

HUMAN RESOURCES IN CHINESE MANAGEMENT – BETWEEN THE MEMOIRS OF ANCESTRY AND THE PURVIEW OF CONTEMPORANEITY

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Abstract:

The strategic planning of human resources¹ management in China has taken the shift gear that economic development in China embarked on plenty of years ago. This commutation in the case of human resources strategic planning has taken a lot of time to be released. The implementation of strategic planning has been put in motion by the influence that branches of foreign firms, opened in China, has been placed upon local firms. It was imperative that an actuation of human resources management strategies to be sparked off as the polishing of image of local firms needed to happen, considering all the haling circumstances involved. In this article, we aim to present a philosophical ancestry of the principles that Chinese corporate thinking in the field of human resources management, as well as a personal conspectus of the state in which human resources management strategies are applied today.

Keywords: Chinese Management, Corporate Thinking, Human resources, Human capital, Human resources Competency, Confucianism, Mencius

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1. Chinese Management – The Memoirs of Ancestry

There are very few countries in the world in which when characterizing an aspect of life, a certain social run-through or performance, when has to attend also the philosophical pursuance underneath. In Asia, we encounter many countries where the memoirs of ancestry have dug corridors that are still not sterile, but rich in meaning for everyday life. Approximating a statistical norm, in Asia, China, Japan, South Korea and India are countries where philosophical principles have been computed in corporate life². Whether in an employment or in a patronage of

¹ Throughout this article, we have used the terms – **human resources** and **human capital** – within the same import of sense and message;

² Of all the countries cited above, India is the least intended to refer to philosophical principles in corporate life; The corporate vitality is a separate area of human life – an approach borrowed via the British influence; Philosophy has found a haven in social life, especially in familial surroundings, or

philosophy, **Chinese management** has not lost at all the refinement of some Chinese philosophical principles that have delivered the key of meaning and explanation for its systematic and longest conversation with corporate principles and strategies, especially in the field of **human capital** in Chinese firms.

Hardly, during so many centuries have these principles changed their befitting implications for corporate thinking. In other parts of the world, **corporate philosophy** is differentiated from what the scholastic meaning of philosophy stands for, leading a beggarly existence on its side. Some of the critics of **Chinese management** have referred to it, more or less as a dusty, vacated room in search of an owner³.

Tracing the map of economic changes, there have been meticulous happenings in the field of corporate management in China, too. The macrocosm of Chinese philosophy has had to allow the keenness of Western principles. These have not entered the Chinese space as such. Moreover, they brought in an insertion of informality and pliability which was not contemplated before in the Chinese corporate world⁴. Stephen Morgan makes a comment regarding the loose-limbed items of corporate strategy that have entered during the last decade the Chinese world: „Withdrawal of overarching government intervention is partial at best. Nearly a third of the mail of Chinese managers comes from government agencies, compared with about 6 per cent for senior managers in America. Unlike their American counterparts, though, Chinese managers reply to little of it, preferring to engage superiors in face-to-face contact. This behaviour reflects a cautious trait of long ancestry: formal written responses may return to haunt you with unpredictable repercussions. Few managers keep diaries, interruptions are constant-made worse by the mobile phone-and frequently managers communicate with each other by dropping in for informal chats and a smoke” (Stephen:2004).

Philosophical principles have not become, withal, something to store away and retrieve later. They are held in auction for explanations and interpretations

in inter-personal relations; More public percepts of social life are not at all treated within the same philosophical mien and air; On the contrary, it finds that philosophy is not to be immersed into such rife and ordinary issues; One can see the difference of impact that philosophy has had in East and South Asia; The difference emerges from the aching of historical wounds and from the menial discourse on how human life has to be managed in East Asia;

³ The author introduced such a metaphor in order to highlight the fact that, especially in Western thinking, philosophical principles are ill-timed for the corporate environment; For some time, this has been associated with China's lack of progress, chiefly in the economic field; Notwithstanding these criticisms, this is something, currently speaking that cannot be decried on China; Hence, the maintaining of philosophical principles into the corporate thinking has not been a hampering, anti-development element;

⁴ One must not let aside the fact that Chinese firms are mostly state-owned; Tractableness was not an option, until recently; Even now, it is not a thing that the top and inferior management musters easily;

regarding the Chinese way of life, and for making China a household name as a **gracious, gratifying economic giant**⁵. They are considered most suitable and right for the showing of knowledge, skill and aptitude of how the Chinese would rather do business. Indeed, as Stephen carries on explaining shifts did happen for Chinese management also: “The past two decades have been challenging times for managers of state enterprises, with the winding back of the planned economy, deregulation, a new competitive environment populated by foreign-invested firms, township and village enterprises, and the rise of private firms. Their enterprises have been reformed repeatedly to become more market-attuned, reconfigured into joint stock companies or quasi-private enterprises, or recycled (sometimes pensioned off) via asset management companies” (Stephen:2004). The expectation of limitation did not give full measure to such events.

The narrative of these memoirs ranks in its higher-most echelons the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. Their teachings have modified the **human resources** strategies utilized in China in order to manage as best as possible the resource and control-based divisions of corporate management in Chinese firms⁶.

The cultural variables of Chinese management are a coordinated mosaic whose main coagulating force is **Confucianism**. Chinese management, like Chinese culture, is an area of constant accumulation. In order to paraphrase Timothy Garton Ash, “**cultural purity** is an oxymoron”⁷ (Gartons Ash:2009). The ways of recommendation of the Chinese culture are many.

Confucianism is an ethical and philosophical system which supplements plenty of directional norms regarding how social life is to be managed in order to fulfill the moral borrow excavation within someone. According to Confucius, a human being can only survive in a social context. Human beings are so interlinked by inner social **virtues** that their existence is caused by them and labeled by their marks. Human beings cannot exist by themselves. There are five social responsible societal relations which an individual can foster in his/hers social interactions: **father-child, superior-subordinate, old man –young man, husband-wife, friend-friend**. These types of relation have the following axiological pilasters which guide inter and intra social human behavior. Their connotations have the power to make it moral and

⁵ In order to be capable of pleasing the image that China wants to promote in foreign affairs: that of a peaceful ascent;

⁶ **Human resource strategies** could not have been took up as such; The fund would be Chinese with some twists of modern strategy-making;

⁷ Gartons Ash Timothy in: **What Confucius tells us about China and beyond**, www.theguardian.com, **date of accesion: 4th of July 2013, accesion time: 12:13 p.m.** professes a return of Confucianism in modern managerial thought in China; As elements of Chinese traditional cultures, **Confucianist principles** have become evergreen principles, clearly exhibiting implications in China`s national being;

based on the likelihood of righteous convictions: **Li** (referring to social rite and etiquette), **Hsiao** (familial understanding), **Yi** (the spirit of justice), **Xin** (honesty and trustworthiness), **Ren** (openness and kindness to others, compassion, virtue in its farthest inward meanings) and **Chung** (loyalty towards the state and state symbols).

These principles manufactured and **invested the social communitarianism** of Chinese society – the image of the island-individual is nullified and stopped from multiplying. Out of the axiological pilasters enumerated above, **Ren** is the punch-line of all human behavior and existence within a social format. Confucius pinpointed that **Ren** – implied for the dutiful individual the levy concerns for the welfare of the others. This denied the interference of roles. As Confucius declared: “there is working governance where the prince is a prince, the minister is minister and the father is a father” (Confucius – **Lunyu**, translation apud: Osamu:1998). A role-reversal is also out of the question. Social hierarchies are not to be down-sized if power is to be effective and moral. An efficient government must be a pumping reservoir of **morality**, as Confucius professed. Confucius` teachings are lively lessons of government, of governance and management. In the field of **human resources** and **human capital**, there are praise-worthy for the briefing debut of hierarchy and obedience between the three levels of management: executive, middle and strategic. The doggedness of these principles has created some generational gaps in approach and in the definition of **human resources** strategies, as Maris Martinson and David Ma observe: “The generation gaps suggest that events such as the **Cultural Revolution** as well as the implementation of both the Open Door Policy and **the One-Child Policy** have shaped the information ethics of Chinese managers. We also discovered fundamental tensions between Western moral philosophies (based on rules, democracy, individual rights, and personal freedoms) and the traditions of Chinese culture (based on relationships, hierarchy, collective responsibilities, and social harmony)” (Martisons, Ma:2009).

For Confucius, **morality** is not a concept that can be reinforced through coercion. It is a concept that binds the individual and the leader within certain behavioral prerequisites. It has a constraining aspect, when and if adopted. However, it cannot be managed through imposition. It is a concept that creates a general indebtedness towards certain doings of comportment, attitude and compassion towards others. According to Confucius, individual property has to be shown the proper respect, despite all the implications arising from **communitarianism**. The image of the individual is also dignified, no matter how strong the emphasis on collective living is. There are many sanctioning norms for the behavior of an individual within a social context. However, these come from inside and from an abstract capsule concentration of conceptual thinking. Many have thought of the **Confucianist system of thinking** that it was too abstractionist for **human**

resources management. In its actual engendering, laws were ethereal – moral and interior. It was considered that **Confucianist thinking**, as it was construed from the written evidence of Confucius' precepts, was disregarding the **legalism** that the moral maxims and injunctions must follow in order to retain a proper following. This lack of interest towards **legalism** was thought to be limiting the inheritance left for **human capital** management, especially in the corporatist field of application⁸.

A very important fillip of Confucianism, especially regarding the human development field in connection with **human resources** management is to learn to be connected and inspired also. An individual must develop a sense of **morality**, first and foremost, by his/her own. Nonetheless, an individual has to be inspired by the superior in rank, the parent, the husband to be moral. **Communitarianism** provides the most adequate milieu for **morality** to make steady progress and to render successful outcomes. If the line of inspiration is broken from its high-pitched ranks, then the inter-subjective social practices will produce a dearth for the implementation of **morality**. If this should happen in the lowest-pitched ranks, then there is still a hope for the evolution of **virtue** and of **morality**.

An enlightened approach to **human resources** management and, especially to the **human capital** strategies that corporate China infers nowadays, can also be drawn from the teachings of Mencius. When mentioned the word **enlightened**, because Mencius provided another philosophical system based on the idea that human beings were inherently good. Beginning with the examination of the good-natured individual and of his/her natural disinclination towards doing Evil, Mencius considered **empathy** to be the most important think that a person should be capable of in his/her social practices. Mencius took on, with pride and absolute fealty and precision **the Confucianist principles**. He developed also other sides of them, that were not particularly earmarked by Confucius, but that were outsourced from **the Confucianist philosophical system**⁹. For Mencius, it was important that a leader

⁸ If legal sanctions were not introduced as incentives of behavior, then what could actually be the purpose of moral ordinances for an individual?; The application of such norms of behavior was thought to be null, if it could not be followed through a proper mechanism of detection of mistakes and of deviations, that will ascertain that such deviations will not occur?; In **the Confucianist line of thinking**, the practice of **ren** is left in the hands and customs of possibility for each and everyone interested; Once an individual turns to **ren**, then he/she will discover and determine the existence of his/her mistakes and will be able to correct them, so that they will not be present anymore in day-to-day behavior; Confucius thought the acquisition of **ren** should not be imposed through authority, coercion or inspired; It should come obviously and unaffectedly for an individual; The acquisition of **ren** was an intimate act; An act that should be acquired as a totality of accumulations and experiences and through the free will of an individual; If an individual cannot express his/her free will in the acquisition of **ren**, then the power of influence of **ren** upon the usual course of behavior that an individual has, will be limited;

⁹ It is believed that Mencius received much of the knowledge of **the Confucianist teachings** from

cared for the destiny of his/her subjects. For Mencius, the most important thing that a state or an organized system, analogous in structure and functions to a body of governance has, is the people. This is the most important legacy that Mencius left for the **human resources** management also: the special importance stressing the human resource in an organization, as opposed to other resources that an organization may decide to develop or invest in. In the study of Charles Rarick, excerpts from the teachings of Mencius are taken, in order to show an area of lightness in the picture of **human resources**: “The people are the most important element in a state; next comes the gods of land and grain; least of all the ruler himself” (Mencius in: Rarick:2008).

The extrapolated principles were that the main highlighter of state-policies (and in the case of organizational management – organizational policies!) have to be the people (the **human resources** working in an organization, who are in the process of acquiring an **organizational identity**). If for Confucius **authority** mattered more, for Mencius, the most insightful awareness was given by the support and the care towards others that an inter-subjective social coexistence could bring – for the leader, as well as for those in lower tiers of authority and of command. For Mencius, leading by example was more important than leading by **authority**¹⁰. These mentioning are quite clear: “When the prince is benevolent, everyone else is benevolent; when the prince is dutiful, everyone is dutiful; when the prince is correct, everyone else is correct. Simply by rectifying the prince one can put the state on a firm basis” (Mencius in: Rarick:2008).

The centerpiece of Confucius` system of ethical beliefs was **ren - virtue**. For Mencius, the most important thing that a leader can attain is **Dao**. Empathy towards others is very important. However, it is not an instrument that a figurehead can relate to, or depend on, when making fundamental government decisions, so that his inner profile will not be obstructed. This inner profile, is associated, in the perspective of Mencius, with the bent of artistry that a leader possesses or develops not to ruin the degree of balance, in society and in nature also. By **Dao**, Mencius refers to the forte of **harmony** in state (and by extension, in organizational!) policies¹¹.

one of Confucius grandsons; Therefore, his attachment to their greater meanings and to the accuracy of their interpretations cannot be understated;

¹⁰ Confucius was also adherent to the leadership by example; For Confucius, unlike for Mencius, a leader`s authority must not be questioned; If such a thing could happen, then many major social imbalances could follow suit to such a situation; Mencius felt that a leader should prove his skills of leadership by displaying caginess and aid towards his/her subjects and by having their needs, queries, desires under a very watchful attention;

¹¹ These ideas were also clutched on by **the Daoist religion**, to which Mencius` beliefs can find some hobnobs in the process of comparison: the same respect for **virtue** and for **the natural order and balance**; Another important point of addition, to which **Daoism** makes reference to, but to whom Mencius did not find it appropriate for stark interrelation is the fact that life is meant to be enjoyable and led without the infliction of pain and suffering upon the individual; One can see here a substance

A leader, as Mencius points out, must not motivate him/herself to redefine the natural order of things. He/She, instead, must work, with in, and provide, by his/her decisions, a connected account to it. The trustworthy history of leadership is for the one who pursues **harmony**. The adequate study of **harmony** anticipates the criticism of despotism and certain wrongs in the political leadership. What Mencius left for the **human resources** management and for the managerial theory, in general, is **humanism** and the idea that people must come first¹². Another very important legacy was the fact that any policy adopted at the top level of management is expected to be familiar with the policies adopted and the middle and inferior levels of management, in order to for the organizational planning to be **harmonious** with the quantitative analysis of the resources available and of the other planning made. The successive changes can be, likewise, assimilated more quickly and without plenty of misrepresenting facts. The failure to produce a good image for the future of an organization can also result from a disharmonious engagement of resources and of landmarks charted for future maturational outgrowth.

On balance, Mencius and Confucius interconnect in their bequest on organizational theory and **human capital** strategies for today's Chinese corporate brainwork. One introduced **management by duty**, the other **management by benevolence**. It is very important to note the fact that neither one of these featured traits actually missed from the ideas professed by both Mencius and Confucius. The contemplative ideas which the other thought to have a more important standing, could actually be laid bare of differences in the contemplative explanations of the other. What is actually various and unconventional between the two of them is the stress-mark placed by each of them on these idiosyncrasies. We will swing the motion of our analysis now to a cognizance of **human capital** and **human resource management** in the probe of research of modern-day Chinese corporate thinking.

2. **Human capital in Chinese Corporate Thinking – The Purview of Contemporaneity**

Modern-day Chinese corporate thinking has been hard and immune to introducing Western principles of corporate **human resources** management, especially in the first years after China opened the gates and the interconnectedness with global economy flooded in¹³. China is still one of the few socialist countries

of difference, in comparison to **Confucianism**, for whom duty and the obligation to live by virtues were the most important prerequisites that an individual must upraise and unravel in his/her social inter-subjective practices;

¹² Centuries later, this was explained and put forward, in Western managerial theory, by Elton Mayo **and the Human Relations School**;

¹³ China had to prove that it was different even if **capitalism** hit hard the economic foundations of the country; The mark of **Chineseness** had to be put in the string of quotation of intentions that

in the world. **Business ventures** were an explored territory, not only in the field of economic development, but also in the field of **human capital** management. These had to be bodied in an organizational thinking that was replete of a coordinated system of motivation¹⁴. The expertise for introducing such principles was lacking, also. The public sector lapsed in business endeavors and provided a point of emulation, in both structure and the performance of duties. The information flows stressed from within did not match an opportunity to influence the decisions taken by the decisional fora¹⁵.

The general reader of the strategies that could convey a repeated offspring of models and paradigms in day-to-day functioning of firms and business organisms in China depended on the way the state-sector understood these changes and the way it should seek information from them. Doug Guthrie summarizes the same points of analytical inquest made by the author of this article: “As many countries around the globe—from Eastern and Central Europe to China and Vietnam—have struggled to find a formula for a successful transition from planned to market economy, the Chinese case has been far and away the most successful of this group. Inasmuch as one of the key organizing principles of China’s reform process has been the gradual transformation of the state sector, there has been considerable attention focused on the dynamics and process of the gradual reform of this sector of the economy and on whether state-led gradualist reform can lead to the creation of a market economy or whether continued state involvement in the economy lies in fundamental opposition to a market economy. Despite the central government’s continued involvement in and support of the state sector, this sector of the economy has declined significantly in terms of its importance, at least according to such official measurements as percentage contribution to GDP and industrial output. It is the other firms in the economy—the “nonstate” firms—which have been referred to as the engine of economic growth that has made China’s economic transformation such a dramatic tale” (Guthrie:2008). Yes, indeed the firms of the non-state sectors have registered to apply for much more significance as far as the **human resources** strategies are concerned. We will peg down the essential qualities of both the public sector organisations, as well as the non-state firms in China. Both of them make an express demand to be analyzed, especially in order to slate out if any changes were made, as China became **an economic juggernaut**¹⁶

were made when searching for ideas of how to maintain **traditionalism** and still spur economic development;

¹⁴ Until 1979, organizational thinking was not thought to be incarnated for creating **a performance-system of human resources**;

¹⁵ A trait that reproduced the same instances of situation even in the small business sector that always indicated signs of presence in the Chinese economy;

¹⁶ A term which was all too often appropriated to China’s economic development, certainly, not in

in the global economy. We abridged a condensation of the main characteristic of human resource management strategies, as it is superseded by the following addendum of remarks:

- **Craving for change, but not sustaining change through adequate expertise;** The conditions for change have been noticed by the public sector and non-public organizations' managers; However, in China, the lack of specialized expertise suffers from a great deal of misrepresentation; Neither the cherishment of specialized expertise has been poignant; A re-orientation towards introducing specialized expertise is seen in both public and non-state organizations in the field of **human resources management**¹⁷; "The Chinese translation of competency training-- was introduced into China by foreign companies only in recent years. Foreign, independent, and joint-venture companies came to China and brought with them their own systems of HR management and employee selection, training and retention. At the same time many international consulting and training companies introduced management training, including competency standards" (Sun, Shi:2008). While one of the external factors for the introduction of **human resources** training and team-building programs was the bias of bandwagon set by the branches of foreign firms, opened in China, the model that China developed for the **human resources** management strategy was and is based on **authoritarianism** and **benevolence**; It is important for the managers that Chinese employees evince utter a certain reverence towards the higher degrees of hierarchy; In the majority of cases, this respect is linked with **competency**; The gestures of respect emphasize the abiding by the body of rules and prescriptions delineated by the superior in charge; Obedience was and still is a required trait for the Chinese employees, as much as it was in the past;

the sense of hero-worship, but rather in the sense of concern for a steamrolling actor, whose ascent was a source of concern for others;

¹⁷ In non-state public organizations, the revival of this prophecy has been more sharp to the keenly distressing effect of not having specialized expertise for **the management of human resources**; This professional prowess if thought to be correlated to the issue of **competency** and to the issue of development of **competency** in the field of **human resources management**; The field of **human resources management** was not given the virtuosity of know-how until now, as until now this was not thought to be pressing; Now, with the mobility of workforce and with the example set by the Chinese living abroad, especially by the ethnic Chinese that are working abroad in Southeast Asia, who can be pointed as success stories as far as their productivity in the workforce market is concerned, have shown that things could be done in a different way; Moreover, offshore firms in China have shown the Chinese managers that a **human resources management strategy** is needed for the missionary activity of a firm, starting within its structures;

- **The destitution of the decentralization of authority in Chinese firms;** Current **human resources** strategies have failed to provide clearer accents of decentralization; Unfortunately, it is not permissible to coin decentralization mechanisms in the Chinese firms; No matter how up-to-date such a subject of current preoccupation is, **authoritarianism** does not allow the flattening of hierarchies within private and public organizations alike; One could actually wonder if the private organizations still rip off special influence from the public sector organizations, where state authorities can freely impose the same model that they used for decision-making in the crafting of a socialist state, that drills and wields capitalist economic policies options; The demand of external conditions, for the razing of the syndrome of absolute power has not been touched profoundly in Chinese corporate organization; This is one of the main factors for the **monocracy**¹⁸ of **human resources** strategies applied;
- **The reproof regarding the scantiness of specificity in job-definition;** The requirements of job-definition and role-definition are not warranted with specifications; An employee is expected to accumulate job-roles and exercise them simultaneously; This is a factor that certainly affects **job-performance**; Empirical evidence in the case of state-owned enterprises is very difficult to obtain, as vagueness and imprecision characterize any information concerning the functioning of state agencies in China; It is expected that public organizations are more attentive for the labeling of job requirements, as things are expected to be much more legally stipulated within the **human resources** framework; The over-extension of attributes for the employees is walloping; This mien will have to be addressed, first and foremost, if the manner of use of **human resources** strategies are to teeming;

In our opinion, the consumptive aspects of the manner in which **human capital** and human resources are approached, show the strong rack of reality that Chinese firms are ledgering at the present moment. We believe that these changes were not spanned by inner circumstances, but rather by outer pressures, imparted by the worldwide scale of influence that the Chinese economy has attained.

Final Deductions

Human resources competency remains a proposed syllogism for the Chinese firms, triggered, in most cases, by the illations of the growth that the Chinese

¹⁸ With reference to the shogunate of decision for the implementation of **human resources** decisions; These are taken mostly by the strategic level of management; In most organizations, a department specialized in **human resources**, responsible for motivation incentives, evaluation of **human resources`** activity, or for the hiring of new people does not exist.

economy has experienced. **Human resources**, within the Chinese firms, are not focused in greatest detail. The changes of the Chinese economy were rather abrupt: they kept some elements from the past for future use and application, while trying to push forward the future plans for China's global emergence: political, economic and security wise. When speaking about the Chinese firms, one cannot take into account the process of the gradual transformation happening in China, at all these levels of development. **Authoritarianism** is an effect of **filial piety** that Confucius introduced in Chinese philosophical thinking. This was kept in fortification by Mencius, even though Mencius did not uphold it in the highest veneration. Surprisingly or not, **human resources** strategies account traditional philosophical principles, as these principles founded a way of life, a culture and a civilization. The transmission of these principles in modern-day China underline the monstrosity of conceptual fact moods, issued from generation, to generation, and also the revulsion to adjustment of Chinese society in general, especially if these needs are not self-imposed!

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