

Interview with
Prof Wang Gungwu –
Redefining Notions of
East and West

A Thucydides Fallacy:
The New Model of
Power Relations
for Southeast Asia,
the US and China

Western Love,
Chinese *Qing*
A Philosophical Interpretation
of the Idea of Love in
Romeo and Juliet and
the Story of *Liang-Zhu*

THINK

AT THE CROSSROADS OF EAST AND WEST

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ON COVER

Jalan Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in the evening.

Photo: Sayid Budhi / Getty Images

Editorial

Regardless of how we define “the East” and “the West”, no one would deny that the two are inextricably intertwined in today’s globalised world. A shirt with an American brand sold in Singapore could have been made using cotton from China in a Thai factory and shipped here on a French freighter run by a Filipino crew. Korean TV series are made by Netflix and streamed to viewers in many parts of the world. Sushi, pizza and curry are enjoyed by many restaurant-goers outside of Japan, Italy and India.

The COVID-19 pandemic has elucidated both the differences and interconnectedness between the East and the West most intensely. During the early stages of the pandemic, China, where the pandemic started, had been supplying most of the protective gear needed in the global war against the virus. Not long after, vaccine inequity and vaccine diplomacy have exemplified how divided and how interdependent the East and the West are.

As a Singapore-based organisation, The HEAD Foundation is geographically and culturally located in a place where the East and the West meet. It is therefore our hope that we can help bring together good cultural practices and resources from both sides through the education and healthcare projects we support, and through our various publications. As part of our effort in doing so, we have invited individuals who have contributed to bridging the gap between the East and the West to share their views with us in this issue of THINK.

We are very honoured to have had the opportunity to interview Prof Wang Gungwu and find out how he looks at the notions of East and West. As a prominent historian, he thinks the line between the East and the West is not always clear-cut. He proposes to examine similarities and differences among different societies from a historical perspective, and the perspective of human nature, rather than at a cultural level. He also emphasises the role basic human instincts play in the course of history.

In his article, Prof Wang Zhenping, a historian who specialises in diplomatic history and geopolitical relations of pre-modern China, tells us how he learned academic rigour from both Asian and Western traditions of scholarship. He also reminds us that there are lessons we can learn from history when we try to resolve today’s geopolitical disputes.

Prof Danny Quah, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and an economist, describes the demand-side role Southeast Asia should play in geopolitical relations. He believes Southeast Asian states have

significant bargaining power when they band together as a regional bloc in the marketplace for a new world order.

Education is a sector in which there is much debate on how the future leaders of a multicultural and globalised world should be nurtured and trained. Prof Khoo Hoon Eng of Yale-NUS College observes that Asian women are being left further behind compared to their Western counterparts. She suggests cultivating Asian women leaders in a university that combines a Western liberal arts curriculum and regionally relevant leadership training.

Also on the topic of leadership, Dr Fu Pingping and Yang Bo discuss the concept of “humanistic leadership”, first introduced in the West, in their article. Using the case of a Chinese company, they illustrate how humanistic leadership is manifested in China, and how such leadership and management practices are aligned with Confucianism.

The differences between East and West are probably more distinct at the personal level. Chris Oestereich, an American who works and lives in Thailand, compares public behaviours during the pandemic in the US and what he observes around him in Bangkok. At a more philosophical level, Prof Cheung Chan-Fai compares the idea of love in Western and Chinese cultures and concludes that the concept of love is very different between the occidental world and the oriental world. His use of *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Butterfly Lovers* to illustrate the differences is both interesting and thought-provoking.

As the consumer market becomes globalised, the branding of consumer products has also become increasingly multicultural and universal. Daniel Li shares how logo designs have evolved over the years, and how challenging and crucial it is to get a brand logo “right”.

The discussion of East and West would be incomplete without some discussion on food. For this, we interviewed celebrity chef Sam Leong to find out what inspired him to “westernise” traditional Chinese cooking and create his Michelin star “modern Chinese cuisine”. We complement Chef Sam’s exciting life story with Ren Zhe’s account of how *sake* was promoted in the global market with a supportive government policy, and Jean Wei’s touching and whimsical comics on food tradition and family ties.

We sincerely thank those who contributed to the content of this issue of THINK. We believe what they have shared shows that the world could become a better place when different cultures make an effort to understand, accept and complement each other. We hope you agree with us.

IN FOCUS

PROF DANNY QUAH is Dean and Li Ka Shing Professor in Economics at NUS's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. His research interests include income inequality, economic growth and international economic relations. Prof Quah's current

research takes an economic approach to world order – with a focus on global power shift and the rise of the East, and alternative models of global power relations.

PROF DANNY QUAH

A Thucydides Fallacy: The New Model of Power Relations for Southeast Asia, the US and China



HAVE SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE US AND CHINA SHIFTED TO A NEW MODEL OF POWER RELATIONS?

When the US switched from Trump to Biden, expectations around the world were set high for change, not least in US-China relations. Certainly, several significant positive and profound course resets have taken place. In early 2021 the US rejoined the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and halted withdrawal from the World Health Organization. Over the course of all of that year, US turn-around on COVID-19 management was visible and marked.

However Trump's base saw him, in his dealings with the rest of the world Trump was volatile, capricious and wilfully random. Trump allowed members of his administration to project of the US an understanding of extreme, end-of-days, life-or-death struggle with chosen national enemies.



Anchorage, Alaska

The first meeting between the US and Chinese officials under the Biden administration was held in Alaska on 18 March 2021. China says a “strong smell of gunpowder and drama” resulted from these talks.

Photo: Frederic J. Brown / Pool Photo via AP, File

But despite all this, on US-China relations, the world might legitimately ask if the change from Trump to Biden has been an improvement. Trump used to say he had a great personal affinity with China’s leader, Xi Jinping. Trump referred to the Uighur encampments in Xinjiang as the “right thing to do”. Trump showed no powerful abiding belief in any grand ideas. All this suggests that Trump’s gripe with China was narrow, and spoke only to his obsession with the US-China trade deficit and what that did to his base.

On the other hand, Biden, too, has to recognise the 74 million Americans who voted against him and for Trump. This is more numerous even than that which voted for Barack Obama in 2008. Moreover, all those Trump voters align with Biden’s supporters in one singular idea, that China is a rival that dangerously threatens the position of the US in the world. On this, Biden has recourse to narratives that Trump never did. Biden will examine China on its record of labour standards, environmental protection, human rights and liberal democratic values. Several times in recent years, Biden has described how he considers Xi Jinping a thug, without a democratic bone in his body.

So, Biden could well be the US leader that sets to rights many of the challenges that lowered America’s standing in the world over the time of the Trump presidency. On US-China relations, however, it remains genuinely unclear whether the Biden administration will bring about a more sensible geostrategic competition. Either way, a rethink of Great Power relations remains almost surely timely.

[The following part of this article was originally published in *The Diplomat* on 27 July 2019.]

With full international attention on the US-China conflict, it is easy to forget that other nations might still have a role to play in how the world order evolves.

The Shangri-La Dialogue of June 2019 gave some clues. The meeting began with Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s keynote speech, in which he argued that while Asia continued to value the US’ presence, the US needed to learn to accept China’s rise. This was “met with shock, dismay and even [...] a measure of incredulity by some US delegates” there and continued “to reverberate in Washington policy circles,” Hugh White wrote in an op-ed for *The Straits Times*. The meeting’s last day had Singapore Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen noting that “if America First or China’s rise is perceived to be lopsided against the national interests of other countries or the collective good, the acceptance of the United States’ or China’s dominance will be diminished.”

In response, Bonnie Glaser — an American scholar and Asia observer — warned the region to “not draw a false equivalence between US and Chinese actions”. Glaser suggested “the choice that Southeast Asia must make is not between the US and China,” but “between a future in which there are shared rules and norms within a rules-based order that everyone upholds, and a future in which power prevails, the strong bully the weak and rules are disregarded in favour of a ‘might makes right’ approach.”

The choice Glaser presents is significant in having only two predetermined options. In essence, the message is: “With us, you get international rule of law; with the others, you get arbitrary exercise of power. Nothing you do will shift that.”

For realists, such reasoning resonates: great powers are engaged in an existential struggle for supremacy. Onlookers do not count. In Thucydides’ words, “[...] the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.” Or, as Kenneth Waltz

In the marketplace for world order, small states like those in Southeast Asia are indeed price-taking consumers. But that does not imply the demand curve is flat, nor that that curve cannot shift.

wrote two millennia later, “It would be as ridiculous to construct a theory of international politics based on Malaysia and Costa Rica as it would be to construct an economic theory of oligopolistic competition based on the minor firms in a sector of the economy.”

The difficulty, however, is that any marketplace — whether the world order or anyone’s favourite economic sector — is more than just a supply side populated by firms. Every market is powerfully moved by both supply and demand. Equilibrium outcomes result jointly from what the supply side provides and what the demand side chooses to buy. Providers and customers both have agency.

Call this the Thucydides Fallacy, where the demand side is ignored in the determination of world order.

In the marketplace for world order, small states like those in Southeast Asia are indeed price-taking consumers. But that does not imply the demand curve is flat, nor that that curve cannot shift. Suppliers in this marketplace compete with one another to satisfy the demand for peace and prosperity, for trust, and for leadership in trade and technology, in return for compensation in the form of some kind of tribute, whether soft power, prestige or the potential for alliance.

The Mekong power play

The Mekong River has become a battleground in Sino-US rivalry, driven by China's promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation. China has constructed 11 giant dams along the Upper Mekong including the Jinghong Hydropower Station, which was claimed by a US-funded study to have held back waters during drought in the lower regions.

Photo: Imaginechina Limited / Alamy



Hugh White's re-statement of Lee's speech describes Asia as an articulate and empowered consumer: "China's conduct raises deep anxieties among its neighbours, but that does not absolve the US of responsibility to react prudently and realistically in a way that does not make a bad situation even worse, which is what it is doing now. [...] Asians will welcome America remaining a major strategic player in Asia but will not support America in trying to contain China's legitimate aspirations for wider regional influence." Outside Asia, this change has occurred too: a recent survey finds Germans trusting China more now, and the US less.

The equivalence that Glaser eschews is actually a clear-eyed view about the actions of alternate providers of world and regional order. Each supplier brings commodities to the market that provide benefits at the same time they inflict costs.

The economics taught at the world's best universities — whether in the West or the East — says that when confronted with options, consumers scrutinize each offer to see how well it suits. Consumers should study advertising sceptically, appropriately weigh up costs and benefits, and choose consumption bundles to mix and match optimally to increase their well-being. In every marketplace, consumers should band together and extract the best deal from potentially oligopolistic or, worse, monopolistic suppliers. Consumers must be well-informed and organised, and ask for what works for them.

The demand side should exercise agency. Small states should learn they can affect outcomes for world order.

For Southeast Asia's nation states, ASEAN is the canvas for a natural banding together of the demand side.

Choosing to be an empowered consumer, and thus remaining on the demand side, does not mean exposing oneself to bullying from the supply side. Sure, even in modern developed markets, large firms on the supply side can exploit customers by behaving as price-gouging monopolists or

The powerful on the supply side protect the demand side because doing so advances their own self-interests, not because of rule of law.

conniving oligopolists. The supply side will only behave in whatever way advances their self-interests. However, once the demand side becomes sufficiently wealthy in their own right and can generate an expected stream of sufficiently great value — whether in tribute, shared prosperity, the according of admiration or prestige, or in their potential as allies — the supply side becomes incentivised to treat the demand side with respect.

Rules-based markets and modern governments exist today because in history, roving bandits — initially nomadic, only plundering and marauding for short-term gains — became stationary bandits, once they understood they stood to gain by such change. These powerful groups began to nurture and protect the population around them that the latter might undertake longer-term agricultural cultivation, commerce and investment. Jointly, all achieved prosperity with the aid of enduring economic institutions.

The powerful on the supply side protect the demand side because doing so advances their own self-interests, not because of rule of law.

The marketplace for a new world order also promises improved balance between supply and demand.

In the new world order Asia's leadership does not mean Asia has to become an alternative architect. Instead, Asia only needs to be an articulate and empowered consumer, and allow demand and supply to work in the marketplace. With care, thought and unity, ASEAN (and indeed all of Asia) can continue to make a success of this new marketplace for world order. ∞

WANG ZHENPING is a retired Associate Professor from the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore. He received his Master's degree in History of Chinese Economy from the University of International Business & Economics, China in 1981, and obtained his Ph.D. in East Asian Studies from Princeton University in 1989. Besides NIE, he has also taught in Rutgers University and the University of Toronto.

Assoc Prof Wang's research interest is in the diplomatic history of pre-modern China, particularly the Tang dynasty (618-907). His major publications include 《汉唐中日关系论》(1997), *Ambassadors from the Islands of Immortals: China-Japan Relations in the Han-Tang Period* (2005), *Tang China in Multi-polar Asia* (2013) and 《唐代宾礼研究》(2017).

ASSOC PROF WANG ZHENPING

Asian and Western Scholarship Traditions in the Eyes of a Historian

I was trained as a historian under the Chinese academic system in Beijing, after spending ten years away from school during the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s, I had opportunities to study in the US and Japan, and focused my research on the diplomacy of the Tang dynasty. I subsequently spent more than 30 years researching and teaching Chinese history in Singapore before I retired a few years ago.

As a historian and researcher, I benefitted much from the great academic traditions of China, Japan and America. I was fortunate enough to have honed my research skills under the guidance of prominent scholars and the most dedicated teachers. Among them were Prof Frederick Mote (牟复礼), Prof Denis Twitchett (杜希德) and Prof James T. C. Liu (刘子健), as well as my late father, Prof Wang Liqi (王利器). In the process, I came to realise that Asian and Western academic traditions shared many similarities in research methodology, of which the thorough examination of historical materials was a common prerequisite.

Prof Mote studied history as an undergraduate in the University of Nanjing from 1946-48, after he had served as a Chinese interpreter in the US Army Air Force during World War II. In his classroom more than 30 years later, his doctorate students were

required to each pick a historical text — be it official archive, local chronicle or other form of record — and examine the origins of these sources. He instructed us to investigate whether a piece of source information was based on an original record further upstream. By so doing, we acquired an in-depth understanding of the nature of the historical information at hand.

Prof Twitchett was a student of Prof Piet van der Loon, a renowned scholar from the Centre of European Sinology at the University of Leiden. His training was based on the tradition of language studies, and he administered a department of languages and literatures at the University of London. As a result, he valued the mastering of ancient and foreign languages, and believed that historical materials can be better assessed and analysed in their original forms. While taking Prof Twitchett's courses, I translated Chinese and Japanese historical texts as my homework. When I worked on my Ph.D. dissertation, I had weekly meetings with him. We would go through the Chinese source materials I had translated into English during the week, after which I would share my understanding and opinions of the relevant materials. He patiently corrected my translations, critiqued my viewpoints and suggested improvements to what I had proposed. I received similar training from Japanese professors during my one-year stay as a research student at Kyoto University between 1987 and 1988.

Prof Mote, Prof Twitchett and my Japanese professors shunned abstract speculations and built their scholarships on a solid, evidence-based academic foundation instead. In fact, their research methodology shared a similar philosophical tradition with the Qian-Jia School (乾嘉学派) from the Qing dynasty, studies on the origin of historical records (*shiyuan xue* 史源学) advocated by historian Chen Yuan (陈垣), and my father's research in textual criticism.

In the 1960s, a group of young American scholars proposed to replace Sinology with multidisciplinary "China studies" based on the principles of social



Assoc Prof Wang Zhenping (left) with Prof Denis Twitchett
Denis Crispin Twitchett (1925-2006) was a British Sinologist and scholar who specialised in Chinese history, and is well-known as one of the co-editors of *The Cambridge History of China*.

sciences. They criticised the traditional European Sinology for being too pedantic and outdated. In his 1964 journal article "A Lone Cheer for Sinology", Prof Twitchett pointed out that the hostility between the two sides was misplaced. Instead, they should have united and complemented each other in contributing to modern Sinology. In his opinion, historians without robust training in languages and research rigour would reduce their opinions to pointless social science theories because of their inability to accurately understand and assess historical information.

All the master historians I know placed immense emphasis on the in-depth and thorough understanding of historical texts in their research methodology. Through this, they imparted to their students the strong abilities to discover and solve problems in their research. My father reminded me time and again that the fundamental skill of a scholar is his ability to "ask questions as he reads", and to "discover problems that others fail to notice while reading the source materials available to all scholars".

Another important lesson I learned from Prof Twitchett is that one needs to systematically conceptualise his interpretations of historical issues so as to gradually develop his own scholarship. He often asked me to compress my initial answer to a question, from a page of writing to a mere sentence, and then to further generalise it to a single word after several iterations. It is through his rigorous guidance that I pioneered the concepts of “mutual self-interest”, “multi-polarity” and “open network” in my research on the diplomacy of the Tang dynasty.

Prof Liu played a key role in introducing the rich tradition of Japanese scholarship on Chinese history to the West. His expertise lay in the conceptual interpretation of the political operations of the Sung dynasty. He often prompted his students to elaborate on their understanding of a historical event or historical figure based on the materials they had examined. Prof Liu summarised his vast research experience in an article entitled “Methods, Techniques and Crises in Historiography”. He advocated the techniques

of “research on a specific aspect of a major issue” (*dati xiaozuo* 大題小做) and “holistic approach to a minor issue” (*xiaoti dazuo* 小題大做). In particular, the second technique emphasised that one should always be mindful of the macro political and socioeconomic background while studying a seemingly minor issue, because a discovery achieved by this method might contain major theoretical implications. They could potentially enhance, correct or even refute a major theory.

“Chinese history belongs to the world not only as a right and necessity, but also as a subject of compelling interest,” Prof Twitchett argues in “The General Editors’ Preface” to *The Cambridge History of China*. In my opinion, there is plenty of room for scholars and researchers from the East and the West to inspire and learn from each other when they work on the history of China. In fact, Prof Twitchett, Prof Mote and Prof Liu were the foremost champions for scholarly co-operation among China, Japan and the West. Together, they transformed the scholarly understanding of pre-modern Chinese history.



Zhang Yichao expelling the Tibetans

In 848 AD, when the Tibetan Empire plunged into civil war, Zhang secretly planned a rebellion with the other Han Chinese, Yugur (Uyghur), Tuyuhun and Qiang residents of Sha Prefecture (Dunhuang) to return Sha Prefecture to Tang allegiance. The above shows a late Tang mural from Mogao Cave 156 depicting the victory of Zhang.

We need the collective efforts of fellow historians to form new and innovative perspectives of some of the key issues in Chinese history. Some of these alternate views may seem narrow at times, but they are the forces that motivate further historical research.

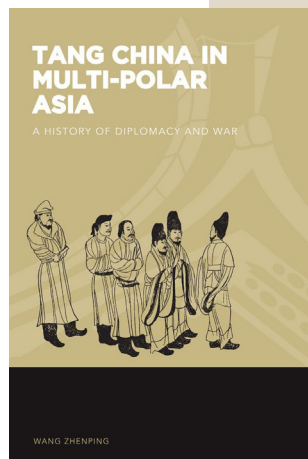
APPLYING WESTERN THEORIES OF HISTORY IN THE STUDY OF CHINESE HISTORY

Western theories of history have their roots in the historical experiences of the West, and this is where the limitations of these theories lie. However, people in both the East and the West faced similar challenges when they built their societies, satisfied material needs and managed international relations over the course of history. Over the centuries, historians in the West have

developed a set of analytical concepts and theoretical frameworks to describe and explain how these challenges were dealt with in the West. These concepts and frameworks are relevant to our historical experiences in the East as well. They should be appreciated because they provide us with a frame of reference and inspire us to reflect on our own experiences.

On the other hand, we should not view these Western theories and frameworks as all-encompassing and universal. Instead, we should attempt to enrich, revise and even dispute them with our points of view based on the research of Chinese history. The notion of “politics of accommodation” (*baorong zhengzhi* 包容政治), which Prof Liu suggested in his research in the court politics during the Song dynasty, is a good example of such a scholarly endeavour.

As for myself, I attempted to apply the concept of “soft power” to explain the foreign relations of the Tang dynasty, and went a step further to redefine the concept introduced and popularised by Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye Jr. Some scholars were of the opinion that I misunderstood Nye’s idea of “soft power”. However, there should be no surprise that the soft power employed by the Tang court in implementing its diplomatic strategy was not exactly the same as that defined by Nye.



Tang China in Multi-Polar Asia A History of Diplomacy and War

This book examines the relations between Tang China (618–907 AD) and its major Asian neighbors. During its almost 290-year course, the Tang experienced often turbulent relations with Koguryŏ, Silla, Paekche, Parhae, the Turks, the Uighurs, the Tibetans, and the Nanzhao Kingdom, running the gamut from peaceful coexistence to open warfare. Except for the Uighurs, these countries rose to power one after another to become in turn China’s principal adversaries (Wang 2013:1).

Source: Zhenping, W. (2013). Introduction. In *Tang China in Multi-Polar Asia: A History of Diplomacy and War* (pp.1-10). University of Hawai’i Press. Retrieved June 16, 2021, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wqhw1>



Tang Empire and Neighbouring States

Considered as China's golden age, the Tang Dynasty stretched from 618 to 907 AD. Chang'an, modern-day Xi'an, was the capital.

In fact, the history of Tang China has enriched our understanding of “soft power”. By extension, I feel that there is much room for the reinterpretation of some of the basic issues in the history of the Sui-Tang period. We need the collective efforts of fellow historians to form new and innovative perspectives of some of the key issues in Chinese history. Some of these alternate views may seem narrow at times, but they are the forces that motivate further historical research. These views are also contributions to the study of history by historians of our generation.

TANG DYNASTY IN MULTIPOLAR ASIA

While there is much consensus on today's international community being multipolar, the multipolar nature of the world was concealed under a unipolar appearance a mere 30 years ago. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, some Western scholars envisaged the development toward a unipolar world, in which the US was the only superpower. Today, the multipolar nature of the world is apparent to us, but we still have much to learn about its complex characteristics.

Coincidentally, traditional historians and some contemporary scholars portrayed Asia during the Tang period as a unipolar world dominated by the Tang empire. Looking back at how the Tang court recognised the Asian geopolitical configuration as multipolar, its corresponding external military experiences, and how it weighed the gains and losses of its foreign policies, we may be able to learn some valuable lessons for the benefits of today's China and today's world.

In medieval Asia, multiple tribes and nations strived to survive and develop. They sometimes fought and competed with each other, sometimes formed alliances against common enemies, or simply left each other alone in other times. In the international community then, the power distribution was dispersed. The relative strengths of its member states were full of uncertainties and shifting from time to time, with no single force having the ability to dominate for long. Multipolarity and fluidity were inherent to the nature of the international relations during that period.

For more than a century between 620 and 755 AD, the Tang empire enjoyed a period of growth during which it had consolidated its political system, strengthened its economy and built its military might. In contrast, its neighbours were weakened by infighting, natural disasters and mutual invasions. However, after they had managed to recover and completed their respective internal consolidations, they often sought equal status with the Tang empire. At times, they even ventured into border disputes and major wars with Tang to protect their interests. When the Tang empire was united and prosperous, defeating a trouble-stricken neighbour was easy. However, when China was unstable internally, the court often had trouble maintaining its diplomatic dominance and was forced to forgo its leadership position in the international community.

In managing its foreign relations in a multipolar Asia, the Tang court often adopted a low-key policy known as the “loose rein” (*ji mi* 羁縻). This was a policy that chose not to force the “master-servant” relation upon China's neighbours, thus freeing China from unnecessary political, economic and military obligations to other countries. The *ji mi* framework also allowed foreign rulers to maintain cultural and economic exchanges in their official relations with China, without having to bear the political cost of being an “outer subject” to the Tang emperor.

Tang China first fought the Turks and subsequently confronted the Tibetans from the 7th to the 8th century. During this time, the Tang court did not demand loyalty from its neighbours in Central Asia, but interacted with them as equals. This policy was mutually beneficial to all parties involved and brought about great diplomatic successes to Tang China.

However, there were also exceptions when Tang's foreign policies deviated from the *ji mi* principle. The wars Emperor Taizong (太宗) and Gaozong (高宗) launched against Goguryeo, a kingdom in northern Korean Peninsula, were examples in point.



Foreign relations in Tang China

Emperor Taizong is depicted giving an audience to Gar Tongtsen Yulsung, the ambassador of the Tibetan Empire, in a later copy of a painting by court artist Yan Liben (600-673 AD).

For those of us who believe in learning from history, the Tang court's success in the effective use of soft power (in the form of *ji mi*), and its failure resulting from the abuse of its hard power (in the form of military strength), have left us with much to reflect upon against today's geopolitical backdrop.

During the early Tang period, Goguryeo aimed at unifying the Korean Peninsula, an ambition that did not directly threaten the Tang empire. Emperor Taizong, however, ignored the failures of the previous Sui court in fighting Goguryeo, the very failures that had accelerated the downfall of the Sui dynasty. He decided to seize Goguryeo in order to control the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. The Tang court underestimated the costs of conquering Goguryeo, and went to war without a comprehensive deliberation of its strategic objective and military plan. As a result, these wars became a huge burden on its coffers, and the post-war restoration of orders turned out to be surprisingly challenging, forcing Emperor Gaozong to eventually withdraw Tang troops from Goguryeo in 676 AD.

For those of us who believe in learning from history, the Tang court's success in the effective use of soft power (in the form of *ji mi*), and its failure resulting from the abuse of its hard power (in the form of military strength), have left us with much to reflect upon against today's geopolitical backdrop. ∞

PERSPECTIVE

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Vice-Chancellor of a new liberal arts institution, namely the Asian University for Women in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Assoc Prof Khoo received her BA in Biochemistry at Smith College, Ph.D. at St Mary's Medical School, London and a Postgraduate Diploma in Medical Education at University of Dundee.

ASSOC PROF KHOO HOON ENG

Liberal Arts and Leadership Education for Women in Asia: East-West-Global

On 10 January 2021, the first South Asian-African-American female Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris, was inaugurated. In November 2015, another highly significant political event also occurred when Justin Trudeau introduced the members of his government cabinet to the Canadian people. The whole world sat up and noticed a remarkable achievement. Half of Prime Minister Trudeau's cabinet was female, thus proving it was possible to have representatives of half your population take on leadership positions in government. When asked why he thought it was so important to include so many women, Mr Trudeau answered, "Because it's 2015."

Yet, barely three years earlier, on the afternoon of 9 October 2012, a young Pakistani girl, Malala Yousafzai, was shot and nearly killed for having the audacity to believe that all girls should get an education. It is a great tribute to Malala that, after her life-threatening ordeal, she continues to be one of the world's strongest advocates for female education. And in July 2020, she graduated with a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Oxford University.

The contrast between continents could not be starker. We should thus ensure that Asian women are not "left behind", nor excluded from shaping the positive growth and developments in their region.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

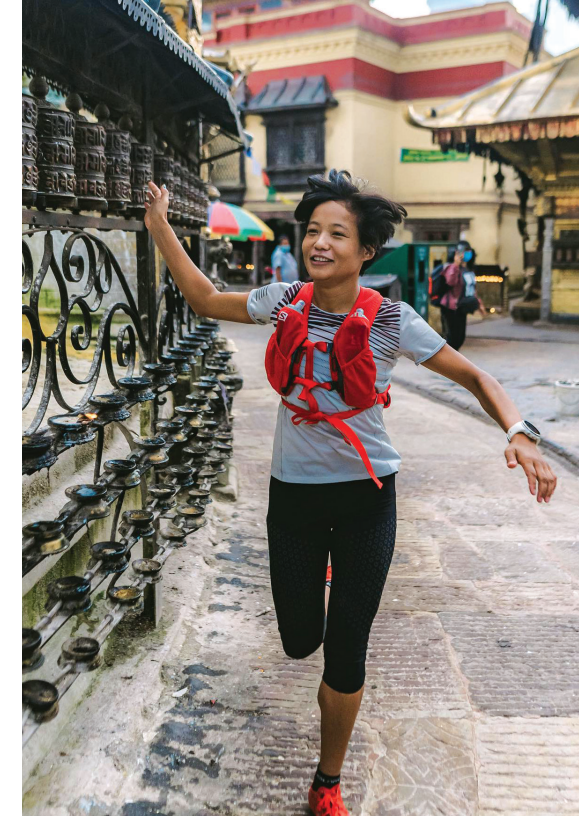
We know that the solution lies in education and cultural and political movements that will transform society so that the inequalities that have been and are still faced by women in Asia can be overcome. To do this we need to have more young women in Asia equipped with the skills that will empower them to lead and change their societies. The following is a discussion of how an all-women's university in Asia focused on nurturing women's leadership skills can be structured.

EDUCATION AND ITS GOALS

Higher education should not just be an escalator for personal success for the individual woman. It should increase her capacity to transform the wider society. As Nelson Mandela famously said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." We should educate Asian women to change their world.

There are existing universities in Asia with female students. Unfortunately, most of them focus on educating students to become professionals, not necessarily to become leaders with the social conscience to make positive changes. Moreover, in these co-educational universities, the opportunities available for female students to take up leadership positions are limited. A study that was conducted at a public university in an Asian country showed that 24 of the presidents of 25 student organisations were male, even though more than 60% of the students in the university were female!

In all-women's universities, all student organisation leaders are women. In their own women-only space, women can more easily and consciously engage in discourse to overcome gender conditioning and develop self-confidence to make their own decisions.



Mira Rai, Nepal

Born into poverty in the remote Himalayan foothills of Bhojpar in Nepal, Mira was a child soldier who grew up to be an ultramarathon legend. In 2017, she was named *National Geographic's* Adventurer of the Year. She runs an "Exchange and Empower" programme, which gives young female athletes access to athletic training, education and professional development.

Source: Mira Rai, Facebook / Prishank Photography

LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

What kind of education should we explore to achieve the goal of increasing the Asian Woman's capacity to transform her wider society? One way is via a liberal arts and sciences education. This mode of education is a critical component to empowering women in building a strong society because it emphasises the development of students' capacity for critical thinking, rather than simply introducing students to different forms of knowledge. This is the most effective way to educate students to act responsibly and effectively when challenging authority and convention in order to bring about change.

The liberal arts and sciences curriculum exposes students to a broad education in the types of knowledge, thinking and tools of major disciplines in social sciences, humanities and natural sciences.

Mai Khôi, Vietnam

A Vietnamese musician, artist and political activist, Khôi began as an award-winning pop singer before becoming known for her outspoken criticism against censorship and lack of democracy in Vietnam. She also advocates for better women's and LGBT rights in her country. In 2018, Amnesty International named Khôi one of the "12 inspiring human rights activists to follow" for that year.

Source: www.mai-khoi.com



The university should aim to improve the lives of students as well as create a cadre of women leaders who can advance social, political and economic development in the region.

With this broad education, graduates will become informed, flexible thinkers and lifelong learners, with a strong foundation of knowledge, skills and experiences that will enable them to reason and make ethical choices, to recognise the importance of the past and work towards a better future.

We should seek to educate, train and cultivate the next generation of Asian women in a university that blends the best of a liberal arts education with regionally relevant and substantive leadership courses. The university should aim to improve the lives of students as well as create a cadre of women leaders who can advance social, political and economic development in the region. An all-women's institution would create opportunities for its students to reach their fullest potential. Such a university can produce empowered graduates who

use their knowledge, self-esteem and leadership skills to advance women's empowerment and contribute to social progress.

The curriculum for such an institution should help ensure that students receive an education that dramatically expands opportunities for international exposure, encourages students to identify and strengthen their academic and personal talents, and challenges them to envision their own role in leading positive change in the world. In addition to formal courses in the classroom, students should also learn from living in residential housing as well as from off-campus experiential learning opportunities.

The siting of the university in Asia means that across different fields of study, the curriculum should incorporate relevant Asian histories, societies, cultures, politics, economies and their contributions. Many courses will offer comparisons both between different parts of Asia and between Asian and Western countries. Students will discuss and debate these similarities and dissimilarities as well as the complex and varied phenomena of modern Asia.

The university will be a living and learning community of common endeavour. Although pursuing different special interests, students and faculty will be involved in the same project

of learning for the purpose of informing one's activism in contributing to the evolution of society, the betterment of life opportunities for others, and the advancement of knowledge.

CURRICULUM DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The design of the curriculum will be as clear and simple as possible, so that students understand the overall structure of their education as well as the place of smaller components within it. The first two years of the programme will give students broad exposure to multiple disciplines as an educational foundation on which to build and contextualise the more specialised work of the third and fourth years. Students will pursue a Major, which will allow them to explore one discipline in depth, and to engage in more sophisticated learning and research. Students will engage in independent research and writing, which will take different forms in different fields. Research work, where students demonstrate independent thinking, will



Wai Wai Nu, Myanmar

A lawyer, former political prisoner and human rights advocate, Wai Wai founded the Women's Peace Network in 2013 with the objectives to build peace and mutual understanding between Myanmar's ethnic communities and to empower marginalised women throughout Myanmar, particularly in Rakhine State. She also founded the Yangon Youth Center to engage youth in the peacebuilding process. She was named one of TIME magazine's Next Generation Leaders in 2017.

Source: [Wai Wai Nu, Facebook](#)

continue throughout the four-year programme, at increasingly challenging levels, culminating in a senior capstone project.

Courses will incorporate intensive writing components that demand significant written work, and include detailed, personal feedback. Students will take leadership courses to develop a broad range of skills which include financial literacy, negotiation, team-building, public speaking, computer literacy, organisational management and social entrepreneurship, among others.

Students will participate in experiential learning involving internship programmes in the community or with companies — regionally or globally — to build on the academic, social and leadership skills gained, to provide opportunities for student employment as well as enhance the university's reputation for educational excellence.

The university's pedagogy will be as important as its curriculum. The university will provide an opportunity to develop new modes of instruction and learning, for example, with the use of case



Lynn Nanticha Ocharoenchai, Thailand

As the organiser of Climate Strike Thailand in 2019, Ocharoenchai is taking center stage in demanding action for climate change. Inspired by Greta Thunberg, Ocharoenchai has taken to writing about environmental conservation and social activism. She also emphasises the importance of working alongside grassroots communities and using creative ventures to engage people.

Photo: [Andre Malerba / ZUMA Wire / Alamy Live News](#)

If we want the world to be a more peaceful one where our women are leaders in their countries, then the university has to be a multicultural, multinational, multi-ethnic, multi-religious institution where students live and learn from each other.

studies, service-learning and innovative lab exercises. Students must take much responsibility for learning. They will be expected, with advice and within parameters, to find areas for enquiry and research within each course, as well as to choose appropriate electives. They will also be encouraged to reflect upon, critically evaluate, make connections between and build from what they have learnt.

The role of the professor will be to stimulate interest, and to guide and facilitate students' learning. Professors will be expected to elicit both oral and written work from students, and to comment constructively, critically and in detail on it. They will be available to students for consultation outside the class and will join in informal discussion with them round the campus. Faculty will be involved in research, some of which will include the collaborative involvement of students.

To cultivate the intellectual and moral qualities required of future civic leaders, most, if not all, of the teaching needs to be in small seminar-like classes, where students are encouraged, indeed expected, to discuss and debate, and interact with professors and classmates in a collegial but critical way. Students' active participation will be encouraged in an atmosphere of mutual learning and trust.

Learning in this university will take place outside as well as inside the classroom. Professors will take their students on field visits, meet with them in their offices, engage in conversations around the campus and over dinner, and host meetings and talks with visiting experts. Annual convocations will provide another avenue for ungraded learning beyond the formal curriculum.

Courses will include the experiences, contributions and relevance of women and Asian peoples to the development of history, politics, science, art, literature and other fields. Excellence, leadership and service will be the key themes because they are at the centre of this university's education. Examples of such courses might include the following:

- *The Past and Present: Asia and the Rest of the World Since the 18th Century*
- *The World Today: Examining Contemporary Issues*
- *Women and Society — Local, Regional, Global*
- *Exploring Great Literature of Asia and the World*

Other courses in Philosophy, Religion, Psychology, Sociology or Multicultural Studies may also provide experiences which allow students to encounter new and thought-provoking aspects of the world and to see them from a variety of perspectives. In addition, courses in Fine Arts, Social Sciences and Laboratory Sciences can help students understand how the methodologies of different disciplines provide ways to process and organise information about the world.

Seminars on leadership can be taught by faculty, visiting executives or industry leaders, to link the academic work with practical knowledge and skills and training. Students will learn about contemporary events and the movers and shakers in various fields as well as receive training, coaching and mentoring experience.

COMPLEMENTARY INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Students will learn in a diverse residential community. Residential life promotes multicultural understanding and tolerance, after-class



Asian University for Women (AUW)

The Asian University for Women (AUW) is an independent, regional institution dedicated to women's education and leadership development in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The university is committed to graduating generations of women leaders who will tackle their countries' social, economic, and political issues while collaborating across cultural, ethnic and religious lines. AUW has more than 850 students enrolled from 19 countries across Asia and the Middle East.

Photo: Moheen Reeyad/ CC BY-SA 4.0

exploration of course materials, and experiences that create lifelong friendships and social networks. Students will have access to a wide variety of on-campus cultural, political and intellectual events. Emphasis will be placed on Community Service, Sports and Physical Education, and Student Clubs and Organisations.

REFLECTING THE REAL WORLD

Beyond the formal curriculum, such an institution should also reflect the diversity of the world. They will need more than just academic content and leadership opportunities. My experience at the Asian University for Women (AUW) that was started in Chittagong, Bangladesh in 2008 has confirmed for me that the ability to understand and work with others who are different forms an important part of the experience. If we want the world to be a more peaceful one where our women are leaders in their countries, then the university

has to be a multicultural, multinational, multi-ethnic, multi-religious institution where students live and learn from each other.

In 2008 our AUW students who came from eight nations shared diverse and at times "clashing" cultural practices. We had a talented Bharatanatyam dancer from India who performed for the community even though many of her classmates from more conservative backgrounds were not allowed to dance in public. We convinced our students, a majority of whom had never learnt to swim and who had to be conservatively clothed, that we would teach them basic water survival skills. A local hotel with a swimming pool kindly reserved it one afternoon just for our use. I recall an Afghan student who wanted to jump into the deep end of the pool straight away as she was so excited. Our swimming instructor managed to convince her to do so at the shallow end first. This amazing student who was so eager to embrace new experiences went on to graduate from



Student organisations

The Speak Up Club at AUW hosted the first annual Women's March through Chittagong to advocate for women's rights.

Source: AUW website

Stanford University. Last year she graduated from Cambridge University with a Ph.D. in Literature and published her first book of poems.

We intentionally placed students of different religious backgrounds in the same rooms. They learnt to respect and accommodate each other's religious practices. A Muslim student told us that she was fine with her Hindu roommate having a picture of Ganesh on their bedroom wall but she needed a place to say her prayers. We had anticipated this and prepared an empty room which anyone could use for prayers or quiet contemplation. Any objects brought into the room would have to be removed by the students when they left.

We had Sri Lankan students from the two major religious and ethnic groups that were the main antagonists of a long civil war in their home country. When they arrived at AUW in 2018, for some of them it was the first time they were interacting with fellow Sri Lankans of a different ethnicity. After some initial hesitation, due to their preconceptions of each other as enemies, they soon bonded as they discovered that they shared so many things in common — food, music, clothes — and became fast friends.

A year later, in 2009, the Tamil Tigers surrendered. Among our Sri Lankan students, the Sinhalese were happy and excited that their country would be at peace, while the Tamils were sad and disappointed. Relations among our Sri Lankan students became strained. Our university psychologist and student counsellor, herself a Sri Lankan Christian, brought them all together and ran workshops that got them to share the reasons for their opposing reactions. Through their honest mutual sharing, the Sri Lankan students, whether Sinhalese or Tamil, spoke about personal losses that each of them had suffered. One had lost her father before she was born while others had lost other loved ones to the conflict. They all realised that they could not continue to be angry and suspicious of each other and discussed how they could share this with their fellow AUW students. Together, they wrote a drama about the Sri Lankan conflict revealing the suffering on both sides. The Sinhalese students took on the Tamil roles and vice-versa. This was performed in front of the whole AUW community and there was not a single dry eye in the audience after that. Many of the other AUW students were not strangers to war and conflict. The Bangladeshis had fought a war of independence in 1971. Many students came from strife-ridden areas of Afghanistan, northern Pakistan and Palestine.

The Sri Lankan students ended their presentation with a pledge to go back to their homeland and set up reconciliation groups. They managed to raise sufficient funds to do so during the vacation. In Sri Lanka, they met with intellectuals, activists and others in the community in a bid to try and understand each other's pain and how to reconcile in tangible ways. They then lived, worked and learnt from the people from a Sinhala as well as a Tamil village who had been affected by the war. At the end of their project, one of the women paraphrased Margaret Mead by saying, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed young women can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

The Sri Lankan students' project was named "Moving Beyond the Conflict", a project which developed organically. It followed the experiences and emerging needs of students whose inner worlds were confounded by the brutality of war, but whose enormous courage propelled them to seek to go beyond their own pain, understand another's pain and, together, find a way of creating meaning out of the chaos of war. It was a testament to a system of education that went beyond the classroom to target both the intellectual and the psychosocial needs of students faced with the multiple dilemmas of responding to and one day becoming leaders skilled in navigating war and reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

The year 2020 will forever be remembered as the pandemic year. A virus reminded the world that we are all interconnected. Any meaningful university curriculum should be one where our students are constantly reminded of this. An all-women's tertiary institution that focuses exclusively on educating women for leadership and empowering them for change will be important in Asia. A model for this was started in Bangladesh in 2008 as the AUW. Much of what I have written here remains aspirational but some aspects that I have shared from my personal experiences at AUW are reflective of what can be accomplished with the right vision, planning, policy, governance and



financial support. Most important of all, the success of such an institution will require capable leaders, faculty, staff and students who share the same vision. ∞

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Note: This paper is based partially on documents that have been prepared for a new women's leadership university in Asia. Some of the proposed institutional and curricular structures are similar but not identical to another young liberal arts institution in Asia, Yale-NUS College, which is co-educational. Special thanks go to Ms Evangeline Ekanayake for sharing the details of the Sri Lankan "Moving Beyond the Conflict" project.



Academic programmes

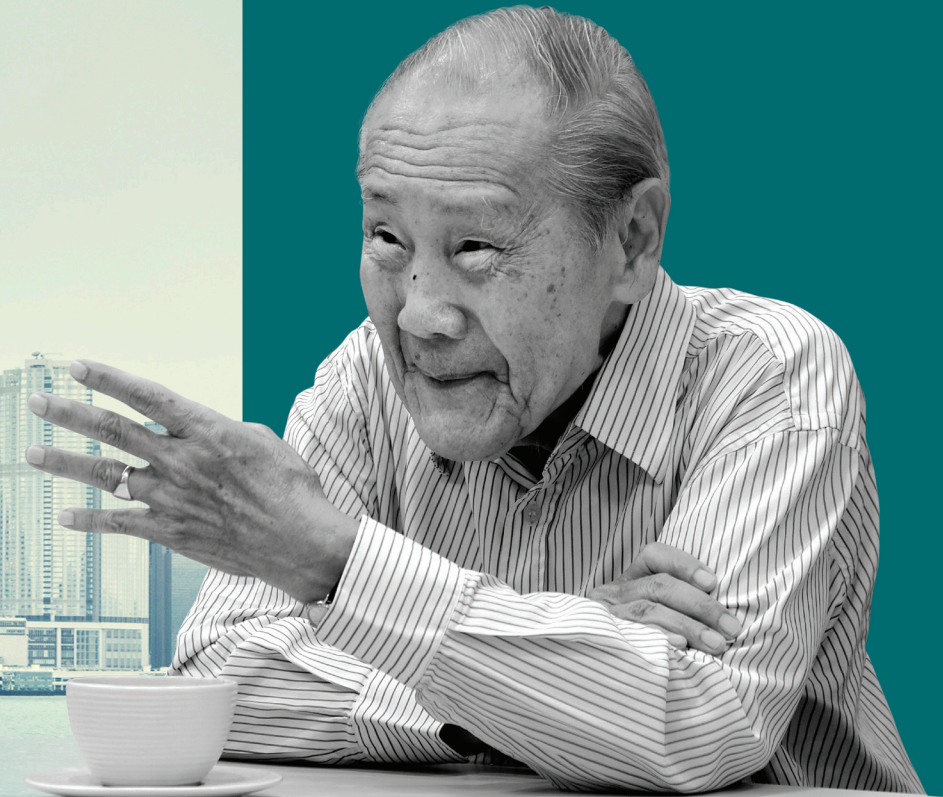
At AUW, students gain both breadth and depth of knowledge in a relevant, interdisciplinary field of choice. Through an American-style liberal arts and sciences curriculum, they learn to think critically, communicate effectively and work intelligently to address the most pressing issues of the day with innovative and bold solutions.

Source: AUW website

Cultural identity in Hong Kong

The ongoing resistance and negotiation between Hong Kong and Chinese culture has led to a deep division of self-identification. The city is in search of an original, native and local culture with shared values among the people.

Photo: Iakov Kalinin / 123rf



INTERVIEW WITH PROF WANG GUNGWU

Redefining Notions of East and West

Prof Wang Gungwu is the Chairman of the East Asian Institute and University Professor at the National University of Singapore. He is also Emeritus Professor of the Australian National University. An esteemed historian, Prof Wang has held several prominent teaching and leadership positions at renowned institutes in the world, including Vice Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong, Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Science, and Honorary Member of the Chinese Academy of Social Science.

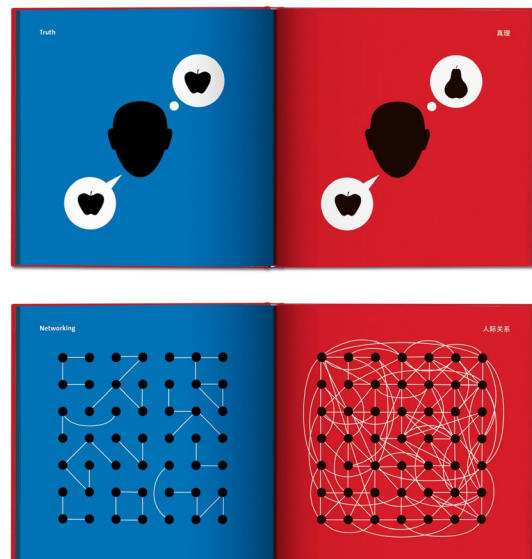
Throughout his career, Prof Wang has also been a prolific writer. He has published numerous books both in English and Chinese, including *Another China Cycle: Committing to Reform* (2014) and 《1800年以来的中英碰撞：战争、贸易、科学及治理》 (2016). Given his remarkable work, he was conferred the Academic Prize of the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize, and was one of ten eminent persons to receive an honorary degree to celebrate Cambridge University's 800th anniversary.

Prof Wang Gungwu received his BA and MA from the University of Malaya in Singapore, and his Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London.

What is your view on the question of East versus West?

One has to be careful in defining what is East or West. The idea of East and West was more relevant before 1945. Ever since the founding of the United Nations, the world has been made up of theoretically equal nations. On what basis they relate to each other became a different thing altogether. Countries started to align themselves based on ideology, national interests, scientific cooperation and market economy, not on the basis of whether they were East or West.

Also, what we generally refer to as the East is made up of a group of very diverse countries and cultures, from China to India to Japan and the Southeast Asian nations. They are very different culturally and politically, and none alone can represent the East.



East meets West at a glance

Beijing-born designer Yang Liu, who moved to Berlin at the age of 13, published a pocket-sized book of pictograms, *East Meets West*, showing how values and practices vary across cultures in the East and West from her point of view. Many intercultural trainers and language programmes have used her pictograms for their lessons or company trainings.

Source: Pictogram by Yang Liu. Courtesy of Taschen.

We read in the news about these interactions taking place among different countries, about collaborations between governments, but inherently people do behave differently, depending on whether they are from the East or the West, don't they?

One would have to distinguish between the different sets of ideas. On questions of material progress, there is probably no difference. On questions of spiritual life and cultural continuity, it varies from country to country. For China, for example, cultural continuity with the past is very important, because that is the very basis of their political system. For other countries, this is less important because their political systems have become completely Western.

Then again, when it comes to things like education, science and technology, finance, trading... it has become very hard to differentiate. All countries share the same concerns for their people. Their economic policies, industrial policies and trade policies are all about raising standards of living, and providing good education and better healthcare. And they try to achieve these by doing very similar things, for example, through industrialisation and trading, and by joining the right international organisations. These are all matters related to national security and material progress. At the macro level, all countries are chasing very similar goals today. As a result, similar economic systems and national policies are driving people from different countries to behave in very similar ways at the social level.

In your view, what are the relative strengths and weaknesses of Asian and Western cultures?

For more than 70 years, nations and cultures have been influencing each other. As a result, many measurements and standards have become universally acceptable. We only need to look at various kinds of global rankings to realise how cultures and values have converged. There are GDP rankings, university rankings, airlines rankings, freedom rankings, even happiness rankings. Both Western and Asian countries can be found occupying both the top and the bottom positions

“IT SHOWS THAT COMPARING STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IS MORE MEANINGFUL AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, RATHER THAN THE CULTURAL LEVEL.”

of these charts. Most countries are trying to move up in ranking following the same criteria, whether they are from the East or from the West. Again, it shows that comparing strengths and weaknesses is more meaningful at the national level, rather than the cultural level.

Let's look at a specific example then: it is generally agreed that the East is doing better than the West in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Why do you think this is the case?

While this appears to be true generally, there are also Asian countries that are not doing so well, for example the Philippines; and there are Western countries that did well in controlling the pandemic, for example Australia and New Zealand.

An alternate explanation I can offer for that observation is an economic one: in the last 20 years, the middle-class population in Asia have seen their lives improving as globalisation brought economic growth and new opportunities. As a result, these societies are more stable, and their people are more likely to cooperate with their governments in controlling the pandemic.

On the other hand, the middle-class in the West have been suffering from economic stagnation for many years, except for those in Australia and New Zealand. The middle-class in the US and Europe are therefore more resistant to the lockdown orders which were hurting their livelihood even more.

Even though countries developed and grew based on the same set of rules and frameworks after 1945, wouldn't different cultures have moved towards very different outcomes because of how people behave under different cultural settings?

I think the most important difference, which everyone notices, is the kind of political system each country produces. However, no matter what political system you have, the ways you are being measured are all very Western today. How free? How democratic? How legalistic? How well the laws are enforced? Once you become a member of the United Nations, these are all measured by the same standards, whether you like it or not. Most states have accepted this. Every nation shares their economic data with organisations like the WTO. If you study in the university, these are the things you learn. This is how much uniformity has been creeping into everybody's lives in the last 75 years.



International rankings of Singapore

Singapore's economy has been ranked freest in the world in the Heritage Foundation's 2021 Index of Economic Freedom, the second year in a row it topped the list. At the same time, it also ranks 160th on the 2021 World Press Freedom index.

Photo: P. Kijsanayothin / iStock



Urbanisation in China

Urbanisation in China increased in speed following the initiation of the reform and opening policy. As of 2020, 60.6% of the total population lived in urban areas, a dramatic increase from 17.9% in 1978. Among all provinces, Shanghai has the highest urban percentage of the total population.

Photo: Maud Beauregar / Unsplash

I am old enough to remember it was not like this 75 years ago. Everybody had just achieved independence. There was a lot of nation-building going on, but countries were doing things in their own ways with very little comparison. But after 75 years, we are actually no longer independent in the same way. We are all moving roughly in the same direction out of necessity. As a government, if you don't follow the same rules, your country will be poorer, you can't keep up, your people will be unhappy, and they will throw you out.

As Asia catches up in its development and starts to play a more prominent role in the international arena, do you see this very Western set of international rules changing?

We expect changes because we assume East and West are very different. However, one of the big debates is that whether certain fundamental concepts are universal and accepted by both East and West. Certain values we wishfully believe belong to our own culture may not be so unique after all.

One of these, for example, is the belief that *knowledge is power*. People from both the East and the West agree with it. However, in modern history, the West seems to have manifested this belief more prominently by having better technology, better universities and more information. When you have better knowledge and more information, you control those who are less informed.

Power is another thing that is universal. Everybody wants it. Throughout history, every civilisation, every government and every politician fought for power. And then you have a law all historians believe in, that is, *power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely*. This is true for both the East and the West. We will continue to see power struggles regardless of who the dominant power is.

Next, we have urbanisation. Asia has become a lot more urbanised since 1945. Some of the consequences of urbanisation, for example smaller families and lower birth rates, are mostly universal and not specific to culture. So, our culture changed not because we are Westernised, but because we are urbanised.

The concept of human rights is also universal. Everyone believes in it, but how do you define human rights? First of all, everyone must be well fed and well sheltered — this is basic and most

“WHAT WE NEED IS TO BE RELATIVELY FREE, BUT WITH SOME CONTROL SO THAT CERTAIN HUMAN INSTINCTS DO NOT CREATE TOO MUCH INSTABILITY. THE CHALLENGE IS TO FIND THE RIGHT BALANCE.”

important for those who have experienced famine, long periods of war and poverty. However, the West tends to take this for granted, and believes that certain freedoms — freedom of speech, freedom to participate in politics and so on — are more important. And then you have the argument of whether social stability is more important than individual freedom. When you get to this level, the priority is different between the East and the West. It is at this level where we might see some changes, since the priority and emphasis for some universal ideas are not the same.

What lessons do you think mankind should have learned from the encounters between the East and the West in the history of civilisation?

As a historian, I would argue that there were no major differences between the East and the West until about 1800. People fought each other for power and wealth, and killed or made life difficult for those who had different beliefs. After 1800, we have liberty, equality and fraternity from the French Revolution; we have science and technology, capitalism, democracy and industrial revolution. All these came from the West and we now identify them as “Western”. However,

is this a matter of who discovered them *first*? Could Asians have also reached a point where they developed the idea of liberty, equality and fraternity independently? This is an argument in history, and no one knows the answer.

Once these modern concepts started to spread, most people agreed with them. If you ask the young people in Asia today, for example, all of them believe in religious freedom, and agree that Black lives matter. And market economy and capitalism dominate world trade today. It goes to show that many things seemed different in the past only because people were unaware of them. Once people become aware and have time to think more broadly and deeply, many values are actually universal and people from both sides find that they have a lot in common.

Another lesson we have learned from history, I think, is that human beings do not like extremes. Most people are quite happy in the middle. So, it is important to find the middle ground. For example, authoritarian is not good, but total freedom doesn't seem to work either. What we need is to be relatively free, but with some control so that certain human instincts do not create too much instability. The challenge is to find the right balance.

#BlackLivesMatter in Korea

About 100 demonstrators participated in a protest in Seoul on 6 June 2020 to show their support for the Black Lives Matter movement in the US. The movement shines light on the deep-rooted racism issue in Korea and across Asia, and gets people to rethink inclusiveness.

Photo: UPI / Alamy Live News



“ANGER AND FEAR ARE VERY POWERFUL HUMAN INSTINCTS, AND THEY ARE NOT UNIQUE TO ANY CULTURE.”



The new space race

Five years after Yang Liwei, China's first man in space, completed his mission, Zhai Zhigang performed the nation's first-ever spacewalk in 2008. On 14 May 2021, China took a huge leap forward and successfully landed its first rover on Mars, ending the American dominance of space exploration.

Photo: Xu haihan / Imaginechina via AP Images

If we are indeed so similar, and if we have learned so much more about each other over the years through globalisation and modern education, shouldn't mutual understanding have created a more harmonious international community with fewer conflicts?

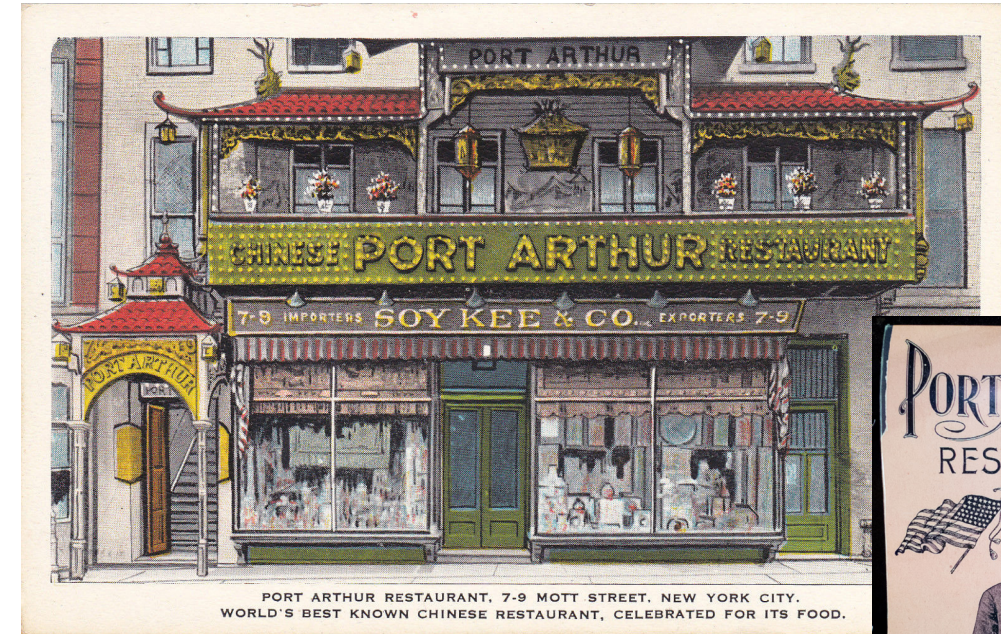
Well, this is an interesting question. While there are more things we now have in common, government systems still operate on the basis of wealth and power, which is universal in a different way.

In today's world, countries are run on the bases of people's ego, desire to control and dominate, selfishness and a sense of territory. All these can be seen as human instincts in us. Intellectually, we believe in treating everyone equally, but it is also natural for us to favour our own friends or family members. We know that wealth brings power, so those who are in power want to prevent others from gathering wealth so that they can remain in power. This is universal in both the East and the West. And this is why having common values and better understanding do not necessarily bring more harmony — because the evils in us are universal, too.

Do you foresee the rise of China leading towards a more harmonised world because of a better East-West balance, or do you expect more geopolitical conflicts arising from more East-West competition?

This comes down to some basic human instincts which are universal. On one hand, there is the fear that China is becoming wealthier and more powerful, and may start to dominate. At the same time, there is also the anger that China, led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is not playing by the rules set by the West.

On the other hand, the Chinese are frightened because they see their progress being blocked and sabotaged. They are also angry because they feel that their policies are being misinterpreted, and their political system is being viewed as a failure by some Western standards.



Port Arthur Restaurant

As early as 1860, there was an emergence of Chinese restaurants in New York City opened by Chinese immigrants. One of the most famous restaurants in Manhattan's Chinatown was Port Arthur, located on Mott Street, operating from 1897 to 1974. Restaurant critic George Chappell noted in *The Restaurants of New York* (1925, Greenberg) that Port Arthur's "carved screens and golden dragon-work make it a splendid showplace".

Source: www.hippocard.com



Anger and fear are very powerful human instincts, and they are not unique to any culture. This is therefore not simply a clash of cultures. When you mix anger and fear, and when both sides feel that much anger and that much fear, they can become very irrational. If they are not careful and get to that point, there will be little chance of a peaceful future.

Let's talk a little about overseas Chinese since you are the expert on this topic. Can the Chinese migration, be it the earlier wave in the last century, or the wave in recent decades, be viewed as a form of migration from the East to the West?

Not necessarily. Southeast Asia was not part of the West although it was made up of Western colonies at one point. Thailand was never a colony, but it has quite a big overseas Chinese population.

In my view, migration has more to do with labour distribution, whether today or in the past. There were labour shortages in many parts of the world

after slavery was forbidden. Slavery was replaced by coolie labour when European ships brought unskilled workers from Asia to different parts of the world. That was followed by chain migration when more workers left home to join their friends and family members abroad to help build infrastructures and to work in mines and plantations. Today, migration, or more appropriately called *expatriation* in some cases, happens for many more reasons.

To what extent, in your assessment, have overseas Chinese been acting as a cultural bridge between the East and the West?

It depends on which period we are talking about. In today's modern cities, yes, some do play that role, but many of the values are already universal for the reasons I mentioned earlier.

In the early days, most Chinese migrants were less educated labourers moving from one peasant society to another very different peasant society. They lived and worked among themselves, or

in Chinese mines and plantations. They were separated from the local communities and did not interact much with the local people. Later, in the late 19th or early 20th century, some of the more entrepreneurial ones started to open small shops in the kampongs or in Chinatowns, and traded with the local people. Whether or how much they shared values and beliefs with their customers back then, I am not sure. The actual assimilation into local societies happened much later.

Singapore and Hong Kong are similar in many ways – among them their East-West heritage. As someone who has lived in both places for a long period of time, which of the two do you think has been more successful in integrating East and West in their post-war development?

Hong Kong appears to have done better in the early years under British rule, and acting as a portal to the large Chinese market, especially in finance and international trade.

Singapore did not have those advantages after its separation from Malaysia, and had very few natural resources to rely on. Many things had to be built from scratch with much determination and some experiments. But over the years, through a lot of hard work and good governance, Singapore has caught up and overtaken Hong Kong in many aspects. This is partly because it has been more diverse in its development strategy. Besides its ports and financial sector, it has also been very aggressive in developing its education sector, high-tech research and advanced manufacturing.

In contrast, Hong Kong became less important as a portal into China when the mainland became more open. The recent social unrest and the latest political development in Hong Kong may further diminish Hong Kong's role as an international financial centre.

In your two-volume autobiography – *Home is Not Here* and *Home is Where We Are* – you gave very detailed accounts of your early life in Ipoh and your early career as a historian and a Sinologist. Are you writing a sequel to tell the rest of your stories?

My two books are about our search for home. As my wife Margaret said at the end of our second book, home is where we are. We are already at home. There won't be a third book.

What advice do you have for The HEAD Foundation, whose strategy is to integrate East and West in contributing to the development of Asia?

I think it is important to focus on the underlying values of things you aspire to support. Whether they are from the East or the West is less important. As long as they are good practices and good policies, and as long as they can help to improve lives in our society, they are worth supporting and advocating. ∞



Home is not here but where we are

Wang Gungwu's two-volume biography is an account of his multicultural upbringing, life under British rule, university education in Singapore and the UK, and the early years of his career as an academic in Malaysia. It is a reflection on family, identity and belonging, and on the ability of the individual to find a place amid the historical currents that have shaped Asia and the world.

Photo: Grassroots Book Room

FEATURE

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DR FU PINGPING & YANG BO

Humanistic Leadership and its Manifestation in a Chinese Context

Global challenges and crises including environmental degradation, distributional inequality and societal distrust point to the need to rethink business strategies as well as management theories and practices. There have been considerable criticisms of conventional management theories that are based on the fundamental assumptions of an 'economistic' paradigm and view humans as driven by rational interests aimed at maximising utility (*homo economicus*). Both scholars and practitioners have called for the reincorporation of humanistic values into business theories, organisations and management practices. Consequently, humanistic management (HM), as a new management paradigm, is gaining increasing attention from academia as well as the business community.

HM was first introduced by Swart (1973) to refer to "a new way to cope with old problems — motivation, work satisfaction, morale and productivity", and has since gone through several stages of development. Most of the earlier definitions regarded it as "a means for both productivity and for developing human potential" (Swart, 1973). The more recent people-focused definition was proposed by Domènec Melé in the early 2000s when he defined HM as "a management that emphasises the human condition and is oriented to the development of human virtue, in all its forms, to its fullest extent."

In 2009, a group of scholars established the Humanistic Management Network (HMN)¹ as a global network of scholars, policy makers and management practitioners aiming to enhance the body of knowledge and promote HM practices. To provide a common understanding and foundation for the work of the HMN, von Kimakowitz et al. (2011) defined HM on the basis of unconditional respect for the dignity of life and formulated three interrelated pillars, which are:

1. the unconditional respect for dignity;
2. the integration of ethical reflection in managerial decision making; and
3. the active and ongoing engagement with stakeholders.

HUMANISTIC MANAGEMENT VS. HUMANISTIC LEADERSHIP

To date, HM has been established as a sharp contrast to other types of management that are mostly oriented toward profits, with people as mere resources to serve the profit goal. Management and leadership are sometimes used synonymously, and at other times they are treated separately in research literature. In reality, it takes both managers and leaders to accomplish goals. In most societies, managers are leaders, and vice versa. However, in societies with high power distance, such as China and Japan, only managers in executive positions are regarded as leaders and followers expect their leaders to act differently from managers. In societies where leaders and managers are distinguished, companies will not be able to implement HM unless those at the top of the company are humanistic and develop a humanistic culture in the company.

HUMANISTIC LEADERSHIP IN CHINA

In the past few decades, China has benefitted greatly from adopting many aspects of Western business systems and managerial theories and practices, which have helped to bring about rapid economic development. However, the values that are embedded in these theories are believed by many to have led to a series of injurious outcomes, including environmental degradation, numerous health problems, increased distrust and greater economic inequality. At the same time, many Chinese entrepreneurs, while having amassed great wealth, feel a lack of spiritual fulfilment. In response to these multiple concerns, many Chinese business professionals and scholars are seeking to develop alternative approaches to management based on China's traditional culture and indigenous philosophies. This trend is similar to the increasing focus on bringing humanism into business through HM and conscious capitalism in the West.

We believe that Confucianism provides a strong foundation for the development of HM and humanistic leadership in the Chinese context because of its centrality to Chinese culture, its fundamentally humanistic and ethical nature, and its emphasis on self-cultivation and the establishment of moral relationships.

In the last decade, an increasing number of Chinese business leaders are reconnecting with Confucian values, building company cultures based on these values and urging their employees to internalise them.

CONFUCIAN LEADERSHIP AND CONFUCIANISM IN BUSINESS

Confucianism, a collective term used in Chinese to refer to the teachings of the great Sage, Confucius, is central to Chinese culture and the most quintessentially Chinese of all wisdom traditions emerging from China. For more than 20 centuries, Confucian philosophy and values have had a profound influence on almost all aspects of society, including politics, education, religion and family life in greater China, as well as in neighbouring countries such as Korea, Japan, Singapore and Vietnam. Confucianism teaches people how to become *junzi* (君子) and how to relate to and interact with others based on moral principles. In ancient Chinese, *junzi* had two meanings: “a person in a ruling position”, that is, a leader, and “a person of great virtue”.

The standing and legitimacy of Confucianism have gone through many ups and downs over the course of Chinese history. Certain institutionalised or “politicised” forms of Confucianism have been heavily criticised, for instance, for giving rise to despotism and nepotism, which some argue have hampered creativity in Chinese society and slowed China's economic development. However, Confucian values remain the major cultural element underlying leadership practices in China and other East Asian societies. In addition, Confucianism has been regarded as an invaluable source for the creation of a modern Chinese cultural identity and rebuilding Chinese people's pride in their cultural heritage. In the last decade, an increasing number of Chinese business leaders are reconnecting with Confucian values, building company cultures based on these values and urging their employees to internalise them.

Confucianism maintains that a society should be made up of reciprocal interpersonal relationships, with the leaders teaching, supervising, mentoring and looking after the followers like family heads taking care of their children's professional and personal lives. Furthermore, Confucius believed that human nature inherently tends to seek its own cultivation and perfection, and that human transformation can only take place through continuous learning and education. Many scholars agree that unlike other conceptualisations of leadership, the Confucian ideal conceptualises leadership as a result of relationalism, self-cultivation and self-regulation. For example, Kim et al. (2015) found that introspection, self-cultivation and ethical integrity are essential to Korean traditional leadership, which is deeply influenced by Confucianism.

There is an old Chinese saying that “one can lead a country with half a volume of the Analects of Confucius.” Although clearly an exaggeration, it implies that Confucianism contains wisdom and



The merchants of Huizhou

The “Hui merchants” (徽商) hailed from Huizhou and Anqing prefectures, and once ruled over the most powerful commercial network in China. They were famous for their reverence of Confucian values, and were said to conduct their business during the day while reading Confucian classics at night.

Photo: William Yu Photography / Alamy

1. www.humanisticmanagement.network



Humanistic leadership

In Fotile's corporate headquarters in Ningbo, Mao Zhongqun has set up the Confucius Hall (*Kongzi Tang*), a 200-square-metre classroom decorated like an ancient Confucian school. Leaders at different levels are required to take monthly classes on Confucianism, and all employees are encouraged to begin their daily work by reading Confucian classics every morning.



tenets that can be effectively applied to the practice of management and governance. Confucianism is humanistic in nature and, therefore, offers a natural philosophical foundation for building Chinese humanistic leadership (Fu et al., 2018).

In the following pages, we use the case of the top leader of a Chinese company, Fotile Kitchenware Group Corporation, to illustrate how Confucian humanistic philosophy can be applied to leadership practices, and its impact on corporate culture as well as employees.

A CHINESE CASE OF HUMANISTIC LEADERSHIP

Fotile Kitchenware Group Corporation was founded by Mao Zhongqun shortly after he graduated from Shanghai Jiaotong University with a Master's degree in Electrical Engineering. Although he benefitted from having an entrepreneurial father who had created a successful business making electronic lighters, he decided to focus on manufacturing high-end kitchen appliances after carefully conducting a market analysis. Quiet and gentle, Mao is both very modest and extremely committed to fulfilling the

company mission and vision. Mao gathered a strong technical team to launch the first product in 1996. After a few years of focusing intensively on products and markets, Mao recognised the need to build the company's culture.

After completing an executive MBA degree at the China European International Business School, he concluded that Western management principles and concepts primarily draw on how Americans and Europeans run their companies, which he believed may not be actionable and sustainable in China without incorporating Chinese indigenous culture. After two years of searching, which included intensive reading and attending classes on philosophy at leading universities in China, he decided to incorporate Confucian values into the company culture, and adopted the Confucian virtues as the company core values. He said, "Confucian ideologies are in the blood of the Chinese people. All we need to do is to arouse them and help people become aware of their existence."

In 2006, the company adopted "*ren yi li zhi xin*" (仁义礼智信 — humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity), the five Confucian cardinal virtues, as the company's core values. It was not easy at the beginning. For example, salespeople complained that following these virtues would not allow them to compete with aggressive competitors, leading to a loss of sales. In response, to emphasise the importance of the values, Mao added five behaviours from the Analects: "*lian chi qin yong yan*" (廉耻勤勇严 — frugality, remorsefulness, diligence, courageousness and rigour) to the core values as well. In 2009, Mao designated 200 square metres of the company lobby for a Confucius Hall for managers and employees to study the classic texts of Confucianism. Leaders at different levels attend monthly classes in the hall, which is also used to train second-generation family business leaders from outside.

Over time, Mao changed the policies that were inconsistent with the company core values and established new ways to exemplify them. Mao persisted by acting as a role model and he

expected other leaders in the company to do the same. He also encouraged employees to spend the first 15 minutes at work reading the Confucian classics. By 2017, the company had grown to over 19,000 employees, and it continues to be the most competitive in the industry with an average annual growth rate of 30% over the past two decades. Fotile's continuous growth has attracted many investors, but Mao has refused to take the company public. Instead, he modified the traditional practice of issuing 'body shares' (身股) according to ownership and issued body shares to anyone with a tenure of two years or more, and also offered dividends twice a year based on tenure and performance. This gives employees a strong sense of belonging and ownership. In 2018, Fotile received the Best Employer award from Aon-Hewitt with an employee engagement score of 87, which is higher than the average of all the Best Employers award recipients in the world.

COMMON ELEMENTS IN CHINESE HUMANISTIC LEADERSHIP

Using the three components of the working definition of humanistic leadership given by Fu et al. (2020) as a guide, we identified three noteworthy commonalities in the management philosophies and behaviours of Mao and other humanistic leaders we studied in China:

1. They offer humanistic care and treat people as holistic human beings;
2. They provide humanistic education as a foundation for employees to grow while simultaneously pursuing their own development because they see them as interrelated; and
3. They take care of the interests of multiple stakeholders and strive to create common good.

Offering humanistic care and treating people as holistic human beings

Mao has shown a commitment to unconditionally offer genuine humanistic care and love to his employees, not in exchange for performance. He regards employees not as an instrumental means

to achieve business objectives but as holistic persons who have both material and non-material (such as psychological, emotional and spiritual) needs. This reflects a key principle of humanistic management: one should manage a business based on compassion and care for employees' well-being instead of ruling by fear or punishment.

Fotile used to fine employees who showed up late for work. Mao realised the penalty-based approach was against the Confucian tenets of virtue-based leadership, and he abolished that policy. Instead, he directed the immediate supervisors of the employees concerned to talk to them in person to find out the reason behind their tardiness and to offer help if needed. The new approach significantly reduced the occurrence of tardiness and made employees feel trusted and cared for. Driven by the spirit of benevolence, Mao also gives generous benefits to his employees to make them feel like members of a family. Unlike most other companies in the region, Fotile provides employees with extra days of paid leave and substantial amounts of interest-free loans to help them purchase cars or homes, or to pay for their children's schooling.

Simultaneously pursuing the development of the self and others

Mao is committed to becoming a role model. He has made employees' development a high priority for his organisation. At Fotile, developing and realising people's full potential is viewed not only for the sake of business performance, but as a response to an intrinsic human desire and the foundation for running a successful business. Mao believes the quality of people, products and the enterprise need to be aligned.

Under Mao's leadership, Fotile University was formally established in 2016. Since its establishment, Fotile University has functioned as the centre of Fotile's 'people development', shouldering the unique and important responsibility of helping employees achieve both material and spiritual prosperity, in both career and life development. Mao encourages his employees to set up a goal, read classic literature, practise filial piety, identify and overcome their own weaknesses, and perform a good deed every day. Such effort is a core element of Fotile's humanistic education and an important methodology for cultivating both virtuous and competent leaders.

Taking care of the interests of multiple stakeholders for the common good

Mao shows a strong sense of responsibility toward multiple stakeholders, rather than having profit maximisation as his sole goal. While Mao aims to build Fotile into a great company, he believes the four features of a great company are: (a) its customers obtain peace of mind from the products and services they acquire; (b) its employees gain happiness through constant learning and hard work; (c) society benefits from its activities because it abides by the law and upholds justice; and (d) its business is sustained by effective strategies and proper management.

Fotile has also adopted the internationally recognised SA8000 social responsibility standards and focuses on developing stable labour relations. Mao holds a 'General Manager Open Day' every month during which the general manager communicates with and listens to employees' opinions. Similar to treating fellow employees with compassion and humanistic care, Mao also urges employees to embody the same virtues and to exhibit a sincere love for the customers, products and each other.

A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Based on the common characteristics and practices we observed among Mao of Fotile and a few other business leaders we have studied, and a synthesis of these observations with core concepts in Confucianism, we propose a conceptual model for Confucian humanistic leadership comprising five key attributes. We present these attributes using some well-known expressions in Confucianism.

The Six Arts (六艺)

The Six Arts formed the basis of education in ancient Chinese culture. During the Zhou dynasty (1122-256 BC), students were required to master the Six Arts: rites (礼), music (乐), archery (射), charioteering (御), calligraphy (书) and mathematics (数). Men who excelled in these six arts were thought to have reached the state of perfection and become the perfect gentleman, paralleling the Western concept of the Renaissance man.

Photo: 王渡 / 123rf



Tui ji ji ren 推己及人 (“Putting oneself in another’s position”) relates to how Confucian humanistic leaders treat others. It compels them to be considerate and treat others with compassion and humanity, just as how they themselves want to be treated as holistic human beings.

Xiu ji da ren 修己达人 (“Developing others through self-cultivation”) indicates that, in addition to viewing themselves and others as holistic persons, humanistic leaders see continual self-cultivation as an essential aspect of human well-being. This entails constant and conscientious effort to develop themselves and their followers to their full potential.

Yi yi wei li 以义为利 (“Making profit by doing righteous things”) describes how they conduct themselves when doing business with their partners and other stakeholders. It helps humanistic leaders to make the right choices when faced with difficult business decisions and moral dilemmas.

Yun zhi jue zhong 允执厥中 (“Insisting on a balance among different positions”) is reflected in the pursuit of the common good through a steadfast approach that seeks to balance multiple perspectives, needs and interests.

Zhi xing he yi 知行合一 (“Aligning one’s knowledge with one’s deeds”) emphasises how Confucian humanistic leaders believe that their knowledge and growth must be manifested in how they behave and what they practice.

Our research showed that the practice of Confucian humanistic leadership in China corresponds well with the emerging scholarly conceptualisation of humanistic leadership. In addition, the five attributes mentioned above found the building blocks, derived from Confucianism, that inform and guide the practice of humanistic leadership in China. While the common elements show the connection between our research and a more universal view of humanistic leadership,

the five attributes show the cultural embeddedness of the practice of Confucian humanistic leadership. Table 1 shows how the five attributes relate to the three common elements.

Importantly, the five attributes contribute to humanistic leadership research by providing important insights into specific capabilities that can help put the principles of humanistic leadership into practice.

For example, *tui ji ji ren* points to the importance of developing the ability to treat others with dignity, support others’ development, and engage with multiple stakeholders and respond to their needs. *Xiu ji da ren* suggests that a focus on self-cultivation, especially on moral self-perfection, is the most direct way to promote the development of others. *Yun zhi jue zhong* indicates that moderation and seeking a balance among different positions and interests are essential if one aims to treat others with dignity and respond to the needs of multiple stakeholders. *Zhi xing he yi* points to the importance of consistency between what one knows and how one behaves, and of being a humanistic leader by actively putting one’s learning into practice.

Developing a framework of Confucian humanistic leadership should be more than a conceptual exercise to build a leadership theory that is universally applicable and culturally sensitive. It is our hope that it helps Chinese business leaders address paradoxical leadership challenges they face in their daily operations, and creates an opportunity to connect contemporary issues of sustainability and human well-being to ancient wisdom that has guided many generations of leaders over thousands of years. ∞

TABLE 1 Common Elements in Humanistic Leadership

	WHOLISTIC ORIENTATION	DEVELOPING SELF AND OTHERS	COMMON GOOD OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS
Tui ji ji ren 推己及人 PUTTING ONESELF IN ANOTHER’S POSITION	●	●	●
Xiu ji da ren 修己达人 DEVELOPING OTHERS THROUGH SELF-CULTIVATION	●	●	
Yi yi wei li 以义为利 MAKING PROFIT BY DOING RIGHTEOUS THINGS	●	●	●
Yun zhi jue zhong 允执厥中 INSISTING ON A BALANCE AMONG DIFFERENT POSITIONS	●	●	●
Zhi xing he yi 知行合一 ALIGNING ONE’S KNOWLEDGE WITH ONE’S DEEDS	●	●	●

Attributes of Confucian Humanistic Leaders

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IN FOCUS

PROF CHEUNG CHAN-FAI obtained his BA and MPhil degrees from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), and Dr. phil. from Freiburg University, Germany. His research interests include phenomenology; the philosophy of love, death, and happiness; Utopian thought; the Idea of University; theories of General Education; and the philosophy of photography. Before he retired from CUHK in 2012, he was Professor and former Chairman of the Department of Philosophy, as well as Director of the following Departments/Centres: University General Education, the Edwin Cheng Foundation Asian Centre for Phenomenology, the Research Centre for General Education, and the Leadership Development Programme. He is the author of, among others, *Existential Questions* (2019); *Proximity and Distance* (2019); *Existential Reflections* (in Chinese, 2019); *Phenomenology of Photography* (in Chinese, 2019); *Another Place, Another Time* (2018); *Life, Love and Death* (in Chinese, 2016); and *Kairos: Phenomenology and Photography* (2009). He is also a regular radio presenter on culture and philosophy, and has held more than ten solo photography exhibitions in and outside Hong Kong.

PROF CHEUNG CHAN-FAI


Western Love, Chinese *Qing*

A Philosophical Interpretation of
the Idea of Love in *Romeo and Juliet*
and the Story of *Liang-Zhu*
(or *The Butterfly Lovers*).

***Romeo and Juliet* (1968)**

Directed and co-written by Franco Zeffirelli, the Shakespeare film adaptation won Academy Awards for Best Cinematography and Best Costume Design. The film was shot in Italy and used actors who were close to the age of the characters from the original play, which became key to its success.

Photo: PictureLux / The Hollywood Archive / Alamy



“LOVE, SUCH AS WE UNDERSTAND IT SINCE OUR TWELFTH CENTURY DOES NOT EVEN HAVE A NAME IN THEIR LANGUAGE... FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE IDEA OF LOVE, THERE ARE REALLY TWO WORLDS, THE ORIENTAL AND THE OCCIDENTAL.”

DENIS DE ROUGEMONT¹

I tend to agree with de Rougemont in general that the metaphysical and theological approaches in the Western articulation of the problem of love in terms of *eros-philia-agape* are foreign to the Chinese mind. The idea of ‘love’ in the Chinese culture is rendered as ‘qing’ (情), which I think has a completely different meaning horizon from the Western conception of ‘love’. However, de Rougemont has merely made an assertion without going into Chinese philosophy and literature to illustrate his point. Perhaps his alleged ignorance should not be blamed. Compared with the vast Western philosophical literature on the problem and nature of love, there is very little said in Chinese culture on this topic. For the Chinese intellectuals, past or present, *qing* is not a proper subject matter to be thematised.

1. Denis de Rougemont, “Love” in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, New York: Scribner’s Son, 1973, p 100.

The Greek concept of love as *eros* and the Christian idea of God's love as *agape* belong clearly to the Western tradition.

However, amorous relationships are human phenomena which are obvious and taken for granted in all cultures. The difference lies only in the understanding and interpretation of these phenomena according to the particular cultural categories of meaning. The *eros-philia-agape* schema denotes the hermeneutic horizon from which the human relationship called "love" is being conceptualised and understood in the Western tradition. Irving Singer, agreeing with de Rougemont, argues for the uniqueness of the West because the two cultural roots of the West, namely, the Greek and the Christian, determine the reference and meaning of all discourse on love. For the *eros* tradition, he says, "In ancient Eastern philosophy — Hinduism Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Zen — the *eros* tradition scarcely existed. Correspondingly, the East did not develop the concept of love in ways that are comparable to those of the West."² On the other hand, religious love is also unique. Singer further comments, "Religious love is mainly a product of the Judaeo-Christian tradition... The two thousand years of Christian theology and philosophy consist of one attempt after another to understand, and render amenable to worship, a love that might be God."³ The Greek concept of love as *eros* and the Christian idea of God's love as *agape* belong clearly to the Western tradition. When de Rougemont and Singer assert that romantic love is an invention of the West, it is because romantic love cannot be understood without the reference to both the Greek *eros* and Christian *agape*.

2. Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love, vol I, Plato to Luther*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 150-151.

3. Ibid, p. 159.

Our present world, however, does not consist of isolated cultures. Western cultural tradition has been eroded by the enormous force of modernisation. At the same time, all other civilisations were confronted by the challenge of the process of Western modernisation. Consequently, the whole world is being transformed. The result is a gradual adoption, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes with bitter struggle, of Western ideology, values, standards, and, in short, almost all western culture, into one's own. We take for granted the ideas of political and economic freedom, human rights, government, science and technology, as well as standard of living, entertainment and so on, which are all of Western origin, as if they were indigenous to our own culture. In fact, our generation is born into this predicament: we are both Chinese and Western.

It is indeed true to say that in the past, there were two different traditions of the idea of love in the



Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss

A masterpiece of Neoclassical sculpture by Antonio Canova, this shows the mythological lovers at a moment of great emotion, characteristic of the emerging movement of Romanticism. It represents the god Cupid (Eros) at the height of love and tenderness, immediately after awakening the lifeless Psyche with a kiss.



The Weaver Girl and the Cowherd

The artwork in the Long Corridor of the Summer Palace in Beijing shows the reunion of the couple, Niu Lang and Zhi Nu, on the bridge of magpies. The earliest-known reference to the myth dates back to over 2,600 years ago, and was told in a poem from the *Classic of Poetry*.

West and the East. There was no romantic love in China. But this assertion has lost its validity in the contemporary world. The popular media culture shows that perhaps 'romantic love' is the best and most welcome commodity. Even our vocabulary and the conception of love have changed drastically without our awareness. Less than a hundred years ago, the locution "I love you", which is most common today, did not exist in any Chinese texts, and definitely no Chinese would utter such a sentence to his or her lover!

I consider a comparative study of the idea of love between the Chinese and the Western traditions more than an academic interest. It is our existential concern to uncover the radical meaning of love embedded in our present consciousness. What we mean by romantic love is the product of a cross-fertilisation of two originally incommensurable traditions of love. To illustrate this, I choose Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as the most obvious example of romantic love, which is at the same time one of the most well-known romantic plays to modern Chinese, and compare it with the Chinese legendary story of *Liang-Zhu* (梁祝), better known as the *Butterfly Lovers*, whose depiction of love is considered equally romantic by most Chinese today.

4. Hong-xin (洪欣), "A Comparison between 'Liang-Zhu' and 'Romeo and Juliet'", (*《梁祝》《羅密歐與朱麗葉》比較說*), 《戲劇學習》, (4) 1985. The version of 'Liang-Zhu' compared in this article is not taken from the original story but a later derivative *yue-yu* (越劇). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Chinese text are mine.

LIANG-ZHU AND ROMEO AND JULIET: SIMILARITIES

There are certainly many superficial similarities between these two stories. A contemporary Chinese scholar, Hong-xin (洪欣) compares the content of the two love stories and concludes that there are "surprising similarities". He enumerates five points:

1. The heroes and heroines met accidentally and fell in love of their free will;
2. There were hidden conflicts and crises in their love;
3. There was someone who helped them in the realisation of their love;
4. The two pairs of lovers were crushed and destroyed by "reactionary" forces;
5. Their lives ended tragically.⁴

The romantic love of *Liang-Zhu* has been further popularised and made known to nearly all Chinese through the *Butterfly Lovers* Violin Concerto by He Zhan-hao (何占豪) and Chen Gang (陈刚) of 1959. One cannot fail to notice the similarities in tone and mood of the *Butterfly Lovers* Concerto to that of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* Overture. Tchaikovsky, needless to say, is one of the chief romantic composers in 19th-century Western music.

So much for the apparent similarities between the two stories.

THE IDEA OF LOVE (QING) IN LIANG-ZHU

I have used the version of the story recorded in *Qing-shi leilue* (情史类略), edited and written by the important late Ming literary author Feng Meng-long (冯梦龙 1574-1646) in the discussion here. Since the story is not a long one, I translated it completely for the purpose of discussion.



Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai (1963)

Also titled *The Love Eterne*, this is a musical film of the Huangmei opera genre directed by Li Han Hsiang based on the story of *Liang-Zhu*. The film won six awards at the 2nd Golden Horse Awards, including Best Picture.

Photo: Photo 12 / Alamy

ZHU YING-TAI 祝英台

Liang Shan-bo (梁山伯) and Zhu Ying-tai (祝英台) lived in the time of the East-Chin (东晋) dynasty. Liang's family was in Hui-ji (会稽) while Zhu's home was in Shang-yu (上虞). They studied together for some time. Zhu went home first and was later visited by Liang in Shang-yu. Only then did Liang realise that Zhu was female. He went home and told his parents that he would like to marry Zhu. Unfortunately, at that time, Zhu was already betrothed to the young son of the Ma family. Knowing that, Liang was very sad and was at a loss. Three years had passed before he became an official at the town Jin (鄞). Soon after he became seriously ill and was going to die. Before he died, he made a wish that he was to be buried at the foot of the Qing-dao Mountain (清道山). Another year passed and this was the time for Zhu to leave home for the marriage to the son of the Ma family. The party was stopped by a sudden storm when they passed the Qing-dao Mountain. Then Zhu visited Liang's grave and wept sorrowfully. The grave opened suddenly and Zhu threw herself into it and died. Hearing of the incident, the Ma family reported it to the Emperor's court. Minister Xie-an (谢安) requested the Emperor to ordain Zhu as 'Chaste-lady'. In the time of the Emperor He (和帝), Liang manifested himself spiritually to serve the people. Because of this, he was ordained 'Chaste-loyalty' (义妇). This story was recorded and inscribed at the Jin-temple. It was also recorded in the 'Annals of Ling-po' (宁波志).

The butterflies in Wu-zhong were transformed from orange larvae. Women and children called the yellow butterfly Liang Shan-bo and the black one Zhu Ying-tai. According to legend, the Zhu family visited the grave after Zhu died and burned clothes in front of it. From the flames of the burning clothes appeared a pair of butterflies. It was believed that such a tale was created by some concerned persons.

祝英台：梁山伯、祝英台，皆东晋人。梁家会稽，祝家上虞，尝同学。祝先归，梁后过上虞寻访之，始知为女。归乃告父母，欲娶之，而祝已许马氏子矣。梁悵然若有所失。后三年，梁为鄞令，病且死，遗言葬清道山下。又明年，祝适马氏，过其处，风涛大作，舟不能进。祝乃造梁家，失声哀恸。忽地裂，祝投而死。马氏闻其事于朝，丞相谢安请封为义妇。和帝时，梁复显灵异效，封为义忠。有事立庙于鄞云。见《宁波志》。

吳中有花蝴蝶，橘蚕所化。妇孺呼黄色者为梁山伯，黑色者为祝英台。俗传祝死後，其家就梁家焚衣，衣于火中化成二蝶。盖好事者为之也。

Source: *Compilation of Qing Stories* (情史类略) Chang-sha, 1984 pp. 282 -293 by Feng Meng-long.

Moral duty without *qing* is hypocritical if not void of meaning. On the other hand, *qing* can only be manifested completely and perfectly if it is confined within the moral order.

For the modern reader who believes the romantic version of the *Liang-Zhu* story, the original is an anticlimax. There was no rebellious struggle of the lovers to act against their parents. Liang made no love vow to Zhu and contemplated no secret marriage. All he did was to ask permission from his own parents to marry Zhu and became seriously ill after he knew there was no hope. There was no love at first sight. The whole episode took a long time (at least seven years) to complete. The only trace of any romanticism was perhaps the butterfly legend, but that was only later added to the original story.

If we disregard the romantic frame of reference and return to the original text, we should discover the love manifested between Liang and Zhu was nothing extraordinary. It was most conservative and moral in nature. The idea of individuality and personal freedom was unknown to them. The overarching principle of morality in traditional Chinese culture is *li* (礼): appropriateness and correctness. For a learned scholar like Liang, the essential obligation is to see whether one's behaviour abides by the moral order. Marriage is considered to be no private business between individuals but between families. Consent and approval from parents are to be strictly regarded. The tragedy of the lovers lies exactly in the conflict between their mutual recognition of love and parental approval. Since Zhu was promised by her parents to be married to the son of the Ma family, it cannot be changed, simply because any change would contaminate the honour of Zhu's parents.

What Feng values is certainly not the 'romantic' ending in the transformed butterflies but the persistence of love that endures all sufferings and finally survives even death. It is indeed most

unfortunate to have an unconsummated love because of other moral duties, but it is of the utmost value to preserve this mutual love.

According to Feng, all human relationships are possible only because of the presence of *qing* between them. *Qing* is therefore that something which bestows meaning and value to human life and relationships. For Feng, the evidence of *qing* is seen from its functions in the human world. Suffering, happiness, joy, sadness, sorrow, anger, jealousy, perversion, indulgence, chastity and virtue — all these human phenomena are the result of the functioning of *qing* between human beings.

Feng contrasts morality with *qing* in the stories and concludes that *qing* is more important than morality, *li* (禮). He says, “The common Confucians understand that *qing* should be regulated through morality, without realising that in fact morality requires *qing* to sustain it.” Accordingly, moral duty without *qing* is hypocritical if not void of meaning. On the other hand, *qing* can only be manifested completely and perfectly if it is confined within the moral order.

With this idea of love by Feng, the ‘tragedy’ of *Liang-Zhu* is readily understood. There is the conflict between *qing* and moral duty. In this mundane world, morality triumphs. However, *qing* transcends morality and completes itself through willed togetherness in death.

THE IDEA OF LOVE IN ROMEO AND JULIET

Unlike the story of *Liang-Zhu*, which is basically moral and conservative, *Romeo and Juliet* is about passionate love, which is at the same time rebellious and transgressional in nature.

De Rougemont is extremely critical of this genre of passionate or romantic love. It is because in the final analysis all these exciting, turbulent and tragic loves are but a kind of useless self-consuming passion. What the passionate lovers want in their love is not the completion of love in the form of marriage or a ‘happy-ever-after’ ending but the continuation of the feeling of love and being in love. So paradoxically, the passionate lovers do not love each other. “What they love is love and being in love.”⁵ Neither do they aim for happiness because they welcome suffering, which is, in the final analysis, the essence of passion. Obstacles and conflicts, whether they are intrinsic or self-created, are the fuel necessary for the burning of passion. Death is the ultimate goal towards which the lovers move and, by dying, they consume their passion in eternity.

It is no wonder that the idea of passionate love is in every sense a reaction against this classical love. While the latter emphasises the objective, universal and general nature, the former takes the subjective, individual and particular as issue.

The transgressional and rebellious nature of passionate love lies exactly in this: while the lovers believe that their destined and fated love is unavoidable even though they know assuredly that it is forbidden, impossible and sometimes immoral, they vow to stay by their love. In so doing they set the whole world against them. The Capulet and Montague families are age-old enemies, so Romeo should not love Juliet. But the emotional seizure of love renders the lovers blind as they are led by their destiny into the blind alley of passion. They consider everything that is obstructing them to be meaningless, be it family, friendship, morality or religion — only through death can they get out of this curse.

However, there is a deeper level of transgression. The idea of love in the Western tradition from Plato to the Middle Ages is dominated by the *eros-philia-agape* schema. According to this schema, the true object of love is never an individual person but Truth, Good and Beauty. Passion, as portrayed by Plato in *Phaedrus*, is the irrational element which must be saved and transformed by reason. And in *Symposium*, *eros* is defined as the desire for the permanent possession of the Good, the Beautiful and ultimately the desire for immortality.⁶ The Aristotelian *philia* does not include emotion or pleasure as the essential element, but virtue. And accordingly, only between virtuous men can there be true *philia*.⁷ *Agape* is the unconditional love that God bestows on men. In short, the dominant idea of love before the Middle Ages is intellectual, virtuous and religious love.

It is no wonder that the idea of passionate love is in every sense a reaction against this classical love. While the latter emphasises the objective, universal and general nature, the former takes the subjective, individual and particular as issue. Of course, the idea of passionate love takes a long history to develop. The second volume of Irving Singer’s *Nature of Love* is devoted to outlining the genesis of passionate love through the development from courtly love in the 12th century to romantic love in the 19th century.

With the clarification of the idea of love both in the classical and in the passionate sense, we can return to the analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*. It is clear that here the love in question does not fall in any of the categories of classical love.

We should remember that before Romeo met Juliet, he was deeply involved with Rosaline, who was immediately forgotten when he was struck by the beauty of Juliet! The whole series of events from falling in love to committing suicide spanned less than a week.⁸ One might doubt the grounds for their love except that they were attracted to each other sexually and emotionally.

5. See Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1956 (1940), esp. Book III, p.41.

6. “So if we were right in describing love as the desire always to possess the good, then the inevitable conclusion is that we desire immortality as well as goodness. On this argument, love must be desire for immortality as much as for beauty.” Plato: *Symposium*: 207a, translated by Tom Griffith. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

7. See Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk 8.

8. See the introduction to the New Clarendon Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1981 (1941), p. 10.



Don Quixote

Miguel de Cervantes seems to be criticising the medieval idea of chivalry and notion of courtly love through the misadventures of his delusional protagonist. He reveals the destructive power of love when breaking away from the social reality in search of the poetic ideal – a perfect but unattainable love.

Photo: History and Art Collection / Alamy

The meeting at Juliet's balcony confirmed their overwhelming mutual desire for each other. They believed that they were destined to be lovers: "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptiz'd; Henceforth I never will be Romeo."⁹ With this pronouncement, they put the whole world against them and their fate was then sealed.

If this is the case, that this passionate, romantic love of Romeo and Juliet is but an emotional and sexual madness of two adolescents, then what is the reason for its powerful influence on the Western consciousness of love?

I think the lasting contribution of the idea of love exemplified in *Romeo and Juliet* and other romantic love lies in the recognition of the self as the individual subject of love. Exactly because

classical love in the *eros-philía-agape* tradition aims at universality, perfection and immortality, it renders any humble individual impotent in the search for love. After all, normal people are weak and fragile. The demand for the intellectual pursuit of the truth and the good is too idealistic for most common people. However, the sudden awareness of falling in love transforms the lovers: the overwhelming power, albeit a self-deceptive one, generates from the passionate union of love, isolates the lovers from the rest of the world. They become themselves. Each lover identifies himself or herself as a unique particular person in front of the beloved. The particularities of two individuals paradoxically dissolve into the universality of love.

Henceforth Romeo has acquired the greatest happiness and power that any single individual

can have. By giving himself totally to Juliet, he gains her totally in return: this complete union — this wholeness — is exactly the ideal of love expounded by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*. Love is the desire for the whole. "...this is where happiness for the human race lies — in the successful pursuit of love, in finding the love who is part of our original self, and in returning to our former state."¹⁰ The tragedy lies, unfortunately, in the polarisation of this union and the rest of the world. Any insoluble conflicts and obstacles will not disappear though they are temporarily suspended. Apparently there is only one answer: only in death can the wholeness be petrified. Death is the final climax of passionate love.

CONCLUSION: ON THE ROMANTICISATION OF LIANG-ZHU

It is clear that in traditional Chinese culture there was no intellectual and religious love, nor passionate and romantic love. Lin Shu (林纾), one of the very first Chinese literary translators, rendered the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* into Chinese in 1904. The story of *Romeo and Juliet* was translated not just into the Chinese language but in a way into Chinese culture. The love scene between the lovers was rendered in a very subtle way. The common word for love 'ai' (爱) did not appear yet in Lin's stories. I suspect the introduction of the words and phrases of love, such as *lian-ai* (恋爱), *ai-qing* (爱情), *ai* (爱) used as verb like *wo-ai-ni* (我爱你) happened after 1900 and before 1918, as Lu Xun's (鲁迅) new poem *The Goddess of Love* (爱之神) was published in 1918.¹¹

Since that time, Chinese culture has undergone tremendous changes. The May Fourth Movement was not just an outcry for science and democracy, which were believed by Chinese intellectuals of

the time to be the answer to the modernisation of China, but also a cultural revolution of the Chinese mind. The active introduction of Western culture by Chinese intellectuals aimed at a transformation of traditional Chinese ways of thinking and feeling into what they thought to be modern, so that an emancipation from the conservative bondage of the past could be achieved. Love is one of the major categories of change. Leo Ou-fan Lee points out the importance of the Western meaning of love in that period. He says:

Love had become an overall symbol of new morality, an easy substitute for the traditional ethos of propriety which was now equated with external restraint. In the general temper of emancipation, love was identified with freedom, in the sense that by loving and by releasing one's passions and energies the individual could become truly a full and free man.¹²

Such an idea of love is clearly not the traditional idea of *qing* but essentially the meaning of romantic love in the Western sense. Hence Lee refers to these Chinese intellectuals as the romantic generation.

I believe the romanticisation of the Chinese *qing* begins in this period. Since then, moral virtues are no longer seen as the fundamental constituents of the idea of *qing*. Instead, passion and romance become its true meanings. Interpreted from this perspective, it is no surprise to see that the modern version of the legend of *Liang-Zhu* does not have the classical meaning of *qing* but is regarded as a romantic story similar to *Romeo and Juliet*. ∞

This article was abridged for THINK from the original: "Western Love, Chinese *Qing* — A Philosophical Interpretation of the Idea of Love in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Butterfly Lovers*". *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 26.4 (1999), pp. 469-488.

The Peony Pavilion

The National Ballet of China performed *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭) at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London in 2016. Originally written for staging as Kunqu opera by playwright Tang Xianzu (汤显祖) in 1598, the play depicts how a young couple overcome social conventions, transcending time and space, life and death, to be together at the end. Comparative studies were often made between *The Peony Pavilion* and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* due to their similarities.

Photo: theatrepix / Alamy



9. *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 2, l.49-50.

10. Plato, *Symposium*, 193c

11. Pan Kuang-dan (潘光旦) mentioned in one footnote in his Chinese translation of Havelock Ellis' *Psychology of Sex* in 1933 that *lian-ai* (恋爱) was only recently used in China. See his *Psychology of Sex* (性心理学), Beijing: 1987 (1933), p.461.

12. Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973, p.265.

PERSPECTIVE

CHRIS OESTEREICH helps communities and organisations shift towards the circular economy via Linear to Circular, as well as community-oriented efforts with the Circular Design Lab. He is also a writer and the publisher of the Wicked Problems Collaborative,

and a lecturer at Thammasat University's School of Global Studies in Thailand, where he teaches active-learning courses on social innovation, social enterprise and advocacy.

CHRIS OESTEREICH

Observing Disintegration

I have vivid memories of my last day at the office. It was March 2020, and I was in a briefing at the UN's regional headquarters in Bangkok, learning about the escalating pandemic. We were getting updates on our circumstances when I received a worrisome email.

I had taught my weekly lecture in the social enterprise programme in Thammasat University's School of Global Studies a couple of days before the meeting. A student who took part in that class had volunteered at a fun run a few days earlier. After attending the class, they learned that someone who had taken part in the race later tested positive for the virus. The student informed the school and an administrator from the school emailed me about the potential exposure.

Alarms went off in my head as I read the email. I leaned over to my lead and whispered the news. I then left the briefing, quickly packed up my things, and exited the world of office work stage right.

Fifteen months later, the world — and life — feels very different. I lived through the Donald Trump era

— as an ardent non-supporter — on the opposite side of the world. In another time, such distance might have greatly lessened my connection to the tumult, but the ever-on nature of social media affords us the possibility of staying connected with the people, places or ideas of our choosing. It also gives us unfettered access to whatever wreckage piles up on the information superhighway.

It was under these circumstances that I experienced the pandemic. I was physically here in Bangkok, while mentally shifting back and forth across the planet. It was a virtual tennis match of my attention.

In Bangkok, I saw a sense of shared responsibility. People wore masks as a matter of course. It was a collectivist enterprise. I wore my mask to help protect others, and the community largely did the same in return. It was not a matter of conflict used to divide communities to the detriment of all. It was a minor inconvenience that helped minimise danger and suffering in a difficult time. We were fellow travellers enduring a rough patch in the road together.



Thai sense of shared responsibility

According to a YouGov survey conducted between 30 March and 27 April 2020, Thais are most likely to wear face masks in public and use hand sanitiser among the six ASEAN members surveyed. Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha was fined 6,000 baht last year for not wearing a face mask during a meeting at his office.

Photo: Sakchai Lalit / AP Images

Back in the US, things seemed very different. I have not visited during the pandemic, so my perception is based on fragments. News reports. Stories from social media. Conversations with family. The mind fills in the gaps. It was an incomplete picture, but what I saw was worrisome.

ANGER. DISTRUST. DIVISION.

The divisions between us were highlighted by the pandemic, but they were decades in the making. The roots of our struggles may be seen in the neoliberal era ushered in by Ronald Reagan's presidency. His 'Reaganomics' programme promised and largely delivered on major cuts to things like regulations, taxes and growth in government spending.¹

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith wrote about one major shift in the approach to governing during that time. As he put it, Reagan focused his policies on "an intensely satisfied voting majority, comfortable with its personal situation." Galbraith saw this as a radical departure from the circumstances faced by prior governments which had had to deal with a large number of people, who "were far from content with their economic and social position." Prior to Reagan, governments had to put forth promises of better lives. But in his time, politicians stopped wooing people to the polls and many discontented Americans gave up on voting.²

Alongside the economic changes, the Reagan years had other tectonic shifts. One of those occurred when he vetoed a bill that would have made the Fairness Doctrine, then a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rule, into law. His FCC appointees later revoked the rule that had held broadcasters responsible for giving time to contrasting viewpoints around controversial issues since 1949.

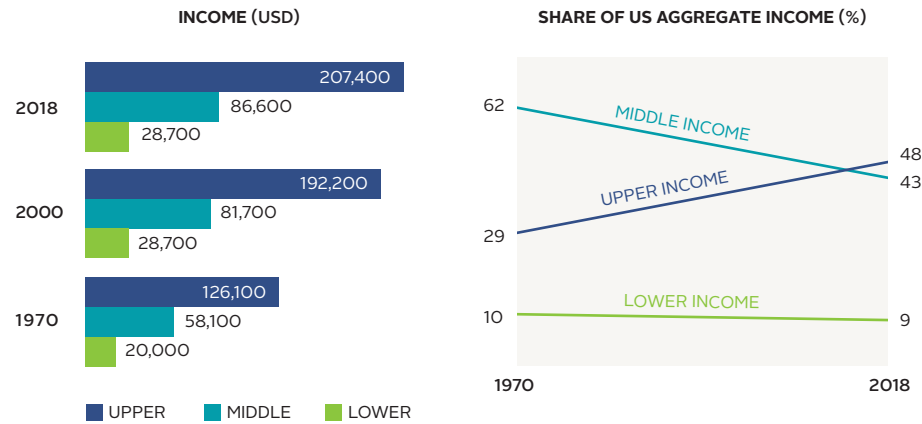
Reagan's other blow had come a few years earlier with the firing of the air traffic controllers in 1981. That move set unions on a path of decreasing power and relevance. They might seem unrelated, but together they paved the way for the unbalanced news ecosystem we are now beholden to and the accelerated decline in union membership, which coincided with the increasing share of income to the top 10% of earners in America. Inequality has continually grown since then.³

1. William A. Niskanen, "Reaganomics," *Library of Economics and Liberty*, <https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc1/Reaganomics.html>.

2. John Kenneth Galbraith, "THE PRICE OF COMFORT: The Reagan-Bush faith in laissez-faire and in the wisdom of the market has cracked America's economic foundations." *LA Times*, Jan. 6, 1991, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-01-06-op-10830-story.html>.

3. Elliot C. Rothenberg, "What can you do when they spew lies: revisiting the Fairness Doctrine," *MinnPost*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2020/05/what-can-you-do-when-they-spew-lies-revisiting-the-fairness-doctrine/>; Camille Caldera, "Fact check: Fairness Doctrine only applied to broadcast licenses, not cable TV like Fox News," *USA Today*, November 28, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2020/11/28/fact-check-fairness-doctrine-applied-broadcast-licenses-not-cable/6439197002/>; Planet Money, "When Reagan Broke the Unions," *NPR*, December 18, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/788002965>.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME, IN 2018 USD, AND SHARE OF US AGGREGATE HOUSEHOLD INCOME, BY INCOME TIER (1970-2018)⁴



The gaps in income between upper-income and middle- and lower-income households are rising, and the share held by middle-income households is falling.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements (IPUMS). "Most Americans Say There is Too Much Economic Inequality in the US, but Fewer Than Half Call It a Top Priority"

Harder times for the bulk of the population were paired with unbalanced news offerings that fuelled beliefs based on falsehoods. People who were reasonably unhappy with their deteriorating circumstances were unreasonably led to blame others who were not at fault. The bonds of civil society slowly frayed. As political scientist Lilliana Mason put it, "There is a breakdown in trust and a breakdown in a shared, common reality." In the context of the pandemic these circumstances have made public health decisions fraught. Reports of angry customers arguing with employees in stores and restaurants have become common. And 15 states are either considering or have already passed "measures to drastically undermine the authority of public health agencies to save lives".⁵

While I'm deeply saddened to see such things occurring in the US, I'm happy to report that I haven't seen anything of the sort here in Thailand. Yes, there are challenges here, like anywhere else. But I have not seen people trying to turn public health into a question of tribal affiliation. I'm thankful for that. Throughout the pandemic, when I have had to go into the city I have seen people with masks on and businesses with sanitiser and thermometers at the door. When I walk the two kilometres to my local market, people smile at the somewhat out of place foreigner wandering by. No one ever bothers me and I have never seen anything approaching a threatening look.

4. Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Ruth Igielnik and Rakesh Kochhar, "Trends in income and wealth inequality," *Pew Research*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>.
 5. Sabrina Tavernise, "An Arms Race in America: Gun Buying Spiked During the Pandemic. It's Still Up." *New York Times*, May 29, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/29/us/gun-purchases-ownership-pandemic.html>; "Proposed Limits on Public Health Authority," *National Association of County and City Health Officials*, May 2021, <https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Proposed-Limits-on-Public-Health-Authority-Dangerous-for-Public-Health-FINAL-5.24.21pm.pdf>.

In the latter part of last year, when transmission was nearly nonexistent, I made a few short trips to the beach in Hua Hin with my family. On those trips, we saw a number of closed businesses – how could there not be that in a country so dependent on tourism? But while many people are struggling through these circumstances, what I have not seen is that frustration translated into anger at outsiders. I wish I could say the same for back home.













My "East meets West" tale is of a cautionary nature. I've watched rampant and growing inequality become a poison pill for civil society. Policies that rewarded a small slice of the American people set us on the path to populism. And a media ecosystem un beholden to truth compounded the challenges long before social media kicked them into hyperdrive.




We have now arrived at a moment where the future of the nation is in question. As the failed January insurrection shrinks in the rear view, the party it supported is openly preparing to pervert the system as much as necessary to claim victory regardless of future electoral outcomes.

Many years ago, I watched a friend deal with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. I had a hard time identifying with what he was going through because I had no relevant frame of reference. I do not know what tomorrow will bring, but in recent years, I feel like I have gained perspective on his experience. ∞

Elena the essential worker, voter and American
 A 24-foot statue "Elena the Essential Worker" was erected at a One Fair Wage and the Poor People's Campaign rally in Washington DC, in support of the introduction of the Raise the Wage Act which includes a USD15 minimum wage for tipped workers, as part of President Biden's American Rescue Plan.
 Photo: Leigh Vogel / UPI / Alamy



01 Apple +38% \$322,999m 	02 Amazon +60% \$200,667m 	03 Microsoft +53% \$166,001m 	04 Google -1% \$165,444m 	05 Samsung +2% \$62,289m 	06 Coca-Cola -10% \$56,894m 
07 Toyota -8% \$51,595m 	08 Mercedes-Benz -3% \$49,268m 	09 McDonald's -6% \$42,816m 	10 Disney -8% \$40,773m 	11 BMW -4% \$39,756m 	12 Intel -8% \$36,971m 

13 Facebook -12% \$35,178m 
19 Instagram NEW \$26,060m 
25 IKEA +3% \$18,870m 

DANIEL LI

LOGO DESIGN IN A MULTICULTURAL MARKET

We see logos everywhere, from giant billboards on buildings to the cover of the book we recently read, on nearly everything we own. They are the face of modern life.

No brand can exist without a logo. No two brands use logos that are identical to each other.

But logos are not a modern invention, in fact, they have existed as long as commerce itself. Ming dynasty porcelain craftsmen in China would leave their workshop's mark on the base of their prized creations. 14th century German great swords proudly bore the "Passau" mark to show their lineage. From East to West, the human race has inadvertently left an abundance of these carefully crafted marks in the history of design.

Interbrand's Best Global Brands 2020

Apple remained the world's best brand for the eighth year in a row while digital newcomers such as Instagram, YouTube and Zoom rose to the top 100 for the first time ever. Interbrand's brand valuation methodology considers customer loyalty, financial performance and future profitability in ranking the world's most valuable brands.

Source: www.interbrand.com

PERSPECTIVE

DANIEL LI is a Chinese creative who has spent most of his grown-up life in Singapore. A veteran of the creative scene, he has worked with Google, YouTube and Netflix, among others, on various branding

and marketing campaigns. He is always keen on creating work that explores his cultural heritage through modern mediums. Daniel heads his own creative agency Rockblue Media.

Over the years, however, the function of the logo has far exceeded the simple task of identifying a brand. They purport to tell stories, represent values, inspire dreams. Modern brands invest a great deal in their logos. In the 21st century, the cost of a brand overhaul can easily exceed millions of dollars. To a lot of good folks outside the design sphere, this investment is perhaps a little 'too much'.

After all, some logo seems no more than a simple glyph of a few strokes. Just take a look at Nike:



Nike logo



Carolyn Davidson's original sketch

In 1972, then freelancing, bankrupt design student Carolyn Davidson took inspiration from the spread wing of the Greek goddess Nike — who symbolized agility, change and speed — and sketched out the Swoosh on a piece of tissue, for a fee of USD35. She could not, however, have anticipated that the logo would go on to become one of the most recognised brand marks in human history.

As of 2020, the Swoosh represents a brand that is worth USD35 billion. Nike might want to think twice before revising its brand identity.

Yet, other corporates, some with a history of a hundred years, ditch their old logos with a flick of a hand, risking recognisability and the brand value that comes with that mark. Why?

Amidst all this seemingly perplexing mystique surrounding logos, what exactly are they? What do they mean to us? Is there a difference in logo design philosophy in the East and in the West?

15 Nike

+6%
\$34,388m



ENGINEER'S BLUEPRINT VS. SHAN SHUI PAINTING

Perhaps, to blatantly split the concept of design into East and West might not be the most ideal mode of categorisation.

The West is an umbrella term that covers a lot of unique cultures. The subtexts and implied meanings behind one logo that works well in the UK might hit all the wrong buttons in Germany. So traditionally, 'Western' logos have tended to lay everything on the table and be very specific about their meaning, usually leaving very little room for interpretation. Even logo execution follows complicated guidelines, specifying where each shape should join or split.

Not unlike the engineer's blueprint.

Rumour would have it that the most successful of Western designs even adhere to mythical aesthetic rules like the Golden Ratio.

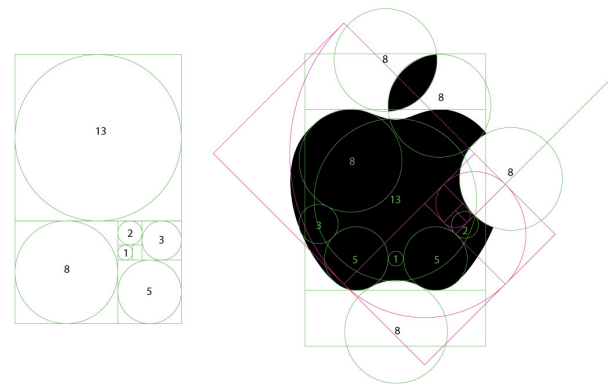
Eastern cultures and societies, on the other hand, emphasise a shared understanding of cultural contexts. Not everything has to be explicitly shown. The undeniable influence of Ancient China strengthens this model. Especially in East Asia, subtexts can usually be accurately read and understood. So 'Eastern' logos do not have to always 'show a lot'.



Bank of China's logo cleverly fuses the shape of an ancient Chinese coin with the character "中" for China.

It is this same philosophy that drives Shan Shui Paintings to '留白' or 'leave blank'.

The Bank of China's logo has been hailed by many as one of the greatest of Chinese logo designs. The simple shape might not ring a bell for anyone without the right cultural background. But to a Chinese, the shape of the logo instantly connects to that of a coin — and therefore finance — which makes sense for a bank. A closer look will also reveal a stylised version of the Chinese character "中", which is the first character of the Bank's name.



Apple's logo is a prime example of geometric design. But contrary to the myth, it is not based on the Golden Ratio.

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

There are some interesting new trends in logo design that can be observed in recent years. Let us take a look at two instances.

In 2016, MasterCard announced a brand mark revision, to the surprise of many.

Renowned design agency Pentagram came up with this overly simplified logo depicting what seems to be merely two overlapping circles. This design was rumoured to have cost MasterCard a staggering USD6 million. Not to mention that they pushed it even further in 2019, taking away the brand name altogether.

According to the company, the new brand identity "marks [the company] as a forward-thinking, human-centred technology company that connects people to priceless possibilities".

To the untrained eye, the change that Pentagram made can hardly justify the price tag. However, such a seemingly simple change did come as a result of many hours of hard work and creativity.

The philosophy behind this design choice is, by an interesting coincidence, a resonance of ancient Chinese wisdom. Mencius famously proposed that the three key factors needed to win any battle were "天时、地利、人和", or the harmony of "Time, Location and People".

First of all, the brand has been an essential part of many people's financial lives for a long time now. It is so familiar that we do not even need the MasterCard brand name to recognise it any more. This change would not have made sense at an earlier stage of brand development when the brand was less well-known.

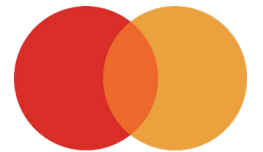
Secondly, the digital era has brought about increasingly more frequent on-screen applications of the logo. The digital devices that the logo appears on calls for more vibrant colour and less cluttered shapes that are legible even in smaller sizes. Hence the original versions of the logo with interlacing shapes with text overlay would not have stood out as well on a smartphone.

Lastly, as globalisation becomes inevitable, corporations have expanded to include more and more markets. Well-recognised graphics work much better (and are more cost-effective) than a brand name shown in a dozen localised variations, helping to create a unified brand identity that gets the message across just as effectively.

In another instance, Xiaomi, the No.1 smartphone maker in China, revealed its new logo in a high profile press conference recently.

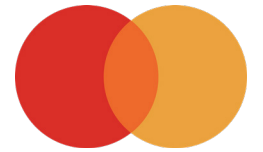


1996-2016



mastercard

2016-2019



2019-present

The evolution of MasterCard logo

In 2019, the company dropped the "Mastercard" sign from the logo. The iconic circles are widely recognisable to the point that they can stand on their own.



The old Xiaomi logo



The new Xiaomi logo

Xiaomi's new brand identity

The new logo sparked a debate among the general public, whether the "relatively simple design change" with rounded corners was necessary and justified the USD300,000 expense.

This controversial logo change baffled many. People struggled to see the difference between the new logo and the old, apart from the more pronounced rounded corners. Netizens ridiculed the design and were soon calling the subtle change “The Emperor’s New Clothes”.

Even Xiaomi’s CEO admitted the subtleness of the change in a self-deprecating opening speech. “Is everyone a little disappointed by this logo, that we just turned from a square into a circle?” Many even reportedly recreated the change “in less than 3 minutes” using word processors like Microsoft Word.

Japanese designer Hara Kenya, who famously served as MUJI’s design director, was the mastermind behind this design. The RMB2 million design is said to have taken three years of hard, creative labour. It is said to encapsulate the philosophy of Xiaomi’s inner spirit: “Alive.”

What is interesting is the extreme contrast between how simple the design eventually turned out and how much behind-the-scenes work actually went into the process.

A logo is usually the most accessible component of any design solution. It is the frontman that represents a whole band of sophisticated thought processes, but is often misunderstood as being ‘all there is’. People mock ‘simple’ designs for their simplicity (actually a true virtue). But they as often ignore the perilous and convoluted labyrinth of creative madness that designers must traverse before arriving at a solution. A design that comes from a slap on the forehead may look just as simple, but that would be relying more on coincidence to succeed rather than a well-thought-through conclusion. In the design world, this may cost a brand millions.

Design is all about solving problems. Another popular misconception is that there is that one single great solution to any design problem. The truth is, there is *no* best route. The best route is the route chosen.

There can be many factors that affect a design, many of which are not really about aesthetics at all — resource constraints, historical burdens, culture taboos, CEOs’ personal preferences (really!). That is why logo design is often compared to dancing in chains.



The modernist master

Paul Rand (1914-96) who was best known for his logo designs, including the logos for IBM, UPS, ABC, NeXT and Enron, once said, “Simplicity is not the goal. It is the by-product of a good idea and modest expectations.”

Source: www.grapheine.com

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE LOOKALIKES

Many luxury brands, whose histories have spanned decades, even centuries, have tried to revitalise their brand. Let’s take a look at some of them.

The traditional logos (in the left-hand column of Fig. 1) are like Hollywood actors of the old times, competing for attention on the silver screen. Each with its own unique character. Well, the new versions of these vintage brands all look... the same?

Stripping away the myth that sans serif fonts look more ‘modern’ than serif fonts, why have they all chosen to forsake their uniqueness (or ‘heritage’) for a slew of distasteful lookalikes?

As mentioned above, design serves to solve problems. The need for ‘looking modern’ has outweighed ‘heritage’, at least in the eyes of the brand managers. They believe that a simpler logo will serve them better in the digital age.

But patrons of vinyl record stores do not care much whether their player has an LCD screen, a clutter of multi-function buttons, or whether it streams 4K videos. Their choice to listen to John Coltrane on vinyl is not because it is efficient or sounds better. It is, rather, the opportunity to taste a slice of a slower, more elegant age that draws them, and that wills them to pay.

These luxury brands fail to realise that, unlike credit card companies, which have only a handful of competitors, they rely on their craftsmanship, rich histories and uniqueness to stand out, and draw their respective loyal audiences.

Solving one problem (surviving a new medium) by introducing a much more serious one (losing identity) is certainly not the way to go.

FIG. 1

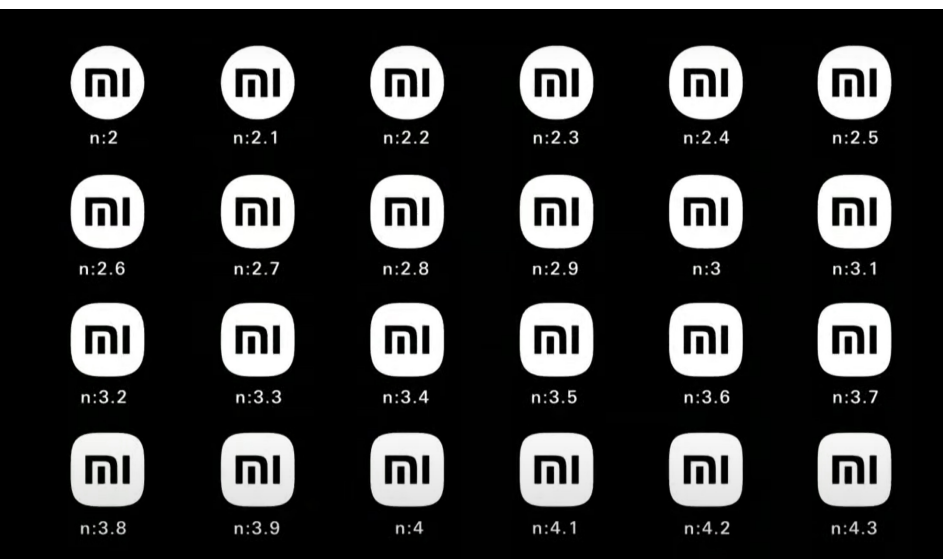


LOGOS, LAID BARE

Ultimately, no matter how much ‘fluff’ a company chooses to put on a logo, its design has to still serve the basic function of representing a brand, along with its values, vision and message. If it can be done in a good-looking package, that would be even better. From East to West, corporates eventually arrive at the same destination, albeit through their respective winding routes.

The logo is the banner that tribes wave when they go to war. It unites the right people. And according to branding master Paul Rand:

“A logo doesn’t sell (directly), it identifies.” ∞



The perfect balance

Xiaomi explained in a blog post that designer Hara Kenya used a “superellipse” mathematical formula when designing the logo of Xiaomi. It occurred to the company that using $n=3$ in the formula struck the perfect balance between a square and a circle, epitomising Xiaomi’s inner spirit of “Alive”.



Nigori sake

Commonly referred to as “unfiltered” sake, *nigori* literally means “cloudy”, and refers to sake that still contains rice solids that have not fermented. *Nigori sake* is far more popular outside Japan than in Japan.

Photo: Marcin Jucha / 123rf

REN ZHE

A Sake Story: Chinese Influence, Global Market Drive and Government Policy Change

FEATURE

REN ZHE is a political scientist at the Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization. His research interests include Chinese politics and comparative politics. He obtained a Ph.D. in

International Studies from Waseda University. He is a Korean Chinese and has been living in Japan since 2001.

As a Chinese who has lived in Japan for more than 20 years, I always find it fascinating to see how sake is entwined with many of the country’s traditions and customs. In Spring, the Japanese drink sake with friends and while away the hours underneath cherry trees. In autumn, the Japanese enjoy sake by the light of the full moon during harvest seasons. In winter, the Japanese drink warm ‘snow-viewing’ sake in the country’s first big snowfall of the year. To the Japanese, by offering sake to the gods in rituals and drinking it with their own meals, they would attain a sense of unity with their gods, and gain protection and blessings.

CHINESE INFLUENCE

The origin of sake is unclear. The earliest Japanese reference to sake is found in the *kojiki* (古事記), Japan’s first written history compiled in 712 AD. It is commonly recognised that the Chinese low-temperature brewing technology had been traditionally applied to sake production in Japan. Even though modern brewing technology was subsequently adopted to improve the flavour of the drink in the Meiji period, today the Chinese cultural influence can still be told by the names of different sake.

For example, the Shimane Sake Brewers Association’s ‘*Ri Haku* 李白’ adopted the name of eminent Chinese poet Li Bai (李白) of the Tang dynasty; the Akita Brewing Company’s ‘*Sui Rakuten* 醉樂天’ was named after Bai Letian (白乐天), another poet of the Tang dynasty. Ancient Chinese intellectuals, such as the ‘Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove’ (竹林七賢) during the Wei and Jin dynasties, and the ‘Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup’ (飲中八仙) appearing in one of the poems by Du Fu (杜甫), a well-known poet in the Tang dynasty, were widely known as the names of sake. In addition to famous historical figures, many sake names use Chinese phrases that construct a poetic world filled with scenes and emotions which can ostensibly only be reached by one’s active imagination and artistic experience. If a person is familiar with Chinese culture, by just looking at the label on a sake bottle, they will enter an artistic space, even before tasting the alcohol.

THE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Japanese culture is underpinned by farming, and offering sake to the gods as thanks for a good harvest has continued since ancient times. Till today, shrines all over Japan use sake in sacrifices

天青



Chinese influence on sake names

Kumazawa Brewing Company's 'Tensei' is taken from the Chinese myth about Emperor Huizong of Song (宋徽宗) dreaming about the colour of the sky where the cloud breaks after rain (雨过天青云破处) – a mesmerising jade celadon colour.

Source: www.kumazawa.jp

and various traditional ceremonies. Many of the *sake* breweries in Japan have a long history. According to statistical data from the Teikoku Databank, by the end of 2017, there were 1254 *sake* breweries in Japan, out of which about 66% were founded in the *Edo* and *Meiji* eras, and 72% have a history of more than 100 years. The selection of rice, the production of the *sake*, as well as the packaging process all follow the traditional way; even the tools used in each process are full of craftsmanship and identical to how they looked 100 years ago.

Kunio Yanagita, the founding father of Japanese native folkloristics, mentioned *sake* and local culture as follows:

The fact that the famous families in each region who serve the *sake* that everyone drinks gradually became a business of *sake* brewing at festivals and ceremonies that led to the local community's maintenance and strengthening shows the profound relationship between *sake* breweries and local culture.¹

The close relations between *sake* and local communities still exist nowadays. Many *sake* breweries are family-owned local companies – maintaining a harmonious relationship with local communities and gaining their trust are at the heart of the companies' governance principles.²

To maintain this social link between *sake* breweries and local communities, the Japanese government has been controlling the issuance of *sake* brewing licences as a means to balance the supply and demand in the country. The National Tax Agency only grants the licence when the new brewery can demonstrate that it will be a stable producer right from the start and will not affect other existing breweries to a significant degree.

THE FADING LOVE

Over the years, this policy has been protecting small and medium breweries from the big producers and new players to the market. Yet, *sake* sales within Japan have decreased by 30% since 1975, according to Japan's National Tax Agency. Why does the Japanese's love of *sake* seem to be fading? The aging population of the country is one factor driving a reduction in total alcohol consumption, including *sake* consumption. *Sake* has an old-fashioned image, and middle-aged

1. Kunio Yanagita, "Meiji Taisho shi Sosei Hen," 1993, Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko.

2. Koji Kihara "A Study on the Role of Local Companies in Local Communities – A Case Study of Sake Manufacturing" (in Japanese), Tokyo University of Agriculture, Agricultural Sciences Bulletin Vol. 56, No. 1, 2011.



The rise of domestic sake in the UK

The demand for *sake* grows with the increasing number of Japanese restaurants in the UK. Located in Peckham, Kanpai is the first *sake* brewery in the UK. Other than brewing its own, Kanpai organises *sake*-making workshops and tasting sessions. It also has a taproom that offers *sake* on tap and experimental *sake* cocktails.

Photo: Nathaniel Noir / Alamy

men form the main consumer base. While *sake* is relatively sensitive in matching food, ready-to-drink alcoholic beverages such as beer, wine and whisky are more appealing to the young generation. *Sake* also has a higher sugar content compared to other types of alcohol — for those on a diet, *sake* is less suitable for evening drinks. Experts also pointed to the transformation of Japanese society after World War II, in which Japan as a whole has been very interested in acquiring a Western, as opposed to traditional, way of living.

As the consumption of *sake* declines, the number of companies that manufacture *sake* is also reducing. According to the National Tax Agency statistics, there were more than 1,900 manufacturers in 2001, but in 2015, the number decreased to 1,421. Most of the companies are small and medium-sized enterprises with 300 or

fewer employees.³ Only 4.5% of the total alcohol tax revenue comes from *sake*, the lowest among all types of alcohol in Japan.

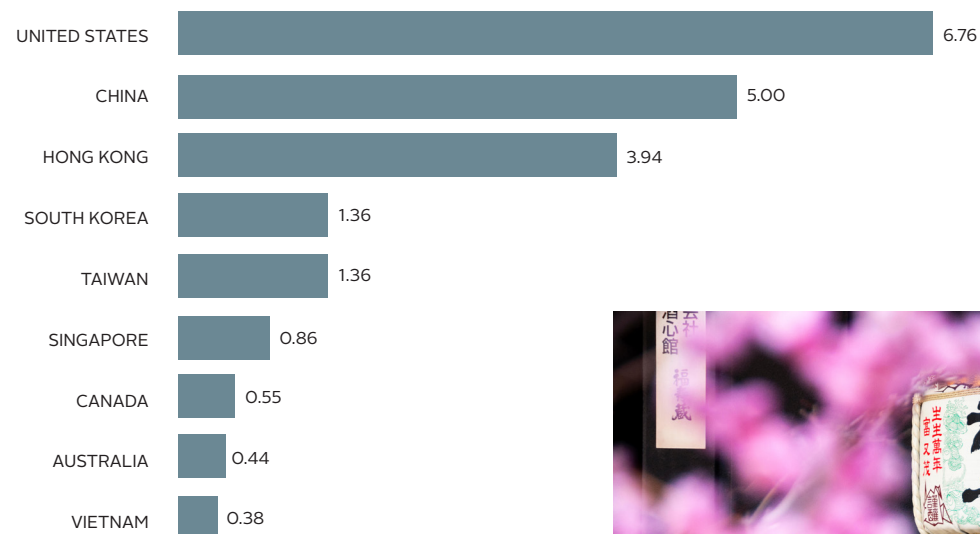
GLOBAL MARKET IMPACT

But even while consumption is declining in Japan, *sake* is becoming more and more popular overseas. *Sake* exports reached USD212 million in 2019, a record for the tenth consecutive year. Among the alcohols produced in Japan that are exported overseas, *sake* is the top batter, accounting for 35% of the total. The main export destinations are the US, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The US accounts for more than a third of Japan's *sake* exports. Some breweries have been set up in the US, France and Australia over the past few years to produce *sake* (these can only be called "sake", not "Japanese sake") for the local markets.

3. National Tax Agency, *Sake* Bookmark, March 2020.

EXPORT VALUE OF DOMESTICALLY PRODUCED SAKE FROM JAPAN IN 2019, BY COUNTRY

(IN BILLION JAPANESE YEN)



Source: Statista

The increasing demand from overseas, especially from Western countries, is changing the appearance of *sake*. Traditionally *kanji* (Chinese characters) and *kana* (syllabic scripts) are commonly used for the labels, which are not immediately recognisable to Western customers. In recent years, many brands added *sake* names written in *romaji* (the use of Latin script to write the Japanese language) or English translation, and some make these roman letters appear even more prominent on the label than their original *kanji* or *kana* scripts. To make the packaging more appealing to international buyers, the bottle shapes are more diverse, and many resemble sparkling wine, champagne and whisky bottles.

DEREGULATION

Overseas demand has not only had an impact on the look of *sake*, it has also greatly eased the supply and demand situation that the National Tax Agency has been trying to balance, and gives more room for the industry to grow. On 20 November 2019, the government announced a major



Traditional sake barrels

Kagami-biraki is a ceremony performed at celebratory events, in which the lid of the *sake* barrel is broken open by a wooden mallet and the *sake* is served to everyone present. It represents an opening to harmony and good fortune.

Photo: Carol Di Rienzo Cornwell / Alamy

change that removes the minimum production requirement for new *sake* brewing licence issuance, on the condition that the *sake* made is only for sale outside of Japan.

In the past, to apply for a new licence, an applicant must have the equipment and materials for an annual output of 60,000 litres. This condition required a huge investment to set up the necessary equipment even before obtaining a licence to make a drop of *sake*. After this restriction was removed for new breweries that intend to sell only outside of Japan, it has become a lot easier to start *sake* production on a small scale. This good news not only benefits aspiring entrants to the *sake* business, but also creates more growth for ancillary

businesses, such as equipment manufacturers. Overall, innovation and new perspectives on *sake* production are expected.

Another implication is that the location of a new brewery will now not be as restricted as before since the target market is strictly overseas. The local environment plays a vital role in shaping the *sake* characteristics. The new brewery can be located near an old one for easy access to the same sources of rice and water under the same climate conditions. This is good news for overseas consumers who expect premium-quality *sake*.

Other than deregulation, in January 2021 the Japanese government announced its plan to seek UNESCO listing for *sake* as a new intangible cultural heritage. The government expects that UNESCO recognition will motivate *sake* brewers and rice growers, and make *sake* more popular worldwide. In February, the government adopted a bill to create a registration system for intangible cultural and intangible folklore cultural assets in the country, for better protection and preservation. According to the Agency for Cultural Affairs, *sake* brewing techniques fall within the category.



SOTO Sake

While staying true to the traditional art of *sake* brewing, SOTO Sake adds a modern spin and takes up a minimalist packaging design to appeal to the wider international audience.

Source: www.sotosake.com



UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

The Japanese government has recently decided to apply to have Japanese *sake* listed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, with the aim of boosting name recognition and brand power as part of efforts to expand overseas exports.

Photo: Tony McNicol / Alamy

The *sake* brewery that I recently visited is the Kumazawa brewery. Founded in 1897, this *sake* brewery is the only brewery left in Shonan, Kanagawa Prefecture. Their words about *sake* brewing and local culture always resonate with me, and I would like to quote the words to conclude this article.

“We don’t think of the brewery as just a brewer. Not only is the *sake* being brewed there the pride of the region, it is also a place where people gather, drink *sake*, and have the magnetic force to produce something. Yes, we want to be the centre of the local culture. Having a brewery there enriches people’s lives and creates a unique culture.” ∞



INTERVIEW WITH CHEF SAM LEONG

Cooking Across Three Generations

In 1994, at the age of 28, Chef Sam Leong became the executive chef at Jiang-Nan Chun at the Four Seasons Hotel Singapore. From 2000 to 2010, he helmed the Tung Lok Group's Chinese restaurants as its corporate chef. After leaving the Group in 2011, Chef Leong devoted his time to culinary education, his restaurant Forest at Resorts World Sentosa, and consultancy work. He has also starred in television cooking shows, appeared in international food events, mentored young chefs and cooked for guests from all walks of life.

On 1 March 2021, Sam Leong, Singapore's very own celebrity chef, and his wife Forest, shared with us their life stories, especially his culinary journey in modernising Chinese cuisine.

As a homegrown celebrity chef, how would you describe your style of cooking?

Modern Chinese cuisine is the term. It is *not* fusion. Fusion food is usually a culinary heritage evolved over time in a culturally diversified society. In Singapore, Hainanese pork chops and steamed chicken with ham are good examples of fusion dishes. My style of cooking is still Chinese. No matter how I use a wide range of ingredients, I keep the core flavour Chinese. The look can be westernised, but the taste must be associated with Chinese food. It is an effort of mine to modernise and popularise Chinese cuisine.

How did your idea of modern Chinese cuisine come about?

The idea originated and was developed during my time with Jiang-Nan Chun restaurant at the Four Seasons Hotel Singapore. Jiang-Nan Chun is an '*atas*' (Malay, "high class") Chinese restaurant serving Cantonese style food. Many businesspeople dine here to discuss business over lunch. For a typical *dim sum* lunch, four pieces of the same item were served in one steamer basket. I observed that when there were three diners, the last piece of dim sum would be the '*paiseh*' (Chinese dialect Hokkien, "embarrassing") piece left behind. The waitperson would approach the diners to ask who among them would like to have the last piece before the steamer basket could be removed to make room for other dishes. With each basket, the diners' business discussion was repeatedly and annoyingly interrupted.

Chef Sam Leong and his father

Before setting foot in Singapore, Sam had worked in some of the best restaurants in Malaysia and Thailand, including a stint with his father (who was known as Malaysia's "King of Shark's Fin") at their highly-acclaimed family restaurant. This was where he learnt all the essential skills and techniques, and developed a dedicated commitment at work.

Photo: Courtesy of Sam Leong

Similarly for fish dishes. In Chinese culinary culture, a cooked fish must be first presented whole to the diners for inspection. After that, the waitperson would divide the fish among the diners as they watch, with the fish head going to the most important guest. Again, the business diners wouldn't be able to dine and discuss business in peace because of the cutting and division of fish, and the debate of who should get the fish head.

When I travelled as a guest chef to Europe and the US, I sometimes chose to dine at upscale western restaurants. I experienced the ambience, analysed the taste of the food, appreciated the dish presentation, and observed the service. I then realised I could serve *dim sum* in individual servings to solve the interruption problem. I started serving assorted *dim sum* platters with three or four different types of *dim sum*, but only one piece each. It turned out my business guests were very happy with this new arrangement.

Following this first success, I continued to design set menus with individual plating. However, such changes brought much additional workload to the kitchen helpers: more ingredients to prepare, more time to spend on plating and more dishes to wash. The front-of-house needed to change service style, which also created chaos. As a result, the restaurant manager became reluctant to promote set menus. Some staff resigned. Worse yet, my customers were unhappy too. They complained that after paying S\$80 for a grouper, they didn't see the whole fish. Instead, they saw only a piece of fillet on each of their plates. I was disheartened.

And then something happened in 1997. An elderly gentleman from New York visited the hotel. He came to the restaurant to check out the *à la carte* menu for his dinner. He loved Peking duck, but felt that he could not finish half a duck on his own and decided to eat elsewhere. I literally had to beg him to stay and convinced him to try our six-course Peking duck set dinner: two slices of Peking duck wrapped in thin pancakes with *foie gras* sauce; Cantonese chicken clear soup in a teacup; steam cod fish fillet; wok-fried black pepper beef; *yee-fu* noodle; and a chocolate dessert by the hotel's pastry chef. After

the meal, he shook my hand and said, "This idea is new, not many people appreciate it now. But don't give up. One day you will be somebody."

Those words from that stranger encouraged me to keep trying. But until today, I still don't know who the old gentleman was.

Is there a dish that you would like to call Sam Leong's signature dish? What's the story behind this dish?

My top signature dish is *Crispy Wasabi Mayonnaise Prawn*. The dish was created in 1989 when I was the Chinese chef at Lok Wah Hin Restaurant at the Novotel Bangkok. It was the first time I used a Japanese ingredient in Chinese cooking. The crispy batter of the prawn and the creamy mayonnaise coating create the contrast in texture, and the sweetness from the mayonnaise, combined with the gentle nasal-clearing spiciness of wasabi, tantalises the taste buds. The idea was actually very simple — in Thailand, everyone simply loves deep fried food. This dish also holds a deeper meaning to me because it was created around the time I met my wife when she was an apprentice chef at Novotel. Back then, I jokingly told her to either marry me or



Romance cooking up in the kitchen

The couple first met at work back in 1988 at the Novotel Bangkok, when Sam was a Chinese chef while Forest was assigned to the dessert station. The two did not start a relationship until at least a year later, at a disco while on a staff holiday in Pattaya.

Photo: Courtesy of Sam Leong

get fired. She has always been very supportive all these years, and she is such an important part of my life.

Another dish that makes me proud is *Coffee Pork Ribs*. The idea of this dish came to me over a dinner at home. I love coffee. One day, I was having coffee while my wife was preparing salt-baked pork ribs for our two sons. The smell of the baked pork came through my nose and met with the sweet and bitter taste of the coffee in my mouth, and my brain came up with the creation. That was in 1995 when I was working for Jiang-Nan Chun at Four Seasons Hotel Singapore. After spending a few days in the kitchen experimenting with coffee powder, cocoa powder, tomato ketchup, plum sauce and Lea & Perrins, I finally found my coffee sauce recipe. Since then, this dish has been carrying my name — *Chef Sam's Coffee Pork Ribs*.

Today, many Chinese restaurant in Singapore have these two dishes on their menus. Of course, they don't call it "Chef Sam's"!

In the late 1990s, you became very famous both locally and internationally. You like to describe it as "a stroke of luck". Why?

I do believe we all need a bit of luck in life. When Jiang-Nan Chun opened in 1994, I was only 28. I spent a good eight years there, and my fame started from there.

One day, a Caucasian hotel guest dined at Jiang-Nan Chun. After the meal, he exchanged name cards with me. His name was Wolfgang Puck. At that time, I had no idea how famous and influential he was. The following year, I received a letter from Mr Puck, inviting me to Los Angeles to attend the annual American Wine and Food Festival (AWFF). I decided to showcase my two signature dishes there.

That was my first time travelling as a guest chef. I was excited but inexperienced. We had been booked to stay at the Beverly Hills Hotel, but I didn't know it was an 'atas' hotel. My team and I were politely rejected by the concierge because we were wearing jeans and sneakers. We eventually had to enter the hotel via its back entrance.



The Leong family

Sam and Forest were married in 1990. Their elder son was born the following year and their younger son two years later. The family relocated to Singapore from Bangkok in 1993.

Photo: Courtesy of Sam Leong

For the opening night of the Festival, most chefs prepared enough ingredients for about 300 servings. Being '*kiasu*' (Chinese dialect Hokkien, "afraid to lose out"), my team prepared a thousand servings of wasabi prawns and coffee pork ribs each. Most booths were closed by 9pm, but the queue outside my booth lasted until 11pm. We cleared all our food and missed the bus back to the hotel.

Back then, most Americans associated Chinese food with fried rice, fried noodle, sweet and sour pork and *dim sum*. However, my dishes gave them a brand new experience. My debut at AWFF was a success. The Americans loved the two dishes, and the American media gave me some very positive reviews. Since then, I have participated in the event for eight consecutive years.

Back in Singapore, the local newspapers and the Tourism Board wanted to know more about me, and the publicity started. In March 1999, during a Parliament debate on the issue of expatriates, then-Minister of Manpower, Lee Boon Yang cited me as a role model — a Malaysian with little academic qualification who came to Singapore to make a living as a chef, created award-winning dishes and did Singapore proud at an international culinary event.

The next day, the headlines of *The Straits Times* read, “Knowledge Workers Don’t Need Doctorates”.

I guess my encounter with Mr Puck at Four Seasons Hotel and being mentioned in Parliament by the Minister were my “strokes of luck”.

Besides luck, all of us know great success also requires tremendous effort. From 2000 to 2010, you were the Director of Kitchens for the Tung Lok Group. You were also the creative force for the Group’s restaurants, and you helped the Group’s overseas expansion. How did your ten years with Tung Lok further elevate your style of modern Chinese cuisine?

Yes, Tung Lok provided me with a very good platform to reach my full potential in my culinary career. Andrew Tjioe, the CEO of the Tung Lok Group, first invited me in 1996 to join his operations. He was visionary, and we shared the same view on modernising Chinese cuisine. However, I felt I was not ready yet. I had just started with Jiang-Nan Chun, and there was still a lot more for me to learn. Then, in 2000, Andrew made me a second offer. Tung Lok was operating 13 restaurants and had just won the bid for Jade, a Chinese restaurant in the Fullerton Hotel. I accepted the offer after Andrew agreed to give me the authority to command the chefs in all his 14 restaurants. I needed the authority to keep things in order. At the age of 34, I was made *Zhong Qu* (Cantonese, “Director of Kitchens”) of the Tung Lok Group.

From Jiang-Nan Chun’s 65-seat capacity to Jade’s 120 seats, I could no longer do the cooking myself. I needed to get myself away from the wok so that I could create new dishes, train the chefs and manage the workflow. I borrowed ideas from Japanese *kaiseki* and French *dégustation* for plating to keep things simple and efficient. My customers were happy and business was good. Dining at Jade had to be reserved three months in advance. Jade was a breakthrough for me.

Two years later, Tung Lok opened My Humble House at Esplanade — the national performing arts centre. This time we followed *gǎnjué* (Mandarin, “feeling”) and went full-scale. We invited a Chinese artist to oversee the concept design: black, blue and silver colours with a bit of gold, dim lights, long table, jazz music, all individual plating menus with wine pairing. We set the right stage for our food, and let the ambience and presentation enhance diners’ experiences.

Initially our local customers were not used to this style of dining. But slowly, My Humble House became an icon for modern Chinese cuisine. *The Business Times* and *The New York Times* praised the restaurant for its food and modern aesthetic. My Humble House was an experiment. It was so successful that we branched out into six cities in Japan, China and India.

During my days with Tung Lok, Andrew always supported my travel overseas as a guest chef. I was given another title, “Corporate Chef”, to represent the Group to explore business opportunities during



My Humble House at Esplanade

My Humble House was a unique dining concept that fused art with modern Chinese cuisine. The dishes had creative names like *The Passion that Lasts, Knows No Bounds* (清酸辣花蟹羹, 一树樱桃带雨) which was hot and sour broth with crab meat and ginger flower.



An Asian culinary icon

Sam Leong is the founder of Michelin star restaurant Forest at Equarius Hotel in Singapore, and has cooked for public figures such as Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, former US presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton, and Queen Elizabeth II of England. In 2019, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the World Gourmet Awards.

my travel. He believed it was good publicity for Tung Lok, and that it would also provide learning opportunities for me. I travelled to meet chefs around the world, learnt about exotic ingredients and brought them back to try in my kitchen.

No matter how fancy the ingredients are, I set a simple rule: appetisers and desserts can be bold and experimental, but the main courses must be Chinese — the Chinese way of cooking and the Chinese taste. From a customer’s perspective, one must know what one is eating; one must truly enjoy the food, and the food must remind one of the Chinese cultural roots.

You have had the honour of serving some famous public figures, such as Mr Lee Kuan Yew, former US presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton, and Queen Elizabeth II. What were these experiences like? Did you have to incorporate western culinary elements into some of the dishes to please their palates?

Oh, in fact, it was very easy to serve VVIPs, because a few days before the actual meal we would have been briefed on what they liked to have, and we had plenty of time to get it right. For example, when Queen Elizabeth came to the Fullerton Hotel in 2006, I was told the Queen just wanted to have fish that was healthily and simply prepared, and she didn’t want it spicy. I just steamed a filleted cod fish, and served it with some clear chicken broth for her.

As a general rule of thumb, we don’t use ingredients such as shark’s fin, fish maw, sea cucumber or bird’s nest for westerners. They are delicacies for Chinese, but westerners usually find them too “exotic” for their tastes.

In your opinion, what are the main differences between a Chinese chef and a western chef?

Let me give you some examples. In my younger days, I was once in Paris with my wife Forest, and we stayed at the Hôtel Plaza Athénée. We went for dinner at Alain Ducasse’s restaurant in the hotel. While we were eating, we were surprised to see Alain Ducasse himself coming to each table to greet every guest. That gesture made the guests feel overwhelmingly honoured. As a result, the guests appreciated not only the food, but also the chef as a person. In Chinese culinary tradition, chefs are heroes in the kitchen but they don’t interact with customers directly. I changed that — I greet my guests in my restaurants.

In western fine dining, the dishes are served without additional sauces by the side. The concept is simple: the chef dictates the taste, and a dish is the final product from the chef with the optimum taste. But in Chinese restaurants, soy sauce, vinegar, chili oil,

pepper powder, and other condiments are all on the table for diners to add if they choose. In our Chinese cuisine restaurants, these sauces are not provided at all. When customers request them, we have to explain the concept to them.

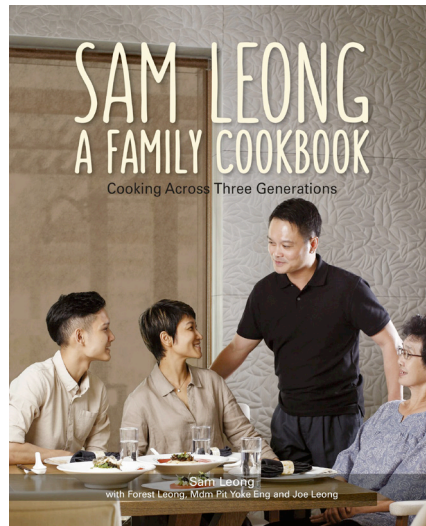
When you received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the World Gourmet Awards in 2019, you said you were inspired by your wife's passion for teaching, and you hoped to impart to others not only the skills of innovative cooking but also the essence of food and hospitality. Could you tell us more about your passion for teaching?

In the 10 years with Tung Lok, with Andrew's support, I achieved a lot, including having my own reality shows, a few cookbooks and a biography. However, I also know I owed my family a lot. I spent too little time with them. I still remember my dad's last words to me when I was only 24: in life, after we have achieved much, we need to know when to let go.

I left Tung Lok in 2010 without a plan in mind. At that time, Forest was teaching Thai cooking classes at PA [People's Association, Singapore's grassroots organisation]. She enjoyed teaching very much and she was very popular among her students, especially the housewives and the elderly. So, we decided to start a cooking school to offer cooking lessons during weekends.

A few months later, I received an invitation from Resorts World Sentosa to be a consultant for one of its new restaurants. As a consultant, I would need to plan kitchen layout, design dishes and train the chefs. I accepted the offer, and the restaurant was named after my wife, "Forest".

From then on, I started doing more consultancy work. Many clients are from Europe and the US. They need to set up Chinese cooking stations inside their kitchens. I help them do the planning and recommend Chinese chefs to them. In a way, I see myself helping other Chinese chefs in their careers and using my knowledge and experience to make Chinese cuisine accessible to more western diners.



A family of chefs

Sam's late father was a renowned Cantonese chef and his mother used to run her own chicken rice stall. His wife, Forest, is a Thai chef and his son, Joe Leong, is a budding pastry chef.

Photo: Sam Leong: A Family Cookbook / Marshall Cavendish

If you were to name two chefs you admire most, one from the East and one from the West, who would they be? Why?

For a Chinese chef, I would say Martin Yan. He is a famous chef and a good presenter. Through his TV shows, he helped to promote Chinese cuisine worldwide.

From the West, it would have to be Spanish chef Ferran Adrià. His name is associated with "molecular gastronomy", "culinary foam", and he is famous for his "deconstructivist" cooking style.

Restaurant businesses slowed down substantially because of the COVID-19 pandemic. What is your plan going forward?

I was diagnosed with stage-four nose cancer in 2016. I stopped all my work and went for treatment. I recovered, but I slowed down a lot. I spent more time with my family.

I have two grandsons now, so Forest and I will be busy taking care of our grandchildren. We are very contented with the life we have now. ∞

JEAN WEI

Ugly Dumpling

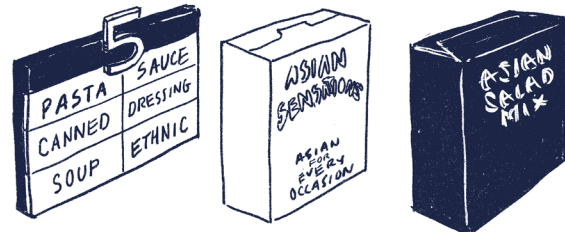


I'M JEAN WEI!

I'm a Taiwanese-American illustrator and cartoonist. I specialise in digital image-making, and also love printmaking.

RISD graduate (2017), from Southern California, currently based in Pennsylvania.

Clients include: Airbnb, GOOD, Google, IDEO, Intercom, The LA Times, The New York Times, Stripe, Workman Publishing.

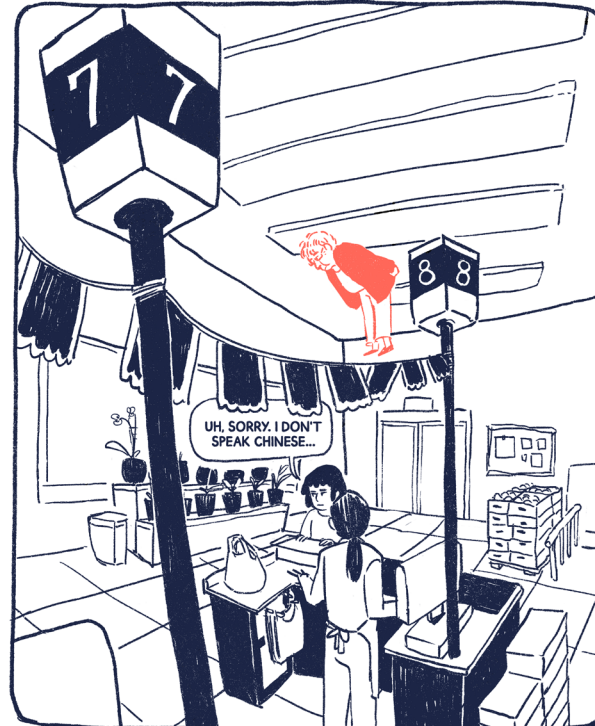


MY NAI NAI'S GHOST FOUND ME IN A GROCERY STORE.

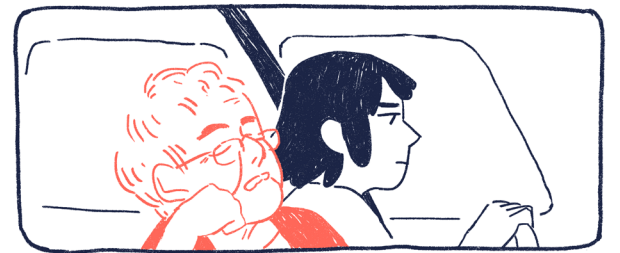


THIS ALL LOOKS DISGUSTING.

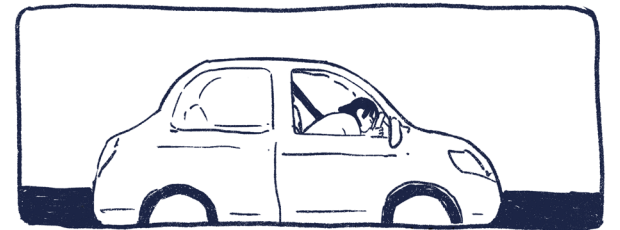
SHE WOULD NEVER HAVE SPOKEN ENGLISH.



MAYBE SHE'S A SPECTER CONJURED BY THE PART OF ME THAT WISHES THAT I COULD PIECE TOGETHER A SENTENCE, THAT I HAD TRIED TO SPEAK AT ALL.



IN THE END THIS COULDN'T BE REAL...



I'M NOT CHINESE ENOUGH TO HAVE ACTUALLY KNOWN HER, NOT AMERICAN ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO ENTIRELY FORGET HER EITHER.



I HADN'T SEEN OR SPOKEN TO HER IN MORE THAN A DECADE.



I NEVER MADE IT TO HER FUNERAL.

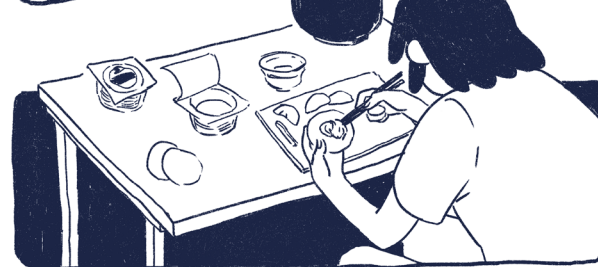


BY THE TIME SHE DIED, IT HAD BEEN FIVE YEARS SINCE I LAST VISITED. I HAD LONG FORGOTTEN THE SOUND OF HER VOICE, THE WAY SHE SPOKE.

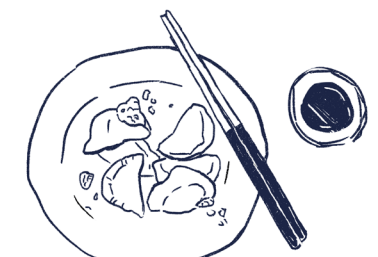


I'M AFRAID OF FORGETTING.

I'M AFRAID I'LL BETRAY MY IGNORANCE FOR THE NTH TIME.



I'M AFRAID THEY'LL TASTE DIFFERENT THAN THE ONES SHE MADE.



BUT IT'S FINE.



THEY TASTE FINE.

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June - September 2021

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Can the two ever truly meet in the middle?



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