

The Relevance of Confucian Philosophy to Modern Concepts of Leadership and Followership

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss Confucian philosophy and compare its relevance to modern concepts of leadership and followership. It will demonstrate that both exemplify the same ideology, though separated by centuries of history. The paper first introduces the reader to the history of Chinese government and the life of Confucius as a teacher. Then it will expand on the importance of understanding his philosophy on leadership and followership as well as its impact on China's political and cultural development. It will then examine three Confucian teachings on leadership and three on followership. Finally, with this information, it will discuss modern concepts of leadership and followership as they pertain to today's world.

A wise man once said, "If you can revive the ancient and use it to understand the modern, then you are worthy to be a teacher" (2:11, Marquis Zhang Analects Version). The famous philosopher who stated this was Confucius and we, the authors of this paper, have decided to follow his advice.

It is beneficial to revive the ancient teachings of Confucius and use them to reflect upon modern theories of leadership and followership. First, it is important to learn about the life of Confucius and his impact on Chinese civilization and eastern philosophy. Then, it is necessary to understand his philosophy on leadership and followership and how it influenced China's political leadership. Finally, with this knowledge, one may reflect upon the teachings of Confucius and compare them with modern theory. To accomplish this, three Confucian teachings on leadership and three on followership will be cited and then analyzed from a modern perspective.

The basic premise is to demonstrate that modern teachings of leadership and followership embody the same principles as those proposed by Confucius, but with one major difference – he taught it 2,500 years ago.

Analysis

China Prior to Confucius

To understand the manner of leadership that Confucius was born under, it is best to trace some important periods leading up to his time. It is easiest to begin with the Shang dynasty (1766-1040 B.C.E.), a time when religious life focused on the worship of human ancestors. *Shang Ti* was the supreme deity of the time who functioned as the source of creation and order. The Shang family forged their theocratic government with this religious system, ruling by virtue of their lineage, purportedly as descendents of *Shang Ti*. This provided the Shang rulers with a transcendental source of legitimacy and power (Hinton, 1998).

Due to the decadence and depredation of the latter Shang rulers, other leaders started to gain power on the outer territories of the empire. These leaders founded the Chou dynasty (1122-221 B.C.E.) and eventually overthrew the Shang family. In order to justify their right to rule, the Chous reinvented *Shang Ti* to mean *Heaven*. This meant that the right to rule was now a mandate from heaven, marking the first time in Chinese philosophy where power was linked to an ethical imperative (Hinton, 1998).

Over time, powerful families and government officials in various states of the Chou Empire started vying for more power. There were constant power struggles and much warring between the factions, often times with the winner claiming the title of Duke (Hinton, 1998). The

Emperor of Chou became a mere figurehead with no control over the various Dukes ruling in different states. Hence, the Chou overthrow of the Shang represents a split in China's social structure (Hinton). Political power had broken free of its family-religious context and was becoming a separate entity. It led to a long period of relentless warring and constant rebellion within and between the various states. Confucius was born during this time of multiple city-states, all vying militarily for power and differing in political structure. This age was called the Warring States Period (403-221 B.C.E.) (Chung, 1948/1996).

Dukes began looking for able men to help them govern their states. This allowed for the rise of an independent intellectual class; the only class which, for the first time, could challenge imperial ideology. The old social order had now collapsed entirely and these intellectuals were struggling to create a new order. Although this was a chaotic period, it also birthed the golden age of Chinese philosophy, earning the name the *Hundred Schools of Thought* (Hinton, 1998). These schools were founded by thinkers who wandered the country with their disciples, teaching and trying to convince the rulers to put their ideas into practice.

The Life of Confucius

Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.) was born a couple of centuries before Socrates' teachings on ethics and logic, and half a millennium before the start of our modern calendar and the birth of Jesus of Nazareth (Chung, 1948/1996). He established a school with the explicit purpose of educating the next generation for political leadership (Chung). He was the first great thinker of the independent intellectual class, and is regarded as China's first self-conscious philosopher who can be historically verified (Hinton, 1998). He is further recognized as China's first teacher, and his ideas have traveled beyond its borders to influence Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and now Western civilizations (Chung).

Confucius is the Latinized version of K'ung Fu-tzu (meaning Master K'ung), with his original birth name being K'ung Ch'iu (Hinton, 1998). He was born in Lu, a state in the Chou Empire. His family had once been part of the Shang aristocracy but was long since removed from title and wealth. He was born to the literate class which no longer had any ties to ruling interests (Hinton). Studious in his youth, as a young man he held a number of menial government positions in Lu. He quit to pursue teaching those who aspired to serve in government. His students were sought by rulers who knew them to be the best trained men in the empire (Hinton). In his late forties, he took several high positions in government, the highest of which was Minister of Justice of Lu (Hinton). By age 56, realizing his philosophy would not be implemented in Lu, he left and spent thirteen years traveling state to state, advising various rulers. He hoped his ideas would be put into practice and lead to a more humane society. Although he was respected as a sage by the rulers, they were not inclined to employ him or enact his ideas. Unable to have any real political impact, he returned to Lu in his late 60's. He devoted the remainder of his life to teaching and completing his life-long task of editing classic texts that preserved China's ancient cultural tradition (Hinton). This was a collection of poetry, music, historical documents and annals that chronicled events at the Lu court, along with extensive commentary on an important Chinese text, *The Book of Changes* (Chung, 1948/1996). This compilation provided a shared cultural vocabulary for his students and was to become the standard curriculum for the Chinese literati in subsequent centuries (Chung).

The Analects

The primary surviving source for the teachings of Confucius is the *Lun Yü: The Analects*, or more literally, "The Selected Sayings" (Hinton, 1998). It is a collage of brief aphoristic fragments, appropriately earning its name from the Greek *alalekta*, with the root meaning,

“leftovers after a feast” (Chung, 1948/1996). The first fifteen discourses were assembled and edited by a congress of Confucius’ disciples shortly after his death. They apparently felt that his Way – what he said and did- should be preserved for future generations (Chung). The text was a personal narrative of what he had to say, to whom he said it, and how he said it. The last five books of *The Analects* appear to have been compiled later, after the most prominent disciples of Confucius had launched their own teaching careers. The disciples primarily elaborated upon the philosophy of their late master (Chung).

The philosophy of Confucius does not purport to lay out a formula of how everyone should live. It is merely the way in which he, as a particular person, chose to live his life. However, as with many ancient books, there are difficulties posed by the text based on its authenticity. Most of the books fragments are assumed to represent the Master’s teachings, handed down accurately by his disciples, but a great many clearly do not (Hinton, 1998). Numerous versions of the sayings were edited over the course of centuries. The concept of individual authorship had not yet been firmly established so extraneous material was included by various editors, smuggling their preferred ideas into the canonical text (Hinton). For all these complications, *The Analects* still possess a unique style that represents the fundamental body of thought that has shaped Chinese civilization. An award-winning translator of ancient Chinese texts, David Hinton, noted that “*The Analects* has had a deeper impact on more people’s lives over a longer period of time than any other book in human history” (p. xii).

Confucianism

Generations of scholars have written commentary on the legacy of Confucius in an effort to make his teachings appropriate for their own times and places. This may be referred to as Confucianism. Two characteristics of Confucianism that has made it so resilient are its accessibility and adaptability. The foundation of Confucius’ teaching was expanded upon by two esteemed disciples, Mencius and Hsün Tsu. Their texts supplement *The Analects* to complete the body of Confucian classics (Chai & Chai, 1965).

As mentioned previously, during the period of The Hundred Schools of Thought, there was much intellectual freedom and progress. During the later Ch’in dynasty (255-206 B.C.E.) the emperor felt that there needed to be unity in the intellectual and political spheres (Chai & Chai, 1965). He had all writings from the various schools of thought in public circulation gathered and burned. This decree put a temporary end to freedom of thought. During the Han dynasty (205 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), Confucian classics and other literature were resurrected (Chai & Chai). Emperor Wu (140-87 C.E.) selected Confucianism as the pre-eminent school of thought and established it as the state orthodoxy (Chai & Chai). Confucianism remained the official doctrine of the Chinese Empire until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 (Chung, 1948/1996).

His Philosophy

Confucian philosophy is humanistic. Confucius believed it is not possible to fully understand a person by looking at him or her individually. It must be taken into account that there is also one’s family and the complex of relationships that surround an individual (Hinton, 1998). Achieving enjoyment and harmony in life involves acting appropriately in each role and relationship that constitutes one’s life. Confucius’ philosophy therefore recognizes society as a structure of human relationships. This social philosophy and its use of rational empiricism was a total break from Shang and Chou spiritualism (Hinton). Based on the blatant power politics that Confucius witnessed during his life, he found it impossible to believe in heaven as a transcendental source of order and legitimacy. Instead, he tried to give Chou culture a more rational and secular basis.

Confucius observed that because society is a weave of relationships between individuals, a healthy community depends upon an attitude of human caring among its members. The government should nurture first, teach second, and only then, govern (Hinton, 1998). Confucianism teaches of three cardinal virtues: humaneness (*jen*) is the supreme virtue and is “what one upholds in one’s heart” (Chai & Chai, 1965, p. 2); righteousness (*yi*) is the belief that certain things should be done for their own sake because they are morally appropriate or obligatory in and of themselves, or “what one upholds in one’s conduct” (p. 2); and ritual (*li*) a belief that the natural tendency of man is to pursue self-interest; therefore it is necessary for society to be governed by a code of conduct. These three virtues have remained the established values in Chinese culture. The idea of a well-balanced individual, a well-ordered family, a well-governed state, and a happy and harmonious world makes Confucianism one of the earliest humanistic political philosophies (Chai & Chai).

Confucius on Leadership

There was little philosophical language prior to Confucius so, in an effort to articulate his ideas, he borrowed from older terms and reshaped their meanings. Interestingly, he shifted their meanings each time he used them so that they could remain somewhat obscure. Typically, he reshaped key concepts which had previously held religious meaning. For example, he changed the term “chün-tzu” which had referred to those of noble birth to instead refer to someone who was “noble-minded,” or educated and cultivated (Hinton, 1998). Hence, he redefined for Chinese society what it is to be *noble*.

Confucius saw personal development as a way to individual fulfillment that would also enable one to take an active role in the development of the community or society at large. An exemplary individual can be found in any *humane* person, not only, and not necessarily, in hereditary aristocrats (Hinton, 1998).

With this emphasis on being an exemplary individual, Confucius believed that the good behavior of the ruler was a prerequisite for successful government. It was especially important for rulers to cultivate their own conduct to set perfect moral examples for their officials and people. This would allow for a government of those who were high-minded rather than high-born (Hinton, 1998).

Confucius on Followership

Confucius’ emphasis on an individual’s social role led to the eventual tendency by those in power to abuse his philosophy in regard to the proper behavior of subordinates. Some rulers played upon ideas that focused on selfless submission to authority. However, it must be made clear that selfless submission does not play part in the thought or life of Confucius himself (Hinton, 1998). In his and his disciples’ writings, there was often fierce insistence on the responsibilities of those in power, even declaring the people more important than the ruler. Confucius taught that *ritual* community depends upon social justice, political dissent, and the role of intellectuals as social critics (Hinton). For this sort of forthright followership to be possible, it depends ultimately upon the education and cultivation of all community members.

His Impact on China

Confucius’ great legacy was his role as China’s first professional teacher, founding the idea of a broad moral education, and establishing the classic texts that composed the essential content of that education (Hinton, 1998). He believed it was necessary for all people to have a basic form of education if there is to be a healthy and moral society. No matter how humble their origins, everyone who sought education should be provided it. As a result of the respect for the noble-minded, Confucianism founded a reverence in Chinese culture for learning which Hinton

states, “is perhaps deeper than in any other culture” (p. xxvi).

Thanks to his furthering of education, he has dominated China’s intellectual life for almost twenty-five centuries. His doctrines were accepted as state teachings. His works were regarded as the canonical books to be studied by students in all schools. More importantly, his cardinal virtues were embodied as the norms and essence of Chinese society.

The Analects and Modern Leadership

Personality development. Confucius said, “There are sprouts that do not send up shoots; there are shoots that do not bear fruit” (9:22).

Confucian philosophy is humanistic, occupying itself with human relations and intrinsic worth. In the Confucian *Analects*, *jen* means seeds – the seeds in the stones of peaches and apricots, that will shoot, grow, and spring into life after being sown in the soil (Chai & Chai, 1965). Confucius expressed *jen* as an ideal for developing human abilities, cultivating relationships, and sublimating one’s character. The doctrine of *jen* is the predominant idea of the whole system that Confucius developed. It is the cardinal principle of humanism that serves as a prime virtue in life and has been displayed in Chinese cultural achievements for thousands of years. Confucius claimed that all human relations and character should be based on the moral sentiment of *jen*, and considered it not merely a special kind of value, but all values combined. It is thus defined as the perfect virtue (Chai & Chai).

From the understanding of Confucian teachings, one’s moral cultivation and prime virtues are the solution for all worldly chaos. They are the root of everything – a disciplined individual, a proportionate family, a well-governed state, and a happy and harmonious world (Chai & Chai, 1965). Cultivation of character is the chief concern in the life of a leader. This is the basis for gaining wisdom in order to improve and enrich one’s leadership potential. Therefore, a leader should demand much of himself, tending to the seeds of *jen* in order to bring harmony, respect, cooperation, and trust within the group. Only then can a leader expect the same from followers.

Even in modern books on leadership, this same virtue is expressed as a power to manifest oneself. In searching for excellent solutions for business problems in today’s world, Osborn (1994) speaks of the importance of exhibiting qualities of a superior man to provide leadership of the highest. It is implied that the leader is then only capable of influencing others by the very worth of one’s being, regardless of the title or position one may hold.

In defining inner excellence, Osborn (1994) identifies the following innate quality of a good leader that pertains to the Confucian philosophy:

A swamp plant, which grows fabulously tall overnight, attracts the eye of all who pass. Nearby, deep within the soil, a tiny acorn sends up a tender shoot. Which plant, over time, contains the greater potential for success? Come back tomorrow morning and you will discover something very interesting. The swamp plant is dead – withered and fallen, its flowers already turning to mud. And the acorn? It is continuing to do its quiet, inner work, persevering day in and day out to fulfill its special destiny. Someday it will be a mighty oak – its development will influence the landscape of the entire region. (pp. 220-221)

The tiny acorn is a metaphor of a good leader and its qualities are equivalent to those of a person with moral worth and inner excellence. In order to succeed in business or any other form of affair, a leader needs to be willing to embrace self, including one’s fears and limitations. It is necessary to wholeheartedly pursue goals, particularly taking the time to nurture oneself at a pace accommodative of one’s overall vitality (Osborn, 1994). Innate virtue is thus the basis for

all activities that a leader can endure, meaning that the Confucian principle of *jen* is still alive and vital in today's modern leadership.

Developing trust. Confucius said, "A gentleman first wins the trust of his people, and then he can mobilize them. Without this trust, they might feel they are being ill-used. He first wins the trust of his prince, and then he may offer criticism. Without this trust, the prince might feel he is being slandered" (19.10).

Mistrust deteriorates relationships, bringing suspicion and deception. People misperceive the values and motives of others and resist taking on commitment. Confucius taught that the effects of mistrust are camouflaged in uncertainty (Berthrong & Berthrong, 2000). One of the many tasks of a leader is to work with people in order to find and solve problems, thus enriching relationships, fostering cooperation, creativity, and commitment. However, how one fosters a well-formed relationship depends on how much people trust the leader (Berthrong & Berthrong). Confucianism places a great deal of importance on trust, which is a vital element within groups. Confucians believed that excellence and accomplishment of decisions ultimately depends on how much leaders and those they work with trust one another (Berthrong & Berthrong). Thus, a leader refines attitudes and influences into one powerful belief of trust. When it is established, the quality of decisions and their implementation are enhanced.

Zand (1997) emphasizes that leadership is based on knowledge, trust, and power. Every individual in a group is equipped with a treasure of information, knowledge, and curiosity. Each is a wealth of commitment, devotion, and affection, with the ability to analyze and master knowledge. Every individual is capable of acquiring new skills and to educate them to others. Only by gaining trust can leaders open up the path to such diverse creativity and imagination within each person (Zand).

Zand (1997) further says that leaders are capable of communicating trust by how they disclose information, share influence, and exercise control. The flow of correct and timely information is critical to a productive relationship and leaders best show trust by disclosing information. Influence pertains to the sources of information and how these alter behavior (Zand). Leaders are said to show trust when they permit others to affect their choices. Control is the regulation and limitation of another person's behavior, and is the most difficult element to implement because it depends on what others will do in the future when the leaders are not present (Zand). Leaders show trust when they depend on others. The open flow of information and mutual influence will greatly enhance their effectiveness of problem solving. Therefore, trust spirals in a corkscrew fashion as leaders act out their trust through these three elements (Zand). Trust moves up and down the spiral depending on how leaders disclose information, exercise and receive mutual influence, and delegate and exercise control. When people trust each other, the three phases flow in a beneficial spiral while revealing timely, accurate, pertinent, and complete information (Zand). They are willing to accept influence from the leaders and in turn influence them. They commit to accomplish what they say. Dependence on each other is accepted because they believe that each person will abide by the agreement and will not abuse any one person's vulnerability. Therefore, trust brings the freedom to be open, and lifts relationships to new heights of achievement. High trust increases openness and mutual acceptance and people are able to accurately perceive the values and motives of the leaders and others in the group as well (Zand). They concentrate on their goal and do not distort what they hear. They have a greater motivation to carry out their decisions, and they become a tighter-knit team.

Faith in leaders' intentions has a powerful influence on trust. Leaders are trusted when they have good intentions even though they might occasionally stumble. Confucian philosophy

stresses that people will believe in the leaders' capability based on their good intentions, and will help by collaborating to correct errors (Brethrong & Berthrong, 2000). Even in modern leadership, people can explore their imaginations and play with their knowledge to bring about productivity in collaboration with a trusted leader. Effective leaders constantly review how they can increase trust to improve relationships and productivity. A trusting group is close-knit, with its members sticking together through ups and downs (Zand, 1997). Sharing misfortune enhances trust and cohesion and effective leaders know that a trusting group has the spirit of motivation, dedication, and mutual commitment which lifts creativity and productivity to new heights. Confucius knew about the basics of trust and leadership and how they are interconnected. Therefore, Confucius emphasized that leaders are required to understand the meaning and effects of trust if they are to improve how they make decisions and the quality of those decisions.

Promoting empowerment. Confucius said, "As for the humane, while they want to be established themselves, they establish others. While they want to succeed themselves, they help others to succeed. They can draw lessons from nearby. These can be called methods of humaneness" (6:30).

Confucius believed that groups are living organizations, made up of people who wish to pursue a common goal, and fellowship must be based upon interests that create enduring relationships (Osborn, 1994). A man of merit continuously uses the ability to improve self while cultivating the same seeds in the followers. Confucians through the ages believed that learning alone was not enough to make a good leader (Berthrong & Berthrong, 2000). Wisdom and power were equally important to restore and maintain accord. A man became a wise leader only through lifelong learning, self-discipline, and influence over others which would develop humaneness or *jen* (Wright & Twitichett, 1962). This would give the leader a capability of empathy toward followers.

It is evident and important to remember that China has the longest-standing success in state formation. Rooted in Chinese history were men of power who were able to transform their environment and direct ordinary people toward the path of virtue. With every opportunity, these men were expected to cultivate in their colleagues the same virtue to produce a balanced and homogeneous order (Wright & Twitichett, 1962). Under the right circumstances, such leaders would use correction not as a penalty but as education, in order to promote constructive qualities in their associates, a willingness to take a risk, desire to learn, and eagerness to make compensations (Osborn, 1994). Confucius spoke of a leader's willingness to take the time to receive feedback from followers, and to keep a positive stance rather than a defensive point of view (Wright & Twitichett). One can then gain the wisdom to improve and enrich life through relations with fellow men. This would not only ensure trust, compassion, and understanding among men but would also bring immeasurable success to the group. Therefore, in teaching, a leader guides followers but does not pull them along, urges them to advance but does not control them, opens up the path but does not hold them back, and encourages them to take their own path. This way, the followers can think for themselves and nurture the seeds of becoming potential leaders themselves.

Confucius was recognized as a zealous learner, a loyal scholar, and an untiring teacher whose success lay in his power to cultivate knowledge in his followers while maintaining personal relations with them to expand his wealth of knowledge (Wright & Twitichett, 1962). These disciples of Confucius excelled in the various fields of literature, philosophy, and others, and it is mostly due to them that Confucian philosophy has had such influence on the development of Chinese culture to this day. Such empowerment is also emphasized in modern

day leadership. Leaders of today still believe in educating and consulting rather than using coercion to understand the constantly changing, complex environment. Outstanding leaders not only influence their followers, they shape the framework of the world. Without the efforts and influence of George Marshall, Europe would not have existed today; and the conditions under which we work were, largely the creation of both Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, who campaigned for the passage of fair labor laws (Mumford, 2006). Henry Ford took the landmark step of raising the wages of workers to five dollars a day, which was considered a huge salary increase for factory workers at that time (Mumford). Ford's vision was to improve the conditions of the workers' lives. There are others such as Mohandas Gandhi, John Kennedy, Andrew Carnegie, Pope John Paul, William Leavitt, and Booker T. Washington who all rose to leadership heights by empowering people (Mumford). Almost all outstanding leaders in all walks of life have exercised influence and empowered their people. They believed in the power of people and in their potential to carry on what the leader had started. By empowering people, they were able to succeed in their vision for the world. This is no different from what Confucius believed in, taught, and lived for, thousands of years ago.

The Analects and Modern Followership

Teamwork and loyalty. "The qualities of social leaders are wind, the qualities of the common people are grass; grass will always bend in the wind" (11:19).

To discuss how Confucius taught on followership, it is appropriate to begin with the above analect. Confucius discusses leaders and followers as the two separate elements wind and grass, and then expresses a relationship between the two. This leader-follower relationship is one that has received a great deal of focus in modern America.

The amount of followership literature, distinct from what is traditionally viewed as leadership literature, is small. As discovered during the research of Baker (2007), a search of 26 electronic databases produced approximately 530 unique citations for the period 1928 through December 2006. About half of the citations were relevant to the area of management and the great majority was written by American authors about American organizations (Baker).

In seeking to understand the foundation of followership theory, Baker (2007) found that in general, it developed in the latter half of the 20th century. This evolution was sparked by the change in American corporate structure from vertical organizational hierarchies of the post-World War II (WWII) era to a complex global economy (Baker). Whereas corporations had previously promised life-long job security to employees in exchange for loyalty, obedience, and hard work, the 1980s and 1990s had pressures that gave birth to takeovers and downsizing trends. Corporate organizational structures flattened, and power and responsibility were delegated to a wide range of people; including the traditionally dependent followers (Baker). There was now a need to better understand the roles and qualities of followers.

A business leadership class taught by Cavell (2007) conducted a survey concerning what traits are most desirable in followers. The trait cited most frequently was that of *supporting the leader's decisions*. According to Jaacks (2007), to be an effective follower one must make an active decision to contribute towards the achievement of the goal set forth by the leader. Those who are not effective are often alienated followers who work only to serve themselves and often act contrary to the group's goals. They usually operate out of disillusionment or feelings of being underappreciated. This is the member of the group that "goes against the grain" or which creates tension and conflict within the group. Based on Confucius' analect, this is the blade of grass going against the wind. This does not mean that opposing opinions or insights are not welcome; in fact, it is often the disillusioned critical thinker who brings new ideas to the table (Jaacks).

Instead, it is the process of leaders and followers working together and respecting each other which brings success and attainment of group goals.

The underlying idea is that followership is a dedication to teamwork necessary to fulfill group goals. Good followers can measure their personal success by the effectiveness, accomplishments and productivity of the team. Team victories are theirs; team losses are theirs as well. Followers support each other individually, support the team as a group and support their leaders (Solovy, 2005).

Latour and Rast (2004) see dynamic followership in those who identify with the leader, are loyal to their “partner in success” and take satisfaction in the leader’s success. The leader-follower relationship in organizations means that the follower is a “partner” whose loyalty creates an atmosphere wherein team members share in the leader’s success by adopting the organization’s shared vision as their own.

General George C. Marshall, the Army chief of staff during WWII, once made the comment that there is no limit to the amount of good that people could accomplish, as long as they did not care who received the credit (as cited in Meilinger, n.d.). This requires an individual’s belief in teamwork and selflessness. This belief is important because in any endeavor, there are more followers than leaders. A case could be made that followership is actually more important to success than leadership (Solovy, 2005). To see the direction, one must watch which way the grass blows.

Self development. Confucius said, “Cultivated people seek from themselves; small people seek from others” (15:17).

Modern leadership theorists like Schachter (2007) often proposes that leadership skills actually develop through followership. To become a good leader, one must first learn what it is to be an effective follower. In other words, cultivate oneself.

With company downsizing and the complexities of a global economy, the rapid changes and nature of problems faced by organizations require more people to solve them. In general, making organizations better is a task that needs to be owned by followers as well as leaders (Latour & Rast, 2004). In a Harvard Business Review article titled “The making of an expert,” the authors dispel the myth that prodigies are born and that individuals appear out of nowhere to become experts in their particular field (as cited in Schachter, 2007). What the authors determined is that individuals described as experts become so through a lot of hard work, practice, and study. To obtain expertise and leadership through followership, Schachter (2007) states that it requires “struggle, sacrifice, and honest, often painful self-assessment. There are no shortcuts” (p.2).

Meilinger (n.d.), a colonel in the US Air Force, wrote what he determined to be the ten rules of good followership. As a means of self development he felt that people must know their own limitations and weaknesses as well as their strengths. He instructs that one must, “Know who you are” (p. 3). People should place themselves in positions that maximize strengths and mask limitations. Also, in the pursuit of greater self development, accept responsibility when it is offered. No organization can work effectively or continue to grow unless it is composed of risk takers willing to assume responsibility and take the initiative (Meilinger). A self-directed change is generally the most successful. Regarding cultivation, Schachter (2007) agrees that for success: get involved, be a good follower, assist with change, and develop one’s area of expertise. This is the recipe for success in the 21st century.

The ideal follower. Confucius said:

Cultivated people have nine thoughts. When they look, they think of how to see clearly.

When they listen, they think of how to hear keenly. In regard to their appearance, they think of how to be warm. In their demeanor, they think of how to be respectful. In their speech, they think of how to be truthful. In their work, they think of how to be serious. When in doubt, they think of how to pose questions. When angry, they think of trouble. When they see gain to be had, they think of justice. (16:10)

By the standards of modern followership theorists, Confucius' nine thoughts of a cultivated person would comprise an individual with good critical thinking skills. Robert E. Kelley, a prominent social scientist in followership studies, focused on two behavioral dimensions for determining follower effectiveness: critical thinking and active participation (as cited in Latour & Rast, 2004). A critical thinker who actively participates will courageously dissent when necessary, share credit, admit mistakes, and habitually exercise superior judgment. Looking at a problem and clarifying it so as to make a sound judgment is one way for a follower to see clearly (Latour & Rast).

Hearing keenly is one of the important communication elements that Solovy (2005) discusses regarding the art of followership. He finds that good followers have the ability to communicate ideas and the willingness to listen and accept the ideas and direction of their leaders. Listening allows one to respectfully consider other perspectives and alternate views, before fully engaging in decision-making.

Good communication in followership also involves being truthful. It may be said that the single most important characteristic may be the willingness to speak the truth. Followers who tell the truth and leaders who listen to it are an unbeatable combination (Cavell, 2007). Sometimes followers must even tell unpleasant truths to their leaders. A disciple once asked Confucius how to work for a ruler. Confucius said, "Don't deceive him, even if you have to offend him" (14:23). Meilinger (n.d.) says the same thing, suggesting that a follower speak honestly and frankly. A person should resist the temptation to tell the boss what that person thinks the boss wants to hear. A follower is obligated to speak up on a matter when, if by not doing so, it could be detrimental to accomplishing the group's goal. However, Meilinger advises that the best way to do this is privately and with tact so as not to embarrass or undermine the leader. As Confucius suggested, by this demeanor and approach, a person is thinking of how to be respectful.

Confucius also mentioned that followers should be serious about their work. Solovy (2005) says that modern followers should focus on their tasks and see them to fruition. Good followership means commitment and engagement in the mission of the organization. By being serious about their work, exemplary followers work beyond the expected to produce exemplary results. This includes striving to be the best at their tasks and deriving satisfaction from applying their highest personal standards (Latour and Rast, 2004). These individuals take work seriously and make it integral to life.

The nine thoughts of the ideal Confucian follower are clearly reflected in the results of the research survey by Cavell (2007), which contains 16 of the most desirable traits in followers. The *ethical* trait is of one who sees gain to be had but thinks of justice. The trait *being trustworthy* is of those who when they speak, think of how to be truthful. The trait *positive attitude* is of those who in regarding their appearance, think of how to be warm. The trait *acknowledging the leader* is seen in those who in their demeanor, think of how to be respectful. Finally, the trait of *being a good listener and communicator* is found in those where when they listen, think of how to hear keenly. This demonstrates that in his one analect, Confucius described half of the top ten most desirable follower traits found in Cavell's survey.

Conclusion

For over two thousand years, Confucian philosophy has been closely related to the Chinese imperial system as an ideological tool for rulers. It has played a major role in unifying China and has become a force in molding the mentality and temperament of the Chinese people. Confucian philosophy is an inexhaustible source of values, wisdom and rules for good conduct, and has succeeded in finding a place in the modern world of leadership and followership. The Confucian way begins with the formation of self by cultivating intelligence, compassion, service, trust, and faithfulness. A person is never isolated but an integral part of society, and it is imperative to extend the virtues of self to all other interpersonal relationships. The ultimate task is to develop concern and consciousness for the welfare of mankind, only then may one be a successful leader. The magnitude of Confucianism lies in its resilience and power of adaptation. What modern theories portray as virtues in leadership and followership are no different from what Confucius perceived them to be. Confucianism thus maintains its place in new social organizations, and the Confucian way of life is still alive in great men and women of merit.

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