



International human resource management and global talent management in Asia: a regional strategic perspective and future directions

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Abstract

Asia has been and continues to be a critical area for international business, and for multinational enterprises (MNEs), executing region-wide strategies in Asia hinges on human capital. However, such human capital is embedded in highly diverse contexts across Asia's subregions, complicating cross-national cooperation and necessitating coordination at the regional level. In this perspective paper, we explore how MNEs can enhance the management of people and talent across Asia. Integrating regional strategies, regiocentric integration mechanisms, and the different strategic orientations of international human resource management (IHRM) and global talent management (GTM), we propose a framework in which optimal IHRM–GTM architectures are developed through the processes of translation, coordination, and calibration. This framework describes how MNEs can sustain locally legitimate HRM practices while simultaneously constructing regionally integrated GTM. We also outline future research directions to deepen our understanding of how MNEs can build resilient, high-performing workforces across one of the world's most dynamic regions.

Keywords International human resource management · Global talent management · Asia · IHRM · GTM architecture · Regional integration mechanisms

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Introduction

Asia has emerged as the world's most dynamic and strategically consequential region for multinational enterprises (MNEs) (Liu, 2024; Pananond & Giroud, 2016). Economic gravity continues to shift eastward, with Asia projected to account for more than half of global GDP growth by 2030 (IMF, 2024). However, from the perspective of international human resource management (IHRM) and global talent management (GTM), Asia should not be treated as a single, homogeneous environment but rather as a region characterized by deep and persistent internal diversity. Asia consists of multiple subregions such as East, Southeast, South, West, and Central Asia, each of which is shaped by distinct institutional systems, cultural legacies, industrial strengths, and human capital profiles (Budhwar et al., 2016; Cooke et al., 2020; Malik et al., 2022). For MNEs, this diversity represents both a source of strategic opportunities and a major coordination challenge.

Existing research in IHRM and GTM has made significant progress in explaining how MNEs balance global integration and local responsiveness through people and talent (e.g., Björkman et al., 2007; Collings et al., 2019; Kasahara et al., 2025; Pudelko & Harzing, 2007). However, most of this scholarship has been anchored in a headquarters (HQ)–subsidiary dyad, emphasizing either centralized control or host-country adaptation (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Farndale & Paauwe 2017). As a result, the regional level of analysis—the “missing middle” between global and national governance (Conroy et al., 2023)—has received far less systematic theoretical attention. When considering the regional level, the framework of global integration and local responsiveness inherently contains a substructure of regional integration and local responsiveness as well as that of global integration and regional responsiveness (e.g., Rugman & Verbeke, 2008a; Verbeke & Asmussen, 2016). In addition, much of this work implicitly treats IHRM and GTM as parallel systems operating under a shared integration–localization logic, without fully theorizing their different strategic orientations (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Farndale et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2016; Wright & McMahan, 2011).

In a semi-globalized world, regionalization represents the most practical level of strategic coordination for MNEs (Ghemawat, 2005). Building on this view, we extend prior research that has conceptualized Asia as a strategic region requiring regionally coordinated strategies (Conroy et al., 2023; Liu, 2024; Nell et al., 2012; Pananond & Giroud, 2016; Rugman & Verbeke, 2004) and a regiocentric approach to IHRM and GTM (Kasahara, 2020; Preece et al., 2013). Among the various subregions of Asia, we mainly discuss East, Southeast, and South Asia, which account for a significant portion of the region's economic and human capital activity and have been the empirical focus of most IHRM and GTM research. These subregions differ markedly in demographic structures, institutional systems, and capability endowments, creating the structural conditions under which region-level coordination of people and talent becomes both necessary and complex.

We argue that human capital constitutes a foundational mechanism of regional integration in Asia and that, where established, regional coordinating units—most prominently regional headquarters (RHQs)—often function as key organizational infrastructures for translating diversity into regional capability through the develop-



ment of the optimal people and talent portfolio. RHQs do so by connecting fragmented national labor markets, supporting the identification and development of regionally mobile leaders, and mediating between global standards and local realities. Rather than treating RHQs as simple extensions of HQ control, we position them as regional intermediaries that operate at the intersection of IHRM and GTM, or what we call “the IHRM–GTM architecture,” whereby IHRM is primarily oriented toward ensuring local institutional responsiveness, whereas GTM is oriented toward enabling the regional integration of people and talent.

Our perspective extends existing literature in three critical ways. First, building on and synthesizing existing work on regional strategies and regiocentric staffing approaches, we position the Asian region as an analytically distinct layer in IHRM and GTM research, moving beyond the HQ–subsidiary dyad and the global integration–local responsiveness framework. Second, we advance the literature by conceptually specifying how regional governance mechanisms, IHRM and GTM mediate institutional diversity and support the strategic alignment of people and talent across Asia. Third, we further develop prior discussions of regional coordination by theorizing human capital as a constitutive mechanism of regional integration, highlighting how RHQs and other regional coordinating units can function as important, though not exclusive, contributors to regional integration through people and talent. In doing so, our perspective contributes to the broader debate on regional coordination in GTM and IHRM by accommodating Asia’s institutional and cultural heterogeneity and clarifying the performance implications of IHRM–GTM architectures in an era of accelerating digitalization and changing trends in global mobility.

Asia as a strategic region for MNEs

Four interrelated dimensions make Asia strategically distinctive. First, Asia has emerged as the world’s primary growth engine, yet its internal diversity makes it far more complex than a single market. For example, East Asia remains a center of advanced manufacturing and technology, whereas Southeast Asia’s demographic growth and expanding consumer base create new opportunities for MNEs. South Asia, driven by service and digital sectors, adds further scale and innovation capacity. According to the IMF (2024), Asia will account for more than half of global GDP growth through 2030, underscoring its centrality to MNE strategies. Within this heterogeneous landscape, some countries such as Singapore and Vietnam have become strategic hubs, benefiting from geopolitical hedging and ongoing supply chain reconfiguration. These dynamics reinforce Asia’s role as a regionalized production and investment platform. Consequently, Asia’s economic dynamism not only powers global growth but also requires MNEs to coordinate IHRM and GTM at the regional level.

Second, Asia’s economic landscape is increasingly structured by overlapping regional agreements that promote integration beyond national boundaries. Frameworks such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Economic Community



(AEC) reduce trade barriers, harmonize standards, and facilitate limited mobility of goods, services, and skilled labor, thereby encouraging firms to design operations at a regional rather than a national level. In line with arguments that MNEs increasingly adopt region-based strategies (Rugman & Verbeke, 2004), this institutional environment supports the emergence of regional integration mechanisms in Asia. RHQs, alongside other coordinating units, help interpret diverse institutional contexts and align organizational practices, providing a link between global expectations and local HRM realities (Kasahara, 2020; Preece et al., 2013). Therefore, this evolving regional economic architecture offers the structural foundation for regiocentric approaches to IHRM and GTM across Asia.

Third, East and Southeast Asia have developed into an integrated production system in which intermediate goods, technology, and services circulate repeatedly across borders before final assembly (Baldwin, 2016; Pananond & Giroud, 2016). Regional value chains have become denser and more specialized, creating mutual dependencies between advanced and emerging Asian economies (Baldwin, 2016). These production linkages shape performance unevenly: economies with more advanced and diversified industrial base tend to capture broader spillovers, whereas many smaller ASEAN economies face stronger pressures to upgrade technological and human capital capabilities to move beyond low value-added segments (Giroud & Scott-Kennel, 2009). In response, MNEs increasingly rely on region-based governance mechanisms to coordinate activities across Asia, helping align production and knowledge flows (Iguchi et al., 2025; Rugman & Verbeke, 2004). This interdependence increases what Sharma et al. (2022) term supply chain complexity. When supported by collaborative platforms and region-level coordination, complexity can enhance resilience and performance; unmanaged, it heightens exposure to cascading disruptions, as seen following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (Oh & Oetzel, 2023).

Fourth, Asia's innovation landscape is increasingly shaped by interconnected regional hubs that combine technological specialization, human capital, and digital infrastructure (Coe & Yeung, 2019; Yeung, 2021). Shenzhen, Bangalore, and Singapore illustrate complementary roles within this regional ecosystem. Shenzhen represents hardware-driven innovation enabled by rapid prototyping and dense supplier networks, whereas Bangalore anchors Asia's digital and service-based frontier through large ICT (Information and communication technology) talent pools and globally connected engineers (Lorenzen & Mudambi, 2013). Singapore functions as an innovation hub and a platform for regional coordination, supporting cross-border research and development (R&D) and digital talent mobility in ASEAN (Yeung, 2021). A key driver of these developments is expanding digital connectivity, which lowers barriers to collaboration and strengthens India–ASEAN linkages (Majumdar et al., 2020). This digital backbone reshapes how MNEs manage distributed talent, virtual teams, and cross-border leadership. Within this environment, regional coordinating units—including, when present, RHQs as well as regional teams or empowered lead subsidiaries—facilitate knowledge flows and align innovation practices, helping integrate diverse hubs into regionally coherent systems (Kasahara, 2020; Preece et al., 2013).



Human capital as the foundation of regional integration in Asia

Asia's highly heterogeneous and fragmented institutional environments are characterized by divergent labor laws, immigration policies, educational inequality, heterogeneous skill-formation systems, and culturally embedded expectations regarding managerial authority (Budhwar et al., 2016; Cooke et al., 2020; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Rowley & Warner, 2007). These conditions produce a structurally uneven baseline of human capital both across and within countries. Asian economies also exhibit disparities between urban and rural labor markets, elite and mass higher education, and formal and informal employment systems (Rowley & Warner, 2007). However, Asia's human capital should not be viewed merely as a sum of discrete national labor pools but as an emerging regional system of capabilities reflecting both diversity and convergence in human capital regimes across Asia (e.g., Cooke, 2018; Rowley & Warner, 2007).

East Asia's leading manufacturing economies—Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan—have long sustained a steady supply of highly skilled technical workers through well-established tertiary and vocational education systems (Cooke & Kim, 2018). At the same time, evidence from a representative set of Asia-Pacific economies—including Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan—shows persistent shortages of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) talent; within this sample, Taiwan exhibits a pronounced supply-demand imbalance (Lee et al., 2022). China contributes a vast pool of STEM graduates and digital entrepreneurs, but human capital development remains uneven across regions, with coastal provinces significantly outperforming inland areas in educational attainment and innovation capacity (Fleisher et al., 2010).

Rapidly aging populations and persistently low fertility rates now constrain labor supply and create structural challenges for sustaining productivity and innovation across East Asia, notably in South Korea and China, where the working-age population is projected to decline sharply and low fertility continues to exert sustained downward pressure on future labor income and growth (Cao et al., 2020; Kim & Lee, 2021). Japan's demographic projections show a continued decline in the working-age population despite rising labor participation among older adults (Nakatani 2023). Firms increasingly rely on automation, digital transformation, and policies extending working lives, such as reemployment and lifelong-learning programs (Sakamoto, 2025). In addition, MNEs operating in these economies must cultivate bilingual and cross-culturally competent managers who can coordinate regional operations and facilitate knowledge integration (Cooke, 2018). Overall, East Asia's advanced skill base and strong institutional systems make it a region of high capability but growing demographic constraint for GTM strategies.

ASEAN economies present a demographically young workforce, with median ages below 32 and steadily increasing tertiary education attainment (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). English proficiency has also improved significantly across ASEAN, especially in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Singapore (EF Education First, 2023). Countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines provide competitive labor costs and expanding digital skill sets, underpinned by the rapid growth of ICT and outsourcing industries (ILO, 2022). Meanwhile, Singapore offers a cosmopolitan



and highly skilled talent base that continues to attract MNEs to establish and expand RHQs (World Bank, 2023).

However, regulatory diversity continues to challenge HRM integration across ASEAN. While Malaysia and Indonesia are often compared in terms of labor market regulation, their differences lie primarily in governance and enforcement rather than in labor law provisions. Malaysia's centralized labor governance contrasts with Indonesia's decentralized and fragmented regulatory system, which has been associated with uneven implementation and ongoing challenges in regulatory compliance (Kurniati & Abdillah, 2025). These institutional contrasts require MNEs to design HRM policies that balance cost efficiency with legal compliance and employee engagement. Although regional frameworks such as the AEC and the RCEP have promoted trade and investment liberalization, progress on skilled labor mobility remains limited and uneven (Papademetriou et al., 2016). Overall, the combination of youthful demographics, digital adaptability, and institutional heterogeneity makes Southeast Asia a source of opportunity and complexity for GTM strategies.

South Asia, led by India, provides one of the world's largest and youngest labor forces, supplying a deep reservoir of technical and managerial talent. India alone produces more than a million engineering and IT graduates each year, supporting its global leadership in software, analytics, and business-process services (Chatterjee et al., 2014). However, despite this quantitative strength, persistent mismatches between tertiary education and industry demand constrain employability and innovation capacity. The resulting "talent paradox"—a surplus of graduates but a shortage of job-ready professionals—continues to challenge firms' human capital strategies (Chatterjee et al., 2014).

The diffusion of digital technologies under the fourth industrial revolution has intensified these challenges while creating new opportunities. Automation and artificial intelligence (AI) adoption demand large-scale reskilling and institutional reform to prevent widening inequality across the region (Lee et al., 2019). Recent analyses have emphasized that sustainable digital transformation in South Asia requires closer integration among higher education systems, vocational training, and corporate learning frameworks to support inclusive growth (Ewers et al., 2021). Meanwhile, persistent high-skilled migration continues to shape the region's labor dynamics. Sustained outflows of engineers and IT professionals generate remittance inflows while being associated with mixed and often adverse effects on domestic capability formation and skill availability (Bhardwaj & Sharma, 2023). At the organizational level, MNEs combine large offshore service hubs with leadership-development programs that cultivate globally mobile managers capable of bridging local and global talent ecosystems. Overall, South Asia's demographic scale and technological orientation make it a pivotal, yet complex, region for GTM strategies.

Linking IHRM and GTM in the Asian regional strategic context

Recent work in international strategy has highlighted the regional level as a critical domain where global integration and local responsiveness are coordinated. Rugman and Verbeke (2004) demonstrated empirically that most MNEs concentrate their



activities within major regional blocs rather than operating globally, underscoring the strategic relevance of regions in practice. Similarly, Ghemawat (2005) challenged “flat world” assumptions through the concept of semi-globalization that reflects the persistence of national and regional differences in how activities and authority are distributed across regions and subregions. Ghemawat (2005) proposed five distinctive regional strategies of MNEs. The home base strategy concentrates core activities in the home country while serving foreign markets primarily through exports or limited local operations. The regional hub strategy centralizes coordination and key functions in a single regional location. The platform strategy replicates similar operations across multiple countries within a region. The mandate strategy grants selected subsidiaries regional or global responsibility for specific functions or capabilities. The portfolio strategy consists of relatively autonomous country operations coordinated at the regional level.

Importantly, these regional strategies may differ systematically in the balance between regional integration and local responsiveness, as well as in the scope and composition of the people and talent portfolios required to implement them (Liu et al., 2025; Morris et al., 2016). These perspectives position regions, rather than only global or national levels, as central arenas for strategic decision-making and for analyzing HRM and GTM coordination. Rugman and Verbeke (2008) further emphasized that regional governance mechanisms such as RHQs help operationalize regional strategies by coordinating knowledge flows, aligning practices, and managing human capital across countries. This stream of work suggests that the execution of regional strategy depends not only on structural choices but also on how human capital is coordinated and deployed at the regional level.

Regarding the management of human capital, the relationship between IHRM and GTM within these regional strategies is asymmetrical rather than parallel. Generally speaking, HRM refers to the comprehensive set of practices for managing all employees (Wright & McMahan, 2011). Thus, IHRM is structurally oriented towards local responsiveness, as it governs the HRM practices for the entire employee base in host-country institutional contexts, and must secure institutional legitimacy, legal compliance, and cultural fit within each national context (Brewster et al., 2016; Ferner, 1997; Jackson & Deeg, 2008). In contrast, GTM is structurally oriented toward global integration, as it seeks to identify, compare, and deploy high-potential individuals and high performers whose value depends on cross-border comparison, mobility, and deployment (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Morris et al., 2016; Scullion et al., 2010). Although GTM can be inclusive (viewing all employees as possessing the potential to be developed and deployed) or exclusive (viewing talent as a strategically selected subset of high-performing or high-potential individuals), the exclusive logic represents the predominant form of GTM in practice (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Kasahara et al., 2025; Meyers et al. 2014; Scullion et al., 2010). Thus, in the international context, IHRM is inherently inclusive and locally embedded, whereas GTM is predominantly exclusive and implemented through global or regional integration.

This asymmetry becomes particularly salient in Asia, where deep institutional and cultural heterogeneity simultaneously intensify pressures for local responsiveness and heighten the strategic importance of regional-level talent integration (Farnedale et al., 2010; Pudelko & Harzing, 2007; Vaiman et al., 2012). Drawing on this



asymmetry, we argue that different regional strategy types call for different ways of combining IHRM and GTM from a regiocentric perspective, which we call the IHRM–GTM architecture. The IHRM–GTM architecture describes how locally adaptive IHRM practices and regionally integrative GTM systems are combined and enacted through regiocentric coordination mechanisms within a given regional strategy type to develop an effective people and talent portfolio at the regional level (Liu et al., 2025; Morris et al., 2016). This conceptual synthesis sets the foundation for a more operational examination of how IHRM and GTM are aligned within regional strategy types.

The above perspective indicates that regional coordinating units such as RHQs—when MNEs employ them—are not merely administrative intermediaries but critical bridging platforms that connect IHRM’s locally responsive logic with GTM’s regionally integrative logic. Perlmutter’s (1969) regiocentric staffing orientation provides the underlying organizational principle that enables this regional balancing of local responsiveness and regional integration within IHRM and GTM. In contrast to the ethnocentric orientation that relies on home-country nationals to manage foreign subsidiaries and the polycentric orientation that relies on host-country nationals to manage their subsidiaries, the regiocentric orientation emphasizes the region as the primary reference point for staffing, coordination, and managerial development, thereby enabling MNEs to reconcile cross-national diversity within a coherent regional logic. It approximates the geocentric orientation that aspires to globally optimal talent allocation irrespective of nationality at the regional level. In this sense, our perspective revitalizes Perlmutter’s regiocentric concept within the contemporary context of regional strategies.

Integrative framework linking regional strategies to IHRM and GTM

To promote the systematic understanding of how MNEs can enhance the management of people and talent strategically across Asia, we present an integrated framework linking regional strategies, regional integration mechanisms, and the dual logics of IHRM and GTM in the Asian context, which is shown in Fig. 1.

The figure shows that different types of MNE’s regional strategies are related to various configurations of IHRM and GTM based on the regiocentric staffing approach, through which firms operationalize region-level people processes via regional coordinating units such as RHQs, lead subsidiaries, and regional teams. Figure 1 illustrates how, under regional strategies in Asia, locally embedded IHRM practices and regionally integrative GTM systems are linked through translation, coordination, and calibration processes enacted by regional coordinating units. These processes represent the practical interface through which regiocentric functions translate local variation, coordinate cross-border talent flows, and calibrate HRM- and GTM-relevant signals at the regional level. These regional integration processes are not tied to any single organizational actor but may be enacted by RHQs (when present), lead subsidiaries, regional teams, or their combinations. Our framework links Ghemawat’s regional strategies with Perlmutter’s (1969) regiocentric staffing approach as complementary concepts. Ghemawat’s framework identifies the structural conditions under which regional coordination takes place, whereas Perlmutter’s (1969) framework provides



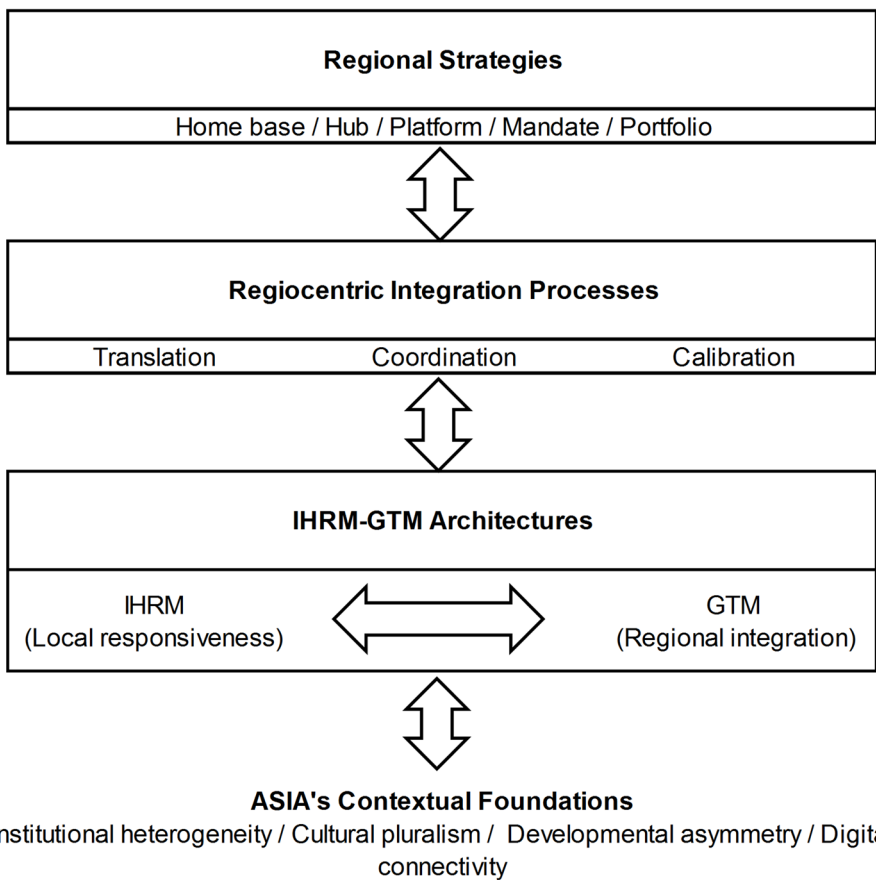


Fig. 1 Integrated framework for linking regional strategies to IHRM–GTM architectures in Asia

the staffing logic through which these structures can be enacted and sustained. Specifically, Perlmutter's regiocentric approach enables region-based recruitment, development, and deployment of managers, thereby facilitating the alignment of IHRM's locally responsive practices with GTM's regionally integrative processes. This complementarity becomes especially salient in the Asian context because neither global nor national mechanisms alone can reconcile the persistent tension between local responsiveness and regional integration.

Building on this complementarity, different regional strategies imply systematically different ways of structuring IHRM and GTM from a regiocentric perspective. In other words, the balance between regional integration and local responsiveness associated with each regional strategy is reflected in distinct IHRM–GTM architectures. Regarding IHRM, coordinated regions such as Europe benefit from considerable institutional harmonization, which supports HRM standardization across countries (Brewster, 1995, 2007). In contrast, Asia is marked by pronounced institutional diversity and weaker regional regulatory integration (Rowley & Warner, 2007), which heightens pressures for local responsiveness and complicates the transfer of



HRM systems. Variations in skill-formation systems, as emphasized in varieties-of-capitalism scholarship (Hall & Soskice, 2001), further require firms to adjust training, performance evaluation, and employment practices to fit the distinctive human capital regimes of each Asian economy.

Regarding GTM, although globally standardized GTM systems/practices increasingly circulate across regions, their implementation in Asia continues to be shaped by state-led human capital development, collectivist value orientations, and fragmented regulatory environments (Cooke et al., 2020; Rowley & Warner, 2007; Witt & Redding, 2014). These features produce distinctive patterns in how MNEs identify, develop, and deploy talent across the region. MNEs operating in Asia need to design GTM strategies around the region's structural population and skill asymmetries. GTM must incorporate regional functional allocation, strategically distributing roles and development opportunities across countries based on their comparative human capital strengths. For sustaining intra-Asian talent flows, MNEs construct firm-driven mobility rather than relying on supranational mobility rules. That is, MNEs actively drive cross-border talent movement under weak regional governance using such practices as short-term assignments, regional rotations, technical-transfer visits, intra-regional commuting, and expatriation (Kirk & Howe-Walsh, 2021).

Importantly, however, the regiocentric approach in this framework does not presuppose that regional leadership or talent pools are constituted exclusively of Asian nationals. Rather, it accommodates diverse cross-regional mobility patterns. For instance, Western MNEs also transfer non-Asian managers to Asian subsidiaries. As long as such assignments contribute to regionally integrated talent development and coordination, they are fully consistent with the regiocentric approach as articulated by Perlmutter.

Translation, coordination, and calibration processes

Our framework illustrates how various types of regional integration mechanisms—including RHQs (when present), lead subsidiaries, and regional teams—balance local responsiveness through IHRM and regional integration through GTM. These mechanisms operate through three interrelated processes: translation refers to reinterpreting HQ-originated HRM frameworks and GTM criteria within diverse national institutional and cultural contexts (Ferner et al., 2012; Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2009); coordination refers to linking country HR units and orchestrating region-wide talent mobility, pools, and deployment (Amann et al., 2020; Kasahara, 2020; Paik & Sohn, 2004; Preece et al., 2013); and calibration refers to interpreting, aligning, and rendering comparable HRM- and GTM-relevant signals across countries and organizational units (Preece et al., 2013).

From the IHRM–GTM architecture perspective, translation constitutes a core regional integration mechanism through which HQ-originated HRM principles, evaluation frameworks, and talent criteria are actively reinterpreted and reconstructed within diverse national institutional and cultural contexts. For IHRM, translation ensures the institutional legitimacy, cultural resonance, and functional usability of HRM practices within heterogeneous host-country environments. For GTM, translation enables global or regional talent criteria to be locally enacted without losing



their strategic intent, thereby preserving the possibility of cross-country comparison despite contextual reinterpretation. For regional coordination mechanisms (e.g., RHQs), translation generates locally grounded yet interpretable talent-related signals that are surfaced, collected, and made visible at the regional level, providing the organizational interface through which subsequent calibration aligns, compares, and aggregates HRM- and GTM-related signals across countries.

In Asia, HQ-originated HRM frameworks cannot be implemented as designed because they do not automatically carry over across contexts (e.g., Maharjan & Sekiguchi, 2016). Instead, reinterpretation necessarily occurs at the subsidiary level, whereas regional coordinating units such as RHQs, lead subsidiaries, and regional teams actively guide, mediate, and structure these reinterpretations to secure institutional legitimacy and functional usability. This makes translation a structurally necessary mechanism rather than a discretionary adaptation, given the region's pronounced institutional and cultural heterogeneity.

The translation process is especially salient in Asia due to institutional and cultural heterogeneity, which is far greater than in more harmonized regions such as the European Union (EU). In Europe, stronger regulatory alignment and shared managerial norms facilitate cross-border standardization of HRM systems (Brewster, 1995, 2007). In contrast, Asia's multiplicity of cultural scripts such as Confucian, Indic, Islamic, together with divergent skill-formation systems and varied expectations of managerial authority create wider interpretive gaps that require firms to establish translation capability—that is, the organizational ability to reinterpret HQ-originated HRM frameworks while preserving strategic intent. In this sense, translation is not merely an IHRM-internal adaptation mechanism but a regionally enacted process through which coordination mechanisms shape how locally responsive HRM practices are rendered intelligible and usable for subsequent regional talent decisions within GTM.

Coordination refers to the regional-level process through which MNEs deliberately link fragmented country HRM systems, organizational units, and managerial actors in order to orchestrate people flows, information exchange, and talent deployment across national boundaries. In the IHRM–GTM architecture, coordination performs an integrative function that goes beyond bilateral HQ–subsidiary control by creating a regionally connected HRM infrastructure. For IHRM, coordination facilitates consistency in HRM implementation across countries by aligning country HR units, sharing practices, and enabling lateral learning, while still allowing local adaptation. For GTM, coordination is primarily expressed through firm-centered mobility infrastructure—the institutionalized systems, processes, organizational arrangements, and career pathways through which that firm-driven logic is routinized and sustained for regional talent allocation—that connects subsidiaries and creates region-wide talent pools, succession pipelines, and developmental pathways.

The firm-centered approach to mobility suggests that mobility infrastructure is a core GTM capability requiring ongoing coordination across HR departments, line management, and regional coordinating units such as RHQs to allocate talent efficiently within the region. In addition, mobility design must explicitly accommodate regulatory fragmentation and heterogeneous immigration regimes. In Asia, visas, work permits, qualifications, and immigration policies are fragmented across nations,



resulting in a weak institutional foundation supporting regional talent mobility. Consequently, to compare, deploy, and develop talent within the region, firms must take the lead in driving talent mobility. However, coordinating such mobility administratively and politically in Asia is more complex than in North America or Europe. Moreover, MNEs must internalize coordination functions that are partially supported by supranational or regional governance systems if available. Compared with other regions such as Europe, where a common labor mobility framework, qualification recognition, and institutional support for intraregional movement exist, MNEs need to integrate and institutionalize the mobility practices themselves, rather than relying on external systems to supplement them.

Calibration refers to the regional-level process through which heterogeneous, locally generated HRM and GTM signals (e.g., performance evaluations, leadership assessments, and potential indicators) are systematically interpreted, aligned, and rendered comparable across countries. Within the IHRM–GTM architecture, calibration performs a distinct function that cannot be substituted by translation or coordination alone. For IHRM, calibration contextualizes locally legitimate evaluation outcomes by situating them within a broader regional reference frame without overriding or homogenizing national evaluation logics. For GTM, calibration constitutes the core integrative mechanism through which regionally coordinated actors (e.g., RHQs) transform locally embedded assessments into strategically actionable signals, enabling cross-national comparison, prioritization, and deployment of talent. For regional coordination mechanisms (e.g., RHQs), calibration enables the aggregation, prioritization, and interpretation of talent-related information from diverse subsidiaries, transforming locally embedded assessments into regionally and globally actionable signals.

In the Asian context, calibration becomes particularly critical due to pronounced institutional, cultural, and evaluative heterogeneity, which generates systematic variation in how merit, leadership, and potential are defined and assessed locally. Unlike in more institutionally harmonized regions, these differences cannot be resolved through standardization alone. Calibration, therefore, constitutes a core regional capability through which MNEs actively reconcile local evaluative diversity with the comparative logic required for coherent GTM systems. Through calibration, MNEs sustain reliable regional and global talent pipelines while preserving the institutional legitimacy of local IHRM practices.

Crucially, the processes of translation, coordination, and calibration are not purely top-down but inherently bidirectional, as regional actors both enact strategic intent and generate bottom-up feedback that may reinforce, adjust, or redirect regional strategic choices. In our framework, translation, coordination, and calibration represent regional-level integration mechanisms, typically enacted by RHQs or other regional coordinating units. For GTM in particular, translation determines how global or regional talent criteria are locally enacted, coordination structures region-wide talent mobility and the formation of regional talent pools, and calibration renders heterogeneous performance and potential signals comparable and actionable for regional and global talent decisions.



The roles of RHQs

Effective GTM depends on the ability to compare, evaluate, and deploy talent across countries. However, because these evaluations are generated through IHRM processes that are locally embedded and institutionally contingent, Asia's cultural and institutional heterogeneity create substantial variation in how performance, leadership, and potential are interpreted locally (Rowley & Warner, 2007; Whitley, 1999). Prior work on cross-border HRM transfer shows that evaluation data cannot be assumed to be commensurable across contexts without some form of translation and calibration (Ferner et al., 2012; Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2009). In this sense, RHQs operate as a regional coordination layer that maintains the distinction between IHRM and GTM while enabling their alignment at the regional level. In this case, RHQs often play a pivotal role in calibrating locally translated evaluation outcomes so that they become comparable and HQ interpretable (Preece et al., 2013), aggregating talent information across diverse subsidiaries (Alfoldi et al., 2012, 2017), standardizing leadership and potential indicators (Cooke et al., 2020), and recommending high-potential individuals to the global talent pool (Kasahara, 2020; Preece et al., 2013).

Recent works have begun to recognize the role of RHQs in the process of regional coordination. In MNEs, RHQs function as organizational bridges that mediate information flows, align practices, and facilitate talent mobility across distant and diverse subsidiaries (Conroy et al., 2023; Kasahara, 2020; Preece et al., 2013). In doing so, they embody the governance mechanisms through which IHRM and GTM intersect. Kasahara (2020), for instance, demonstrated how RHQs help Japanese MNEs identify high-potential local individuals and high performers in subsidiaries that are geographically and institutionally distant from HQs and incorporate them into HQ-level global talent pools, thereby overcoming informational and social distance. Complementing this perspective, other recent studies have conceptualized RHQs in various ways. Conroy et al., (2023), for example, reframed RHQs as arenas of power and politics, whereas Lee et al. (2022) highlighted their role as key nodes that strengthen subsidiary resilience through talent development and coordination. Nonetheless, MNEs vary considerably in their regional strategies, and many of them integrate IHRM and GTM across Asia without relying on RHQs. In this sense, RHQs should be understood not as a mandatory or universal mechanism but as one among several organizational options that firms may use, or choose not to use, when coordinating human capital across Asia's heterogeneous institutional landscape.

Hybridization and dual-layer development as distinctive characteristics of IHRM and GTM in Asia

Empirical studies show that MNEs routinely combine HQ-driven HRM philosophies with extensive local responsiveness in Asian subsidiaries, resulting in hybrid HRM systems (Pudelko & Harzing, 2007; Rowley & Warner, 2007). For example, research on European, Japanese, and U.S. firms in China and Southeast Asia demonstrates that performance evaluation, promotion criteria, and skill-development practices are systematically reconfigured to align with local labor markets, educational systems, and authority structures (Cooke & Kim, 2018). Thus, hybridization in Asia is not



a discretionary choice but a structural response to institutional fragmentation and human capital heterogeneity, making hybrid IHRM a foundational organizational response. Empirical cases also illustrate how hybridization occurs through translation in practice. For instance, Beamond et al. (2016) showed that subsidiaries routinely reinterpret competency and evaluation criteria to match local expectations regarding hierarchy, interpersonal harmony, and role behavior—illustrating translation as an active, negotiated process. Lu's (2014) case study of MNE subsidiaries in China demonstrates that local managers adjust HQ evaluation templates and leadership criteria to reflect Chinese relational norms, authority structures, and indirect communication patterns. This case results in hybrid, locally meaningful evaluation practices, even when formal HR systems are globally standardized.

Because many Asian labor markets lack uniformly developed foundational capabilities, MNEs must compensate through broad-based competency upgrading. This structural condition gives rise to what we conceptualize as a dual-layer human capital development that distinguishes Asian IHRM–GTM architectures: the simultaneous pursuit of mass capability building through IHRM and selective elite development through GTM, as documented across prior studies of talent management and human capital development in Asia (Pucik et al., 2004). Under these conditions, MNEs operating in Asia face pressures to develop individuals through two structurally distinct layers, combining broad-based foundational capability upgrading with selective investment in high-potential individuals (Chatterjee et al., 2014; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Cooke et al., 2014; Cooke et al., 2020). The first layer consists of broad-based foundational training—analytical skills, ICT literacy, quality control, and collaborative work—to raise baseline capability. The second layer consists of selective elite development, in which high-potential individuals are fast-tracked into regional or global career paths.

These dual-layer dynamics are observable in the talent development architectures of global MNEs operating in Asia. A representative case is Unilever's dual-track development architecture operating across emerging and developed markets, which combines broad-based capability building through the Four Acres leadership and learning curriculum with selective leadership pipelines such as the Unilever Future Leader Programme (UFLP) (Human Resources Online, 2016). As a result, the bifurcation between inclusive IHRM and exclusive GTM is more pronounced in Asia than in Western economies: Four Acres functions as an inclusive, firm-wide platform aimed at raising heterogeneous foundational skills across diverse national contexts, whereas UFLP represents an exclusive pipeline designed to accelerate the development and advancement of high-potential individuals. This dual-layer system reflects an institutional necessity: uneven skill baselines require broad-based capability building, whereas competitive pressure for global leadership talent drives selective investment in high performers.

Implementing dual-layer development architectures across institutionally heterogeneous countries requires regional-level coordination mechanisms. These mechanisms allocate differentiated development roles and talent pipelines under the condition of uneven foundational skills. For example, DIC has established an Asia (ex-Japan) RHQ that integrates GTM and HRM systems across the region, allocating development roles and leadership pipelines to subsidiaries based on their comparative



strengths (DIC Integrated Report 2025). Similarly, Shiseido's Asia Pacific RHQ in Singapore coordinates region-wide talent reviews and leadership development while functionally distributing R&D, marketing, and supply chain competencies across East, Southeast, and South Asia according to local talent pools (Shiseido Sustainability Report 2024). Yokogawa also employs a regionally differentiated GTM system under its Asia Pacific RHQ, which manages leadership development and talent calibration across countries by leveraging demographic and skill advantages (Yokogawa Sustainability Report 2024). Samsung's Regional Specialist Program similarly functions as a firm-designed mobility infrastructure that substitutes for weak region-wide mobility rules (Lee & Kim, 2025). Beyond these firm-specific designs, prior research has shown that European MNEs operating in Asia rely on RHQs and other regional coordination structures to calibrate talent assessments and align leadership-related evaluations across subsidiaries, highlighting the increasingly central role of RHQs as regional talent information calibrators that link locally generated signals with global expectations (Alfoldi et al., 2012, 2017; Cooke et al., 2020; Edgington & Hayter, 2013; Rowley & Warner, 2007). Collectively, these cases illustrate how the three core features of the proposed IHRM–GTM architecture are enacted in practice.

Overall, hybridization under institutional fragmentation and dual-layer human capital development demonstrates that IHRM–GTM architectures in Asia are shaped by structural heterogeneity rather than discretionary managerial choice. One important organizational implication of these mechanisms is the emergence of firm-centered mobility infrastructures through which MNEs internalize cross-border talent allocation under conditions of institutional fragmentation. These mechanisms show that MNEs operating in institutionally heterogeneous environments must build translation, coordination, and calibration capabilities, as well as dual-layer approaches to human capital development, in order to reconcile regional and global talent integration with locally embedded IHRM logics. These functions become more critical as within-region heterogeneity increases: when the institutional and cultural landscape is more diverse, the need for those capabilities led by RHQs or equivalent units is greater. From a theoretical standpoint, this suggests that the importance of RHQs in GTM is positively associated with the degree of regional heterogeneity, providing a conceptual mechanism for understanding why RHQs matter more in Asia than in Europe or North America.

Future research directions

Focusing on Asia as a dynamic, diverse, complex, and strategically important region for MNEs, this perspective has integrated regional strategies, regiocentric staffing orientations, the coordinating role of regional units, and the IHRM-GTM architecture. By doing so, this perspective opens up several promising avenues for future research to deepen our understanding of how MNEs can build resilient, high-performing workforces across Asia.



Theorizing and testing the regional level integration mechanisms between IHRM and GTM

Future research should move beyond the conventional HQ–subsidiary dyad and establish the region as an independent analytical level for theorizing how IHRM and GTM are linked, mediated, and implemented through regional integration mechanisms. Whereas existing research emphasizes global standardization and local responsiveness, incorporating the regional level suggests a more complex, multilayered tension structure. Specifically, MNEs increasingly face simultaneous tensions between global integration and regional responsiveness, reflected in region-specific systems (e.g., Asia-, Europe-, or North America-oriented practices), as well as between regional integration and local responsiveness within each region.

These layered tensions are particularly salient in institutionally heterogeneous regions such as Asia where deep diversity persists even within the same region. As a result, region-level coordination mechanisms must mediate not only between global integration and local responsiveness but also between regionally integrated systems and nationally embedded HRM practices. Future research should therefore examine how regional coordination architectures generate intermediate talent-governance outcomes that cannot be reduced to either global or national effects alone. Multilevel and comparative research designs are needed to examine how regional integration shapes cross-border talent allocation, institutional synchronization across heterogeneous labor markets, and subsidiary-, regional-, and firm-level performance outcomes (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Conroy et al., 2023; Farndale et al., 2017; Rugman & Verbeke, 2004). Such work would clarify the distinct value-added to the regional layer in international talent governance.

More specifically, future research should examine how different regional strategies require different IHRM–GTM architectures because the degrees of regional integration and local responsiveness may differ according to regional strategies. For example, the home base strategy is likely to entail limited regional integration and greater local responsiveness, whereas regional hub and platform strategies should require more systematic regional coordination to connect subsidiaries through region-wide talent flows, shared talent pools, and comparable talent signals. Mandate and portfolio strategies are likely to involve more complex regional governance and higher-order coordination to balance regional integration and local responsiveness, as differentiated subsidiary roles and more distributed control increase the need for region-level orchestration, signal calibration, and conflict resolution across heterogeneous national HRM systems (Rugman & Verbeke, 2008b).

Future research should also investigate how the balance between regional integration and local responsiveness, the composition of regional talent portfolios, and the configuration of IHRM and GTM coevolve through regional coordination processes. This line of inquiry could also examine which value-chain and support activities (including HRM) are regionalized versus globalized within the same firm, as well as how such (mis)alignment shapes the design and evolution of IHRM–GTM architectures (Mudambi & Puck, 2016). This line of inquiry would clarify how regional strategy types systematically condition the intensity and complexity of regional inte-



gration, coordination, and governance—and, in turn, the evolution of IHRM–GTM architectures.

Generalizability of Asia’s human capital regimes and the dual-layer IHRM–GTM architecture

This perspective identifies the IHRM–GTM architecture in which IHRM supports broad-based capability formation, and GTM selectively concentrates resources on high-potential individuals and high performers. This configuration appears to be structurally embedded in Asia’s fragmented skill-formation regimes, state-led human capital development, and persistent institutional heterogeneity. Future research should investigate whether this dual-layer architecture is unique to Asia or generalizable to other emerging regions such as Eastern Europe, Latin America, or the Middle East, which share strong state involvement in skill formation, fragmented institutional arrangements, and volatile labor market regulations (Brewster et al., 2018; Cooke et al., 2020). While prior research on South Korean, Japanese, and Western MNEs operating in China and Southeast Asia has illustrated the dual-layer IHRM–GTM architecture, it remains unclear whether such an IHRM–GTM architecture is specific to the Asian regional context or transferable to other regions characterized by different configurations of institutional heterogeneity. Future research should further examine how the composition, relative emphasis, and internal coherence between the two layers vary across institutional contexts, as well as how such variation shapes the effectiveness and legitimacy of IHRM–GTM architectures.

The Asian context provides a particularly productive empirical setting for advancing broader IHRM and GTM theory, especially for understanding how GTM systems function under high contextual variation and weak regional governance. Moreover, scholars should theorize more rigorously how national institutional arrangements and firm-level talent strategies function as complementary systems that jointly shape the boundary between inclusive IHRM and exclusive GTM (Cooke et al., 2020; Rowley & Warner, 2007; Witt & Redding, 2014). More broadly, incorporating the regional level highlights a shift from the traditional dual framework of global integration versus local responsiveness toward a multilayered tension structure. In regions such as Asia, where institutional heterogeneity persists even within the same region, these nested tensions become particularly salient. Future research should theorize how firms manage these layered integration–responsiveness tensions and whether different regions exhibit distinct patterns in how such tensions are resolved.

Process analysis of translation, coordination, and calibration in regional talent governance

In this perspective, translation, coordination, and calibration are conceptualized as the core processes through which hybridization and dual-layer human capital development emerge at the regional level. Specifically, translation underpins the hybridization of HRM practices by enabling locally legitimate reinterpretations of HQ-originated templates, whereas coordination and calibration jointly give rise to dual-layer development architectures by linking subsidiaries and aligning hetero-



geneous talent signals across countries. The micro processes through which these mechanisms dynamically reshape the configuration of regional talent systems remain under-theorized. Future research should examine how RHQs, lead subsidiaries, and regional teams dynamically divide, compete over, and complement one another in performing these functions. In particular, scholars should investigate how translation mediates the locally legitimate reinterpretation of HQ-originated principles and templates that subsequently shape IHRM and GTM practices, how coordination links fragmented subsidiaries through region-wide mobility and information flows that integrate IHRM and GTM across national boundaries, and how calibration aligns heterogeneous performance and potential signals into regionally and globally comparable criteria that structure GTM decisions and IHRM systems (Ferner et al., 2012; Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2009; Preece et al., 2013). Such research would illuminate how regional coordination architectures operate as institutional translation and signal-alignment devices rather than as mere administrative intermediaries.

Structuring regional talent flows and firm-driven mobility under weak regional governance

As discussed in this perspective paper, the types and quality of human capital differ across subregions of Asia (e.g., East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia), necessitating optimal people and talent allocation through regional mobility for MNEs to implement regional strategies. However, unlike the EU, Asia lacks strong supranational institutions supporting cross-border labor mobility. Although national visa and migration regimes increasingly define the institutional conditions of cross-border mobility, firms remain the primary architects of how regional talent flows are operationalized. As a result, MNEs must rely on a firm-driven mobility logic to operationalize regional talent flows, and this logic is enacted through firm-centered mobility infrastructures such as short-term project assignments, regional rotations, technical-transfer visits, and expatriation (Caligiuri et al., 2024; Kirk & Howe-Walsh, 2021). Importantly, these infrastructure practices are not unique to Asia; rather, what differs is the extent to which MNEs must design, integrate, and sustain them autonomously under weaker and more fragmented region-wide mobility regimes. This firm-centered logic resonates with broader conceptualizations of talent mobility as circular and relational rather than linear, emphasizing that regional talent flows are embedded in governance arrangements that shape how mobility is initiated, sustained, and valued within and across regions (Kuah et al., 2021; Rezaei & Mouritzen, 2021).

Future research should systematically examine how MNEs design and govern these internal mobility infrastructures, how firm-driven mobility shapes career formation, leadership development, and organizational learning, and how regional talent flows interact with functional allocation, RHQ governance, and regional value-chain configuration (Cooke et al., 2020; Papademetriou et al., 2016; Rowley & Warner, 2007). Future research should also examine how digitalization and AI are reshaping firm-driven regional mobility under weak regional governance, particularly by enabling digitally mediated and hybrid forms of mobility that allow MNEs to orchestrate regional talent flows without relying on strong supranational institutions (Bucher et al., 2024; Caligiuri et al., 2024; Lazarova et al., 2023). This stream would



establish regional talent flows as a core analytical construct in IHRM and GTM rather than as a peripheral extension of expatriation research.

Geopolitical risk, visa regime transformations, and regio-centric GTM

Recent IHRM and GTM research has increasingly recognized geopolitical risk and policy volatility as central boundary conditions of regional talent governance. Pandemics, conflicts, border controls, and regulatory shifts directly disrupt cross-border mobility and compel firms to reconfigure regional staffing and leadership pipelines (Caligiuri et al., 2024; Farndale et al., 2025). These developments reflect a broader shift away from frictionless globalization toward renewed state control over labor mobility and talent flows, as highlighted in recent work on deglobalization and the political backlash against global integration (Kobrin, 2017; Witt, 2019). Under these conditions, MNEs are increasingly compelled to reconfigure globally oriented GTM systems around regions. At the same time, globally oriented GTM systems are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. In parallel, globalization has become intertwined with regionalization, prompting MNEs to reorganize talent strategies around regions rather than at a purely global scale (Tung, 2016).

However, despite the growing role of states in shaping the institutional conditions of mobility, the translation of these state-level shocks into concrete regional staffing architectures remains largely firm-driven. At the same time, migration regimes and administrative frictions—including visa processing times, eligibility constraints tied to job categories, and family-related regulations—may condition or constrain regional talent strategies even when firm-level coordination mechanisms and mobility infrastructures are highly developed. Beyond firm-controllable risk, visa regime transformations constitute a direct institutional shock to regional GTM implementation. Escalating U.S. H-1B costs and restrictions have generated an “exogenous cost shock” to global mobility systems (Glennon, 2024), whereas Asian economies have introduced STEM-oriented schemes such as China’s K-Visa, Singapore’s Tech Pass and ONE Pass, Japan’s J-SKIP, and Taiwan’s Gold Card. These shifts signal a move from firm-sponsored to state-enabled mobility, repositioning governments as proactive agents in regional talent competition.

Future research should therefore examine how geopolitical uncertainty and visa policy diversity jointly reshape regional talent allocation, how RHQs translate these state-designed regimes into firm-level GTM architectures, and how talent-friendly regimes affect innovation capacity and leadership development under persistent uncertainty, thereby clarifying how globally oriented GTM systems are reconfigured through regio-centric implementation under geopolitical and institutional shocks (Caligiuri et al., 2024; Farndale et al., 2025; Glennon, 2024; Tung, 2016).

Conclusion

Persistent evidence shows that many MNEs remain strongly region oriented and that the regional level continues to matter for strategy and organization (Rosa et al., 2020; Rugman & Verbeke, 2004). Focusing on Asia, this perspective has advanced under-



standing of how MNEs can deploy IHRM and GTM to pursue effective regional strategies in Asia by articulating a regionally grounded framework that links regional strategies, regiocentric staffing orientations, regional integration mechanisms, and the IHRM–GTM architecture. Our framework not only provides conceptual guidance for MNEs seeking to manage people and talent across Asia’s heterogeneous institutional environments but also delineates key directions for future research. Specifically, it highlights the need for further theorizing and empirical investigation into regional-level integration mechanisms, the generalizability of dual-layer IHRM–GTM architectures beyond Asia, and the dynamic processes through which translation, coordination, and calibration shape regional talent governance over time.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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