



Review

Asian leadership style and ways: the case of the leader being the boat, and his subjects the water

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Abstract

The Asian leading ways or governance has frequently been criticized as predecessor, out-of-date or archaic to the liberal democracy and individual freedom advocated by the west. Here, the researcher-practitioner examines that in Asia, should the leaders want to be successful leaders, the needs of their people must indeed be catered to. Leaders must listen to the people's voice, and that is important. In a gist, it is as democratic as the Western style and ways of leadership. There is support for the leaders, and the leaders can or will continue to be in power as long as there is the support of the people or the Heavenly Mandate exists.

Keywords: Heavenly Mandate, leaders, non-leaders, people's needs, people's support, Confucius, Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, self-cultivation.

INTRODUCTION

The Asian ways of leading or governance have frequently been criticized as antecedent to the liberal democracy and individual freedom advocated by the west.

Paper's aim and objectives

The aim and objectives of the paper is two-fold. One, this paper is an intention and an attempt to examine the fact that in Asia, should the leaders want to succeed in leading their people, the people's needs must truly be provided for. Two, it also seeks to include a pulse check, posing self-questions, on one's leadership style and ways, and in particular, to make the needs of one's followers paramount and be essentially provided for. Remember, after all, what have been stressed by Confucius, and to paraphrase Confucius –The Analects, I verse 4 (Lau, 1979: 59), every day I examine myself on three counts. In what I have undertaken on another's (the organization's) behalf, have I failed to do my best? In my dealings with my people have I failed in what I say and do? Have I passed on to others anything that I have not tried out myself?

In the sense that in Asia, the leaders must cater to their people's needs, it is as democratic as the Western style and ways of leadership. There is support for the leaders, and the leaders can or will continue to be in

power as long as there is the Heavenly Mandate (the people's support).

Based on the Confucian Rectification of Names, if a non-leader is appointed to a leadership position, then not having the abilities and/or competencies/skills, he or she will not be able to lead. If a person is a non-leader, he or she basically cannot lead. As such, a leader should be a leader; in the same vein, the same interpretation can be derived from Zhuang Zi's (Zhuang Tzu's) statement that "a small bag cannot hold large things; and a short rope cannot reach a deep well" (Zhuang Zi Says, 2009: 197). In the Confucian sense, if a petty person should be appointed as a leader or assume a leadership position with its attendant responsibilities, then he or she would clearly fail, if not miserably.

This being the case, Confucianism stresses that one should then first cultivate one's own character – one strives, "perfects his or her virtue" (Low, 2008: 39; italics, author's), just to name several qualities, to be upright (廉, lian), benevolent (仁爱, ren ai), set the example, has moral courage (义, yi), brother(sister)hood (悌, ti) and magnanimous/ big-heartedness (宽容之心, kuān róng zhī xīn) as well as polite or courteous (礼, li) (Shen, 2012; Low, 2008). Confucius emphasized the cultivation of the individual, and from cultivating oneself to regulating one's family, then to governing the country and establishing



Figure 1. Diagram/ analogy of the tree, roots and soil illustrating that organizations (nations) grow from strength to strength or flourish because of their leaders, and people giving support to their leaders; they trust them. The leaders must indeed care for their people.

peace throughout the world at large.

Both Lao Zi (Lao Tzu) and Zhuang Zi advocate a lifestyle with few desires. Its aim, one simply be oneself and be simple and natural. Should one have few desires or needs, one would then be able to better attend to the needs of the people. From the works of Confucius, Mencius, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, we now draw wisdom, strengths and support for the notion or metaphors or symbols that the leader’s the boat and the people’s the water.

And in the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad-Gita (Song of God) or Indian moral traditions, one notes that Sri Krishna leads Arjuna to this path of skillful, selfless action and non-attachment (Swami Rama, 1996: 294); and more so, in the leadership setting, such dharma (dutiful) actions lead to successful leadership actions as the leader seeks to fulfill the needs while making the masses happy.

The Leader Is the Boat: His Subjects the Water

The lord is the boat: his subjects the water. It is the water that sustains the boat, and it is the water that capsizes the boat.” (Book 9.4 of Xunzi, 313-238 BC, cited in Shen, 2012; Eberhard, 1997). Here, it can be taken that the people are important. In Confucianism, the people are an important asset. The leader can be successful only when it has the support of the people.

And in Taoism, it can be likened to the fact that leaders are the keeper; the tiger is gentle to the keeper because the keeper complies with its disposition (Zhuang Zi Says, 2009). By the same token, the people’s needs must be fulfilled by the leader. The tiger can get murderous only when it gets irritated. So also the people would resist or overthrow the leader when their needs are

not satisfied. The people’s needs are thus paramount; their needs must always be catered to by the leader, failing which, not trusting the leader, the people will not be contented; they will instead clamor for the leader’s appropriate or fitting actions and/or even his or her removal.

In this respect, the gist and core of the Malay saying: “kuat pohon kerana akarnya. Kuat akar kerana tanahnya” is pertinent and indeed applicable here; it essentially means that “if the tree is strong and firm, it is because of its roots. Strong roots ordinarily arisen because of the soil (the tree is in).” Likewise, organizations (nations) grow from strength to strength or flourish because of their leaders, and people giving support to their leaders; they trust them. These leaders care for their people, catering to their needs. And being trustworthy, the people support their leaders; and these leaders are thus able to lead the people (Figure 1).

Valuing People and Appreciating Talents

People or human resources should be treasured and talents respected (Low, 2010). It creates or builds peaceful industrial relations, good employer-employee relationships as well as it is on the whole good to do business in the country. Good and successful leaders make full use of their strengths and that of their team or people. These, in fact, resonate with what Rath and Conchie (2008: 2) has pointed out, that is, the most effective leaders are said to “surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their teams”.

When the stables burned down, Confucius – caring most and showing concern about people – asked if any person had been hurt; he did not ask about the horses (Confucius – The Analects, X verse 17) (Lau, 1979: 104).

He also recognized the free will of every individual, believing that the commander of three armies could be removed, but the will of even a common person could not be taken away. (Low, 2011: 25).

Leaders need to ask themselves and candidly answer these questions:

“Do I value my people?”

“Do I appreciate the talents that I have?”

“Do I put the people’s strengths to use?”

Getting the People’s Support: The Majority-Support of the People Is Essential

Leaders need the majority-support of the people, without such a support, leaders would fail to act or lead effectively. It is tantamount to the common Chinese saying that goes, “A single tree cannot make a forest. A single beam cannot support a great house.” (Lau with Lau and Lau, 1995: 19). This not only shows the connection or relationship of the leader with his or her people but also, the relationships among the people or the collectivist nature/ culture of the Asian peoples.

Interestingly, Mao Zedong applied this principle adeptly in China’s struggle and fight against the Kuomintang and the invading Japanese. China, having an agrarian economy, has peasants as the majority of her population; and Maoism saw the agrarian peasantry, rather than the working class, as the prime revolutionary force which can basically transform capitalist society towards socialism. “Be concerned with the well-being of the masses, pay attention to methods of work.” (27 January 1934) (Selected Works, Vol. 1:147, cited in <http://art-bin.com/art/omao8.html>). Maoist organizations mainly emphasize the People’s War based on Mao’s ideology, its leaders believe in mobilizing large parts of rural populations to revolt against established institutions by engaging in guerilla warfare. Mao’s downsides are the reliance on violence; to him, “power comes out from the barrel of the gun”.

Undeniably, investments are to be readily made and rendered on the people; the population must learn and be trained. And it is worthy to note that Mao Zedong was also a key educator of the proletariat. With his extensive writings on education itself and his substantial practical experience of teaching, he paved the way for a specifically Chinese form of socialist education. The Chinese sum up his contribution to education in the phrase: ‘The educational doctrine of Mao Zedong’ (<http://www.greenstone.org/greenstone3/nzdl?a=dandd=HASH01c9f1faddf992ff57c9240e.9andc=edudevanddt=>).

Listening to the People’s Voice: The People’s Voice Is Critical

A leader should, according to the late Japanese corpo-

rate leader, Matsushita Konosuke, take or assume that public opinion is generally correct. A Latin proverb puts it thus – vox populi, vox dei. Or as the great American politician Abraham Lincoln (cited in Matsushita, 1991: 99) said, “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you can’t fool all the people all of the time”. In essence, one must listen to the people’s voice as if it were the voice of God, and obey it fairly, justly and sincerely. As long as a leader does this, the world will receive him or her warmly, and will have no reason to rise in anger. “It is a leader who strays from this path that incurs the wrath of the people.” (Matsushita, 1991: 99).

Leaders thus need to ask themselves whether they are actually listening to the voice of their people.

Putting People First

The leader must be humane in his or her dealings with others (Matsushita, 1991). In true Confucian fashion, the late Japanese corporate leader Soichiro Honda valued the human element (Honda, 1996: 45). For Honda, “simple or high power work is entrusted to machine production, and the remaining work is the total responsibility of the workers” (Honda, 1996: 44, 45).

If leaders or for that matter anyone who are going to make the world a better place, and increase the sum of human happiness, we must know ourselves. All of us should understand what it means to be human, and how humans should behave. If any one of us, or more so, if leaders are thoughtless and needlessly cruel, then all our efforts will prove futile, unproductive and result, in its place, in human suffering. As a leader, one must really strive to be humane. One needs to use this as a basis or heart for leading one’s life and it will prove to be a true source of strength (Matsushita, 1991).

Westerners call it “democratic values” or “equality”, but the author would attribute this to the Asians’ sense of gratitude or appreciation and putting people first. To Confucius, a man will only be called a man if he treats all men equally as men.

When handing down an order, Matsushita did so in the spirit of a polite request rather than a command. The product of this approach was a feeling of respect and gratitude for the labors of the employees, that might be articulated by saying “That was a good job well done!” and offering a cup of tea or other refreshment after a successful accomplishment (Matsushita, 1994: 51). A president could not just sit passively by while his staff toiled, moreover; he had to carefully guide the company according to sound business principles and with a strong sense of mission.

Leaders need to significantly ask themselves and honestly answer these questions:

“Do I put the people first?”

“Do I put my interests first?”

“What can I do to put the people first?”
 “What else can I do to put the people first?”
 “What more could I do to put my people first?”

Knowing the Paramount Needs or Priorities of the People

Successful leaders know that the people’s needs are paramount; and this is what leadership is all about. “Leaders should understand the needs of their followers.” (Moss, 1994: 81), and that is the mark of a good leader of people. An outstanding example is that of Mahatma Gandhi; he was not only empathetic but he also understood the people’s needs. Having the ordinary people touch, Gandhi was able to connect with the Indian masses, and the people trusted him. They identified with him. For the Mahatma, he felt that he had to live or be with them, thus, he dressed like one of them, just wearing a lion-cloth; this was an Indian peasant’s wear and not wearing a Western suit, coat and tie. (Low, 2012; Low, 2010a: 114; Fischer, 1954).

It is worthy to note that Mao Zedong valued China’s outstanding cultural heritage, believing that over several millennia, from Confucius to Sun Yatsen, the Chinese people had created a beautiful civilization which they should both appreciate and bring forward, in a spirit of critical awareness, retaining its best features and rejecting the useless (http://www.greenstone.org/greenstone3/nzdl?a=dandd=HASH01c9f1faddf992ff57c9240e.9andc=edudevanddt=). It can be said that caring for the Chinese masses and their needs, Mao was against ‘wholesale Westernization’.

One can argue that in the Confucian sense, the leader upholds the value of benevolence or *ren ai*; and in today’s business context, to be *ren* is to be “people-driven”, focusing on relationships including those outside the business area, respecting authority and superiors, caring about peers and team members (Wang and Chee, 2011: 27); the people’s needs must be looked into and catered for. And to add, in present day’s overall context, there is a need to look into the societal needs, environmental greenness and the relationships with other countries as well as the overall well-being of the international community.

In Taoism, one can see that for Zhuang Zi, grand music will not interest or appeal to the villagers; however, popular music will set them laughing heartily. Therefore, lofty or snooty speech will not remain in the hearts of the common people, great truth will not be spoken by the common people, and only worldly or experienced sayings are prevalent (Zhuang Zi Says, 2009: 23). Hence the people’s needs are paramount.

And in Hinduism or India’s philosophical traditions (Hawley, 2006; Swami Prabhavananda, 1977), in terms of dharma or duty, the leader or the individual should give him (her) self over to the needs of the community or the

people. To quote the Bhagavad-Gita (cited in Swami Prabhavananda, 1977: 106):

All mankind
 Is born for perfection
 And each shall attain it,
 Will he but follow
 His nature’s duty.

Faithful performance of one’s duty brings respect and gratitude from one’s peers; however, in the end, even this will not satisfy, and the individual strives for liberation or moksha, freeing oneself from desires and selfishness – doing his or her duty while loving God; and this then will ultimately help him or her to rise to the highest ideal of personhood while truly attaining being, infinite joy and ultimate bliss.

Indeed the main point here is that “the most effective leaders understand their followers’ needs.” (Rath and Conchie, 2008: 3). Then again, perhaps leader at times do not cater to their people needs. According to Rath and Conchie (2008): coauthors of *Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow*, it is easy for leaders to misunderstand or misread what followers need. The confusion is made worse because what leaders get paid to do often is not what their followers need them to do.

Leaders, in order to run an organization effectively, must be able to strategize, set visions and priorities, build relationships, influence others, and make things happen. However, if one asks followers what they need from leaders, the clear answer is trust, compassion, stability, and hope. These four fundamental needs are the result of Rath, Conchie, and a Gallup research team asking more than 10,000 followers what the most influential leaders contribute to their lives. Trust is essentially built through relationships, and it is vital because it is the initial currency that a leader has with her team or her followers.

In this regard, Confucius urged one to “be trustworthy in what you say; avoid excesses in expenditure and love your fellow men” (Confucius – *The Analects*, I verse 5) (Lau, 1979: 59). Besides, “the Master instructs under four heads: culture, moral conduct, doing one’s best and being trustworthy in what one says.” (Confucius – *The Analects*, VII verse 15) (Lau, 1979: 89).

Leaders must thus ask themselves these:

“Do I know what my people need?”

“What and how can I do to cater to the needs of my people?”

Being Patient, Patiently Prodding On and Resolving the Problem(s)

A proverb goes as such, “He that can have patience, can have what he will.”

Lao Zi pointed out that patience was critical, being one of the three treasures (Verse 67, *Tao de Ching*, Lao Tzu, 1990; Low, 2013; 2009). In Verse 29, he spoke of:

“There is a time for being ahead,
 a time for being behind;
 a time for being in motion,
 a time for being at rest;
 a time for being vigorous,
 a time for being exhausted;
 a time for being safe,
 a time for being in danger.”

For the Chinese, there is a time or season for everything; timing is everything. And in essence, being patient is an asset or an advantage, indeed a virtue to be valued. Confucianism also stresses on the importance of being patient; the lack of patience in small matters will eventually bring ruins to the great or overall plan. (Confucius – the Analects, XV verse 27) (Lau, 1979: 135).

When confronted with an issue or a problem, to the author, the Western style and ways of leadership would include certain benchmarks, the highest standards or some definite criteria in which all members of the team or the inside group members – whether meeting their needs or that they are satisfied or otherwise – have to aspire to, subscribe and follow through, and no matter what happens, these are then abided or complied.

Unlike the Western style and ways, Asian leaders tackle issues or problems differently. One respondent intimated to this researcher that “the Chinese or Asian way involves the slow cooking or hot pot strategy, getting to know the people/ the other side, surveying their needs; discussing things, meeting their needs; creating rapport; building relationships, and looking at various ways to satisfy all parties concerned” (an interviewee’s inputs). Take a look at the Taiwan issue, and Taiwan is to be part of the People’s Republic of China; things are to be worked out, dead-slow it may be, but in a fashion that is to be in line with the needs and/ or satisfaction of all parties concerned – and much need to be talked and discussed as well as more patience required.

In another example, if Asian leaders are faced or challenged with any grave problem(s), they, the Association of South East Asian Nations: ASEAN leaders are patient in their approach, inching in their ways and style. Issues are highlighted and discussed; yes, they wish to see things being settled; and yes, settled well. However, it is to be mended or reconciled with the long-term interests in mind as well as customarily, with the full satisfaction of all – not just some or a few – of the members involved.

One Chinese proverb speaks of, “with time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes a silk gown”. Obviously, patience is a virtue and power; it is not only about bearing or enduring a long wait. Patience is also about withstanding blames, insults, provocation and mistreatment without resentment. Why put up with misuse or abuse? It is commendable to note that this is all because patience is also an articulation and an example of compassion and being benevolent (ren) or

human. Because Asians should or need to be compassionate. (Asian philosophies, and more specifically, Confucius and Buddha taught them so. Buddhists normally refer to patience as armor that shields the compassionate person from the barbs and verbal attacks of others.) They need to stomach or endure the flaws of others and work things out, and there is a need to settle things patiently, empathetically and cooperatively.

Thus, to sum up, leaders should often ask themselves these questions:

“Am I patient enough to establish rapport and know the people’s (the other party’s) needs?”

“Do I enjoy the rapport or closeness with my people (parties I am involved with)?”

“Do I really know their needs?”

“How am I to work with them?” or “How can we work in short-term and in long-term ways to mutually satisfy each other(, meeting our respective goals)?”

Pushing a Falling Fence: Being Resilient

A leader constantly renews his determination to succeed; he or she has these fondness or penchants towards “never give up”; while catering to the needs of his or her people, he or she “keep(s) his (or her) resolve fresh” (Matsushita, 1991: 36-37).

A wise ancient Chinese saying has it that, “Everybody pushes a falling fence”. And so they do. In disrespect, perhaps because the falling fence leans away from whatever pushed it; a leader should instead be ready to lean some more whenever it is pushed again, and this they must! And be determinedly leaning towards the people’s needs.

When there is, for example, a problem or a crisis; clearly the leader should be there. Perceptively-speaking, leaders should have leanings to facing and meeting the problem and the challenge to cater to the needs of the people. They cannot do nothing, ignoring the issue or pretending that it does not exist. Leaders must really confront, tackle and act on the challenge, meeting the needs of the people. This author fully agrees with Kopmeyer (2003: 259: 261) who insightfully argues that leaders should have the bent or leanings towards danger and their people’s needs. Accordingly, those who have watched a pack or group of animals can easily tell the leader. Animals can sense. When there is a coming danger and always, without the least hesitation or slightest indecision, the leader of the herd moves toward the danger. Or he or she would no longer be accepted as leader; the leader is instinctively predisposed to place himself between the herd and danger. The leader leans toward danger; the person is thus the unquestioned leader.

So, overall here, leaders should always ask themselves these questions:

“Do I have the rapport with my people?”

“Am I, by nature or my make-up – or even better, by training – inclined to always, without the slightest hesitation, place myself between my people and danger?”

“When hurricanes or the storms of life reach the force to push me around, do I purposefully and determinedly lean into every storm and stand firm?”

Serving the People

Of deep significance are these: “Those who strive for wealth will not give up their salary; those who strive for reputation will not give up their good fame; and those who strive for power will not give up their position.” (Zhuang Zi says, 2009: 169). Egoistic, bosses, in fact, do not serve, they want to be served; being humble, leaders serve (Low, 2013).

For Zhuang Zi, he who shares or portions his virtue with others is called a sage and his talents with others is called a worthy man. “A man by his worth lords it over others will never win the support of others”; a man who by his worth exceeds over others will surely win the support of others. (Zhuang Zi says, 2009: 166-167).

Mao said these, “We should be modest and prudent, guard against arrogance and rashness, and serve the Chinese people heart and soul” (China’s Two Possible Destinies) (23 April 1945) (Selected Works, Vol. III, p. 253, cited in <http://art-bin.com/art/omao17.html>). This, to the author, is the key reason for leadership; leaders are to serve and not be served.

In Hinduism (the Bhagavad-Gita speaks of, as a leader), one needs “to balance your life by giving more than you receive. . . The whole scheme of nature is not centered on grabbing but on offering loving, selfless service, which is sacrifice” (Hawley 2006: 77; also cited in Low, 2013: 167). Such a leader is helpful and works in the interest of the community. (To this author, should the leader not talk or act based on self-sacrifice; he or she may not want even to talk about rewards and perks, my word! Please be cynical, if not, at least, be duly aware of him or her. Somehow, trust it, that the leader would make it good for he or she would also have the vital spiritual ballast, and this spiritual counterweight, acting as a spring well, could greatly assist him or her – and even in overcoming whatever obstacles.)

Servant leaders ordinarily dedicate themselves to serving the needs of organization (nation) members, focus on meeting the needs of those they lead, develop or grow employees to bring out the best in them, coach others and encourage their self-expression, facilitate personal growth in all who work with them and listen well to build a sense of community and joint ownership. Servant leaders are felt to be effective because the followers’ needs are so looked after that they reach their full potential, hence perform at their best. A good point of

such a way of looking at servant leadership is that it forces us away from self-serving, domineering or overbearing leadership and makes those in charge think harder about how to respect, appreciate and motivate people reporting to them (McCrimmon, 2012). In short, advocates of servant leadership stresses on these two factors, that is, serving the people and a valuable trait of the leaders’ being selfless. The leader who campaigns mainly on the basis of popular policies like cutting taxes serves the needs of the electorate, but is really just buying votes. How can this be leadership? Indeed such a person is more interested in getting elected than doing what is best for the people or country. It is good to take a skeptical attitude toward such people, and one should question whether they ought to be considered as leaders at all. (McCrimmon, 2012).

Leaders should thus seriously and decisively ask themselves:

“Do I serve my people?”

“Do I serve my people well?”

“What else can I do to serve my people better?”

Caring and Showing Concern

Asian leadership is overall caring; though firm or disciplined, Asian leadership is paternalistic and parental in approach (Low, 2006). Like the father/ bread-winner, the leader (kacho - Japanese) looks after the family (organization/ nation) and ensures or promotes their well-being (Low, 2008; 2006; Hanada and Yoshikawa, 1991). The leader indeed looks after the people, and the people are obliged to be loyal and obey the leader; it is a mutual exchange and relationship, striving to attain win-win relationships for all parties. The leader devotes and heavily invests on the people; and the people follow and support the leader. In Islamic ways, “He who wisheth to enter Paradise at the best door must please his father and mother” (Prophet Mohammad cited, in Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 103). There is truly a definite trust of the father leader. This however presupposes that the leader is correct in all sense of the word – particularly in the moral sense, not being corrupt and is, overall, ethically above board. Note though that things are changing since, nowadays, the Asian populace is getting more educated, more vocal, demanding and participative, this author feels that the people would still follow or obey if the leader is sincere, and is serious in wanting to help the people; and more so, if he or she has the people’s needs and interests in mind, action and even results.

In the Bhagavad Gita traditions and the Hindu holy books, caring for others is critical. Every person or leader has to act or take actions; it is then noted that good actions are to be performed selflessly and with the fruits given as offerings to the Lord who is in everyone have no binding power. Selfless service is important and besides, good actions bring good fruits, and those fruits can be

used just to allow one to live in the world so that he or she can discharge his or her duties effectively (Sri Rama, 1996: 226-227).

Readers would note that Asia has in fact grown at a remarkable speed over the past decade, and is expected to continue to do so in the next 10 years (Yahya, 2011). And indeed present Asian leaders thus need to engage and talk to the populations more while listening, hearing and factoring in their views – not just be seen doing, but more so, these being done from the leaders' heart. And they, the people can tell so if all these are genuine.

And should the leader have good support of the ground, the people, the humanistic leader such as a (post or modern) Confucian leader, working with the people can really affect or cause growth. This has undoubtedly been the case of Singapore Government in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. And it is reflected in the Chinese saying that goes, "If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want ten years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want hundred years of prosperity, grow people." (iWise, Inc. 2012). The Singapore government has indeed invested a lot on education and training as well as upgrading of skills of its people (Low, 2006). The Singapore Government invests in university education, seeking to make local universities "world-class" and "best in the region"; and "with Singapore's ambition to be the knowledge center of the region, it is only natural to emphasise research and development" (Cham 1998: 35-40, also cited in Low, 2013).

Leaders must truly face, handle and act on the challenge, meeting the people's needs, giving them comfort and security. If they are too business-minded, task-oriented or materialistic, how can leaders adequately meet the people's needs or satisfactorily give them comfort, both physically and mentally. It is indeed logical that when a spring dries up, the fish are stranded or stuck on the land, moistening each other with their breath and wetting each other with their slime. But it would be much better for them to live in the rivers and lakes and forget each other (Zhuang Zi says, 2009: 103). By the same token, it appears reasonable that governments or leaders and their followers jostle, squabble over their respective share of rewards (just to name a few examples, lesser bonuses or fewer perks and salaries' reduction or even loss of jobs: reduced hiring/ increased firing) and/or resources during times of slow economic growth. It would, however, be much better for all to live well; the people and the leaders/ government doing or fulfilling their respective roles and duties (in line with the Tao or the Confucian Rectification of Names) – the people then work hard and the government, not forgetting the people's priorities, takes care of the people in whatever state of economy (business). In short, leaders must simply remember their people's needs. And fulfill them. They must simply care for their people.

In the Malay world context, the leaders are there traditionally to protect the people (Low, 2013). "Ibarat

kayu (pohon) besar ditengah padang, tempat bernaung kepanasan, tempat berlindung kehujan (translated, meaning 'like a big tree in a middle of the field, a place for shades in a hot day, a place for shelter on rainy days'). This Malay proverb indicates that a good leader is someone who will look after the well-being of his followers by ensuring their safety and security. A Malay leader would always be seen by his followers as their patron or protector. Thus he will have to be sensitive to the needs of his followers, and the environments" (Low, 2013: 260-261). This author would agree that the leaders must have these values, including caring (pemedulian) towards his followers, striving for the welfare (kebajikan) of his followers and showing mercy (balas kasihan) towards them but being fair and firm to them.

It is also worthy to note that in Islam or Islamic tradition, of kindness and being caring, the Prophet Mohammad said that, "He who helpeth his fellow-creature in the hour of need, and he who helpeth the oppressed, him will God help in the Day of Travail." (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 89). The Prophet also spoke of "What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured." (Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, 1992: 89; also cited in Low, 2008a: 79).

Leaders should thus aptly ask themselves:

"Do I care for my people?"

"Do I really care for my people?"

"Am I taking actions for my people?"

"What (right) actions can I take for my people?"

"Do I invest on my people well?"

Having One's Fingers on the Pulse

Leaders need to learn to ponder or introspect, to express their knowledge, and to increase consistency; they also remove problems and difficulties so others can succeed. (Jennings and Stahl, 2004).

In Confucius – The Analects, V verse 20 (Lau, 1979: 79), we are told that "Chi Wen Tzu always thought three times before taking action. When the Master was told of this, he commented, 'Twice is quite enough'." In Taosim, Zhuang Zi dream that he was a butterfly, flying about or that he was a butterfly that dreamt he was Zhuang Zi (Zhuang Zi says, 2009). This author would thus perceive that Asian philosophies, as a whole, can be reflective and contemplative in nature; and as such the Asian leader should be reflective, thinking of his or her actions. Put it in another way, the Asian leader should examine, always having his or her fingers on the pulse, and basically know his or her constituents.

It can be said that the late Matsushita Konosuke "succeeded because of his astute appreciation of the necessity for keeping in touch with the actual workplace where products are made" (Hajime, 1994: 135); he had

his fingers on the pulse. Leaders cannot hope to succeed in the future if they do not encourage such kind of realistic approach.

Often he also listened patiently to the people (Hajime, 1994; Matsushita, 1994).

Low (2012: 818 - 826) has highlighted the need for leaders to not only be listening, but also be empathetic. "Being empathetic is the fine art of 'winning people' (several interviewees' inputs). 'Understanding and being empathetic... coming from leaders and managers can be very motivating'; '(these are) soft power ways and a leader's winning ways' (several interviewees' inputs; Quick and Nelson, 2013, cited in Low, 2012: 825)".

In Confucianism, and according to Mencius, Confucius' later disciple, when men are subdued by force, their hearts are not truly won over; they submit just because they do not have enough strength to fight or resist. However, when men are won by virtue (such as being empathetic and caring), they submit or accept sincerely and are glad in their hearts (Tsai, 1991: 27; italics author's; Zi, 2009, also cited in Low, 2012: 825).

Leaders thus need to critically ask themselves:
 "Do I have my finger on the pulse of my followers?"
 "Do I listen well to my people?"
 "Do I listen patiently to my people?"

Consulting Is Better than Telling or Ordering

It is sweetness or the honey that attracts the ants.

When as company president, Matsushita Konosuke had orders to give an employee, he was known for broaching the topic as if seeking advice or offering a suggestion. In other words, instead of simply saying "Would you do such-and-such," he would say something like "I've been thinking we could do such-and-such this way; what do you think?" or "Would you undertake this job?" thus making his employees feel free to present their own opinions and suggestions on the matter. The result of this approach was that his employees would undertake assignments as if on their own initiative. It can be said that people display their best abilities when they are working on their own volition and responsibility (Matsushita, 1994).

Leaders must hence vitally ask themselves:
 "Do I ask my people?"
 "Do I consult them?" Or
 "Do I bulldoze my decisions to my people? And how often I do it?"

Sharing Dreams and Visions

Rather than the leaders and the lead being and behaving like strange bedfellows or not conversant to each other, they should share dreams and visions. Dreams and visions must, in fact, be shared. And this is important for

both the leader and the lead.

As president of Matsushita Electric, the late Matsushita took every opportunity to inform his people of his plans and dreams for the company's future. These included the Five-Year Plan announced in 1956 aimed at quadrupling sales and the project begun in 1960 to institute the five-day workweek by 1965. Most companies at the time were afraid to let the public know such plans – to show their cards, as it were – for fear of the information leaking out and being taken advantage of by competitors (Matsushita, 1994: 50). This author would agree with Matsushita in the ways in which leaders would share his information with his people. In Matsushita's case, he was fully aware of what the consequences might be, yet he chose to keep his people well-informed, because he wanted them to share in his dreams for the company, and because he believed it was simply the proper thing for the leader of a business to do.

Leaders must, as a result, essentially ask themselves:
 "Do I share the dreams with my people?"
 "Do my people know and understand the dreams we have?"

Prelude to Conclusion: Voicing Out More

Asian leaders and writers, as a whole, need to be proactive; they need to be bold, voicing out more. Tun Dr. Mahathir, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia has once argued that from his perspective, Asian leaders should assume and assert true leadership, seizing the initiatives in terms of ideas and thoughts and getting their people's respect. He deemed that some countries suffer from "too much democracy", with too many political parties; and even if good leaders were elected, they cannot finish their work or produce results within a short time (Today's Manager, 2005, cited in Low, 2006). It appears that the West or some may suspect that governments in Asia are not democratic because the government party remains in power for so long. However, he argued that if the people choose the same party and the same leader(s), then it is the people's democratic right to do so as long as proper elections were held. He also cited some undemocratic leaders in the past such as China's Deng Xiaoping who have dragged their countries and people kicking and screaming into the modern world (Today's Manager, 2004/2005, cited in Low, 2006).

CONCLUSION

For Asia, there are indeed much philosophical underpinnings or rich theoretical and ethical foundations for leaders to be democratic, let alone be liberal, be caring, and all the more, for them to do more for the people. They need to satisfy the people's needs.

All in all, if one wants to lead, it is critical to know and

understand what the people need and expect from one as a leader. And leaders really need to share their visions and dreams with their people. As a leader, one must monitor one's own behavior while searching one's heart and keeping one's conscience clear. With a clear head and a pure heart, one gets tremendous boldness, strength and support in leading, especially so, when one's behaviors are beyond reproach or blame; and one essentially looks after one's people's needs and priorities.

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