

Leveraging Chinese Culture for Effective Organizational Leadership: The China Case

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This article examined organizational leadership in the context of China. Taking a cultural perspective, this literature review traced the cultural roots of Chinese leadership and analyzed the cultural impact on leadership practice in organizations. It further provided general guidelines for leadership development in China, followed by recommendations of areas for future research in HRD.

Keywords: Organizational Leadership, Culture, China

The past two decades have witnessed the People's Republic of China (China) experiencing fundamental transformation in every aspect of its societal life, including the transition of economic system from being rigid and centrally planned to free market driven, the transition of domestic enterprises from being government controlled production units to independent economic entities, the transition of industrial structure from having primarily state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to representing mixed forms of ownership (e.g., town and village enterprises, privately owned firms, joint ventures and shared-holding enterprises), and the transition of culture from being Confucianism dominated to becoming more diverse with emerging capitalist values (Wang & Wang, 2006). Few countries in the world have experienced as many changes in institutional rules, social norms, and cultural values as China is. This unique blend of changes makes China a fascinating case for study. In addition, China's rapid development and increasing presence on the global economic platform since 1978 has provided numerous opportunities for multinational corporations from all over the world. In spite of such reality, China remains one of the regions that have been studied the least by organization management scholars (Tsui, Schoonhoven, Meyer, Lau, & Milkovich, 2004). This is evidenced by the relatively short history (more than 20 years) of research on organization management in and on China and consequently, the paucity of available literature (Wang & Wang, 2006).

The magnitude of economic, institutional, and cultural transformations in China gives rise to many questions, particularly, how to successfully lead and manage organizations under such rapidly changing, highly turbulent and complex conditions? While leadership and leadership development are not new phenomena in China, the challenges posed by the ever-changing domestic and global environments are unfamiliar to many organizational leaders in contemporary times. Existing management theories that are primarily derived from studies in the Western context, particularly the United States, Canada, and Western Europe (Tsui et al., 2004), provide limited information to help us understand pressing issues facing organizational leaders in the unique China context. Furthermore, among the extant publications on management on/in Greater China, while much research attention was paid to a wide range of issues such as Chinese cultural values, human resource management, firm strategy, organizational structure and change, market transitions and reform, managerial performance, multinational corporations in China (Tsui et al.), very few studies were dedicated to leadership related issues in mainland China. Additionally, the majority of these studies reported empirical findings from survey or archival data analysis; the number of theoretical and conceptual papers is very small.

Furthermore, a review of the bulk of the leadership literature points to a couple of cultural limitations. One is that extant leadership theories mostly capture and describe Western industrialized culture. In fact, almost all of the prevailing theories and empirical evidence on leadership are rather distinctly American in nature, characterized by being individualistic rather than collectivist, stressing rationality rather than asceticism or religion, focusing on followers' responsibilities rather than rights, assuming hedonism rather than commitment to duty or altruistic motivation, and assuming centrality of work and democratic value orientation, (Littrell, 2002). These emphases are not particularly Asian in nature, and certainly not typical of China. Therefore, a frequently noted limitation of these theories is that they do not address the issue as to whether they can be generalized to other cultures. However, the available literature on Chinese leadership is scarce. Another related problem is that, within the extant studies of leadership from a cultural lens, it appears that much of the analytical attention has been given to organizational culture (e.g., Bass, & Avolio, 1993; Schein, 1985, 1992; Sinclair, 1993). Through the literature search, I found relatively small amount of research articulating leadership and national culture particularly in the context of China. Given such, this article is a timely and needed effort.

Purpose and Method

This research was conducted to explore the phenomenon of organizational leadership in the context of China. To address this broad issue, I took the national culture perspective to situate Chinese leadership in the cultural and historical context. Specifically, this article focused on three lines of inquiry: (1) What is the cultural root of Chinese leadership? (2) How has Chinese culture impacted organizational leadership practice in China? (3) How can HRD professionals leverage Chinese culture to develop effective organizational leadership in China?

To accomplish these goals, I adopted the literature review approach. I conducted a search through several Western databases in the business, economics, and education, including ABI/INFORM Complete at ProQuest and ERIC at EBSCOhost, PsychInfo, Academic Search Premier, and Business Search Premier, to locate literature on organizational leadership and Chinese culture. The following keywords were used either separately or in combinations: leadership, organizational leadership, leadership practice, leadership development, organizational leaders, leadership education, organization management, Chinese culture, national culture, China, and People's Republic of China. Our search generated a large body of literature on leadership theories developed in the Western context, yet a limited volume of publications on Chinese leadership, and even less exploring Chinese leadership practices from the culture perspective.

The remainder of the article starts with a brief introduction to the theoretical perspectives of leadership. We then describe Chinese leadership through the lens of the national culture. It is worth noting here the leadership theories reviewed below are derived in the West, hence may not be applicable to the China context. However, due to the lack of literature on Chinese leadership, it is necessary to provide some theoretical foundations and incorporate Western leadership perspectives into this article. The perspectives presented in the following section are selected based on their relevance to the Chinese setting. Following theoretical perspectives of leadership, the article identifies the cultural roots from which the Chinese leadership practices originated. It then moves to unfold the cultural impact on leadership practices within organizations in China. A few strategies are recommended to demonstrate to international HRD practitioners how they may leverage some critical Chinese culture elements to assist in developing leadership competencies effective and appropriate to the transitioning nature of organizations in China. The article concludes with directions for future research in HRD.

Theoretical Perspectives of Leadership

Due to the lack of leadership theories in/on China, this article draws primarily Western literature to lay a theoretical foundation for this research. Leadership is highly complex and well researched topic, evidenced by the large number of extant theories and publications (Callahan, Whitener, & Sandlin, 2007). Briefly speaking, leadership approaches can be divided into five categories, namely, (1) trait theory—emphasizing leaders' personal attributes, (2) behavioral theory—articulating what leaders actually do and identifying different leadership styles and their influence on group performance, (3) situational theory—describing the demands that different situations place on leadership and styles, (4) power-influence theory—explaining leadership in terms of the amount, type, and use of power and influence tactics, and finally (5) transformational theory—highlighting the leader's role in the creation of culture and competitive advantage of organizations (Lynham, 2000; Northouse, 2007). In addition to the above theories, other leadership frameworks, referred to as contingency approaches to leadership (Northouse, 2007), have also been identified including responsible leadership (Lynham & Swanson, 1997); authentic leadership (Terry, 1993); communal leadership (Lynham, 2000), and moral leadership (Heifetz, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992).

What appears to be an appropriate theoretical framework in the Chinese cultural context is moral leadership. This mode of leadership has received consideration attention in the English-speaking world (Wong, 2001). Heifetz (1994), for example, argued that a leader must "take sides" in the exercise of leadership. In that sense, leadership is subjective and normative. Recounting stories of successful school leaders who had been intimately involved in classrooms with students and teachers, Sergiovanni (1992) developed a hierarchy of leadership—moral, professional rational-technical, psychological, and bureaucratic modes of leadership. He took the view that the highest level of leadership authority is to be found in professional and moral domains. Moral leadership calls attention to what is right and wrong. Similarly, China also has a long history of valuing leadership and cultivating strong morals in leaders (Wong, 2001), yet with a different focus from that in the West. For example, based on a comparative analysis of moral preparation between China and the West, Lo (1996) noted that the West had been predominately concerned with theories and abstract concepts to understand the nature of morality and to define "good," "right," "ought," and "obligation." Although Chinese philosophers also spent time on the meaning of moral values, they had been more interested in the practical aspects of morality, and in finding ways of doing good.

Cultural Roots of Chinese Leadership

As Schein (1992) noted, “Leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin” (p. 1). Leadership “is embedded in social and cultural beliefs and values, [and] cannot be fully understood apart from the context in which it exists” (Biggart & Hamilton, 1987, p. 437). Therefore, to understand Chinese leadership, it is necessary and important to first understand its cultural roots. Given China’s increasingly active role in the global market, such an understanding becomes even more critical. In addition, a clear understanding of values held by organizational leaders is also crucial because business practice is often shaped by philosophies and customs that constitute a value system (Ralston, Gustafson, Terpstra, & Holt, 1995). While this point may appear self-evident, many Westerners are slow in recognizing the importance of understanding other cultures. As a result, many Western managers working abroad have failed to account for subtle differences in values and their effect on the practice of local managers (Wang, Wang, Ruona, & Rojewski, 2005). Multinational corporations in China also continuously express frustrations when working with their Chinese counterparts (Wang et al.). This issue is well documented in the literature. For example, through a cross-cultural study, Punnett and Yu (1990) found that American participants did not rank differences in decision-making or negotiating styles as important factors in doing business with China. Similarly, other researchers (e.g., Adler & Graham, 1989; O’Keefe & O’Keefe, 1997; Tung, 1991) also pointed out that undesirable outcomes at the negotiation table were frequently the result of cross-cultural misunderstanding. This section presents a synthesis of three schools of philosophy that had made fundamental lasting impact in China for centuries. These thoughts are advocated by a few most influential ancient Chinese philosophers and scholars—Confucius, Han Fei Tzu, and Lao Tzu, and are categorized into the humanistic, legalistic, and naturalistic schools (Wah, 2003). It is worth noting here that given the complexity and dynamics of Chinese culture, this discussion is just a broad sketch and by no means attempts to capture the breath and depth of Chinese culture.

Confucius’ Humanistic School of Thoughts

Developed by the Chinese philosopher and educator, Confucius (551-479 B.C.), Confucian ideology has been firmly established as perhaps the most powerful system of moral, political and social principles governing Chinese society (Wang et al., 2005). Confucian thought can be understood from two sides. One side focuses on *Wu lun*—five cardinal role relations between emperor-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger brothers and friend-friend. All these relationships involve a set of defined roles and mutual obligations. With the exception of the last dyadic role relation, all the others are typically dominant-subservient in nature. The other side of Confucian ideology is represented by five virtues: *ren* (humanity-benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), and *xin* (trustworthiness). Among them, *ren*—humanity is the source of all virtues and the highest morality. It nurtures the inner character of an individual and furthers his/her ethical maturation. Thus, if one side of Confucianism is the conformity and acceptance of norms of individual behavior in social institutions and human relationships, the other side is the cultivation of conscience and character through education and reflection on one’s action, as well as a lifetime commitment to character building (Berling, 1982). With the fundamental belief that human nature is intrinsically good thus there is no difference among men, the primary concern is not in understanding what is right or good, but how good or right could and should be done (Wong, 2001); it is learning and earnest practice that set people apart (Wah, 2003). In short, Confucian thought can be characterized by the teaching of humanity and a focus on striking a balance between knowledge and morality (Wah, 2003). For a comprehensive review of Confucian values, see Wang et al. (2005).

Han Fei Tzu’s Legalistic School of Thoughts

Unlike Confucian, Han Fei Tzu (born around 280 B.C.), a scholar of Chinese political science, believed that man is evil by nature and guided by self-interest, hence, cannot be trusted. In that line of thinking, Han Fei Tzu advocated that peace and proper social order cannot be warranted through moral conduct but rather through laws and well defined punishments. To the legalist, prevention is the cure, and the best way to prevent or deter crime is to have harsh laws and heavy punishments. A leader’s position in any matter is always justified by his power to reward or punish, and the power to punish is the best strategy in governance. A leader should rule his people by exercising his authority and executing laws. Furthermore, laws need to be periodically reviewed and changed in order to meet the changing environment. Once the law is formulated, it should be made known and fully understood by all members of the society. To Han Fei Tzu, education is not a means to uplift the morality of an individual; instead, it is through laws and punishments that one becomes good or moral (Wah, 2003).

Lao Tzu’s Naturalistic School of Thoughts

In contrast to the above two schools of thoughts, Taoism made no assumption about human nature and believes in being natural. As a result, it detests rites and customs and seeks a true self in living harmony with nature. Known for synthetic and dialectical thinking (Wong, 2001), Lao Tzu (571 B.C.) focused on how things happen and work. He advocated the concept of *wu wei*, meaning doing nothing or non-interference. However, *wu wei* does not suggest

no activity at all. Instead, it calls for a natural way of behavior, which allows things to unfold by themselves or in their natural order. As the natural law embraces all events, both human and non-human, all natural principles are considered good and moral. Lao Tzu also argued that all behaviors and things consist of opposites or polarities. Being able to appreciate opposing poles as a driving force, or seeing opportunities in contradiction, is considered as an example of Taoist wisdom. Lao Tzu proposed the principle of *Yin* (passive or feminine property) and *Yang* (active or masculine property) to avoid extremes and move towards a “middle path.” By learning to value the co-existence of opposites, one will keep things in balance and harmony (Wah, 2003).

Cultural Impact on Chinese Leadership

This section presents three leadership approaches influenced by the three schools of thought introduced above. It further offers some empirical evidence gathered through more recent studies with a hope to provide a deeper insight into the role of Chinese culture in shaping the behavior of organizational leaders in China.

Three Leadership Approaches

The Chinese culture heritage discussed above has led to the formation of three distinct approaches to leadership in China, known as humanistic, legalistic, and naturalistic approaches (for a comprehensive review, see Wah, 2003). Generally speaking, a leader who embraces Confucius’s humanistic school of thought would first strive to cultivate his or her own personal and moral values (e.g., humanism, benevolence, love, affection, and kindness) through constant learning and education in order to warrant effective leadership. Central to a humanistic leader is the practice of being a good role model, and the concept of “ruling by man” rather than “ruling by law.” The best practice of a humanistic leader is perhaps to help other people do good.

On the other hand, a legalistic leader is more than likely to adopt the approach of “ruling by law” and exercises his or her authority and power to reward those who abide by laws and punish those who do not. As Sheh (1998) noted, a Chinese leader believes that in order to ensure the effectiveness of the law, he or she must enforce it by punishing a few so as to warn the rest that the law and its enforcement is real.

In contrast to humanistic and legalistic approaches, the school of Taoism or naturalistic view endorses leadership through facilitation or invisible leadership. In other words, a leader who adopts the naturalistic view is likely to consider himself as a facilitator, facilitating the group, not his own, process. Moreover, a naturalistic leader tries to “make sense out of the non-sense, derive logic out of the illogic, and find meaning out of the meaningless...and think beyond the conventional” (Wah, 2003, p. 57-4).

Research on Chinese Leadership

Research on leadership, including that in China, continually shows two dimensions—consideration and task orientation (Littrell, 2002). In the 1980s, the Institute of Psychology in Beijing, China, added a third factor of leadership behavior—moral character. The measures include (1) commitment to abide by the law and avoid corrupt practices, (2) a positive attitude toward the Central Communist Party and willingness to follow party dictates even when they conflict with one’s own personal views, (3) fairness to all employees, (4) a positive attitude toward party political workshops held during working hours, and (5) responsiveness to suggestions from workers (Bond, 1991).

Researchers have made an effort to understand the cultural influences on leadership practice in contemporary China. For example, through a survey of 82 managers from the Eastern region of China over a 2.5-year period, Ralston et al. (1995) examined the evolution in managerial values among these young Chinese managers and provided several important insights. First, they discovered a shift in managerial values that indicated a growing spirit of “Chinese-style” individualism, tempered by cultural relationships and centralized controls, yet compatible with Western values. Second, they indicated that greater accountability and self-determination are not only being encouraged by China’s leaders but are rapidly being integrated into managerial behavior and decision making. Third, Chinese managers place greater emphasis on informal means of influence rather than on formal authority and legal mandates. They also appear to be becoming more open to new methods and processes, embracing organizational changes, and accepting greater risks through individual decision making. Yet, there appears to be reluctant to part from Confucian values and well-entrenched moral traditions. Consequently, the challenge for Western managers who interact with their Chinese counterparts is that they need to be aware of the possibility of a paradoxical environment where, on one hand, tremendous changes are occurring; on the other hand, established behavioral norms may never change significantly.

Hui and Tan (1996) reported results of a small body of research on Chinese leadership, which rather randomly mixed supervisory and leadership processes. They stated that Chinese employees want their leaders to be considerate and benevolent, adhere to the Confucian parental role, and exercise sound moral judgment such as being self-restrained, honest toward fellow colleagues and subordinates, trustworthy and impartial. These traits are exemplary of Confucian ideology.

Taking a slightly different focus, Sarros and Santora (2001) surveyed 181 executives of Australia, Japan, China, and Russia to explore the linkage between their value orientations and leadership behaviors. They found that Chinese executives emphasized values such as benevolence, harmony with others, and self-restraint. They also noted that compared to executives from the other three countries, Chinese executives did not identify independent thinking as a key value dimension. A viable explanation for such findings may be traced back again to the Confucian thought where emphasis is given to morality, respect for authority, harmony, and group orientation (Wang et al., 2005).

In a more recent study, Huang and Snell (2003) examined leadership and governance through case studies of three Chinese state-owned enterprises and portrayed sharply different pictures of five organizational leaders. One appeared to exercise transformational leadership and act as a moral exemplar. He used his power to strengthen internal rule of law, corrected injustices, cultivated a spirited moral climate, and achieved turnaround. In another case, the leader settled for transactional leadership, neither bringing about systemic changes, nor inspiring strong moral values. In the third case, three pseudo-transformational leaders capitalized on weaknesses in the governance system for personal gain. Apparently, regardless of the leadership behaviors demonstrated, these leaders influenced moral atmosphere of the organizations through role modeling, acting or not-acting on governance systems. The cases in this study offer good examples of how leaders' moral integrity and leadership capabilities may influence the creation of a virtue-oriented organizational culture, and ultimately the organizational success.

These studies, while not representative of all, revealed a reoccurring theme. That is, Chinese leadership behaviors are deeply rooted in the unique national culture. Just as Littrell (2002) well summarized,

Indigenous leadership styles and work values in China are considerably different from Western concepts and also deviate from many other Asian countries...Western values are merely superficially embraced, more as skin-deep cosmetics than a fundamental basis for thought and conduct...It can be argued that the Chinese cognitively and emotionally separate modernization from Westernization. Remaining Sino-centric, they are able to adopt some modern Western practices, and regard themselves as modern without losing their Chineseness...Consequently, most expatriate managers would encounter a cultural divide in China. (p. 22)

Leveraging Chinese Culture for Effective Organizational Leadership

The discussions above point to a couple of important issues for further consideration. First, despite the evolving nature of Chinese culture, traditional values (e.g., Confucianism and Taoism) are deeply embraced by Chinese leaders and likely to continue influencing leadership thinking and practices in contemporary China (Huang, 1988; Littrell, 2002; Wang et al., 2005). Second, the Chinese humanistic, legalistic, and naturalistic schools of thoughts represent strikingly different or even opposing cultural perspectives and each has its own strengths and constraints. This section suggests a few strategies that HRD professionals may adopt to leverage these dynamic cultural forces in an attempt to cultivate desirable organizational leadership behaviors.

Cultivating Moral Leadership through Learning and Moral Character Building

China has a long history of valuing leadership that emphasizes morality and obligations. Despite the long history of emphasizing moral preparation for leaders and even add “moral character” development on the government agenda (Bond, 1991), immoral or unethical behaviors of organizational leaders are not uncommon today. Use the year of 2000 as an example, 45,000 corruption cases were reported in China, a 15% increase from 1999 (Luo, 2002). Therefore, focusing on morality and character building should become the top priority in the development and cultivation of competent organizational leaders (Wah, 2003). HRD professionals can take a leading role in such endeavor. Specifically, HRD professionals can leverage the humanistic culture dimension to help cultivate moral and development-oriented leaders. From the humanistic perspective, leadership should be built on a foundation of moral character which can be nurtured through learning or education, and exercised through a virtuous example (Wah, 2003). In fact, Confucius argued that learning does not serve a primarily vocational purpose; its function lies in character training—learning to be faithful and altruistic (Wong, 2001). Furthermore, it is insufficient for one to keep learning to self. “Man of ethical humanity must also practice what he has learnt. When he wishes to establish himself, he must at the same time establish the others. When he wishes to be prominent, he must also help others to be prominent” (The Analects, 6, 28, as cited in Chan, 1963, p. 31). Charged with the mission of leadership development, HRD professionals must provide effective learning-based interventions that will help organizational leaders strive for the highest moral standing of benevolence, righteousness, duty, wisdom, reliability, instead of thinking of personal gains. Only through virtue, can the leader gain support and confidence from his followers, and motivating employees to achieve high performance.

Leading by Law

On the two sides of the same coin are two opposite cultural orientations associated with different schools of ancient thoughts—development orientation espoused by Confucianism and control orientation endorsed in the

legalistic view. While the two orientations co-exist in China, it is the Confucian values that have dominated the Chinese society. The long-term emphasis of Chinese culture on concepts like hierarchy and control has fostered a Chinese management style known as *ruling by man* (as opposed to *ruling by law*) in which the top leaders often have the unlimited power and make decisions which are unquestionable (Wang et al., 2005). Ruled by man, organizations often lack standard policies or procedures to ensure the leader's power is not abused. Consequently, empowering others is not an easy task for many Chinese leaders. However, to maintain competitive advantage in the global economy, it is essential to have certain effective control mechanisms (e.g., policies, procedures, structures) within organizations so that desirable individual and organizational behaviors can be induced (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Yukl, 1994). Indeed, given the long history of Chinese culture, "control" is an "emotionally-charged, many-faceted concept" which will not be easily relinquished in China (Littrell, 2002). Therefore, the challenge for a truly moral leader becomes to learn how to deal with the paradoxical nature between humanistic approach to leading through development and legalistic approach to leading through control (Wah, 2003), so that employees do act within parameters, while motivated and empowered for self-development. The naturalistic view would enable a leader to value the co-existence of opposite cultural forces such as the humanistic and legalistic perspectives, remain open and flexible, and keep perspectives in balance and harmony. For HRD professionals who operate in the complex Chinese culture, it is crucial to understand these cultural dynamics so that different cultural forces can be leveraged to warrant the best results.

Leading with the Power of Respect

"Respect" is a major principle of the naturalistic school of thought, or Taoism. It means respect for self, one another, and the life process. Self-respect builds integrity, uniting our thoughts and feelings, words and actions, into a new cycle of personal empowerment. Successful leaders respect their own personal resources. Meditation, reflection, and visualization are an essential part of leadership development. In fact, the research already demonstrated the powerful effects of regular contemplative practice in helping busy executives cope with stress and avoid burnout (Delbecq & Friedlander, 1995). Another part of self-respect is being honest with self and others. Honesty helps create an atmosphere of openness and trust, what Hendricks and Ludeman (1996) called "a force field of aliveness, energy, and creativity" (pp. 29-30).

Self-respect leads to respect for others, and thus creating harmony, which is another emphasis of Chinese culture. Respect gets transmitted through communication. By doing so, leaders are able to create an open culture that would empower employees to have a dynamic exchange of ideas with the leaders. As a result of the open communication, a trusting atmosphere is created, and a higher level of work effectiveness is achieved. Another aspect of being respectful is to respect the process, stay connected and be present. Undoubtedly, respect transforms reality, turning fragmented interactions into living relationships, conflicts into creative communication, and lifeless, mechanical systems into living, breathing, learning organization (Dreher, 2002). Leaders whose attitudes or moods can affect or infect an entire organization, influencing productivity, profit and overall organizational health (Dreher, 2002), should more than ever, make a firm commitment to ongoing personal growth (Boyatzis, & McKee, 2001). HRD professionals can certainly play a role in coaching organizational leaders on their journey to becoming reflective leaders who keep things in balance and perspective.

Directions for Future Research

As many others, this article has its own limitations, yet each one of them points to a direction for future research. First, while this research will hopefully provide some insights into the culture-based Chinese leadership practices, it is a very broad sketch. There is a need for future studies that will take a narrower focus, for example, to study leadership at different levels and/or in a specific type of organizations, such as SOEs, JVs, collectives, and FIEs. Meanwhile, since leadership lies at the heart of organization development (Turnbull & Edwards, 2005), further research within HRD is needed to investigate the impact of developing effective leadership on organizational performance and the subsequent success of the OD process.

Second, this article has methodological limitations. The discussions were based on a review of selected literature; the conceptual nature of this research thus does not offer compelling empirical evidence. HRD professionals who are interested in this line of inquiry need to embrace multiple lenses to examine the leadership phenomenon. I recommend that more empirical studies, both qualitative and quantitative, through interviews, observations, surveys, to name a few, be conducted to collect evidence that may help us gain a fuller and deeper understanding of what organizational leaders have actually done to lead their organizations and people through drastic changes as in the case of reformed China, and to what extent their current leadership behaviors or practices in contemporary times still carry the traditional Chinese cultural imprints.

Third, while I am highly aware of the evolving nature and dynamics of the co-existence of diverse culture values in transitioning China and the decreasing impact of traditional Chinese cultural values, this study made no attempt at studying them all. The fact that this study focused on one force of culture in China—the traditional Chinese culture—may expose the findings and arguments to further scholarly inquiry. On the positive side, this limitation suggests some opportunities for future research. For example, studies need to be conducted to examine the impact of other culture forces such as capitalist values on Chinese leadership, to capture the reality of leadership in modern-day organizations, and to derive more implications for leadership development and organization development that may be more appropriate to China's transitioning context. Meanwhile, further search needs to be conducted to identify indigenous literature on Chinese leadership (including in the language of Chinese) to expand and enrich our understanding of the topic and to identify/develop the indigenous model.

Finally, China presents a living and complex case for organization management and leadership development. Understanding Chinese culture and their implications on leadership practice requires extensive and continuing research efforts by more scholars. Expanded longitudinal and cross-sectional studies of this vast and diverse country is necessary to help us more fully appreciate the implications for leading and working with organizations in one of the world's fastest growing economies.

Conclusion and Contribution to HRD

This article identified three major cultural perspectives—humanistic, legalistic, and naturalistic, and demonstrated how these different cultural forces led to different practice of organizational leaders in China over the years and in contemporary times. It offered an indigenous perspective to leadership theory in general and in organization management in particular. The guidelines provided, while at a broad sketch, can serve a starting point for international HRD professionals who are charged with the important mission of leadership development in the cross-cultural settings. The few research areas recommended will hopefully trigger more research interests along this line of inquiry. By illustrating the paradoxical nature and complexity of the Chinese culture, this article is not simply a review of literature, but rather a call for attention and action for learning about dynamic interactions of these Chinese cultural forces so that the international HRD professionals are better positioned to leverage the culture to the benefit of individuals and organizations, as well as design culture-sensitive leadership development interventions that are more likely to conquer cultural constraints (Martinsons & Martinsons, 1996). The findings of this research expand our current knowledge of leadership to the international arena, specifically in the China context. It also contributes to the much-needed literature on Chinese organization leadership and management. For expatriate leaders and managers who interact with their Chinese counterparts, or operate in China, this study provides useful insights and guidance.

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