

East Meets West: Chinese Leadership Research

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The exemplary person helps to bring out the best in others, but does not help to bring out the worst.—Confucius

Abstract

After 8,000 studies (Bass, 1990), what do we really know about leadership? The overwhelming majority of leadership studies have been conducted in the Western world, primarily in the U.S. Yet, China has historically provided outstanding examples of leadership. What is the status of leadership studies in China? How does a researcher go about conducting leadership research in China? Does a researcher utilize Western-developed instruments with a Chinese population? What impact does traditional Chinese philosophy, particularly that of Confucius, have on modern China? This article explores Chinese leadership principles and practices from Confucius to current social science research.

Clearly leadership is among the most researched of all social science concepts. Bass and Stogdill's (1990) classic *Handbook* cites over 8,000 leadership studies. It is safe to say that the number has mushroom since that edition. Yet, most of these studies are conducted by Western researchers primarily in the U.S (cf. Dorfman & House, 2004). Given the dramatic increasing influence of China in global society, it seems rather obvious to this researcher that leadership practices and philosophy need to be investigated in China. China finds itself striving for balance between its rich cultural traditions and the pressures of its rapid economic growth—at a rate of 8 percent a year compared to 3 percent in the U.S. What can be learned from Chinese leadership practices? Have Chinese scholars developed a unique way of understanding leadership or followed Western quantitative models?

A glimpse into the sayings of Confucius provides a window into the background of Chinese leadership philosophy by noting his accent on leadership as a way of life comprised of all that a person is and does. The dominant subject matter in Confucius' teachings was how to become an exemplary person by improving one's own character. Among his most cherished virtues that characterize the exemplary person are humanity, justice, courtesy, wisdom, goodness, courage, principles, and honesty. Though Confucius does not use the word "leadership," he clearly focuses on the concept. All quotations are from the 1998 translation of *The Analects of Confucius* by Roger Ames. An introduction to Confucian teachings is fundamental to an understanding of Chinese leadership thinking given his impact on millennia of Chinese history.

It is essential for the reader of the *Analects*—and Confucian writings more generally—to appreciate the singular role played by the Master in shaping Chinese thought, government, culture, and daily life. The importance of Daoism and Buddhism notwithstanding, Confucianism has been the dominant cultural resource transmitted and elaborated upon by the literati for over two millennia, and because government officials were drawn from the ranks of the literati, it serve as the official state ideology as well. Moreover, because it celebrated tradition, rituals, filial obligations, ancestor reverence, and other such popular institutions, Confucianism was exemplified in the lives of Chinese commoners, who were thereby followers of the Master in practice even though they had no firsthand knowledge of the *Analects* and related texts (Ames, 1998, p. 18).

Confucius says

"What qualifies one to participate in government?" Confucius said, "Honor five virtues, and reject the four vices. Then you can participate in government." His pupil asked, "What are the five virtues? Confucius said, "Good people are generous without being wasteful; are hardworking without being resentful; they desire without being greedy; they are at ease without being haughty; they are dignified without being fierce." The pupil asked, "What are the four vices?" Confucius replied, "To execute without having admonished; this is called cruelty. To examine accomplishments without having instructed; this is called brutality. To be lax in direction yet make deadlines; this is labeled viciousness. To be stingy in giving what is due to others; this is called being bureaucratic" (*Analects* 20:2).

You are humane if you can practice five things in the world: respectfulness, magnanimity, truthfulness, acuity, and generosity.

- If you are respectful, you won't be despised.
 - If you are magnanimous, you will win people.
 - If you are truthful, you will be trusted.
 - If you are acute, you will be successful.
 - If you are generous, you will be able to employ people. (*Analects* 17:6)
- The exemplary person helps to bring out the best in others, but does not help to bring out the worst. (*Analects* 12:16)
- Being firm, resolute, honest, and deliberate in speech is close to authoritative conduct. (*Analects* 13:27)
- Exemplary persons always keep nine things in mind:
- In looking they think about clarity,
 In hearing they think about acuity,
 In countenance they think about cordiality,
 In bearing and attitude they think about deference,
 In speaking they think about doing their utmost,
 In conducting affairs they think about due respect,
 In entertaining doubts they think about the proper questions to ask,
 In anger they think about regret,
 In sight of gain they think about appropriate conduct. (*Analects* 16:10)

A person who is able to carry into practice five attitudes in the world can be considered authoritative: Deference, tolerance, making good on one's word, diligence, and generosity.

- if you are deferential, you will not suffer insult;
- if tolerant, you will win over the many;
- if you make good on your word, others will rely upon you;
- if diligent, you will get results;
- if generous, you will have the status to employ others effectively. (*Analects* 17:6)

In summary, Confucius' principles of character, virtue, humaneness and generosity are paramount. His emphasis on human values as practiced in family, village, and community represents the ethical side of Chinese culture. He advocated the restoration of just government and the revivification of society through the cultivation of what he called the ideal cultured person, the exemplary individual. Confucius believed the moral foundation of social order must rest on the primary virtue of humaneness or humanity. (Cleary, 1993)

Next to humanity Confucius stresses the virtue justice. This word can also be translated duty or principle. The meanings of justice, principle, and duty should be understood to be intimately related in the original thought of Confucius. The virtue that binds everything together in the pragmatic moral universe of Confucius is the virtue of truthfulness of trustworthiness, faithfulness to the ideals exemplified by the cardinal virtues of humanity, justice, courtesy, and wisdom (Cleary, 1993). These principles from Confucius will provide enlightenment when examining contemporary Chinese leadership studies.

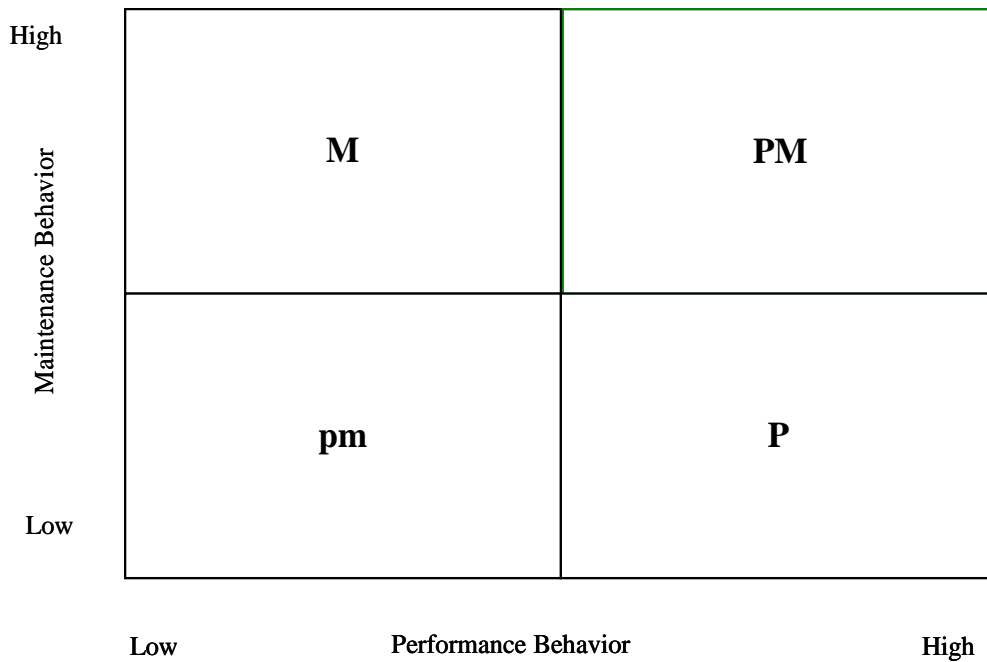
This examination of Chinese leadership begins with Misumi's (1985) leadership research. Misumi, a Japanese scholar, will prove to be influential on contemporary Chinese leadership studies. Misumi's research parallels the better known Ohio State (Fleishman, 1953; Fleishman, Harris, & Burt, 1955) and Michigan studies (Katz & Kahn, 1952) that focused on task and people dimensions of leadership (labeled as initiating structure and consideration or task and relationship behavior plus participative leadership respectively).

Misumi's (1985) leadership model has considerable similarities with the Ohio State/Michigan leadership research. Misumi developed a two factor leadership model with the factors of performance (P) and maintenance (M). His two factors clearly continue the focus on task and relationship dimensions of leadership. Performance-oriented leadership comprised two elements: planning and pressure. Planning includes coordinating work-related activities, solving work problems, and scheduling work. Pressure refers to the leader's skill at pressuring or motivating workers to work at maximum capacity. It includes commitment to deadlines and rules and regulations. Maintenance-oriented leadership is behavior aimed toward the maintenance or improvement of human relations within the workforce. M-leadership strives to preserve the group by reducing excessive tensions, resolving conflict, providing encouragement, and promoting interdependence among group members. Thus, the PM behaviors correspond to the task and people orientations of U.S. research.

The P and M leadership behaviors work together to form four specific leadership patterns (PM, Pm, pM, pm). PM fulfills both performance and maintenance functions; Pm and pM fulfill only one of the functions; and pm fulfills neither function. Misumi conducted multiple studies including interviews, laboratory research and surveys. Over 150,000 were surveyed in coal mines, steel mills, electric power companies, gas companies, shipyards,

machinery manufacturing companies, petrochemical companies, railroads, busses and banks (Misumi, 1985). P scores were obtained by adding up the twelve P behavior scores. M scores were obtained the same way. The P and M scores for each leader were derived using the average of ratings by immediate subordinates. If the leader had a P score higher than the average of P scores for all respondents and also had an M score higher than the average M score for all respondents, then he was classified as a PM type leader. A leader who only had an above average score in P, was classified as a P type leader (sometimes referred to as Pm). A leader who only had an above average score in M, was classified as a M type leader (sometimes referred to as pM). A leader whose score was below average in both P and M scores was classified as a pm type leader. (See Diagram 1)

Diagram 1



The research revealed a general tendency for worker effectiveness criteria including productivity, accident rates, and morale, to correspond to a certain leadership pattern (Sugiman, 1998). This pattern consisted not so much in what the leader objectively did, but in what followers perceived the leader as doing. The preferred pattern was PM leadership where the leader was perceived as maintaining an above-average emphasis on both performance and maintenance functions. For most criteria and in the long-term, M leadership was next most

effective followed by P, and finally pm leadership. For the most part, these findings echo those of U.S. studies. However, the finding that pressure behaviors as a component of performance leadership behavior correlated positively with worker effectiveness contrasts with U.S. research.

Further, Misumi and Peterson (1985) reported found that in Japanese business and governmental organizations, productivity of the group and the satisfaction of group members was rated highest under PM leadership followed by M leadership and P leadership, and again the least productivity and satisfaction occurred under pm leadership.

Following in the steps of Misumi, a group of Chinese social scientists began to develop Chinese leadership theory (Hui and Tan, 1999). Researchers found the PM model to be relevant to various Chinese government organizations (Xu, Chen, Wong & Xue, 1985). Yet, interviews with respondents indicated that the PM pattern was insufficient for interpreting leadership in Chinese work culture. Chinese researchers alertly noted that effective leaders should also rate high on moral character (Ling, 1989). This moral character dimension including characteristics such as righteousness and self-control would be termed "C." Thus, Chinese leadership theory would postulate the importance of performance and maintenance combined with the essential feature of moral character.

Why would the moral character dimension be viewed with such significance in developing a Chinese leadership theory? Ling and Fang (1995) assert that traditionally moral standing has been a factor in the selection and assessment of government officials within the Chinese civil and political system. Further, traditional Chinese culture prior to the Communist system greatly emphasized the moral integrity of leaders. Confucius stressed the concept that great leadership begins with the family and the smaller political group before moving to the larger sphere of the world. To achieve this type of greatness requires moral uprightness. Ling and Fang (1995) finally contend that moral uprightness is essential in a culture without a strong, delineated, explicit system of formal rules with a clear judicial system. The system thus depends on the "benevolence of enlightened leaders whose moral character enables them to lead and control with tolerance and forbearance" (p. 276) in a culture characterized by high power distance.

The CPM Chinese leadership model added the moral character (C) dimension to the performance (P) and maintenance (M) dimensions adapted from Misumi (1985) (Ling, 1989; Ling & Fang, 1995; Ling & Fang, 2003). Ling and Fang (2003) report that a 30 item, 3 factor (CPM) scale was developed and administered to 8,792 subjects. The scale demonstrated strong reliability and validity. In one study of 282 subjects the Cronbach alpha scores ranged from .895 to .925 for the three factors.

Hui and Tan (1999) started with Ling's list of CPM behaviors and operationalized the behaviors as follows. Behaviors on the P dimension included: setting time limits for work, giving useful advice, designing and effective work schedule, observing strict regulations, and planning effective remedial actions. M dimension behaviors included: trusting in others' abilities and efforts, being understanding and accommodating, treating every group member impartially, not attributing blame to others, and not avoiding responsibility and making excuses. The C dimension behaviors are: not currying favor, not seeking personal vengeance under the guise of office matters, not using underhanded means, acknowledging subordinates' efforts accordingly, and not abusing authority.

After multiple studies, Hui and Tan (1999) combined with Tse and Leung (1997) to present the following characteristics representative of strong moral fiber in leaders.

- Refraining from flattery
- Disciplining subordinates according to fair rules
- Giving proper credit to others
- Playing games by the rules
- Allocating resources fairly & unselfishly
- Exhibiting thriftiness
- Showing concern for others

Hui and Tan (1999) contend that moral character (the C component) is more than another leadership characteristic—it is a primary leadership component. Leader demonstration of high C competency generated the highest employee attitude and productivity. Leader usage of C-type leadership influenced work satisfaction, stress, and productivity positively. Work supervisors perceived to be high in moral character tended to create a work group that is congenial and warm in social relationships. Apparently this warm atmosphere translated into increased productivity. Their research does not diminish the value of the P dimension though or that all perceived effective leaders demonstrated high moral character.

Indeed, while in China many great leaders are enshrined as morally unblemished, there are also very competent leaders who are morally dubious. Under those circumstances, performance, not morality, is the pivotal dimension in determining who is the best leader. When the task at hand is very difficult, and leadership is expected to be highly performance oriented, those displaying a low level of moral conduct are seen as being as prototypical as, if not more prototypical than, those with high moral standards. Although this observation may at first seem puzzling, it may reflect the fact that Chinese workers hold schemata of leadership that are consistent with the old Chinese adage of “thick face, black heart.” This saying suggests that to succeed in life (especially in one’s career), one may sometimes employ a certain amount of guile and underhandedness. Thus, an effective leader will sometimes display a certain level of moral “flexibility” or expediency coupled with high performance orientation. (p. 262)

Ling & Fang (2003) administered the CPM scale to over 100 organizations including 67 government bureaus and 10 other types of organizations. Some of the applications of the model are: the CPM scale can be used as a check on cadres. In the past, this type of assessment was done with interviews and personnel bureaus were overwhelmed by the workload. The CPM scale has been warmly received by personnel bureaus as a valid instrument that also save time. The instrument has also provided guidance on the strong and weak points of organizational leaders, thus providing an opportunity for improvement. In China, the CPM scale has also proven useful for selecting organizational leaders. CPM scores combined with qualitative checks provide a basis of comparison for potential leaders. The instrument has also demonstrated utility in organizing teams rationally.

In addition to the development of the CPM leadership, Ling and Fang (2003) developed a Chinese implicit leadership theory based on personal characteristics and attributes that followers expect in their leaders. Implicit leadership theory (ILT) is based on the concept that “individuals have implicit beliefs, convictions, and assumptions concerning attributes and behaviors that distinguish leaders from followers, effective leaders from ineffective leaders, and moral leaders from evils leaders” (House and Javidan, 2004, p, 9). Offerman, Kennedy, and Wirtz (1994) identified eight major factors of implicit leadership

theory in U.S. participants: sensitivity, dedication, tyranny, charisma, attractiveness, masculinity, intelligence, and strength.

Ling, Chia and Fang (2000) and Ling and Fang (2003) asked 133 participants to write 25 words or phrases describing leader characteristics. This group generated 2,546 terms that were narrow down to 690 items due to redundant terms. This list was further narrowed to 163 items combined due to similar meanings. The final Chinese Implicit Leadership Scale (CILS) included 163 items that were placed in a likert-type format (1 = totally uncharacteristic of a leader with 10 = very characteristic of a leader). The scale was administered to 622 participants in Beijing. After factor analysis, the following four factors emerged: personal morality, goal effectiveness, interpersonal competency, and versatility. These four factors combined for 91% of the variance. Personal morality refers to the idea that a leader should be a public servant, have integrity and honesty, be consistent in thought and word, be a truth-seeker, be fair, serve as a role model and be willing to accept criticism. Thus, along the lines of Confucius, personal morality—virtue was the most highly regarded characteristic. Goal effectiveness includes broad vision, ability to plan strategically, a keen sense of perception, open mindedness, the will to do what is right, decisiveness, being deliberate, outstanding ability, and insightfulness in bringing out the best in workers. Interpersonal competence refers to leaders who are mature, straightforward, socially skilled, and effective persuaders. It includes a leader's grace, good form and elegance. The fourth factor, versatility, shows the leader is expected to have command of knowledge, broad interests, and a sense of humor and to be multitasked, imaginative, willing to take risks, and to be approachable. Note the overlap of the first three factors: personal morality, goal effectiveness and interpersonal competency with the CPM model of character, performance and maintenance!

Project GLOBE is an exhaustive, longitudinal study of global leadership and organizational behavior effectiveness undertaken under the leadership of Robert J. House and numerous colleagues. The project began in 1991 and continues currently. The primary goal was to discover if there are leadership universals. 170 principle investigators from 60 cultures tested 27 hypotheses with a total sample of 15,022 middle managers from the 60 cultures. These managers had to have at least two hierarchical layers below and above them. There were 250 average respondents per culture. The respondents represented 779 different organizations from three industries (food, finance, and telecommunication). The primary hypothesis was to determine if transformational leadership principles would be perceived as contributing to outstanding leadership world wide (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta, 2004).

For an item to be considered as a universal positive leader attribute 95% of the country/culture scores on the item had to exceed the mean of 5 on a 7 point scale plus the grand mean score for all countries had to exceed 6 for the item. The universal positive leader attributes identified in the study are categorized as follows:

- Integrity/character items:
 - trustworthy
 - just
 - honest
- Charismatic, inspirational, visionary items:

- encouraging
- positive
- motivational
- confidence builder
- dynamic
- foresight
- Team-oriented items:
 - team-building
 - communicating
 - coordinating
- Other items (often associated with charismatic leadership)
 - excellence-oriented
 - decisive
 - intelligent
 - win-win problem solver

Additionally, Project GLOBE identified the following universal negative leader attributes (i.e., these were perceived as universal impediments to leadership effectiveness): loner, social, non-cooperative, irritable, nonexplicit, ruthless, and dictatorial. The criteria for inclusion in the universal impediment list required that the item grand mean for all cultures be less than 3 on a 7-point scale and that 95% of the culture scores on the item be less than 3 on a 7-point scale. A significant contribution to the leadership literature was the finding that members of diverse cultures share “common observations and values concerning what constitutes effective and ineffective leadership termed culturally endorsed implicit theories of leadership (CLT)” (Javidan, House & Dorfman, 2004).

Project GLOBE clustered countries into groupings of common interest countries. China was included in a cluster termed Confucian Asia that included China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. The Confucian Asia cluster is characterized by relatively high scores for charismatic/value-based, self-protective, team-oriented, and humane-oriented leadership. Charismatic/value-based leadership includes items of integrity such as trustworthy, just, honest as well as charismatic items such as visionary, inspirational and self-sacrifice (Dorfman, Hanges & Brodbeck, 2004). Thus, the charismatic/value-based dimension corresponds to the C character factor of the CPM scale/theory.

Roger Ames, past chair of the Center of Chinese Studies at the University of Hawaii and translator extraordinaire of *The Analects of Confucius* and *Sun-Tzu The Art of Warfare*, was not surprised that it was challenging to find indigenous Chinese leadership studies, particularly quantitative ones, because he maintains that the Chinese would not think to approach leadership that way (R. Ames, personal communication, March 22, 2005). He states that leadership is a way of life in Chinese thinking; it is everything we are and do. He concurred with the emphasis on character in several Chinese leadership studies since with Confucius, exemplary persons are not functionaries (emphasis on skills) but those demonstrating character that flows from the person within. Ames believes that the Western-style leadership research encountered in this review are to be expected due to the Western-style social science training of the researchers. An approach to the study of Chinese leadership that would be more congruent with Chinese culture would be more qualitative in nature,

allowing the free flow of behaviors, values, and characteristics one would observe in exemplary leaders.

Perhaps excessive emphasis is placed on researching Chinese leadership via the “tried and true” quantitative approach that tends to be linear in nature. Hill (1999) maintains that a fundamental assumption of leadership is that “leadership is a more circular, rather than linear, process” (p. 207). How frequently Western communication theorists indict linear models of communication. Yet, do we fall into a trap of using linear thinking to investigate Chinese leadership? Confucius and other Chinese philosophers would have us view life, including leadership, more holistically rather than with more of dualistic perspective. Hill asserts the value of a different perspective:

The Chinese fretted balls, an art form of carving balls within balls, provides a metaphorical vehicle for addressing leadership. What are the central, distinctive features of the persons in positions of leadership? What are the emerging styles of various leaders who might differently address the surrounding tasks? What situational demands generate group goals and set the course of leadership? (p. 208).

Perhaps these questions can reorient us to an examination of Chinese leadership that begins indigenously within the Chinese culture. The closest approximation to this perspective discovered in this research is the Chinese implicit leadership theory approach. AS Confucius says, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” Let us continue the journey with a single step of enlightenment.

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