



Twenty-five years of corporate political activity research in Asia: A literature review and research agenda

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Abstract

Corporate political activity (CPA) in Asia has attracted increasing interdisciplinary attention due to the region's shifting institutional landscape and growing geopolitical significance. However, existing literature remains fragmented across theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and empirical settings. A dominant focus on relational CPA tends to obscure Asia's broader and evolving spectrum of political strategies, as well as ongoing debates regarding their effectiveness and outcomes. In response, this study presents the first regionally focused, systematic literature review of CPA in Asia, synthesizing 323 studies published between 2000 and 2024. It evaluates the theoretical foundations, institutional and firm-level antecedents, strategy typologies, moderators, mediators, and outcomes that characterize CPA within the Asian context. While challenging Western-centric assumptions, we propose a typology that incorporates both Asia-specific CPA strategies, such as religious and cultural engagement, party-embedded structures, and the voluntary co-optation, and globally prevalent strategies, including trade association lobbying, relational ties, and political CSR, which are institutionally adapted across diverse Asian regimes. We then employ an integrative Antecedents–Phenomenon–Consequences framework and classify CPA outcomes into three domains: firm-level, institutional, and ethical/ governance-related. This review contributes by providing theoretical insights, clarifying when and how CPA leads to different outcomes, and demonstrating how political strategies vary across institutional environments. We conclude by identifying critical research gaps and suggesting future directions to engage more critically with Asia's institutional heterogeneity and its implications for global CPA theory and practice.

Keywords Non-market strategy · Corporate political activity · Asia · Descriptive review

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Introduction

In 2006, JP Morgan launched the Sons and Daughters Program, hiring the children of China's ruling political elite to protect its business interest in the country (Liu et al., 2015). In India, Future Gaming and Hotel Services, a lottery company, emerged as a prominent political donor, topping lists of leading contributors under an electoral bond scheme that permitted anonymous donations from individuals and corporations (BBC News, 2024). These cases reflect a broader and longstanding feature of many Asian economies: the close—and often—opaque relationship between political elites and corporate strategy. In this context, firms regularly engage with political institutions to navigate regulations, access resources, and secure strategic advantages. Broadly referred to as corporate political activity (CPA) (Getz, 2001; Hillman & Hitt, 1999a, 1999b; Katic & Hillman, 2023; Schuler, 1996), CPA is particularly important in Asia, where state influence over economic activity is more direct and pervasive than in many Western settings (Den Hond et al., 2014).

Although CPA in Asia has gained traction in recent years, the literature remains fragmented across theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and empirical settings. Studies from strategic management (Li et al., 2018; Schuler et al., 2017), international business (Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015a), entrepreneurship (Luo et al., 2020), and related fields have offered valuable insights, but these often draw from Western-centric models that do not fully account for Asia's institutional diversity. Institutional variations across regime types, religious influences, regulatory systems, and cultural expectations shape distinct forms of CPA that remain underexplored. Firms in Asia increasingly operate in culturally embedded sectors like Islamic finance, healthcare, and media. They leverage CPA not just to manage political risk but to shape institutions and gain market advantage, underscoring the need for Asia-specific conceptualizations of CPA (Azmeah & Nadvi, 2014; Luo et al., 2021).

While prior reviews (e.g., Hillman et al., 2004; Lawton et al., 2013; Rajwani & Liedong, 2015) have advanced the field (see Table 1), they are largely Western-orientated and provide only partial engagement with some Asian contexts (Mellahi et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2023), thereby overlooking South, Southeast, and Middle Eastern Asia. Moreover, although relational CPA is widely regarded as the dominant strategy in Asia, this view can obscure the broader repertoire of political behaviors emerging across the region. There remains limited clarity on how firm characteristics, particularly ownership differences between state-owned and private firms, influence the design and effectiveness of political strategies (Li et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2019; Okhmatovskiy, 2010). In addition, recent transformations such as the US–China trade decoupling (Hu et al., 2021), post-COVID economic nationalism (Ciravegna & Michailova, 2022), technology regulation (Wen et al., 2024), data localization (Coche et al., 2024), anti-corruption initiatives (Islam et al., 2024), and green policy shifts (Ghauri et al., 2021) have made political engagement more dynamic and unpredictable. These developments have rendered earlier frameworks inadequate, reinforcing the need for an integrative, regionally grounded literature review that reflects Asia's evolving institutional realities.

This study addresses these gaps by conducting a regionally focused, systematic review of CPA research in Asia. Drawing on 323 peer-reviewed articles published

Table 1 Overview of previous reviews on the CPA domain

Study	Research Method	Thematic Scope	Time Span	# Publications	#Journals	Context	Insights on Asian Markets	Key Insights
Hillman et al. (2004)	Narrative Review	Types, antecedents, and outcomes of CPA	NA	NA	NA	Western	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integration of CPA types, antecedents, and consequences
Oliver and Holzinger (2008)	Narrative review	Dynamic capabilities framework for CPA	1985–2005	25	NA	Western	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectiveness of political strategies will be a function of firms' dynamic political management capabilities
Lux et al. (2011)	meta-analysis	Antecedents of CPA and its impact on FP	1976–2010	78	NA	US	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional antecedents of CPA do affect CPA to some extent and CPA is positively related to firm performance CPA practices continue to expand as commerce goes increasingly global and, consequently, involves a wider array of political actors and institutions
Lawton et al. (2013)	Systematic Literature Review	Classifies CPA into three domains --resources and capabilities focus; institutional focus; and political environment focus	1940–2011	NA	NA	All	Low	
Rajwani and Liedong (2015)	Systematic Literature Review	International comparative assessment	1998–2013	56	Top rated journals	Developed and developing countries)	Moderate (Focused on developing countries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The mixed findings across different countries suggest that institutional characteristics could have a bearing on CPA outcomes
Melalahi et al. (2016)	Systematic Literature Review	Non-market strategy (CSR and CPA) and organizational performance	2000–2014	214	14	All	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disconnection between scholars' call for multi-theoretical perspectives and the overreliance on single theoretical lenses in empirical research
Dorobantu et al. (2017)	Integrative Review	Integration of non-market strategy research using institutional theory lens	NA	NA	NA	NA	Moderate (Focused on institutional context)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faced with weak institutions, firms can create and appropriate value by either adapting to, augmenting, or transforming the existing institutional environment, and can do so either independently or in collaboration with others

Table 1 (continued)

Study	Research Method	Thematic Scope	Time Span	# Publications	# Journals	Context	Insights on Asian Markets	Key Insights
Tihanyi et al. (2019)	Meta-analysis	Political connections—firm performance relationship	1961–2015	210	139 countries	139 countries	Moderate (Limited to PC and FP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconclusive findings on political connections and firm performance link
Brown et al. (2022)	Systematic Literature Review	Understanding predictors and approaches of CPA	2005–2021	62	NA	NA	Low (India centric insights)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classify CPA predictors as Internal and External CPA approaches will vary depending on the firm's goal to either manage or mitigate regulation and legislation as compared to attempting to pass new bills into law Scholars are already adopting other theories side by side with the political markets' perspective
Lenway et al. (2022)	Literature Review	CPA from political market perspective	1960–2020	48	Business & Society and other management journals	All	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholars are already adopting other theories side by side with the political markets' perspective
Adel Tanlawy et al. (2023)	Systematic Literature Review	Political ties-firm performance	2000–2022	114	ABS rated journals (Excludes articles from politics and economics)	China and some emerging countries	Moderate (Focused on Political Ties)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conceptual and methodological approaches adopted in different management disciplines have resulted in inconclusive and mixed findings on the relationship between political ties and performance
Wei et al. (2023)	Systematic Literature Review	Corporate political connections	1990–2020	269	24 peer reviewed journals	All	Moderate (Focused on Political Connections)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided conceptualization of CPA, the antecedents, and the outcomes
Katic and Hillman (2023)	Systematic Literature Review	Political marketplace 2.0	1963–2021	331	NA	All	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated the conceptualization of the political marketplace Introduction of a new categorization of CPA along the dimensions of formality and directness

Table 1 (continued)

Study	Research Method	Thematic Scope	Time Span	# Publications	#Journals	Context	Insights on Asian Markets	Key Insights
Shirodkar et al. (2024)	Literature Review	Nonmarket strategies	NA	30+ papers in Special issue + Other papers	Multiple leading journals	Global	Moderate (Highlights how MNEs in institutionally fragile economies (often in Asia) adopt values-based nonmarket strategies to build legitimacy and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Argues that traditional stewardship models are insufficient; MNEs require authentic, culturally embedded nonmarket strategies
Present Study	Systematic Literature Review	Theoretical foundations, antecedents, conceptualizations, boundaries, and outcomes of CPA in Asian Context	2000–2024	323	ABDC A & A* Journals	Asian Countries	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study presents a systematic review of the existent research on the CPA in the context of Asia Theoretical foundations, strategies, antecedents, moderators, mediators and outcomes of CPA in Asian context are addressed

between 2000 and 2024, including those from top-tier journals (e.g., ABDC A & A*) and select high-quality studies from underrepresented regions, we synthesize findings across disciplinary boundaries. The review adopts an institutional lens, drawing particularly on Scott's (1995) three-pillar framework, to organize how CPA strategies are shaped by Asia's regulative, normative, and cognitive structures. In doing so, it provides a much-needed synthesis of fragmented insights and advances a nuanced understanding of how firms in Asia engage politically within their highly varied institutional environments.

Our review makes several contributions. First, it identifies underexplored CPA strategies specific to Asia, including religious and cultural forms of engagement, party-embedded structures, and voluntary co-optation (Zhou et al., 2013; Li, 2023a, 2023b). Second, it demonstrates how widely studied strategies, such as trade association CPA or relational CPA are adapted in regionally embedded ways, for example, through *Amakudari* in Japan, *Chaebol-state* ties in Korea, or *Bumiputera* patronage in Malaysia (Nguyen, 2014; Wang et al., 2019). Third, we assess CPA outcomes across three domains: firm-level, institutional, and ethical/governance, highlighting how outcomes are shaped by context (Adel Tantawy et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2023). Finally, we examine how Western theories, such as institutional theory, resource dependence, and the resource-based view, are recalibrated in Asian contexts, often incorporating indigenous constructs like Confucian ethics or informal regulatory orders (Rajwani & Liedong, 2015; Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015a, 2015b). In doing so, we position Asia not just as a site of empirical variation, but as a generative context for advancing CPA theory.

Research design

Given the fragmented nature of the literature, which underpins this study's motivation and highlights the need for a critical, structured synthesis—we conducted a descriptive review (Paré et al., 2015). This approach aligns with the objective of building a comprehensive, evidence-driven model that illuminates the complex foundations of CPA in Asia and identifies clear pathways for future research. To ensure methodological rigor and transparency, we adopted the three-step iterative process proposed by Hiebl (2023), which includes study identification, data screening, and disclosure (see Fig. 1).

This review includes articles published between 2000–2024, reflecting our intent to produce the most comprehensive synthesis of CPA in Asia. Since our research questions incorporated two thematic concepts of CPA and Asia, we developed keyword terms aligned with each theme and expanded them using relevant variants to ensure broader search coverage (see Table 2). Once the search terms and their groupings were determined, we developed a set of search strings combining keywords from both themes to ensure high relevance. The final search string comprised 68 keywords, specifically designed to capture abstracts containing terms from both thematic groups and to maximize retrieval accuracy (see Table 2).

To identify relevant studies, we used both electronic and cross-referencing methods, consistent with previous reviews (e.g. Deng, 2012; Gruner & Soutar, 2021; Tran-

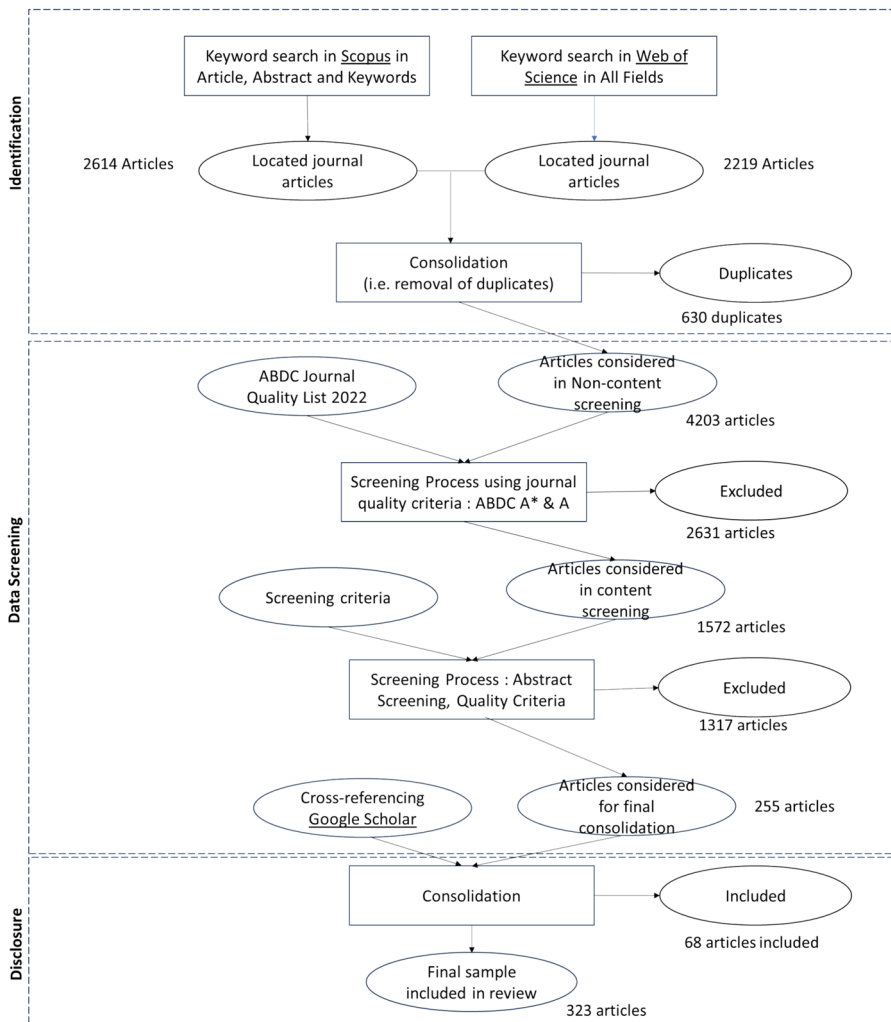


Fig. 1 Summary of search strategy and sampling process

field et al., 2003). For electronic databases, we selected Scopus and Web of Science (WOS) due to their comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed articles. To supplement this, we manually searched Google Scholar, reviewing the reference lists of articles already included in the sample to ensure comprehensive coverage.

The search process employed the full set of 68 keyword combinations across both databases using advanced search functions. This yielded 2,614 articles from Scopus and 2,219 from Web of Science. After removing 630 duplicates, a consolidated pool of 4,203 articles remained for further screening (see Fig. 1).

The screening process followed Hiebl's (2023) distinction between non-content and content screening. For non-content screening, we excluded articles published in journals not listed as A or A* in the Australian Business Deans Council's (ABDC)

Table 2 Search keywords

Theme	Keywords
CPA	'Corporate Political Strategy,' 'Corporate Political Activity,' 'CPA,' 'Political Donations,' 'Lobbying,' 'Corporate Political Action,' 'Political Campaign Contribution,' 'Business Political Activity,' 'Political Connections,' 'Business Political Behavior,' 'Business Political Strategy,' 'Managerial Political Ties,' 'Nonmarket Strategy,' 'Political Donation', 'Political Campaign', 'Political Contribution', 'Political Ties', 'Political Embeddedness', 'Non-market Strategy', 'Non-market Actions'
Asia	'Asia', 'Japan', 'Brunei', 'Cambodia', 'China', 'Korea', 'Fiji', 'Hong Kong', 'Indonesia', 'Kiribati', 'Lao', 'Malaysia', 'Mongolia', 'Myanmar', 'Papua New Guinea', 'Philippines', 'The democratic People's Republic of Korea', 'Samoa', 'Singapore', 'Solomon Islands', 'Taiwan', 'Thailand', 'Timor-Leste', 'Vanuatu', 'Vietnam', 'Afghanistan', 'Bangladesh', 'Bhutan', 'India', 'Iran', 'Maldives', 'Nepal', 'Pakistan', 'Sri Lanka', 'Bahrain', 'Iraq', 'Israel', 'Jordan', 'Kuwait', 'Lebanon', 'Oman', 'Qatar', 'Saudi Arabia', 'Palestine', 'Syrian Arab Republic', 'Turkey', 'United Arab Emirates', 'Yemen'

2022 Journal Quality List, removing 2,631 records. This left 1,572 articles for content screening. In this phase, titles and abstracts were evaluated using fit-for-purpose inclusion/exclusion criteria derived from four conceptual dimensions of CPA: (1) strategy types, (2) antecedents, (3) outcomes at the firm or system level, and (4) internal mechanisms such as mediators and moderators. Based on these dimensions, the following inclusion criteria was applied: 1) Does the study investigate CPA in an Asian context? 2) In cross-national studies, is the role of Asian CPA clearly distinguishable? 3) Is the study published in a peer-reviewed academic journal? 4) Is the study featured in business- and management-related journal? 5) Does the study examine CPA as either an antecedent or outcome? Articles that did not meet these criteria were excluded. To ensure academic quality, all retained articles were also assessed using the ABDC Journal Quality List (Ruggiero & Mussari, 2024). This process resulted in the selection of 255 core articles.

Recognizing the limitations of keyword-based searches (Christofi et al., 2021), particularly when it comes to culturally embedded or under-represented CPA practices such as religious or tribal forms of engagement in Middle Eastern contexts, we undertook an additional cross-referencing process. By reviewing the reference lists of initially selected articles and conducting targeted Google Scholar searches, we identified 68 more relevant studies. This brought the total sample to 323 articles. To factor in regional representation, we expanded our inclusion criteria to allow for high-quality studies published in ABDC B and C journals, a step also taken in previous reviews addressing underrepresented regions (e.g., Sauer & Seuring, 2023). This broader inclusion strategy was essential for capturing the full diversity of CPA practices in Asia and for developing a framework that reflects the region's institutional and cultural heterogeneity.

Descriptive characteristics of existing studies

Careful analysis of the 323 articles in our sample shows that CPA in Asia has steadily gained scholarly attention over the past 25 years (2000–2024). Although no specific starting point was imposed as an eligibility criterion, the earliest article included the

review is Peng and Luo's (2000) seminal work, which examined the relationship between managerial ties and firm performance in China—offering an early conceptual base for CPA in transitional economies of Asia.

As shown in Fig. 2, the field remained relatively nascent during its first decade. Only 21 of the 323 articles (approximately 7%) were published between 2000 and 2009. The field gained momentum between 2010 and 2019, with 142 articles (44%) published during this period, reflecting rising empirical and theoretical interest in how firms manage institutional transitions in emerging Asian markets. The most significant growth occurred from 2020 to 2024, when 160 articles (49%) were published, indicating a significant expansion and growing maturity of the field.

The findings confirm that despite it being quite a new field of study in Asian region, CPA has promising potential and has been successful in diffusion. In consideration to journals included in the sample (see Fig. 3 for Top 10 journals), the articles on CPA in Asian context were published across 119 journals, with the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* and the *Journal of Corporate Finance* identified as the most active journals publishing papers on Asian CPA.

The *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* has played a significant role in advancing CPA scholarship in Asia. Studies published in this journal have examined the impact of political ties on various firm-level outcomes and institutional mechanisms. For example, scholars have explored the impact of state ownership on internationalization (Tang et al., 2022), the role of ex-bureaucrats on Indian boards (Awasthi & George, 2021), and the ambivalent effects of political ties on innovation and firm performance (Wang et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Zhang et al., 2023a, 2023b). Although some studies highlight positive outcomes, such as enhanced IPO performance (Wu et al., 2013) and diversification (Li et al., 2012)—others reveal governance risks, including financial fraud (Kim & Lee, 2023) and resource appropriation (Dieleman

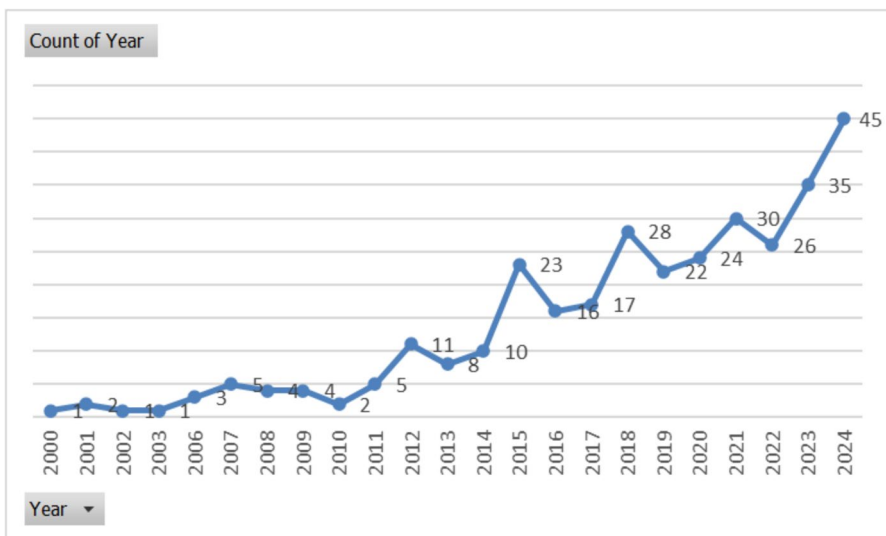


Fig. 2 Number of articles year on year (2000–2024)

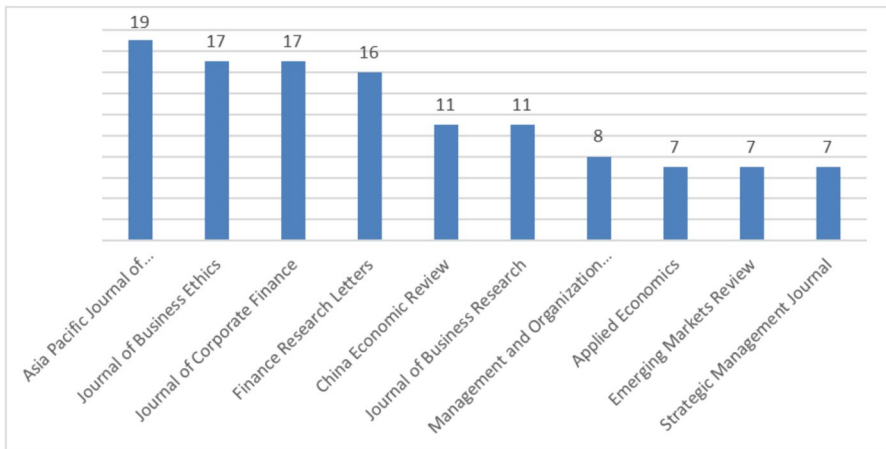


Fig. 3 Publications by journal (Top 10)

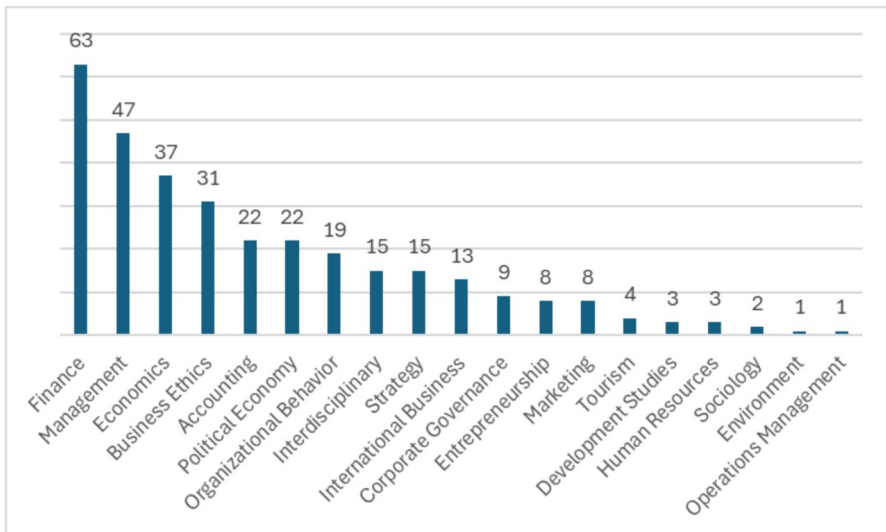


Fig. 4 Publications by Domain Area

& Widjaja, 2019). Collectively, these articles underscore the strategic context-dependent, and institutionally embedded nature of CPA in Asia.

To assess the disciplinary breadth of CPA research in Asia, we categorized the 323 articles by their core academic field. As shown in Fig. 4, the top five contributing domains are Management (18.7%), Finance (17.6%), Economics (11.2%), Accounting (9.0%), and International Business (7.9%), together accounting for 64.4% of the sample. Other contributions come from Business Ethics and Disclosure (6.1%), Strategic Management (5.8%), Marketing (5.0%), and Political Science (5.0%). This distribution reflects both a concentration in core business disciplines and the field's

interdisciplinary richness, with additional contributions from development studies, entrepreneurship, tourism, and sustainability.

Data and empirical characteristics of existing studies

The geographic distribution of the reviewed articles, shown in Table 3, shows a strong predominance of single-country studies—over 92% of articles focus on individual Asian economies. The sample spans 31 distinct geographic contexts, including 22 recognized Asian sovereign states. These range from developed economies (e.g., Japan, South Korea, Israel, Taiwan), to emerging economies (e.g., China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Turkey), and transitional or frontier economies (e.g., Bangladesh, Lebanon, Jordan, Myanmar, Mongolia, Iran). China dominates the field, accounting for 219 articles (approximately 68% of the total), driven by its distinctive political economy, market size, and availability of firm-level data through the China Stock Market and Accounting Research (CSMAR) database. Malaysia follows with 16 studies, reflecting its entrenched political-business networks (Bliss & Gul, 2012; Johnson & Mitton, 2003; Phan et al., 2020). Studies on India (13 studies), Vietnam (9), and Indonesia (6) also appear, though remain underexplored relative to their economic and political prominence. Japan, Taiwan and South Korea each feature in four studies, suggesting limited engagement with developed Asian democracies. Countries such as Bangladesh, Lebanon, and Myanmar, along with the broader Middle East, are especially underrepresented, highlighting opportunities for broader geographic coverage.

On the industry dimension, most studies (84.5%) use multi-industry samples, which enhance generalisability and allow for cross-sectoral comparison. Single-industry studies (15.5%) are less common but often offer detailed insight into sectors, such as agriculture, banking, biopharma, electronics, energy, financial services, and specially manufacturing. The manufacturing sector features prominently across numerous studies (e.g. Bai et al., 2019a; Bliss & Gul, 2012; Cull et al., 2015; Dieleman & Widjaja, 2019; Hung et al., 2017; Li et al., 2019; Papaioannou et al., 2016; Sukhtankar, 2012) indicating its salience.

With regard to methodology, the majority of reviewed studies employed quantitative approaches. Of the total sample, 81% utilized quantitative methods, including secondary data analysis (66%), panel data regression, event studies, surveys, and econometric modelling. The dominance of secondary data—particularly panel data—reflects the accessibility of datasets like CSMAR, which support firm-level political analysis (Zhou et al., 2024). In contrast, only 12% of the studies use qualitative methods, including case studies, interviews, ethnographies, and cross-national comparisons. These studies typically provided rich contextual insights into political embeddedness, informal governance structures, and cultural mechanisms—such as *Guanxi* or *Wasta*. Mixed-method studies account for just 2.7% of the total and typically integrate interviews with surveys or combine textual and secondary data sources. These offer more holistic understandings on the institutional and sociopolitical complexity of CPA in Asian settings.

Table 3 Data and empirical characteristics

Empirical Assessment	Total	Represented studies
Country		
China	219	Bai et al., 2019a, 2019b; Cheng et al., 2017; Dang et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2023; Jean et al., 2018; Jia et al., 2022; Kennedy, 2007; Luo et al., 2021; Schuler et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2023; Zhu & Chung, 2014; Cheng et al., 2024
Malaysia	16	Adhikari et al., 2006; Fung et al., 2015; Tee, 2018; Wahab et al., 2020; Wong & Hooy, 2021
India	13	Awasthi & George, 2021; Blake & Jandhyala, 2019; Shirodkar et al., 2018; Sukhtankar, 2012
Indonesia	6	Arifin et al., 2020; Dieleman & Widjaja, 2019; Nys et al., 2014; Roell et al., 2022
Vietnam	9	Linh, 2023; Malesky and Taussig, 2017; Minh et al., 2021
South Korea	4	Jeong & Siegel, 2018; Kim & Lee, 2023; Shin et al., 2018
Taiwan	3	Chen et al., 2011; Chung & Zhu, 2021; Mahmood et al., 2017
Japan	4	Naoi and Krauss, 2009; Okazaki & Sawada, 2017
Philippines	3	White et al., 2018a, 2018b; White et al., 2015
Thailand	3	Li et al., 2024a, 2024b; Chintakananda & Liu, 2024
Bangladesh	2	Muttakin et al., 2015; Siddiqui et al., 2021
Hong Kong	2	Bliss et al., 2018; Köseoglu et al., 2020
Lebanon	2	Diwan & Haidar, 2021; Stel and Naudé, 2016
Saudi Arabia, UAE	2	Alsarhan & Al-Twal, 2023, Hutchings & Weir, 2006
Myanmar	2	Win & Kofinas, 2021, Turnell, 2011
Iran	1	Faraji et al., 2020
Mongolia	1	Ulziisukh & Wei, 2022
Turkey	1	Özcan & Gündüz, 2015
Israel	1	Lehrer, 2018
Jordan	1	Alshirah et al., 2022
Mongolia	1	Ulziisukh and Wei, 2022
Multiple countries (Asian context)	27	Zhang et al., 2019; Carney et al., 2020
Methodology		
Quantitative	263	Bao et al., 2016; Chen and Touve, 2011; Dang et al., 2022; Fengyan et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2023; Haveman et al., 2017; Komera and Tiwari, 2022
Qualitative	41	Dieleman & Boddewyn, 2012; Hsu et al., 2012; Li & Zhan, 2023; Papaioannou et al., 2016
Mixed methods	9	Jean et al., 2018; Lebedev et al., 2021; Li et al., 2016; Li, 2023a, 2023b; Zhan & Tang, 2016; Zhang et al., 2020a, 2020b
Conceptual	10	
Data collection & Analysis		
Secondary	216	Cheng, 2018; Fung et al., 2015; Schuler et al., 2017; Wong & Hooy, 2021; Yin et al., 2022
Survey	47	Köseoglu et al., 2020; Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015a, 2015b; Su et al., 2021; Tian et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2013; Zhou, 2013
Interview	37	Berg & Holtbrügge, 2001; Hsu et al., 2012; Lebedev et al., 2021; Zhan & Tang, 2016
Case study	12	Dieleman & Widjaja, 2019; Girschik, 2020; Kenedy, 2007; Tian et al., 2008
Ethnography	1	Wei and Hassard, 2023

Table 3 (continued)

Empirical Assessment	Total	Represented studies
Industry		
Agriculture	1	Sukhtantar, 2012
Banking	3	Hung et al., 2017; Nys et al., 2014
Bio-fuel	1	Dieleman & Widjaja, 2019;
Biopharmaceutical	3	Papaioannou et al., 2016; Girschik, 2020; Klarin and Sharmelly, 2021
Electronics	4	Li and Zhan, 2023; Zhou et al., 2021a, 2021b
Energy	4	Li et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2020; Zhang, 2017
Manufacturing	12	Cull et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2023
Financial	3	Bliss & Gul, 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Wei & Hassard, 2023
Services	5	Bai et al., 2019a, 2019b; Hsu et al., 2012; Köseoglu et al., 2020
Telecommunications	1	Blake & Jandhyala, 2019
Automobiles	1	Jean et al., 2018
Various Industries	285	

Theoretical characteristics of existing studies

While the extant CPA literature in Asia draws heavily from Western theoretical foundations, its application reveals important nuances shaped by Asia's distinctive institutional configurations. Table 4 presents the theoretical bases employed in the reviewed studies, showing that while approximately 31% of the articles lack an explicit theoretical framework, the remainder employ at least one. A key insight from the review is that although many theories originate from Western contexts, their core assumptions, mechanisms, and outcomes are often adapted or even reversed when applied to Asia's unique political, institutional, and socio-cultural environments.

Contextual reapplication of western theories

The dominant trend in the literature is the application of well-established Western theories—such as Institutional Theory, Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), Agency Theory, the Resource-Based View (RBV), and Signalling Theory—to explain political strategies among Asian firms. However, these theories often operate under altered logics in the Asian setting.

For instance, Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which is widely used to explain CPA, traditionally assumes institutional isomorphism under mature and stable conditions. However, in Asia, where institutions are often underdeveloped, politicized, or uneven across regions, CPA is frequently used not to conform to institutions but to actively shape or bypass them. In such contexts, CPA serves as a substitute for missing or weak market institutions, enabling firms to secure legitimacy and access resources that formal mechanisms fail to provide (Carney et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2021). Thus, political embeddedness becomes a means of institutional navigation rather than institutional conformity.

Similarly, Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2015), while highlighting external power asymmetries and firms' strategies to secure resources, gains renewed relevance in Asian markets due to state dominance in resource allocation.

Table 4 Theoretical perspectives

Theory Type	Theory	#Articles	Key citations	Theoretical Adaptations
Use of Existing Theories in New Contexts	Institutional Theory	37	Tian et al., 2009; Yang & Tang, 2020; Wang & Wu, 2020; Fung et al., 2015	Institutional theory reflects substitution for weak formal institutions and legitimizing through state alignment, not conformity
	RDT	25	Haveman et al., 2017; Luo et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2018; Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015a, 2015b	Resource dependence becomes personal, relational (e.g., guanxi), shaped by informal networks and state resource control
	Resource Based View	3	Cao et al., 2017; Mutta-kin et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c	RBV interprets CPA as a firm-specific capability in opaque regulatory environments
	Agency Theory	9	Arifin et al., 2020; Cao et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2015	Agency theory blurred by elite intertwinement, party-state logic, and familial control over firm-political roles
	Multiple Theories	24	Jean et al., 2018; Jia & Zhang, 2018; Mithani, 2019; Tee et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2012a, 2012b	
Extending and Adapting Existing Theories	Institutional Theory	6	Jiang et al., 2021a, 2021b; Luo & Wang, 2021; Roell et al., 2022; Siddiqui et al., 2021	Legitimacy seen as compliance with normative, regime-driven expectations, not market-based conformity
	RDT	6	Dieleman & Boddewyn, 2012; Li, 2022; Luo et al., 2020	RDT extended to account for variation in connection type and delegation across business group structures
	Resource Based View	1	Li et al., 2012	RBV integrated with transaction costs and institutional void theory in new ventures
	Agency Theory	1	Linh, 2023	Introduces cultural-politico role expectations beyond typical principal-agent dilemmas
Developing Context-Specific Theories	Multiple Theories	13	Arnoldi and Villadsen, 2015; Li & Zhang, 2007; Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015a, 2015b	
	Legitimacy-as-process perspective	1	Girschik, 2020	Legitimacy built via consultative regulation and procedural fairness
	Political Path Dependence Model	1	Jiang et al., 2021a, 2021b	Strategic path dependency limits CPA reorientation due to prior embedded ties
	Confucian social model of role transition	1	Li & Liang, 2015	Role transition model grounded in Confucian public service norms

Table 4 (continued)

Theory Type	Theory	#Articles	Key citations	Theoretical Adaptations
	The bounded social responsibility of firms	1	Malesky and Taussig, 2017	Reframes compliance as a function of informal rulemaking and negotiated governance

Yet the nature of dependence is qualitatively different. Rather than dealing with impersonal market regulators, firms often depend on personal ties with state officials, making informal relationships, *guanxi*, or party networks essential (Dieleman & Widjaja, 2019; Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015b; Ulziisukh & Wei, 2022). As a result, RDT in Asia must account for the idiosyncratic and interpersonal dimensions of resource exchange that depart from its traditional bureaucratic assumptions.

Agency Theory (Jensen, 1983) has been applied to explain firm-politician relationships, often portraying politicians as agents acting on behalf of firm principals (Getz, 2001). In the Asian context, however, the agent-principal distinction becomes blurred due to the close entanglement of political and business elites, familial control, or the party-state's role in SOEs. Studies such as Arifin et al. (2020) and Cao et al. (2016) reveal how political turnover and elite reciprocity complicate traditional agency roles and introduce multidirectional forms of control.

The Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) and Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973) are also commonly used but undergo contextual shifts. In Asian markets, CPA itself is frequently viewed as a valuable firm resource often proprietary and non-replicable, especially when institutional environments are opaque (Li et al., 2012; Jia et al., 2022). Rather than simply signaling firm quality, political ties signal regime loyalty, alignment with state objectives, or access to regulatory arbitrage. These altered interpretations highlight the contextual plasticity of classic theories when applied in Asian institutional terrains.

Institutionally responsive extensions of existing theories

Several studies do not merely apply Western theories in Asia but adapt and extend them to better reflect the region's complex institutional logics. Dieleman and Bodewyn (2012) expand Resource Dependence Theory by demonstrating how loosely coupled business groups in Indonesia manage political ties across levels of formality and centrality. This adaptation recognizes the dominant role of business groups in many Asian economies, where political engagement is often delegated across the group's subsidiaries. Similarly, Li (2022) enriches RDT by showing that the type and heterogeneity of political resources—not just their existence—matter in shaping firms' strategic options. Ascribed political connections, for example, provide informational and reputational advantages that vary across institutional environments (Zhang et al., 2016a, 2016b).

Extensions to the RBV also emerge in the Asian literature. For example, Li and Zhang (2007) integrate RBV with transaction cost economics to explain how institutional voids impact the effectiveness of management resources in new ventures.

These adaptations demonstrate how institutional uncertainty and informality affect how firms accumulate, combine, and deploy their political capabilities.

Institutional theory, too, is extended by research on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Asia. Luo and Wang (2021) explore how transitional political pressures compel firms to engage in political CSR not merely for legitimacy but to comply with state-driven normative expectations. This shifts the understanding of legitimacy from market-based reputation building to regime-centered compliance.

Institution-driven theoretical innovation

A smaller but growing body of work builds new theoretical models to explain CPA behaviors in Asia that are not readily captured by Western theories. Li and Liang (2015) offer a Confucian model of role transition, arguing that some entrepreneurs are driven by public service motives rooted in Confucian ethics rather than solely by rent-seeking logic. This challenges the dominant rational choice assumptions of political strategy literature (e.g., Faccio et al., 2006; Lux et al., 2011). Similarly, Jiang et al., (2021a, 2021b) propose a political path dependency model, demonstrating that firms' ability to adjust their political ties is constrained by prior affiliations and relational entrenchment—contrasting with Western assumptions of managerial flexibility in political strategy (Hillman et al., 2004; Lester et al., 2008).

Malesky and Taussig (2017) develop the “Bounded Social Responsibility” framework, integrating insights from deliberative democracy and procedural justice to argue that firm compliance with regulation is more likely when rulemaking involves meaningful consultation. This reflects how state-business relations in Asia often rely on informal, negotiated orders rather than rule-bound governance. Schweizer et al. (2019) introduce the “political connection trade-off” theory, showing that politically connected managers in private Asian firms may be more adept at completing cross-border acquisitions, but at the cost of overexposure to political risk.

Synthesis of key findings: an integrative conceptual framework

Building on a comprehensive review of 323 publications on CPA in Asia from 2000 to 2024, we develop an integrative framework (see Fig. 5) that captures the evolving landscape of CPA research in the region. As illustrated in Fig. 5, the literature converges around six core thematic areas: CPA strategies, drivers (antecedents), outcomes, and moderators and mediators that explain the dynamics between them.

CPA strategies

CPA strategies in Asia can be meaningfully grouped into two overarching categories: Asia-Contextualized Global Strategies and Asia-Specific Strategies (See Table 5). This classification helps distinguish between globally recognized CPA practices that take on unique institutional and cultural forms in Asia, and those that are deeply embedded in local political logics and not commonly observed elsewhere.

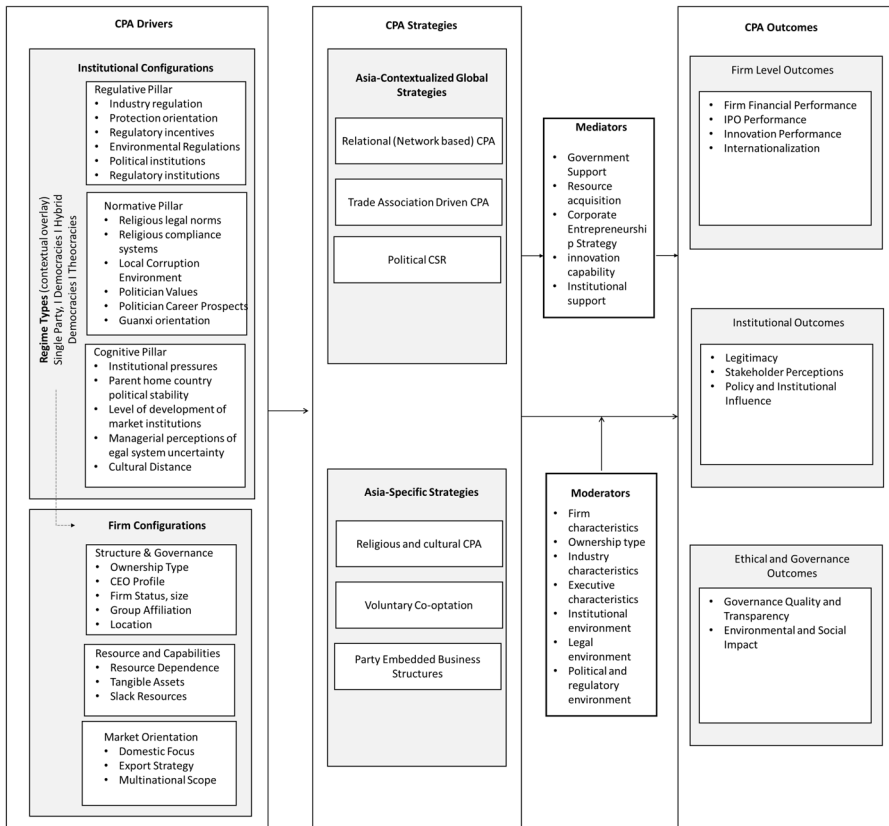


Fig. 5 An integrative framework of literature that captures the drivers, strategies, mediators, moderators, and outcomes of CPA in the Asian context

Asia-contextualized global strategies

Relational (Network driven) CPA Relational CPA has emerged as a dominant strategic approach among firms operating in Asian institutional contexts. Relational CPA broadly refers to a firm’s engagement in informal political networking, including building long-term personal and institutional relationships with politicians and regulatory bodies. A substantial body of research identifies it as the most prevalent CPA strategy, with an estimated 68% of studies highlighting its usage across various economies in the region (Gao et al., 2018; Rajwani & Liedong, 2015).

Corporate Political Connections (CPCs) are at the core of relational CPA. These connections may be formal—such as appointing politicians to corporate boards (Hadani & Schuler, 2013; Hillman, 2005)—or informal, including social interactions or familial ties with political actors (Adhikari et al., 2006; Jean et al., 2018). These ties are often described as political connections (Liu et al., 2018), or political networking capabilities (Chen et al., 2018). Research shows that CPCs are especially salient in the upper echelons of firms, with board members (Dieleman & Boddewyn, 2012), CEOs (Jia et al., 2019), and entrepreneurs (Li et al., 2022) leveraging their ties to

Table 5 CPA strategies

Classification	CPA Strategy	#Articles	Key Insights on Adaptation in Asia	Key Citations
Asia Contextualized	Relational	212	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded in guanxi, chaebols, and ethnic ties • Functions as informal institutional substitute 	Luo et al., 2021; Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015a; Dieleman & Widjaja, 2019
	Trade Association Driven CPA	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts as a semi-regulatory vehicle in China and Vietnam • Often aligned with state priorities 	Zhang et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; Tian et al., 2009
	Political CSR	51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driven by normative obligations (e.g., India's CSR law) • Used for legitimacy in authoritarian or hybrid regimes 	Fung et al., 2015; Luo & Wang, 2021
Asia-Specific	Religious and Cultural CPA	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rooted in religious identity and compliance (e.g., Sharia law) • Used for trust-building in tribal or religious societies 	Wan Ismail et al., 2015; Alsarhan & Al-Twal, 2023
	Party Embedded Business Structure	23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blurs boundaries between party and corporate governance • Prominent in single-party regimes like China and Vietnam 	Luo et al., 2021; Linh, 2023
	Voluntary Co-optation	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firms align voluntarily with state ideologies • Strategy to mitigate regulatory risk in hybrid systems 	Zhang et al., 2016a, 2016b; Jiang et al., 2021a, 2021b

gain preferential access to state resources, secure licenses, or mitigate regulatory uncertainty.

China's Guanxi system epitomizes relational CPA. Guanxi translated as "connections" or "relationships"—involves cultivating long-standing, trust-based personal ties with government officials (Dobrucali, 2020; Dunfee & Warren, 2001). Rather than formal lobbying, Chinese firms rely on these relationships to gain access to subsidies, influence policy outcomes, and shield themselves from bureaucratic overreach (Gu et al., 2008; Marquis & Raynard, 2015). Guanxi networks often extend beyond business into social and familial spheres, highlighting the embeddedness of politics in the business ecosystem.

In Japan, Amakudari (literally "descent from heaven") (Choi, 2007) refers to the practice in Japan whereby retired senior bureaucrats take executive positions in private-sector firms, especially those they once regulated. This practice creates strong informal networks between business and government, facilitating policy influence, regulatory leniency, and privileged access to state resources. It institutionalizes mutual dependence, thereby reinforcing Japan's business-government nexus.

In South Korea, Chaebols (family-owned conglomerates) maintain symbiotic relationships with the state (Campbell & Keys, 2002; Lee, 2022). These conglomerates, such as Samsung and Hyundai, have historically received favorable treatment, including tax incentives and market protections, in return for supporting national development agendas. While these relationships have evolved over time, political

ties remain critical for navigating South Korea's regulatory landscape (Lee, 2022). Malaysia's Bumiputera patronage (Gist & Abdul Wahab, 2021) offers another variant of relational CPA. Here, firms align themselves with ethnic-based affirmative action policies, fostering connections with Malay political elites to access government contracts and licenses. These networks are shaped by race-based institutional logics and have contributed to a hybrid form of political capitalism.

Trade Association Driven CPA Trade associations in Asia have emerged as pivotal actors in shaping CPA, serving as collective platforms through which firms engage with policymakers, influence regulatory frameworks, and navigate complex political landscapes. Unlike individual corporate lobbying, trade associations offer a unified voice, enabling businesses to pool resources and present consolidated positions on policy matters (Berg & Holtbrügge, 2001; Jia, 2014; Kennedy, 2007, 2009;). Trade association-driven CPA is not a new strategy, but rather a collective form of informational lobbying (Hillman & Hitt, 1999a, 1999b; Katic & Hillman, 2023). It involves the aggregation of evidence- and expertise-based influence through industry bodies, which lowers costs, reduces firm-level visibility, and enhances policy credibility.

In China, trade associations reflect a hybrid model of state-mediated pluralism. While historically embedded in corporatist state structures, associations have evolved to accommodate more pluralist lobbying behaviors. Kennedy (2009) notes that Chinese business associations often align with state priorities, acting as intermediaries between firms and regulators. Weil (2018) shows that even foreign trade associations, like the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China (EUCCC), engage in strategic pluralist lobbying—mobilizing collective business interests to influence policy from within corporatist constraints. In Japan, trade associations have played a strategic role in influencing trade policy, particularly concerning preferential trade agreements (PTAs). Solis (2013) develops a model of selective corporate lobbying, demonstrating that Japanese business associations engage in lobbying activities when there is a convergence of high preference intensity, technical expertise, and favorable institutional access. In India, Saha et al. (2023) find that corporate actors employ a *bimodal lobbying strategy*, oscillating between direct lobbying and trade association-driven collective action based on policy uncertainty and firm heterogeneity.

Political CSR Firms in Asian markets employ CSR strategies, including corporate philanthropy, to reduce political risk and generate political opportunities (Hao et al., 2020; Shirodkar et al., 2018). Firms utilise CSR activities for 'self-regulation' in host countries where governance mechanisms are ineffective or poorly enforced (Wang & Wu, 2020). In countries where government officials significantly influence resource allocation among firms, charitable donations may be mechanisms for firms to engage in reciprocal favour exchanges with officials (Hao et al., 2020). These CSR activities are commonly termed *political CSR* (PCSR) activities because their primary objective is to impact public policymaking and make rules (Scherer & Palazzo 2007, 2012). Political CSR is categorised as transactional because companies conduct CSR practices in reaction to events, such as elections or forthcoming policy modifications. Hao et al. (2020) demonstrated that charitable donations are intrinsically linked to

political objectives. They indicate the 2013 Chinese anti-corruption campaign significantly reduced charitable donations from listed companies with strong political connections, decreased government subsidies to these companies and enhanced their productivity. Siddiqui et al. (2021) demonstrated that Bangladeshi companies primarily engage in CSR activities to align with the ruling regime influenced by traditionalism. Shirodkar et al. (2018) examined firm-level factors, including resource criticality, international interdependence and managerial ties, as significant determinants of CSR as a CPA strategy in India.

Asia specific CPA strategies

Religious and cultural CPA CPA in Asia is often shaped not only by political institutions but also by deeply embedded religious and cultural norms that influence how businesses engage with the state actors (Alsarhan & Al-Twal, 2023; Chintakananda & Liu, 2024; Hutchings & Weir, 2006; Li & Liang, 2015; Masruki et al., 2020; Wan Ismail et al., 2015). In contrast to Western economies, where secular governance is more dominant, many Asian markets exhibit strong overlaps between religion, culture, and politics, leading to religious and cultural forms of CPA.

In Malaysia, Islamic principles are deeply institutionalized within the corporate regulatory environment, particularly in banking and finance (Wan Ismail et al., 2015). Shariah governance mechanisms—such as board-level Shariah supervisory councils and formal compliance systems—are used by firms not only for regulatory adherence but also as strategic tools to gain political legitimacy and strengthen ties with religious-state institutions (Masruki et al., 2020). These practices, along with CSR initiatives aligned with Islamic values (e.g., Zakat, support for Islamic education), allow firms to signal ideological alignment with state-backed Islamic parties and benefit from preferential treatment under pro-Bumiputera policies (Murphy & Smolarski, 2020). Thus, in Malaysia, religiously grounded CPA strategies enable firms to secure both market legitimacy and political advantage.

In the Middle East, religious-cultural CPA is strongly mediated through tribal and kinship-based networks such as *Wasta* (Alsarhan & Al-Twal, 2023), a system of favoritism rooted in family, tribe, or sect. *Wasta* involves leveraging kinship or clan-based ties to secure favorable treatment from bureaucratic and political gatekeepers (Hutchings & Weir, 2006). It often bypasses formal channels and has been shown to influence hiring, licensing, and regulatory outcomes across Gulf economies like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan. Unlike Western merit-based systems, *Wasta* represents a culturally legitimized form of political access embedded in tribal and family loyalty. Overall, religious and cultural CPA in Asia reflects a hybridization of institutional influence, where identity-based affiliations act as strategic tools for legitimacy, access, and long-term alignment with political power structures.

Voluntary co-optation Voluntary co-optation is an emerging CPA strategy whereby firms proactively align themselves with state ideologies, goals, and personnel expectations, not under direct coercion, but as a calculated strategic move (Apriliyanti & Kristiansen, 2019; Dieleman & Boddewyn, 2012; Dieleman & Widjaja, 2019; Li, 2023a, 2023b; Wei & Hassard, 2023; Zhan & Tang, 2016). This strategy is particu-

larly salient in authoritarian and hybrid regimes across Asia, where regulatory discretion is high, and formal lobbying channels are weak or unpredictable. In their study of China's futures market, Wei and Hassard (2023) demonstrate how firms responded to political sanctions not by resisting, but through strategic acquiescence and voluntary state co-optation. Firms restructured boards to increase political acceptability, adopted state rhetoric in public communications, and explicitly supported central policies. This voluntary alignment served to maintain legitimacy and continued access to critical market infrastructure, particularly in a politically sensitive sector such as financial derivatives. Importantly, this strategic alignment was not coerced but voluntarily adopted to mitigate political uncertainty and regulatory threat.

Such behavior is not unique to China. In Vietnam, Malesky and Taussig (2017) demonstrate that government responsiveness to firm concerns plays a crucial role in shaping regulatory compliance. Their study finds that firms engage regulators through signalling strategies aligned with state objectives, including participation in government-led business forums and symbolic adherence to socialist-market values. However, when firms perceive their input is routinely ignored, compliance weakens. In this context, voluntary co-optation emerges as a dual-purpose CPA strategy: signalling loyalty to reduce regulatory risk while simultaneously seeking to elicit state responsiveness in opaque policy environments.

Both cases highlight how voluntary co-optation operates as a risk management mechanism. In contrast to conventional CPA strategies like direct lobbying or campaign contributions common in Western democracies, voluntary co-optation emphasizes symbolic compliance, political embeddedness, and ideological alignment. These approaches are better suited to institutional environments where regulatory decisions are discretionary, and formal political access is limited or dangerous.

Party-embedded business structures Party-embedded business structures represent a distinctive form of CPA in Asia, where private firms integrate politically with ruling parties to secure legitimacy, access, and protection (Arnoldi & Muratova, 2019; Campbell and Keys, 2002; Liu et al., 2024a, 2024b). Unlike voluntary co-optation, which involves firm-initiated efforts to align with state interests (Wei and Hassard, 2023), party-embedded structures are institutionalized arrangements in which the boundaries between party and enterprise are deliberately blurred, and often mandated.

In China, the most formalized version of this strategy is visible through the establishment of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cells within private enterprises, mandated by party-state policy. Majority of the of non-state firms had established internal party organizations (Cheng, 2022). Ahlstrom et al., (2008) argue that party-business symbiosis enables firms to mitigate institutional uncertainty and ensure long-term survival, especially in industries prone to regulatory shifts. The party's deep integration into governance structures such as board appointments or investment committees gives politically aligned firms an advantage over competitors lacking party endorsement.

In Vietnam, a parallel structure exists under the Vietnam Communist Party (VCP). Party membership is often a precondition for business success, particularly in sectors aligned with national planning goals (Nguyen, 2016).

In Myanmar, while party-embedded structures are less ideological, they take the form of military-business conglomerates. Firms that collaborate with military-aligned actors such as MEHL (Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited) and MEC (Myanmar Economic Corporation) benefit from access to strategic resources and regulatory immunity (Turnell, 2011; Win & Kofinas, 2021). Here, embedding occurs through military ties rather than political party membership but functions similarly to guarantee preferential treatment.

Party-embedded structures thus represent a structural CPA strategy where political alignment is not merely symbolic or strategic (as in voluntary co-optation) but constitutive of firm identity and survival. These arrangements are underpinned by authoritarian or hybrid political logics where economic participation is conditional on political loyalty. Moreover, they are sustained not only by top-down mandates but also by firms' rational calculus to embed politically for resource acquisition, regulatory shielding, and policy access.

Drivers of Asian CPA strategies

CPA in Asia is shaped by both institutional and firm-level configurations, each influencing strategies individually and in combination (See Table 6). Institutional pillars shape the norms and expectations of engagement, while firm-level factors, such as ownership, resource dependence, and market orientation, further condition strategic choices. Together, these layers explain the diversity of CPA approaches observed across the region.

Institutional configurations as drivers of CPA

Following Scott (1995), we treat the regulative, normative, and cognitive pillars as the immediate drivers of CPA in Asia, while political regime types (single-party, democratic, hybrid, theocratic) operate as a contextual overlay that shapes how those pillars are configured and coupled, rather than acting as a separate drivers (Anckar & Fredriksson, 2019; Cheibub et al., 2010; Witt & Redding, 2013).

Regulative pillar The regulative pillar, comprising sectoral rules, policy instruments, and enforcement capacity, defines firms' formal opportunity structure for influence and the costs of non-compliance (Scott, 1995), thereby influencing firms operating in Asia toward a wide range of different CPA strategies. Where rule-making is centralized, access to permits/licenses is discretionary, and enforcement is uneven, firms face high regulatory exposure and therefore prioritize relational CPA (Mithani, 2019; Papaioannou et al., 2016; Weymouth, 2012). Targeted regulatory incentives (subsidies, tax relief, land/credit) create strong marginal returns to targeted access (often paired with association advocacy on program design), while tightening environmental rules simultaneously encourage political CSR as compliance/legitimacy signalling and, under crackdowns, spur relational tactics to navigate inspections ("environmental clientelism") (Jean et al., 2018; Li & Zhan, 2023). In hybrid systems where formal protections coexist with administrative discretion, firms frequently adopt voluntary co-optation public alignment with policy campaigns to pre-empt regulatory frictions

Table 6 CPA drivers

A. Institutional Configurations as drivers of CPA			
Configuration	Variable	CPA strategy alignment	Key citations
Institutional – Regulative	Industry regulation (licensing, standards, inspections)	Relational CPA (U) Trade-association CPA (U)	Weymouth (2012); Papaioannou et al. (2016)
Institutional – Regulative	Protection orientation (tariffs/NTBs, procurement preferences, local protectionism)	Relational CPA (U) Voluntary co-optation (public alignment) (A)	Weymouth (2012); Luo et al. (2021); Awasthi and George (2021)
Institutional – Regulative	Regulatory incentives (subsidies, tax, land/credit)	Relational CPA (U)	Jean et al. (2018); Papaioannou et al. (2016)
Institutional – Regulative	Environmental regulations (standards, monitoring, crackdowns)	Political CSR (U) Relational CPA (A)	Jean et al. (2018); Li and Zhan (2023)
Institutional – Regulative	Political institutions (centralization; party–state interfaces; policy process design)	Party-embedded structures Relational CPA (A) Trade-association CPA (U)	Papaioannou et al. (2016); Awasthi and George (2021); Mithani (2019)
Institutional – Regulative	Regulatory institutions (procedural transparency; consultation; enforcement style)	Trade-association CPA Relational CPA (U) Voluntary co-optation (A)	Mithani (2019); Papaioannou et al. (2016); Weymouth (2012)
Institutional – Normative	Religious legal norms	Religious/Cultural CPA (A) Political CSR (U)	Masruki et al. (2020); Wan Ismail et al. (2015)
Institutional – Normative	Religious compliance systems (Shariah boards, halal oversight)	Co-produced CSR with religious institutions. (A) Relational CPA (U)	Wan Ismail et al. (2015); Masruki et al. (2020)
Institutional – Normative	Local corruption environment	Relational CPA (U) Political CSR (U) Voluntary co-optation (A)	Li and Pan (2023); Zhou et al., (2021a, 2021b)
Institutional – Normative	Politician values (ideology/public-good campaigns)	Political CSR (U) Voluntary co-optation (A)	Wang (2017); Zhou et al., (2021a, 2021b)
Institutional – Normative	Politician career prospects (need measurable wins)	Political CSR (U)	Wang et al. (2019); Zhou et al., (2021a, 2021b)
Institutional – Normative	Guanxi orientation (reciprocity/long-term obligation)	Relational CPA (U) Voluntary co-optation (A)	Wang et al. (2019); Li and Pan (2023)
Institutional – Cognitive	Institutional pressures (field conformity, transparency expectations)	Relational CPA (U) Political CSR (U)	White et al., (2018a, 2018b); Aggarwal and Jha (2019)
Institutional – Cognitive	Parent home-country political stability	Political CSR (U) Relational CPA (U)	Zhang et al., (2016a, 2016b); White et al., (2018a, 2018b)

Table 6 (continued)

Institutional – Cognitive	Level of development of market institutions	Relational CPA (U) Political CSR(U)	White et al. (2015); White et al., (2018a, 2018b); Aggarwal and Jha (2019)
Institutional – Cognitive	Managerial perceptions of legal system uncertainty	Relational CPA (U) Political CSR (U)	White et al. (2015); Zhang et al., (2016a, 2016b)
Institutional – Cognitive	Cultural distance	Relational CPA (U) Political CSR (U)	Zhang et al., (2016a, 2016b); Aggarwal and Jha (2019)
B. Firm Configurations as drivers of CPA			
Configuration	Variable	CPA strategy alignment	Key citations
Firm – Ownership & Structure	Firm size	Relational CPA + Political CSR (U)	Naoi and Krauss (2009); Weymouth (2012)
Firm – Ownership & Structure	Government ownership	Party-embedded structures (A)	Awasthi and George (2021); Chung and Zhu (2021)
Firm – Ownership & Structure	Foreign ownership	Trade-association CPA (U) Political CSR Relational CPA (U)	Naoi and Krauss (2009); Weymouth (2012)
Firm – Ownership & Structure	Family-dominated ownership	Relational CPA (U) Voluntary co-optation (A)	Campbell and Keys (2002) Chung and Zhu (2021)
Firm – Ownership & Structure	Firm location (sub-national politics)	Relational CPA (U)	Zhang et al., (2020a, 2020b); Weymouth (2012)
Firm – Ownership & Structure	Organizational structure (groups/GA units/revolving door)	Relational CPA (U)	Tang et al. (2022); Chung and Zhu (2021)
Firm – Resources & Capabilities	Market capabilities (sensing, networking)	Relational CPA (U) Political CSR (U)	Jia (2016); Shirodkar and Mohr (2015a, 2015b)
Firm – Resources & Capabilities	Criticality of resources (licenses, land, credit)	Relational CPA (U) Voluntary co-optation (A)	Tian et al. (2009); Shirodkar and Mohr (2015a, 2015b)
Firm – Resources & Capabilities	Critically dependent on local resources	Relational CPA(U)	Tian et al. (2009); Jia (2016)
Firm – Resources & Capabilities	Slack resources	Political CSR (U) Trade association CPA (U)	Tian et al. (2009); Shirodkar and Mohr (2015a, 2015b)
Firm – Resources & Capabilities	Resource tangibility (immobile assets)	Relational CPA (U) Trade association CPA (U)	Shirodkar and Mohr (2015a, 2015b)
Firm – Resources & Capabilities	Product diversification	Relational CPA (U)	Tian et al. (2009)
Firm – Resources & Capabilities	Integration with other foreign subsidiaries	Trade association CPA (U) Political CSR (U)	Shirodkar et al. (2018); Shirodkar and Mohr (2015a, 2015b)
Firm – Market Orientation	Competition	Relational CPA (U) Voluntary Co-optation (A)	Tian et al. (2009); Weymouth (2012)
Firm – Market Orientation	Market power	Political CSR (U)	Weymouth (2012); Tian et al. (2009)

and secure administrative goodwill (Awasthi & George, 2021; Mithani, 2019; Weymouth, 2012). In short, the regulative architecture and its enforcement style determine whether firms can rely on collective, rules-based channels or must invest in relational/aligning strategies to manage policy risk and shape the fine print of implementation (Mithani, 2019; Papaioannou et al., 2016; Weymouth, 2012).

Normative pillar The normative pillar plays a pivotal role in shaping CPA strategies in Asia. It's not just about what should be done, but also about the shared cultural, professional, and religious expectations that define which influence channels are proper (Scott, 1995). These expectations significantly influence how CPA strategies evolve in Asia. For instance, in settings where communal stewardship, hierarchy, or faith-based obligations are prominent, firms earn legitimacy by showing alignment through visible political CSR, religious/cultural CPA, or maintaining relational ties that signal respect and reciprocity. Conversely, in environments where the local norm is patronage or gift-exchange, firms default to relational CPA and, when scrutiny rises, pair it with CSR to maintain a veneer of public-mindedness. Thus, norms not only permit CPA, but they also play a crucial role in ranking strategies by moral acceptability and reputational payoffs, thereby guiding firms in their ethical considerations (Li & Pan, 2023; Masruki et al., 2020; Wan Ismail et al., 2015; Wang, 2017; Wang et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2021a, 2021b).

Cognitive pillar The cognitive pillar is instrumental in navigating policy risk in Asian settings. It concerns the taken-for-granted scripts managers use, particularly in settings marked by legal ambiguity and uneven enforcement. In such environments, firms come to view relational CPA as a routine problem-solving device, not an exception, intensifying political tie-building where legal systems are perceived as unreliable (White et al., 2015, 2018a, 2018b). These shared “what works” beliefs tend to stick, but shocks and scrutiny can change them. As transparency and pressure grow, firms tend to gravitate towards collective voice (e.g., trade-association channels) and political CSR as safer, legitimacy-enhancing routes (Aggarwal & Jha, 2019; White et al., 2018a, 2018b). For foreign-invested firms facing institutional duality, cognitive frames are further shaped by the need to reconcile home and host expectations: some adopt local relational scripts when distance is high and law is uncertain; others lean on association-based advocacy and CSR signalling to minimise nonmarket frictions (White et al., 2018a, 2018b; Zhang et al., 2016a, 2016b).

Regime type (As a contextual overlay) We view political regime types (single-party, democratic, hybrid democratic, theocratic) as a contextual overlay that intricately shapes the regulative, normative, and cognitive pillars, rather than as a fourth driver of CPA (Anckar & Fredriksson, 2019; Cheibub et al., 2010; Scott, 1995; Witt & Redding, 2013). This perspective underscores the nuanced influence of regime type, conditioning regulative instruments and enforcement styles, normative expectations of appropriate influence, and cognitive “what-works” scripts. These pillars, in turn, guide firms towards various CPA strategies, such as relational CPA, trade-association lobbying, political CSR, religious/cultural CPA, party-embedded structures, or voluntary co-optation.

In single-party systems (e.g., China, Vietnam), party–state fusion centralises the regulative pillar and embeds political control inside organisational fields (cadre appointments, party branches in firms, state-guided associations), while normative expectations of loyalty and cognitive acceptance of coordination normalise party-embedded and relational strategies, often complemented by co-optation (Mithani, 2019; Papaioannou et al., 2016). In democracies (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan), regulative rule-of-law, procedural transparency, and pluralist norms support trade-association lobbying and political CSR oriented to stakeholder accountability (Nguyen, 2014; Witt & Redding, 2013). Hybrid democracies (India, Malaysia, Indonesia) combine formal institutions with uneven enforcement: the regulative pillar is shot through with discretion; normative practices such as ethnic mobilization/patronage persist; and cognitive “workarounds” broaden the repertoire from relational ties to politically mandated/visible CSR (Awasthi & George, 2021; Wan Ismail et al., 2015). Religious legitimacy suffuses regulative and normative orders in theocratic regimes (e.g., Iran), elevating religiously aligned CSR and cultural CPA as central influence modes (Li & Pan, 2023; Masruki et al., 2020).

While the pillars are the proximal drivers of strategy choice, some Asian contexts display direct regime-to-firm channels that operate alongside the overlay: single-party authorities may mandate party committees or cadre placements inside firms, shaping governance and normalizing party-embedded CPA without fully filtering through market-wide pillar change (Mithani, 2019; Papaioannou et al., 2016). Democratic–hybrid polities can statutorily or informally mandate CSR visibility and public alignment, prompting political CSR even before norms and cognitive scripts converge (Aggarwal & Jha, 2019; Awasthi & George, 2021). In theocratic settings, religious compliance systems (e.g., Shariah governance) may directly constrain financing and disclosure choices, channelling firms into religious/cultural CPA and faith-framed CSR to secure a license to operate (Masruki et al., 2020). We therefore model regime type as a contextual overlay that primarily acts through the pillars, while allowing for contingent, direct pathways in Asia where institutional fusion or religious governance embeds political authority within the firm itself.

Firm configurations as drivers of CPA

Firm heterogeneity matters for nonmarket behaviour. Building on resource dependence and capability views (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2015; Barney, 1991), and work on market–nonmarket complementarity (Dorobantu et al., 2017; Hillman & Hitt, 1999a, 1999b), we group firm-level drivers into (i) ownership and structure, (ii) resources and capabilities, and (iii) market orientation. These micro-foundations shape both what a firm needs from government (permits, subsidies, forbearance, information) and how it can credibly pursue it (relational access, collective voice via associations, visible alignment through political CSR, party-embedded interfaces, or voluntary co-optation). Crucially, these firm configurations are partly endogenous to the institutional context, but they remain the proximal levers that translate exposure and opportunity into a concrete CPA repertoire (Awasthi & George, 2021; Chung & Zhu, 2021; Tian et al., 2009; Weymouth, 2012).

Ownership and structure Ownership and structural features concentrate exposure to the state and the means to engage it. For instance, government ownership institutionalises proximity to policy and inspection authorities, so State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and state-proximate firms normalise party-embedded structures (e.g., party committees) and use associations to transmit/shape policy, often complemented by visible political CSR (Awasthi & George, 2021; Tihanyi et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2022). Family-dominated ownership structure and concentrated control ease relational CPA via kinship/alum networks and long-horizon reciprocity; in hybrids, these firms also practice voluntary co-optation to secure forbearance (Campbell and Keys, 2002; Chung & Zhu, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020a, 2020b). Foreign ownership raises liability-of-foreignness and disclosure scrutiny, pushing firms toward trade-association channels and political CSR as legible signals, with selective relational ties where discretion is high (Naoui & Krauss, 2009; Weymouth, 2012). Firm size increases the number of regulatory touchpoints and the capacity to professionalise government affairs, so large firms adopt multi-channel CPA (Naoui & Krauss, 2009; Weymouth, 2012). Location near sub-national centres and implementing bureaus raises the return to local relational networks; business-group/association organizational structures help buffer and orchestrate ties (Dieleman & Boddewyn, 2012; Li et al., 2008; Tang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020a, 2020b).

What a firm needs from government, and how credibly it can ask, depends largely on its resource profile and nonmarket capabilities. A high criticality of (local) resources (e.g., land, licenses, credit) and high resource tangibility (e.g., immobile plants, land) increases exposure to administrative discretion. This exposure pushes firms toward targeted relational CPA and voluntary co-optation with allocating agencies. Furthermore, diversified resource exposure motivates firms to build association portfolios to shape cross-sector standards (Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015b; Tian et al., 2009). Slack resources underwrite lobbying fixed costs and visible political CSR, while market/political capabilities (sensing, networking) enable finer matching of channels to regulators (Jia, 2016; Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015a; Tian et al., 2009). Integration with other foreign subsidiaries lets MNEs codify and transfer nonmarket routines, standardizing association lobbying and CSR signalling across markets, with local relational access used where discretion remains pivotal (Shirodkar & Mohr, 2015a; Shirodkar et al., 2018). Put differently, higher dependence and tangibility favour relational/aligning strategies; slack and capabilities expand collective and signalling options.

Competitive positioning sets the stakes for nonmarket action. Where competition is intense, firms escalate CPA intensity and mix—combining relational access (to influence timing, permits, inspections) with trade-association advocacy (to shape standards/procurement rules) and, in hybrids, co-optation to reduce enforcement risk (Tian et al., 2009; Weymouth, 2012). Firms with greater market power tend to institutionalize association voice (to entrench standards and raise rivals' costs) and deploy political CSR to sustain legitimacy commensurate with prominence, while maintaining selective relational ties to preserve implementation flexibility (Tian et al., 2009; Weymouth, 2012). In short, competitive pressure drives firms toward instrumental, multi-channel CPA, whereas durable market power encourages rule-shaping through associations and strategic legitimacy signalling.

Outcomes of Asian CPA strategies

CPA is often associated with significant firm-level benefits—including improved financial returns, innovation capabilities, IPO performance, and enhanced legitimacy—it may also entail governance risks, social and environmental trade-offs, and public accountability concerns. To capture this duality, the outcomes of CPA can be classified into three major categories: Firm-Level Outcomes, Institutional and Legitimacy Outcomes, and Ethical and Governance Outcomes (Table 7).

Firm level outcomes

Firm Financial Performance: Firm financial performance remains the most widely examined CPA outcome, accounting for nearly half of all performance-focused studies. Numerous scholars have observed a positive relationship between CPA and financial metrics such as ROA, firm value, stock returns, earnings quality, and cost of capital (Hung et al., 2017; Sharma et al., 2020; Tee et al., 2021; Wahab et al., 2020). Trade associations, particularly in export-intensive economies like Vietnam and Indonesia, facilitate policy influence, leading to cost savings and profitability (Nguyen, 2014). In religious contexts like Malaysia, firms aligned with Shariah norms often gain investor trust and superior reporting outcomes (Masruki et al., 2020). However, the association is not uniformly positive. Over-politicization of firm strategy may foster inefficiency, reduce strategic autonomy, and heighten exposure to political turnover. Politically connected firms may prioritize state directives over market rationality, resulting in suboptimal financial outcomes (Bai et al., 2019a; Kim & Lee, 2023).

IPO Performance: CPA are often seen as credibility signals in Asian capital markets, enhancing IPO valuation, pricing, and allocation (Li, 2023a, 2023b; Wang et al., 2020). Trade associations, by lobbying for sector-specific incentives, promote industry-wide IPO success (Solís, 2013). In Islamic economies, compliance with religious norms further improves IPO prospects (Wan Ismail et al., 2015). Nonetheless, excessive political embeddedness may deter foreign investors, especially when transparency or governance standards are compromised (Wang et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).

Innovation Performance: CPA's impact on innovation is mixed. In some cases, political connections secure funding and regulatory flexibility that promote green or strategic innovation (Jiang et al., 2023). In other cases, especially among SOEs, bureaucratic inertia and rent-seeking dilute innovation incentives (Wang et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2017). The net effect appears contingent on local institutional development and the nature of political engagement.

Institutional outcomes

Legitimacy and Stakeholder Perceptions: CPA helps firms build institutional legitimacy, particularly in contexts where alignment with political or cultural norms signals social acceptability. Entrepreneurs often gain status and legitimacy through political networks (Klarin & Sharmelly, 2021), while joint ventures combine CPA with CSR to build social capital (Bai et al., 2019b). Faith-based norms or party affiliations also

Table 7 CPA outcomes

Outcome Type	Sub-Type	Outcome Direction	Number of Articles	Citations
Firm Level Outcomes	Firm Financial Performance	Positive	72	Adhikari et al., 2006; Fengyan et al., 2022; Haveman et al., 2017
		Negative	26	Gist and Abdul Wahab, 2021; Ding et al., 2018; Komera & Tiwari, 2022
		Mixed	8	Hu et al., 2020
	IPO Performance	Positive	5	Francis et al., 2009; Li & Zhou, 2015; Liu et al., 2013
		Negative	1	Fan et al., 2007
		Mixed	1	Wang & Wu, 2020
	Innovation Performance	Positive	16	Ali et al., 2023; Gao, et al., 2018; Jiang et al., 2023
		Negative	8	Desheng et al., 2021; Shou et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2018c
		Mixed	1	Cheng et al., 2019
	Internationalization and Diversification	Positive	9	Chen et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020a, 2020b; Jia et al., 2022; Lee & Hooy, 2018; Mahmood et al., 2017
		Negative	7	Du et al., 2019; Hung et al., 2012; Leuz & Oberholzer-Gee, 2006; Dai & Wang, 2023
		Mixed	5	Huang et al., 2023; Lebedev et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2020; Su et al., 2020; Chung and Zhu, 2021
Institutional Outcomes	Legitimacy and Stakeholder Perceptions	Positive	8	Bai et al., 2019a, 2019b; Girschik, 2020; Klarin & Sharmelly, 2021
		Positive	13	Berg and Holtbrügge, 2001; Zhan and Tang, 2016; Chen et al., 2020; Jia et al., 2019
	Regulatory Control	Negative	2	Lin et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019
		Positive	8	Chen et al., 2020; Jia et al., 2019
Ethical and Governance Outcomes	Governance Quality and Transparency	Negative	2	Lin et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019
		Positive	4	Chen et al., 2023; Phan et al., 2020
		Negative	8	Alshirah et al., 2022; Habib et al., 2017
	Environmental and Social Impact	Mixed	1	Liu et al., 2017
		Positive	17	Cheng et al., 2017; Dang et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022
		Negative	8	Florackis et al., 2023; Deng et al., 2020

enhance local legitimacy (Alsarhan & Al-Twal, 2023). However, these same political affiliations may compromise legitimacy in global markets, especially if linked to authoritarian regimes or opaque governance structures (Li, 2023a, 2023b).

Policy and Institutional Influence: CPA strategies often influence regulatory policy. Firms and trade associations shape tax codes, labor regulations, and environmental policies to reflect private interests (Chen et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2015). While this may support business development, it can also foster institutional or regulatory capture

and unequal policy access. In countries like Vietnam, political co-optation improves compliance but risks marginalizing unconnected firms (Malesky & Taussig, 2017).

Ethical and governance outcomes

Governance Quality and Transparency: CPA can erode governance standards. In Indonesia, politically connected firms avoid high-quality auditors to obscure related-party transactions (Habib et al., 2017). In Malaysia, auditors charge higher fees to account for political risk (Wahab et al., 2011). These findings underscore the potential for CPA to create new governance vulnerabilities.

Environmental and Social Impact: Politically influential firms often underperform on environmental metrics, especially in weak regulatory environments (Deng et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2023). CPA may also enable regulatory evasion and greenwashing (Lyon and Montgomery 2015). In some sectors, religious governance norms foster authentic environmental engagement (Masruki et al., 2020), but party-controlled firms are more prone to environmental underperformance (Deng et al., 2020).

Moderators

An overview of the key moderators (See Table 8) identified across the CPA literature in Asia is presented below.

Firm characteristics Firm characteristics influence whether CPA converts into performance or becomes a liability. Firms embedded in dense social and knowledge networks can turn political relationships into real gains through faster adoption and more innovation (e.g., green innovation via boundary-spanning ties). At the same time, weak internal absorptive capacity diminishes these potential returns (Ali et al., 2023). Governance and disclosure practices also play a critical role. When family ownership and political ties coincide with poor risk reporting, investors become wary, leading to stock price discounts and increased external monitoring. This dynamic reduces the financial benefits of relational CPA (cf. Alshirah et al., 2022).

Ownership type (SOEs vs. non-SOEs) Ownership structure shapes how firms use CPA and who benefits. Non-SOEs with greater managerial autonomy deploy relational CPA to ease financing frictions, secure regulatory timing advantages, and enhance export/innovation outcomes (Li & Zhang, 2007; Wu et al., 2012a, 2012b; Yang et al., 2018). SOEs channel CPA toward policy transmission and socio-political mandates (employment stabilisation, strategic sectors). Party-embedded interfaces often substitute for market lobbying and can dilute private returns unless paired with market logics (Komera & Tiwari, 2022; Li et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). In addition, policy-induced innovation effects depend on ownership and internal capabilities (Chen et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

Industry characteristics Industry structure and regulation decide which CPA channel works best. In regulation driven or highly competitive sectors, trade-association driven CPA often beats one-to-one access because standards, certifications, and pro-

Table 8 CPA moderators

Moderator	# Articles	Key Insights	Citations
Firm Characteristics	19	Firm characteristics shape performance outcomes of CPA, especially relational and party-embedded forms	Ali et al., 2023; Alshirah et al., 2022; Bai et al., 2019a, 2019b
Ownership Type (SOEs vs Non-SOEs)	7	Non-SOEs benefit more from political ties due to greater autonomy; SOEs' CPA often aligns with socio-political mandates	Chen et al., 2020; Li & Zhang, 2007; Wu et al., 2012a, 2012b; Yang et al., 2018; Komera & Tiwari, 2022; Li et al., 2019; Schweizer et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Zhang et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c
Industry Characteristics	9	Trade association-driven CPA is more effective in competitive or regulated sectors; coordination enhances CPA outcomes	Haveman et al., 2017; Komera & Tiwari, 2022; Qin & Zhang, 2019
Executive Characteristics	12	Politically motivated CEOs drive performance; pro-social leaders redirect CPA toward legitimacy and CSR	Bliss & Gul, 2012; Peng et al., 2017; Wahab et al., 2011
Institutional Environment	22	Institutional development influences the effectiveness and necessity of CPA; better institutions reduce reliance on political ties	Arnoldi & Muratova, 2019; Du & Luo, 2016; Liu et al., 2018
Legal Environment	6	Strong legal environments constrain the use of CPA for compliance avoidance, reducing its impact on environmental performance	Jiang et al., 2021a, 2021b; Wang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c
Political and Regulatory Environment	30	Unstable environments encourage transactional CPA but increase volatility; stable settings support long-term embedded strategies	Kim & Lee, 2023; Sukhtankar, 2012; Wong and Hooy, 2021; Liu et al., 2012; Okazaki & Sawada, 2017; Schweizer et al., 2019
Socio-economic and Technological Conditions	3	Weak regions co-opt politically connected firms for public goals, reducing innovation and strategic value creation	Jia et al., 2022; Sheng et al., 2011; Song et al., 2023

curement rules are set at the sector level. Firm-level ties then matter mainly at the implementation stage, not in policy formulation. (Qin & Zhang, 2019). In corporatist or politically embedded settings, associations also lower individual visibility risk and make outcomes more predictable. Where the state organizes interest intermediation, party-proximate channels can substitute for or complement associations. In short, industry conditions tilt the channel mix and shape the size and timing of CPA outcomes (Komera & Tiwari, 2022).

Executive characteristics Top management/board traits set the organisation's risk appetite and framing for political engagement. Politically connected boards and executives lower search and coordination costs for relational CPA, easing credit and regulatory access. Therefore, it leads to lower debt costs and improved financing where such ties are norm-consistent (Bliss & Gul, 2012; Peng et al., 2017). However, those ties elevate monitoring and pricing by auditors and markets, encouraging a shift toward association driven CPA and political CSR to preserve legitimacy

in stricter environments (Wahab et al., 2011). Put differently, politically motivated CEOs amplify relational tactics and near-term performance sensitivity, whereas pro-social or legitimacy-oriented leaders redirect effort toward CSR-framed engagement and coalition-based lobbying, trading immediate rents for robustness under regulatory gaze (Bliss & Gul, 2012; Peng et al., 2017; Wahab et al., 2011).

Institutional environment Stronger institutions let rules replace relationships. In well-governed markets, trade-association lobbying and formal consultations pay off more, while one-to-one political ties pay less or even backfire if they break existing norms (Arnoldi & Muratova, 2019). Across countries, firms from strong home institutions can export association/CSR playbooks and lean less on private ties; firms from weaker institutions stick to relational tactics, especially in discretionary host regimes (Du & Luo, 2016). As a country's institutions improve, the need for ties falls and any benefit from them depends on complementary capabilities (e.g., innovation, market learning), pushing firms to rebalance toward association/CSR channels (Liu et al., 2018).

Legal environment When laws are strong and enforcement is credible, firms have less room to use political ties to dodge rules. They shift from off-book relationships to visible, collective channels like trade-association driven CPA and political CSR that helps deliver public goals (Jiang et al., 2021a, 2021b). In these settings, political connections are filtered through governance to support green innovation rather than evasion (Wang et al., 2021). For example, where legal systems are weaker, connections can hurt environmental performance or enable avoidance; once enforcement tightens, firms quickly reframe CPA toward compliance-oriented CSR and collective lobbying (Jiang et al., 2021a, 2021b; Wang et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

Political and regulatory environment Macro-political risk and administrative volatility shape both the timing and variance of returns to CPA. In unstable settings (leadership turnover, policy reversals), firms gravitate to relational CPA like access to procurement, licensing, targeted forbearance yielding short-term gains but elevating cash-flow volatility and crash risk if alliances unravel (Kim & Lee, 2023; Schweizer et al., 2019; Wong & Hooy, 2021). When patronage dominates (e.g., sectoral rents such as sugar quotas), firms rely more on bilateral, one-to-one deals with officials. When reform or anti-corruption waves arrive, the payoff reverses: those private ties become liabilities under scrutiny, while firms that pivot to collective, more transparent channels like trade-association coalitions and political CSR are rewarded (Liu et al., 2012; Okazaki & Sawada, 2017; Sukhtankar, 2012). Over longer horizons, stable regulatory regimes favor embedded/party-proximate arrangements that trade flexibility for predictability, whereas unstable regimes reward agility but penalize visibility (Kim & Lee, 2023; Schweizer et al., 2019; Wong & Hooy, 2021).

Socio-economic and technological conditions In less-developed regions, governments often enlist politically connected firms to deliver jobs and local investment. That pushes CPA away from chasing private rents and toward quasi-public service,

Table 9 CPA mediator

Mediator	# Articles	Key Insights	Citations
Government Support	5	Government support acts as a conduit for CPA to enhance firm performance by providing financial subsidies, technical aid, and preferential policies; it strengthens competitive advantage and deters unethical behaviour by rivals	Bai et al., 2023; Malesky & Taussig, 2017; Zhang, 2017
Resource Acquisition	4	CPA facilitates access to capital, land, and regulatory benefits; however, it may result in inefficiencies and environmental harm, reflecting a dual effect	Gao et al., 2018; Haveman et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2013
Corporate Entrepreneurship Strategy	2	Political networking reduces institutional uncertainty and encourages strategic risk-taking, thereby promoting entrepreneurial behavior and innovation	Lin et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c
Innovation Capability	2	While political ties can reduce uncertainty, they may also diminish managerial incentives for innovation by creating security through non-market strategies	Wang et al., 2021
Institutional Support	3	Political ties provide both tangible (e.g., funding) and intangible (e.g., regulatory support) institutional resources, aiding long-term innovation and reducing risk from institutional voids	Gao et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019

which can dampen innovation intensity (Jia et al., 2022). When firms lean on political ties to handle uncertainty, they may get implementation flexibility but fall behind on capability building. By contrast, firms that pair CPA with industry standards work and sustainability initiatives tend to protect radical innovation under environmental and technological turbulence (Sheng et al., 2011; Song et al., 2023).

Mediators

While CPA research in Asia often focuses on direct links between political strategies and firm-level outcomes, mediating mechanisms remain underexplored. Of the reviewed literature, only 23 studies explicitly incorporate mediators (See Table 9), despite their critical role in explaining how CPA translates into outcomes like performance, legitimacy, innovation, or resource acquisition.

Government support Firms that engage in CPA, such as relational ties, trade-association lobbying, and public alignment with policy goals, tend to receive more government support (e.g., subsidies, program access, administrative responsiveness, technical assistance). This support is the mechanism linking CPA to improved performance, investment, and compliance capacity (Bai et al., 2023; Malesky & Taussig, 2017; Zhang, 2017). In this logic, ties are inputs, support is the throughput, and performance/innovation/legitimacy are outputs. For example, where agencies reward politically aligned firms with expedited approvals or programmatic aid, relational/association CPA improves productivity and deters rivals' opportunism via more predictable enforcement because support flows through administrative channels opened by CPA (Malesky & Taussig, 2017; Zhang, 2017). Thus, when CPA causes govern-

ment support, it properly functions as a mediator (Bai et al., 2023). We treat government support as a mediator, not a moderator, because CPA causes subsequent subsidies, expedited approvals, technical assistance, and responsive enforcement, translating into performance, innovation, and compliance gains (Bai et al., 2023; Malesky & Taussig, 2017).

Resource acquisition CPA helps firms by expanding access to critical resources, credit, land, licenses, information which then enable growth, market entry, and capability development. Resource inflows are therefore a proximal conduit from political engagement to firm outcomes (Gao et al., 2018; Haveman et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2013). Relational channels and association positions help firms secure scarce inputs and regulatory benefits. These resource gains translate into performance, while also carrying dual effects, e.g., potential inefficiency or environmental externalities if access weakens competitive pressure (Haveman et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2013). In this framing, CPA is not valuable per se; its resource-acquisition yield is the mediating pathway that makes CPA productive (Gao et al., 2018).

Corporate entrepreneurship strategy Where institutions are volatile, CPA reduces perceived uncertainty and buffers downside risk, thereby encouraging entrepreneurial action (Lin et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Relational ties and association standing improve information, access, and procedural protection, shifting managers' risk–return calculus toward bolder initiatives (Lin et al., 2016). In SOEs, the same logic applies: political linkages drive green innovation and capability renewal, with entrepreneurship acting as a mediating engine rather than a mere boundary condition (Zhang et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

Innovation capability Political ties can ease financing and policy frictions, enabling firms to build innovation capabilities, which enhance efficiency and performance. Moreover, embedded ties may reduce competitive pressure, providing a more conducive environment for innovation. This double-edged mediating path, while challenging, also presents opportunities for firms to leverage their political ties for innovation and growth (Wang et al., 2021). In other words, CPA shapes the internal capability base, and that capability (or its erosion) explains the realised outcome (Wang et al., 2021).

Institutional support Institutional support refers to the backing and resources that firms receive from established institutions, including inclusion in development plans, regulatory endorsements, standard-setting roles, and association-brokered platforms. When firms deploy CPA, they can transform it into institutional support, which then reduces policy risk, anchors long-horizon investments, and accelerates diffusion (Gao et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019). Here, the mechanism is field-level scaffolding, where political/association engagement builds institutional capital, which attracts complementary resources and stabilises expectations, thereby converting CPA into durable advantages (Gao et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2014).

Discussion and future research directions

This systematic review synthesizes CPA scholarship in Asia, revealing how region-specific institutional contexts generate strategic variants that diverge from conventional Western frameworks. By categorizing CPA into six strategy types—relational, trade association-driven, political CSR, religious/cultural CPA, voluntary co-optation, and party-embedded business structures the review highlights how firms navigate regulative opacity, normative embeddedness, and cognitive legitimacy demands. Rather than solely influencing policy, firms in Asia use CPA to survive, ideologically align, and embed themselves within state structures. These findings position CPA in Asia as a multifaceted and institutionalized phenomenon, requiring a context-sensitive lens Tables 8 and 9.

The first key contribution lies in identifying CPA strategies unique to Asian political economies. Religious and cultural CPA (e.g., in Malaysia and the Middle East), voluntary co-optation (e.g., China, Vietnam), and party-embedded business structures (e.g., China, Myanmar) reflect how firms strategically align with ideological, religious, or authoritarian institutions to gain legitimacy and reduce regulatory risk. These forms of CPA are largely absent in Western contexts and underscore the adaptive, survival-oriented logic of political behavior in Asia's politicized markets.

Second, the review shows how globally recognized CPA strategies are transformed in Asia. Relational CPA, for instance, assumes deeply embedded and culturally specific forms—such as Guanxi (China), Amakudari (Japan), Chaebol-state ties (Korea), and Bumiputera patronage (Malaysia) driven by normative and cognitive institutional logics. Trade associations, rather than acting as neutral aggregators, often function as state-aligned intermediaries. These variations suggest that the logic, intensity, and institutional embeddedness of CPA differ substantially across regions and require more differentiated theorization.

The third contribution integrates Scott's (1995) institutional pillars with contextual political regime types—single-party, democratic, hybrid democratic, and theocratic—to explain how institutional and political configurations jointly shape CPA strategies. For instance, centralized regulative systems in single-party regimes encourage party-embedded structures, while regulatory ambiguity in hybrid democracies fuels relational CPA. The normative pillar drives political CSR and religious CPA in ideologically governed contexts, while cognitive pillars legitimize practices like Guanxi or Wasta as taken-for-granted political strategies. This dual-lens framework advances a more grounded, institutionally attuned understanding of CPA in Asia.

Fourth, our review classifies CPA outcomes into three categories i.e. firm-level, legitimacy/institutional, and ethical/governance outcomes. CPA may enhance profitability, innovation, and capital access, but it can also lead to rent-seeking, governance failures, and reduced accountability. These trade-offs are mediated by institutional logics and political embeddedness, illustrating that CPA in Asia is not uniformly beneficial or harmful, but deeply context dependent.

Finally, the review critiques how Western theoretical frameworks such as Institutional Theory, RDT, Agency Theory, RBV, and Signalling Theory are applied and

reinterpreted in Asian CPA research. Rather than institutional conformity, CPA in Asia often reflects strategic navigation or circumvention of politicized or underdeveloped institutions.

Future research directions

Future research should investigate underexplored CPA strategies unique to Asian institutional configurations, such as religious or cultural CPA, and party-embedded business structures. Comparative studies can assess how these strategies differ in implementation and efficacy across subregions (e.g., East vs. South Asia). Furthermore, attention should be paid to hybrid CPA strategies that blend relational and political CSR efforts examining how firms simultaneously navigate formal political structures and informal social hierarchies.

While many studies have examined firm-level factors behind CPA in Asia, the role of institutional drivers especially how different types of institutions interact remains underexplored. Future research should look more closely at how regulative, normative, and cognitive institutions work together to shape CPA strategies. CPA researchers could compare how different forms of state capitalism affect the use of personal political ties (relational CPA) versus association-based approaches. For example, do stronger state-led systems rely more on informal connections? In addition, scholars might explore how religious values and cultural norms especially in countries with large Muslim or Buddhist populations—influence firms' political behavior.

Future research should aim to deepen our understanding of the varied consequences of CPA in Asia by examining the full spectrum of outcomes such as firm-level, institutional and legitimacy-related, and ethical and governance-related. While much of the existing literature emphasizes financial performance, future studies could focus more on non-financial outcomes such as organizational legitimacy, access to international markets, or alignment with national development priorities. Further, comparative analysis is needed to explore how the effects of CPA differ across firm types for instance, between multinational and local firms, or state-owned and privately held firms. Importantly, CPA does not always produce beneficial results; it can also lead to negative governance outcomes, including reputational damage, weakened transparency, and increased regulatory risk. Future studies could investigate these adverse effects more systematically, especially in politically volatile or weak institutional environments.

Expanding the understanding of what conditions influence the effectiveness of CPA in Asia requires models that incorporate contextually grounded moderators and mediators. One promising avenue is to examine how ownership structures such as family-controlled firms, state-owned enterprises, and business group affiliations moderate the choice and impact of strategies like relational CPA, party-embedded networks, and trade association lobbying. The strength of religious, tribal, or cultural affiliations (e.g., *Wasta* in the Middle East or *Guanxi* in China) could also serve as key moderators, shaping how firms deploy culturally embedded CPA and how such strategies affect legitimacy or environmental performance. CPA's influence on Asian firms' performance has not been adequately explored regarding their mediating

mechanisms. Only 23 of 240 studies reported mediating mechanisms. Researchers should consider exploring more mediating mechanisms between CPA and firm outcomes to reveal the underlying processes explaining how CPA translates into tangible benefits or challenges for firms. No studies in our sample investigated the mediating mechanisms between CPA antecedents and strategies, which remains a major limitation. Understanding these mediating mechanisms would provide valuable insights into how internal and external drivers of CPA form CPA strategies. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to fully understand the pathways through which antecedents influence CPA.

Future CPA research in Asia must move beyond applying Western theories toward building frameworks grounded in indigenous institutional realities. While theories like Institutional Theory and RDT have offered useful starting points, they often fail to account for the informal, personalized, and ideologically embedded nature of CPA in many Asian contexts (Li et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2019). Scholars should recontextualize these theories by examining how their assumptions evolve in collectivist, authoritarian, or religiously governed regimes. Mid-range theories incorporating constructs such as political embeddedness, developmental statism, and cultural reciprocity (Luo et al., 2020; Wei & Hassard, 2023) can provide better explanatory fit. There is also strong potential for interdisciplinary integration to deepen CPA scholarship in Asia. In other words, while corporate political activity is often viewed through a firm-centric lens, political science and political economy perspectives could potentially offer critical insights into why political actors engage with firms. For example, Jia et al. (2019) argue that political connections may create reciprocal burdens on firms when political actors seek personal or institutional benefits. Yet existing CPA frameworks seldom consider the incentives, constraints, and career trade-offs political elites face. Integrating principal–agent theory can illuminate agency dilemmas between political actors and their constituents or superiors, which in turn shape their responsiveness to corporate engagement (Gailmard, 2009).

Conclusion

Our research responds to longstanding calls for a structured and systematic synthesis of CPA in Asia an economically vital yet under-researched region (Katic & Hillman, 2023). By employing a descriptive review methodology, we have mapped the landscape of CPA developments across the continent and identified major thematic patterns. Through a critical and integrative analysis, we developed a comprehensive conceptual framework that not only organizes existing knowledge but also sets the stage for a robust future research agenda. This framework enables scholars to navigate the fragmented literature and identify conceptually meaningful research gaps and opportunities.

Asia's political and economic diversity spanning democracies and autocracies, and economies at varying stages of development presents a distinctive and rich tapestry for studying CPA. This heterogeneity offers exciting intellectual opportunities to examine how institutional configurations, governance systems, and development trajectories shape firms' political strategies. While we acknowledge Hambrick's

(2007) caution against theory proliferation, our review reveals an encouraging trend: foundational theories are being actively adapted and recontextualized to explain the unique features of Asian CPA. Moreover, we observe the emergence of novel theoretical frameworks tailored to phenomena that conventional Western theories cannot fully capture. We therefore urge scholars to embrace Asia not just as an empirical context, but as a catalyst for theory testing, refinement, and innovation.

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Data availability Data is available on reasonable request.

Declarations

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Conflict of interest We declare that we have no conflict of interest to report.

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