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With the advent of globalization, the track record of multinational companies (MNCs) has been vague in relation to their corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the emerging host markets. What seems lacking is a better understanding of what exactly is required of today's MNCs to simultaneously generate profits for shareholders, while satisfying the legitimate demands from multiple stakeholders in the countries where they operate. This paper explores whether and how MNC subsidiaries practice strategic CSR in the emerging market of China. Drawing on various streams of CSR literature, we develop a conceptual framework and then apply it to analyze the CSR strategies of eleven MNCs known to be active in relation to their CSR involvement in China. Our multiple case studies, involving interviews with MNC managers and archival research, reveal distinctive features of CSR orientation and the strategies of MNCs that rely on developing relationships with non-traditional stakeholders, co-inventing social solutions, and building local capacity and infrastructure in emerging markets, being sensitized to a mixture of motivations and reconciling social and economic value creation. The findings are analyzed and implications are drawn regarding how MNC subsidiaries position themselves in the context of CSR in emerging markets.

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