

## Letter to the Editor

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### Indigenous Cultural Antecedents to Compositional-Based View?

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

Two articles published in MOR recently have been about Chinese innovation (i.e., Augier, Guo, & Rowen, 2016; Luo & Child, 2015). The first paper argues that Chinese innovations are different from Western innovations because they have greater emphasis on imitating existing technologies. It raises a question about ‘how China’s history, culture, institutions, and organizations aid or hinder innovation’. However, the second paper argues that enterprises in emerging economies in general, and Chinese enterprises in particular, benefit from a unique compositional capability (composition-based view [CBV]) with a focus on the competitive advantages gained from innovations created by combining *existing* resources in *novel* ways. These two papers seem to engage in a debate over whether and how Chinese firms are capable of innovation.

We agree that many successful Chinese companies have engaged in compositional practices. For example, the China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation (CRRC) has successfully adopted advanced technologies from diverse sources (e.g., Germany, Japan, France, and Canada) and recombined those technologies to develop CRRC’s own high-speed train. Privately owned enterprises such as Xiaomi are also based largely on their compositional capability, that is, by reconfiguring or remixing various elements.

During the Dragon Boat Festival in 2016, we visited a classical Chinese garden in Suzhou. We saw the Chinese symbol of the phoenix [*fenghuang* 凤凰] in many places, such as on flowerpots, pillars, and sidewalks. In Chinese mythology, the phoenix is a bird sent as a messenger from Heaven, and it is used as a symbol of prosperity and longevity (Minao & Soper, 1990). The Chinese phoenix is often described as a composite of many birds, including the head of a golden pheasant, the body of a mandarin duck, the tail of a peacock, the legs of a crane, the mouth of a parrot, and the wings of a swallow (see [Figure 1](#)). This kind of image has appeared in China for over 7,000 years in jade and pottery motifs as far back as the Hongshan Neolithic

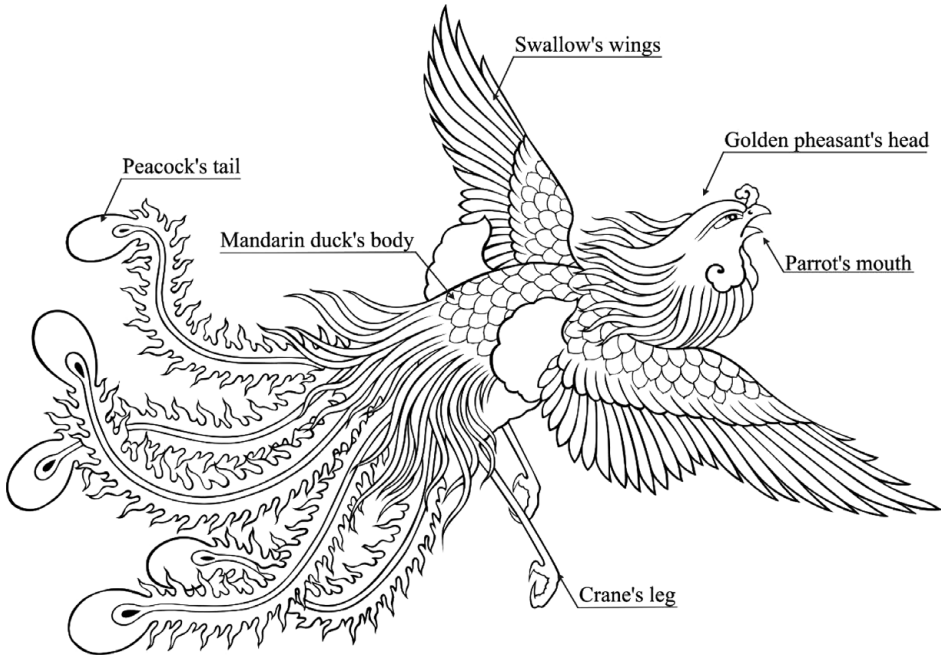


Figure 1. Phoenix

period (Zhou, 2004). The image also appeared in decorative bronze as well as jade figurines in Hemudu Culture between 5500 BCE and 3300 BCE.

Given the historical salience of the Chinese phoenix as a ‘compositional’ bird, we suggest that CBV reflects a deep historically rooted indigenous pattern and style of innovation at Chinese companies, which is consistent with Schumpeter’s notion about resource recombination as a typical form of innovation (Galunic & Rodan, 1998; Schumpeter, 1934). We wonder whether CBV is rooted in traditional Chinese culture. Is Chinese culture one important reason for the different patterns of innovation between China and the West?

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