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He is an internationally recognised scholar in strategic management and organisation theory, best known for his foundational contributions to optimal distinctiveness theory, which have reshaped understanding of how organisations balance differentiation and legitimacy across markets and institutional environments.

His research has had broad and sustained impact across multiple disciplines, including strategy, organisation theory, entrepreneurship, sociology, and international business, and has been published in leading journals such as *Academy of Management Annals*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Organization Science*, and *Strategic Management Journal*. His work has been cited widely, and his book *Optimal Distinctiveness* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) is widely regarded as a definitive treatment of the field.

Professor Zhao's recent scholarship extends this work to the study of artificial intelligence, focusing on AI-driven transformation, human-machine collaboration, and organisational resilience in an era of technological disruption. He is currently writing a book on *AI Strategy and Competitiveness* (Oxford University Press).

He has received numerous international honours, including the *Strategic Management Society Emerging Scholar Award*, the *Academy of Management Emerging Scholar Award*, and recognition as one of the *world's top 2% scientists*. He serves in senior editorial roles at leading journals and plays a central role in shaping the global research agenda in strategy and organisation theory. He has also mentored 30+ doctoral students and early career scholars who now hold faculty positions at leading universities worldwide.