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Linking Chinese Neo-Confucianism Culture in Western Women Leadership

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to revisit theoretical positions on women's leadership and the implications by building upon traditional Neo-Confucianism philosophy of women's leadership. This research explores how traditional Chinese Neo-Confucianism Culture can promote western women elite leaders' positive relationship with others. This research focuses on those women elite leaders' experiences of positive social relations whom at the top of hierarchies as directors in organisations. This paper is a theoretical research. The author argues that Neo-Confucianism is a driving cultural forces, its theories can be used in Western countries to promote positive women leadership. The author claims that benevolence, propriety, and trustworthiness are important factors of collaborative and mutually positive relationship, and are foundational factors for modern women leadership and women's relationships. The writer contends that women elite leaders should know the unity of Yin and Yang, follow the principle of yin and yang, and seek a balance between masculinity and femininity. This report focuses on link traditional Chinese Neo-Confucianism philosophy in Western Women Leadership research and practice, drawing upon the analysis of Confucianism (people), Daoist (nature), and Buddhist (spirit) theories into women's leadership.

Keywords: *Neo-Confucianism, women leadership, benevolence, propriety, trustworthiness, harmony.*

Introduction

This research explores how Chinese Neo-Confucianism Culture can promote western women elite leaders' positive relationship with others, which are areas still under study. This research focuses on those women elite leaders' experiences of positive social relations whom at the top of hierarchies as directors in organisations with other people such as peers, friends, and her followers in the workplace. This research links traditional Chinese Neo-Confucianism Culture in women's leadership theories and practice and pays particular attention to how to build their positive relationship with others. In this paper, the leader refers to the women elite leader.

Women leaders are women in the context of senior positions in organisations and motivate themselves to achieve promotion in organisational hierarchies. After breaking

the glass ceiling, they meet new challenges such as a glass cliff from other women and men, and social relations influence their experiences of leadership with others. The literature suggests leadership are understood as agentic characteristics same as “yang” in China more typical of men, while gender stereotypes believe women are as “yin” in China. Women leaders struggle between the fundamental yin and yang.

In China, leadership theories exist five thousand years. Neo-Confucian engaged in harmony in interpersonal relationships and can mediate between different hierarchical. The Neo-Confucian principal believes leadership should be benevolent, graciousness and kindness. The leader, as a mentor, monitor, and motivator, should take care of the followers, not only in their workplace but also in their private life. In modern business life, women are thought to have more characters of taking care of others and may more suitable for leadership jobs. Thus, linking Chinese Neo-Confucianism culture in western women's leadership will assist more women to elevate their leadership power.

Literature Review

Women leadership in western countries

After promoting to a higher position in the organisation, women elite leaders gather privilege. However, they also faced social hindrance based on gender (Atewologun and Sealy, 2014; Mavin and Grandy, 2014). Women elite leaders are those already broken through the glass ceiling, and they find they achieved a ‘masculine strategic situation’ (Tyler, 2005:569; Mavin and Grandy, 2014) no matter what is their original intention of leadership style. Then they find they are in another situation, the glass cliff, which women often are placed in uncertain leadership positions with increased risk of failure and been replaced by men later, they are forecast more probably to leave their organisation.

Following Krane et al. (2004) this research contend that women elite leaders suffered a paradox lifestyle with two cultures: they practice their leader role which is traditionally inherent by the character of masculine and privilege (Atewologun and Sealy, 2014), such as competitive, confident, and decisive, which are traditionally viewed as men leaders’ characteristics. While they live in a wider societal culture to perform their femininity but as a disadvantage (Mavin and Grandy, 2014) to their leadership role. Women elite leaders often feel misfit between their female gender stereotype role and the apparent requirements of the professional leadership role (Heilman 2001; Schuh et al., 2014) in the organisation.

The job tasks and responsibilities habitually make women’s progression harder, after they have reached the highest levels of hierarchy, they may be tending to distance themselves from other women, particularly when to decide if they should strive for gender equality or support other women’s promotion (Rhoton, 2011). Women elite leaders may face a dilemma in whether advance gender equality or not, as a women leader they should promote equality, but as women, they suffered from gender stereotypes. Furthermore, they need to protect themselves from falling the glass cliff. When peers and the followers find the woman leader achieved under their expectation, they will give the leader disapprove and bad feedback. Their organisation need to find a way to gain more profit and benefit, gender diversity is a way the modern business preferred in recent years, and how to reach new balance inside their organisation among women leaders, men leaders, peers, and followers is beyond an individual’s ability, the organisation should restructure

themselves more or less. The key to maximising the benefits of members of boards team diversity is to advocate and practice a collaborative behaviour; all team members should cooperate with each other (Boone & Hendricks, 2009).

History of Neo-Confucianism

In the period of ancient Chinese history, Confucian (BC551-BC479) is China's most influential philosopher. Confucianism, integrated with Daoist and Buddhist beliefs, formed the Neo-Confucianism and became the dominant philosophy. Neo-Confucianism is not understood as practising Confucian philosophy into modern Chinese culture and business, or as the reform of Confucian philosophy and update its theories to fit Chinese modern lifestyle, but is the theoretical integration of traditional Chinese philosophy of Confucianism (people), Daoist (nature), and Buddhist (spirit). Neo-Confucianism philosophy includes lots of books of ancient China, among them, "Confucian Analects" is the most important book. Neo-Confucianism philosophy formed in the period of Song dynasty by Cheng Yi (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi (1133-1200), whom the Neo-Confucianism school was named after their names. The school dominated Chinese philosophy for a very long time until the Republic revolution of 1911.

Neo-Confucianism theories and its practices in women leadership

This paper explores how can Neo-Confucianism culture link in women leadership, philosophy is included in the big concept of culture in this article, and Neo-Confucianism philosophy is a part of Chinese traditional culture. Disregard some dysfunctional manifestations; Neo-Confucianism brings business with a positive force in areas of managerial theories, leadership theories and their application.

Neo-Confucianism culture can link to women leadership

Hofstede named Culture as the common programme development of one country distinguishes from other nations (Hofstede, 1993, p.89). Neo-Confucianism philosophy, as a cultural process and a part of culture (Cahoone, 1988), plays a major role in traditional Chinese culture and life.

Neo-Confucianism philosophy (culture) can link in management theory such as women leadership. Recently, Neo-Confucianism philosophy been introduced into lots Chinese companies as an added in part of their management and leadership culture. "All great ideas in science, politics and management have travelled from one country to another, and been enriched by foreign influences" (Hofstede, 1993, p.93). Neo-Confucianism is a driving cultural forces; its theories can also be used in Western countries to promote positive women leadership.

Confucian core theories link in women leadership

Journal Confucius philosophy consists lots of leadership theories, most of them can be found in its most famous book "Confucian Analects". Among this book, Benevolence/Humanity (仁), Righteousness (义), Propriety/Ritual/Esteem (礼), Wisdom/Knowledge (智), and Integrity/fidelity/sincerity/trustworthiness (信) are five key factors of Confucian theories. While Confucianism leadership is an emphasis on relationships based upon the merits of benevolence, propriety, and trustworthiness, they

are important factors of collaborative and mutually positive relationship, and are foundational factors for business relationships.

Nowadays, we can introduce benevolence theory into women leadership. The leader should be kind to her followers and love all her followers, it is the kind of love to all people. The leader cooperates with her followers with her mission and vision. The woman leader should subdue herself and return to propriety; she performs perfect virtue. If a woman leader can subdue herself and return to propriety, all people around her will ascribe perfect virtue to her. Confucius believed that instruct and taught the followers who are comparatively weaker than others is crucial than criticism them, so mutually encourage each other between the leader and the followers can build a positive, respectful and harmonised relationship.

Propriety and trustworthiness are other two vital core aspects of Confucius' leadership theories; Confucian believes building trustworthiness from the followers is essential. In modern society, after introducing propriety and trustworthiness into organisation, women elite leaders could also obtain esteem and support from her followers. In propriety theories, doing things obey the nature is to be prized. Women elite leaders need to "doing gender well and differently" (Mavin and Grandy, 2012) obey the nature as a woman and as a leader.

Neo-Confucianism theories believe the leader must establish a harmonious environment around her. With harmony, the leader can build up good a relationship among the leader and other people. While, women elite leaders practice harmony does not try to avoid conflict, difference and diversity. On the contrary, harmony welcomes conflict, difference and diversity, so long as the conflict, different and diverse seek cooperation among women elite leaders and other persons for mutual benefits or win-win situation. If disagreement and debate are a move toward the spirit of benevolence, propriety, trustworthiness, cooperation, and mutual benefits, which are all fundamental traits to Confucianism, then we can expect that self-improvement, relationship progress and reciprocated benefits can emerge in a procedure of interaction.

Legge translates quote from *Confucian Analects* as:

"In practising the rules of propriety, a natural ease is to be prized. In the ways prescribed by the ancient kings, this is the excellent quality, and in things small and great we follow them. Yet it is not to be observed in all cases. If one, knowing how such ease should be prized, manifests it, without regulating it by the rules of propriety, this likewise is not to be done." (Legge, 1893, no page)

A woman elite performs leadership as practising her propriety; she should obey the rule of nature and harmony. However, just a harmonious way to do things is not enough, and something it will not work. It is because a woman leader cannot do things just for the purpose of harmony without the rules of propriety to regulate it. Conflict and imbalance can sometimes happen, while propriety is the key to coping with the relationship between a woman leader and other people such as peers, friends, and followers.

Another factor of Confucianism, which can affect women's leadership, is responsible, it emphasises that a woman elite leader must put herself in collective activities with others and strive for success for all members.

Taoist core theories link in women leadership

The Taoist philosophy initiates from Lao Tzu. The theory of way/road/means/methodology is Taoist core theory. The first line of Lao Tzu's famous book "Tao Te Ching" said: "The way that becomes a way is not the immortal way" (Lao Tzu, no year). This sentence can be introduced in women leadership, and it can be understood as the way toward women leadership is a way changes encountered.

Lao Tzu perceived that fairness is crucial. Fairness is a major factor women elite leaders struggling for. Several scholars contended that men are naturally better in competition, while gender unfairness persists (Baron-Cohen, 2003, Lawrence, 2006, Barres, 2006). To reduce unfairness as an elite leader, women need to "doing gender well and differently" (Mavin and Grandy, 2012; Mavin, 2014) as a different way from male dominated leadership theories.

The theory of Yin and Yang is included in the Taoist philosophy. Yin (i.e. feminine, darkness, passive, and tolerant) is a contrast to Yang (i.e. masculine, brightness, active, and domineering), Yin and Yang are mutually reflected, they are complementary, interconnected, interdependent, interact, and interrelated with each other and form a whole entirety. This Yin Yang complementarity echoes with Confucianism theory of human being, and should act according to the natural order.

Women leaders working in modern business should acknowledge the integrity of Yin and Yang, following the rule of yin and yang. They need to seek a balance between masculinity and femininity; they also need to pursue a balanced relationship with other people in the workplace. Women leadership needs to rebalance the organisational system or re-stabilize the system; women leaders promoted to the higher hierarchy will not break the system, but to maintaining the continuousness, consistency, and coherence of the business operating system.

According to the theory of Yin and Yang, the harmonious transfer between the opposite sides creates versatile leadership styles, which arise from the constant vibration between opposite but integrated sides of Yin and Yang: to be powerful and at the same time permitting; to be visionary and simultaneously practicable.

Daoist believe a leader should avoid direct conflict with the followers who are opposite with the leader's idea or are hard to be controlled by the leader. The woman leader in modern life needs to use appropriate strategies to get mutual benefits between herself and her followers; that is a kind of win-win or value added gain.

Also, Daoist prefers soft leadership style but not carry out a tough measure which can initiate strong disappointment and response from the followers.

Modern women leadership should practice relationship with other people as soft as water thus as powerful as water takes. While soft leadership style cannot build up by an individual but need changes from the management system. As Hofstede contended, "Women's roles differ from men's roles in all countries; but in tough societies, the differences are larger than in tender ones" (Hofstede, 1993, p.90). Only after Soft leadership style been established in tender societies, can a woman in a position of management practices her roles as a leader.

Buddhism links in women leadership

Buddhism believes that the leader should be lenient, she/he calmly faces and dealing with conflict through adequate consideration. The leader knows what the followers need; then

the leader can build compatible relationships with them. The leader pursues fairness and equality between herself/himself and the followers, the leader and the followers mutually respect each other. The leader should restrict self-interest and endlessly develop her/his ability, consequently the leader can own the followers' respect, trustworthiness, and following after the leader (Chan, 1963; Wen, 2012).

From all Buddhism characters cited above, this research thinks it is a supplementary to Confucianism and Daoist philosophy; all characters can be found inside the other two, and do not need to do the repeated work here.

Conclusion

Neo-Confucianism is a driving cultural forces; its theories can be used in Western countries to promote positive women leadership.

Benevolence, propriety, and trustworthiness are important factors of collaborative and mutually positive relationship, and are foundational factors for modern women leadership and women's relationships. Women elite leaders must establish a harmonious environment around them, harmony welcomes conflict, difference and diversity. Women elite leaders should obey the rule of nature and harmony, and use rules of propriety to regulate harmony. Propriety is the key to coping with the relationship between a woman leader and other people. Responsibility emphasizes that women elite leaders must put themselves in collective activities with others.

The way toward women leadership is a way change encountered. To reduce unfairness as an elite leader, women need to "doing gender well and differently". Women elite leaders should recognise the unity of Yin and Yang, follow the principle of yin and yang, and seek a balance between masculinity and femininity. The harmonious transfer between the opposite sides creates versatile leadership styles. Women elite leaders can apply appropriate strategies to make mutual benefits between themselves and the followers, that is a kind of win-win or value added. Women elite leaders should prefer soft leadership style. Women leadership should practice relationship with other people as soft as water, thus as powerful as water takes.

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