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*Management Communication Quarterly* 2011 25: 644 originally published online  
19 May 2011

DOI: 10.1177/0893318911405621

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# An Empirical Study of Confucianism: Measuring Chinese Academic Leadership

Management Communication Quarterly  
25(4) 644–662  
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DOI: 10.1177/0893318911405621  
<http://mcq.sagepub.com>



**Kaibin Xu<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

Globalization has led to increased interest in leadership in indigenous cultures. The current study focused on developing a scale of faculty members' perception of preferred academic leadership in Chinese universities. Seven factors were generated from the Confucian principles of leadership and were used to code and group items gathered through interviews. A survey consisting of 41 leadership items was administered to participants. Confirmatory factor analyses of three hypothesized models using LISREL 8.8 demonstrate that the survey is reliable with five confirmed factors—morality, nurturing, communicating/relating, fairness, and administrative competence. The findings suggest that the contemporary Chinese view of leadership is consistent with the Confucian philosophy of leadership.

## **Keywords**

Confucianism, leadership, morality, communicating/relating, measurement

Recently researchers have become interested in leadership within different cultural contexts. One of the most sophisticated studies is the GLOBE project that involved 170 researchers and 62 cultures of the world, lasting over 10 years

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(House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Along this line, some researchers began to study leadership in the Chinese cultural context (Cheng, 2004; Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Fernandez, 2004; Fu & Tusi, 2003; Fu, Wu, Yang, & Ye, 2007; Lin & Clair, 2007; Tjosvold, Yu, & Liu, 2003; Tusi et al., 2004; Vilkinas, Shen, & Cartan, 2009). Most of these studies concerned leadership in business organizations, as did the GLOBE project. It is doubtful that their leadership instruments can be generalized to other types of organizations, such as educational, government, and nonprofit organizations. This study aims to develop an academic leadership scale that captures the unique characteristics of the university as an alternative organization and the characteristics of the Chinese cultural context.

## Confucianism and Leadership

Few philosophical traditions have influenced the Chinese society more profoundly than Confucianism. Undoubtedly, Confucianism also has impact on Chinese leaders. In the field of communication, researchers have studied the implications of Confucianism for communication theories and practices in the last two decades (Chen & Chung, 1994; Ding, 2006; Garrett, 1999; Lu, 1998; Xiao & Chen, 2009; Yum, 1988, 2007).

*Ren* (benevolence, kindness), *yi* (be righteous), and *li* (proper conduct code) are three of the most important Confucian principles. They were proposed by Confucius originally to remind the kings in his time to overcome the “way of despot,” or the way of force, by the “kingly way,” or the way of moral power and humane government. These principles were later extended to dictate the character and behavior of *jun-zi* (nobleman) that govern all human behaviors (Chan, 1998; Chen, 1997). Whereas anyone can become a *jun-zi* by self-cultivation, only a *jun-zi* should be in the position of leadership (Zhu, 2004). Thus, these principles are also the essential elements in and requirements of Chinese leadership. For this study, the author focuses on *ren*, *li*, and *nurturing* because they are relevant to leadership studies in important ways.

*Ren* has been translated as “benevolence,” “kindness,” or “humanity”. It is the central doctrine of Confucianism. Three elements of *ren* related to leadership include self-oriented moral character or self-control, other-oriented kindness and caring, and expertise or talent. For example, when asked what *ren* was, Confucius explained, “If a ruler sets himself right, he will be followed without his command. If he does not set himself right, even his commands will not be obeyed” (Analects, 13:6). The Confucian leader is expected to achieve self-control and be a model for others to follow. For Confucius, the leader

should study, should have expertise, talent, and ability, and should be willing to serve the common good. Confucius endowed talent with a moral connotation and insisted that only talented individuals with moral conduct be selected as leaders (Hsiao, 1979).

*Li*, translated as rites or propriety, is the conventionally accepted etiquette and courtesy. For Confucius, *li* is the means to cultivate *ren*: “The gentleman has morality as his basic stuff and by observing the rites puts it into practice” (Analects, 15:17). *Li* is an important means to establish and maintain human relationships and harmony (Ding, 2006; Yum, 1988, 2007). *Li* also consists of the virtue of fairness, another concept important for harmony. Confucius said, “. . . I have heard those who administer a state or a family do not worry about there being too few people, but worry about unequal distribution of wealth . . . For when wealth is equally distributed, there will not be poverty” (Analects, 16:1). Today fairness has gained a somewhat different meaning (gains in accordance with amounts of work), but the original meaning still applies simultaneously with the new meaning. It requires the leader to be fair to followers; otherwise, harmony is damaged.

Finally, Confucius regarded people as the most important resource for a country and the leader has a moral responsibility to nurture and develop them. According to Confucius, “A man of humanity, wishing to establish his own character, also establishes the character of others; and wishing to be prominent himself, also helps others to be prominent” (Analects, 6:28). Confucius strongly believed that *nurturing* people—helping others to grow and succeed—was a moral requirement on the leader.

*Li*, harmony, and nurturing provide particular insights into leadership communication. *Li* and harmony require the leader to be considerate and supportive of followers, remain objective while listening to and taking the advice of others, and be concerned for the employees’ well-being (Lin & Clair, 2007; Taormina & Selvarajah, 2005). The Confucian view of harmony requires interpersonal relationships to be reciprocal (Chen, 1997; Ding, 2006). On one hand, a leader has certain responsibility and obligations, such as protection and concern for followers; on the other hand, the followers, in turn, have obligations toward the leader, such as loyalty or commitment to the leader. The reciprocal relationship between the leader and followers has been regarded as *paternalistic leadership*, a style that combines authority with fatherly benevolence and moral integrity (Cheng et al., 2004; Farh & Cheng, 2000). Recent research from East Asia suggests that paternalism does not necessarily connote authoritarianism but rather a relationship in which subordinates willingly reciprocate the care and protection of paternal leaders (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008).

The emphasis on harmonious interpersonal relationships has contributed to the Chinese communication patterns of process orientation, indirect communication emphasis, and receiver-centered communication (Yum, 1988, 2007). Because a primary function of leadership is to initiate, develop, and maintain social relationships, there is a strong emphasis on the process of communication that promotes proper relationships between the leader and followers. This characteristic distinguishes itself from many Western functionalist leadership studies that focus on the outcome and effects of leadership. In the last two decades, Western communication scholars began to study leader–member communication processes (Lee, 1999, 2001; Sias & Jablin, 1996; Waldron, 1999). The conceptual foundation of leader–member communication includes two main points: (a) It illustrates a dyadic, processual focus; and (b) it sets communication and relationship at an equivalent status (Fairhurst, 2001).

Although Confucius wrote two thousand and five hundred years ago, his leadership principles are consistent with contemporary Western leadership theories. For example, the three elements of *ren*, (a) self-oriented control and ethical standards; (b) expertise and willingness to serve; and (c) other-oriented caring and benevolence, are similar to what servant leadership theories advocated (Greenleaf, 1977, 1996; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). The two elements *interpersonal relationships* and *fairness in li/harmony* have also been emphasized by Leader–Member Exchange Theory (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Lee, 1999, 2001). The three elements of nurturing, (a) treating people as the most important resource; (b) trusting followers; and (c) developing followers, are also prevalent in contemporary leadership theories, such as *consideration* in the early Ohio State Studies' *consideration vs. initiating structure* model, *empowerment* in shared leadership theories, and *individualized attention* in transformational leadership theories (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1993). It is therefore appropriate to conclude that the Confucian principles of leadership are comprehensive and still up-to-date. However, the Confucian principles of leadership need to be empirically tested if they are to be accepted by the outside world. Until now such efforts are scarce.

Based on the review of the Confucian philosophy of leadership, the author proposed seven leadership factors. These factors and their operational definitions include the following. First is *morality*; the leader is supposed to show self-discipline and moral character and serve as a moral model for followers. Second, the leader should demonstrate *academic expertise*; the leader should be competent in research and teaching. Third, the leader is *nurturing*, making efforts to support and help followers grow and succeed in their work. Fourth, the leader cultivates *relating*, the relationship dynamics between the leader and followers. Fifth involves *communicating* and the communication behaviors the leader shows in interaction with followers. Sixth, the leader displays *fairness*;

the leader is fair in distributing resources so as to achieve harmony among followers. And finally, seventh, the leader is competent in managing administrative affairs—*administrative competence*.

This study compares three hypothesized models. The first is a seven-factor model (morality, academic expertise, nurturing, relating, communicating, fairness, and administrative competence) based on the Confucian principles of leadership. Each factor was expected to be distinct and correlated with each other. The study used the seven-factor model as the primary base target, but also tested alternative models.

The second model uses six correlated factors: morality, academic expertise, nurturing, communicating/relating, fairness, and administrative competence. *Relating* is combined with *communicating* because they may be highly correlated. The rationale is that when a leader shows caring communication behaviors it will result in good relationships with followers. It is also consistent with the notion that relationship is synonymous with communication (Fairhurst, 2001).

The third model is a five-factor model: morality, nurturing, communicating/relating, fairness, and administrative competence. Although *academic expertise* is one of the basic requirements for a person to emerge as a leader, once they become the leader, this factor may not be able to differentiate leaders like other leadership behaviors. Thus this factor is removed in the hypothesized five-factor model.

A second-order factor model is hypothesized to be able to explain the covariations of the first-order factor model and will be tested based on the optimal first-order model. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the data was conducted with LISREL 8.8 using maximum likelihood (ML) estimation.

## Method

Based on the guidelines about scale development suggested by Converse and Presser (1986) and DeVellis (2003), procedures for scale development in this study consist of three steps. A survey was designed based on the items developed through these procedures. In the last decade, most previously department-based academic units at Chinese universities have expanded into college-level units due to the rapid increase in student enrollment. Thus, this study focused on leaders at the college level.

### Scale Development Procedures

The first stage used interviews to generate items that capture the respondents' view of academic leadership. The author interviewed five deans and 12 faculty members from three universities in China. In the interviews with the deans,

the author asked questions about how they led and what they thought made a “good dean”. In the interviews with faculty members, the author asked about their dean’s leadership behaviors that they liked and disliked. The author summarized the items that both the deans and faculty members consider important.

The second stage involved coding the items with the predetermined seven factors generated from the Confucian principles of leadership. When items were duplicative or had overlaps, the most concise and clearest item was selected. When an item captured the meanings of more than one factor, it was either discarded or rewritten so that it fit only one of the factors.

The last stage involved expert panel and instrument revision. Panel members were asked to examine and comment on the quality of the items based on three criteria: (a) relevance to leadership behavior in their college; (b) clarity and specificity; and (c) match with the definition of the factor. Modification of items was conducted based on the written comments from panel members. The revised instrument is presented in Table 1.

## Measures

The survey consists of 41 leadership items to capture the hypothesized seven leadership factors. Each of the items is a statement regarding the behavior of the dean of their college. Respondents were requested to rate their dean on the items as objectively as possible. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale anchored by 0 = *strongly disagree*, 1 = *disagree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *strongly agree*. In the Chinese cultural context, respondents may tend to choose the neutral option given the influence of the Confucian principle *middle way* (*zhong yong*) and that would have a negative impact on the objectivity of the study. Thus this study follows Converse and Presse’s (1986) suggestion and does not provide a neutral option.

## Sample and Data Collection

The web-based survey was administered to two samples of faculty members in Chinese universities. In the first sample, the author used snowballing procedures to collect data through friends who are teaching in seven Chinese universities, resulting in 82 responses. The second sample involved random selection. The author randomly selected 31 universities in China (11 universities in the East, 3 universities in the South, 5 universities in the West, 9 universities in the North, and 3 universities in Central China, which resembles the configuration of Chinese universities), then selected three different colleges (humanities/social sciences, science, and engineering) within each university, and finally chose 12 faculty members in each college. The author sent an email

**Table 1.** The 41 Survey Items**Factor 1: Morality**

- M1. The dean is committed to his or her responsibility to the college.
- M2. The dean is a humble person.
- M3. The dean is a person who deserves my respect.
- M4. The dean likes to use his or her power for self-interests. (reversed item)

**Factor 2: Academic expertise**

- AE1. The dean is one of the top scholars in my college.
- AE2. The dean is a famous scholar in his or her research area.
- AE3. The dean is still very active in academic research.
- AE4. The dean is committed to his or her role as a teacher.

**Factor 3: Nurturing**

- N1. The dean has encouraged me.
- N2. The dean is happy to coach my colleagues.
- N3. The dean understands the difficulty of my colleagues in their work.
- N4. The dean encourages followers to participate in decision making regarding college affairs.
- N5. The dean makes efforts to elect/appoint faculty members who represent different groups of the faculty to be on the faculty representatives' committee.
- N6. The dean makes efforts to provide the faculty with opportunities for study and research, either in the same university or other universities.
- N7. The dean makes efforts to hold academic symposiums in the college (e.g., inviting scholars inside or outside of the university to give lectures).
- N8. The dean takes measures (including financial means) to encourage the faculty to publish in academic journals.

**Factor 4: Relating**

- R1. The dean has good interpersonal relationships with his or her leadership team.
- R2. The dean has good interpersonal relationships with followers.
- R3. The dean respects the achievements of followers.
- R4. The dean has used his or her power to help me solve problems in my work.
- R5. The majority of my colleagues respect the dean.
- R6. I would justify the dean's decision if he or she were not present to do so.

**Factor 5: Communicating**

- C1. The dean shows interest in communicating with followers.
- C2. The dean is willing to listen to and adopt followers' ideas/suggestions.
- C3. The dean is earnest and patient in communicating with followers.
- C4. The dean is good at expressing himself or herself in interaction with followers.
- C5. The dean presents persuasive yet concise presentations in faculty meetings regarding college affairs.
- C6. The dean always speaks in an authoritative tone in interaction with followers. (reversed item)
- C7. The dean never hurts followers' face in public.

**Table 1. (continued)****Factor 6: Fairness**

- F1. The dean is fair in distributing bonus that is under the control of the college.
- F2. The dean is fair in evaluating all faculty members for academic promotion.
- F3. The dean is fair in distributing research resources to all faculty members.
- F4. The dean takes measures to publicize important materials to let the faculty know about the decision making processes regarding important decisions (e.g., new hiring, promotion) to improve transparency.

**Factor 7: Administrative competence**

- AC1. The dean is able to gain resources for the college from the university.
- AC2. The dean takes measures to improve relationships among the faculty by providing collective extracurricular activities.
- AC3. The dean has organizing ability.
- AC4. The dean can handle college affairs in a timely manner.
- AC5. The dean has clear 3-5 year goals for the college.
- AC6. The dean builds understanding of the goals among my colleagues.
- AC7. The dean actively takes measures to achieve the goals of the college.
- AC8. The goals of my college are highly feasible.

to the selected 1,116 respondents with an explanation about this research project, a web link for the survey, and the consent form. One week after the initial email, the author sent a second email to remind them to fill out the survey. The second sample resulted in 234 responses (a response rate of 21.05%). The author collected 316 responses from the two samples altogether, which after screening showed 304 valid responses.

## Results

### *The Seven-Factor Model (Morality, Academic Expertise, Nurturing, Relating, Communicating, Fairness, and Administrative Competence)*

The model chi square is significant,  $\chi^2 (758, N = 304) = 3,354.12, p < .001$ . Ideally, a nonsignificant chi square is desired. But chi square is sensitive to sample size and it is necessary to examine other fit indices. Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .11, indicating poor model fit; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .075 and comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, indicating good model fit. Standardized factor loadings and error variances showed most items load on their hypothesized factors. Significant

correlations were also exposed between the seven factors. Standardized factor loadings for the subscales above the .70 criterion are considered acceptable fit as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). Thus, items with standardized loadings lower than .70 (M4, AE4, N4, N5, N7, N8, R1, R4, R6, C4, C5, C6, C7, AC2) were removed in further testing the six-factor model.

The correlation between *relating* and *communicating* is high (.90). In addition, *relating* also correlated relatively high with *morality* (.89) and *nurturing* (.89). The factors of a scale are supposed to measure different aspects of a concept. The high coefficient between relating and communicating suggests they are measuring similar aspects of leadership. The result is consistent with the hypothesis that relationship may be synonymous with communication. Thus, in testing the six-factor model, *relating* was combined with *communicating* and renamed *communicating/relating*.

### ***The Six-Factor Model (Morality, Academic Expertise, Nurturing, Communicating/Relating, Fairness, and Administrative Competence)***

This model resulted in better model fit than the seven-factor model. RMSEA = .095, SRMR = .056, CFI = .97, and goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .79; all these indices improved over those in the seven-factor model and indicated good model fit. Standardized coefficients values and error variances showed all items loaded significantly on the hypothesized factors. Akaike's information criterion (AIC) is a helpful index to use when comparing models that are not nested; smaller values indicate better model fit and parsimony. The AIC = 1108.24, smaller than that of the seven-factor model (3,560.12), demonstrating that this model is better fitting and more parsimonious than the seven-factor model.

*Academic expertise* has relatively low correlations with the other factors. The result supported the hypothesis that this factor may not be as able to differentiate leaders as other leadership behaviors. Thus in testing the 5-factor hypothesis, *academic expertise* was removed from the 6-factor model.

### ***The Five-Factor Model (Morality, Nurturing, Communicating/Relating, Fairness, and Administrative Competence)***

RMSEA = .098, SRMR = .048, CFI = .97, GFI = .82, indicating good model fit. Compared with the six-factor model, all these indices improved except the RMSEA value and are within the values for a good-fitting model. The

**Table 2.** Comparison of Fit Indices for the Three Models

Model	$\chi^2$ (df)	AIC	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR	GFI
7-Factor	3354.12 (758)	3560.12	.11	.95	.075	.65
6-Factor	978.24 (260)	1108.24	.095	.97	.056	.79
5-Factor	707.07 (179)	809.07	.098	.97	.048	.82

Note.  $\chi^2$  and AIC are used to compare models. The ideal values for RMSEA, CFI, SRMR are  $\{.06-.10\}$ ,  $> .95$ , and  $< .08$ , respectively. GFI is akin to *R*-squared.

chi-square difference between the 5-factor model and the 6-factor model is 271.17 with a degree of freedom difference 81; the chi-square difference is significant and demonstrates that the 5-factor model is better-fitting than the 6-factor model. The model AIC = 809.07, smaller than that of the 6-factor model (1,108.24), also showed that the 5-factor model is better-fitting and more parsimonious than the 6-factor model. Standardized coefficients values and error variances showed that all items loaded significantly on their hypothesized factors.

### *Reliability, Validity, and Second-Order Modeling*

The results indicate that the 5-factor model showed optimal model fit among the three models. The following table shows the fit indices for the three models (Table 2):

SPSS V.17 was employed to examine internal consistency of the scale based on the optimal 5-factor model. The results showed satisfactory reliability for each of the factors. In addition, the adequacy of the model is evaluated based on the criteria of convergent and discriminant validity. To evaluate convergent validity, standardized factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE) were examined. Standardized factor loadings showed that all items loaded significantly (with values larger than .70) on their hypothesized factors. The average variance extracted (AVE) estimates the amount of common variance among latent construct indicators; an AVE value larger than .50 will be supportive for convergent validity. The results showed that each of the five factors has an average variance extracted larger than .50 (see Table 3). The final scale, consisting of five factors and 21 items and their standardized factor loadings, is presented in Table 3.

To demonstrate discriminant validity, the cutoff value of .90 was used as distinction in construct content. The estimated correlations between the five factors range from .70 to .87 and all of them are less than .90, which demonstrated discriminant validity.

**Table 3.** The Final Scale Consisting of Five Factors and 21 Items

Factor/indicators	Standardized factor loading	Variance	Average variance extracted (AVE)
1: Morality			.69
M1.	.82 (16.89)	.68	
M2.	.80 (16.45)	.64	
M3.	.87 (18.74)	.76	
2: Nurturing			.58
N1.	.74 (14.51)	.55	
N2.	.80 (16.29)	.65	
N3.	.80 (16.07)	.63	
N6.	.71 (13.76)	.50	
3: Communicating/relating			.72
R2.	.87 (18.76)	.75	
R3.	.85 (18.19)	.72	
C1.	.85 (18.18)	.72	
C2.	.89 (19.52)	.78	
C3.	.78 (16.17)	.62	
4: Fairness			.65
F1.	.80 (16.18)	.64	
F2.	.84 (17.55)	.71	
F3.	.84 (17.67)	.71	
F4.	.73 (14.29)	.53	
5: Administrative competence			.58
AC3.	.80 (16.06)	.63	
AC4.	.77 (15.23)	.59	
AC5.	.74 (14.65)	.55	
AC6.	.74 (14.44)	.54	
AC7.	.74 (14.36)	.54	

Note: Numbers in parentheses are *t* values.

Because the five-factor model is the optimal model, a second-order factor analysis was conducted based on this model. This is to model the interrelationships among the factors not as correlations but as derivations from a primary factor that is the explanation for the five factors. Results of the second-order factor analysis showed that RMSEA = .098, SRMR = .049, CFI = .97, and GFI = .82, indicating a good-fitting model (see Figure 1). Each of the items had strong loadings on the corresponding first-order factor, and all the five first-order factors had strong loadings on the second-order factor. The high second-order factor loadings suggested that the five factors were strongly influenced

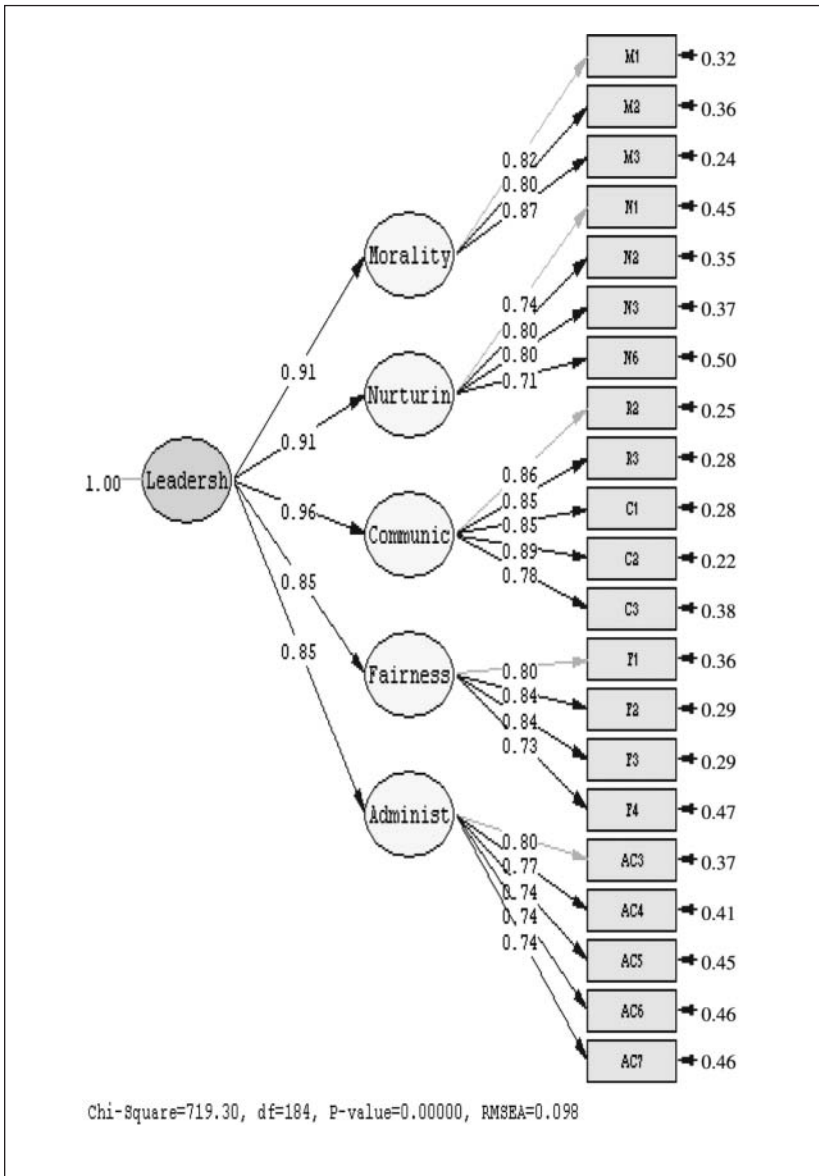


Figure 1. Standardized factor loadings of the second order factor model

by the second-order factor. To assess the ability of the second-order model to explain the covariations among the five first-order factors, target coefficient was computed. Target coefficient is defined as the ratio of the chi-square of the first-order model to the chi-square of the second-order factor model. The target coefficient was equal to .98, indicating that the second-order factor explained 98% of the covariations among the 5 first-order factors. All these results provide support for the hypothesized structure in which the items were able to assess the five factors that represent one underlying construct *leadership*.

## Discussion

The present study aims to develop an instrument of academic leadership in the Chinese cultural context. The author tested three models—a 7-factor model, a 6-factor model, and a 5-factor model. Results indicate that the 5-factor model showed optimal model fit. The successful confirmation of the 5-factor model (*morality, nurturing, communicating/relating, fairness, and administrative competence*) is consistent with the Confucian philosophy of leadership. *Morality* reflects *ren*—the central doctrine of Confucianism. *Nurturing* and developing followers is a basic requirement on the Confucian leader and has also been empirically confirmed by other researchers (Vilkinas et al., 2009). *Fairness* reflects the Confucian focus on promoting harmony. *Administrative competence* is consistent with the Confucian emphasis on the leader's talent.

*Academic expertise* is not confirmed to be an independent factor. Although academic expertise is a basic requirement for people to emerge as dean at the university, once they become the leaders, it is not their academic expertise but leadership behaviors that distinguish among leaders. *Relating* with colleagues is not confirmed to be an independent factor. The reason is that the notion of *relating* overlaps with *communicating*.

*Communicating/relating* is confirmed to be an independent factor. Items loaded on this factor include C1, "The dean shows interest in communicating with followers"; C2, "The dean is willing to listen to and adopt followers' ideas/suggestions"; C3, "The dean is earnest and patient in communicating with followers"; R2, "The dean has a good relationship with followers"; and R3, "The dean respects the achievements of followers". Items C1, C2, and C3 showed that the good leader is earnest in communicating with followers and is willing to listen to them. It is consistent with the Confucian idea that "If one is earnest, one will not be treated with disrespect. If one is liberal, one will win the hearts of all" (Analects, 17:6). Being earnest and open-minded in communication is a way for the leader to show caring and kindness and develop good relationships with followers. Through the virtue of sincerity and liberality one achieves the power of competent communication. The loadings of items R2

and R3 on *communicating/relating* confirmed the assumption that relationship is synonymous with communication (Fairhurst, 2001). The results are also consistent with the findings of Tsui, Wang, Xin, Zhang, and Fu (2004) that identified *relating/communicating* as one of the six dimensions of Chinese executive leadership behaviors.

However, items that focus on delivery skills did not load well on *communicating/relating*, such as item C4, "The dean is good at expressing himself or herself," and item C5, "The dean gives persuasive yet concise presentations in faculty meetings". This can be explained by the fact that "good at expressing and speaking" is not necessarily a good characteristic in the eyes of the Chinese. Confucius posited, "A man with clever words . . . is seldom a man of humanity" (Analects, 1:3). Confucianism has a deep mistrust of verbal skills, regarding these as superficiality in contrast to inner feelings and understanding. The Chinese society has deep doubts about those who are good at speaking because people think this is just a way to show off one's knowledge and hide one's defects. The Chinese have a proverb "The deep water is not loud and the loud water is not deep," which means that people with real expertise and knowledge tend not to speak out in public and only those who lack these qualities tend to show off because they worry if they don't speak out people will recognize their ignorance. Neuliep (2006) also noted in an editorial welcome of *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* that the Chinese "consider the wisest and most trustworthy person as the one who talks the least and who listens, watches, and restricts his/her verbal communication" (p. 1).

Based on the results, it is reasonable to conclude that the Chinese view of communication is not the same as that of the West. Western notions of communication competence emphasize the technical aspects of delivery, including assertiveness, accuracy, clarity, effectiveness, and appropriateness. The Chinese conception of communication competence focuses on the earnest and patient attitudes in communicating with others and the willingness to listen to others' ideas. Communication competence is manifested in sincerity. In Xiao and Chen's (2009) words, moral competence is communicative competence. Morality is itself the power of persuasion: "Right is might". Although Confucius formulated a set of rules for effective, appropriate, and competent communication, he emphasized the sincerity of the communicator, and his standard of judging effectiveness and appropriateness was *cheng* (sincerity) and *li* (proper conduct; Xiao & Chen, 2009). That is, effectiveness and appropriateness were assessed based on the sincerity and goodness of the words and deeds and whether they contribute to maintaining and promoting the harmonious growth of the group, organization, and society.

From the above discussion, we can conclude that the views on leadership held by the faculty at Chinese universities are consistent with the Confucian philosophy of leadership. The findings of this study confirmed that the Chinese are deeply influenced by Confucianism and it still deeply permeates the Chinese society.

## **Implications and Limitations**

This study makes four major contributions to the leadership literature. First, this study found that individuals in the contemporary Chinese society still emphasize the Confucian values. The findings demonstrate that leaders with the Confucian values are evaluated highly by their followers. It seems that people in the Chinese context would agree with the potential contribution of these values to leadership effectiveness, although they realize that the leaders are not always free to align their behavior with these values on a day-to-day basis. This is significant in light of new pressures for leaders and employees in developing countries such as China to adjust to Western ways of leading and working while traditional values are often thought to impede the modernization effort and successful contemporary leadership.

Second, the study provides insights into understanding leadership and the indigenous culture and philosophy. This is one of the very few studies to measure Confucianism and leadership in the Chinese cultural context. Although empirical studies of Chinese leadership are available, most of them simply tested leadership instruments proposed by Western researchers. Necessary though these are, developing scales and items based on the indigenous culture is perhaps more relevant to understanding leadership situated in particular cultures. The findings of the current study—specifically, contemporary Chinese still hold leadership views consistent with the Confucian principles of leadership—provides support to the claim that culturally indigenous measures may be more useful and relevant to the practice of leading.

Third, the findings supported the view that the Confucian perspective on communication competence differs fundamentally from that of the West. For Confucians, communication competence is manifested in morality and sincerity of the communicator. This study also supported the claim that communicating is synonymous to relating and communicating/relating is one of the major factors of leadership behaviors.

Finally, the current study also has practical implications for issues of leadership in universities. The instrument tested in this study can be applied to Chinese universities to assess leadership behaviors and train university leaders

in efficient ways. It may also be useful in developing instruments for measuring leadership in other types of alternative organizations in China. The study too can act as a potential foundation for developing and testing instruments to measure university leadership in other countries.

There are several limitations that need to be addressed. First, because the contact information of some provincial universities' faculty is not available online, most participants in this sample (224 out of 304) are faculty members at national universities. This limitation may make the instrument hard to generalize to all types of universities. A second limitation is the difficulty of collecting large samples of data that can be used for multigroup and multisample confirmatory factor analysis, which can further enhance validity of the instrument. A third limitation is that all data was collected online. While this guarantees control of the speed of data collection, it was difficult to collect significant amount of data from a specific university. The lack of such data makes it difficult to examine whether certain organizational characteristics affect leadership behaviors.

A recommendation is to collect enough data to ensure multigroup and multisample confirmatory factor analysis. This offers the possibility of validating the instrument across subgroups and with different samples. Another recommendation is to include items in the survey that measure variables that can either predict or be predicted by leadership behaviors. Testing the relationship between leadership and these variables will provide extra proof of validity (e.g., predictive validity).

### **Acknowledgments**

The author thanks Stanley Deetz, Bryan Taylor, Tim Kuhn, Joseph Rosse, and John Mciver for their suggestions on this study. Sincere thanks to Ling Chen and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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## Bio

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