Managerial knowledge acquisition has drawn much attention in recent IB literature. However, there are at least two research gaps up to date. First, prior work has focused on the characteristics of the partners, but has not fully identified the mechanism or processes through which learning occurs. Particularly, control has been recognized as associated with inter-partner learning, but the control-learning link has not been explicitly established. Second, prior research has largely taken the perspective of Western MNCs and rarely considered how local partners acquire managerial knowledge from their Western counterparts. Although control has been a central concern in IJV management given its performance implications, it is not clear how local partners’ approach toward control is influenced by their learning endeavours. The study examines the acquisition of managerial knowledge by Chinese companies through IJVs, focusing on the effect of management control by U.S. partners. 

To develop its conceptual framework, a series of interviews have been conducted with IJV managers. Then, data were collected using structured questionnaires among a sample of 135 Chinese managers in Sino-U.S. JVs. According to LISREL results, Chinese parent companies perceive U.S. management control as a necessary condition for learning to take place, but at the same time detrimental to quality interaction - a key venue for learning. For the purpose of strategic integration, Chinese parent companies tend to maintain a commitment to JV performance, and both the strategic integration orientation and JV performance commitment likely embrace an articulated learning intent. However, although JV performance commitment encourages learning and lends support to U.S. control indirectly through enhanced learning intent, it directly counters management control by the U.S. partner.

The findings suggest that control may have different implications for JV performance and partner learning, and local partners need to balance their long-term integration and short-term performance needs. With this understanding, Western partners exercising management control should endeavour to facilitate effective interaction and encourage local partner participation. The study sheds fresh light on the debate over JV control and contributes to emerging literature on JV learning.