Ancient Wisdom for Modern Leadership

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1 First Chinese, Then Chinese American

At age 16, I was ignorant of the impact those 16 years had on me as a Chinese person whose parents were exiles from mainland China. It is incomprehensive to be told that my birthplace Taiwan was not my real home but simply an island where my parents had been stranded by circumstances beyond their control. Outside of the home, there was also a noticeable difference between an outsider Mainland Chinese versus a native Taiwanese. It was a psychic jolt because everything about the island gave me a sense of home—I should belong there because I had grown up there. After this revelation, there developed a perpetual incongruence between how I felt and the message I received. *You do not belong here*.

With my relocation to the United States at 16, the identity of an *outsider* was instantaneous from day one. This time it was quite different, an internal and external reality. There were no hints or subtleties needed to convey that I did not belong here. The message could be passed on with a simple look. Immigrants, of course, have always been more keenly aware of differences in how we behave, think, believe, and perceive. That is our lens and barometer, also a weapon of defense. Learning the language was the first bridge for me to fluidly connect, communicate, and code-switch across the two worlds in which I now lived. I needed to feel whole in both worlds. Yet, I am unsure if I ever achieved it even after having lived here for more than half a century.

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Since the first day we arrived in Ohio, the Chinese in me became more pronounced as I encountered differences in traveling between my concurrent American and Chinese lives. What was a normal and automatic mode of operation became a conscious and constant awareness that my Chinese self was neither functional nor accepted. I was very lonely in my Chinese life.

My first visit to Chinatown, New York was filled with anticipation and excitement. I looked forward to connecting with fellow Chinese people but was disappointed to find that language remained a barrier. In 1969, Cantonese was spoken in Chinatown, while I spoke Mandarin, so we had to rely on English to communicate as ethnic Chinese.

Additionally, I found it perplexing that the Chinese Americans in Chinatown seemed to maintain a very traditional way of life, reminiscent of nineteenth-century China. Their dress, mannerism, communication styles, and cultural habits were strikingly similar to those depicted in older Chinese dramas.

Little did I know that, more than five decades later, to newly arrived Chinese immigrants, I too may seem like a relic of the past, holding tightly to my cultural identity that defines who I am as a Chinese person. I recognized the importance of embracing my cultural heritage and did not want to let it go, despite the passage of time.

This is not everyone's experience I have discovered. Many immigrants, to erode the feeling of being an outsider or to evade prejudice and racism, meticulously strip themselves of any cultural identifiers of being anything other than an "American." Somehow, I did not even believe that was even a choice, but I could have never reconciled such a choice with my soul, regardless. I did the exact opposite in refusing to give up that which is precious to me and more. For example, instead of adopting a Western name, I persisted in using Ding-Jo despite much ridicule and micro-aggressions regarding my name over the years.

I understand the generational trauma depicted by Lee (2015), which Asian Americans have endured as both the despised and the model minority in the United States. Unfortunately, as Takaki (1989) described in *Strangers from Different Shores*, regardless of one being a first-, second-, or third-generation Asian American, the stereotype that *you must be from somewhere else other than here* persists. I understand, in a small part, the internal and external identity conflict from my Taiwan–China paradox—*you are born here, but you do not belong here.*

What I brought with me to this land—besides one suitcase and the two large bills packed inside my head and tucked away in my soul—were the teachings of my cultural and family values. I held on to them as the family heirloom that needed protection, just like the Chinese immigrants in Chinatown. They were the last treasures that could not be traded for who I am. I witnessed the bartering of many like me that in the end never resulted in the acceptance of their identity as an "American." Still, even if I was accepted as an American, Asian American, or Chinese American, I have yet to reconcile my Chinese identity, which will always be a prominent and permanent part of me and who I am.

2 Aspiring and Rising to Leadership

Navigating the whitewater currents of higher education has been like swimming upstream in the muddy roiling River. American higher education is a mirror reflection of the American society. In many ways, the system produces future generations that in turn perpetuate the system. The dominant culture of White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants manifests itself in every aspect of the system, from faculty, leadership profiles, curriculum, policies, and practices, to program designs and institutional culture (Thelin, 2011).

It is not difficult then to understand why, in so many instances, I felt as if I were submerged in the depths of that muddy river, not knowing which way the current was flowing or where its surface and bottom were, and I felt radically powerless. While Asian Americans constitute a significant percentage of faculty in higher education, they are the least aspiring in regard to the most senior leadership position of a college or university president (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). The vaunted academe has not been a welcoming system to people of color or women like me (Gangone, 2013).

My own experiences reflect ACE's (2017) statistics; being a president was not a position I could ever see myself assuming to ascend. The profile of a leader I had in mind then did not match my self-perception. I failed to identify with the White male or female model leadership mindsets, philosophical frameworks, styles, behaviors, and values. The possibility of being a leader was just not on my radar, not in such systems. I knew no leader who looked like me, and certainly, I thought, no one resembled my inner characteristics and values. Asian Americans were not perceived to fit the leadership profile, and this reality engenders vicious cycles of such void in both aspirations and appointments in senior leadership roles. Like many Asian American women, race and gender have become two main origins of hardship confronted on the journey toward leadership roles (Darity & Mason, 1998; Mella, 2012). There are a lot of barriers to break through before you even get to that bamboo ceiling.

It was hard to test and express my leadership style until I was in my initial leadership role. The more leadership opportunities I took, the more I experienced the effect and impact of my developing leadership. It was invigorating to uncover my unique way of leading, as I felt a sense of freedom, validation, and inner joy. However, those feelings did not come easily, smoothly, or without constant doubts and challenges. I am grateful for those who gave me leadership roles including Dr. Jim Martois, then director of the Refugee Assistance Program at Long Beach City College (LBCC); Dr. Constance Carroll, then president of Saddleback College; Dr. Ned Doffoney, then president at Saddleback College; Dr. Jess Carreon, then superintendent president at Rio Hondo College; and Dr. Bill Vega, then chancellor at Coast Community College District and on the board of trustees of 2009 for the Coast Community College District. I want to acknowledge their confidence in me by hiring and supporting me.

When serving at the vice president level, I began to see the uniqueness of my leadership style differentiated by distinct philosophical frameworks, cultural values, and intentional practices that were not many parts of the Western ideas of leadership. For example, when others suggested that I light some "fire and bomb" to the interim president to protest his decisions, I chose to maintain harmony and use the consultation process. When others want to impose strict rules, I chose to first conduct empathy interviews then followed by equity-centered decisions. One validation came after I was chosen as the final candidate for my next job as college president. A presidential search committee had come to my campus and interviewed groups from various constituencies. After the committee had chosen me as the successful candidate for my next job as college president, one trustee on that site visit shared that his decision was solidified when he asked my colleagues who wanted to follow me to the new college—the entire room of faculty, classified professionals, student leaders, and administrators unanimously raised their hands without hesitation. I felt vindicated from the wounds incurred when I stood up to injustices, inequities, and the bullying of a White dominant system. I felt validated for applying principles and values from that immigrant teenage girl who would not let her ancestors go.

I felt completely free to be me.

Being a college president soon became the ultimate test of my leadership. I was responsible and accountable for my own decisions and behaviors. I was able to truly put the theories, culture, beliefs, and values to the test. Our leadership practices are anchored in our values, philosophy, and beliefs, all of which are in turn reflected and refracted by our gender identity, race, ethnicity, and culture (ASHE, 2014). I could see, feel, and understand with evidence in concrete results, how I led absolutely reflected all the above. Don't misinterpret this to mean that I perfected the leadership act. The difference back then was that I knew my principles worked, and I found alignment with whom I was, what I stood for, and how I led.

Living and working in a "foreign" country as an immigrant resident gave me the benefit of gaining clarity of my self-identity and my social identity. Each encounter, challenge, internal or external conflict, and moment of feeling alone became perfect prompts for self-discerning reflections. From the East to the West, I came so far away from my home. Yet, I was closer to discovering myself in a new way (Adam et al., 2018).

3 Confucian Influence

For many Asians, the Confucian philosophy has become a cultural DNA with no label or identification. After nearly 3000 years, for the Chinese in particular, Confucian philosophy has become the embodiment of culture, indistinguishable from the essence of our being. A government may attempt to abolish the ideology and teachings of Confucius, such as the case during the decade-long Chinese

Cultural Revolution, but the deep-rooted philosophy resists; it cannot be wiped out so easily. Confucian thought has infiltrated the fundamental consciousness, automated behavioral patterns, and ingrained in the moral compass of the Chinese society and people. It is an integral psychocultural construct of modern Chinese ethos (Tu, 1998).

I was socialized into this mindset long before I realized who Confucius was. It was not typical for students to study the *Analects*, the collection of Confucius's teachings, until high school and college. Thus, I should have missed the opportunity to study Confucius before relocating to the United States. However, the middle school principal, Ms. Shao Meng Lan, an ardent enthusiast and exemplar of Confucian education philosophy, taught us the *Analects* weekly. She was the only one in Taiwan to include this curriculum at the middle school level and to teach the subject herself.

For this class, students made folding canvas chairs in a craft class and carried the chairs to the auditorium each week to sit through this *Analects* course. No one looked forward to this weekly torture because Principal Shao randomly selected students to stand up and recite the rest of the paragraph after she prompted them with the first phrase. She interpreted the *Analects* phrase by phrase, but to the mind of a 13-year-old, none of them made any sense despite her translations. I endured 3 years of middle school with this weekly torment. The reciting and regurgitation were merely routine, and the digestion of what I recited did not take place till much later in life. The meaning of Confucius's words came to me like the waves returning to shores. They enveloped me every time I encountered the incongruencies of confronting the American way of being and, later, the American way of leading. I feel compelled to share my reflections here, focusing on the impact of Confucius in the context of leadership.

4 Who Is the Betrayer?

I spent the first 10 years of my higher education career at Long Beach City College (LBCC). My job as the coordinator of the Refugee Assistance Program and the entire department was funded by annual renewable grants to support the refugee students. Coming upon the tenth year there, I received a *pink slip*, which arrived as certified mail at home. It informed me the grant might not be renewed and my job would be terminated should that occur—I would be laid off due to a lack of funds without any warning or extended explanation. A feeling of hurt and betrayal can still feel like a fresh wound whenever recalling that moment of reading the certified pink slip notice. The human resources department explained that they discovered they were supposed to send earlier notices out for the scenario, just in case the funding was cut. I could not reconcile 10 years of devotion, hard work, and loyalty to my job and the cavalier treatment from the institution following the cold, impersonal, and callous notice in the certified mail. Was this the recompense for my hard work and loyalty?

I immediately started looking for a new job elsewhere, disregarding colleagues' assurances that my role would continue. I received two job offers from two different colleges that veered my career in a new direction. To my surprise, when my father learned I accepted a new and better job elsewhere, instead of praise, he critiqued my departure as a disloyal act, as LBCC had provided me with such a good job for 10 years. I felt a sense of guilt with his reminder; yet, I could not help but wonder where the reciprocity in loyalty was.

Central to Confucius's teachings is the virtue of loyalty, *Zhong* (忠). One's loyalty to family and country is revered and considered a basic foundation of character. However, Confucius contextualized this when his disciple asked whether the son was considered loyal when he reported to the authority his father's stealing to feed his family. To my surprise, Confucius said "no," because the son's loyalty resided with his father. Nothing is set in stone. The essence of loyalty in a Confucian school of thought is complex and not simplistic regarding the modern interpretation of loyalty (Sung, 2022).

If I were to use the modern interpretation of loyalty in the context of the potential severance notice and my father's expectations, I deeply felt the breach of reciprocity in such loyalty. This experience was a poignant, profound lesson for me: Loyalty is sacred and shall not be breached. 己欲立而立人，己欲达而达人. (If you want to establish yourself, establish others first; if you want to reach achievement for yourself, then help others achieve first.) This simple rule of being loyal to others first has remained a guiding principle with me—other-centered leadership. Yet, in many ways, this concept operates contrary to the individualistic North American cultural values of what is important for the leader to develop and achieve. Coincidentally, Confucius paired another word, *Shu* (恕consideration for others), with *Zhong* (loyalty). When asked about the cardinal and consistent teaching of Confucius, his disciple replied *Zhong Shu* was the all-encompassing rule of conduct. Linking to the concept of *Shu*, Confucius's words resonate with me. 己所不欲，勿施于人 described the essence of *Shu* as the familiar golden rule: That which we do not wish upon ourselves, do not do unto others.

My personal pink slip story influenced my future leadership action. Several times in my career, we discussed budget cuts in the context of cutting class sections or hourly workers instead of laying off full-time staff. I consistently pointed out that to those part-time faculty and hourly staff, it is effectively the same as being laid off, their livelihoods were taken away from them. Our inclusive language applied equitably to understanding the conditions, feelings, and needs of the group and guiding our actions accordingly. Furthermore, when we had to reduce staffing, we should not deliver the notice coldly by certified mail. Instead, we communicated in person with compassion, empathy, and whatever support was required. I have found *Shu* to be an inclusive and compassion-based leadership concept central to the virtue of empathy through consistent practice (Lippiello, 2010).

5 Internal Loyalty Versus Blind Loyalty

Navigating the vast and complex roadmaps of higher education can be quite intimidating and lonely. As an immigrant, I did not possess the dominant cultural codes and I had purposefully not sought to "assimilate" or behave like a native-born person. As a woman of color, I also faced the double jeopardy of being not male or White. I felt even a triple jeopardy because not identifying with Latinx or Black rendered me a different positionality and intersectionality. My experiences participating in and later hosting the Kaleidoscope Leadership Institute for women of color helped me contrast my leadership journey as an Asian or rather a Chinese American woman. I found myself at the crossroads more frequently than not having to choose and switch between the two worlds and often felt conflicted about being true to my cultural roots and philosophical frameworks in how I conducted myself as a leader.

I could not help but reflect on this word loyalty at those crossroads, asking myself if I was to remain loyal to how I was raised, cultured, and becoming. The *Zhong* referred to here is loyalty to one's authentic self. To Confucius, when a cultured person remains genuine and pure, it leads to trustworthiness (*Xin*信) and justice (*Yi* 义). My choice to remain culturally authentic—though at times carried hard consequences—proved to be the route that led me to feel relaxed, free, and confident and brought in dividends in return. The deep-rooted Confucian frameworks of loyalty, internal to self and external to the team, institution, and principles, have provided me with rewarding and rich leadership experiences. Every supervisor I had has given me feedback that my authentic self has helped them gain respect and appreciation for who I am while my loyalty to them, *not blind loyalty*, garnered high levels of respect and trust in me. One previous supervisor shared what he had said during a reference call regarding the question of loyalty: "Ding-Jo's unwavering loyalty is unquestionable to me, to her team, to the institution, and the students. She will take a bullet for me, and that is how much I trust her."

However, I do not seek blind loyalty to me. When I was the president, I asked one of my vice presidents why he transferred from a sister college in the district. He told me his previous supervisor asked him to do something he felt was illegal or immoral, and he felt he could not work for that person or the institution that endorsed such a request. I told him I was glad he was a man of integrity and not blind loyalty. More importantly, I wanted a vice president anchored by a clear moral compass, with the courage and honesty to stand up to me when they did not agree with my actions or requests. The trust in their own external and internal loyalty is equally important to my loyalty to be authentically me. This authenticity has been easier in principle than practice, especially when I found myself at crossroads because I was at odds with dominant cultural practices and policies and my moral compass and values of *Zhong* (loyalty).

6 Leadership Starts with Self-Cultivation

As a leadership practitioner, I find scholarship without practice deficient and without much merit. There are many theories and models of leadership. Yet, for those who practice the art of leadership, the Chinese call such abstractions merely 纸上谈兵 (discussing battles of the war on paper and not understanding the boots-on-the-ground reality of actual battlefields). I have witnessed educational leadership scholars failing at modeling the leadership theories they can cite book-and-verse and lecture on so well. I did not major in leadership or earn any advanced degree in leadership. Yet serving in various leadership roles was on-the-job training for leadership from the School of Hard Knocks.

The more challenges I had to face, overcome, and work through, the more I grew and developed as a leader, by sharpening my skills and mastering the essence of leading people. For this reason, I have always respected Confucius. Not only did he start from humble beginnings in poverty, raised by his widowed mother, but also worked his way up as a public servant leader in the government with prominent executive-level positions. His teachings are the culmination of wisdom gained by his intellect and his long tenure as a leader.

In my younger days, I thought the Confucian teachings I received were about cultivating one's behavior, morals, and virtuous life. I memorized the passage passed down from Confucius's disciple, Zheng Zi, that exemplified Confucius's teaching: 吾日三省吾身，为人谋而不忠乎?与朋友交而不信乎?传不习乎? This passage is about developing the habit of self-discipline, self-reflections, and self-correction. He asks one to conduct daily self-reflection. First, examine one's loyalty in conducting business with others; second, whether one has been trustworthy with friends; and third, if one has practiced what they learned. It was not until many years later that I discovered I was using Confucian teachings in my leadership practice. This was followed by an epiphany in understanding that so much of Confucian wisdom and principles were profoundly important guidance for leaders. Confucius was not only advising and coaching the heads of state on how to govern but also cultivating the development of future leaders to serve the heads of state. Leading is modeling, as Confucius said, 见贤思齐焉 (when you witness the virtuous, one follows to think and act virtuously).

As a leader, especially for a team, department, division, or entire organization, I have found that every word a leader utters matters, and every action will be scrutinized under the microscope. The first time I experienced the Freedom of Information Act—when all my emails, memorandums, and text message communications had to be handed over for careful review—I realized everything I do must be with total transparency to stand in the public's eyes and the courts' scrutiny.

I have conducted my affairs as if I reside in a glass ball, with the intention of justifying integrity in all my affairs. It is often the advice I offer other rising leaders to model the behaviors and words they wish others to conduct themselves. As Confucius pointed out—and I later understood from witnessing other leaders at

work—whether for a team or two, a small division or as president of a country, modeling is one of the most powerful ways a leader creates the institutional culture and impacts the followers' behaviors. It makes self-cultivation clear as the first step in a leader's mindset and development.

7 Other-Centered Leadership

"修身、齐家、治国、平天下" (Confucius & Lionshare Media, 2010) (Self-cultivation, family harmony, governing a national state, and a peaceful world come in that order).

The emphasis on self-cultivation, self-reflection, and self-improvement as a foundation in the lessons by my middle school principal made at least partial sense. However, messages on family harmony, governance of the state, and world peace did not surface in my consciousness until years later. It was not until I married a Midwestern American, living the life of two cultures integrated into one and raising two bicultural and bilingual daughters that I realized the challenges of creating harmony in a family unit. If I am unable to bring about unity in a family of loved ones, how can I speak of the abilities to govern an organization or a nation-state without turmoil or aspire to a world without conflicts?

At the beginning of my career, I did not comprehend why it was important to sit in each of the escalating levels of leadership positions to climb up to the top as a senior higher education leader. After I ascended to the office of the president with retrospection upon the positions held and their value in my leadership preparation, I became a firm believer in the merit and magnitude of each leadership role's influence and impact. Furthermore, the longevity of tenure in each position also made a difference. Each position tested my skills, shifted my positionality, and sharpened my focus on myself as a human and a leader. I can recount the challenges I had to confront, mistakes I made, and perspectives of that position level. With each step of the ladder, I gained leadership muscle built from strenuous exercising my values and principles. I observed that when a leader does not stay in one position long before stone skipping to the next promotion, one does not understand the impact of their leadership mistakes nor do they have time to learn or develop their teams.

When coaching college presidents a few years ago, I came across a president who ascended to his presidency in less than 2 years as provost with a pattern of short tenure in his leadership history. I commented that he achieved the presidency in a brief time, and he responded that his colleague reached the presidency in less time than he did. Not to my surprise, this president barely finished 1 year of presidency before the chancellor and the board asked him to leave. The cultivation of self while being a leader requires the *progressive growth* that comes from an expanded horizon of more panoramic perspectives and a deepening of the anchors from one's upward

rise. What I experienced and observed reinforced and magnified Confucian principles of 修己以敬，修己以安人，修己以安百姓, requiring an intentional self-cultivated leader as a prerequisite of modeling as a force of calm, trust, and joy for others and being able to provide the comfort and safety for the people.

8 Ren (Love/Compassion)-Based Leadership

Higher education has operated as institutions with a lot of structures but void of emotions or compassion (Tong, 2017). Indeed these organizations are hierarchical with a power-based model that leans toward male-dominant orientation. As a woman, that orientation was part of the incongruence I experienced. I felt the absence of 仁(*Ren*), which, to me, is the cross between love and compassion. *Ren* is a central concept of Confucius's teachings. I have come to understand *Ren* in a spiritual context as an action that carries no conditions or prerequisites for the followers. As a leader, I must ask myself whether I can unconditionally love my team, students, and institution even though I see their flaws and witness their weakest moments. I honestly did not reach that level of love until I became president.

This concept of *Ren* also does not mean I did not hold people accountable or could not let go of people who crossed the ultimate boundary in their actions. Even if I had to dismiss a person after supportive measures, I could do so with the love and compassion of *Ren* to maintain that person's dignity and humanity. *Ren* was my guide when I thought about serving those in the military studying from the foxholes and submarines or students who had been incarcerated with education delivered to their prison cells. My enlightenment on *Ren* came at the moment I internalized the process of reciprocity when unconditional love, instead of power, is applied. To have received immense love and compassion in return from those with whom I provided leadership was a transformative and triumphant moment as a leader. Tong (2017) claimed higher education could use a lot more Confucian *Ren* in practice, and I agree. In my analysis, Confucius understood the formula: 仁 (*Ren*) = 爱 (love) + 恕 (compassion) + 礼 (respect). Although I have been preaching love-based leadership for a while, I need to start to credit Confucius for his *Ren*-based model.

9 Unity in Diversity

As a woman of color and a Chinese immigrant, I was keenly aware of the positionality differences among people. However, from early childhood education, I was guided to conform and avoid being different, let alone recognize or appreciate my difference. Therefore, with a monocultural and collective cultural background, being different has not been something of which I have developed a critical consciousness. I have not relied on the conflicts inherent in divergent ideologies and positionalities to address crises or believe that inconsistent intersectionality is a

healthy condition for leadership. I was socialized by my Chinese background, infused with Confucius's demand for harmony as a condition for achieving success in any context. For this reason, some perceived me as someone who may not embrace or be able to manage conflicts. I was taught to avoid unnecessary conflicts and design conditions for harmonious energy. For Confucius, 和 (*he*) (harmony and harmonization) is the ultimate ideal context for leaders to achieve despite primary differences. In other words, the goal is not to eliminate the differences or conflicts by submission and force but through the additive effect of the combined strengths (Li, 2006). I recalled the memorized words 君子和而不同,小人同而不和, (the learned derive unity amid differences, the unlearned have disunity even with likenesses) after I experienced sparks in work environments and around board tables and the increased tension in our diverse societies today. I bowed down to the wisdom of Confucius, who grasped the conceptual framework of unity in diversity with sage leadership and the dichotomy of disunity with uniformity by poor leadership. To think this profound leadership principle existed nearly 3000 years ago is something for which I am most grateful. Confucius knew that the ultimate leader strives to seek diversity in all perspectives and positionalities and to achieve unity in diversity with harmonious energy as the outcome. I would like to think that many Chinese American higher education leaders have this principle in mind, striving for harmony derived from unity amid what diverse people bring in the richness and challenges of their divergent lived experiences. Aren't we still trying to uncover how to lead in the new local and global diversity of our modern twenty-first century? I felt privileged to have been inculcated with early indoctrinations of the unity in diversity principles and concepts.

10 Leadership Development

Ever since I participated in my first leadership development program for women in 1985, I have become an advocate of leadership development programs, hosting many years of the Kaleidoscope Leadership Program designed for women of color, founded by Carolyn Desjardins. As a White woman, Desjardins understood women's unique and urgent needs, women who were often excluded in the mainstream leadership programs and left with unmet needs through traditional content with which they cannot identify. I have endeavored to continue Desjardins's vision of providing leadership development programs targeting and designed specifically for those who find themselves on islands in the vast sea of higher education without a compass or a lighthouse to guide their career pathways and leadership journeys.

Confucius made it his lifelong mission to cultivate future leaders of states and nations. His disciples have become his successors, the exemplars, and leaders; his teachings espoused to model. Indeed, many of his disciples and their students have become prominent leaders. I can feel the sense of duty, responsibility, and pride in Confucius's tireless teachings to accomplish these goals. Since retiring from my chancellor role, I have devoted my work full-time to leadership development. Like

many chief executive officers, we are confronting a vacuum when it comes to quality leaders with the positionality, capacity, and passion for leading in the diversity context and accomplishing the equity agenda through today's turbulent landscape in higher education.

With a modest grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, I started the Leadership Institute for Tomorrow (LIFT), an endeavor to serve first-generation, diverse, and emergent leaders. Like Confucius, who believed integrating music and the arts were important in leadership practice, I designed a program that helps leaders experience and use the arts as a leadership power tool. Confucius was right: We need the arts as a universal language to connect, inspire, and elicit transformative changes and action. I have found the outcomes thus far exhilarating, extremely empowering, and encouraging.

I am so glad colleagues such as Yolanda Moses, Jerry Hunter, Bill Vega, and Pam Walker, whom I respect and admire, wanted to join our LIFT team. On the topic of leadership, Confucius emphasized, 为政以德, 譬如北辰, 居其所, 而众星共之. He used the metaphor of the North Star Polaris as the center of the universe for all stars. Leaders must also stand out by their virtues as models, influence, and guide in the way they govern. LIFT programs have emphasized character development by first recognizing the strengths and unique dispositions of family, culture, and spiritual backgrounds, so participants are anchored in and are led by their convictions to virtues (Hackett & Wang, 2012).

I find the work of leadership development urgent and meaningful. There are many leadership gurus in modern history; somehow, the Confucian model has not been widely recognized.

11 Equity and Justice Mindedness

Coming from a Chinese collective and authoritarian culture with distinctive pressures to conform, obey, and be mindful of the perceptions of others, I have understood there is almost no room for individualistic thinking or appreciation for being unique. Standing out is strongly discouraged; that was the mindset with which I was inculcated. Not until the recent decade when I was teaching in the higher education leadership doctoral program, examining and reflecting on various philosophical frameworks, have I realized why I was drawn to community colleges where a 100% of applicants are accepted, indifferent to at what level or how a student arrives at the entrance door. What I recited back in middle school, 有教无类 (education without discrimination) suddenly became crystal clear—being an equity-minded educator with an open access value was seeded in the passages I memorized by heart. Except for this time, the regurgitation of those passages hit me like a lightning bolt with an exhilarating epiphany. Not only does the phrase mirror the community colleges' open-access practices, regardless of students' innate capacities or disabilities, but more importantly, it reminded me of the way Confucius practiced equity-minded pedagogy when he used an example of how one should respond differently to two

students based on their unique needs derived from their backgrounds, dispositions, and temperaments.

As educators and leaders, we are tasked with uncovering the uniqueness of individuals and developing them accordingly. This Confucian concept of 因材施教 (teach in accordance with student's background and aptitude) is foundational in the way I have been taught about designing equity-minded pedagogy and programs, but it took me a while to realize it has always been a deep-rooted conceptual framework for me. Caring about equity and not equality is a unique way of achieving justice. I loved the way Confucius taught us about equitable distribution. Without it, justice cannot be achieved; without justice, people will not feel safe and secure or be at peace. For example, the following quote was not something I could have comprehended, 不患寡而患不均，不患贫而患不安, in which Confucius said that instead of worrying about scarcity, one should be concerned about inequity; instead of poverty, be concerned about peace and security of people. He spoke of equity not as the average, which we interpret as equality, but within a completely different conceptual framework with which to govern. In the United States, are we not just beginning to grapple with the complexity of achieving equity as a means to the ultimate fairness and justice?

I recall the plaques on the auditorium door in my middle school and hung in many great halls were 天下为公, which originated with Confucius's 大道之行也，天下为公 (Confucius—礼运大同篇 *Liyun*—The Conveyance of Rites), meaning in the great ways to lead, the world belongs to the people. Many leaders have used it as their slogan to demonstrate that their mission and cause are to pursue the common good for all. It is a selfless and egoless mindset to protect the interest of the whole. When I first learned about Abraham Lincoln's "Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people," I thought that was what Confucius espoused more than 2500 years ago with 天下为公.

12 Concluding Reflections

I have shared one of the most central and pivotal influences in my personal and professional life because so many of the ancient Eastern philosophies and teachings have not been recognized or acknowledged as valuable leadership schools of thought or models. As a Chinese American leader in higher education for the past four decades, I have witnessed the undervalued and misperceptions of leadership quality, styles, and models of many Asian Americans. The stereotypical archetypes became an artificial veil to see through the true leader identity and values of many Asian Americans who have been influenced by quite different, yet profoundly effective principles. Some principles, such as Confucian leadership—which I unconsciously subscribed to and now consciously do so—served me, and I like to think they also served many other Chinese American leaders.

Reflecting on the multitudes of challenges confronting the world today, the ancient wisdom of Confucius can be relevant, extremely valuable, and constructive toward a new world civilization, a unified nation, and harmonious families. I have merely scratched the surface of the Confucian leadership model and dream of a day when it can become a mainstream model to be studied and followed, as I have been a loyal follower and benefactor.

When we can celebrate and enjoy the freedom to lean into our authentic selves with a total alignment of their cultural, experiential, ethnic, and spiritual values, we find the best of ourselves at that intersection. For me, that path started long ago when I sat in a canvas chair reciting Confucius.

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