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Beyond the Western Conceptions with François Jullien: The Process of Leadership Informed by the Chinese *Shi* 勢 as Organizational Propensity

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Abstract

This conceptual paper examines the considerable scope of leadership theories built from literature originating in the West to focus on the 'process' of leadership. By opening the door to include traditional Chinese thought, the worldview of Western tradition is challenged using the work of philosopher and sinologist François Jullien. Chinese culture views process as the basis of transformation and renewal in the world. It is explained through 'the propensity of things' in relation to European ontology and causality. Recognizing the evolving nature of reality through the generic Chinese notion of *shi* 勢, which serves as a conceptual tool for Jullien, leadership process is understood as an aspect of organization propensity. *Shi* 勢 is then recognized as a leading force encompassing human agency that is able to open a new avenue for research nurturing the emerging quantum phase of leadership.

摘要

这篇概念性论文着眼于领导的 '过程', 并探讨了从西方文献中建立起来的大量领导理论. 作者们运用哲学和汉学家朱利安的研究成果, 通过引入中国传统思想来挑战现代西方世界观. 与欧洲的本体论和因果关系有所不同,中国古人认为不断变化是万物的本质. 他们通过 '势' 来理解领导过程, 而且把 '势' 视为变革和更新的基础. 运用中国古代思想, 这篇文章用 '势' 作为概念工具来解剖领导过程, 并把领导过程理解为组织整体变化的一个层面. 把 '势' 理解为一种影响企业变化的主导力能够为研究培育新兴的领导力量子阶段开辟一条新途径.

Introduction

Popular leadership theories such as transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), Maslow's motivational leadership (Maslow, Stephens, & Heil, 1998), and charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) based their studies mainly on US and European organizations and CEOs; in other words, Western thinking. The US style of management and leadership, especially, have dominated organization knowledge (Shrivastava & Persson, 2018). Traditional Western management theories often claim to be universal, international, and context-free without needing to question themselves outside of their own conception (Alcadipani, Khan, Gantman, & Nkomo, 2012). Somewhat recently, scholars have recognized that non-Western management and organization knowledge offers valuable insights to existing organizational issues, provides perspectives that are outside the Western scope, and expands the canon of existing management and organization knowledge (Chia, 2003; Jullien, 2014; Persson, Agostini, &

Kleber, 2017; Schedlitzki, Ahonen, Wankhade, Edwards, & Gaggiotti, 2017). In the present paper, we address these calls by re-examining the process of leadership through the specific consideration of Eastern perspectives, beyond the dominant Western ones, to broaden the field's understanding of leadership process and reflect an enriched conception of reality. We argue that a dialogue between the East and West can enable a more flexible and adaptable worldview that serves multiple perspectives.

As a consequence of studying leadership mainly through Western lenses, Schedlitzki et al. (2017) find that leadership theories have become Western stereotypes of cultures. Leadership is a concept that does not exist in the ancient Chinese language; however, the power and effect of the leadership process have been frequently researched, keenly observed, and highly leveraged in classical Chinese literature (Jullien, 1995, 2004). This theoretical paper aims to revisit the 'leadership process' from Western perspectives before introducing the classical Chinese conceptualization of reality. In particular, it mobilizes *the propensity of things* (Jullien, 1995) as a history of efficacy in China through the Chinese concept of *shi* 勢 (generally understood as disposition or circumstance, power or potential). Our purpose is to allow leadership process to be freed from the domination of one (Western) perspective and bring forth its dynamic nature beyond the existing scope and foci. We believe Jullien's conception of the propensity of things enables us to introduce a new emerging phase in leadership studies, which emphasizes an expanded consciousness.

As Jullien (1995: 15) explains 'A term like shi 勢, while somewhat disappointing from the perspective of a conceptual history of Chinese thought, is well worth studying to help *illuminate* such thought'. By using the Chinese *shi* 勢 supported by Jullien's approach, we neither favor nor exclude a specific approach within the Chinese schools, as did Chen and Lee (2008) in their understanding of Chinese leadership and management. The application of *shi* 勢 is a way to open a door toward a Chinese conception of a reality in-flux, which is potentially advantageous for dealing with spontaneity and movement, compared to the Western tradition; especially in today's fast-changing global business environment (Western & Garcia, 2008).

Our motivation for this line of inquiry is to reconceive the leadership process from an Eastern perspective to help the field expand the canon of leadership scholarship and potentially offer insights on leadership process that are outside the strength and scope of existing studies from the West. Thus, although we reference the leadership literature to uncover dominant underlying assumptions, our focus is on making a contribution to the field's understanding of the process ontology in the present paper.

We contribute to the literature on leadership process by suggesting the field needs to progress toward a new holistic way of thinking that includes an Eastern interpretation of the leadership process, emerging as a fruitful avenue for research. Through the application of *shi* 勢 and Jullien's propensity of things, we posit that studies on leadership process must entail a broader worldview perspective thereby envisioning a new phase of leadership studies. It is our contention that an Eastern lens will help propel leadership process research toward a new progressive phase. In particular, it becomes possible and valuable to reframe leadership process through the Chinese *shi* 勢, as a joint or interactive force of situational momentum and human agency. Then *shi* 勢 nurtures organizational propensity in the context of leadership with both internal agency and external momentum as the two dimensions of organizational propensity. In the sections that follow, we first provide background and key elements that influence the cultural distance between the West and China by using the expertise of François Jullien, a French philosopher and sinologist who has explored this cultural distance for 40 years and whose books have been translated in more than 25 languages. Then, we describe the current, dominant conceptions of leadership through a Western lens. Here, we walk through the phases leadership studies have gone through to demonstrate the evolution of scholarship in this area. In the second section, we argue that it is time for leadership studies to continue to progress by expanding the Western worldview. Our arguments hinge on Jullien's work because he offers an approach that enables leadership studies to move into a new consciousness for business especially useful in a time of globalization for a meaningful dialogue between cultures (Jullien, 2014). Following these arguments, we offer the Chinese perspective as dissected by Jullien (1995 in *The Propensity of Things*) to expand the field's understanding of leadership process. This facilitates our discussion of leadership process in terms of

organizational propensity. This conceptualization of leadership process consists of the Chinese perspective, experiences, and value systems that are outside the existing scope of dominant Western thinking, thereby freeing it from the more limited worldview associated with Western preconceptions. Especially the Chinese *shi* 勢, in the context of leadership process, can be considered as a joint or interactive effect of external (non-human and objective) situation and internal (human and subjective) agency. The expanded worldview provided by this perspective opens a window for a dialogue with a quantum-type of understanding of leadership process (Laszlo, 2019) that is able to guide future research in this area and expand the scope of possibilities for organizational leaders (Tsao & Laszlo, 2019). We end the paper with implications for management and leadership studies. Consistent with Shrivastava and Persson (2018), we invite the field to engage in a real dialogue between the East and West to propel leadership studies forward.

Theoretical Background

In this section, we present our primary argument to revisit the process of leadership beyond the Western scope to welcome Chinese insights from a non-Western perspective. For this, we begin with a quote from François Jullien as presented by De Boever (2020: 17): 'By working within a divergence between Western thought and Chinese thought, Jullien is precisely not working within an opposition between the two […] Chinese thought has a *coherence* of its own that was developed *exterior* to Western thought; the *divergence* between Western thought and Chinese thought that Jullien stages marks that *distance*'.

Facing the Distance between Two Cultures with Jullien

When Bass and Stogdill (1990) suggest that leadership is universal and that it is found in humans as well as in animals; they did not seem to consider that leadership does not objectively *exist* outside of language. The term, leadership, is a product of language and is a subjective categorization of reality based on specific cultural biases and agenda toward certain human activities (D'Iribarne, Chevrier, Henry, Segal, & Tréguer-Felten, 2020).

Some scholars acknowledge the powerful thought-shaping role that language plays in leadership thinking. In attempts to understand the enduring issue of dualism in organization studies, Knights (1997), Collinson (2005), Fairhurst (2011), and Baxter and Hughes (2004) found the root of dualism in European languages. The alphabetical languages function to name the world which produced a reality comprised of separate forms (beings). A being is characterized by a unique identity that differs itself from the rest of reality, and defers other meanings (Derrida, 2001). Conceiving reality on the basis of being privileges the aspects of reality that separate aspects of the world and is thus a source of a dualism.

In contrast, Jullien (1995) suggests that the ancient Chinese conceived reality on the basis of tendency of evolving, rather than being, so they prioritized the process of propensity, rather than the status of identity. Chia (2003: 978) argues that Chinese civilization's 'commitment to flux and transformation as the basis of life and the concomitant subscription to a non-representationalist view of language' are keys to its economic success. Chia (2003) suggests that the Chinese language is formed to convey process and movement instead of a static reality. As the basis of reality, 'change' in Chinese thought does not indicate disruption of harmony or balance, but the natural and harmonious way reality functions on a daily and moment-to-moment basis (Chia, 2014). As we will show, this is a very different conception from what the West offers.

The distance between Western and Chinese cultures has been explicitly explored by François Jullien. His major deconstructing enterprise of Western culture is actually not a 'destruction' (De Boever, 2020: 107). In fact, Jullien aims to favor a real intercultural dialogue from resources of both cultures (Jullien, 2014). The 'Chinese thought' used by Jullien often means pre-Buddhist classical Chinese thought (De Boever, 2020). Jullien 'frequently distinguishes between Daoïsm, Buddhism and contemporary Chinese thought, all of which appear in his work' (De Boever, 2020: xv). Thus, the reason for an

emphasis on Jullien is he provides a literary analysis of fundamental Chinese texts belonging to the main schools (also identified by Chen & Lee (2008) for leadership and management in China).

Western Conceptions of the Leadership Process: The Evolution of Leadership Thinking

It is important to understand how thinking can evolve within its linguistic boundaries before demonstrating ways of conceiving and thinking about the leadership process outside of these boundaries. This section reviews the way existing thinking has evolved with regard to the understanding of the leadership process. Here, we categorize the evolution of the leadership process in four phases: *linear*, *dyadic*, *collective network*, and *shared practice*. These phases do not mean to suggest a strict representation of a linear process of development in the understanding of leadership process, but only to demonstrate the movement of general trends. We begin with the Linear Phase.

Linear phase

Traditionally, this process is initiated by the leader who is regarded as the active change-agent. The leadership process is approached as a one-sided affair from the leader to influence followers who are passive recipients, to conform to the leader's agenda and goals (Bass, 1985; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Yukl, 2010). Leadership is viewed as the property of the individual leader. From earlier thoughts that leaders are *born*, to later understanding that leaders are *made*; the individual leader is perceived as a superior being who is a hero and savior of followers, and is the sole driver of change (Grint, 2001; Hosking, 1988; Yukl, 2010). This understanding led to the scholarship focus on the individual leader more than on the process. Studies are primarily biographical and psychological based and focus on individual's traits (Galton, 2012; Grint, 1997; Maslow et al., 1998), vision, and ways of being (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Greenleaf, 1991; House, 1977). The leadership process is seen as a natural consequence of the individual's being. Important theories of this phase include transformational leadership (Avolio, 2005; Bass, 1985), charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977; House & Aditya, 1997), visionary leadership (Nanus, 1992; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989), authentic leadership (Ladkin & Spiller, 2013; Terry, 1993), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1991) theories.

Dyadic phase

A newer phase in the evolution of leadership studies from the West started when the notion of 'follower as passive recipient' was rejected (Collinson, 2006). When followers are no longer conceived as passive, the role of the individual leader changes from the sole initiator of the leadership process to only one of the two equally active parties involved in the process. The understanding of leadership thus becomes more process oriented as it involves interaction between the leader and follower (Hollander, 1992; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Leadership is conceived as a dialectic process (Collinson, 2014; Fairhurst, 2011), interpersonal communication and individual identity are the primary focus leadership studies in this phase (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). Influential theories include leader-member exchange theory (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden et al., 1997) and Hollander's relational theory (Hollander, 1992, 1995).

Collective network phase

The mythical superiority of the leader further declines in contemporary leadership studies, and as a consequence, leadership started to be separated from the individual leaders. In this collective network phase, leaders are neither regarded as the sole owner of leadership, nor the dominant party that can single-handedly affect the process (Graen & Graen, 2006). Leadership is being studied as a process; and is a product of a dynamic social method of interactions among a network of individuals (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005; Kilduff & Tsai, 2003; Tichy, Tushman, & Fombrun, 1979). These studies usually focus on organization member's individual self, collective self (Ford, Harding, & Learmonth, 2008; Karp & Helgø, 2009), and a sensemaking process (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). They provided the basis for the emergence of theories such as Sharing Network leadership (Graen & Graen, 2006; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and Post-industrial leadership (Joseph, 1995; Rost, 1993).

The management field proposes a more dynamic understanding of the leadership process by moving the base investigation away from the individual human agent. For example, Dachler (1992), Holmberg (2000), and Hosking (1988) conceive leadership as a relational process. These scholars suggest that because relationships are the basis of organizational life and the leadership process, it should be used as the foundational unit for leadership studies instead of individual human agent. A relationship involves more than communication and individual identity; it also includes factors such as experiences, common interests, value systems, and action (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leadership in this phase is no longer directly tied to individual human agents, but rather is conceived 'as the processes by which social order is constructed and changed' (664).

As relationships are constantly changing and evolving, leadership is in the process of becoming. This understanding of the leadership process provides the basis for what Drath (2001) and Murrell (1997) call, relational leadership. With social relations as the basis of leadership, Drath, McCauley, Palus, Van Velsor, O'Connor, and McGuire (2008) propose to replace the ontological language of leadership studies from the entitative triad of leader, follower, and goal, to the more relational and collective terms of direction, alignment, and commitment. Doing so enables leadership studies to focus more on the collective outcomes produced by leadership as a product of social relations and interactions instead of by individual identities. What is noteworthy during this phase is that organization scholars also started to replace the concept of organization with organizing to indicate an ongoing and continuously changing organizational process (Hosking, 1988, 2007). Next, we present the latest general phase – Shared practice.

Shared practice phase

Also moving focus away from individual agent, Raelin, Kempster, Youngs, Carroll, and Jackson (2018) conceive leadership as a product of shared practice. Based on an understanding that 'A *practice* is a coordinative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome' (p. 3), leadership-as-practice privileges the day-by-day interactions and mundane organizing activities that produce directions and achievements. Carroll, Levy, and Richmond (2008) propose that leadership-as-practice challenges the traditional (Western) competency thinking; using 'building' and 'dwelling' as analogy, Carroll and colleagues (2008: 367) suggest that the traditional competency is like the process of building, which 'involves a predefined outcome'; while leadership-as-practice is more like 'dwelling' which 'is purposive in that it "gives consistency, stability and ultimately, identity to the agent, be it individual or organization, as a locus of action"'. Carroll and colleagues critique the limitation of the traditional causality for restraining leadership thought; without resolving the causality issue or proposing new models, they encourage thinking beyond existing boundaries.

In leadership-as-practice theory, leader and follower are no longer studied as separate parties, but as equal participants in the leadership process. This is grounded in a process ontology. Leadership-as-practice is conceived as a phenomenon and is in a constant process of becoming. This 'becoming' is the product of collective interactions among organization members, and organization achievement is seen as a result of the collective interaction and moment-by-moment production of direction that every stakeholder takes part in (Raelin, 2016).

Prioritizing the collective production of directions and accomplishments, past focus on identity is replaced by 'identity work', which privileges the process that produces the ongoing evolvement of collective identity achievements. In this post-human phase, the purpose of working with identity is no longer about an individual's meaning or sensemaking. Instead, identity is considered for maximizing collective outcomes (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013). Scholars suggest that the increasing complexity and fluidity in the understanding of leadership process are responses for adapting to the fast-changing global environment and business context (Fletcher, 2004; Huey & Sookdeo, 1994).

This review on the evolving understanding of the leadership process shows that existing studies have been able to conceive leadership as a complex, in flux, and constantly moving process even within the Western linguistic tradition. In response to this analysis, we suggest turning to the Chinese conception of reality to enrich our understanding of the leadership process in this global environment, but from

another side of the world through another kind of language. By including a Chinese perspective on the worldview regarding leadership process, we are able to connect thought and language more deeply (Jullien, 2006, 2020). As we demonstrate in the next section, Jullien provides an approach for reconceptualization which enables us to propose an avenue for moving toward a new phase for leadership studies.

Expanding the Worldview of the Western Tradition: Enabling a New Phase of Leadership Studies

To enable the next possible phase of leadership studies, we argue that current work needs to be deconstructed from the dominant biases and influences of the Western Tradition. We start this argumentation with specific insights from Jullien to focus then on the Chinese understanding of process.

Questioning Western Norms with Jullien

With the intention of deeply understanding Western thinking, Jullien questions what could not be imagined, conceived, questioned, or doubted in existing philosophy (Jullien, 2015). Especially, he recognizes that the culture-shaping preconceptions are the most taken-for-granted *norms* and are the least questioned or contested. The norms serve as the basis for thinking, and are the least doubted because it is 'no longer thought to be some intangible canon that comes from outside to impress itself upon the world; instead, it is now regarded as the correct mean immanent in things' (Jullien, 2004: 2–3). As a result, conceiving and questioning reality beyond one's own preconception can be extremely difficult especially without a frame of reference.

Jullien recognizes that a big challenge in thinking beyond the Western *norms* is that 'Western philosophy never questions itself except from within' (Jullien, 2000: 371). Language, as the first resource for speaking and thinking, is an entry point of his work (Jullien, 2006, 2015). Studying classical Chinese literature in the Chinese language, Jullien employs Chinese thought as a lever to deconstruct and bring forth the limitations in existing Western thinking. He suggests that 'using the Chinese worldview, we can look at our thoughts from a new angle and put them into perspective. Importantly, we can look at our "non thought" in order to understand the indistinct in our own thought system' (De La Robertie et al., 2017: 11).

Chinese thinking strives to embrace the ambiguity and uncertainty that philosophy discriminates against and resists (Jullien, 2002). Chinese thought teaches us 'how to be carried along by the potential of situation and adapt to circumstances to profit rather than to follow a model; how to focus on the process instead of fixating on a model' (De La Robertie et al., 2017: 10). In his effort to investigate the Western thought from a distance, Jullien simultaneously formed an interpretation of the Chinese texts that are free of the influence of the Western preconceptions (Ivanova & Persson, 2017; Persson & Shrivastava, 2016). His method is to deconstruct the roots of Western philosophy by using texts coming from a 'heterotopic' way of thinking – traditional Chinese thought as a whole, to elucidate the most fundamental presuppositions of Western thought. Jullien (2014) provides the basis for a difficult but true dialogue between Chinese and Western perspectives. He is not searching for the 'truth' of each thought. Rather, he places each of them in the mirror of the other, using for each of them, their respective languages as we underlined in the first section.

Generally speaking, existing leadership studies employ the Chinese contexts for three main purposes: they are either used as samples for building context-free theories, for modifying existing leadership theories in the Chinese context, or for developing new theories for the Chinese context. The first and second types of studies represent the majority of the existing embodiment of Chinese thought; in these studies, Chinese organizations are merely case studies that help inform Western theories like transformational leadership (Lei, Phouvong, & Le, 2019; Li, Castaño, & Li, 2018), visionary leadership (Jia, Tang, Li, Yue, & Zhu, 2004), servant leadership (Liu, Hu, & Cheng, 2015), ethical leadership (Wang, Chiang, Chou, & Cheng, 2017), and leader-member exchange theory (Cheng, 2017; Nie & Lämsä, 2015). Based on theories that were developed under the Western context and existing

paradigmatic structure, Chinese cultural thoughts and organizational practices are not conceived as valuable wisdom or intellectual resources *per se*, but as an (indigenous) environment or context to confirm or modify existing thinking under the Western framework. It is important to have a deeper connection with indigenous perspectives in order to have a broader understanding of the field (Van de Ven, Meyer, & Jing, 2018). This is a way of developing a new consciousness in leadership studies.

As a third purpose, Chinese thought can be a valuable basis for developing new theories and contributing to the existing leadership thought. Liu (2017), Lu (2015), and Xiao and Wu (2014) alike propose that leadership in the Chinese context requires unique theories separated from the existing leadership thought. These authors propose that cultural context is the basis for investigation; existing Western theories do not apply in China, nor can the theory created in the Chinese context contribute to leadership thinking outside of the Chinese context.

However, scholars like Chen and Lee (2008), Chen and Miller (2010), Chia (2003, 2014), and Fang (2010, 2012, 2016) conceive culture not as uncrossable barriers that separate knowledge, but as unique and valuable tokens of wisdom for humanity to contribute to the development, growth, and prosperity of each other. By recognizing the unconscious habitual biases in cultural thoughts, these scholars find that the Chinese thought, as an example of well-reserved non-Western thought in the world, can complement Western thought and add to the existing leadership knowledge and wisdom from outside of the existing Western scope.

As a product of language, Western thought tends to favor *existing* while Chinese thought prioritizes *living*. 'The very notion of existing etymologically refers to getting out of a primordial substrate (exist), therefore to a separation; it ignores the flow of living through the propensity of things' (Persson et al., 2017: 303). Western philosophy divides reality based on the differences between static forms and produced anthropocentric approaches to reality. Jullien (2014) suggests that classical Chinese thought is wisdom that prioritizes living in the midst of ever-changing circumstances. As a result, 'China is more fitted to express (to think) not essence and determination, but flux, the between, the impersonal, the continuous, the transitional – interaction and transformation (at least according to the terms we possess)' (155).

Thus, with the focus of Jullien's work that combines Western and Eastern viewpoints, it is possible to expand our worldview of leadership studies and generate a broader consciousness for business. Next, we expand the scope of thinking about leadership by providing an understanding of the leadership process that offers an alternative way of conceiving process outside the existing Western philosophical scope.

The Chinese Understanding of Process

Based on Jullien's work, the ancient Chinese conceive reality processually, not on the basis of being, but in a whole/part relationship of moving tendencies. The prioritization of movement in classical Chinese thought is rooted in its language too. The Chinese language focuses not on naming fixed objects but describing the moving tendencies in reality. This is unlike words in the European languages. A Chinese character often contains multiple potential meanings, a phrase (*ci*) communicates more precise meaning and is a product of combining a number of characters (Jullien, 2014). This is a representation of an understanding of reality as the interplay of tendencies. Common phrases like 多少 *duō shǎo* (more and less) for 'how many' or 'how much', 大小 *dà xiǎo* (big, and small) for 'size', 轻重 *qīng zhòng* (light, and heavy) for 'weight', 长短 *cháng duǎn* (long and short) for 'length', 东西 *dōng xī* (east, and west) for 'things', 买卖 *mǎi mài* (buy, and sell) for 'trade', 山水 *shān shuǐ* (mountain, and water) for 'landscape', and 风水 *fēng shuǐ* (wind, and water) for cosmic flow of energy represents a Chinese understanding where phenomena in the sensory world are not inherently unique and separate beings, but the interplay of the cosmic flow of energies. While the Western ontology-epistemology paradigm can study the English term 'landscape', it is not made for studying a concept that combines two terms 'mountain' and 'water'. This is because unlike a Western term, a Chinese concept is not a being.

As a product of its language, ancient Chinese conceive reality through the dynamism of nature; and suggests that process is the basis for all transformation and renewal in the world (Jullien, 2002). As such, the ancient Chinese thinking does not consider identity; instead, it prioritizes the movement of the dynamic. For example, committing to act and the failure to act (omission) are not in an

active/passive binary relationship; instead, they are both considered active. This is because prosperity is not understood as being based on human action but on the propensity of motions in the sensory world. Based on this understanding, Jullien proposes that Chinese thought is not ontologically based, but instead it is emergent from a conception of reality where the propensity of the world as a whole is coproduced by the motions of every tendency within it. In this whole/part relationship, the propensity of the whole and its parts are constantly in a process of influencing and being influenced by each other; this process is often understood through a *yin-yang* balancing (Li, 2014, 2016).

Interpreting leadership process through a *yin-yang* balancing can potentially reveal insights that are unavailable from the Western tradition. As underlined by Li (2014: 325), 'although the *Yin-Yang* frame has originated from Chinese culture, it is open to all people from all cultures'. Conceiving reality through *yin-yang* balancing, propensity functions through the alternation of *yin-yang* tensions. Li (2016: 60) explains that '*Yin-Yang* balancing should be characterized as the "either/and" system, with "either" indicating the existence of tension, trade-off, and conflict, with "and" indicating the existence of harmony, synergy, and complementarity'. Through the lens of *yin-yang* balancing, a situation can then appear as extreme *yin*, extreme *yang*, moderate *yin*, and moderate *yang*. In other words, due to the constant tensions and interactions of *yin* and *yang* forces, some situations develop one-sidedly, while others can be partially conflicting, some are partially complementing. In order to adapt to, and take advantage of the propensity of a situation, 'the dual effects of being both partially complementary and partially conflicting (相生相克 in Chinese) require continuously rebalancing actions' (54), which can lead to human activities such as compromise, negotiation, manipulation, and others. Based on an understanding of that the development of a situation is joint or interactive effect of external (non-human and objective) situation and internal (human and subjective) agency, Chinese thought function in relation to the propensity of the situation by detecting its *yin-yang* balancing, and then take action to leverage its inherent *shi* 勢.

Yin and *yang* have most commonly been considered as 'binaries' by Western philosophers and sinologists alike (Burik, 2009; Chen & Lee, 2008; Graham, 1989). But through the study of language, *yin* and *yang* are not fixed nouns; they are ever-moving opposing tendencies that co-create the self-regulating process of reality (Jullien, 1995). *Yin* represents an ever coalescing and concentrating natural tendency, while *yang* is constantly dispersing. From the day/night cycle, season change, life cycle, to feelings and desires, reality functions and innovates through the alternation of opposing tensions (Jullien, 1995, 2011). In the context of leadership, since '*shi* 勢' includes both internal agency and external momentum as dimensions of organizational propensity, *shi* 勢 is consistent with the lens of *yin-yang* balancing.

In Chinese thought, change is coproduced by *yin* and *yang* as mobilized, for example, by Li (2016) for paradox management. Unlike a Western binary, both *yin* and *yang* are understood to be ever present. Jullien (2012) explains that the loudest sound mutes all sounds because it becomes the background, as the basis for recognizing other sounds. As a consequence, all that we can hear are the different interplays between sound and silence. Every tendency is constantly changing, and as their interplay modifies, so is the visibility, sound, temperature, season, and other aspects of the sensory world. A being, or an identifiable form, has no inherent nature, nor is it definable. It is conceived as a temporary appearance of the changing tendencies, and a consequence of the interplay between factors that influence the environment from which a form can be identified. As the environment changes, the identifiability of a form also modifies. Based on this understanding, Jullien suggests that Chinese thought approaches a motion *with* the situation so that the propensity of a tendency is inseparable from the factors that influence its motion. In the context of leadership process within organizations, we need to combine human agency as part of internal profile with the situational momentum as part of external context, thus the holistic and dynamic interplay between internal and external factors from the lens of *yin-yang* balancing as we suggest in the coming sections.

Leadership Process as an Aspect of Organization Propensity

Instead of focusing on the human agent, Chinese tradition studies the function of reality on the basis of a situation (Jullien, 1995, 2004). The Chinese recognize that there are multiple objective factors

inherited within any given situation; in affecting circumstances, in shaping outcomes and, in dictating possibilities. Many factors within the situation are beyond human control, and this conception of reality has made anthropocentrism unappealing to the ancient Chinese. The situation in this paper thus refers to the situation in which an organization exists. The occurrence of leadership is dependent on the organization. Instead of being viewed as a separate entity, through the Chinese lens, leadership emerges within an organization for the purpose of serving an organizational need. This also means that leadership process can only be understood in relation to the propensity of the organization.

Organizations, like all other aspects of society in the classical Chinese thought, are ever changing and evolving. Jullien refers to silent transformations that constantly take place (2011). Its propensity is determined by the factors that affect the current situation. Factors such as the boards of directors, customers, employee morale, organization culture, financial state, and resources can all have a powerful impact on the origination's circumstance, and in turn affect its leadership (Jing & Van de Ven, 2014). Each factor has its own propensity; an organization's circumstance is created not only by one single factor but the interaction among all the factors. Many of these factors are beyond individual intentionality and action, and in turn, beyond the power of leadership (Chia, 2014).

Chinese thought conceives change as the product of the interplay among situational factors, and not directly caused by a human agent. Following a Western thinking framework, existing scholarship studies leadership through a subject–object causal relationship. It conceives human as the direct cause of leadership process, and focuses on human activities such as behavior, attributes, skills, mindset, meaning, relationships, and working practices. Through a Chinese lens, human agents are constantly in a process of interacting with the situation they are in. Identifiable human activities in a leadership process are circumstantial reactions to a past situation, and not the direct cause of a process. A leadership process emerges spontaneously in the interplay of situational factors influencing the organization's propensity; it is not directly decided, nor controllable by an organization. Through the Chinese lens, the propensity of tendency must be understood in order to understand the leadership process. This is because what produces the leadership process is the silent tendency that drives the identifiable changes in an organization. That is where we turn to next.

Organization Propensity

The Chinese understanding of reality is a self-regulating process of constant transformation and renewal driven by the propensity of its tendency (Jullien, 2011). With no exception, an organization's emergence, disappearance, growth, decay, transformation, and decline are also within this process. Through the Chinese lens, propensity functions through the alternation of *yin-yang* tensions. Thus, *yin* and *yang* are ever-moving opposing tendencies that co-create the self-regulating process of reality (Jullien, 1995). From the day/night cycle, season change, life cycle, to feelings and desires, reality functions and innovates through the alternation of the opposing tensions (Jullien, 1995, 2011). Identifiable aspects of the world are manifestations of the tendency behind their changes.

A tendency emergent from an organizational circumstance is either *yin* or *yang*. The natural propensity of organization evolves through the alternation of *yin* and *yang* cycles such as stability and instability, stability and flux, and ambiguity and clarity. Unlike a binary relationship, both opposites are equally valuable for the survival and prosperity of an organization.

In Chinese thought, opposing forces are not binary but partners because they represent tendencies and not beings. A being follows the law of non-contradiction, and cannot simultaneously occupy the same physical space as another being. However, a tendency like wind or water-flow can merge with infinite streams of wind and water to reproduce a new motion. A tendency does not follow the law of a physical object. Any learning process starts from ambiguity. Clarity brings focus and commitment, but it also implies a lack of growth and expansion. *Yin* and *yang* also become each other, constant instability eventually leads to the need for stability, and absolute certainty will also inspire doubt for the certainty itself. Neither *yin* nor *yang* is escapable, and they both are valuable for the long-term prosperity of an organization. As such, classical Chinese thought does not conceive any leadership practice as inherently good or evil (Jullien, 2011). The *yin-yang* conception of the world suggests

that the basis of success and failure is not determined by action as much as the propensity of the organization's tendency to silently drive its change.

It is important to understand that *yin* and *yang* are not fixed points of destinations but opposing tendencies. This means that organization propensity does not move in a linear process from A to B or from a predetermined point of *yang* to *yin*. According to Jullien, the Western concept of time is the ultimate basis for a linear conception of process (like the linear phase of leadership studies); and it is a product of the language (Jullien, 2011). Through conjugations, European languages created a preconception of reality as a linear process of progression from the past to the future. This resulted in the validity for 'predicting the future based on the past' in Western thinking that is the basis for all scientific and empirical investigations. Reality is conceived through the changes occurring moment by moment spontaneously. The modern Chinese word for time is 時間, combining the character for moment 時 *shi* and the character for between 間 *jian*; which directly translates into 'between moments'. Even this translation cannot convey the linear direction the term time communicates (Jullien, 2011). Without this concept of time, process is not linear in the classical Chinese understanding. Instead, on a moment-to-moment basis, a tendency either expands or contracts (Jing & Van de Ven, 2014).

Shi 勢 *as the Leading Force of Organization Propensity*

The ancient Chinese recognizes that reality unfolds through *shi* 勢. *Shi* 勢 contains meanings of tendency, momentum, and propensity (Jing & Van de Ven, 2014; Jullien, 1995). *Shi* 勢 indicates the strength of flow and can predict the length of an effect. In classical literature, *shi* 勢 often refers to the momentum of a silent tendency that drives the regulatory process of reality – the alternation of *yin* and *yang*. The stronger the *shi* 勢, the more powerful the momentum of a situation, and more enduring its effects will be. If the *shi* 勢 is strengthening, it means the momentum is still building; when *shi* 勢 is declining, the momentum is depleting, and when the tendency vanishes, reversal process might start (Jullien, 1995). Without needing to know exactly how reality is going to manifest itself, the strength of *shi* 勢 predicts the direction in which reality manifests, and the likely outcome of the situation.

By positioning oneself in alignment with the dominant *shi* 勢; ancient Chinese strategists could capitalize from the natural propensity of the situation. But to act against it, every action is forceful and will encounter resistance from the entire momentum of the situation. *Shi* 勢 is the leading force of process and the silent driver of change. For example, a tendency to ease one's hunger can lead to infinite possible actions, from simply taking available food to begging, working, stealing, and killing dependent on the interplay between the person and the circumstance. More importantly, activities change as the intensity of the hunger modifies. While no human activity is inherently hunger-related, it becomes hunger-related because hunger was its driving force. Similarly, there is also a silent driving force behind organizational change that continues to manifest into diverse forms of organizing including structure, communication, leadership, and power dynamics as its *shi* 勢 seamlessly evolves.

The development of *shi* 勢 is influenced by all factors influencing the situation, such as government policies, technological advancement, as well as other social political, and natural factors. Most situational factors are beyond the organization's control. An organization is always in midst of one process or another and is therefore influencing and being influenced by *shi* 勢. The growth and decline of *shi* 勢 indicates the organization's existing circumstance in the situational propensity. A poorly managed organizations can profit from the situation when *shi* 勢 is in its favor; but when *shi* 勢 is unfavorable, even the most well-managed organizations in the industry will also struggle.

Conceiving reality through the partnership of *yin* and *yang*, the situational propensity of an organization includes both processes of growth and decline, expansion and contraction. Jullien (2007) recognizes that a tendency, as it emerges, is inclined to develop; however, as the tendency exceeds its capacity to grow, its momentum declines. As one tendency diminishes, a new tendency emerges, and the organization's propensity renews. The enduring success of an organization is thus not a linear process of constant gain, but the accumulation of momentum throughout multiple regulatory cycles of *yin-yang* alternations.

Toward a Revised Leadership Process

Understanding an organization's propensity has provided the basis for studying the process of leadership. Because an organization's propensity functions through the alternation of opposing tensions of *yin* and *yang*, all one-sided processes are temporary. Leadership functions within the organization context and its process is part of the organization's situational propensity. However, leadership as a process is almost always described as a linear process in existing Western studies. Thus, it is not the organization propensity. Some emerging processual approaches like 'direction', 'alignment', and 'commitment' (Drath et al., 2008), relational leadership (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2010) and leadership-as-practice (Raelin, 2011) recognize that leadership is a changing phenomenon; however, even though these theories identify that leadership's motion is produced spontaneously, they are oblivious to the role the spontaneously formed directions play in the overall phenomenon of leadership. In these theories, leadership's motion is projected merely as an identifiable aspect of the leadership phenomenon, and seems to ignore the powerful effect that the accumulated directions (*shi* 勢) could produce in the leadership process. Thus, we need a broader worldview that allows for these multiplicity directions to be considered.

Situational propensity functions through momentum, and momentum is one-directional like the existing descriptions of leadership process. Putting leadership process into an organization's propensity reveals that leadership process emerges as a part of the organization propensity to serve a temporary and one-sided agenda or purpose. The ancient Chinese recognize that a one-sided process depletes and eventually reverses; this means that when the circumstance changes, the process that previously was considered as leadership will no longer serve the propensity of the organization, and therefore, no longer will fulfill a leadership process. This suggests that through a Chinese lens, no identifiable human activity is inherently leadership-related; it becomes an aspect of leadership only by embodying the silent tendency driving the organizational change. A form of organizing without being driven by a leadership tendency is like a corpse without life.

Momentum through the Chinese conception of reality is a consequence of the interactions between multiple situational factors that humans are only a part of and cannot dominate (Jullien, 2004). However, leadership process in existing scholarship is initiated directly by human agent(s), whether through individual behavior, collective meaning, direction, socio-relational configuration, or collaborative agency (see, e.g., Crevani, 2018; Grint, 2011; Raelin et al., 2018; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Any movement in the leadership process is a direct outcome of human intentionality and/or action in the West. But the Chinese conception of reality understands organizational change as coproduced by the interplay of multiple factors, and not directly by human agent or group, in a subject–object causal relationship. From this perspective, leadership is not the direct cause of organizational change, but one of many factors influencing an organization's prosperity.

In existing organizational studies, leadership process, whether spoken of as the property of an individual, or a group, as behavior, relationships, meaning, or practice, seems to refer almost exclusively to the anthropocentric activities within an organization (e.g., Allison, Goethals, & Kramer, 2017; Grint, 2011; Raelin, 2016; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Through the Chinese lens, leadership process thus represents an anthropocentric process of mobilizing action among human agents within a temporary situational momentum for the purpose of profiting from the circumstance. Situational momentum is a consequence of *shi* 勢. Whether leading to organization prosperity or decline, the leadership involves generating a kind of 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢. This is described in the following section.

'Anthropocentric' Shi 勢

Shi 勢 appears as a joint effect of non-human situation and human agency in interaction. Then, 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢 represents in this article a deep awareness to the silent driving force behind the organizational change. This driving force is not decided by any particular party or individual, instead, it is the dominant response within the organization toward the organization's situation or context. The awareness of 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢 highlights an understanding that leadership process and

organizational change are influenced by the tendency that already exists in an organization, and the changes in this tendency's intensity, development, and scope of influence.

Human agents are not isolated entities in the classical Chinese understanding of reality but are results of their interactions with circumstances and environments across time (Jullien, 2011). A human agent, just like all aspects of reality, is conceived in terms of changing states. Humans' feelings, desires, values, and needs are all changing tendencies that are either intensifying, expanding, diminishing, or contracting at every moment. The classical Chinese thought does not doubt that individuals obtain unique energies, but their tendencies are products of their interactions with situational circumstances. Just like the organization's propensity, an individual's interaction with circumstances through time accumulates strong momentum and produces his or her unique way of operating in the world. Human tendencies such as traits and qualities are consequences of circumstances rather than only being inherited within their separated being or fixed identity. It is the momentum of the situation that dominates human tendencies instead of the other way around.

This understanding is contrary to most of the existing leadership development practices in the West. In developmental practices, individuals are commonly trained to follow a leadership prototype (*eidos*). This prototype is the ideal (*telos*) in which every individual candidate is discriminated against. Because ancient Chinese thought recognizes that every tendency can be valuable circumstantially, individuals are capable of contributing to leadership when the circumstance calls. Through the Chinese lens, limiting leadership by one prototype means the organization can benefit from their leader only in one circumstance. Fixating the leadership position prevents the spontaneous emergence of individual leaders as well as collective leadership. A fixed leadership position indicates that no leadership can emerge spontaneously to serve the natural propensity of the organization; the only action that is called leadership is a planned and predetermined effort to mobilize actions. These actions most commonly ignore the situational propensity.

The Chinese lens suggests that every individual in the organization is affecting and simultaneously being affected by the circumstance of the organization. Their collective tendencies generate a *shi* 勢; even though the anthropocentric *shi* 勢 cannot dominate the momentum of the entire situation, it can contribute to the prosperity of the organization. Using the *yin-yang* understanding of organization propensity, an organization requires opposing tensions to continue its innovation and renewal. Both opposing *shi* 勢 of an organization emerge naturally to carry it through its process of transformation and renewal.

How Can Shi 勢 *Be Detected*

There are many ways a manager can detect *shi* 勢 to monitor and leverage its influence in leadership process for organizational prosperity. This section provides several examples for detecting the emergence of a new tendency and monitoring the change in *shi* 勢.

The emergence of a new tendency can be detected through subtle changes in people's mundane activities. Chinese habitual thinking encourages one to detect the tendency early before it manifests into identifiable outcomes. A sign of the emergence of a new tendency is that the organizational activities embodying the previous driving force no longer motivate people. Early changes may include a *shi* 勢 in one's motivation, work habits, primary concerns and attitude toward work, peers, and/or authorities. However, changes of one or two individuals might not indicate the changes in *shi* 勢. Multiple tools for detecting *shi* 勢 should be used simultaneously to inform one's assessment.

Monitoring people's reactions toward leaders is one useful tool for detecting the change of *shi* 勢. Chinese thought conceives heroes and leaders are circumstantially produced by *shi* 勢. A leader arises not because of their personal qualities or behavior, but the circumstantial needs of a collective. This is aligned with follower-centric thinking, where a leader is decided by the followers (Carsten, Bligh, Kohles, & Wing-Yan Lau, 2019; Meindl & Shamir, 2007). However, as circumstances change, so is the group's priority and value system. This also influences their reactions toward the heroes and leaders embodying the previous *shi* 勢. A clue of a tendency-change can be reflected in *shi* 勢 in the power dynamics within the group. As the same people who gained power and influenced in previous *shi* 勢 might no longer provide leadership in the emerging *shi* 勢, people's reactions such as respect,

agreements, and reactions toward these heroes and/or leaders may change. The changes in the important figures of existing or past *shi* 勢 are a better indicator of a *shi* 勢 change.

The propensity of a tendency can be detected through the changes in the motivation within the organization. If the motivations of the people increase over time, it is likely that the existing leadership tendency is in the process of gaining momentum. The momentum itself can be detected by identifying the speed at which the dominant motivations and/or narratives are being adopted within the organization. The more a tendency is widely adopted, the stronger the *shi* 勢; the faster its intensity builds, the more explosive its short-term manifestations are likely to be. The same principle applies both to the development and decline of a tendency's momentum.

Taking Advantage of Shi 勢

The purpose of detecting *shi* 勢 is to take advantage of its momentum, which combines both reaction toward the situation and active influence to the situation's development. Through the lens of ying-yang balancing (Li, 2014, 2016), the process can include *zao shi* 造勢: creating favorable momentum, and *ying shi* 应勢: leveraging momentum (Gao, Ren, & Miao, 2018; Jing and Van de Ven, 2014). Then, we differentiate between the '*ying shi*' (reactive agency toward situation, thus more situation than agency in their interaction) and '*zao shi*' (proactive agency toward situation, thus more agency than situation in their interaction), thus consistent with the lens of yin-yang balancing. With an understanding of situation as coproduced by the interplay of factors, not with a direct subject–object causality, favorable momentum is not created by directly causing reality to change, but by indirectly influencing the interplay of the situational factor(s) (Jullien, 2000). For example, Jing and Van de Ven (2014) describe the case of Chengdu Bus company that was in decline as a consequence of a competitive market circumstance. Instead of focusing directly on financial side of the business by cutting costs or increasing income, the organization recognizes the financial turmoil as an appearance of the interplay of factors. The CEO started to slowly transform the situation by modifying a factor he could modify: the ticket price. By lowering the ticket price, the company gains popularity among the customers.

As more favorable momentum is injected into the interplay of the factors, the situation also starts to change. The Bus group leverage the favorable momentum (*yingshi*), by opening new bus routes, and signed more advertising deals with clients. As their market share increased, the organization further nurtured the momentum of the favorable *shi* 勢 by offering public services and privileges to elderly citizens and increasing wages to boost employee morale. Through a series of activities to *zao shi* and *ying shi*, the sustainable prosperity of Chengdu Bus Company is a demonstration of silent transformations without force or rupture of firing and structure change, but through the modification of *shi* 勢 (Jing and Van de Ven, 2014).

Similarly, Gao et al. (2018) also highlight that *zao shi* and *ying shi* are crucial for facilitating *guanxi* or the relational aspects of business in China. In this case, the relational broker influences the dynamics of the relationship between two businesses through his/her personal *guanxi* connections. For example, because the *guanxi* broker is one that two businesses mutually trust, even though the two businesses had no prior relationships with each other, positive momentum is created in the situation when the *guanxi* broker enters into the relationship. The broker transforms the dynamics of the relationship, and through his or her social credibility, the three parties produce a level of certainty, trust, and relationship that the two businesses do not have without the broker. The business broker leverages momentum by putting the positive relationships into actions in business operations.

As the driving force of organizational activities, the effect of leadership, as 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢 within the organization, can also be taken advantage of through *zao shi* and *ying shi*. For example, if the existing 'anthropocentric' motivations are unfavorable to the organization, the manager/CEO can influence the development of *shi* 勢 by distributing the power and influence of key figures within the organization who embody the motivations by implementing a more flat structure of organizing and decision-making. Similarly, the manager/CEO can also concentrate power around individuals who embody the motivations favorable to the organization to influence the development of favorable *shi* 勢. The manager/CEO can leverage the favorable momentum (*ying shi*) by implementing

organizational structures, formulate goals and objectives in alignment with the favorable *shi* 勢 as it develops. Doing so potentially allows favorable momentum to continuingly being nurtured, and its manifestations continue to manifest.

The Future of Leadership Studies Research: Enabling a Dialogue Between the East and West through Quantum Thinking

As we have shown, Francois Jullien's approach challenges the dominant Western view and also permits us to open our minds to the propensity of things. A possible outcome of propensity and *shi* 勢 could be the emergence of a new phase of leadership studies – a quantum phase. It entails a broader worldview and involves 'cultivating consciousness to celebrate the creation of life and business creativity …' (Tsao & Laszlo, 2019: vii). A quantum perspective involves looking at problems from all sides with the assumption that everything in life is interconnected and constitutes an inseparable part of the greater whole. Humans are 'entangled through language, meaning, and shared contexts …' (O'Brien, 2021: 4). Quantum thinking involves an ontological transformation to a different way of thinking (Laszlo, 2019). While the quantum notion of a broader consciousness toward the world and individuals' relationship with it has emerged from the West, we argue that this perspective offers the best opportunity for opening a dialogue with the Chinese worldview for leadership studies. In our efforts to advance understanding of leadership process, we emphasize the need for a bridge between the East and West for being aware of the propensity of things. Thus, Western quantum thinking opens a door for enabling a dialogue with the East.

Relevant to our previous discussion, *yin-yang* can be thought of as a metaphor for a quantum worldview in that it emphasizes the complementary and interconnected forces of nature (Laszlo, Waddock, Maheshwari, Nigri, & Storberg-Walker, 2021). Rooted in quantum science, quantum thinking's ultimate objective is human flourishing. Two central elements from quantum physics – coherence and harmony – are central to the idea of promoting the experience of oneness (Bohm, 1975). It is characterized by an indeterminism where observable phenomena cannot be analyzed definitively, thereby creating a new perspective on reality. The manifestation of reality is defined by our own observations. Thus, in a quantum mindset, elements of the world that are normally viewed as conflicting or as tensions are now viewed as integrated and natural. This new consciousness reduces the distance between the East and West and the tensions that are manifested by that either/or perspective. Table 1 compares the main elements and worldviews of the different phases of leadership studies to illustrate the evolution of thinking to a possible next phase for future work. We specifically highlight the changing underlying assumptions as well as the primary drivers of the leadership process associated with each phase.

Quantum leadership operates on the premise that a leader's work needs to be more collaborative and inclusive, a notion that can resonate with Chinese thought. This is regardless of type of organizational environment. As Tsao and Laszlo (2019: 48) posit, managers must overcome working within their own silos and become more aware of the big picture to 'exercise creativity to fulfill the purpose of business as an institution that serves peoples' well-being'. This can take place in high velocity business environments characterized by flatter bureaucratic structures as well as within more hierarchical, regulative types. Since it is the product of elements of both Western sciences and Eastern philosophy, encompassing a holistic view of business means thinking beyond the mere generation of profit (2019: viii). This involves expanding leaders' consciousness to think more broadly and to lengthen the temporal scope of their decisions (Laszlo, 2018). Akin to Francois Jullien's approach (Jullien, 2007, 2016), quantum leadership involves requiring an inner transformation of leaders to embrace how their decisions are intimately integrated with nature and how the world is interconnected. The purpose of this type of leadership is to nurture the experience of oneness, where the achievement of cooperation and compassion are the main drivers of success (Laszlo, 2020).

The *shi* 勢 to a quantum worldview 'is represented as a transformation from "first-tier" to "second tier", meaning that it represents an ontological leap to an entirely new way of being' (Laszlo, 2019: 89). These tiers represent phases of human development (Laloux, 2014). The West's dominant worldview, as reflected by the phases of leadership discussed earlier in this paper, are rooted in economistic assumptions. A quantum worldview, in contrast, is truly a global one; a view that does not distinguish

Table 1. Summary of elements comprising the phases of leadership studies

Phase	Linear	Dyadic	Collective network	Practice	Quantum
Assumption about Humans	Leader superiority over followers	Followers are active participants in the leader exchange	People have individual and collective identities	Agency is collective	People are part of the (organizational) world
Driver of Process	Leader	Two equal active parties	Social interactions	Mundane working activities for producing collective outcomes	Situation itself through the propensity of things

between the East and West, or North and South. A quantum worldview's ultimate objective is flourishing, which should be directed by leadership process (Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015). Epistemologically, quantum involves direct-intuitive and holistic elements while promoting a consciousness of oneness (Laszlo, 2019).

The leadership outcomes that are likely to result from entering into a quantum worldview involve changing leaders in a deep, cognitive level. Getting leaders to understand the importance of enlivened experience (Weber, 2013) combined with the nurturing of cognitive skills for a reinvigorated care for the well-being of others and the planet is part of the quantum leadership model. Tsao and Laszlo advocate for mindfulness practices to help leaders achieve this new level of consciousness. The idea of mindfulness is connected to a global mindset for global leadership competencies (Chandwani, Agrawal, & Kedia, 2015). Mindfulness coaching is useful for justifying the global approach to business and above all the necessity to think about leadership beyond the dominant Western approach and practices.

Our assumption in this paper is to think of leadership and specifically, leadership process, beyond a supposed leader(ship) nature anchored in ontology. Quantum thinking opens the door in the West to insights from the East. Francois Jullien's work also offers us a new way of thinking about individuals' relationship with the world. By reducing the distance between East and West, Jullien enables the possibility for a next phase for leadership.

We discuss some implications for management next.

Discussion

Implications for Management of an Enriched Leadership Process

Conceiving leadership as a process of generating 'anthropocentric' shi 勢 within situational momentum puts human power and effects into a wider context. In doing so, the power and limitations of leadership in relation to organization prosperity are clarified in ways that are outside of the existing anthropocentric scope of the West. Investigating leadership process through the Chinese lens suggests that leadership is not the answer to all organization problems, it does not directly produce prosperity. Leadership emerges and disappears constantly and spontaneously in an organization as a part of its natural propensity; fixed prototypes and positions only limit and prevent the spontaneous manifestation of the natural leadership emerging within the organization. Leadership practices that result in prosperity are a product of mobilizing action in a direction that is aligned with the situational momentum of the organization. But if situational momentum is resisted, leadership and the 'anthropocentric' shi 勢 that it generates is likely to encounter heavy resistance from the propensity of the situation and is likely to result in failure. This approach to leadership invites a re-examination of the anthropocentric thinking that is deeply rooted in leadership scholarship.

This conception of leadership can provide new directions for the development of existing leadership research building on a quantum type of consciousness. For one, it allows leadership studies to focus on propensity and movement without being bounded by the Western limits of identity and meaning.

As contemporary leadership thought begins to drift away from a static conception and toward a more fluid understanding of leadership, a Chinese conception of reality can function as a frame of reference to bring insights to the static origin of Western thought that created the need for fluidity and the potential obstacles it can potentially produce in the process.

Grounded in a conception of the world that is flux, the Chinese perspective adds a dimension to leadership studies that prioritize motion and propensity over definition and meaning. The purpose of studying the propensity of leadership is not to define it or distinguish its meaning or identity, but to maximize prosperity from the natural propensity of leadership through the detection of its *shi* 勢 and take advantage of its momentum as it happens. This requires a quantum way of thinking. It approaches leadership as being *in-motion* and opens up new dimensions of leadership knowledge and inquiries that investigate the detection, manipulation, and efficiency in taking advantage of the natural anthropocentric tendency and momentum spontaneously emerge within the organization as it is happening. This approach could also have implications on an alternative approach to efficacy which inefficient decisions and counterproductive actions are conceived in relation to their alignment with leadership or the existing 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢.

Conceiving leadership through *shi* 勢 can also potentially contribute to the expansion of existing leadership theories. As leadership is studied for the purpose of taking advantage of its propensity, the lack of meaning or identity can no longer hold the leadership scholarship back from exploring the complexity of leadership process. This is especially beneficial for the emerging theories that are grounded in a process ontology or practice ontology that has been critiqued for morphing leader and follower into the same leadership process and makes leadership indistinctive (Alvesson, 2019). The practice perspective conceives leadership as a result of spontaneous productions of directions through the everyday mundane interactions, relations, and actions (Raelin, 2011). However, this model places itself in a binary categorization within the traditional competency model (Carroll et al., 2008) and fails to produce a way of understanding leadership efficacy and take advantage of the everyday production of direction (Alvesson, 2019). But conceived through *shi* 勢, the spontaneous everyday production of organizational direction is recognized as a tendency 'in-motion' that its accumulation produces momentum. By detecting leadership or the 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢, the organization can take advantage of this momentum and profit from its actualization.

The findings of this paper also have real-world implications for managers and CEOs. By recognizing that leadership, including its type, configuration, and power dynamics, appears and disappears circumstantially in an organization to serve spontaneously emerged issues, managers and CEOs can reflect on the role they can play in acquiring organizational prosperity. Instead of trying to be effective leaders in every situation, being the regulators of *shi* 勢 can be a more efficient way for acquiring prosperity.

Knowing that the 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢 is the driving force of organizational activities, managers and CEOs can leverage *shi* 勢 by aligning the organizational direction, goals, and tasks with the direction of the 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢. Instead of designing the organizational structure, types of leadership, power dynamics, and ways of working together; driven by *shi* 勢, a circumstantially compatible way of functioning will form spontaneously in the process of working together to serve the collective's shared agenda and/or fulfill their common goal. And as *shi* 勢 changes, the organizational structure, type of leadership, power dynamics, and ways of working together also modify spontaneously according to the organizational circumstance.

Managers and CEOs can also nurture the development of the 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢 in multiple ways. They can allocate resources that strategically further the development of *shi* 勢; they can also reward and informally strengthen the power of the simultaneously emerged leadership within the organization. Because the power dynamics emerge spontaneously as a consequence of *shi* 勢, people who play key roles within the collective are compatible with the group's dominant will under the circumstance. Informally increasing these key people's influences thus furthers the existing *shi* 勢. This is also to say that reducing their influences when 'anthropocentric' *shi* 勢 declines can also accelerate the contraction of *shi* 勢.

In their book on quantum leadership, Tsao and Laszlo (2019) identify over a dozen global businesses who demonstrate 'a consciousness of connectedness' reflected in their desire to increase employees'

awareness of the positive impacts their companies have on society and the planet. For example, Unilever strives to view its corporate mission and strategy in terms of positively affecting the 17 sustainable development goals. Furniture giant, IKEA, focuses its entire corporate outlook on being People and Planet Positive. For a thriving world, quantum thinking is necessary. Quantum social change mandates a change of business narratives to revise dominant norms to reflect equity and human flourishing (O'Brien, 2021).

By not directly interfering with the forming of leadership, managers and CEOs as regulators of the 'anthropocentric' shi 勢 should not directly modify employees' lives; consequently, they would encounter minimal to no resistance from the employees. Instead, by nurturing shi 勢, they are likely to be seen by the employees as the supporters of the collective's causes. The findings of this research suggest that being a regulator of the 'anthropocentric' shi 勢 can be an efficient way of managing an organization.

Limitations and Future Research

As underlined by Li (2014: 305), 'it requires a lot of confidence to explore a new path rather than to exploit an old road'; and of course, we acknowledge the limitations of our proposed approach in this paper. Since our approach involves abstract concepts from ancient Chinese wisdom and quantum physics, the empirical measurement of propensity and a broader consciousness present a challenge. Given the nature of these concepts of ways of thinking, no quantitative measurements of shi 勢 and quantum thinking have been developed. The approach offered in this present article (from the Chinese shi 勢 as organizational propensity) is much more conducive to qualitative research methods or to case studies. Future research on leadership process needs address this challenge through qualitative studies to identify if quantum leader characteristics exist in multinational companies. Future work should consider how shi 勢 and organizational propensity may vary across contexts and cultures where there is constant change, diversity of employees, and diverse supply chains. Again, this is likely best approached through qualitative interviewing research methods that can identify 'anthropocentric' shi 勢 among leaders.

In organizational settings, as a starting point for future research, managers can encourage reflexivity and mindfulness that can encourage broader worldviews in practice. For quantum-type thinking, several secular techniques can be exercised. Presencing practices including contemplation time at work and the use of meditation rooms are useful for instilling a sense of connectedness (Tsao & Laszlo, 2019). Mindfulness-based stress reduction practices that emphasize embodied awareness and compassion are also useful in this regard. Relatedly, firms can employ Eastern active embodiment exercises like yoga and qigong.

Our paper attempts to contribute to management and organization knowledge by freeing leadership process research from the bounds of dominant Western modes of thinking, especially its privilege of human action over the natural propensities of the sensory world. We build on the premise that a deeper knowledge of Eastern philosophical and linguistic traditions can provide a fuller understanding of leadership studies in a global environment (Barkema, Chen, George, Luo, & Tsui, 2015; Vu & Gill, 2019). We contend that leadership process scholarship can benefit from insights from the Chinese wisdom, especially its awareness and respect to the power of the spontaneous, fluid and unidentifiable aspects of organization. Approaching leadership process as a relational outcome between the natural propensity of a situation and human actions suggests a potentially more holistic understanding of how situation manifest comparing to a human-centered interpretation. The Chinese way of thinking could be used to understand the propensity of thinking that will propel us into a quantum phase. As we have argued in this paper, this approach conceives propensity as the interplay between the tendency produced by the source, and the situation from which the tendency develops. While we do not reject Western notions of leadership and leadership process, we argue that an integration of mindsets can help the field address modern-day challenges and situations. It is time for the field to evolve into a new phase of research for approaching leadership process.

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