

Examining Cultural Influences on Leadership Styles and Learning From Chinese Approaches to Management

Emerging Research and Opportunities



Valerie Zhu

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Valerie Zhu

Xi'an University of Science and Technology, China

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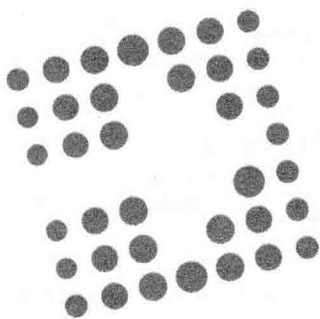
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Preface

China is the most representative emerging economic entity in BRIC countries. With her astounding economic development in the past thirty years since its reform and opening up policy, more and more scholars and expertise both at home and abroad have paid special attention to conduct researches and relevant projects taking China as the subject. The same is true of Valerie Zhu's research.

I have known her since her undergraduate education in Xian International Studies University (abbreviated as XISU) during which I taught her several courses on cross-cultural communication and translation. After graduation, she has been working as a tourist guide, a project manager in international trade. Later, she went to Aberdeen University, Scotland, the UK to fulfill her master's degree in Management Science & Engineering. Knowing the true meaning of lifelong learning, she continued her PhD program in Management Science & Engineering in Xi'an Jiaotong University (shortened as XJTU), which is one of the leading higher learning universities in China. From her personal experiences both in career and education, I have seen Valerie Zhu as an industrious, hard working and ambitious lady. Actually, she has very well demonstrated the principle of combining theory with practice. It is well known that management is a systematic soft science with strong requirement for practice. Obviously, Valerie's work experiences have, to a great extent, added more tea leaves for her further education in management field. Her affluent background about business operation in China has provided plenty of real time cases in her teaching and learning processes.

From the very ancient times, Chinese people began to investigate the essence of management, but most of them were falling into the scope of state and political management. Though in Chinese history, there have emerged lots of famous business persons like Fan Li in the Spring and Autumn Period, Hu Xue'yan in the Qing Dynasty and various business groups in different areas in China, for example, Jin Shang in Shanxi, Hui Shang in Anhui, Qin Shang in Shaanxi, etc., all these have played an important role in the commercial devel-

opment in China superficially. However, in Chinese history, business persons had never been seen as a privileged social class as the social strata have been ranked as government officials, farmers, craftsmen and businessmen, which indicated that business persons had been listed as the last in the society. Such inferior position remained till the founding of New China in 1949. Because of such categorization of social strata, business management was not stressed, let alone to say systematic theories of management science. With the reform and opening up, China began to learn the scientific management from the developed countries, namely Europe and the USA. No exaggerating, modern business management theories are almost loan words from foreign countries. In the last thirty years, scholars and experts have noticed that management theories which derived from the soils of the Western world may not apply to Chinese context all the time due to cultural differences. They began to look back into the real Chinese situation and thought about the development of management science deeply rooted in Chinese situation. I could find the similar mindset in Valerie Zhu's research. After communicating and looking through her research topics and academic publications in recently years, I could sense that she has made a close tie between her research and Chinese characteristics. Just like the research she has done with IGI publishing Group *Examining Cultural Influence on Leadership Style and Learning From Chinese Approaches to Management: Emerging Research and Opportunities*. The research topic is of great interest and significance. Leadership theories have been developing fast in the last 50 years with multiple schools of trait theory, behavioral approach, contingency theory, transformational theories, etc. just as above-mentioned, there is not very systematic sole research about Chinese business leaders. Such reality exposes that Valerie's research may to some extent fill in the blank in this field. Not only she has chosen the right topics, but also she has put great efforts in doing it: to determine which surveys she should adopt, she visited Michael Harris Bond in HK for twice to discuss her research; to make a comprehensive literature review, she contacted Schwartz through emails; to secure the quality of questionnaire, she trained those who dispatched the questionnaire on her behalf.... All these have indicated that she has been taking serious attitudes towards this research. In addition, every step she took in the whole process of research was solid and sound, which guaranteed the research quality.

Based on the comprehensive review of her research in this topic and that of her previous research experiences, I have seen very positive opinions about her contribution in this research field and her faithfulness, sincerity to IGI Publishing Group is also revealed from her prudent behavior in academic research.

Mingzhong Zhang

Xi'an University of Science and Technology, China

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First of all, I should extend my sincere thanks to IGI publishing Group for granting me this valuable opportunity for this research. My special hearted thanks go to Travers, Moore for their excellent collaboration with me in the process of fulfilling this research. The accomplishment of this research is a combined efforts of many people in this field: professor Michael Harris Bond, professor Schwartz, professor Barbara Flynn, Amrik Sohal, Aleda Roth, Daniel Vicky Smith, Jeff Yeung, Chris Voss, etc. They all offered their generous support and assistance in one way or another. Without their support and encouragement, I could not have had the capability to fulfill this research. Also, I would like to thank my mother, my son and my siblings for their understanding and assistance in enabling me to concentrate on my research without the intervention of house chores.

My very unique thanks extent to Professor Jeff Yeung and his research center for their financial support in the process of data collection and processing. Their golden suggestions and very expertise instructions are of great importance in achieving the outcome of this research.

Though this research is temporarily done, being professional personnel in management science field, there is still a long way to explore with time goes by.

Valerie C. Y. Zhu

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Introduction

Culture has been embedded into people's blood. Since his birth, his behaviors will be deeply influenced by the culture in which has been raised and living. Based on substantial amount of literature review and worldwide discussions with professors at home and abroad, the author has collected nearly 800 pieces of questionnaires on values survey and leadership styles on the same population. After processing the raw data, lots of significant results have been found to indicate the correlations between cultures & values systems and leadership styles. Quite a number of magnificent implications have been drawn out from the results. In general, there isn't a one-for-all leadership even for the same person. Leadership style is only a multidimensional tendency of a person which has been closely related to the industry, age, gender, education, tenure, etc. Since questionnaires on values survey and leadership styles, as well as the already well-developed theories on values and leadership styles are all adopted from the western world, this will be a significant pavement for the author and other scholars who are interested in this research topic to do profound comparative studies between China and Western world. Due to the time limits and specific requirements of the word limits for this research, the author has to postpone the further research to the next stage.

Through over two years of survey on the same batch of Guinea pigs on their cultures and values system as well as leadership styles, 778 pieces of valid questionnaires have been collected and processed by appropriate statistical software. Based on the statistical results, the following possible results have been drawn from:

1. Culture and values systems have been ingrained and embedded into people's blood which leaves footprints all the way through his life. Therefore, person's behavior and conducts are the miniatures of the cultures and values systems in which the person is soaked, especially things that they have obtained before 13 years old. Thus, when people come to the post being a leader, their leadership styles will also be significantly influenced by their culture and values system.

2. There is no one-for-all leadership style in the world. Even though the same person's leadership style may alter according to different occasions, when the contexts within which he leads change. It is wrong and at least not exact to say that a person has a specific leadership style all through the periods when he is acting as a leader. It is more reasonable and acceptable to say that a person has a higher tendency in one leadership style over the other leadership styles due to the nature of the industry, the tenure of his career in the firms, as well as the characteristics of the subordinates under which he leads.
3. Additionally, one's leadership styles have been largely affected by numerous other factors which are relevant to the leader. Such as the nature of the industry, the ownership specificity of the enterprise, the education level, gender, age, the competitive environment in which the enterprises belong to, as well as the geographic locations of the enterprises and the tenure. To be specific, in traditional industries such as manufacturing sectors, leaders are more likely to follow autocratic leadership styles; whereas in the high-tech industries, leaders are more likely to adopt democratic and free reign leadership styles; male leaders are more likely to adopt autocratic leadership styles rather than female leaders; leaders with higher education levels are more probably to adopt democratic leadership style and free reign leadership style than those who are at lower education levels.
4. Statistics results have revealed that among the demographic factors, age and education level of the guinea pigs have much greater influence on their leadership styles as against all other demographic factors. This has verified that leader's leadership styles have been deeply affected by his experiences in life and work. With the increase of age, people are intending to have more rational and mature views on lots of things in their life and work and as a result, their leadership styles are more likely to demonstrate in multidimensional scale. They may express different leadership styles according to the specific situation in which they are handling. Education is also a key factor to influence people's leadership style. The higher the education level, the more like the Guinea pigs are intending to conduct in a democratic style or free reign leadership style, as higher education levels have armed themselves on how to empower the subordinates and be delegated by the followers.

5. The geographic location of the enterprise and tenure of the surveyed population will definitely influence the leadership styles. Research results have indicated that business leaders whose enterprises are located along the east-southern coastal lines are more likely to adopt democratic leadership style and free reign leadership style. Moreover, those who have longer tenure in the firms are more probably to adopt democratic and free reign leadership styles. This might be explained as follows: companies which are located in the south-eastern coastal lines have been experiencing more open policy and the location has enabled them to know, understand, and learn more western management styles due to the more and quicker information flow especially during the first half of the period when China has implemented open door policy. The longer the tenure of the leader in the enterprise, the more likely he is to adopt democratic and free reign leadership styles, which is because the longer the time he stays in the enterprises, the more trust and friendliness he has established with his subordinates.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 IDENTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

Culture has been embedded into people's blood. Since his birth, his behaviors will be deeply influenced by the culture in which has been raised and living. Based on substantial amount of literature review and worldwide discussions with professors at home and abroad, the author has distributed 1200 pieces of questionnaire and collected 800 pieces with 778 valid on values survey and leadership styles on the same population. After processing the raw data, lots of significant results have been found to indicate the correlations between cultures & values systems and leadership styles. Quite a number of magnificent implications have been drawn out from the results. In general, there isn't a one-for-all leadership even for the same person. Leadership style is only a multidimensional tendency of a person which has been closely related to the industry, age, gender, education, tenure, etc. Since questionnaires on values survey and leadership styles, as well as the already well-developed theories on values and leadership styles are all adopted from the western world, this will be a significant pavement for the author and other scholars who are interested in this research topic to do profound comparative studies between

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China and Western world. Due to the time limits and specific requirements of the word limits for this research, the author has to postpone the further research to the next stage.

1.2 STATUS QUO OF LEADERSHIP RESEARCH IN GENERAL

The development of leadership theories and leadership styles has been come across several prominent stages. Such development and the research on the development and evolution of leadership theories and practices are itself a reflection and miniature of the social and economic development of the world. As early as at the turn of the 1950s, trait theory was very popular in this research field. Trait theory is trying to identify either a common or universal set of characteristics that distinguishes between: 1) Leader – Follower; 2) Effective leader - Ineffective leader. As its main theme suggests the fatal weakness of trait theory is trying to pinpoint universal leadership characteristics. Between 1950s and 1970s, behavioral theory was dominant in the research of leadership styles. The main features of this theory is trying to identify various leadership styles and try to find a general most effective leadership style across all situations. (Bass, 1981; Kerr et al.1974). The drawback of this leadership in general was a simple-minded approach. Since 1980s, in the field of leadership research, there emerged contingency theory which features in 1). Focusing on the dynamic interplay among the leaders, the followers and the situations in which both find themselves (Bass, 1981; Yukl, 1981); 2). Focusing on not only how the leader behaves, but also how the situation and context shape the leaders activities (Bell & Chase, 1995).

The drawbacks of contingency theory are also obvious. To be specific, in this development stage, it ignores the broader managerial roles which leaders must perform; it also ignores the fact that leadership is inherently a process of interpersonal influence.

Then, Mintzberg (1973) suggested in his research that managers might be seen as performing a multitude of roles, which nurtured the appearance of the coming “new phase” - A Managerial Phase. It considers realistic complexities and views leader from an interpersonal influence perspective. The new phase leadership theory embodies the following trends: A focus on leadership as one aspect of management. And it is an elaboration on interpersonal influence process, as well as a concentration on much broader conceptualizations of styles. In the new phase period, there emerged mainly three kinds of leadership theories. That is, Contingency theories; Transactional Leadership;

Transformational Leadership and Reinforcement Strategies, which in a whole have been seen as strategic leadership theory beginning from 1980s. Strategic theories of leadership are concerned with leadership “of” organizations (Hunt, 1991) and are “marked by a concern for the evolution of the organization as a whole, including its changing aims and capabilities” (Selznick, 1984).

The essence of strategic theory is the creation and maintenance of absorptive capacity; adaptive capacity and managerial wisdom. In transactional approach to leadership, it represents the processes of influence and counter-influence among followers in leaderless groups to describe the power leaders have in formal groups, which can be implied as the following: 1) Exchange of Benefits - Leaders give something to followers; 2) mutual rights and understandings - Effective leadership exists when everyone perceives a fair exchange of benefits. As for LMX (Leader-Member Exchange) Theory, which is based on social exchange theory, it emphasize the two relationships between leaders and followers in two aspects: 1) high degree of mutual influence and attraction between the leader and a limited number of subordinates; 2) lesser degree of trust and influence between leader and followers.

No matter how leadership theories develop, to have a better and comprehensive view on leadership theories and research, experts have developed multiple-factor leadership which have been used worldwide to survey the leadership styles at individual level. This is the reason why the author of this research has adopted this survey to conduct her research. In order to match leadership survey, the author has also adopted Schwartz value survey to test the orientation of values system at the individual level.

1.3 GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESEARCH AND POTENTIAL RESULTS

Through over two years of survey on the same batch of Guinea pigs on their cultures and values system as well as leadership styles, 778 pieces of valid questionnaires have been collected and processed by appropriate statistical software. Based on the statistical results, the following possible results have been drawn from:

1. Culture and values systems have been ingrained and embedded into people's blood which leaves footprints all the way through his life. Therefore, person's behavior and conducts are the miniatures of the cultures and values systems in which the person is soaked, especially things that they have obtained before 13 years old. Thus, when people