

Publication date: Available online 2 June 2014

Source:Journal of World Business

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To manage stakeholder CSR pressures, firms from emerging economies can employ two legitimation strategies simultaneously – compliance and strategic adaptation. Compliance is useful in responding to explicitly expressed demands for CSR, while strategic adaptation is useful when a specific form of CSR is seen as most instrumental in drawing positive responses from a particular stakeholder group. We analyze the adoption of two extreme CSR forms – philanthropy and sustainability. In a sample of 288 firms from China, we demonstrate that firms adopt both CSR forms, but emphasize philanthropy when seeking legitimacy with outsider stakeholders and sustainability with insider stakeholders.

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