

A Research Conception on Indigenous Chinese Leadership: Based on Comparative Case Studies on Political Elites in Ancient China

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Due to the complexity of leadership and its variability across situations, it is suggested that research on leadership should focus on attempts to understand leadership in specific situations or roles, and develop local knowledge about leadership in each situation or role. This paper validates the possibility and importance of building indigenous leadership theories from historical perspective. We demonstrated how to carry out research on indigenous Chinese leadership from a historical perspective by comparative case studies using historical data. Based on the principles of typicalness, representativeness, and comparativeness, we selected six counterparts of political elites in ancient China as comparative cases, which includes Guan Zhong & Shang Yang (organizational reformer), Liu Bang & Xiang Yu (entrepreneur), Li Shimin & Qin Shihuang (intergenerational transition successor), Zhuge Liang & Zeng Guofan (professional manager), Lu Su & Zhang Juzheng (mess-to-order maker), and Zuo Zongtang & Wang Anshi (national dream driver). The paper aims to develop indigenous leadership theory specific to Chinese mental states and culture.

Keywords: historical perspective, indigenous leadership, political elites in ancient China, comparative case study, qualitative study

Introduction

The rise of technology and knowledge workforces has accelerated the process of globalization, while provoking fierce competition among companies. The demand of surviving in a volatile environment and fierce competition evokes a greater need for indigenous leadership research. In particular, given the fact that most of extant theories of management and organization are built upon the cultural values and empirical evidence in the West (Bruton, Zahra, Van de Ven, & Hitt, 2022), it is imperative to conduct indigenous Chinese research which could potentially revise and modify, supplement and enrich, or even supersede and replace the Western theories.

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It has been encouraged that creative research should be solidly grounded in the context of national or regional cultural traditions (Li, Sekiguchi, & Zhou, 2016).

The Rapid Rise of Emerging Economies Calls for Indigenous Leadership Research

The last years have witnessed a tremendous development in many emerging markets around the world. According to a study of Goldman Sachs, China will become the largest economy in the world by 2040 (Wilson & Purushothaman, 2003). Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (the so-called BRICS countries) are expected to grow at considerably higher rates than Western industrialized countries as well. As a result, the accumulated GNP of the five BRICS countries is likely to exceed that of the G7 countries, including USA, Japan, Germany, France, UK, Italy, and Canada in the coming years (Holtbrügge, 2013).

However, despite the large success of emerging economies, the knowledge about management practices in these economies is still limited and the academic literature is still dominated by Western concepts, mainly conducted in the US (Chai, Jeong, J. Kim, S. Kim, & Hamlin, 2016). As Yukl (1998) put it 20 years ago, the popularity of American and European management theories and practices everywhere is somewhat justified because much of the production of knowledge on the topic has come from research studies from American and European corporate environments and is authored by scholars from universities located in these regions.

Therefore, it is now very urgent for management researchers in the whole world, especially those who come from emerging economies, to shift their focus to the study of management practices adopted outside of the United States and Europe (House, 1995; Tung, 2003; Bruton et al., 2022), and to pay much attention to developing theories accounting for the unique leadership and management phenomena in emerging countries' context (Zhang, Z. X. Chen, Y. R. Chen, & Ang, 2014). Further, a number of corporations from emerging economies are becoming successful global corporations and, therefore, are likely to start dictating what is to become the new trend of management practices in the coming years (Wooldridge, 2010).

Correspondingly, the overwhelming reliance on management theories and practices of the United States and Europe has been increasingly questioned in recent years (G. H. Hofstede, G. J. Hofstede, & Minkov, 2005; House, 1995; McLean, 2010; Tung, 2003), because of profound cultural, social, and economic differences among countries. As Marsden argued already more than 28 years ago,

Strategies based on European scientific techniques ignore the rich resources, both practical and intellectual, which exist in non-western societies (...). "Local", "traditional" or "folk" knowledge is no longer the irrelevant vestige of "backward" people who have not yet made the transition to modernity, but the vital well-spring and resource bank from which alternative futures might be built. (Marsden, 1991, p. 32)

Echoing to Marsden (1991), there have been many scholars calling for the consideration of local concepts for many years (e.g., Banerjee & Prasad, 2008; Gopinath, 1998; Holtbrügge, 2013; Li & Tsui, 2015; Meyer, 2006; Panda & Gupta, 2007; Zheng & Lamond, 2009). However, this aspect has only recently been recognized in international management research. For example, in a study of the indigenous conceptual dimensions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in China, Xu and Yang (2010) revealed that several widely accepted CSR dimensions in the Western world have no embodiments in China. Besides, Liu and An (2021) suggested that only relying on Western management theories is not enough, Chinese indigenous organizations should also consider Chinese traditional Yin-Yang philosophy. Additionally, Das (2010) showed how the Indian view of good management practices is deeply rooted in ancient Indian epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Furthermore, Jackson, Amaeshi, and Yavuz (2008) demonstrated how the success of firms in Africa was

affected by the use of local management techniques that evolved over several centuries.

Moreover, studying indigenous management concepts can also be useful for understanding the implicit assumptions of Western theories of management and thus contributes to global management knowledge as well (Tsui, 2004; Welge & Holtbrügge, 1999). Consequently, the analysis of management concepts originating from non-Western countries may improve seemingly universal theories of corporate strategy, innovation management, or leadership (Cappelli, H. Singh, J. Singh, & Useem, 2010; Leung, 2012).

As countries such as India and China aspire to play an increasingly important role in the world, and economy and indigenous managers attempt to build and lead world-class companies, possibilities of the emergence of a richer model for managers need to be explored (...). The choice is clearly for not only the indigenous management to tap into its deep-rooted ethos, but also to contribute the contemporary concepts and practices of governance in developing a true globally relevant cross-verging managerial frame to emerge. (Chatterjee, 2009, p. 138)

Creative Transformation of Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture Is the Premise and Key of Chinese Indigenous Leadership Research

During the past three decades, as the largest developing country (Liu & Zhou, 2021), China has risen from an under-developed country to the world's second largest economy (Zhao, Ma, Chen, Shang, & Song, 2022), and is the leading driving force for world economic growth (Barboza, 2010). Correspondingly, the topic of leadership in the Chinese context has attracted much research attention.

Following the categorization approach of Jia, You, and Du (2012) in terms of the degree to which the Chinese context is considered in the theory and hypotheses, Zhang et al. (2014) classified the existing studies on indigenous leadership of Chinese into three streams. The first is building context-free theories using Chinese samples (e.g., Fu, Tsui, Liu, & Li, 2010; Ou et al., 2014; H. Wang, Law, Hackett, D. Wang, & Chen, 2005), contributing to the literature by providing evidence for the generalizability of Western-developed theories and frameworks. The second is modifying existing leadership constructs and theories (e.g., Chen & Aryee, 2007; Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007; Jia, Tang, Li, Yue, & Zhu, 2004; Li & Shi, 2005). This stream focuses on either modifying and adapting leadership constructs and measures developed in the West, or identifying some variables characterizing Chinese employees that moderate the relationships in existing leadership theories. The third is developing new constructs and theories in the Chinese context (e.g., Chen & Farh, 2010; Erben & Güneşer, 2008; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Pellegrini, Scandura, & Jayaraman, 2010; Tsui, Wang, Xin, Zhang, & Fu, 2004; Zhang et al., 2014; Zhou & Long, 2007), focusing on developing new constructs and theories to understand Chinese leadership using Chinese samples.

Among the three streams, because the third stream has adopted an inductive or indigenous approach to exploring leadership issues in Chinese organizations, Jia et al. (2012) considered it the highest degree of contextualization and more indigenous than the other two. However, most studies conducted in China have mainly focused on validating Western management theories (Cheng, Wang, & Huang, 2009; Jia et al., 2012). While some scholars have been trying to develop Chinese theories of leadership, most scholars have neglected the Chinese context in their theorizing (Child, 2009; Jia et al., 2012; Tsui, 2006). Researchers, educators, and practitioners are all aware that Western-based leadership theories cannot sufficiently account for the rich and unique leadership phenomena in the Chinese context (e.g., Tsui et al., 2004). Therefore, it is encouraged to study indigenous leadership in China and develop theories to explain any unique leadership issues in the Chinese context, in which China's distinctive political, social, and cultural environments have been regarded as the major factors breeding the leadership phenomenon in Chinese organizations (Tsui et al., 2004).

In view that Chinese traditional culture is the most important variable in Chinese context, the creative evolution and development of Chinese excellent traditional culture is the spiritual connotation and main logical chain of indigenous Chinese leadership research. Since Chinese excellent traditional culture is more fully and comprehensively represented in the cognition and behavior of key figures in great historical events (political elites in ancient China), taking these key figures as the research objects could be important in facilitating indigenous Chinese leadership research. Using event system theory and qualitative comparative analysis method to conduct case studies, we can explore how Chinese traditional culture influences leadership effectiveness under different situations and figures. This perspective provides new insights for the construction and perfection of China's indigenous leadership theory and the creative transformation and innovative development of China's excellent traditional culture.

Historical Perspective Is an Effective Method to Deconstruct the Traditional Cultural Attribute of Indigenous Chinese Leadership

Given that indigenous leadership research is required where “the context is explicitly modelled in the study, either as an independent variable or as a moderator variable... (It) involves scientific studies of local phenomena using local language, local subjects, and locally meaningful constructs” (Tsui, 2004, p. 501), which means not only the framework of cultural intelligence (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Earley & Ang, 2003), but also further context-sensitive research methods should be acknowledged (e.g., Chilisa, 2011; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Singh & Sharma, 2009; Thomas & Bendixen, 2000). We think it highly recommended to study indigenous leadership from historical perspective, because both independent variable and moderator variable of local phenomena, including but not limited to local subjects, local language, and locally meaningful constructs, must be culture-specific and they are also the crystallization of history.

Traditional cultural roots influence the thought patterns and behaviors of all citizens in a community including its leaders (Parsons & Shils, 1951). Hence, leadership practices should reflect unique cultural idiosyncrasies, and indigenous leadership research must put more attention on the cultural roots (Li & Tsui, 2015). Researches on indigenous leadership might use the configuration approaches to mapping holistic leadership behaviors rather than measuring leader behavior as different dimensions (Meyer, Tsui, & Hinings, 1993), which is a common practice in current research. Li and Tsui (2015) further suggested that leaders in different types of organizations might have different configurations of leadership behaviors producing different leadership outcomes, given their cultural contexts.

The essence of leadership research is to reveal the source and content of leaders' influence and control on the followers in a specific environment, and the problems of how to influence and control them. These problems are different in different historical, social, and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, indigenous leadership theory must not only develop in specific historical, cultural, and social contexts, but also focus on the vivid and rich interactive process. However, according to a recently published review on indigenous Chinese leadership research (Zhang et al., 2017), although 194 indigenous leadership research pieces have been published in eight top Chinese academic journals during 2000-2016, only three out of them focused on the interaction mechanism of social, historical, and cultural factors, and there is a clear gap between theoretical research and practical needs. Therefore, both theoretical and practical needs call for indigenous leadership research from a historical perspective.

Otherwise, leadership transpires within a linear time frame as organizations evolve in response to various internal and external forces. For example, researchers describe growth, competitive, endgame, and life-cycle

strategies, each with a genesis and, ultimately, a history. As a linear and, thus, historical concept, the leadership of organizations can be studied using evidence of past events and decisions. Therefore, historical perspective (Lawrence, 1984) is appropriate for indigenous leadership research.

Historical perspective differs from history. It refers to understanding a subject in light of its earliest phases and subsequent evolution with its object to sharpen one's vision of the present, not the past. When historical perspective is overlooked in social research, researchers may draw misleading conclusions. Historical perspective expands research horizons by encouraging study of the relative stability of phenomena, providing alternative explanations for phenomena, and aiding problem formulation and research design. Especially, historical perspective provided by the age, cohort, and period methodology, combined with a concern for defining meaningful units of time, can help generate new research questions as well as look at old questions in new ways. Therefore, historical perspective is a simple but crucial tool in understanding the present context of social research (Lawrence, 1984), and it should be one of the most effective methods to study indigenous leadership. As for the reasons, as Kieser put it in 1994, there are four aspects. The first is that the structures of and behavior in present organizations reflect culture-specific historical developments. Differences between organizations in different cultures can, therefore, only be explained completely if the historical dimension is included in the comparison. The second is that the identification of actual organizational problems and of their appropriate remedies is often not free of ideology. Confronting current "fashionable" trends in organizational theory and practice with similar developments in the past, we can identify and possibly overcome prejudices that characterize the presentation of these trends. The third is that historical analyses teach us to interpret existing organizational structures not as determined by laws but as the result of decisions in past choice opportunities, some of which were made intentionally and others more implicitly. The fourth is that by confronting theories of organizational change with historical development, these theories can be subjected to a more radical test than they have to pass when merely being confronted with data on short-run changes.

By the way, historical perspective on indigenous leadership research is different from the evolutionary perspective of leadership research. The former focuses on the key figures in the key events that determine the development process of a particular organization or region in a specific cultural context, such as Ren Zhengfei in the founding and growth of Huawei Company, Deng Xiaoping in the successful Opening-up and Promotion in China, etc. In contrast, the latter focuses on the process mechanism and influencing factors of why leaders and followers become leaders and followers (Bastardo & Van Vugt, 2019).

In fact, there have been repeated calls for more history in management education (Cummings & Bridgman, 2011; Madansky, 2008; Smith, 2007; Van Fleet & Wren, 2005) and a historical perspective in organizational theory (Aldrich, 1999; Bucheli & Wadhvani, 2014; Kieser, 1994; Üsdiken & Kieser, 2004; Zald, 1993). If we are to realize the potential for a plurality of historical perspectives in organizational theory, we should consider the prospects for dialogue with historians, as historical sociologists, such as Sewell (2005), have done. In order to facilitate such a dialogue, we should try to recognize what organizational theorists know or need to know, and what historians know or need to know. Whereas organizational theorists need to understand theory and methods, historians need to know their historical contexts and sources (Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decher, 2014).

To sum up, culture is a basic and key factor of indigenous leadership, and it is not only an historically transmitted pattern of meanings, but also as a tool for the local people to pass their minds down through generations. Therefore, culture is an important factor in developing theories and interpreting behaviors in indigenous leadership research. Discussing indigenous leadership from a historical, critical, comparative, and contextual perspective will contribute a lot to our increased understanding of the local phenomena in emerging

markets. In addition, this perspective is very timely and relevant for international management/cross-cultural research, leadership research, and organizational behavior research.

Subjects Selection and Data Collection in Indigenous Leadership Research

It is an effective method to study indigenous leadership from the historical perspective of culture-specific context. However, we should notice that the number of context factors that can potentially affect leadership manifestations is infinite, so a theory of indigenous leadership can never hope to include all dimensions of the context. Furthermore, because each particular context can be characterized by multiple features from different perspectives, no context will ever perfectly fit a single theory or model. Nevertheless, if the context dimensions to be included in the theories are carefully chosen to represent factors that potentially apply to many different situations, and their understanding is well developed in the social sciences (e.g., power, status, legitimacy, structure), then the indigenous leadership theories that include these dimensions may provide us with a better understanding of the indigenous leadership phenomenon. Shamir (2013) suggested that indigenous leadership studies should be complemented by comparative studies that do not focus on a single context but examine and compare manifestations of leadership in different contexts, again with the purpose of inductively deriving theoretical propositions from their findings and insights.

Samples of Indigenous Leadership Research Should Give Priority to Comparable Social Elites in Homologous Cultural Background

Building theory from case studies in indigenous leadership research is a research strategy that involves using one or more cases to create theoretical constructs, propositions, and/or midrange theory from case-based and empirical evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989). Case studies are rich, empirical descriptions of particular instances of a phenomenon that are typically based on a variety of data sources (Yin, 1994). Given the limited number of cases which can usually be studied, as Pettigrew (1988) noted, it makes sense to choose cases such as extreme situations and polar types in which the process of interest is “transparently observable”. That is to say, a particularly important theoretical sampling approach is “polar types”, in which a researcher samples extreme (e.g., very high and very low performing) cases in order to more easily observe contrasting patterns in the data. Although such an approach can surprise reviewers because the resulting theory is so consistently supported by the empirical evidence, this sampling leads to very clear pattern recognition of the central constructs, relationships, and logic of the focal phenomenon. Thus, the goal of theoretical sampling is to choose cases which are likely to replicate or extend the emergent theory. In contrast, traditional and within-experiment hypothesis-testing studies rely on statistical sampling, in which researchers randomly select the sample from the population. In this type of study, the goal of the sampling process is to obtain accurate statistical evidence on the distributions of variables within the population.

For comparative case study in indigenous leadership research, the first decision that must be made is sampling. The sample is not random, but should reflect the selection of specific cases to extend the theory to a broad range of organizations. Multiple cases within each category should allow findings to be replicated within categories, and in order to enhance the generalizability of indigenous leadership model, cases selected should be from different positions or roles (Gersick, 1988). When researchers turn to historical data, the answer to this question is often self-evident (Simonton, 1999). The sample for indigenous leadership researchers, for example, consists of the historical figures whose lives need some kind of culture-specific interpretation. The sampling

decision becomes a little more complicated in multiple-case investigations, such as those favored in historiometric analyses (Simonton, 1990). In the simplest instances, the samples are self-defining, because the number of relevant cases is finite and manageable. Examples include presidents of the American Psychological Association (Suedfeld, 1985), the first ladies of US presidents (Simonton, 1996), Nobel laureates (Manniche & Falk, 1957), and Olympic athletes (Schulz & Curnow, 1988; Fernández-Dols & Ruiz-Belda, 1995).

When the potential samples are more open ended and ill defined, a commonplace sampling strategy is to apply the eminence criterion (Simonton, 1999). The most eminent individuals in a domain are not only the most representative of the phenomenon of interest, but information about such subjects is likely to be more extensive and reliable (Cox, 1926; Simonton, 1976). In addition, leaders are those who aim to influence and guide others into pursuing particular objectives or visions of the future and to stimulate them into wanting to follow (Brooks, 2009, p. 163). Therefore, the characteristics of leadership and the contents of influencing and guiding others, pursuing visions of the future, and stimulating them into wanting to follow require that researchers on indigenous leadership should mainly select elites as subjects and pay much attention to the interaction among the leader, the follower, and the context.

The Data Collection of Indigenous Leadership Research Includes Various Historical Materials and Data that Can Reveal the Cultural Background of Leadership and Show Its Interactive Process

Once the researcher has decided on the most appropriate sample, the next step is to find the necessary sources of raw data. In general, there are two types of historical data, primary and secondary (Simonton, 1990). The most commonly used primary source is the written document. Some of these documents may be public, such as campaign speeches, inaugural addresses, diplomatic communiqués, court decisions, poems, short stories, publication titles, and journal abstracts (e.g., A. E. Martindale & C. Martindale, 1988; Simonton, 1992; Tetlock, 1981a; 1981b; 1985), whereas others may be private, such as correspondence and diaries (e.g., Porter & Suedfeld, 1981; Schaller, 1997; Suedfeld & Bluck, 1993).

Nonverbal materials provide another useful primary source, including artworks, musical compositions, architectural monuments, and various cultural artifacts (e.g., Devlin & Nasar, 1989; Hasenfus, Martindale, & Birnbaum, 1983; Lindauer, 1993; McClelland, 1961; Simonton, 1980a). Secondary sources, in contrast, provide information compiled by historians and other scholars. The most common sources are biographies, histories, encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries, bibliographies, and obituaries (Deluga, 1997; Dennis, 1954; Harrison, Struthers, & Moore, 1988; Simonton, 1998). These works may be either general (e.g., Encyclopedia Britannica, 1994) or specific (e.g., Zusne, 1984). It should be pointed out that often the selection of a data source comes before the sample is determined. That happens when the sampling criterion is whether an individual has an entry in one or more reference works (Cattell, 1903; Galton, 1869; Simonton, 1991a; 1991b).

Otherwise, as suggested by Child (2014), we should take account of the “triangle” of resource, as well as institutional and political factors applied in indigenous leadership contexts, which means we should draw upon insights from resource-based, institutional, and political perspectives simultaneously.

Most notably, the research method of comparative case study differs very little from the comparisons and contrasts seen in traditional historiography (e.g., Plutarch’s Lives). Indigenous leadership researchers, on the other hand, have developed techniques that depart significantly from historiographic practice. From the very beginning, the subjects’ biography was treated as a special form of case study; that is, the investigator would interpret the historical information as if it came from an actual session with the research (Erikson, 1958; 1969;

Freud, 1964). The only genuine difference arises from the fact that the biographer is engaged in classical assessment “at a distance”—necessarily so when the subject is a deceased historical celebrity. Eventually, however, researchers began to realize that there were certain methodological pitfalls inherent to biographical analyses. As a consequence, recent biographers have attempted to devise more sophisticated methods to help ensure that these pitfalls can be successfully avoided (Alexander, 1988; 1990; Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1982; 1988). For instance, great care must be exercised to avoid such problems as negative or positive transference, circular reasoning, psychological reductionism, and the overinterpretation of biographical particulars.

Although these analytical methods were designed for use with contemporary research participants, they often can be applied directly to historical data with minor or even minimal modifications (Simonton, 1990; 1999). Thus, by adapting already established psychometric measures, historical figures have been assessed on characteristics as diverse as intelligence, cognitive style, personality, motivation, psychopathology, interests, beliefs, and values (McClelland, 1961; McCrae, 1987; Tetlock, Armor, & Peterson, 1994; Winter, 1987; Zullow, Oettingen, Peterson, & Seligman, 1988). Admittedly, it is not uncommon for psychologists to devise special measurement strategies unique to historical data. For instance, computerized content analytical schemes have been created to investigate music compositions (Cerulo, 1989; Paisley & William, 1964; Simonton, 1980b). Even so, the majority of measurements seen in the psychological analysis of historical data have manifested counterparts in more mainstream research.

A Brief Introduction of Process of Comparative Case Study Between Political Elites in Ancient China

As one of the oldest civilizations, China has produced many world-class leaders as well as political elites, whose thought patterns and behaviors generally are influenced by traditional philosophical and cultural wisdom in ancient China, such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism. For example, Liu Bang (256 BC-195 BC), the founder of the Han Dynasty, following Daoist philosophy and adopting laissez-faire attitude toward people's lives, abolished brutal Qin laws, eliminated clan punishments, and proposed the idea of “rule primarily by virtue and supplemented by punishments”. Economically, he asked to “rest with the people”, freed all slaves, reduced compulsory labor services, and lowered agricultural tax rate from Qin's 20%-50% to 7%, even to 3%, the lowest at the time. Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty was the first to issue a “rescript for penitence” and ask people's forgiveness for natural disasters or mistakes he made, which is a typical behavior of Confucianism. According to China's official history record, 264 “rescripts for penitence” were issued by 89 Chinese emperors over the period of more than two thousand years (Guo, 2014).

The traditional wisdom accumulated in Chinese history, which has shaped and regulated ancient China's political elites' thought patterns and behaviors, is the most important part of the cultural fabric in China today, and still greatly influences leaders in the Chinese diaspora (Chai & Rhee, 2010). Based on systematically discoursing the relationship between three major Chinese philosophical schools and modern leadership theories, Ma and Tsui (2015) further analyzed the leadership behaviors of 15 highly successful Chinese business leaders, and found that Legalism dominates in an unsurprising alignment with modern management emphasizing order, control, reliability, predictability, and professionalism. However, leader integrity, benevolence, trust in followers and empowerment are also important, suggesting the influence of Confucianism and Daoism. Such theoretical and practical researches show that it is a highly recommended research perspective to study indigenous leadership of Chinese from comparative case study of political elites in ancient China.

Moreover, although macro-level sociological and economic analyses have given some attention to the linkage between China's huge population and the fast-growing economy today, at the micro level, the relationship between Chinese leaders and their followers in various organizational contexts has been largely ignored (Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005). Therefore, the objective of this research, from the perspective of comparative case-study of political elites in ancient China, is trying to explore indigenous theoretical framework for understanding leadership in China, which will not only benefit the development of indigenous leadership in China, but also provide some theoretical contributions to the basic principles of leadership academic research.

Selection of Political Elites in Ancient China

Based on the attributes of successful leaders from the perspective of a performance requirements, Zaccaro, LaPort, and Jose (2013) argued that leader attribute research must be grounded in a strong conceptual framework of why and how particular personal qualities are related to leadership process and outcomes. The reason is that they found that although most leader attribute research has been bivariate in nature, a survey of such research conducted from 1904 to 2011 indicated that the attributes defined as a function of leader-performance requirements have received empirical support across multiple leadership outcomes, domains, and studies.

Leaders exist because of the realization of organizational goals, but the personal career goals of leaders and organizational goals may not be the same, and may not be synchronized in the evolution process. Accordingly, we classified political elites in ancient China in this research into two categories of fully-effective and not-so-effective leaders. The former includes those who have accomplished both their individual career goals and their position performance requirements (organizational goals), while the latter includes those who haven't accomplished either their individual career goals or their position performance requirements (organizational goals), or achieved neither of these two goals.

Considering the data and the position comparability of political elites in ancient China, we chose six dyads as following in Table 1 to show how to select subjects in indigenous Chinese leadership research.

Methods

The research design is a multiple-case study that allows replication logic, with each case confirming or not the inferences drawn from the others (Yin, 1994). The research setting is political circumstance in ancient China and six dyads of political elites are studied (Table 1).

Table 1

Six Dyads of Political Elites in Ancient China

Social role	The key question to answer	Not-so-effective	Fully-effective
Entrepreneur	How does entrepreneur's mental model affect his followers' engagement and finally the organizational performance?	Xiang Yu (the hero of conquering Qin Dynasty)	Liu Bang (the founder of Han Dynasty)
Intergenerational transition successor	For a family business successor, how are the various complex relationships balanced during and after transition period?	Qin Shihuang (the final founder of Qin Dynasty)	Li Shimin (the second empire of Tang Dynasty)
Reformer	For an organizational reformer, how to identify different political interest, and then take appropriate tactics to get multi-win results?	Shang Yang (a great reformer of Qin state in the Warring States Period)	Guan Zhong (a great reformer of Qi state in Spring and Autumn Period)
Professional manager	As a professional manager, how to select a suitable organization to continue personal professional career, and how to balance between "something to do" and "nothing to do"?	Zhuge Liang (a Prime Minister of Shu state in the Three Kingdoms Period)	Zeng Guofan (a Prime Minister in the Qing Dynasty)

Table 1 to be continued

Mess-to-order maker	Confronting internal mess and external threat, as an authorized mess-to-order maker, how to integrate all kinds of resources and relationships to assure the organization on the right track?	Zhang Juzheng (a Prime Minister in the Ming Dynasty)	Lu Su (a Prime Minister of Wu state in the Three Kingdoms Period)
National dream driver	If somebody's life goal is to save the future of his nation, then why must he and how can he get the authorization from the national decision maker to make both his and national dream come true?	Zuo Zongtang (a Prime Minister in the Qing Dynasty)	Wang Anshi (a Prime Minister in the Song Dynasty)

Data Sources and Coding

Our study relied mainly on historical archives. For historical archives, a distinction should be made between ontological theories that refer to “history as an object” and epistemological theories concerned with “knowledge of that object” (Lorenz, 2011, p. 20), and we assume that “history matters” in organizational theory usually mean that past human actions are seen as ontologically significant for path dependence (e.g., Sydow, Schreyögg, & Koch, 2009). Equally, it could be said that “history matters” are epistemological for understanding how the past can be known or represented, either directly, through organizational research and writing, or through historiography. Therefore, we paid much attention to the data triangulated one source with another, which mainly includes the four sources of the political elites: (1) (auto)biography, (2) critical biography and later classic comments, (3) personal writing, including memorial to the throne/imperial edict, essays, poetries, political comments, etc., and (4) biographees and their colleagues' achievements recorded in official history. Here take Wang Anshi (1021-1086) as an example to briefly introduce the data sources and coding, which mainly consists of three steps or stages.

The first step is opening coding. In this step, we first read the materials independently, and then discussed in groups to mark key points, which included but was not limited to the following aspects.

(1) Various biographies of Wang Anshi

For example, one kind of biography is *Biography of Wang Anshi* written by Liang Qichao (1873-1929), in which he wrote:

At that time (the years before the Xining Reform led and promoted by Wang Anshi), Fan Zhongyan was the only politician in the central government who knew where the country should go and how it should change. But compared with Wang Anshi, Fan's wisdom and tactics to promote organizational change are too weak and insufficient. (Liang, 2009, p. 230)

(2) Personal writing and compiling in Wang Anshi's Collected Works

We find that in Wang Anshi's works, it is very common to show his outstanding tendency of seeking differences. For example, in one of his diaries, he wrote, “the magnificence and peculiarity of the world often lie in the danger and distance, and people seldom see what they want, so they can't come without ambition”¹.

(3) Biography of Wang Anshi in Song History

The editor-in-chief of the official history of the Song Dynasty is a Mongolian named Tuotuo. In chapter 86 of this book, *Biography of Wang Anshi*, historians commented on Wang Anshi,

Wang Anshi is good at eloquence and quotation. He dares to insist on acting according to his own opinions. He has set up an ambition to rectify the world and change the traditional bad habits with generosity and enthusiasm. ...Wang Anshi has a stubborn personality. He is confident that everything he decides will never change, right or wrong. As for

¹ Excerpts from *Diary of Tourism in Bao Chan Mountain*.

discussing the reform, Wang Anshi argued with the Ministers of the central government. He quoted classics, made a lot of comments, and spoke hundreds of words at once. Everyone could not refute him. He even said, “The occurrence of natural disasters is a normal phenomenon, and it is not worth fearing and worrying. The rules of our ancestors are not all worthwhile to follow. It’s normal to have different voices about the reform. There’s no need to worry about it.” During Wang Anshi’s leading and promoting the Xining Reform, he almost dismissed or expelled all the competent officials inside and outside the court, and mostly promoted some frivolous and smart young people.²

(4) Classical works on the study of Wang Anshi’s merits and demerits

As commented in Zhang Xianghao and Wei Fuming (2011), in history, Wang Anshi can be considered one of the most controversial figures. Because people with different views on change have different opinions about him (Zhang & Wei, 2011, p. 413).

In our research, Wang Anshi’s role is a reformer who promotes the realization of the national dream. Since the essence of reform lies in the reconstruction of the interest pattern of different social groups, the role of the reformer should be the conductor of the band. Therefore, the effectiveness of communication among reformers, their direct superiors, colleagues, people at the bottom of the society, and even political enemies with completely different views, determines the possibility of successful change. Supported by this theoretical background, our open coding focuses on how Wang Anshi, as a reformer, interacts with different social groups, especially with the social elites who determine whether the reform will succeed in the end. Unfortunately, the existing literature has seldom explored this issue in depth.

The second step is axial coding. At this stage, we deconstruct and sort out Wang Anshi’s interaction with different social groups around “why to change”, “how to change”, “who will lead and promote change”, “the process of change and the corresponding key events”. It was found that Emperor Song Shenzong hoped to enrich the country and strengthen the army through the reform led and promoted by Wang Anshi, and Wang Anshi was also wholehearted and devoted to this. However, in the process of promoting and implementing the reform, Wang Anshi’s deliberate or original innovations in cognition and behavior led to his increasingly alienated interaction with various social groups, especially with social elites such as Sima Guang and Su Dongpo who decided the success or failure of the reform. Therefore, the whole reform process led and promoted by Wang Anshi was, on the whole, a process in which political partners and supporters gradually transformed into political enemies.

The third step is selective coding. At this stage, the question we focus on is why the Xining Reform led and promoted by Wang Anshi should succeed, but finally it did not succeed. Based on the logic of “problem driven-evidence chain construction-proposition presentation-response to management realities”, with the help of comprehensive analysis of various data, and repeated iterations between propositions and cross-validation of evidence, finally we concluded one of the most important reasons about the failure of the Xining Reform, which is discussed as following.

Wang Anshi’s actual cognition and behavior were not the same as what he had been advocated in the reform guiding principles in *Basic Opinions and Programmes on Reform* submitted to Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty. Actually, his behavior was almost completely contrary to the inherent requirement of the success of the reform which was built based on the assumption that different social groups act for the same goal in different ways. On the whole, one of the answers to the question above is that although Wang Anshi claimed to have been devoting himself to the progress and future of his country, he was actually limited in

² Excerpt from Chapter 86 of History of Song Dynasty, *Biography of Wang Anshi*.

communication effectiveness and political skills, especially in the interaction with Sima Guang, Su Dongpo, and other political elites who decided the success or failure of the reform. As a result, these political elites, who were supposed to be supporters of the reform, gradually turned into opponents, transforming from friends to enemies. In this way, with the progress of reform, Wang Anshi had fewer friends at senior levels, and started to have more and more enemies. It was more and more difficult to carry out the reform. Failure was only a matter of time. In a word, an important reason for the failure of the Xining Reform was the separation between what Wang Anshi knew and what he actually did. The coding results for Wang Anshi and others are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

The Main Differences Between Political Elites Who Are Not-So-Effective and Those Fully-Effective in Ancient China

Main historical role	Dyads compared	Dimension contributed	From not-so-effective to fully-effective
Entrepreneur	Xiang Yu & Liu Bang	Mental Model	From Nobody-but-me to Everybody-up-me
Intergenerational transition successor	Qin Shihuang & Li Shimin	Historical Instruction	From “today is more important than yesterday and tomorrow” to “yesterday and tomorrow are more important than today”
Reformer	Shang Yang & Guan Zhong	Political Interests Identification and Management	From imposing personal value on others to searching for and guiding common political interests
Professional manager	Zhuge Liang & Zeng Guofan	Goals Balancing	From paying attention to the fulfilment of personal goals to concentrating on the bright future of the public
Mess-to-order maker	Zhang Juzheng & Lu Su	Resource Integration	From changing friends into enemies to changing enemies into friends
National dream driver	Zuo Zongtang & Wang Anshi	Personal Development	From combing knowing with doing to separating knowing from doing

Data Analysis

Whether qualitative or quantitative, the use of coding and content analysis objectifies sources as data and represents an epistemological attempt to ground historical interpretation in a systematic analysis of selected texts. To assure its predication on a “replication logic” (Eisenhardt, 1989), within-case and cross-case analyses with no priori hypotheses are adopted in this research. We split the data into groups of cases, focusing on one group of cases initially, while later focusing on the remaining cases (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Eisenhardt (1989) thought these tactics are to force investigators to go beyond initial impressions, especially through the use of structured and diverse lenses on the data. These tactics improve the likelihood of accurate and reliable theory, that is, a theory with a close fit with the data. Also, cross-case searching tactics enhance the probability that the investigators will capture the novel findings which may exist in the data.

Discussion

The trait theory of leadership suggests that personality traits, such as leaders’ core self-evaluations, can predict leader effectiveness (Colbert, Judge, Choi, & Wang, 2012; Rode, Judge, & Sun, 2014), and these effects are often channeled through leaders’ unconstrained exercise of power (House & Aditya, 1997). Then the link between personality and effective leadership is mediated by two key factors of the leader’s socio-political intelligence, which refers to his/her ability to understand within and between group political dynamics, and the degree to which the leader is seen as having integrity. Hogen and Judge (2013) further pointed out that personality can be defined in terms of its bright- and dark-side manifestation to accord with positive and negative leadership.

Although the leader, such as CEO in a company, plays a distinct role in influencing organizational financial performance and collective organizational commitment, organizational effectiveness is influenced not only by the leader but also by a dominant coalition of leaders (Colbert, Barrick, & Bradley, 2014). So some scholars have suggested that leaders should drop airs of omniscience and authority, avoid communicating in monologues (Drucker, 1992; Weick, 2001), and learn along with others, or make up for their missing skills by relying on others (Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, & Senge, 2007). However, just as Hambrick lamented, his biggest disappointment with the upper echelon theory was the lack of research “directly examining the psychological and social processes that stand between executive characteristics on the one hand and executive behavior on the other” (Hambrick, 2005).

Echoing to Hambrick’s lament, recently Ou et al. (2014) found CEO humility to be positively associated with empowering leadership behaviors, which in turn correlates with TMT integration and middle managers’ work engagement, affective commitment, and job performance. Liu, Fisher, and Chen (2018) suggested that how CEO attributes influence the TMT process through cognitive mechanisms has been largely overlooked. They thus posited CEO capabilities, organization identification, role, and social identification as cognitive mechanisms linking elements in the process model. Based on Hogen and Judge’s (2013) suggestions, as well as the research pieces from Ou et al. (2014) and Liu et al. (2018), we found that the main difference of political elites in ancient China between not-so-effective and fully-effective ones existed in six dimensions (Table 2).

Obviously, our findings not only confirmed some relative researches (Hollander, 2013; Roche & Harr, 2013; Sternberg, 2013) with qualitative methods and samples of political elites in ancient China, but also provided the psychological and social processes that stand between executive characteristics on the one hand and executive behavior on the other with theoretical and practical direction.

Summary and Future Research

In an introduction to a recent special issue of the *American Psychologist* devoted to leadership, Warren Bennis (2007), one of the most prominent leadership scholars of our time, wrote that “after studying leadership for six decades, I am struck by how small is the body of knowledge of which I am sure”. Perhaps this courageously admitted lack of confidence can be attributed in part to the fact that the majority of leadership scholars, Bennis included, still devote most of their theoretical efforts and empirical studies to developing and testing leadership theories and models that ignore the situational influence on shaping the phenomenon they try to understand. Accordingly, one possible response to the pitfall of leadership research is to abandon the search for general principles and the attempt to develop general theories and models. Instead, we should focus on attempts to understand leadership in specific situations or roles, develop local knowledge about leadership in each situation or role, and build context sensitive theories of leadership, namely theories that focus not only on the actors involved but also on the situation in which they are embedded. This is an endeavor that has been largely abandoned by the field of leadership studies. Therefore, in order to get leadership’s authenticity, it is time for both leadership theory building and practice to shift their focus to the independent and moderating variables of indigenous and local factors, and pay much attention to culture-specific as well as historical factors in which the local phenomena and local people are cultivated.

This paper discussed the possibility and importance to study indigenous leadership from the historical perspective, using six counterparts of political elites in ancient China to test the new path of building

indigenous leadership theory in China. The work is the beginning of a long trip, but the direction is worth recommending. We will go ahead until the bright future!

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