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Sun Zi Art of War as Catalyst of Change and Performance for Malaysian Chinese Corporate Leader: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Background: The focus of this study is on the influence of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy on Chinese corporate leaders and leadership in Malaysia. A practical and theoretical understanding of the influence of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy on Chinese corporate leadership will not only contribute to the body of knowledge of leadership studies, but also provide a different perspective on the understanding of the intricacies and complexities of Chinese corporate leadership. **Objective:** Hence, two interdependent areas of interests, that is, the practice and theory in the study corporate leadership, within the framework of an understanding of leadership behavior actions, involving knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy, including values, ethics, morals and a review of leadership assumptions, within the context of Chinese corporate leaders in Malaysia, consciously or unconsciously applying their knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy to execute vision and implement change in their organizations to be examined. The qualitative design employed to answer the research questions is organized into four sections: (a) Sampling-selection of participants, (b) instrumentation, (c) data collection, and (d) data analysis. **Results:** Through the inductive analysis based on this study, the influence of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy on leadership have emerged. Specifically, the themes of the influences are pointed to the dimensions of strategic mindset, proper planning and execution and leadership qualities. The finding indicates that even though the participants possess the knowledge and understanding of Chinese traditional philosophy in general It was not difficult to see that Participants' statements show that their deep knowledge and understanding are dependent on the deep evaluated understanding on moral influence (dao) such as being patience, doing away the inner greed, honesty and fairness, morality and strategic mindset. They have also shown deep and high level of knowledge and understanding in terms of values such as sincerity, confidence, diligence, good courtesy, faith and being kind, and chung yung. They have shown their evaluated understanding in terms of values such as swiftness and flexibility as well as overwhelming momentum. **Conclusion:** It was not difficult to see that respondents statements show that they have deep knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War such as deepest evaluated understanding of the dimensions of Sun Zi Art of War which are the philosophical mindset of strategic approach, planning and execution of strategies and the qualities of leadership. In addition, the understanding of carefulness in deciding commitment to war, deterrence as well as swiftness in ending war battles were observed. The finding suggests that the participants' responses based on knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy that shown in terms of frequency, intensity and consistency in the qualitative responses/data collected via interviews were quite consistent. Through the inductive analysis based on this study, the influence of Sun Zi Art War philosophy on leadership have emerged. Specifically, the themes of the influences are pointed to the moral and strategic philosophical values of Sun Zi Art of War where spiritual understanding is seen as critical understanding and action for complex corporate decision making, applying both knowledge and actions for organizational purposes and reasons.

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INTRODUCTION

The current research on leadership found no conclusive evidence in terms of consensus on the interpretation and definition of leaders and leadership. There are as many definitions of leadership as there are researchers of leadership (Bass, 1990). However, research on leaders and leadership is still growing and contributing to the confusion by using similar approach (such as contingency and traits approaches), instruments (such as LBDQ), and generating similar findings.

In South East Asia, particularly in Malaysia, as a developing nation, most of the the studies were focused on the Chinese business community and organisations which were based on western theories and models, such as the studies by Balasubramaniam (2006), Cheong (1992), Chin (2003), Gomez (1999), Hara (1991), Heng (1992), Jesudason (1989), Jomo (2005), Lee (2000), Lim (1981), Yeung (1999), Yong (1987) and Yoshihara (1988). There is a lack of scholarly in-depth research on and inquiry of Chinese business leadership practices with a display of wisdom based on the knowledge and understanding of Buddhism values, thoughts, morals, traditions and philosophy, apart from the research on overall Chinese business community mentioned above.

There are many approaches in the studies of leaders and leadership but the conclusions are not conclusive (Gill 2011; Yulk 2010; Stogdill 1974; Chemers 1997; Bass 1985, Stogdill (1974), Chermers (1997), Guillen (2010), Whittington *et al.* (2005), Timothy *et al.* (2004) and Furnham (2010) focused on trait theories whereas Likert (1961), Dixon (1985), Blake and Mouton (1982), Chomsky (1999), Moller (1994), Timmothy *et al.* (2004) and Hoel (2009) studied the relationship between leadership behavior and leadership effectiveness. Similarly, Wright (2000), Bryman (1992), Hodgson and White (2001), Ciulla (2004) and Goffee and Jones (2000) conducted research on the relationship between situational factors and leadership effectiveness, while Bass (1990), Randell (2008), Bass and Avolio (1994), Popper and Mayseless (2003) and John and Beverly (2007) explored transactional and transformational leadership.

There is a large number of Malaysian Chinese corporate leaders who started their business from a very small family concern to become multi-billion business enterprise. Success stories of personalities such as Robert Kuok, Lim Goh Tong, Lok Boon Siew, William Cheng, Vincent Tan, Lee Shen Jin, Yeoh Tiong Lay (YTL), Teoh Hong Piow, Quek Leng Chan, and many others are commonly splashed across pages in local newspapers, business magazines. Their business acumen, diligence, determination, beliefs, philosophy, and etc have become the hallmark of their many successes. It is noted that most of these entrepreneurs are not highly educated and most of them are very stubbornly oriental and Chinese in outlook and orientation, with

minimal exposure to Western theories and approaches of leadership. Their diligence, determination, endurance and hardwork, and hence their success in transforming their family businesses into multi-national business concerns across the globe are the focus of discussion in forums and interviews.

The strong oriental character in general and Chinese character in particular in the conduct of their business is a reflection of deeply entrenched or embedded Chinese philosophy, and the ability to act as a result of their knowledge and understanding of the Chinese values, morals, philosophies, strategies, and traditions (Yeung 2006; Xi 2011; Warner 2008). As a departure to the normal approaches to leadership as mentioned above, it is believed that there is a strong need to study leader and leadership in a new light, not being unnecessarily being confined and restricted theoretically, a qualitative research approach should be chosen to explore and examine the potentials of values, traditions, beliefs, morals and philosophies and in facilitating leaders in the transformation of the organizations.

The lived experiences of eminent Malaysian Chinese corporate leaders, their knowledge and understanding of Buddhism philosophy, thoughts, values, ethics, has not been the focus of serious academic study even though it has been variously published in business magazines and newspapers. This experience in leadership is valuable. Virtually every leader achieved success by building on earlier experiences, learn from these experiences, by analyzing them to help solve future problems and meet future challenges.

Background Of The Study:

According to Chemers (1997), Mendonca and Kanungo (1994), cultural fit between the styles of leadership and the societal ethos is a determination of organizational success. There are differences in terms of culture, for instance, power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and time perspective (Hofstede, *et al.* 2002). There are evidences that the fit between leadership and followers' value orientation is conducive to better work achievement. (Jung & Avolio 1999).

Due to the differences in terms of value orientation across cultures, different view of leadership is needed for organizational transformation. This study is designed to explore and examine the influence of Buddhism on corporate leadership practices in Malaysia.

While religious beliefs have always impacted the practice of management, there has been increased interest in the relationship between spiritualism and business in recent years (Dean, Fornaciari, and McGee 2003; Fry 2003; Abuznaid 2006; Schwartz 2006). Some of this interest has been directed towards an ethical orientation (White 1999; White

and Taft 2004; Suen, Cheung, and Mondejar 2007), however, the area of study has now been expanded to include other areas of interest to management researchers. The impact of religious beliefs on managerial behavior, and how researchers should study this relationship, has become a legitimate field of inquiry. Religion, as part of culture, has been of interest to management researchers for at least the past few decades; however, it generally gets less attention in lieu of the more secular aspects of culture. Leadership research can benefit from further investigations into the relationship between religion and business activity, not only to help explain managerial practices cross-culturally, but also to offer suggestions for improved practices.

In a nutshell, Western theories of leadership are generally based on the principles of democracy and individual freedom (Yukl 2010). Organisation's structure developed based on command and control assuming individuals are self motivated. In comparison, oriental concept of leadership is not as widely studied as Western and most of the Eastern leadership studies are mainly based on superficial narrative studies.

Purpose Of The Study:

The purpose of this study is to examine how Sun Zi Art of War influences corporate leaders' change and performance and leadership in general and Chinese corporate leaders in Malaysia in particular through a comparative study.

The main purpose of this study hence is to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions:

The main purpose of the study is to examine how knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy influences corporate leaders' managerial practices and performance and leadership in Malaysia. It is primarily a qualitative research, embodying within its framework the inductive paradigm.

Objectives of the study encompassing two main objectives, the study attempts to:

- (1) Examine what is the participant's responses of knowledge and understanding for Sun Zi Art of War philosophy.
- (2) Explain how does Sun Zi Art of War influences participant's leadership and managerial practices.

Specifically, the study attempts to provide answer to the following research questions:

RQ#1. What is the respondent's responses of knowledge and understanding for Sun Zi Art of war philosophy?

RQ#2. How does Sun Zi Art of War philosophy influences leadership?

Literature Review:

Sun Zi Art Of War Philosophical Probing:

Sun Zi lived between the sixth and fifth century B.C. in the State of Qi during the Spring and Autumn period. He was the author of The Art of War which

consists of 13 chapters and 5600 words. The Art of War has enormous influences to the Chinese cultural, military, political as well as in business. Today, the book has been read by many in the world and the philosophy focuses on the art of strategy to gain competitive advantage by overcoming psychological barriers. In the book, Sun Zi described the application of tactics and techniques such as the art of deception and camouflage, the principle of paradox and the creation of illusion to overcome the challenges and difficulties created by the enemies.

Sun Zi emphasized the importance of positioning in military strategy. The decision to position an army must be based on both objective conditions in the physical environment and the subjective beliefs of other, competitive factors in that environment. He thought that strategy was not planning in the sense of working through an established list, but rather that it requires quick and appropriate responses to changing conditions. Planning works in a controlled environment; but in a changing environment, competing plans collide, creating unexpected situations.

Sun Zi believed that war is a matter of life and death. Hence, the highest order of warfare is in attacking or frustrating the enemy's strategy. The Art of War can be studied as the following; moral influence; strategy and stratagem as well as organizational capabilities.

Sun Zi Art of War is divided into 13 chapters (or piān); the collection is referred to as being one zhuàn ("whole" or alternatively "chronicle").

Moral Influence:

Moral character is seen as one of the most important quality of an effective leader. Moral rules are social contract that must be adhered to. The fundamental factors that determine the success of a war is the 'Way' (Lin 1995). The Way is the underlying factor that makes people think inline with the leader with devoted followership.

Likewise, Wee (2005) stated that moral influence refers to the additional quality of a leader which distinguishes him from other than the playing the role of commander or general. The moral influence is critical in determining the success of organizational endeavours. Recently, there were vast evidences of corporate corruptions and issues of moral decay among the corporate scenes in many parts of the world and caused the crisis of confidence due to immoral or unethical leadership.

Leadership will fail in long run unless it is supported by moral influence. Sun Zi also mentioned that the ability to command is another factor that should be observed. According to Sun Zi, command includes a wise, trustworthiness, sincerity, benevolence, courage leadership behaviour (Lin 1995). The leader needs to establish his moral influence with good personal character before effective leadership. By wisdom, leader should be wise in his thought and actions (Wee 2005).

According to Sun Zi, effective leader uses authority and law to govern the behaviour of

followers. In enforcing discipline, a leader must be responsible, flexible and impartial as to reward and punishment is concern. Sun Zi's Art of War has drawn an association between living wisdom leadership and strategic leadership theory, suggesting that the existing transactional-transformational

construct doesn't effectively lend itself to the ineluctable pace of organizational change manifest in today's geo political environment.

Table 1: Sun Zi Art of War chapter names in translations by Giles, Wing, Sawyer, and Chow-Hou Wee.

Chapter	Lionel Giles (1910)	R.L. Wing (1988)	Ralph D. Sawyer (1996)	Chow-Hou Wee (2003)
I	Laying Plans	The Calculations	Initial Estimations	Detail Assessment and Planning
II	Waging War	The Challenge	Waging War	Waging War
III	Attack by Stratagem	The Plan of Attack	Planning Offensives	Strategic Attack
IV	Tactical Dispositions	Positioning	Military Disposition	Disposition of the Army
V	Use of Energy	Directing	Strategic Military Power	Forces
VI	Weak Points and Strong	Illusion and Reality	Vacuity and Substance	Weaknesses and Strengths
VII	Maneuvering an Army	Engaging The Force	Military Combat	Military Maneuvers
VIII	Variation of Tactics	The Nine Variations	Nine Changes	Variations and Adaptability
IX	The Army on the March	Moving The Force	Maneuvering the Army	Movement and Development of Troops
X	Classification of Terrain	Situational Positioning	Configurations of Terrain	Terrain
XI	The Nine Situations	The Nine Situations	Nine Terrains	The Nine Battlegrounds
XII	Attack by Fire	The Fiery Attack	Incendiary Attacks	Attacking with Fire
XIII	Use of Spies	The Use of Intelligence	Employing Spies	Intelligence and Espionage

Sun Zi said: "The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected" (Sun Zi: 1:1)

The system of thought of Sun Zi manifested a strategic planning decision that should be made prior to any war or confrontation and with the awareness of the importance of prior planning and the calculation of chances of winning the war in terms of careful war (**sheng zhang**). One should be able to obtain the preemptive position on offensive and defensive possibilities. Thus, the main issue of winning in a war is of highest strategic intent and content.

Sun Zi said :” The art of war, then, is governed by five constant factors, to be taken into account in one’s deliberations, when seeking to determine the conditions obtaining in the field, these are; the moral law (dao); heaven (tian); earth (di), the commander (jiang) and by method and discipline (fa). The moral law causes the people to be in complete accord with their ruler, so that they will follow him regardless of their lives, undismayed by any danger. Heaven signifies night and day, cold and heat, times and seasons. Earth comprises distances, great and small; danger and security; open ground and narrow passes; the chances of life and death. The commander stands for the virtues of wisdom, sincerity, benevolence, courage and strictness. By method and discipline are to be understood the marshaling of the army in its proper subdivisions, the graduations of rank among the officers, the maintenance of roads by which supplies may reach the army, and the control of military expenditure. These five factors should be familiar to every general: he who knows them will be victorious; he who knows them not will fail”. (Sun Zi:1:2)

Obviously, Sun Zi’s philosophy focused on the five factors that governed the outcome of a war.

Nevertheless, initiating a war is considered the last resort to conflict resolution in relation to prior political harmonization. Thus, the practices of wisdom on any confrontation should be utmost encouraged.

Sun Zi said: “If you punish a soldier for not being devoted to you, they will remain disobedient; and hence they will be difficult to manage. If a soldier is devoted but discipline is not enforced, they will still be difficult to manage. As such, it is important to treat them humanly but keep them in line with strict discipline. It is when authority of command is highly respected, then there is bound to be a harmonious relationship between the leader and his followers.” quoted in Sun Zi: The Art of War (Wee 2005)

While it is important for an effective leader to possess certain positive attributes to make him strong, avoiding negative attributes will allow him to avert possible disaster. Sun Zi said:

“If he is stubborn and reckless, he may be deceived and killed. If he fears death, he may be captured. If he is hot tempered, he may be provoked. If he is honest yet has too delicate a sense of honor, he is open to insult. If he is too compassionate towards his people, he may be easily troubled and upset.” Quoted in Sun Zi: The Art of War (Wee 2005)

Strategy and Stratagem:

Sun Zi believed that a good generalship must know how to attack by stratagem. The success in warfare is determined by the following five factors. Sun Zi said:

“The which knows when to fight and when not to will win. The side which knows the difference between commanding a large army and a small army will win. The side which has unity of purpose among its officers and men will win. The side which engages enemy troops that are unprepared with preparedness on its own part will win. The side

which has a capable commander who is free of interference from the sovereign will win." Quoted in Sun Zi: The Art of War (Wee 2005)

In strategizing, a leader needs to carefully study the strengths and weaknesses of its enemy and his own because the best strategy is to attack the enemy without fighting it. Sun Zi said:

"knowing oneself and knowing others will lead to 100 percent success. Knowing oneself but not knowing others will lead to 50 percent success. Not knowing oneself and not knowing others will lead to 100 percent failure." Quoted in Sun Zi: The Art of War (Wee 2005)

For instance, Sun Zhi sees leadership (towards war) is a question of vital importance to the state, a matter of life and death, and the road to survival or ruin. Hence, it is a subject which calls for careful study. To assess the outcome of war, a leader needs to examine the belligerent parties and compare them in terms of the following five fundamental factors: The first is the way (tao); the second, heaven (tian); the third, earth (di); the fourth, command (jiang); and the fifth, rules and regulations (fa). It is he who masters them that wins and he who does not that loses (Wee 2005).

Organisational Capabilities:

Apart from being a good strategist, effective leader also needs to be able to organize with clear and efficient organizational structure with clear authority, responsibility, accountability, relationship and communication. In the fifth chapter of Sun Zi Art of War, Sun Zi said "There is no difference between administering many troops and few troops, large army or small army. It is a matter of organization and communication respectively."

Organisational structure is needed to support the strategy in order to achieve the business goals and objectives. In other words, in organisations, it is critical to have an appropriately defined chain of command of authority that flows from the top to the bottom level.

To Sun Zi, having a proper organizational structure and a clear line of authority are important to the success of the troops. In the organizational context, having a clear line of authority with proper reporting relationship is pre-requisite to any organizational success (Lin, 1995 and Wee, 2005).

Method:

The focus of this study is on the influence of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy on Chinese corporate leaders and leadership in Malaysia. A practical and theoretical understanding of the influence of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy on Chinese corporate leadership will not only contribute to the body of knowledge of leadership studies, but also provide a different perspective on the understanding of the intricacies and complexities of Chinese corporate leadership. Hence, we see two interdependent areas

of interests, that is, the practice and theory in the study corporate leadership, within the framework of an understanding of leadership behavior actions, involving knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy, including values, ethics, morals and a review of leadership assumptions, within the context of Chinese corporate leaders in Malaysia, consciously or unconsciously applying their knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy to execute vision and implement change in their organizations.

The analytic process and the method employed to answer the research questions is presented and organized into four sections: (a) Sampling-selection of participants, (b) instrumentation, (c) data collection, and (d) data analysis.

Sampling:

The samples are selected based on theoretical sampling according to the size of the business (capitalization), business type, and performance of corporation based on the various indices as published by Bursa Saham Malaysia (BSM). The operational difficulties of defining corporate performance objectively, on close inspection, permeated with practical and conceptual difficulties. As such, a rather straight forward definition is adopted based on BSM's yardstick of performance standards in corporate performance.

The selection strategy consists of first attempting to obtain a mix of six cases or individuals that would provide diverse background between various corporate entities, and within these cases, to get as much range along the other dimensions as possible. For this study, the samples are then purposively selected based on this diversity for rigorous data collection and in-depth analysis. This is done in line with the aim of providing an initial insight for future greater project in similar vein.

In special situation, the purposive sampling provided the appropriate means to investigate a specialized population of Malaysian Chinese corporate leaders. The exploration of purposive sample allowed for the investigation of element of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy in leadership practices from the participant, which had not taken place prior to this study. Approval had been received from the selected respondent for interviews and data obtained were used for the purposes of this study. An agreement to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of company and individual was signed by both the researcher and participant.

Instrumentation:

The instrument used in this study was semi-structured open-ended interviews with six chosen participants. Semi-structured interviews are interviews that evolve from inquiry composed of a mix of structured and unstructured questions. The unstructured questions were open-ended to allow

more space of freedom and creativity from the respondents answering the interview questions (Yin 1984).

The semi-structured interviews approach used in this study had provided reasonably rich data within the respondent with the flexibility to probe answers more deeply and gather more information. To relate this study to previous work with leadership research, Interview questions were created based on the literature reviewed and theoretical framework developed. Questions were designed to allow the respondents to reflect upon the element of knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy their experiences and practices of corporate leadership.

Data Requirement and Collection:

Bennett and George (1997) are of the opinion that the case study method will be more effective if the research design includes a specification of the data to be obtained from the cases to be analyzed. In this study, general and comprehensive questions were formulated applicable to the one chosen case in a class of processes or events relevant to corporate leadership. General questions can be asked from the cases to elicit responses satisfying the research objective of the study and to contribute to building of insights that is intended. In this study for example, general questions can be formulated to illuminate the orientation of the participants to the Sun Zi Art of War philosophy that presumably influence their leadership within the framework of facing the challenges and needs of the corporate world.

The study focused on data collection on tracing the knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War from the participants. In keeping the interest in a rich and insightful understanding of Sun Zi Art of War that influences leaders' ability to act based on participant's knowledge and understanding or evaluated understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy in response to a particular or combination of situations or environments.

Based on the findings of the enumerated data, Sun Zi Art of War appeared to serve as an important source of influence on leadership of R#1. As R#1 recollected:

"I started my business when three aspiring entrepreneurs teamed up to build a network marketing company with the strategic vision to introduce a solid business plan that would enable just about anyone to start their own business with minimum capital. What started from a dream, a vision - soon took shape and catapulted the business into one of the major players in the direct selling industry in Malaysia. In August 2005, my group was listed on the main board of Bursa Malaysia through its holding company, X Holdings Berhad. I would say that this would be impossible without upholding to the values of morality, flexibility that we insisted all the while, as well as our organizational capabilities strategic thinking that contribute to this performance."

R#1's leadership is found derived from the evaluated knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi's Art of War. The evaluated understanding of the value of strategic thinking influenced the practice of Sun Zi's Art of War leadership in building moral influence, developing strategies, organizational capabilities and practicing flexibility. R#1 described as in the following way:

"The way I managed the organizational crisis is to face it immediately without delay. This is a strategic approach towards managing changes. The kindness to my staff would help adjust to changes collectively that would ensure sustainability and flexibility of our business operations."

This was when R#1 was leading his multi-national corporation, he felt powerless in influencing the macro environment, particularly the political and economic environment. But as the founding CEO and a role model, he had to play his role as a leader. He further described his understanding of Sun Zi art of War philosophy in the following way:

"We need to be very conservative, when interest was suddenly increased by 30 % to 40% to the record high of 12%, while many companies which were over invested were collapsed, we still surviving and then we became more alert and cautious in managing funds and profitability as well as investment. Thanks to my belief in Sun Zi Art of War that stressed on strategic planning...."

Clearly, R#1 believed that in a competitive environment, leaders should not too aggressive and being successful was not always performance contingent but being careful in planning and execution of strategy. He further described:

"We need to know and understand our own company and the external environment to see whether opportunities exist. But self-restraint is very important, we need to aware that heavy borrowing for further investment and expansion is very dangerous...and lead to painful consequences....With bold determination and a passion to transform people's lives, regardless of race, religion or nationality, my group has enriched people's lives with offerings of innovative products and services through the sharing of experiences and mutual support. From humble beginnings as a homegrown MLM enterprise to becoming a trusted public listed company, my group has reach international shores, nurturing and expanding loyal communities. With over two decades of growth, my group continues its progress, uplifting lives in its dynamic communities and assured of a brighter future. My group's vision is to become a dynamic and strategic organization that continuously strives to create a better life for all through shared experience and mutual support. And the mission is that my company is more than just a business; firmly rooted in Chinese traditional values, we blend the best of East and West to deliver the highest value to help enrich the lives of the staff, members, partners,

customers and the greater society. Uplifting Lives is my group's concerted efforts are made in earnest to

deliver holistic uplifting experiences that enhance the quality of life and inspire people we care."

Results:

Respondents' Basic Information:

Table 2: Participants' Age, Educational Background/Level, Experience and Family Background.

Respondent	Age	Educational Background	Educational Level	Experience/Family Background
Respondent 1 (R#1)	62	Chinese Educated	Teacher Training Diploma	<p>Experience: More than 30 years of MLM experience. Business internationalized into 11 countries with solid MLM expertise. A famous social philanthropist.</p> <p>Family Background: Born in a poor family in Selangor, R#1 has seven siblings in the family. His parents were originally from the Province of Fu Jian in China. The couple worked as farmers without any formal education. Even though the condition of living for the family was very difficult, R#1's parents insisted that their children must go to school for formal education. As a poor farmer, his father had worked very hard in order to save sufficiently for children's education. R#1 completed his secondary education and worked as a school teacher for ten years before migrated to commercial world.</p>
Respondent 2 (R#2)	75	Chinese Educated	Undergraduate degree in chemistry	<p>Experience: More than 45 years of gold jewellery industry in Malaysia and international markets. An absolute expert in the industry. A well-known leader in Chinese Associations in Malaysia.</p> <p>Family Background: Like many other Chinese who lived in the Southern region of China, R#2's parents were from Da He village in Cheng-Jiang town of Meixian in the Guangdong Province, decided to seek greener pastures in Malacca in view of the political uncertainty in the country and poor production in the agricultural sector. The couple migrated to Malacca in 1927 before moving on to Pasir Puteh in 1933. They earned a living as farmers. In 1941, R#2's father passed away in Penang. R#2 was their 10th child and he had four brothers and five sisters. R#2's father passed away when he was four. With the family losing its main source of income, his mother became the sole breadwinner in the family by growing vegetables, rearing pigs and making tofu (beancurd) for a living. During his primary schooldays, R#2 had to walk barefoot for two miles to SJK (C) Pay Fong and the situation improved during his secondary schooldays as he could cycle to Pay Fong High School, after he had finished his daily chore of selling his homegrown vegetables at the wet market. The family's expenses were defrayed from the income received on the sale of vegetables and tofu, while money earned through the selling of goats and pigs was meant for education. Although R#2's mother had never received any formal education, she deeply subscribed to a principle-education should not be hindered by poverty. R#2 did quite well academically during his secondary schooldays. His excellent result thus secured him a free air ticket to Taiwan to study Chemistry in NCKU. His inclination toward Chemistry was influenced by his teacher.</p>
Respondent 3 (R#3)	51	Chinese Educated	Undergraduate degree in Marketing	<p>Experience: More than 20 years of maternity wear industry and actively participate in Chinese association in Malaysia.</p> <p>Family Background: R#3's grandparents were originally from China. At an early time, their grandparents migrated to Kedah and settled down there. They had been living there for three generations. R#3's parents complemented each other epitomizing traditional Chinese values. Although did not receive any formal education, R#3's parents earnest teachings are ingrained in his children for his love for them. R#3 came from a poor family with four siblings one of his sibling is a very successful businessman in Penang.</p>
Respondent 4 (R#4)	71	English Educated	Undergraduate degree in English	<p>Experience: More than 40 years of experience in car industry, supermarket industry and property development.</p> <p>Family Background: R#4's parents were from Penang. They did not come from a rich family. R#4's parents had the cardinal principles of life in mind and excelled in their roles as parents. They loved their family deeply and set great upbringing for their children. R#4 has several siblings and his parents had been tirelessly inculcating them with traditional Chinese values. The parental teachings have a profound impact on R#4's precept in life.</p>
Respondent 5 (R#5)	58	Chinese Educated	Doctorate Degree	<p>Experience: More than 30 years of experience in education and business industries and achieved self actualization status through his extra-ordinary continuing personal and business efforts.</p> <p>Family Background: R#5 is from a family involving small business in a northern state of Malaysia.</p>
Respondent 6 (R#6)	55	Chinese Educated	High School Certificate	<p>Experience: More than 30 years of experience in printing business.</p> <p>Family Background: R#6 is from an average income family.</p>

To R#1, profitability is not the prime concern, what is even more important is the organizational contribution to the society and community through good leadership. R#1 mentioned:

"We need to do good to the society through good leadership, we need to work hard and contribute tax to government revenues and helping the needy." He further described his leadership in the following way:

"In 1998, Si En Ai Foundation was established, it was the first foundation set up by an MLM group

in Malaysia. Every year, we consistently led and contributed a large amount from our company earnings to help students from poor families to further their higher education and also helping single parent families with their financial difficulties. The purpose of this foundation is to deliver our love and concern to these weaker societal groups This initiative is utmost important in leadership qualities..."

R#1 further shared his experience within his group in the following way:

“Our corporate culture is based on the belief in contributing to the society at large, this is our attitude and all of our products and services meant to fulfill the consumers’ needs. Our sincerity and confidence are important to us, we are committed and felt passionate in bringing healthy products to the community, by doing this, we are not only helping ourselves, helping others but practicing honesty and fairness to all stakeholders involved are crucial to leaders...”

R#1 further commented:

“To my staff, I would encourage my staff to work hard and be honest and be fair to others in all undertaking. I always shared with them, company is just a platform for them to service others, service-oriented attitude is virtue... it will lead to good conduct and better work spirit as a strategic leader...”

R#1 described influence of Sun Zi Art of War in him:

“As the business environment is very competitive, we need to learn to do good to everyone in everyday based on good moral values. Sometimes, letting others taking advantage on us is beneficial as it may influence others by reflection. We need to be morally right in all undertaking and be contented and being able to let go things that we are not suppose to possess. Under whatever situation, we need to continue to survive and be innovative. Natural competition is good and it promotes innovative products and services to the consumers. Corporate leaders must understand that we learn from mistakes and such experience builds our wisdom, the wisdom of being able to lead morally and being able to let go our unnecessary desire”

R#1 excitingly described the sensational Sun Zi Art of War philosophical values in him in the following way:

“My group’s Ant Mascot serves to instill core values to help staffs and distributors succeed in their business and everyday life such as: Nurture love and generosity; be sensitive and responsive to surrounding events; Be self-motivated to learn and executing the ways of true success; Carry a positive and enthusiastic approach to all thinking and action; Never be arrogant amidst success; always appreciate and respect others; Always stay ahead by applying creative and innovative ideas; Work professionally, diligently, and with great resolution to achieve maximum result; Hold true to all mutual agreements and decisions, and carry out the responsibilities without compromise; Take personal responsibility in ensuring success of tasks; Cultivate team spirit and build close ties with members of the my group family; Good mastery of communication skills, always stay informed, and able to convey messages clearly and accurately.”

Therefore, R#1 sees his experience which led to the state of strategic mindset:

“Wisdom includes the understanding of innovation of products and services in order to satisfy consumers at large, understanding of changes of external environment, knowing the business mechanism as well as corporate social responsibilities. We need to consistently improving...and through proper education and continuous effort, we can train our future successors...this is what I expect...”

Similarly, It was interesting to note that R#2 who experienced the transformation of his business transitions generalized his perceptions toward evaluated and overall understanding of the influence of Sun Zi Art of War philosophical values on his understanding in the following list on moral influence mindset and the good way of behaviour:

“...people have worldly passions which lead them into delusions and sufferings. There are five ways to emancipate themselves from the bond of worldly passions...First, they should have right ideas of things, ideas that are based on careful observation, and understand causes and effects and their significance correctly. Since the cause of suffering is rooted in the mind’s desires and attachments, and since desire and attachment are related to mistaken observations of an ego-self and neglects the significance of the law of cause and effect...Second, people can get rid of these mistaken observations and resulting worldly passions by careful and patient mind-control. With the efficient mind-control they can avoid desires arising from the stimulating of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin and the subsequent mental processes and, by doing so, will cut off the very root of all worldly passions...Third, they should have correct ideas with regard to the proper use of all things. That is, with regard to the proper use of food and clothing...Fourth, people should learn endurance; they should learn to endure the discomforts of hunger and thirst...and fifth, people should learn to see and to avoid all danger...if one practices caution and prudence, the fire of worldly passions which is burning in their vitals will die down...”

R#2 recalled, his business performance is mainly influenced by the knowledge and understanding of planning, execution and leadership based on Sun Zi Art of War philosophy. He shared his thought at the time:

“I have leading this group for more than 25 years since its inception. Our group performance was a joint hard work among all of my assistants and staff. Their perspiration and inspiration with me in terms of designing business strategies, managing organisational resources and capabilities had helped the group to shine. Thanks to morality we have established and the flexibility we have cultivated in our business endeavours.”

R#2 added:

"Being able to change to suit consumers' expectation is very crucial. Nothing is permanent, except change itself. We will continuously change our products to satisfy our consumers in terms of quality, design and packaging and change is also instituted in our HR practices specially to our staff training programmes as they need to keep their competencies up to date and being helpful to all of our agents and consumers."

It was not difficult to see that R#2's statements show that his deep knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy is based on his evaluated understanding particularly dependent on the deep evaluated understanding on moral influence (tao) such as being patience, doing away the inner greed, honesty and fairness, morality and strategic mindset. He has also shown deep and high level of knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War in terms of values such as sincerity, confidence, diligence, good courtesy, faith and being kind, and chung yung. P#1 has shown his evaluated understanding in terms of values such as swiftness and flexibility as well as overwhelming momentum. Obviously, R#2 has shown deepest evaluated understanding of the dimensions of Sun Zi Art of War which are the philosophical mindset of strategic approach, planning and execution of strategies and the qualities of leadership. In addition, the understanding of carefulness in deciding commitment to war (careful war), deterrence as well as swiftness in ending war battles were observed.

These perceptions of R#2 were indeed consistent with the teaching of Sun Zi Art of War that considered war as a necessary evil that must be avoided whenever possible. The war should be fought swiftly to avoid economic losses: "No long war ever profited any country: 100 victories in 100 battles is simply ridiculous. Anyone who excels in defeating his enemies triumphs before his enemy's threats become real" (Wee 2003).

Sun Zi Art of War emphasized the importance of positioning in military strategy. The decision to position an army must be based on both objective conditions in the physical environment and the subjective beliefs of other, competitive factors in that environment. Strategy was not planning in the sense of working through an established list, but rather that it requires quick and appropriate responses to changing conditions. Planning works in a controlled environment; but in a changing environment, competing plans collide, creating unexpected situations. These evidences show that R#2 reflected an evaluated understanding of philosophy of Sun Zi Art of War while leading his organization.

In other words, it is observed that R#2 shown a deep insight and a high level of evaluated understanding of Sun Zi Art of War. He was very consistent in terms of mentioning of concepts of Sun Zi Art of War with high intensity. This can be seen from the pattern of the frequency observed.

In the same vein, R#3 described knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi's Art of War in his corporate experience in the following way:

"Strategic option is very important to me. The world is like a small cosmology, to win is to know our self comparing to our competitors and make the most use in promoting our understanding of environmental screening. I practice strategic thinking for all aspects of my company operation."

Based on the findings of the enumerated data, R#3 shown moderate to high level of evaluated knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War in terms of patience, honesty and self-restraint and strategic thinking.

Similarly, R#4 shared his experience with the knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War in the following way:

"I streamlined my company to make it cost-efficient and responsive to a fast evolving environment. So many things were mismanaged and the merchandising selection was mismatched. We had to be realistic based on our location and consumer profile, which is 80% Malay. We need to be fair to this market segment. The value of fairness to our consumers at large is crucial in my leadership. Of course, this brings us to the missing Louis Vuitton and Gucci boutiques. When my company first opened, we had big name in-store boutiques. This format was identical to my company stores in Japan but we soon realised this business model was unsuitable. Ability of self-restraint is very important, we don't go into business areas that we are not good at, we are not greedy, but stay focus on our expertise"

R#4 also expressed his generalized perceptions on Sun Zi Art of War on the following list:

"...people love their egoistic comfort which is the love of fame and praise. But fame and praise are like incense that consumes itself and soon disappears. If people chase after honors and public acclaim and leave the way of truth, they are in serious danger and will soon have cause for regret..."

"...it is difficult to follow the way to Enlightenment, but it is more difficult if people have no mind to seek such a way. Without Enlightenment, there is endless suffering in this world of life and death..."

"...according to my understanding, the Noble Eightfold Path refers to right view, right thought, right speech, right behavior, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and rith concentration..."

On the other hand, R#5 showed his knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War when he recollected his corporate experience in his company:

"Crisis tends to happen in business and it depends on types of problems. Certain problems are controllable and certain are not. How to tackle crisis is through our learning from mistakes and we should

learn to convert the mistake to opportunities. Therefore, successful businessmen know how to interact with people with good faith and sincerity. Our courtesy and kindness to others, together with strategies, doing something best, possess sustainability, stay focus and the luck factor will determine likelihood of business success. The way I lead my company is to create loyalty, letting staff feeling satisfied and belonged to the company and always talk to them directly about their problems. Though this trust, we can build better working relationship..."

R#5 continued in the following:

"By understanding their background differences we can then develop appropriate HR practices for them. I always tell my staffs how important they are to our company, and it is not only through education but rather, through social interaction that build trust and sincerity"

According to R#6, effective leader must possess trust, sincerity, diligence and good faith. He further generalized his perceptions on Sun Zi Art of War in the following list on self discipline, purpose and leading organisation.

"...self discipline means, at its most personal level, that you do not attempt to deceive yourself. Always be careful what you think and do, but be particularly careful when you believe you are alone. Practice self restraint in your private life Remember that a person's opinion of himself eventually shows in his face and is reflected in his outward behavior. A true leader exercises self discipline through controlling his thoughts and actions even when he believes that no one else can see him..."

"...practice the manner of the refined, not that of the masses. Do not indulge in bragging, pettiness, or other excessive behavior..."

"...purpose is the motivating force for achievement. When you are doing something which serves your purpose, you are at your best. A man cannot use what he learns without the fire of purpose in his heart. The driving ambition of sincere purpose alone enables him to perform great accomplishments..."

"...If you want to encourage mutual respect and teamwork in the workplace, always be courteous and considerate of others. Accomplishing worthwhile goals becomes easier when people respect each other and work harmoniously in team..."

"...A leader can be called truly skillful in human relations when he values other people's strong points even after learning about their faults. An outstanding leader quickly overlooks small faults, errors, or wrongs. As a result, he has few enemies. Petty disagreements can disrupt team spirit, just as small irritations and minor impatience can destroy great projects..."

R#6 also emphasized the influence of Sun Zi's Art of War on his corporate experience:

"In business, we need to use strategies to win the competitive game based on morality influence. I don't believe in winning through unethical ways, this is sinful and self damaging, organisations with strategic perspective always have an added advantages in market competition."

Table 3 depicts number of times a concept or dimension is mentioned or referenced about philosophy of Sun Zi Art of War during the interviews.

Table 3: Cross Case Comparison of Frequency of Respondents' Responses of Knowledge and Understanding for Sun Zi Art of War philosophy.

Respondent	Sun Zi Art of War Frequency (# of times a concept or dimension is mentioned or referenced)
R#1	35
R#2	50
R#3	50
R#4	60
R#5	63
R#6	21

Discussion And Conclusion:

Previous researchers (Liu 2009; Redding 1990; Wah 2010; Warner 2008; Cheng 2011; Yao 2006) studied extensively that Chinese leadership studies can not be isolated in context from Chinese wisdom rooted in the rich traditional culture and philosophy. The finding of this study explored how Buddhism philosophy influences corporate leaders and leadership in general and Chinese corporate leaders in Malaysia in particular.

It was not difficult to see that respondents statements show that they have deep knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War such as deepest evaluated understanding of the dimensions of Sun Zi Art of War which are the philosophical mindset of

strategic approach, planning and execution of strategies and the qualities of leadership. In addition, the understanding of carefulness in deciding commitment to war, deterrence as well as swiftness in ending war battles were observed.

The finding indicates that even though the participant possesses the knowledge and understanding of Chinese traditional philosophy in general, Respondents shown their higher level of understanding of Sun Zi Art of War hence leading their organizations to a certain along the tenets of the Chinese traditional philosophy they subscribed to most. The finding suggests that the participants' responses based on knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy that shown in terms of

frequency, intensity and consistency in the qualitative responses/data collected via interviews were quite consistent.

Through the inductive analysis based on this study, the influence of Sun Zi Art War philosophy on leadership have emerged. Specifically, the themes of the influences are pointed to the moral and strategic philosophical values of Sun Zi Art of War.. The finding of this study echoed to the most research on related leadership literature (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Eflin 2003; Hersley and Farrel 1997; Holliday and Chandler, 1986; Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse, & Kouzmin, 2001; Malen and Kriger 1998; Kriger & Seng, 2005; Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, Goodwin, 2005 and Yang and Bond (1990) where spiritual understanding is seen as critical understanding and action for complex corporate decision making, applying both knowledge and actions for organizational purposes and reasons.

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