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Book Review

Book Review: Leadership and Management in China: Philosophies, Theories and Practices

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Chao-Chuan Chen and Yueh-Ting Lee (eds.) (2008):

Leadership and Management in China: Philosophies, Theories and Practices

Cambridge University Press, 328 pages

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This is a very interesting and ambitious book on Chinese leadership philosophies and practices. Drawing from some 20 contributors, this book covers the thoughts of key philosophers in ancient China, including, Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Hanfeizi, and Sunzi, and includes papers which discuss more modern and contemporary leadership theories and practices, like paternalistic leadership, leadership of prominent contemporary Chinese leaders, like Mao, relating to the Chinese communist revolution, and Deng, in relation to China's economic reform. A study of contemporary leadership based on interviews with business leaders in China was carried out for the purpose of this book and a concluding paper commenting on the significance of Chinese leadership philosophies for the world, wraps up this volume.

The volume starts with an excellent introduction on the diversity and dynamism of Chinese philosophies on leadership by the editors, which lays down the logic of the book's organization. As the book features the 3 main schools of thought and their respective ideas about state leadership, namely, Confucianism, Daoism and Legalism, the similarities and differences of these 3 schools were discussed in the first part of this introduction by the editors in terms of their differing basic assumptions of human nature, being inherently good or bad, and different views of how things may or should hold together in the social system. Here, the discussion is focused on the following issues in separate sections: The inherent goodness versus badness of human beings and the rule of virtue versus the rule of law; Individualism, relationalism and collectivism; Social hierarchy and social equality; and Individual, dyadic, institutional, and active non-action leadership. The second part of this introduction focuses on the Modern Chinese leadership theories and practices. In a first section of this part, the editors provided a focused discussion on paternalism, which is rooted in Confucianism, and the socialistic ideologies of Mao and Deng, which pointed to such interesting parallels as: "Xunzi led the transition from Confucianism to Legalism and Deng led the transition from orthodox socialism to market-oriented socialism." This second part ended with the assertion "that Chinese traditional culture contains both socialist and capitalist values". The next section discusses the Western influences on modern Chinese leadership theories and practices. The third and final part of this introduction focuses on the Theoretical and practical implications. The first section of this part discusses "Some common themes of Chinese Leadership philosophies". Here, the editors feature the following issues: Chinese humanism, Culture-building, Moral character of the leader, Dialecticism and holism, Control mechanisms, and Leadership agency. The second and concluding section of this last part of the introduction emphasized "the utility of eclectic and holistic approaches" for Chinese leaders.

The book is presented in 3 parts. The 2 chapters in Part 1 discuss the Confucianist foundation. Xin-hui Yang, Yan-qin Peng, and Yueh-ting Lee provided an excellent discussion about the "The Confucian and Mencian philosophy of benevolent leadership". The Confucian virtues of "ren, yi, li, zhi, xin and xiao", are clearly still universally accepted virtues among Chinese today. The next chapter is an excellent paper by Yan-qin Peng, Chao-chuan Chen, and Xin-hui Yang on "Bridging Confucianism and Legalism: Xunzi's philosophy of sage-kingship", which points to the revisionist approach of Xunzi in the face of reality.

Such is the application of philosophies to life where assumptions which are deemed inconsistent are revised into consistency and applicability in the face of what is perceived to be (a different) reality.

The second part of this book focuses on the "Alternative traditional Chinese leadership philosophies". This section starts off with chapter 3 on the theory and application of Daoist leadership by Yueh-ting Lee, Ai-guo Han, Tammy K. Byron, and Hong-xia Fan. Gems from this paper include this interesting citation from Laozi, which demonstrated his wisdom and depth of thought:

"When the Master governs, the people
Are hardly aware that he exists.
Next best is a leader who is loved.
Next, one who is feared.
The worst is one who is despised.

If you don't trust people,
You make them untrustworthy.
The Master doesn't talk, he(he) acts.
When his (her) work is done,
The people say, "Amazing:
We did it all by ourselves!"

Chapter 4, on "Leadership theory of legalism and its function in Confucian society" by Kwang-kuo Hwang, presents Hanfeizi's ideas on leadership. Chapter 5, by Hai-fa Sun, Chao-chuan Chen, and Shi-he Zhang, discusses the "Strategic leadership of Sunzi in the Art of war".

The third part of the book (chapters 6–9) focuses on "Modern Chinese leadership theories and practices". Chapter 6, by Jiing-lih Farh, Jian Liang, Li-fang Chou, and Bor-shiung Cheng, discusses "Paternalistic leadership in Chinese organizations". The next chapter, by Xin-an Lu and Jie Lu discusses "The leadership theories and practices of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping". Chapter 8, by Zhi-xue Zhang, Chao-chuan Chen, Leigh Anne Liu, and Xue-feng Liu discusses the influences of "Chinese traditions and Western theories" on business leaders in China, based on interviews specially conducted for the purpose of this book. The final chapter (9) by George Baer Graen attempts to link "Chinese leadership theory and practice to the world", and serves as the concluding chapter.

While one can come to terms with some form of understanding of the diversity of Chinese philosophies, and the often contradicting assumptions of different schools of thought, it is often and obviously difficult to detect how each stream of thought has affected the thinking of contemporary Chinese leaders. It is most probable that Chinese socialization process would have somewhat presented the individual with a certain integrated understanding of the different traditional schools of thought, which is somewhat eclectic and yet holistic according to the understanding of the recipient and the teachings he or she has been exposed to. Clearly, every single one of the ancient sages mentioned in this volume is respected by most Chinese who are literate, despite the differences in beliefs and perspectives of these sages. It is also clear that many Chinese would continue to live their lives according to Chinese traditions without any inkling as to how their traditions would relate to the teachings of any one or more of these sages. Such, is the reality of human consciousness and so-

cieties everywhere, which makes the task of helping readers to understand “the thoughts and views of Chinese leadership and management” through such a volume, near to impossible. Would understanding the philosophies of these sages enable us to understand better the Chinese psyche or at least the thinking of Chinese leaders and managers? Assuming that these leaders and managers are learned in these ancient philosophies, this could well be the case, although one may still have to inquire into the constellation of diverse knowledge and experiences which makes up this holistic and yet eclectic collection of ideas and perspectives in each individual.

Despite the immensity and impossibility of the task, this book has done a surprisingly decent job. I would therefore congratulate the many authors, and especially the editors for this fine volume. This is probably the first book of its kind and hopefully, not the last, in attempting to link ancient and more contemporary philosophies to current Chinese business leadership.

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