeddedness, regional institutional development, and Confucian culture. The study advances understanding of CER from an imprinting perspective and contributes to upper echelons theory by specifying institutional imprinting as a key micro-foundational mechanism through which executives internalize historical legacies to shape contemporary corporate environmental sustainability.



KEYWORDS

- Confucian culture
- Corporate environmental responsibility
- Entrepreneurs' institutional imprints
- Imprinting theory
- Party organization embeddedness
- Regional institutional development

RESEARCH RELEVANCE

- Drawing on upper echelons theory and imprinting theory, we examine how Chinese private entrepreneurs' experiences in the state-led Danwei system influence corporate environmental responsibility (CER) by shaping institutional imprints.
- Using a unique dataset of 17,252 firm-year observations from 2008 to 2018, we find that Danwei system experience significantly enhances CER.
- This effect is strengthened by party organization embeddedness, regional institutional development, and Confucian culture.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Hua, X., Zhong, L., Yin, J., & Hu, Y. (2026). Navigating to Greener Firms: How Entrepreneurs' Institutional Imprints Influence Corporate Environmental Responsibility. *Business Ethics, the Environment and Responsibility*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.70134>

“Entrepreneurs' earlier experiences in the state-led Danwei system leave enduring imprints and increase their corporate environmental responsibility later on.”

