

## **A Review of Chinese Philosophers: Intersecting Eastern and Western Higher Education**

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### **Abstract**

*The advent and proliferation of globalism has intertwined many relationships among American and Chinese business and higher education institutions. This paper reviews examples of Chinese business philosophies and their influences within the contexts of business studies and higher education. This paper introduces the philosophies of Guan Zhong, Xunzi, Confucius, Mencius, Sun Tzu, and Lao Tzu. A brief commentary is expressed regarding their philosophies within the contexts of management and academic business higher education programs and business philosophy.*

**Keywords:** American; business philosophy; Chinese; globalism; higher education; management; Sun Tzu

### **1. Introduction**

A substantial connection exists economically and financially between the United States and China. For instance, in 2014, between the United State (U.S.) and China, America exported \$123,675.7 million in goods and services whereas it imported \$466,754.5 million in goods and services (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The U.S. Census Bureau (2016) indicates that this financial and economic activity showed a negative U.S. trade balance of -\$343,078.8 million dollars. Some of these business endeavors and relationships are impacted by difficulties and misunderstandings whereas others are meaningful and productive (Ambler, Witzel, & Xi, 2008).

For example, the U.S. restaurant chain Kentucky Fried Chicken experienced much success among Chinese markets whereas Metro Plastics Technologies, Inc. experienced much difficulty and misunderstanding during its efforts of installing, operating, and maintaining Chinese molding facilities (Conis, 2007). Although successes of American organizations exist among Chinese markets, the chances of a successful outcome initially within the Chinese market are less than what would be experienced domestically (Saxon, 2007). Although a variety of business practices, processes, and procedures may be adapted within foreign markets and may contribute toward successful outcomes, differences among managerial philosophies and cultural attributes often cause difficulties and misunderstandings thereby hampering business relationships. Historically, various successes of business operations exist between Asian and U.S. organizations. For instance, from Japan, the philosophies of total quality management and tenets of lean manufacturing were eventually accepted by Western organizations (Ambler, Witzel, & Xi, 2008). However, there exists no dominating Chinese management philosophy that is commensurately and overwhelmingly embraced by Western organizations (Ambler, Wetzels, & Xi, 2008).

During the emerging and maturing of markets, the managers of Chinese firms develop unique methods and operations which may be contrary to the concepts and tenets of Western management philosophies (Ambler, Wetzell, & Xi, 2008).

Regarding manufacturing and partnering between European and Chinese organizations, Gebauer and Fischer (2009), indicate that learning relationships should be forged when attempting to analyze, conceptualize, and understand the needs of Chinese consumers. Regardless, trust is a considerable aspect of such international endeavors and relationships (Chen, Doss, & Holland, 2008; Lovett, Simmons, & Kali, 1999). The domain of higher education also has witnessed partnering between U.S. and Chinese entities. During recent years, China represented the dominant source of foreign students among American institutions of higher learning (Qingfeng, 2013). Western colleges and universities exist within the Chinese market, and have residential campuses in China. For example, New York University maintains a physical campus in Shanghai (Lai, 2013). The University of Nottingham also has a Chinese campus (Fazackerley, 2007).

These Western endeavors within the Chinese academic market are significant factors toward bridging cultures. They also provide opportunities for enabling Chinese students to earn an education from a reputable, notable American institution. However, although standardized test scores are considered by both American and Chinese institutions during the student admissions process, they are seemingly more important among Chinese universities (Cole, 2009). Known as the “Black Year,” the year preceding Chinese university application consists of younger Chinese students believing that their eventual fates are depending solely upon nationally standardized examinations (Cole, 2009). Regardless, within the Chinese market, the presences of Western higher education institutions are significant accomplishments between bridging and transcending cultures and providing opportunities for Chinese students to earn an education from a reputable American institution.

Chinese students who graduate from domestic, traditional American institutions and who eventually re-enter Chinese culture may be disadvantaged initially within the Chinese job and labor markets (Zhao, 2013). This situation occurs because these individuals are deemed as *haigui*, a term that represents someone who studied overseas and returned to China (Cangbai, Siu-Lun, & Wenbin, 2006). This status impacts the time required for securing employment (Hao & Welch, 2012). Although approximately 72% of the Chinese students who study abroad eventually return to China either after working a few years or experiencing academic study, at least 70% of Chinese employers do not treat preferentially *haigui* prospects, and approximately 8% find them undesirable (Zhao, 2013). A variety of factors contribute to this recalcitrance, ranging from the diminished *guan xi* of the individual after having been separated from Chinese culture to differences of expectations regarding salaries and wages (Zhao, 2013).

Globalization has produced a worldwide community whose cultural and social characteristics were unimaginable and unthinkable historically (McElreath, et al., 2013). Globalization, technologies, and the Internet provided the foundations for worldwide commerce and the exchanging of information rapidly while simultaneously diminishing the impacts of physical boundaries and borders (McElreath, et al., 2014). Because of globalism, concerns of homeland and national security have international attributes and consequences (Doss, et al., 2016). Given the effects of globalism, organizational posturing and positioning are essential aspects of many international businesses and their financing (Doss, Sumrall, McElreath, & Jones, 2013; Doss, Sumrall, & Jones, 2012). The effects of globalization are present within the business relationships of both America and China. By the year 2009, the U.S. became the world’s largest importer of merchandise whereas China represented the globe’s larger exporter of merchandise (Wisner, Tan, & Leong, 2016). Chinese business operations exist external to the Chinese mainland. They may emphasize a solitary market or product, and exhibit flexibility via diversification opportunities (Hofstede, 1993).

Preparation for careers among professional settings is often accomplished through formal learning among institutions of higher education. Both Western and Chinese universities provide a plethora of programs and opportunities whereby graduates may compete for employment globally. However, basic differences exist between Western and Eastern business philosophies that are unreconciled among organizations and business relationships (Chen & Miller, 2010). Despite such differences, some commonness exists between the tenets of ancient Chinese philosophers and modern business philosophies that are espoused among Western societies (Li-Hua, 2014).

## **2. Design and Methodology**

This article incorporates a qualitative design and methodology for generating a literature review of Eastern and Western philosophies regarding business administration and higher education. According to Remenyi (2012), qualitative research designs and approaches often require less depth than historiography, and may be useful within a topical context. Relevant research items concerning Eastern and Western concepts were located by searching the EBSCO and Proquest databases. These concepts were also researched via the Google search engine. As a method of including several materials, the search terms were widespread. Examples of search terms employed within this research consisted of “business philosophy,” “Confucius,” “Guan Zhong,” “Mencius,” “Lao Tzŭ,” “Sun Tzu,” and “XunZi.” Researchers in the areas of higher education and business administration from the University of Central Arkansas and the University of West Alabama were polled for specific, additional topic areas and article recommendations.

## **3. Examples of Chinese Philosophers**

The teachings of several philosophers may be pertinent for enhancing management theories among Chinese markets and higher education settings. Several Chinese philosophers espoused notions that are commensurate with modern management philosophies and practices. Examples of these philosophers and their beliefs are given as follows: Confucius – Confucius emphasized human values through expressing that the “moral life is not following the spiritual authority or God, but to follow humanistic sensitivity and reflection (Huang, 2011, p. 159).” Confucius advocated the notions of leading by example, task initiation, self-cultivation, and benevolence (Wei & Zhang, 2011). Guan Zhong – Guan Zhong expressed the foundations of qingzhong regarding political economics.

His writings embodied “government manipulation of goods and prices by purchasing or otherwise acquiring grain and other critical commodities when they are plentiful and cheap (Qing) and selling them when the price has been driven up by naturally or artificially created shortages (zhong) (Cheng, 1998, p. 359).” Through observations of the economics of supply and demand, including exploitation of pricing opportunities, Zhong indicated that government entities may reap profits while avoiding public dissatisfaction that may arise from taxation. Mencius – Mencius furthered the tenets of Confucius by believing emphatically in governing humanely, and expressed that people were of greatest importance within the context of government (Ramos, 2004). He also disavowed “righteousness to utility, advantages, and profit,” and his writings also included the corruption of individuals resulting from lackluster management (Ramos, 2004, p. 51).

His teachings reflected concepts that are common among modern operation and production management settings regarding divisions of labor and their advantages (Nanda, 2006). Lao Tzŭ -- Lao Tzŭ identified and expressed three ethical codes that influence management theory: kindness (i.e. generosity), thrift (i.e., austerity), and docility (Ma, 2009). His writings addressing issues of moral standards, involving integrity, modesty, and pragmatism, also influence managed environments (Ma, 2009). Cumulatively, his philosophies contribute to crafting organizational environments and generating peaceful interpersonal relationships regarding commonness of values toward generating motivation and enthusiasm (Ma, 2009). Sun Tzu – Other than Confucius, Sun Tzu is probably one of the most well-known and easily recognized Chinese philosophers. Most notably, he authored the Art of War. This work contributes much to management theory ranging from the necessity of strategy to the humane treatment of personnel. Further, it must be noted that business and war are not identical entities. However, they share common attributes (e.g., planning, logistics, human resources, etc.) that are relevant to managed environments.

XunZi – XunZi expressed the notions that “water and fire have breath, but no life; vegetations are animate, but without awareness; animals have awareness, but no righteousness,” and that humans possess all of these attributes and are the “most valuable on the world” (Wei & Zhang, 2011, p. 241). His writings emphasized the meaning of the earth and heavens as foundations for natural law and management thereby reflecting the hierarchical importance of managerial structuring with respect to such observances. Various similarities may be drawn between various Chinese philosophies and contemporary Western business concepts. For instance, regarding human motivation, the Chinese philosophers Mengzi and XunZi expressed concepts that reflected the modern, Western principles of Theory X management and Theory Y management, respectively (Li-Hua, 2014). Similarities are expressed between the philosophies of Sungzi and the Western principles of organizing, directing, and planning (Li-Hua, 2014).

Within the context of personnel management, the notions of Sungzi and Hanfeizi are commensurate with the Western concepts of equity theory and expectancy theory, respectively (Li-Hua, 2014). Hanfeizi's writings are also appropriate for leaders when motivating group member contributions (Li-Hua, 2014). Within the context of scientific management, the tenets of Mozi are reflective of concepts involving efficiency and bureaucracy (Li-Hua, 2014). Marketing management concepts involving the evaluating of supply and demand are found among the tenets of Fan Lei (Li-Hua, 2014).

#### **4. Influences of Chinese Philosophers**

Examining the teachings of these Chinese philosophers yields strong inclinations regarding the developing of personal relationships among managed environments. They impact aspects of both business performance and personal experiences in a variety of ways ranging from trustfulness and intimacy between persons to the methods through which resources are allocated and managed. Certainly, they also have implications for corporate governance. For instance, according to Goh (2008), some cases of organizational transparency may be diminished within the context of Confucianism. Regardless of the context, familiarity and an observance of Chinese philosophies may enhance the abilities of American and Chinese organizations to successfully conduct business endeavors mutually.

These notions are pertinent within the context of higher education, especially within the management discipline. Within the domestic U.S., very little is discussed about these philosophers within foundational, traditional management courses despite the increasing quantity of business and educational relationships that exist and that are emerging with Chinese organizations. During contemporary times, among undergraduate curriculums, few academic institutions incorporate a business philosophy course in which a plethora of different cultural business philosophies are discussed. For American institutions that operate and maintain overseas campuses in China, an opportunity exists through which philosophical concepts may be integrated among management teachings. Given the plethora of Chinese students entering domestic U.S. business schools, some mentioning of these philosophies may be pertinent within the context of international business, strategy, policy, and management studies that involve Asian case studies or considerations of international business venues. They may also be beneficial as preparatory materials for American students that are contemplating Asian internships. Conversely, they may be applicable for Chinese students whom seek American internships. An array of business collaborations and relationships exist between the United States and China. Examples of such endeavors include partnerships between General Motors and the Pan Asia Technical Automotive Center for automobile production; Hormel Foods and Da-Chang Further Processing Meat Company to form Shanghai Hormel Foods Co. Ltd; Merck and Simcere Pharma for pharmaceutical developments; and China's GCL-Poly Energy Holdings, Ltd. and Solar Reserve. Certainly, numerous others exist that involve significant capitalization, and that affect a plethora of stakeholders internationally. Especially among Asian operations, permeating these concepts is the notion of Chinese business philosophy.

Conceptualizing and understanding Chinese business philosophies is often difficult for Western entities. Similarly, conceptualizing American business philosophies is often difficult for Chinese entities. Cultural differences often create misunderstandings and problematic scenarios that adversely impact business endeavors and transnational relationships. When considering a relationship with a Chinese entity or when conducting Asian operations, Lam recommends that approaching cultural understanding and fashioning trustful relationships involves asking "Americans to accommodate the Chinese more and to listen to their advice" (Lam, 2000, p. 70). Such advice may be salient because Kankaanranta and Lu (2013) indicate that Chinese business philosophies are most likely influenced by greater economic factors than those of Western cultures.

Chinese philosophies impact business environments and relationships between U.S. and Chinese organizations. Conducting business with Chinese organizations necessitates the crafting and maturing of strong personal relationships between American and Chinese managers and leaders (Haley, Haley, & Tan, 2004). Degrees of intimacy may interject difficulty with respect to the objectivity of rendering business decisions that are in the best interest of the organization (Haley, Haley, & Tan, 2004). Such relationships may also be viewed as derivatives of family relationships thereby signifying attributes of trustfulness, performance expectations, and loyalty (Haley, Haley, & Tan, 2004).

Social contexts differ geographically among nations, and must be considered by organizations when rendering decisions or examining courses of actions that affect the organization, its stakeholders, or the public (Doss, Guo, & Lee, 2012). Essentially, Eastern business paradigms exhibit more relational contexts whereas Western paradigms exhibit much less a relational perspective (Li, 2014).

Both paradigms are primarily different regarding their respective interpersonal orientations and worldviews (Li, 2014). The Art of War, authored by Sun Tzu, provides information for influencing business relationships and functions from a variety of perspectives. Although war and business are not identical, much can be learned from strategic war fighting concepts that are pertinent for business strategy. McNeilly (2012) indicates that Sun Tzu's strategies provides advantages to organizations when attempting to accomplish the following: 1) capturing market share; 2) leveraging market information and intelligence for competitive advantage; 3) crafting and implementing business strategy; 4) speed to market regarding products and services; 5) innovativeness and business security; 6) instantiating character among managers and leaders; and 7) the implementing of cumulative business strategy, tactics, and operations through time. According to Krause (2005), the tenets of Sun Tzu are also beneficial tactically and operationally throughout enterprises, ranging from the functions of personnel training and discipline to the acts of personnel selection and the gathering of intelligence.

Regardless of the setting, people are the most important, indispensable resource of any organization. Examining the tenets of the aforementioned philosophers shows allusions to the concepts of people-oriented management. This emphasis reflects the importance of humans within the context of management – both those, whom are managed, the managers whom are responsible for rendering organizational decisions, and the relationship between them. Given these notions, these philosophies presented herein impact the primary managerial functions of controlling, coordinating, leading, organizing, staffing, directing, and planning.

These areas are also affected within the contexts of strategic, tactical, and operational functions that impact the long-term, short-term, and immediate decisions that are rendered among organizations. These observations are also reflective of the notion that Chinese business philosophy affects the intangible characteristics of business (e.g., motivation, trust, etc.) as well as the tangible attributes of business (e.g., contracts, supply lines, etc.). Because of these business considerations, Chinese philosophy represents a concept that may be beneficial among undergraduate and graduate business management courses to prepare students for possibly encountering business ventures involving Chinese organizations. Academic institutions enhance their competitiveness by satisfying some unique, niche market (Doss, et al., 2015; Doss, et al, 2016b). Incorporating materials addressing such philosophers and business concepts within higher education management curriculums may satisfy a unique niche, and attract both domestic and international students among colleges and universities.

At the time of this writing, Chinese philosophy had entered American classrooms. Notably, at Harvard University, a course titled Classical Chinese Ethical and Political Theory exists as an introductory experience wherein students gain better understandings of Confucius's and Mencius's writings and philosophies (Gross-Loh, 2013). The course not only introduces theoretical concepts, but also emphasizes the practical application of learning (Gross-Loh, 2013). By applying philosophical tenets practically, it is hoped that students gain a higher level of awareness about themselves and life (Gross-Loh, 2013). As a result, students gain a stronger appreciation of not only Chinese philosophy, but also its relevancy within their respective worldviews (Gross-Loh, 2013).

Research universities are not the only institutions that have a vested interest in Western partnerships with Chinese academia. Nice markets may be satisfied by regional teaching institutions (Doss, et al., 2016b). For instance, international agreements exist between American regional teaching institutions and Chinese higher education institutions (Doss, et al. 2016a). At the University of West Alabama, students within an entrepreneurship course benefitted from discourses involving their Chinese peers (Ma, 2016). Such discourses allow and facilitate the direct exchanging of concepts and ideas wherein representatives of both cultures learn mutually from each other (Ma, 2016). Thus, opportunity exists for introducing Eastern, Chinese philosophies within the context of entrepreneurship among Western business schools.

## **5. Conclusion**

No universal paradigm exists that integrates fully Eastern and Western business philosophies (Li-Hua, 2014). However, Ellerman (2015) argues that some common ground may eventually be established regarding the democratizing of workplaces between Eastern and Western societies. Doss, et al., (2016a) introduce the notion of international agreements between Eastern and Western academic institutions.

Similar to commercial agreements and relations, the considered management environments are affected by culture and human behaviors (Doss, et al., 2016c). Examining Chinese philosophies among Western higher education settings provides an opportunity to better understand counterpart nations and cultures academically and theoretically regarding considerations of business ventures. For instance, within the context of business accounting ethics, studying the tenets of Confucius provides a foundation for understanding ethical concepts that pervade realms of Southeast and East Asia (Waldmann, 2000).

Thus, for organizations and entrepreneurs seeking and pursuing business ventures among such regions, understanding the philosophical aspects of business provides insight that may benefit the business venture.

Chinese philosophy has a rich history that affects modern business settings and that may enhance business studies among institutions of Western high education. However, no solitary Chinese philosophy is dominant within the context of management with the same scope and magnitude that were afforded total quality management or lean concepts that emerged from Japan during the twentieth century (Ambler, 2008). When exercised operationally, practices of Chinese organizations vary from nation to nation, and they are acclimated to satisfy different sociological and political environments (Chen, 2001). Despite the lacking of a dominant philosophy, Chinese business philosophies undeniably affect international business relationships and managed environments. These notions are not always taught among Western classrooms.

Within Chinese business philosophy, the leveraging of the familial aspects of such relationships must neither be taken lightly or ignored completely regarding the sanctity of trustfulness that contributes toward the foundation of working, healthy business functions. The Chinese business philosophies that impact personnel management influence the productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness of the functioning of organizations that enter transnational relationships. Such philosophies also contribute toward the motivating of personnel to perform their individual and group functions with respect to the overall benefitting of international collaborations. The strengthening of business relationships that exist between Chinese organizations (or that involve Chinese personnel) and the organizations and personnel of other nations must integrate and accommodate multiple cultures.

Through understanding and leveraging the basic tenets of Chinese philosophies that affect transnational business environments, international business alliances, and higher education institutions, organizations may overcome cultural and philosophical differences that challenge problematically the leaders of both Chinese and American organizations. Both Western and Eastern higher education entities may consider these notions when examining possible enhancements and the strengthening of their respective higher education programs targeted toward preparing students for experiencing international business and employment globally.

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