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Chinese Personality – Center in a Network

Verner Worm

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Chinese Personality – Center in a Network

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Abstract

This chapter try to highlight some key elements of Chinese thinking described from a cultural and philosophical perspective starting with explaining the background for Chinese philosophy, mainly Confucianism followed by central concepts such as holism (ying/yang) and a discussion of the concept of change that appears to be somewhat unique because of the central position change occupies in the Chinese philosophy. More specific, but still important concepts like face, guanxi, the Middle way and paradoxes way are also elaborated on. For reference comparison is now and then made to western philosophy when it is found to clarify Chinese thought. Comparative philosophy brings together philosophical traditions that have developed in relative isolation from one another and that are defined quite broadly along cultural and regional lines -- Chinese versus Western is here chosen, but it is not to indicate that similar phenomena might not have appeared in other places in the world if not stated explicitly.

Keywords: China, relationships, philosophy, yin-yang, Confucianism, networks, hierarchy**,** characters

Background of Chinese Philosophy

China is the only existing non-religious civilization in the world and the only civilization that does not have a creation myth. As stated by Mote (1971: 17-18) “The Chinese are apparently unique in having no Creation myth; that is they have regarded the world and man as uncreated, as constituting the central feature of a self-generating cosmos having no creator, god, ultimate cause or will external to itself,”

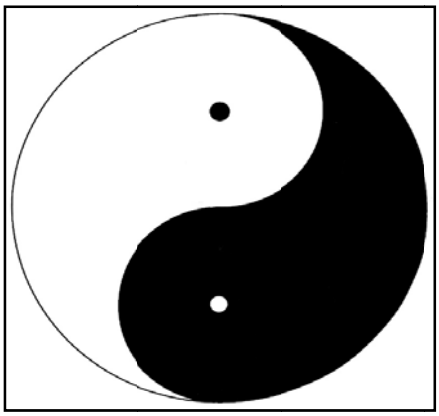
A religion is understood as a systematic set of beliefs and practices, centered upon specific supernatural and moral claims about reality, the cosmos, and human nature, and often codified as prayers, rituals, or religious laws and institutions. The Chinese has never systematized their thought about the cosmos which may be at least one of the reasons that they raised the question how everything began. That the Chinese do not have a creation myth fits well into the pragmatic way of Chinese thinking described below. If something works there is no need to find out why it works. It is more important to find new ways that works. The Chinese were superstitious in the sense that they did not deny supernatural phenomena, but did not systematize these phenomena into a systematic system. As it is stated in the Confucian Analects: "The Master did not discuss mystical matters, force, disorder or Gods" (Legge, 1994, VII, 21).

The fact that the Chinese people should not relate themselves to a God has brought the individual into a central position. Morality meaning following the rituals became a central tenet of the Confucian tradition in the sense of self-cultivation. Self-cultivation was a precondition for the individual to enter into the larger networks that the Chinese society was and is built around. If people did not behave according to the rituals they were not accepted by other network members who were educated in and followed the rituals.

Another tenet that has had a long term influence on Chinese thinking is their pictographic written language which might have added to their holistic world view. In classical Chinese a pictographic character was a word, meaning that one could not split a word up into phonemes or other substructures. Classical Chinese is a very condense language. In particular during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) whole poems were composed of only 16 characters. Both phenomena have probably pointed in the direction of holistic thinking.

The Chinese society is built on a strong trust in the family. The family-based Chinese society may have caused the Chinese society to be a low social trust society in general (Fukuyama, 1995), meaning that people preferred to know each other in order to have the necessary affect-based interpersonal trust to conduct business or other activities with each others. Business in the West tend to evolve in the opposite direction i.e. from cognitive-based trust towards affect-based trust (McCallister, 1995)

Yin – Yang symbol （阴阳）



The yin- yang figure is, as it might be deduced from its characters and configuration, a symbol of both holism and change. The last part of the first character means moon (dark) and the last part of

the second character means sun (阴阳). After darkness the sun (light) will raise and after light it will be dark (represented by the moon) again. The two are intertwined. Within the dark area there is a white spot and visa versa.

Ying-yang is a classification of relations. They are continually in flux, each growing out of the other. Any given subject might be designated yin in one set of relations and yang in another (Wang 1996).

Despite the continuous fluctuations it does not mean that what is going on within the "system" is always the same. Yang (day, sun) has been affiliated with movement while yin has been characterized with stagnation and rest, in the same sense as how we sleep during the night and are more active during day time.

Laozi, the father of Taoism said: 'Everything is embedded in *yin* and embraces *yang*, through "qi" (vital energy) it reaches harmony' (Wang, 2006). Professor Wang (2006) states that it is through yin-yang's function as 'qi' and through the interaction between yin–yang that everything comes into existence. In this sense one comes close to a creation myth in the early description of yin- yang. The most enduring interpretation of *yinyang* in Chinese thought is related to the concept of *qi* (vital energy). According to this interpretation, *yin* and *yang* are seen as *qi* (in both *yin* and *yang* forms) operating in the universe. Q*i*, a force arising from the interplay between *yin* and *yang*, becomes a context in which *yinyang* is seated and functions. *Yinyang* as *qi* provides an explanation of the beginning of the universe and serves as a building block of the Chinese intellectual tradition. (Wang, 2006)

Middle Way

Middle way conveys a dynamic concept of harmonious integration of opposites rather than a compromise between them as often understood in the west. Middle Kingdom (中国), the traditional word for China, calls for a country maintaining an integrated lifestyle by balancing the extremes, and not, as is often misunderstood, a hegemonic undertone of a country that considers itself to be superior to others (Chen, 2002). The Chinese believe that all things in the universe contain competing tendencies that must be balanced, opposite elements constitute an integrated whole. The middle way concept 'zhonghe' (中和) literally means 'middle way' and 'harmony' (he). In that sense, as pointed out by Chen (2002), the middle way philosophy embraces two opposing but interdependent ideas: holism and paradox.

Holism

Holism means that all things are interconnected and interdependent so that looking at things in isolation does not make sense. As the saying goes 'you find what you look for', meaning that when you look for relations you also find relations, which has strengthened the Chinese belief that one cannot understand a phenomenon in isolation.

Western thinking has been characterized by an analytical view that parses reality into independent objects and considers such ideas as the self and the other, life and death as a paradox, whereas the Chinese perspective will be that families have children that carry the family on and thereby overcome 'death'. The Chinese world view has traditionally embraced an integrative view of the world which brings about the concept of holism, meaning that all things are inseparable from their opposite and relationships are interdependent. The self in China is considered as an interdependent unit that is defined in relation to and by others. The character for 'human', 'ren' (仁), consists of the

character for man and the character for two. Even more clear is the expression ‘ren zhi ren ye’（人之仁也）.The first character means *man* and the third character *human*. The other two are grammatical particles. Translated it means that what constitute a person’s self is its interaction with others. This author has experienced Chinese thinking embracing an integrative view when advising Chinese students’ master thesis. The Chinese tend to see the relation between the advisor and the student as interdependent. When a Chinese student obtains a high grade, he or she will tend to give me a gift. On the hand when a student of Chinese origin gets a poor grade, they will tend to blame me. One Chinese student who was dissatisfied with her grade called me afterwards and said: ‘I did everything you told me to do’. In the west we tend to look for own contributions, and few western students will bother to think about their advisor as soon as their thesis is approved. Contrary to the Chinese, the western students see themselves as clever when they get a good grade (independent self).

The idea of the self versus the other as interdependent is natural in traditional Chinese self-perception, meaning that the Chinese tend to see themselves as part of a group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). A result of the interdependent self can be a network based society, which developed in China and will be described later, but a result of this harmonistic interdependence was that debate was discouraged within the social group. This is an issue that many Chinese still struggle with. You do not discuss with your friends.

Nisbett introduces his book *The Geography of Thought* (2005) with a quote from his Chinese research assistant, saying that the difference between you and me is that you see the world as a line where I see it as a circle (P. XIII).In a circle, or more correctly a spiral, issues recur but on a higher level, whereas linear thinking tends towards the analytical and focuses on isolated items The Chinese research assistant’s observation fits well with the Yin- yang symbol, whereas Nisbett is trained in western analytical and sequential thinking.

In China there is no tradition of posing ‘why’ questions meaning that they were more interested in ‘what’ questions. Traditionally in China, people were satisfied if things functioned and there was no need to understand why. This is something that Chinese medicine has tried to make up for in recent years by testing its traditional medicine according to western requirements in order to get the products on the list that is a precondition for patients to have the medicine reimbursed in the west.

A result of the above described attitude is that the Chinese are extreme ‘doers’. When the Chinese get an idea, they try it and if it works use it, if not discard it. Deng Xiaoping who jump-started the 30 years of Chinese hyper growth is well-known for his saying that the Chinese ‘are groping the stones to the pass the river’ (Nolan, 2004). It indicates that there was no big master plan behind the growth that has taken place during the latest 30 years in China. Chinese children of a certain age know more verbs than American children, while American children know more nouns. Another expression of the same is that if children are asked to pair three pictures consisting of a cow, a dog and a grass field, the American children tend to pair the two animals, because they belong to the same category, while the majority of Chinese children pair the cow and grass because the cow eats grass (Nisbett, 2005). ‘Doers’ are action-oriented wherefore verbs become relatively more important than more analytical westerners who tend to focus on things and action

Paradox

The embrace of paradoxes is an integral component of the *middle way* philosophy (ying/yang). The Chinese see opposites containing within themselves the seed of the other, yet forming a dynamic unity. This world view captures the Chinese view of a paradox as an interdependent unity constituting a whole (Chen, 2001). In Taoism neither opposite can exist without the other. ‘The

extreme of yin is yang and the extreme of yang is yin' said Confucius. The combination of yin and yang is the way of nature and the seed of change ('Yi' is an older word for change) [The Book of Change is called Yijing in Chinese]. It signifies how Chinese philosophy seeks to avoid simple polarizing of contradictions. Each force contains the seed of its opposition and together they form an integrated whole (Chen 2002). The Chinese take a dialectical approach that retains basic elements of opposing perspectives rather than polarizing contradictions as in Western thought (Peng and Nisbett, 1999)

The notion of interdependent opposites is embedded in the Chinese language. Many Chinese words consist of two characters that embrace contradictory ideas or paradoxes. For example 'many' and 'few' means 'how much' (多少) when combined. Another example is 'weiji' (危机) the word for 'crisis'. The first character means 'danger' and the second 'opportunity'. This takes us to what Chen (2002) calls paradoxical integration, or from either/or to both/and. The idea that two opposites are interdependent in nature and together form a totality contributes to paradoxical transcendence. In this framework the opposites in a paradox are not only intertwined in a state of tension, but in fact constitute a state of wholeness.

Interdependent opposites refer to entities that exist only within the concept of its other or find their definition only in terms of that of their opposite such as dark and light (Chen 2001).

Networks

Chinese society is traditionally network oriented according to the famous anthropologist and sociologist Fei Xiaotong. Traditionally where Western societies have organizations China has networks as the Chinese sociologist Fei stated in the 1940s (1992). The Chinese society has always had some organizations and the West some networks, but networks are more common and play a more crucial role in China than in the West. At this level of abstraction we are talking about

propensities. The traditional society is built up by elastic networks. The relationship-focused mentality of the Chinese caused Fei (1992) to use the following metaphor: 'While Western society is represented by straws collected to form a haystack (organized), Chinese society is represented by ripples flowing out from the splash of a rock thrown into the water' (i.e. categories of social relationships). Fei (1992) describes four key features of the networks.

1. Networks are discontinuous and they center on the individual and have a different composition for each person. Because each person is the center of his or her network, Fei calls Chinese society egocentric or particularistic with a more modern concept, meaning that the Chinese distinguish more between those in their network and other outside the network.
2. Each link in a network is defined in terms of a dyadic social tie. These interpersonal ties are known in Chinese as guanxi. Each tie is strictly personal.
3. Networks have no explicit boundaries. The ties are preexisting and therefore a person is called upon to 'achieve' the relationship by rising to the level of morality required be the specific tie. Moral obligation has traditionally been a strong tenant in Chinese society, while laws have been frowned on. A society built on rituals and without a common God tends to be controlled by interpersonal moral.
4. The moral content of behavior in a network society is situation specific. Embedded in a world of differentially categorized social relationships, people evaluate ongoing action by considering the specific relations among actors. What is considered moral behavior depends on the situation and on the social categories of the actors, rather than on abstract standards pertaining to autonomous individuals

An example of this is mentioned by Chen (2002) where the son of one of the richest people in Hong Kong said that if he spent 200 million dollars buying a company, he did not need to ask his father, but if he sued somebody, however insignificant they may be, he would have to check with his father beforehand. In a network society, one can never know the disruptive effect such an action would have on one's network.

The core of the network is the family and the oldest male in the family is the leader. The family concept is an elastic one. Concepts are not defined as in the West, which is action oriented, but relations are defined. A Chinese scholar studying the oldest Chinese dictionary, the two thousand year old “Er Ya” discovered that there are more than one hundred Chinese nouns to express the different family relations of which most of them have no correspondents in English (Feng, 1948.) The family consists of concentric circles that are filtered into each other. Two brothers have the same parents, but not the same friends (Yang, 1994).

In the Analects, the Governor of She told Confucius: ‘There is a straight person in my village. He gave evidence against his father, who had stolen a sheep. Confucius answered: The straight people in my village are quite different. Fathers cover up for their sons and the sons cover up for their fathers.’ (Legge, 1994, XIII 18). The quotation shows again that harmony is more important than disclosing ‘facts’ as defined by the West in traditional Chinese world view.

The fulfillment of one's role comes from the very structure and dynamic of the *relationships* and the emphasis on belonging (Redding, 1990). In such a society of vertical relations, especially when people come into contact with each other, is conducted via an adoption of roles, expressing mutual dependence.

Hierarchy

Having established the Chinese society as a relationship focused society it is necessary to stress that all relationships are vertical. Fei (1992) characterizes the Chinese society as a ‘differential mode of association’ or nonequivalent, ranked categories of societal relationships. In traditional China the most important relation in society is between father and son. The sons shall respect and show obedience towards his father, who shall protect his sons. The relationship between husband and wife was less important in the sense that men tend to spend even their spare time outside the home,

as portrayed in many Chinese movies. If couples talked to each other they were often quarreling, otherwise they would not be talking. They know each other so well that there is nothing to talk about. In the Confucian hierarchical system the wife should be submissive towards her husband, but the husband has obligations towards his wife. The relation between emperor and subject was modeled along the same line. The subject should be loyal to the emperor, who should be kind to the subject. Somewhat ironically this relationships surfaced again under the Cultural Revolution where many Chinese wore a Mao-emblems with the character for loyalty 'zhong' (忠) (note that the character for loyalty consists of the 'middle way' discussed above and heart, meaning that your heart follow the middle way).The heart has roughly the same meaning in Chinese tradition than the brain has in Western. Humans come to know their spirit using their heart -- not head or brain**.** The core Chinese concept is *xin* (the heart-mind). As the translation suggests, Chinese folk psychology lacked a contrast between cognitive states (representative ideas, cognition, reason, beliefs) and affective states (desires, motives, emotions, feelings). The *xin (heart-mind)* guides action, but not via beliefs and desires (Philosophy of the Mind in Chinese).

The fourth relation is between older brother and younger brother, where the older brother should care for his younger brother. The younger brother should see his older brother as a role model. Relationships with daughters are not described. They would marry and move to their husband's home. This remains the reason for many Chinese couples wanting a son, because who would otherwise take care of them when they grow old.

The fifth relationship is between friends, and is characterized by trust and exchange of favors. As I do not believe that horizontal relations exist in China, there will also be at least some difference in the status of friends. Feng (1966, p.197) explains there is always a 'Kang' (1966, p.197). The meaning of 'kang' is a major cord in a net, to which all other strings are attached. An example that has nothing to do with family relations is that of a Chinese colleague who spent one year at

Copenhagen Business School yet always called me Professor or the respectful version of ‘you’ ‘nin’ (您)

Confucianism

Confucianism is the dominant philosophical school in China’s official discourse throughout Chinese history. It focuses on secular issues concentrating on dealing with detailed rules for interpersonal behavior. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) considered himself a transmitter of a harmonious philosophy believed to have existed in China some 2.500 years before Confucius. In order to reinstate the ‘Golden Age’ the individual’s obligations to comply with the ritual is essential. In order to be able to do this self-cultivation becomes essential As the Chinese are without any religious affiliation, they believe that people through hard studies can improve themselves and their social position. We see reminiscences of this today, where even the poorest farmer will do whatever he can in order to save money so that his son or daughter can go to university. Even though Chinese society is one of the most unequal in the world, today nobody thinks it impossible to make a career if one studies hard. Human nature is seen as plastic (Ng, 1990). The concept of social heritage is unknown in China even today, where people again experience that they have a chance to get a higher education. An example is that to promote peasants’ children Mao implemented quotas for university intakes. When they were removed in 1977 and entrance examination reinstalled the percentage of children from the countryside increased. The village could again support an intelligent youngster so he or she could pay a tutor to teach the brilliants, while the system under Mao was mainly beneficial to the rural cadres, children, who sent their children to universities (Information provided by a Professor at Peking University).

As indicated above Confucianism is based on a strong ethical behavior, which stands in opposition to western rationalism. Confucianism concentrated on making the population understand prescribed

behavioral rules and demonstrating self-discipline. The purpose of life was to fulfill one's place, meaning to comply with the surroundings expectation rather than realize oneself (Worm, 1997). The harmonistic consequence of such a philosophy is indirect communication and even what the west perceives as a lack of communication. The Confucian tradition strongly emphasizes status. The individual must know his place or position in society in order to behave concordantly, which might be the reason for the Chinese tending to perceive status as something natural (Worm, 1997). A central tenet of Confucianism is to 'subdue the self and follow the rites' （克己复礼）Self-cultivation was the foundation for managing others. Confucius said 'What the superior man seeks is in himself and what the petty man seeks is in others'. The point of departure is the individual, who becomes an individual through network relations. According to the 'Great Learning', one of the Confucian Classics: 'The emperor first put his state in good order. Wishing to order their states they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families they first cultivated their own self'. We see the paradoxical thinking where the individual has to begin with himself (the centre), but on the other hand can only constitute himself in a network,

Face

As described above the Chinese society is built on reciprocity, which pertains to all social relations. When Chinese help others they know that they can draw on that investment later, otherwise the recipient of a favor will lose face. (Fang, 2006, Tung, 2002)

One implication of a network society is the importance of face. The only constraint in your network is that you lose face if you do not live up to the requirements of the networks you are involved in. The importance of face seems to be relatively more important in China than in the West. There are two words for face in Chinese language *'lian'*(脸）which refers to the ethical aspect of one's

personal behavior, i.e. behaving as a decent human being. *Lian* is something that is ascribed to a person by others rather than something one can acquire oneself. It is often translated to 'moral',

The other word for face 'mianzi' (面子) is the forefront of the head. The size of one's 'mianzi' is an indication of the degree of one's success. 'Mianzi' contributes to regulate behavior, for example showing aggression means a loss of face, which tallies with Confucian principles advising one to control one's emotions and behavior. Given that the Chinese do not wish others to lose face, they are reluctant to refuse anything openly or to say something that others do not want to hear. The Chinese tend to focus as much on giving face as causing others to avoid losing face, which is another reason that indirect communication is prevalent in China. Face can be protected, saved and given by observing social rituals (banquets, exchanging appropriate gifts in public).

Change

That change is a central term in a conservative Chinese culture is paradoxical from a western perspective (Fang et al., 2008)

The term *Bian-tong*（变通）has a deep historical root in the Chinese mindset. It derives from *Yijing*, the ancient Chinese book written more than three thousands years ago, and considered the oldest of the ancient Chinese five classics. Yijing, the Book of Changes, is as its name indicates a book on mastery of change building on a holistic approach (Cleary, 1991).

The generative structure of *"Bian" (change)* and *"Tong" (smooth)* represents Chinese dialectic way of thinking. *"Tong" (smooth)* is the result of *"Bian" (change)*, *"Bian" (change)* is a precondition of getting "*Tong" (smooth)*. There is a dialectical and dynamic relationship between the two words. Only interaction taking place between these two words can constitute the path to good management of relations. The precondition is a desire for a positive outcome (*Tong) (smooth)*, so *Bian (change)*

should be subordinated to *Tong (smooth)*, while at the same time *Bian (change)* also governs *Tong (smooth)*. If *Tong (smooth)* fails, *Bian (change)* will lose its significance.

Bian-tong is art of changes, which is a central concept of traditional Chinese philosophy. For example in Taoist philosophy it is said, 'Change is threefold: There is the Change of Heaven, the Change of sages, and the Change of mind.' (Cleary, 1991). According to Chinese philosophy the change of Heaven can be seen in the four seasons, the change of sages can be seen in their adaptations to change and their capability for innovations with changes. The change of mind can be seen in the *Tao* (way) of transformation, if the *Tao* is put into practice, it will make people feel ease in their mind. (Cleary, 1991)

The word *Bian* (*change)* is not only used repeatedly in the Book of Change, but it is also used in people's daily life in modern times. The connotations of *change* has been internalized, time goes on, from change to change of heavens—restoration of reactionary rule, alter, modify, transform, reform, differ, unexpected turn of events etc. All of these meanings stress the important quality of change. One of our interviewees revealed his thinking about change by saying that everything in the universe would change except that change itself does not change (Interviewee no.1). In other words, people should follow the law of change and master the practice of this law.

The dialectical universal view of *Yijing* stresses things will develop with different forms and stages in the world such as strong and weak, strength and decline going along or with each other in a cyclical move.

Bian-tong (change-smooth) is associated with appropriate timing. The appropriate time seems to suggest when accomplishing whatever is to be done, that is the time when something becomes possible or necessary due to a suitable configuration of conditions. It may also be suggested that the appropriate timing of action and inaction---harmonization with time by active or passive adaptation

to the present situation in order to proceed along the optimum line of development. (Cleary, 1991) We can discern that time plays a very important role in *Bian-tong (change-smooth).*

'Relation is a foundation when two parts make a deal. No relation, no deal, no matter what you do' (Interviewee no.2).The statement should be understood through the Chinese view of relational management of Chinese *Bian-tong*.

The Chinese show higher propensity to attribute an action to situation specific circumstances where westerner are more prone to use personal dispositions as explanation (Morris & Peng, 1994). In addition Morris and Peng (1994) state that where westerners see an individual as leader of a group then the Chinese tend to see a group following an individual.

Chinese Stratagems

Lin (1989) joked that Confucius forgot to regulate the relation between strangers. In fact several books in Chinese tradition discuss the topic called the Chinese Stratagems or *ji* （计）in Chinese, which describe how to lay plans to conquer the enemy. *Ji* is neither strategy nor tactics, but encompasses the meaning of both (Fang, 1999). Several classic books describe these strategies. The best known is Sun Zi. *The Art of War* (孙子，宾发). *The Art of War* can be described as the manipulation of various strategies. The book emphasizes that rather than resorting to absolute military force 'subdue the enemy without fighting' is more skillful (Fang, 1999). Sunzi's book is not really about war and Fang (1999) called it a book about the 'art of non-war'. A typical quote goes like this 'Regard your soldiers as your beloved children and they will follow you into the deepest valley' (Bing, 2004). Other quotes point in the opposite direction such as 'All warfare is based on deception.' The absence of moral universality becomes clearer in the 36 stratagems stemming from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) where one is urged to 'loot a burning house', 'Hide a knife in a

smile' or 'kill with a borrowed knife' meaning that one should make use of external resources for one's own gain. (Fang, 1999)

The main point is that when a culture like the Chinese does not subscribe to universalistic principles, the individual is not confined by anything when among strangers. As long as no one in one's network is included, any action is legitimate because you do not have any responsibility towards people you do not know. The context specificity becomes extremely important. An example can be seen in the traffic, where people are not confined by their networks. It will in many cities appear as total anarchy, where each person is trying to get ahead as fast as possible and are not thinking about others.

Time perception

The Chinese are well-known for their long-term perspective in family related issues. My mother in law takes it for granted that that one of our daughters will buy our house sometime, and her thinking about the house is determined by this perspective. As mentioned earlier, China is the oldest existing civilization and as such has a strong retrospective orientation. In addition time is considered cyclical. Events are elastic and coexist rather than having a causal relation. A consequence of this is that western logic, with its emphasis on cause and effect is not prevalent in China. The Chinese way of thinking is much more about synthesizing. Causation is not responsive but contextual and to a high extent determined by the environment (Ronan & Nedham, 1988). A particle's behavior is controlled by the force field in which it co-exists with other particles (Worm, 1997).

The above description does not mean that the Chinese cannot be short-term oriented under particular circumstances such as in a business setting. The specific context determines the specific approach.

Conclusion

Hopefully this article can provide some background knowledge on some key elements of Chinese philosophy such as elements of Confucianism, face, change, time, strategies etc.

In relation to the Chinese and others, there are basically two positions in the debate about mentality. Some tend to say that concepts like mentality and culture should not be generalized in the way I have done here. Everything is very context specific, negotiated and people shift cultural codes (Molinsky, 2007). People behave in different cultural rooms, dependent on what they do and when they do it.

The other line of research does not deny changes but tends to see culture as an "onion", where different layers change with different speed and some of the inner layers change slower than the outer. A good exposition of this view in a Chinese context is found in Lynton and Thøgersen (2006), where they argue that Chinese values as described above in more detail become dominating, even for foreigners, when living in China for many years. Based on interviews with western expatriates living many years in China, they show how these managers have changed because they have been influenced by the Chinese mentality. On the one hand it shows that the Chinese are mainly influenced by traditional Chinese values, which we can learn from, but on the other hand it also shows that western expatriates learn to shift cultural codes and vice versa. In that sense, the two viewpoints can be combined. There is some stability in the mentality of a nation, but it is prone to change somewhat when exposed to other cultures and create hybrid forms or what Ralton et.al. called crossvergence (1997)). Both of these positions have their values and in a good Chinese way I would say that in some contexts, more constant situations such as running a subsidiary the functionalist approach has more explanative value, while in others, such as a time limited

communication process, the first is better in terms of explaining the interaction. The problem that is not solved is that the whole discussion of change, to take an example, is built on two different mindsets in China and the West. In China change is 'natural', whereas westerners prefer predictability (Kumar & Nti, 2004). A culture like the Chinese stressing harmony is much more disposed to engage in situational as opposed to dispositional attributions whereas Western propensity of mastery over nature tend to engage in dispositional attributions or predictability. That people can learn the other side's mindset is without question, but it takes some time. What both lines of thought should be able to agree on is that culture does not exist, but is constructed in the mind of the actors. I hope this chapter can be of some value in understanding the Chinese, although I focus on differences rather than commonalities, which is not to say that commonalities do not exist. It is more important now than ever in recent time that the China and the West learn from each other. These seemingly divergent traditions are actually more complementary and antagonistic to each other, but it requires that we dare see the differences.

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