TALENT DIVERSITY IN CHINA

A Garden of Learning Opportunities

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In this article servant-leadership is highlighted in relation to nurturing the diversity of talents. Nurturing talent diversity means developing multiple competencies in individuals and in teams. Servant-leadership is a philosophy and practice of leadership, where leaders achieve results for their organizations by giving priority to the needs of those they serve. Servant-leaders are key in enhancing the full talent potential of people. Exploring and building talent competences is a life-long process in learning communities such as the home, the school, and the corporate workplace. China's fascination with Multiple Intelligences theory (MI) can be traced back to the historical influence of, among others, their rich Confucian heritage. Culture-specific angles with roots in Confucianism and other philosophies in China are meaningful to help understand the twenty-first-century multicultural workplace. In the future, comparative educational research may provide awareness of how servant-leadership can enhance talent diversity and create meaning in worldwide learning communities. With the increased globalization of the workplace, talent development in the perspective of cultural diversity has become an imperative. The new lifelong learning generation is not only diverse in age, gender, language, and cultural background; they may also differ in their learning competencies and ambitions. If the learning environment is inspiring, their leaders may nurture and serve their talents. Talent diversity and servant-leadership are considered here in the context of lifelong learning, where learners are motivated and inspired to get the most out of their life, study, work, and leisure.

There is not one overarching talent dimension. Talent diversity is a composite of various human competences of equal value, nurtured by servant-leaders in educational and business settings. In this article we will

take a closer look at local talent practices in the case of China. We will learn from the different talent development priorities, needs, and concerns. How can (educational) leaders anticipate these, and what if talent nurturing is hindered in a communist regime? From Confucian history we learn that Chinese education is devoted to promoting all-round talent development: moral, intellectual, physical, and artistic. In China today, a remarkable revival of these historical educational values can be noticed, reshaped by new twenty-first-century insights. This time the educational renewal is inspired by, among others, the MI containing components of Western and more Eastern cultures. Political, cultural, and educational factors contributing to the success of MI in emerging China will be discussed. This article concludes with a discussion of the comparative research implications—exploring new horizons on how to interconnect the East toward West metaphor, beyond bipolar thinking. It is about promoting culture-sensitive learning empowered by servant-leaders.

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP CONCEPTUALIZATION

First, we will identify the meaning of talent diversity nurtured by servant-leadership. Subsequently, we will be able to apply the concept of servant-leadership to the context of talent diversity in the case of China.

What is servant-leadership? Over the centuries, world religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and philosophies such as those of the Romans and Greeks adopted the idea of servant-leadership in their own way. In recent decades, an international knowledge network on servant-leadership has developed. With his inspiring and fundamental work Robert K. Greenleaf (1977) strengthened the spiritual connection with and gave meaning to servant-leadership in the world of business and academia. Since the powerful vision of Greenleaf, servant-leadership has been a growing movement in industry, public (school) organizations, and academia. In addition, there have been leadership developments that are not explicitly labeled "servant-leadership" but have a lot in common with the principles of servant-leadership, such as ethical leadership and transformational leadership.

Servant-leadership is multidimensional, and enhances more than ever before the human and ethical factor in (school) organizations. Traditional leaders tend to be focused on tasks, control, and processes in organizations, whereas servant-leaders are connected with people in an ethical way,

reconciling dilemmas and empowering them as team members, employees, customers, pupils, students, or citizens. It is about empowerment; the servant-leader is keen to contribute value to other people to let their talents grow. The served people, for instance, school teachers and pupils, become healthier and more autonomous. They are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility to others. Major attributes of servant-leadership can be found across cultures, as in the case of China. Moreover, these major attributes contain an ethical dimension and can be specified in:

1. **Listening**. Unbiased listening to the other with heart, mind, and ears, to get in touch with one's inner voice and the desire to know what the other is thinking; being flexible and adaptive and exercising caution in the act of listening before speaking;
2. **Empathy**. Understanding others, accepting and recognizing their special and unique behaviors;
3. **Healing of relationships**. He/she genuinely cares about other people and their welfare; healing is a powerful ethical force for transformation and integration;
4. **Awareness**. Achieving mindfulness through reflection. General as well as self-awareness creates a better understanding of power, ethics, and values in groups. The leader knows what is going on in the organization, the team or the situation and adjusts accordingly;
5. **Persuasion**. Convincing rather than coercing others, effectively building consensus within groups and helping other people to understand and learn;
6. **Conceptualization**. Thinking beyond day-to-day realities, seeking a delicate balance with conceptual thinking; helping others to see the bigger picture and how everything relates;
7. **Foresight**. Understanding the lessons of the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of the future. The leader has a vision and wants others to embrace and embody the vision;
8. **Stewardship**. Holding the trust of others in order to serve the needs of all; by serving in a mindful and ethical way, a good leader gains the trust and confidence of others;
9. **Commitment to the growth of others**, committed to their learning and improvement;
10. **Building community** among those who work within a given organization. (see Nuijten, 2009; Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009; Vargas & Hanlon, 2007; Spears, 2000; Hale & Fields, 2007)

The concept of servant-leadership includes dynamic dilemmas. Servant-leaders serve their followers with compassion. At the same time, a servant-leader is accountable for the performance of his or her organization, such as a company, school, church, or even a nation. Each investment of the servant-leader in the well-being of the other is at the same time an investment for the benefit of the common good. The leader's skills appear in bridging the contrasting dilemmas of leading and serving, courage and caution, control and compassion, power over and commitment to others. This article will demonstrate that from a historical point of view Chinese servant-leaders have long possessed the skills to reconcile these dilemmas. Trompenaars and Voerman (2009) show that servant-leadership can be found across modern and ancient cultures such as in India, Greece, and, in our case, China. Thus, for example, Aristotle stated that the essence of life is to serve others and do good (Handy, 1978). Within the concept of servant-leadership, leading and serving are two sides of the same coin. Despite cultural diversity among people and their talents, there is a common basis, namely, being human. According to Trompenaars and Voerman (2009), servant-leaders are not tempted into making a choice between two opposite (cross-cultural and/or ethical) values. In other words, servant-leaders avoid choosing an unsatisfactory compromise. The servant-leader will choose a solution where both opposing value sets—such as love and power—are combined in a dialectical process. Through thesis and antithesis, the servant-leader achieves synthesis, which enriches the intercultural context of the common good. Managing to reconcile cultural dilemmas is an integral part of this dialectical process. In the following article we will see how the Chinese relational mindset is learningful. In the dialectical perspective of servant-leadership detrimental extremes are avoided. Opposites such as "servant" and "leader" do not exist as such, but are bound together and interconnected. This is in line with ancient Chinese philosophy. For example, the Chinese word for "conflict" (衝突) consists of two symbols, namely, danger and opportunity. Within relationships with other people, even in times of crisis, lies the birth of all opportunities. In the relational perspective of Chinese organizations, the servant-leader not simply reflects personal priorities or a selected group of stakeholders. Beyond that, a leader must serve and reconcile the interests of all stakeholders, including the society at large (Chen and Miller, 2011).

China in the Global Economy

China entered the international market economy during the last few decades. Today it is the world's second-largest economy. Many Chinese companies are increasingly successful since the complex and multifaceted market reforms in the People's Republic of China. China is not only inter-connected with the external market economy; China is interconnected with the international world of training and development—through East-West university linkages, (imported) MBA and in-company courses, and highly qualified Chinese expatriates returning to their home country. China's entry into the international market was made possible through a policy of "open doors" that accompanied the economic reform in the late 1970s. Given the importance of China in our interconnected global economy and its human potential (with a total population of 1.3 billion), it is essential to get to know more about China's talent approach. China has a long history of Confucianism, Taoism, and various other cultural influences. It has affected Chinese thinking and behavior, also with respect to education. Despite China's emerging superpower status of today, both the former planned economy and ancient cultural influences such as Confucianism are still visible in many aspects of Chinese society.

Confucianism, Leadership, and Education

Confucianism in ancient China originated more than two thousand years ago. This article's focus is on Confucianism, though other philosophies also influenced Chinese society, such as Taoism (preceded even Confucianism), Buddhism, communism, and, recently, capitalism. The traditional culture of Confucianism is integrated in and visible through, for instance, the style of leadership in current Chinese (school) organizations. Respect for wisdom and seniority is an important layer in Confucianism and other religious beliefs in China. In early childhood and throughout one's lifetime this value is cherished. Biggs and Watkins (2001) show insights into teaching the Chinese learner through Confucian concepts such as filial piety (Chinese: 孝; pinyin: *xiào*), which describes respect for the parents

and ancestors. In a family, the son's or daughter's filial duty is to care for and nurture their own physical, mental, and moral qualities. Each child tries to be as perfect as possible, in order to pay due honor, love, and respect to his/her parents. Filial piety is also due in the world outside the family. The child has to care for the good name and reputation of one's parents and ancestors. Later on in professional life one has to earn enough money to support parents, and carry out sacrifices to ancestors. This respectful attitude toward seniority is visible in adulthood, where you show respect for the skills and experience of your master, such as a teacher, tutor, or your father, also called *shifu* 師傅 or *dashi* (great master in, e.g., arts). Filial piety and other expressions of respectfulness have influenced the style of leadership in Chinese organizations. Ellis (2004) shows how current Chinese leaders enhance organizational commitment by building relationships with their followers. From Confucian culture, true leaders almost routinely care for their followers and their talents (compare servant-leadership attribute 2, empathy). Western managers need to recognize how in twenty-first-century Chinese organizations the social relationship more often than not comes before the task. True Chinese leaders are role models acting in the spirit of social responsibility. These leaders try to benefit both the local followers' talents and the larger organization. Chinese leaders try to motivate followers by applying the Confucian recognition that the individual is inseparable from society (compare servant-leadership attribute 6, conceptualization, and attribute 10, community building). Last but not least, the following Confucian proverb illustrates the long-term empowering vision regarding durability and investing in education: "If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of ten years, plant trees; if in terms of 100 years, teach the people."

Humility

Zhang and Ng (2009) highlight the blessing of leadership humility and servant-leadership. A true leader does not fight for power, position, or self-serving interests (compare servant-leadership attribute 9, commitment). Servant-leaders do not bring others down in a selfish way for their own advancement on the career stepladder. Ideally, these leaders work together primarily for the common good. Zhang and Ng (2009) quote Confucius in the *I Ching*: "If a leader is too full of himself, he will not be held in esteem

despite his noble position; he ranks high but no one follows him; he may have wise men under him in the hierarchy, but they do not assist him; the more he wants to make a move, the greater the resistance. He will regret his arrogance."

Listening

To a Western observer it may seem that the Chinese learner is passive and not participating actively in the classroom. However, the Chinese learner may listen intently when teachers present or interact with other students in a way that few Western students do (Biggs & Watkins, 2001). The listening talent is highly trained in Chinese schools (compare servant-leadership attribute 1, listening). This listening skill implies that even in large classes the teacher may interact only with a few for the lesson to be experienced by and meaningful for all.

Chinese toward Western Leaders

Recognizing that neither "Eastern," nor "Chinese," nor "Western" leaders are homogeneous entities, some features will be described here. Zhang and Chua (2009) identify features of Chinese and more Western leaders. Both types of leaders act differently in influencing others and promoting change. The Western (so-called) Harvard model of human resource management is characterized by restraint, modesty, and tenacity. The Chinese (so-called) *I Ching* (*I Ching* is an ancient classic Chinese book of divinations) model has virtues of prudence, balance, and authority. The *I Ching* is an essential guide to Chinese leadership, which is conducted by exercising patience, resonance, and balancing. The authors underline the need for leaders in both the Chinese and more Western organizations to be aware of the diverse models so as to enhance their competencies and capacities in maximizing change. The Harvard model (which views workers essentially as resources, but as resources that are stakeholders in the company as well) is well designed and highly applicable, according to Zhang and Chua (2009). At the same time, the Chinese classics on influential leaders are still relevant in today's world. Western leaders may want to control and channel as effectively as possible. In comparison, the *I Ching* leaders are cautious and considerate. Winning the trust of the people is considered most

important goal (*you fu*), as only then will the leaders' actions be perceived as righteous by their followers (*ge er dang*). Ideally, the servant-leader will choose a solution where both opposing value sets—such as prudence and control—are combined in a dialectical process.

I Ching Philosophy

From a historical point of view effective leadership, and how to inspire followers and nurture their talents, is based on the philosophical perspectives of the *I Ching, The Book of Changes* (Zhang & Chua, 2009). In ancient China the *I Ching*'s directions are expressed in and empowered by five pairs of qualities:

1. **Words and resonance**; effective leadership is not demonstrated through the leader's superior manner. Instead, it is reflected in the leader's actions. The value of integrity implies how words are used and how these words are translated into actions (compare servant-leadership attribute 5, persuasion);
2. **Articulation and creativity**; mindful, inspiring others through their clear vision, optimism, and a profound belief in their followers' ability to learn, or like the Chinese proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" (compare servant-leadership attribute 6, conceptualization);
3. **Caution and trustworthiness**; or a *junzi* leader with a noble character, sharing values with followers, enhancing a power of positive influence on the followers (compare servant-leadership attribute 9, commitment).
4. **Patience and engagement**; leaders are required to maintain calm in conflict situations, despite their emotions. Patience must be accompanied with sincerity and engagement. The combination of these personal qualities will enable the leader to become a forerunner, winning people's trust and willingness to follow him (compare servant-leadership attribute 8, stewardship);
5. **Balance and persistence**. Emotional maturity and balance is an essential quality of leaders. The leader needs to know when to concede the rights of followers with persistence, and when to withdraw them (compare servant-leadership attribute 4, awareness). Key is the desire to preserve the harmony of the group.

Local Talent Concerns

In the last decade China has steadily established a nationwide policy of developing human capital and adopting practical measures of implementing talent development (Yang & Wang, 2009). Some Chinese leaders do not feel familiar with the Western blueprint for talent development at all. Others are in a transition phase or have their own specific talent concerns. Thus, for example, there is concern about the urgent need for highly trained technicians (Hutchings et al., 2009) and the need for a new/improved work ethic in state-owned enterprises (Li & Madsen, 2009).

Incompatibility of Western Course Materials

Talent development has become a strategic necessity in multinational companies in China and joint ventures with Western counterparts. However, in these East-West businesses a major local-global dilemma occurs. Comparable Western talent development strategies and course material was and often is not appropriate or meaningful in the Chinese context. For example, Liang and Neng Shu (2008) show the lack of applicability of international business school curricula within the Chinese context. Local Chinese companies and their multinational counterparts struggle with transplanting and adopting Western educational insights into the Chinese local context (Wang et al., 2009).

Marketing Education

Another example comes from marketing education in China. What is the state of the art? More practical knowledge and local Chinese case materials in the marketing curriculum are required. Basu and Guo (2007) discuss the case of marketing education in China. Their research shows that the development of marketing education is well underway in China. However, a range of severe roadblocks to innovation of the curriculum can be anticipated. These innovation barriers are caused by China's educational leaders and their limited ability to nurture marketing talent. The current curriculum is overly theoretical. Practical marketing knowledge that is needed for

international talent development is missing. According to Basu and Guo (2007), China's educational mindset should change from the ad hoc to the systematic, and from the tactical to the strategic approach.

China's Got Talent

We will next touch on some of the current trends regarding China's talent. Without pretending to generalize the findings on any pan-country scale, we will explore, compare, and learn from ancinet and more recent talent practices within China. It may help twenty-first-century leaders, practitioners, and educationalists to better understand educational mindsets based on their own and other cultures.[1] A greater mutual awareness of educational mindsets across cultures is needed. The following comparison between Chinese and more Western talent approaches may help accelerate cross-cultural and reciprocal understanding. These are only first explorative steps to identify tailor-made talent strategies in China and beyond. More comparative research on China's talent is needed with respect to, for example, learning styles, (team) appraisal, recruitment, coaching and senior mentorship, performance management, career development, and professional training.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN CHINESE (MULTINATIONAL) COMPANIES

What is the relevance of local talent development in Chinese companies? Chinese policymakers may argue: Why not use the Western blueprints and anticipate assimilation in the more international global culture? For example, in large cosmopolitan cities such as Shanghai, local and typical Chinese talent potential has almost diminished. Gilmore (2003) gives a historical analysis of the creative potential of the city of Shanghai. In the 1920s and 1930s Shanghai was the artistic center of China. Shanghai's own traditional and indigenous culture flourished. The city was a beacon that drew talent from every corner of the world. In the Shanghai of today, the city's unique culture and traditions are sinking under external (Western) influences. Shanghai citizens would now rather assimilate international culture than anything local.

Asymmetric Understanding

Despite the globalization trends—as in the case of Shanghai—the Chinese workfloor and classroom are interconnected with the previously

described more traditional Chinese values. Talent development should not only be considered in the context of the quality and reciprocity of the Chinese relationships (like *guanxi*) on the workfloor or in the classroom. It is also about maintaining social harmony. Cheung (2008) shows how multinational companies in China encounter talent-related dilemmas. From an outsider and expatriate point of view these multinational companies "speak for" their local employees, as if the local employees had no voices of their own. The authors argue there is an asymmetric understanding between the Western managers and their Chinese employees. Cheung (2008) hopes that more talent-related studies may help create a platform for a meaningful cross-cultural dialogue between voices from the East and West.

Remuneration and Retention

In the former, centrally planned Chinese economy, all employees were equally paid. Salary was determined by the length and hours of service, rather than on performance or actual skill level (Chatterjee & Nankervis, 2007, p. 57). Pay differentials to support high performance of talents based on incentives and benefits were usually small. Material salary incentives were strictly limited. However, under the new Chinese Labour Law from 1995 onward (Chatterjee & Nankervis, 2007) the salary structure is increasingly based on individual performance and enterprise productivity, especially in the more wealthy and urban areas. This Labour Law was launched to increase flexibility in the employer-employee relationship and consequently better retain talent in Chinese companies. The employment contract system was introduced, incorporating efficiency and competitive values in the Chinese workplace. To retain talent, work incentives and career development schemes were implemented.

Local Talent Strategy Required in Multinational Firms

As has been stated, China's economy is growing rapidly. International companies start joint ventures or establish business divisions on the Chinese mainland. In practice, Western professionals in China often have to work in a highly complex, ambiguous, and uncertain environment. Despite the available Chinese talent pool,[2] there is an urgent need for specific (international) skills and talents. In their study for the *McKinsey Quarterly*, Guthridge, Komm, and Lawson (2008, p. 57) show how multinational company leaders in China such as Citigroup, General Electric, and HSBC

suffer from fierce competition for talent against local Chinese businesses. Therefore, new local talent strategies have been developed with nurturing facilities for career development, housing, educational benefits, and training. Talent shortage—especially among employees with English-speaking ability (Chatterjee and Nankervis 2007, 56–57)—is a major concern in China's business world today. Binding talent is another problem for leaders within multinational companies that operate in China. Sharon Ruwart, CEO of Elsevier Science & Technology in China, emphasizes that teamwork is one of the problems on the Elsevier work floor in China (Dijk van, 2008, p. 5). Chinese colleagues at Elsevier did not feel familiar with the Western way of teamwork and coaching at all. They were used to and preferred to follow the instructions of their Chinese supervisor, to get the best (team) achievements.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT LOCAL CHINESE COMPANIES

Major Talent Dilemmas

Even more complex are the talent-related dilemmas in the local Chinese companies themselves. There is a major lack of competent (servant-) leaders and managers in the emerging local companies and training facilities. Wang and Wang (2006) explored management training practices in China. Talent development for local managers in China tends to be fragmented and lacks coherence. To better understand the causes of the current talent crisis, the authors reviewed practitioner-based literature, including the most popular Chinese management trade journals (e.g., *Manager, Professional Managers in the Chinese Market, HR World*) and a few related Chinese Web sites (e.g., China Professional Managers Research Center's Website, China HRD Net, China Training Net, etc.). Major talent problems in current China were identified, such as reputation of the company, high turnover rate of employees, (im)balance between workload and compensation, workforce potential and unfair competition in the labor market, and (lack of) trust, integrity, and acknowledgment by the organization. Trompenaars and Woolliams (2011) show how in relationship-centered organizations among BRIC countries with their tolerance of failure, innovation and learning can be encouraged. At the same time this relationship-centered organization may also be wasteful. In the case of China, employees may be reluctant to compete with friends. This may hinder business opportunities. On the

other hand, in a rules-centered organization (e.g., in the United States or Australia) rules are more transparent, and often greater cost efficiency may be found. According to Trompenaars and Woolliams (2011) these rules-centered organizations also breed inflexibility and mountains of red tape. Ideally, companies can combine the virtues of both by recognizing that rules and exceptions are mutually sustaining. And this is key for giving way to talent development.

Transition Toward Market Economy

The transition from a planned economy to a market-driven economy has created great challenges for local Chinese leaders and managers. During the economic transition these managers had to shift roles from bureaucratic administrators to strategic decision makers, from civil servants that follow Chinese government decisions and orders (cadre or *gong pu*) to competitive managers. In practice, great resistance to change could be observed. Thus, for example, some Chinese HR (Human Resource) managers may still base their evaluations more on personal relationships than job performance. Wang et al. (2009) show how the Chinese workfloor may still be influenced by the more traditional "ruling of man" factor. This means that employee and talent selection is based more on *renqing* (human feelings) and *guanxi* (social relationships) than on personal competence. Promotion of employees is executed on the basis of loyalty and social acceptance. Financial compensation and rewards are mostly established on seniority rather than performance. Performance evaluation is largely qualitative and tends to be subjective. HRM in China is more focused on utilization of employees than on training and development of talents. Last but not least, the major task of the HR managers is to support and safeguard the social harmony in the Chinese company (Wang et al., 2009).

GUANXI IN DAILY LIFE

Above described talent-related dilemmas may occur in the fast-changing international and local Chinese companies. To further understand the context of Chinese talent development, nurtured by their (servant-) leaders, one of the important layers is the concept of *guanxi* (关系) in Chinese organizations. *Guanxi* stands for the (lifelong) personal connections and social networks of trust, obligation, and shared experience. *Guanxi* has wide cultural

and social influence on human interaction and has great implications in the relationship-centered Chinese society. Chen and Miller (2011) highlight the importance of relational thinking in Chinese society. In the Chinese context, no person exists except in relationship to another. Within the relationship itself lies the birth of all possibility. They give the example of "sound" that only makes sense in the presence of human ears: "If a tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it, does it make a sound?" (Cheng & Miller, 2011, p. 8). So human existence only makes sense in the presence of others. *Guanxi* is a mode of reciprocal relationship between people (within family, school, work, club), characterized by trust, general understanding, mutual obligation, and shared experience. Crucial in Chinese communication is the desire to preserve the harmony of the group. The personal connection also implies a social duty to perform a favor or service for the other, and vice versa. Within the *guanxi* relationship one can use influence when something needs to be done. Reciprocity in doing favors or serving the other is key. Failure in meeting reciprocity is considered a serious social offense. According to Hutchings and Weir (2006), international leaders and HR managers need to get acquainted with the dynamics of *guanxi* to improve their operations in China. *Guanxi* originated from Confucian philosophy and is seen as all-pervasive in Chinese business and social activities. *Guanxi* differs from interfirm networking in the West; it plays a fundamental role in Chinese daily life, schools, and business culture. The Chinese focus on relationships is created over longer periods of time and built on frequent social exchanges. Furthermore, "face" is an important feature of Chinese social networks built on dignity, honor, respect, and status. It's about emotional investment that needs maintenance, and can otherwise be lost. What respect can you claim from others; how is your behavior judged by others? *Guanxi* is connected with the so-called communitarian culture that values the group over the individual (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009, p. 77). The individual or the servant-leader feels responsible for serving the group. People are judged on how much they serve the needs of the group collective. Individual success is less important.

Culture of Connections

Whereas in most Western nations business and social positions are often quite separate, in China both business and social interactions are viewed as part of a whole relationship. Hierarchical relationships in the workplace are replicated in a social setting. A Chinese individual with a problem, personal or organizational, naturally turns to his or her *guanxiwang*, or "relationship

network," for assistance. An individual is not limited to his or her own *guanxiwang*. An individual may tap into the networks of those with whom he or she has *guanxi*. This networking is summed up in the expression "*duo yige guanxi, duo yitiao lu*"—"one more connection offers one more road to take" (Weir & Hutchings, 2005). *Guanxi* creates a culture of connections and privileged access to business and career opportunities. According to Lo and Everett (2001), *guanxi* networking plays an important role in ensuring appropriate codes of conduct for everyone involved in the social network. Understanding the power of *guanxi* would enable "Westerners" to better deal with the complexities and uncertainties in human transactions in the Chinese workplace and classroom. *Guanxi* is not a phenomenon unique to China. Many similar practices can be observed in other cultures as well—compare the Arab *wasta*, African *ubuntu*, Russian *blat*, and *dignitas* in the traditional Roman mindset. Where members of these social networks rely strongly on their friends, the boundaries between business and social lives may become ambiguous. In practice, these social networks can, first and for all, enhance community building, but also may have negative effects such as nepotism and corruption.

Song, Werbel, and Werbel (2007) analyzed the role of *guanxi* in the process of job search. *Guanxi* has a major effect on the intensity of job search and the methods used by leaders (family members, friends, colleagues) to serve themselves in the job search. *Guanxi* has a moderate effect as well on the linkage between search intensity and job search confidence. A successful job search by someone leaving school, therefore, is influenced by the quality and intensity of the following three types of *guanxi*:

- *Chia-jen* means that there is mutual support in a stable relationship with no expectations of return favors. Literally, *Chia-jen* means "family members" who assist you in your job search; therefore, no reciprocity in terms of favors is needed.
- *Shou-jen* is based on social obligation and reciprocity in relationships. It is important to cultivate these relationships; they form the basis for *guanxi* at work. Literally, *shou-jen* means "acquaintances" such as school, friends, neighbors, or colleagues.
- *Sheng-jen* refers to relationships with people outside the social network. Interactions with, for example, colleagues are considered temporary and functional relationships. *Sheng-jen* means, literally, "unknown," thus people you do not know but with whom it is important to build a *guanxi* relationship from scratch.

Danwei and Talent Recruitment

Historically speaking, social networks in China such as farms, schools, and enterprises were referred to as work units, or *danwei* (in Chinese: 单 位). Formerly, each citizen in the communist society belonged to a *danwei*. This social unit provided citizens with a job, salary, housing, food, clothing, shops, etc. In the People's Republic of China the unit authorities kept a dossier (*dang'an*) on each person, recording, among other data, his family, friends, social behavior, membership in organizations, and political reliability. Only after permission from the *danwei* work units was it possible to travel, have children, or get married. Peverelli (2006, p. 23) states that the *danwei* was the "ideal" form of social control, where superiors had access to your dossier. However, citizens were not allowed to see their personal dossiers. *Danwei* units were used by the authorities to implement Party policy.

What were the consequences for job search in the communist past, when *danwei* units were ruling the lives of citizens? With respect to those entering the labor market, it should be noted that, in the past, recruitment was completely controlled by the communist authorities. Peverelli (2006, pp. 23–24) argues that young people leaving the educational system were not required to go out looking for a job themselves. A position would be assigned to them by special government-run labor offices. As unemployment was regarded as incompatible with socialism, all youngsters leaving middle school or some form of tertiary education were assigned to a work unit.

What happened to *danwei* after the political reform? In contemporary China it is possible to dismiss employees. This means that, officially, it is possible to be unemployed. The responsibility for those who are unemployed is in the hands of a low-ranking government unit, namely, a neighborhood or street committee; compare this with the *danwei* system. Thus, although the *danwei* unit system has changed over recent decades, the basic system is still intact, according to Peverelli (2006, p. 24). Young school dropouts and school graduates will still go to their *danwei* to get advice from wise and more senior adults (usually men) about possible job opportunities. *Danwei* supports contemporary Chinese talent entering the labor market in ways similar to *guanxi*.

Character Education

What is the impact of China's (ancient) history on more recent education and training? Nowadays, conformity, respect, and loyalty toward the (senior) teacher is still highly valued. At the same time, educational practices may vary enormously, from high tech in the cosmopolitan cities to very traditional in rural areas. In the more recent past, educational reforms were initiated by Deng Xiaoping (1978). The current climate of economic and significant social reform has led to a new character education movement. Character education and training refers to and builds on earlier Confucian traditions.

Multiple Intelligence Theory

The current character education movement in China has been empowered by, among others, the MI of Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard University (Gardner, 2005; www.howardgardner.com). Gardner offers an alternative talent-diverse vision for the future of education. MI contains components of Western and more Eastern cultures. It is a pluralistic view of the mind, recognizing many different and discrete facets of cognition. In a way, recognizing and anticipating on this diversity of talents is a feature of servant-leaders (see servant-leader attribute 7, foresight). MI is a broad view on intelligence far ahead of traditional IQ-based thinking.

Conceptualization

MI shows educationalists the bigger picture of how everything is related in talent development (compare servant-leadership attribute 6, conceptualization). The MI educational vision is about a multitude of cultural and social competences of learners, which cannot be traced or explained easily via quantitative data by a regular IQ test. This lack of a quantitative approach weakens the influence of MI. MI has to compete with the legitimacy of the established mainstream testing industry (see also the critical and constructive comments on Gardner's work in Pava, 2008). However, MI is an innovative, creative, and qualitative way of looking at

talent diversity. MI supports and gives practical tools to educationalists worldwide—as in the case of China—for reform. That is why we explicitly pay attention to MI here, realizing that there are many more innovative developments in China that cannot be discussed in the limited space of this article.

Diversity of Learning Styles

MI acknowledges that learners have different strengths and cognitive styles, described by Gardner (2005, pp. 7–9) as follows:

- **Linguistic intelligence**: the intelligence of a writer, orator, journalist;
- **Logical-mathematical intelligence**: the intelligence of a logician, mathematician, or scientist;
- **Musical intelligence**: the capacity to create, perform, and appreciate music;
- **Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence**: the capacity to solve problems or fashion products using your whole body, exhibited by dancers, athletes, craftspersons, surgeons, etc.;
- **Spatial intelligence**: the capacity to form mental imagery of the world, the larger world of the aviator or navigator, or the more local world of the chess player or the surgeon; the capacity to manipulate those mental images;
- **Interpersonal intelligence**: the ability to understand others, what motivates them; the capacity to form an accurate model of one-self—one's strengths, weaknesses, desires, and fears—and to use that model effectively in life (compare servant-leadership attribute 2: empathy, and attribute 4: awareness);
- **Naturalist intelligence:** the capacity to make consequent distinctions in nature, between one plant and another, among animals, etc. It is likely that our entire consumer culture is based on our naturalist capacity to differentiate one car brand from another, one sneaker from another, etc. (compare servant-leadership attribute 6: conceptualization);
- **Existential intelligence**: the capacity to locate oneself with respect to the cosmos, or the intelligence of the "big questions" related to the size of the universum, the future of the planet, love, conflict, etc. (compare servant-leadership attribute 4: awareness).

First Observations

In the 1970s and 1980s Gardner visited China several times to study art and music teaching (Biggs, 1999). He was impressed by the drawing skill of very young Chinese children, far in advance of that of American children of a similar age. Gardner realized that his first observations were simplistic. The Chinese learning processes he observed were not as they first appeared to be, because the Western stereotype of education in China was and often still is that of authoritarian teachers, rote learning, and memorizing. In one of his first books, *To Open Minds*, (Gardner, 1989) he addresses the dilemma of contemporary education in China. He explores the progressive style of education, as exemplified in his own American childhood education, followed by his years of research on creativity at Harvard. Furthermore, he describes the more traditional style of education, as practiced in ancient China. What he saw in modern Chinese classrooms made him realize that a program was needed for opening minds to meet the traditional and more progressive potential in the human mind. Thus, for example, repetitive skill development comes first for the Chinese learner, followed by meaning and interpretation. Repetition is being used in the classroom as a tool for creating meaning (Gardner, 2005).

Applicability of MI in China

The applicability of MI to the educational field and talent development is enormous. For example, Smith (2006) shows how the MI can be applied in digital libraries where multiple cultures and contents need to be respected. In *Multiple Intelligences around the World* (Chen et al., 2009), MI practitioners worldwide describe how MI is implemented in their respective countries. The co-authors discuss some of the cultural challenges they faced along the way. Chinese co-authors Chen, Cheung, and Shen (2009) describe how and why MI is warmly welcomed by Chinese schools and public. They explain that Howard Gardner made several trips to China from the early 1980s onward, building a large network of MI researchers and educationalists. In 2002, the Chinese Education Society founded a project entitled Applied Research of Multiple Intelligences Theory on Developing Students Potential. More than 150 schools in thirteen Chinese provinces have been involved in the research and practice. About 3,500 publications followed from this MI research project in China. Since 2000, one hundred

books on MI have been translated into or written in Chinese characters (Shen, 2009). Among others, the Multiple Intelligences Education Society of China (MIESC) was established, as well as the *Multiple Intelligences Magazine*.

Why is MI so Popular in China?

According to Shen (2006), MI coincides with Chinese culture and ancient educational ideologies. Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions and thoughts have also influenced the Chinese educational tradition. In the Confucian idea of education, *Yin Cai Shi Jiao* means to teach learners using different approaches according to their different areas of talent. This is in line with the more recent MI and talent diversity thinking (Shen, 2006). During Confucian times (551–479 BCE), six skills were equally important in education and training:

- *Li*: rule of property;
- *Yue*: music;
- *She*: archery (spatial);
- *Yu*: driving carriage (kinaesthetic);
- *Shu*: writing, calligraphy, and painting (linguistics, art);
- *Shu*: mathematics.

In Confucianism, the human being is primarily a maker of meaning (compare servant-leadership attribute 7, foresight). Human development is a matter of growing into a kind of focus where one engages in the fullest and most fruitful way with society, with nature, and with heaven itself. The different learning phases in a person's life show the importance of lifelong learning (Haydoe, 2006). In this Confucian context any cultural bias against each learner's uniqueness is rejected. This is in contrast to the later China's communist period, in which all learners were considered the same. In an exclusive way, the acquisition of the six Confucian skills listed above has empowered individuals to develop their unique personal strengths, or what we would call talent diversity encouraged by servant-leaders.

Talent Development and Serving the Family

Introducing MI in China built on the momentum of educational reform. MI was welcomed in the climate of the open door policy and the renaissance

of traditional Chinese pedagogy and thought from the 1980s onward. According to Chen (2009), the implementation of MI in Chinese schools is the result of a strong acculturation process. To understand the acculturation of MI in Chinese education and training we need to learn more about the conceptualization of intelligence in the Chinese context. In the Confucian tradition human intelligence is attributed to the family rather than to the individual. A proper servant relationship with your parents and family is fundamental in Chinese life. Or as stated by Confucius (*Analects*, 2004, p. 1:6):

> A young man should serve his parents at home and be respectful to elders outside his home. He should be earnest and truthful, loving all, but become intimate with *ren* [humaneness or goodness]. After doing this, if he has energy to spare, he can study literature and the arts. Only after these things are taken care of it is proper to go off and play at whatever one likes—even if this "play" involves the serious study of some art form.

According to Chen (2009), MI practices in China involve the whole family. A family intellectual profile is not viewed as separate bar graphs, but rather a dynamic intellectual and social system in which each member of the family adds, supports, and enhances the development and learning (*hsueh*) of another social community member. This is in line with servant-leadership attribute 10, building community (also compare the helping-conceptualization, in Schein, 2009). In the Confucian tradition, learning is more than intellectual, academic study, or the accumulation of facts, although this aspect is included. Real learning is the process of manifesting one's *ren* by developing one's talents in self-reflection via the various types of human relationships (compare servant-leadership attribute 4, awareness). Or as Zixia, one of Confucius's students, stated (*Analects*, 2004, p. 1:6):

> If you can treat the worthy as worthy without strain, exert your utmost in serving your parents, devote your whole self in serving your prince, and be honest in speech when dealing with your friends. Then even if someone says you are not learned (*hsueh*), I would say that you are definitely learned.

TOWARD NEW HORIZONS

Talent Shortage and Talent Development

Despite current fast developments in (higher) education and training, China suffers from talent-related dilemmas such as shortage of skilled

employees, inadequate leadership, and a brain drain of well-qualified employees (Benson & Zhu, 2002). Hutchings et al. (2009) consider the critical shortage of skilled technicians in Chinese firms a major bottleneck in China's economic development. According to Hutchings et al., this problem partly results from failures of China's (higher) education policy to develop adequate vocational training. China still faces significant dilemmas. On the one hand China has a large human potential, and at the same time China suffers from limited resources, inadequate processes, and ideological restrictions in providing talent development programs. In addition, Western managers and investors find it hard to understand the Chinese managers' conventional approach to learning and talent development. Reconciling diverse international and local Chinese organizational and employee needs (Chatterjee & Nankervis, 2007) is a long-term process. Furthermore, the loss of linkages between industry and vocational training during the Great Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and the nationwide one-child policy have affected the current talent shortage. The situation is getting worse, due to the emigration of skilled employees.

Huge Growth of Talent Programs

A huge growth of talent development programs is to be expected in China in the years to come. The worldwide economic recession is influencing this demand. According to Gordon (2009), there will be a growing job crisis worldwide after the current recession. Demographic trends in the United States, Europe, Russia, and Japan will create a drastic talent shortage. China too is influenced by this worldwide trend. The need for talent development programs in China is confirmed by Chuai and Preece (2008). They argue that talent management in China, especially in the case of multinationals in Beijing, should not be considered as "old wine in new bottles." The authors explore how, since the open door policy of Deng Xiaoping, dramatic changes have occurred in China's enterprises. Not only were planning and decision-making processes decentralized, but also private and foreign-invested enterprises were encouraged, and responsibility systems enhancing individual accountability were introduced. Due to the stronger competition and current talent shortage, more attention is given to talent management. Multinational companies in particular are exposed to Western approaches to management.

Thousand Talents Plan

In 2008 the Chinese government initiated the "Thousand Talents Plan" to attract highly qualified Chinese expatriates. The program aims to raise the level of research and improve the academic environment in China. The Chinese experts who return bring back firsthand experience and knowledge to China. According to Cao (2009), the Thousand Talents Plan will eventually change Chinese society's emphasis on *guanxi*, or personal relationships. Because of the international outreach and academic network of returned Chinese professionals, more meritocratic tendencies are to be expected. A culture of risk taking and failure tolerance will be more acceptable than in the communist past.

Future Talent Development in China

The question may be asked: How did organizations in China anticipate the recent social changes and what are the limits of future talent development? Some (educational) organizations have tried to address this question by building capacity—for example, in the area of management development. Over the past few years China has gradually established a nationwide management development system with a renewed emphasis on professionalism, competency development, curriculum planning, and innovations in matching management training with organizational strategies (Wang & Wang, 2006, p. 189). Since the beginning of China's economic reforms, more than eight million managers and supervisors have been offered some type of management training (ibid., p. 187). Executive and corporate university courses and Western-style MBA programs have helped to increase their managerial capacity. Organizations in China are more committed to the personal development of their employees. Chinese managers are getting more interested in lifelong learning. This can be classroom-based learning, experiential learning, or learning from work and life practice, according to Wang and Wang.

Tailor-made horizons for Chinese companies and schools need to be designed, where educationalists and policymakers may want to include the popular multiple intelligence insights. The research findings of Li and Madsen (2009) in reformed and state-owned Chinese enterprises reveal major talent-related dilemmas. The Chinese workplace may provide not

only a place to make a living, but also a network of social support. This social network often becomes a safety net for the employee in difficult times. This sense of belonging in Chinese firms creates most committed employees: a commitment that is not driven by strategy plans or individual performance appraisal but primarily by social support. Practices such as these on the Chinese workfloor require a rethinking of Western talent-related purposes, originating from a more Western market-driven ideology. Key in the Western talent perspective is the improvement of individual and organizational performance. According to Li and Madsen (2009, p. 185), this will not work in China. Tailor-made solutions are necessary to reconcile the above dilemmas, because: "Pure performance orientation results in competition may break down trust, the building block of the social networks for these workers" (ibid.). Further cross-continental research is needed on talent diversity in the Chinese workplace and beyond.

Guanxi and Talent Recruitment

Guanxi is a concept that needs further careful study from researchers in the field of talent diversity. The implications of guanxi and other related cultural phenomena in China are relatively unknown in the West, though very relevant for cross-Atlantic (business) cooperation. Despite their relevance in the twenty-first-century multicultural workplace, guanxi, danwei and other similar social phenomena in, for instance, the Arab world and the African continent have not yet received much attention from talent recruitment professionals. We have seen how the job search process in China might be full of interdependencies due to guanxi and other social network relations. The mainstream (Anglo-American) theories about talent recruitment are not in tune with the culturally specific Chinese environment. Comparative research on these issues might bring an interesting so-called mirror effect to the daily practice of Western talent recruitment professionals. To some extent, one might recognize quanxi tendencies in many communities worldwide. Last but not least, one might become more aware how and where strong social ties might influence the recruitment process in more Western organizations, too.

Talent Diversity and Servant-Leadership

There is still much to be learned about servant-leadership in the diverse educational environment. The concept of servant-leadership needs further

definition and empirical analysis across cultures (Hale & Fields, 2007; Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2011; Pekerti & Sendjaya, 2010). The interaction between the servant-leader (head teacher, lecturer, policymaker, etc.) and the followers (pupils, students, customers, parents, etc.) needs further examination. In this article we have learned about the talent-related specifics in China. The rapidly emerging economy of China makes it the "factory of the world" where talent growth is key. In international and comparative studies, more attention should be paid to the contextual horizons across countries and cultures, like outside-the-box thinking. The main attributes of servant-leadership were discussed and related to (ancient) China. This is just one building block in creating a cross-cultural body of knowledge, encouraging thinking in which leaders have the ability to integrate apparently opposite values. Searching and listening to today's China may help increase our awareness of the diverse cultural horizons worldwide. We have seen that true servant-leaders create a sense of connection and meaningfulness for their learning community. The sense of belonging is enhanced by the positive social relationships within the learning organization, respecting the talents of its (Chinese) members. Servant-leadership can help to provide an answer to twenty-first-century organizational concerns such as school dropouts, unemployment, ethical conflicts, and demotivation. It becomes a success when leaders live it with passion and introspection. Servant-leadership empowering talents is cost effective too. It enhances the personal growth and motivation of the learning community. These new leaders, with integrity, dignity, and respect, will become the change agents for talent development in a durable society where reciprocity is key. In conclusion: in educational settings the management is of the mind, whereas servant-leadership is of the heart. Without pretending to give a complete view here, exploring horizons and sharing insights on how to serve talent development in China brings a joyful garden of learning opportunities. To conclude with a meaningful ancient Chinese proverb:

> If you want happiness for an hour; take a nap. If you want happiness for a day; go fishing. If you want happiness for a month; get married. If you want happiness for a year; inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime; help someone else.

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NOTES

1. For extended research outcomes on talent diversity across cultures, see S. van de Bunt-Kokhuis, "Talent Diversity, A Garden of Opportunities," in: L. van der Sluis and S. van de Bunt-Kokhuis, *Competing for Talent* (Assen: Royal Publishers Van Gorcum, 2009), 90–140.
2. The relevance of the above economical issue was underlined by Jean Paul Votron, the CEO of Fortis Bank (Bates and van Wijnen 2008, 32). Votron argues that some remarkable talent pools happen to occur in Russia, China, and India. This should be a wake-up call for the Western world. Training and development in these and other emerging countries should become priority to nurture their talents.

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