

Chinese and Western Leadership Models: A Literature Review

Peter King (Corresponding author)

Beijing University of Technology, Beijing, China; University of Phoenix, Arizona, USA

E-mail: kipet2002@yahoo.com

Wei Zhang

Business School, Beijing University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, China

E-mail: weizhangm@vip.sina.com

Received: Jan. 16, 2014 Accepted: February 19, 2014 Published: April 1, 2014

doi:10.5296/jmr.v6i2.4927

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jmr.v6i2.4927>

Abstract

Purpose: This study sought to examine how models of Western and Chinese leadership are changing and perhaps converging toward a notionally similar and possibly holistic concept of leadership.

Methodology: We reviewed and analyzed research on Western and Chinese leadership published over the past sixty years to develop a different perspective from which to consider the future development of leadership concepts.

Findings: We suggest that (1) since the middle of the twentieth century, paradigms of leadership have been changing; (2) Western and Chinese concepts of leadership, though historically different, are converging; and (3) leadership should be considered from a holistic rather than taxonomic perspective.

Implications: A holistic view of leadership helps us consider how leadership might evolve and affect future business practices in China and the West.

Originality: This paper presents a new perspective on Chinese and Western leadership that facilitates an understanding of how differences in leadership concepts could diminish and how business organizations might evolve in the future.

Keywords: China, leadership principles, leadership, cultural differences in leadership, convergence in leadership principles

1. Introduction

Since adopting a market economy in 1979, China has become one of the three leading economies in the world. Having been an arguably less developed country, China has since abandoned many of its socialist beliefs and increasingly adopted Western management tools and market principles while retaining many of its traditional (Confucian-based) principles. Concurrent with China's adaptation to Western ideas, Western businesses have become aware of traditional Chinese management ideas. In this paper, we consider how cross-cultural exchanges could lead to a convergent concept of leadership in a manner that is visual rather than taxonomic.

We examined 646 studies (cf., Tseng, Tung, & Duan, 2010) on Western and Chinese leadership traditions to identify the attributes of leaders, including their roles, qualities, and treatment of subordinates. Much of the research focused on Western leadership and management principles (e.g., Amernic, Craig, & Tourish, 2007; Antonakis & House, 2002; Bass, 1985; Bass, Waldman, Avolio, & Bebb, 1987; Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 2003) as distinct from Chinese management principles (e.g., Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Jung, Chan, Chen, & Chow, 2010; Lu, Ling, Wu, & Liu, 2012; Xing & Sims, 2011). We included in our study only those papers that specifically reported leadership attributes that were comparable between Western and Chinese leadership principles. While studies comparing Chinese and Western leadership practices have been published in the last few decades, few researchers have specifically identified cross-cultural influences; however, some findings (e.g., Chen & Lee, 2008; Schein, 2006) could be interpreted as finding similarities or equivalences.

Most Western research has been etic, and concerns over the applicability of Western perspectives have been noted (e.g., Jung et al., 2010; King & Zhang, 2013). Some researchers have argued for an indigenous approach (e.g., Zhang et al., 2012b) and some for a holistic approach (e.g., Kadar & Mills, 2011). Published emic research is sparsely available in the West, possibly because of a paucity of adequate translations and because Chinese leadership research has not yet contributed significantly to indigenous leadership theories (Cao & Li, 2010).

Several papers have identified a possible grafting or cohabitation of Western and Chinese leadership models in developing respective leadership concepts (e.g., Connor, Min, & Iyengar, 2013; Chow, 2005; Gadiesh, Di Paola, Caruso, & Leung, 2007; Gao, Arnulf, & Kristofferson, 2011; Iles & Feng, 2011; Jung et al., 2010; Zhang, Everett, Elking, & Cone, 2012a). Such research, however, has not posited a possible convergence between the two models (e.g., Jogulu, 2010; Chen & Lee, 2008; Conte & Novello, 2008; Gutierrez, Spencer, & Zhu, 2012; Vilkinas, Shen, & Cartan, 2009; Weldon & Chow, 2005) that could produce a holistic concept of leadership. Taken together, discussions of the various aspects of leadership tend to resemble the parable of the five blind men who describe an elephant in terms of its parts (Allio, 2013). In this paper, we offer a perspective on leadership that could facilitate a more complete view of the elephant.

2. Methodology

We searched for peer-reviewed publications using only the following keywords: “leadership,” “Chinese leadership,” and “Chinese culture.” While we found little emic research on Chinese leadership published before the year 2000, etic research on Chinese leadership, which arguably commenced with Redding (1980), has been published extensively. We focused on the period after 1980 because China has achieved high standing in the economic world since adopting a market economy in 1979. We recognize that earlier emic research may have been published in Chinese, but such research might have reflected political rather than business principles. While future studies could address earlier emic research, such an approach is beyond the scope of this paper.

In this paper, we offer no empirical evidence. While empirical evidence has its uses, there are attendant pitfalls. Empirical evidence invites predictions of possible outcomes (and by implication applications to decision making), but outcomes do not always follow theoretical predictions (Silver, 2012). Hunches, “gut feelings,” or logic may also be effective in determining factors that lead to outcomes (Tetlock, 2000).

We considered the role of surveys but were cognizant of the limitations (many of which are not recognized) that surveys often entail (Silver, 2012). Ionnides (2005) notes that published research that conducts statistical testing has high error rates. One effort that attempted to verify published findings found that about two-thirds of positive findings could not be replicated. Silver offers several reasons for such high error rates, including psychological biases, methodological errors, and misaligned incentives.

To the reasons offered by Silver (2012), we would add the error of perceiving survey populations to be homogenous, a view that Schlevogt (2001) showed to be erroneous on the basis of regional residence. Although the Globe Study (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) and other publications (e.g., Hofstede, 2001) demonstrated that common characteristics vary when segregated by region or by industry sector, we suggest the segregations were generally broad brush and on national levels, and thus could not reflect the influences of individual characteristics in leadership issues. Furthermore, Popper and Mayseless (2002) demonstrated that 40% of the required attributes of a leader depends on genetic factors, and Dawkins (1986) showed that the odds of two people having the same genetic makeup are billions to one. However, these differences often become subsumed by generalities and disappear in large surveys. At issue is the extent to which broad-brush common characteristics can be measured statistically and applied when considering leadership issues.

Leadership issues are people issues that reflect how people react to the plethora of challenges that arise and, in particular, how leaders react. How leaders react successfully has been examined by many researchers who have found that success is in part influenced by the leader’s own cultural background and the cultural backgrounds of followers (e.g., Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007; House et al., 2004; Yooyanyon & Muenjohn, 2010). The notion that people can be statistically measured like ball bearings on a production line seems, therefore, to be a potentially fallacious assumption.

We do not wish to suggest that statistical methods have no place in research. We do suggest, however, that in social studies the application of statistical methods needs considerably more care than has been demonstrated in many published findings. Consequently, we have focused on published literature that, even if supported by empirical evidence, identifies leadership characteristics that demonstrate successful leadership. We suggest that these characteristics are always present in leaders but that the application of characteristics varies according to situational contexts.

3. Literature Review

The literature reveals multiple leadership competencies, traits, styles, and behavioral attributes, but no generally accepted taxonomy or leadership paradigm has emerged (Allio, 2013; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002). Common to all recent research, however, is an explicit or implicit acceptance of the suggestion by Yukl et al. (2002) that effective leadership should correlate with subordinate behavior.

Leaders manage cultures, and cultures are about people (e.g., Chhokar et al., 2007; House et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2001; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). Leadership is interrelated with the culture in which the leader operates (e.g., Hui, Chiu, Yu, Cheng, & Tse, 2007; Schein, 2006), and contemporary organizational cultures are characterized by demographic and cultural diversity (e.g., Chin & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007; Yooyanyong & Muenjohn, 2010). Leaders need to establish trust in the public at large (Kelley & Anderson, 2006) and build consensus among colleagues and followers inside and outside the organization (Maak & Pless, 2006).

Leaders need to possess genetically based attributes that facilitate the development of leadership qualities (Popper & Mayseless, 2002). However, there are differences of opinion about whether leadership is genetic per se (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). While the totality of leadership qualities may not be solely attributable to genetics, effective leadership requires training, and training is culturally based (e.g., Cardno, 2007; Ereh & Beshei, 2011; Rayner, 2009; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009).

3.1 Considerations of comparisons between current Western and Chinese leadership principles

Dorfman et al. (1997) and Fukuyama (2011), among others, have suggested that leadership is a universal phenomenon; however, only certain forms of leadership (e.g., charismatic leadership) are universally effective (Dorfman, Lavidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, & House, 2012). Leadership practices that are successful in one culture are likely to be unsuccessful in another if cultural differences are not considered (Blunt & Jones, 1997; Dorfman et al., 1997; Gao et al., 2011; Gutierrez et al., 2012; Jogulu, 2010; Law, 2012). Despite the cultural differences between China and the West, a comparison between Western leadership principles (e.g., Antonakis & House, 2002; Beddell, Hunter, Angie, & Vert, 2006; Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2006; Miller, Le Breton-Miller, & Scholnick, 2008; Pitcher, 1995; Scharmer, 2009; Schein, 2006; Yukl et al., 2002) and Chinese principles (e.g., Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010; Cheng et al., 2004; Chen & Lee, 2008; Jung et al., 2010; Lu et al.,

2012; Redding, 1980; Senge, 2006; Singelis et al., 1995; Xing & Sims, 2011) shows that there are also similarities.

3.2 Western leadership principles

Although Western leadership principles vary to some degree across European and American cultures, we found general agreement on the salience of specific leadership practices; the differences mainly included the degrees of importance attached to certain features (Martin, Resick, Keating, & Dickson, 2009). On examining the findings of Martin et al. (2009), we determined that, for the purposes of this study, the differences were not significant enough to disaggregate leadership principles and that we could confidently apply generalizations obtained from the literature review.

Western leadership principles and management theory have focused on profit generation (Wren, 2005), giving rise to *specialist* rather than *generalist* leadership practices (e.g., Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2006; Pitcher, 1995). Specialist practices include articulating a view of the future for followers (e.g., Beddell et al., 2006; Pitcher, 1995; Scharmer, 2009; Schein, 2006), managing innovation (e.g., O'Sullivan & Dooley, 2009), fostering human relations (e.g., Chen & Tjosvold, 2007; Kassing, 2007), and strategic planning (e.g., Mintzberg, Lampel, Quinn, & Ghoshal, 2003; Nonaka & Zhu, 2012), which is considered a programmatic and analytical thought process (Chen & Wu, 2006; Franken, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009). In this context, workers or followers are regarded as impersonal components of production (Wang, 2006; Wren, 2005). An analysis of the plethora of Western management theories suggests that the discussion of objectives is given the highest priority (e.g., Drucker, 2003) followed by command (e.g., Amernic et al., 2007), tactics (e.g., Mintzberg et al., 2003), and finally personnel.

A leader is expected to display ethical behavior (e.g., Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010; Caldwell, Hayes, Karri, & Bernal, 2008; Chen & Lee, 2008) and integrity, which the leader has to learn (Loeser, 2008; Odrakiewicz, 2010; Zhao, 2007) to establish trust (Gosling & Huang, 2009). Integrity, along with ability and benevolence, is one of the three antecedents of trust (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), and trust is essential for the health of economic and financial systems (Frankel, 2008).

The idea that subordinates are entitled to humane considerations such as respect did not reappear until the last decades of the twentieth century (McCloskey, 2006; McGregor, 2006; McGregor, 1960; Nonaka & Zhu, 2012; Sergiovanni, 1992; Wren, 2005). Leaders are now expected to respect their subordinates (Alban-Metcalfe & Alimo-Metcalfe, 2009; Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010; Chen & Lee, 2008; Mohr & Wolfram, 2008; Van Quakabeke & Eckloff, 2010), interact politely (Bowe & Martin, 2007; Kadar & Mills, 2011), value the contributions of subordinates (Caldwell et al., 2008; Hui et al., 2007), involve subordinates through communication (Franken et al., 2009), and promote career development (Cheng et al., 2004). Such humane considerations are found in Chinese leadership approaches (Chen & Lee, 2008; Fu, Wu, Yang, & Ye, 2007; Jung et al., 2010).

Researchers have identified deficiencies in and recommended corrective actions for Western leadership practices. Latham and Vinyard (2005) suggest that leadership behavior and the means by which examples are set and communicated to all employees is one criterion by which to measure leadership in an organization. LaRue, Childs, and Larson (2006) stress the importance of ethical leadership in setting examples for employees, while Andolsen (2008) points out that employees need to be able to trust the leadership. According to these studies, leadership should refrain from “shaving” the limits of ethical behavior (Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008). Transparent communication with employees helps diffuse suspicion and distrust (Drazin & Joyce, n.d.), while efforts to understand employees’ values foster communication and understanding (Goodall, Na, & Warner, 2006). Open ethical communication also helps avoid retaliatory employee reactions (Kassing, 2007). We suggest that another way of viewing these findings is that leaders need to recognize the value of employees as individuals who deserve respect. The concept of interactional respect is a fundamental principle of Chinese social interaction (Chen & Lee, 2008; Hwang, 2012a, 2012b).

3.3 Chinese leadership principles

Chinese business leadership as a research topic is a relatively new phenomenon that emerged about thirty years ago (Wu, 2009; Yang, 2009). Current research, however, suggests that Chinese business practices continue to follow traditional, long-established Chinese approaches (e.g., Chen & Lee, 2008; Chen & Tjosvold, 2007; Conte & Novello, 2008; Clydesdale, 2007; Gelbras, 2008; Gutierrez et al., 2012; Huang, 2005; Liu, Zhang, & Leung, 2006; McGregor, 2010; Schlevogt, 2001)—described by Wong (2001) as *moral leadership*—rooted in ancient Chinese philosophy (e.g., Chen & Lee, 2008; Chhokar et al., 2007; Sunzi [*The Art of War*]; Xing & Sims, 2011). Such approaches can be conceptually linked with political, social, and commercial paradigms (Chen & Lee, 2008; Fang, 2006; Khoo, 2002; McIntyre-Bhatty & Parker, 2011).

Within this philosophical framework, leadership has focused on being humanistic and improving followers through personal development (Chen & Lee, 2008; Wang, 2006). Leaders are differentiated by the designations *ling xiu* for leaders who have achieved a vision and *ling dao* for leaders who act in a stewardship role where managers focus on getting the job done (Vilkinas et al., 2009; Wang, 2006). The ideas in Sunzi’s *The Art of War* have been included in traditional Chinese leadership concepts. In their analysis of *The Art of War*, Chen and Lee (2008) found that discussions of personnel represented approximately 35% of the text, tactics 30%, objectives 22%, and command 13%.

Chinese leaders are expected to rank ethical considerations above the achievement of profit (Ahmed, Kung, & Eichenseher, 2003). A leader can be a model and a source of inspiration for subordinates by using persuasion rather than coercion; promoting harmony with nature and with others; and setting a personal example by promoting equality, simple living, and a rejection of the trappings of status (Chen & Lee, 2008). Finally, a leader should exert minimal influence on subordinates (Xing & Sims, 2011). Although described as discrete elements, these principles are interlinked and interdependent (King & Zhang, 2013).

While Chinese leadership principles sustained Chinese development for millennia, Chinese business did not sustain economic development to the same extent as development in the West. Although China was once economically on par with the West (Clydesdale, 2007), by the middle of the twentieth century, it was considered a “less developed country.” The opening up of China that began in 1979 initiated what might be termed “catch-up initiatives,” through which Western management techniques were acquired.

Chinese leaders have imported Western management techniques previously unknown in China (Cao & Li, 2010; Chen & Lee, 2008; Connor et al., 2013) as a result of being educated abroad and being exposed to Western enterprises that invest in China (e.g., Gao et al., 2011). As a result, Chinese leaders have applied a mixture of communism, Confucian values, and Western management concepts (Clegg, 2003). Although the foundation of authoritarianism has weakened, it is still found among Chinese leaders (Fenby, 2013; Jung et al., 2010). Fu et al. (2007) suggest that “the reforms have changed people’s behaviors on the surface, but deep inside, their values, which were formed at an early stage in life, are still there” (p. 892).

4. Discussion

4.1 Similarities and differences

Westerners focus on leaders while Chinese people focus on the collective activities of followers (Conte & Novello, 2008). Western and Chinese leaders both focus on results, but the delivery of results in China is specifically a managerial function. Western and Chinese leadership models both pragmatically focus on financial success to achieve benefits for the owners (Redding, 1993; Wren, 2005). While Western research has found authoritarian leadership counterproductive (Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010), such leadership is still accepted in China (Cheng et al., 2004). The distinction between *transformational* and *transactional* leadership (e.g., Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) was recognized in China via the designations of *ling xiu* (transformational) and *ling dao* (transactional/stewardship).

A comparison of organizational citizenship behaviors shows that characteristics such as altruism and conscientiousness toward colleagues are very similar, if not identical, between Western and Chinese behaviors when measured on an etic organizational citizenship behavior scale. No similarities, however, are found using an emic scale (Farh, Earley, & Shu-Chi Lin, 1997).

A comparison of etic findings by Western researchers and emic findings by Wang (2006) and Chen and Lee (2008) suggests that Chinese practices approach leadership as an art and emphasize interdependent, humanistic, and situational aspects; Westerners, on the other hand, consider leadership a science and focus on objective organizational results and impersonal processes supported by logic and analysis.

Chen and Lee (2008) offer another perspective with their analysis of *The Art of War*, which suggests that Sunzi was concerned first with personnel, second with tactics, and third with results. Western leadership, however, places results before tactics and tactics before people (e.g., Antonakis & House, 2002; Bass et al., 1987; Beddell et al., 2006; Mintzberg et al.,

2003). We suggest that if people are the primary concern, then personal emotions, aspirations, and ethics should be essential considerations for leadership.

Chen and Lee (2008) found that of the seven values identified as important to Chinese managers, four of them were less important to Western leaders: propriety, righteousness, incorruptibility, and a sense of shame. Because of these differences in values, Kouzes and Posner's (2003) model of five practices of exemplary leadership might not be applicable to Chinese businesses without modification (Gallo, 2008).

After reviewing the literature, we determined that both Western and Chinese leadership principles primarily focus on the achievement of economic benefits. However, we believe Western values still view people (i.e., employees) in a largely dehumanized manner as components of production; Chinese values, on the other hand, regard people in a more humanistic manner as individuals who can contribute to the organization.

In the current world climate emphasizing dignity and human rights, the Western view is likely to erode; however, a replacement view has not yet been chosen. We suggest that the Chinese view of leadership offers such a replacement. On the other hand, the Chinese view will recognize, or has already recognized, the value of Western management tools. We suggest that such cross-cultural exchanges invite a convergence or melding of principles.

4.2 Convergences

Western leadership research published between 2000 and 2009 directly or indirectly reported the relevance of Chinese humanistic concepts to Western management theories (see Table 1).

Table 1. Publication dates of Western research papers referring to cross-cultural transference of leadership concepts

Publication period	Leadership styles that reflect no significant importation of cross-cultural views of leadership	References to the West addressing human considerations (that reflect Chinese views of leadership)	References to China importing Western leadership technology
1950-1999	Discussed in Redding (1990)		
2000-2009	Wren (2005)	Chow (2005) Weldon (2005) Gadiesh et al. (2007)	Clydesdale (2007) Gadiesh et al. (2007) Chen & Lee (2008)
Since 2009	Tseng et al. (2010)	Cheng et al. (2004) Mostovicz et al. (2009) Nunes et al. (2010) Gao et al. (2011) Iles & Feng (2011) Law (2012) Nonaka & Zhu (2012) Dorfman et al. (2012) Zhang et al. (2012a) Connor et al. (2013) Allio (2013)	Gao et al. (2011) Dorfman et al. (2012) (Cao & Li [2010] examined 94 papers, all of which referred to Western principles)

Cao and Li (2010) note that emic Chinese research repeats or validates Western management concepts but has not yet contributed to indigenous leadership research. However, emic leadership research specifically focused on humanistic issues remains to be established. Given the importance of humanistic values in Chinese culture, the need to study such values in leadership might be less apparent to emic researchers than to etic researchers.

Several Western researchers have identified a possible grafting or cohabitation of Western and Chinese leadership models in developing new leadership concepts (e.g., Connor et al., 2013; Chow, 2005; Gadiesh et al., 2007; Gao et al., 2011; Iles & Feng, 2011; Jung et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2012a). Incorporating the leadership practices of one culture can help improve leadership practices in another culture (Connor et al., 2013; Chow, 2005; Gadiesh et al., 2007; Gao et al., 2011; Iles & Feng, 2011; Zhang et al., 2012a). Farh et al. (1997) found that in China, it is possible to blend traditional and modern attitudinal perspectives in organizational citizenship behaviors. Because leadership is culturally dependent (Rhodes &

Brundrett, 2009) and subject to influences from other cultures (Law, 2012), a leader needs to ensure that his or her worldview fits with the activities of the organization (Mostovicz, Kakabadse, & Kakabadse, 2009; Yooyanyong & Muenjohn, 2010). Existing research, however, has not posited a possible convergence between the two practices that could lead to a universal concept (e.g., Jogulu, 2010; Chen & Lee, 2008; Conte & Novello, 2008; Gutierrez et al., 2012; Vilkinas et al., 2009; Weldon, 2005).

As noted earlier, Chinese managers have been increasingly exposed to Western “scientific management” principles. We argue, however, that such “specialist management” activities do not constitute Western leadership per se, even if in the jargon that often attends management consulting, the aggregate of all these practices constitutes “scientific management.” As Chinese leaders increasingly adopt scientific management, the techniques become a part of existing Chinese leadership approaches.

We argue that focusing on the different specialties renders consensus on a leadership taxonomy improbable and further diverts focus from the leader as an individual. An individual might use the tools of scientific management, but he or she relies fundamentally on emotion and intellect. Tetlock (2000) found no contradiction between “the formal prescriptivism [*sic*] of decision making theory and the informal ideological hunches of decision makers who cope with messy human and organizational realities from day to day” (p. 324).

The idea of blending tradition with modernity has been discussed by Farh et al. (1997). If traditional and modern leadership principles are converging, there should be evidence in each culture of cross-cultural assumption or assimilation from the other culture. That is, a traditional principle from one culture (e.g., the Chinese humanistic principle) becomes a modern principle in the other culture (e.g., in Western management theory). However, the extent of such principles is limited by existing knowledge; that is, existing knowledge limits the extent of available principles that can be transferred cross-culturally. Nevertheless, we suggest that there is evidence of cross-cultural transference in the literature.

Since 2009, research into the relevance of Chinese philosophy for Western management has increased. So far, however, there is no research showing that such philosophy has been generally incorporated into Western management theories. This is perhaps attributable to the remaining vestiges of earlier paradigms. While the differences between Western and Chinese leadership practices have been reported, we suggest these differences are matters of emphasis and not of meaning. While propriety, righteousness, incorruptibility, and a sense of shame might not carry the same importance in the West as in China, recent events (e.g., Enron) suggest that the West is revising its views of such values.

We noted that, in the last two decades, Western theories have been increasingly focusing on the humanistic aspects of successful leadership that we consider similar to Chinese values; at the same time, Chinese leadership has adopted many Western management tools. Any increase in Western focus on the humanistic aspects of leadership suggests that Chinese humanistic principles should resonate favorably with, and be increasingly incorporated into, Western leadership theory. Chinese leadership can be expected to further incorporate the

specialist tools developed in the West. As Western leaders have incorporated Chinese principles and Chinese leaders have adopted Western management tools, their respective operational effectiveness and efficiency will likely improve.

As Chinese and Western leaders incorporate concepts that originated in their respective cultures, mosaic-like concepts of leadership can be expected—under the pressure of a globalized economy—to aggregate into a universal concept of leadership where the same discrete elements of leadership become linked and interdependent, but not necessarily in the same ways. To use the analogy of the mosaic, the respective Chinese and Western “stones” will be present to the same degree, but not necessarily in the same pattern. However, each mosaic has a defined boundary or frame, and we suggest that the development of such a frame for leadership is possible.

Extrapolating from the current state of leadership principles, we suggest that Western leadership principles will increasingly apply humanistic concepts that reflect Chinese philosophies, even though the basis will not be the complete Confucian philosophy. For example, the Chinese concepts of hierarchy implicit in Confucian philosophy (Fenby, 2006; Gallo, 2008; Gelbras, 2008; McGregor, 2010) are unlikely to be accepted in the West (Chhokar et al., 2007; House et al., 2004).

4.3 Universal concept

The extensive lists of roles and characteristics that leaders are expected to fulfill and display suggest that a taxonomy of leadership might not be possible. We argue that similar to other studies on cross-cultural issues (cf., Kadar & Mills, 2011), a view of leadership might be required that differs from the views hitherto accepted in China and the West. Such a culturally neutral or universal view would encompass components of leadership philosophies from other cultures, including Western and Chinese perspectives.

Structuring the qualities and/or practices identified above into a taxonomy could be an Augean task. We offer, therefore, a different concept using a conceptual depiction of leadership in the context of the identified qualities and/or practices. An effective leader recognizes that leadership is not a formula or a recipe; it is an aggregation or mixture of skills and insights in a single person. These skills and insights work together to create a solution for each new situation as it arises. Each situation is unique and requires the necessary skills to meet the challenge of that specific situation.

While a subordinate follows a set of steps defined by a leader that progresses from problem to solution, the leader is aware of his or her position at the center of the situation and acts or reacts using leadership principles; we suggest these principles can be represented by a number of lines (or parameters) intersecting at that center. No two lines are parallel, none begins or ends at the same point, and each is unique in its path, yet notionally all lines intersect at the one common situation. Given that there can be infinite unique possibilities, an infinite number of intersecting lines can exist. An infinite number of non-parallel lines can equate to an infinite number of tangents and can be used to define a circle. If each tangent

reflects a leadership principle, we suggest the circle can define a universal concept of leadership (Figure 1).

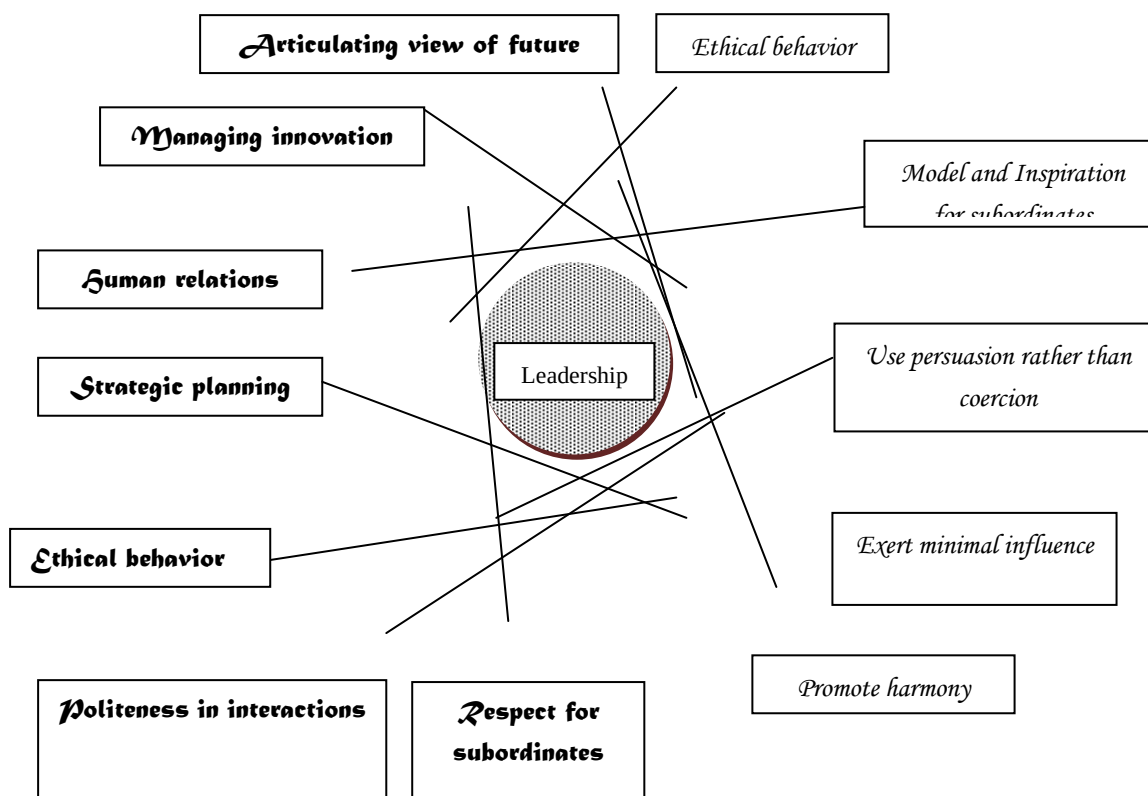


Figure 1. Notional leadership circle formed by tangents (parameters) of Western leadership principles (boldface) and/or Chinese philosophical principles (italics)

Figure 1 captures Western and Chinese leadership concepts, but additional tangents can be added, thereby adding further definitions to the circle. However, a universal concept of leadership cannot mean that “one size fits all.” Just as a multilingual speaker will use the language of the audience, a leader needs to choose the leadership style appropriate for his or her followers. Notionally, the five blind men exchanged information and consulted with each other about the shape of the elephant.

5. Implications and Future Research

Western and Chinese concepts of leadership are converging. The implications of this convergence are that Western leadership theories could place greater emphasis on humanistic considerations and thereby influence labor relations and organizational commitment. At the

same time, China's increasing adoption of Western leadership techniques is likely to encourage innovation and improve the efficiency of current Chinese businesses. Future research will need to determine the extent and influence of this convergence.

Western leaders have experienced difficulties in Chinese milieus (Goodall et al., 2006). Such cross-cultural situations have prompted educational programs to help Chinese leaders operate using Western techniques (e.g., Connor et al., 2013) and help Western leaders in Chinese environments (e.g., Goodall et al., 2006). The holistic approach provides a basis for understanding cross-cultural management and for flexibility in responding to situations a leader might encounter.

Western leaders need to learn and apply the concepts of moral leadership (Wong, 2001) to improve leadership practices in general. In cross-cultural situations between the West and China, Western leaders need to understand the importance of Chinese values (King & Zhang, 2013). Further research could determine the extent to which Chinese leadership philosophy has been incorporated into Western management theories.

Future research might examine past findings to determine the validity of the concept of universal leadership. If the concept is found to be valid, future leadership training might be tailored to offer leaders a wider range of situational responses.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we aggregated the results of our review of published research on Western and Chinese leadership concepts. We found that while leaders have myriad obligations toward their followers, responding to the task of meeting such obligations requires innumerable qualities. These qualities developed independently in Western and Chinese cultures. Over the last two decades, Chinese and Western leaders have incorporated principles from each other's cultures in ways that suggest convergence. This convergence of Western and Chinese leadership concepts offers a means to view leadership not in a taxonomic way but as a visual model. Such a concept has implications for the development of both Western and Chinese businesses and leadership training. Western leadership models could benefit from increased emphasis on humanistic factors and reduced prioritization of rationality, while Chinese leadership concepts can be expected to increasingly emphasize "scientific management," including innovation.

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