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What is This?

Harmony and Patriarchy: The Cultural Basis for 'Paternalistic Headship' Among the Overseas Chinese

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Abstract

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This paper outlines a model of *leadership* attuned to the cultural specificities of the Overseas Chinese (OSC) context. The model is developed in a contrastive mode to U.S. approaches to leadership which are depicted as being culturally bounded and non-transferable to the OSC situation. The model is extrapolated from the persisting cultural values and traditions still prevalent in OSC organizations and management style. The concept of *headship* is heuristically adopted to demarcate the underlying orientation towards legitimized influencing of followers by leaders and the structuring of relationships among the OSC. Chinese organizational 'heads' are seen to function on the basis of meeting the mutually reinforcing dual requirements for legitimized order and compliance achievement and the maintenance of social harmony. The cultural basis for meeting these requirements is examined in detail. The resulting 'leadership' orientation is depicted as 'paternalistic headship', the behavioural and attitudinal elements of which are explored. The arguments are situated in the context of a burgeoning interest in, and recognition of a distinctive OSC management and business orientation.

Descriptors: leadership, Chinese, headship, paternalism, harmony

Introduction

The intention in this paper is to explore a specific, but vital, component of what is increasingly being recognized as a distinctive Overseas Chinese (OSC) management/business orientation: namely *leadership*. The principle aim is to examine and articulate a culturally informed and warranted ground for a leadership model in the OSC context that marks a difference from the presumptive hegemony of Western (primarily United States) perspectives. Doing so leads to a questioning of the basic assumptions pertaining to the construct *leadership* as expressed in the Anglo-American literature, reconfiguring it from an OSC perspective such that the very application of the term is made problematical and the alternative, *'paternalistic headship'*, promulgated. Such an orientation is argued to emerge out of a traditional, but persisting, cultural ethos that provides a legitimized and workable frame

based upon 'natural' authority structures and social injunctions for harmony and reciprocity.

The Overseas Chinese

The remarkable economic growth of Asia's 'Four Dragons' (Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea) and the rapid emergence of other Southeast Asian economies such as Malaysia and Thailand, where there is a very significant ethnic-Chinese business presence, has led to an interest in the particularities of the management styles and systems of the Overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*). This echoes the frenzied attention to Japanese management systems in the light of their post-World War II 'economic miracle'. Interest in the Chinese case is heightened by speculation that a common, indigenous, culturally-informed management style/system is discernible, representing a distinctive alternative to Western and Japanese models. Further impetus is provided by the assertion that, as with Japan, purely macro-economic factors cannot alone account for the economic success and that a distinctive cultural heritage and persisting socio-cultural mileau has been instrumental in shaping an approach to business and management conducive to rapid economic development (Berger and Hsiao 1988; Clegg, Dunphy and Redding 1986; Hicks and Redding 1983; Yoshihara 1988). A focus on the cultural determinants of economic success in East Asia has given rise to the Post-Confucian Hypothesis (Kahn 1979; Hofstede and Bond 1988; Redding 1990; Redding and Hsiao 1990). This broadly argues that the notable economic development is explainable by the common Confucian cultural heritage shared by members of the 'Confucian League'. That is, each location shares a persisting cultural value system rooted in the Confucian ethic and that this, together with certain international economic conditions, has proven to be fertile ground for successful organization functioning and entrepreneurial activity in the context of modern economic growth. There is variability in subsuming different countries under the rubric, but it would certainly include the 'Four Dragons'. It has also been extended to incorporate those other Southeast Asian countries where there is a predominant or significant Chinese business presence such as Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea and Indonesia. Some now want to include the PRC, but this stretches the argument with respect to economic success (see Kao et al. 1994 and Chao 1994).

Whether or not the Post-Confucian Hypothesis as such is proposed, other attempts to articulate a distinctive Asian, or more specifically Chinese, approach to management are emerging. Some of the earliest came from the work of Redding and colleagues (Redding 1980; Hicks and Redding 1983; Redding and Ng 1982; Redding and Wong 1986) and from indigenous Asian scholars (Jou 1983; Limlingan 1986; Silin 1976; Wong 1983, 1985; Yang et al. 1984). Redding has since

developed an empirically-grounded, comprehensive conceptualization of the OSC management orientation (Redding 1990). This remains the most thorough and coherent articulation to date and strongly pursues a culturalist account. Other encompassing treatments can be found in Whitley (1992), Kao et al. (1994), Chen (1995), Putti (1991). An exploration of the cultural roots of a distinctive management and business practice has been a common theme in much of this literature (see also, Hall and Xu 1991; Oh 1991; Redding 1991).

Interest in 'Chinese' management is given greater acuity by the re-entrance of the People's Republic of China (PRC) into the world economy and its rapid economic growth under the current reform process. Issues related to a PRC management style are being addressed in the Western literature (Child 1994; Laaksonen 1988; Shenkar 1991; Warner 1987) and in China, especially via a re-exploration of traditional culture and Chinese classical writings (Jiang and Min 1989; Gua 1988; Li and Ma 1991; Wee 1991). This raises a difficulty since, although the PRC obviously has the largest ethnic Chinese population in the world, its recent ideological and politico-economic history, stage of development and the distinctive approach being taken to economic and enterprise reform means that it cannot sensibly be considered alongside the OSC in terms of a common management and business system. Whether PRC management will converge on an OSC model given the cultural affinity and the extent of OSC investment in the PRC is a moot point and beyond the scope of this paper. Because of these persisting differences, references to 'Chinese management' in this paper are restricted to the OSC — in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore and in the diasporo around Asia — and not to the PRC.

The OSC represent a large, amorphous, but extremely influential, socio-economic group. The term 'overseas Chinese' clearly lacks precision since it is not identifying a class of people on the basis of national identity or specific geographical location. Chen (1995) suggests that it incorporates Chinese nationals who live overseas, ethnic Chinese or people of Chinese descent who live outside China and who may be nationals of other countries, and the *Gangao tonbao* and *Taiwan tonbao* (the Chinese 'compatriots' of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan). These people dispersed around the South China Sea and into South Asia through long traditions of maritime trading, but most penetratingly since the mid-18th century. Accounts of OSC history and experience can be found in Lim and Gosling (1983), Poston and Yu (1990), Wang (1991), Wu and Wu (1980).

The business and management systems of the OSC are much less understood than those of Japan or even South Korea, and remain something of an enigma (Redding 1995). Exact figures are impossible to calculate, but it is estimated that there are about 51 million OSC, and that between them they have assets of US$2.5 trillion and generate a GDP of over US$700 billion (*The Economist* 1996). In Southeast Asia, ethnic Chinese constitute only about 10 percent of the total population,

but account for 86 percent of the billionaires (Rees and Sullivan 1995).

The spectacular economic growth of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore — each having a dominant ethnic-Chinese majority — does not need any recapitulation here. What does need to be noted is that ethnic Chinese are a significant economic force and a dominant part of the business systems of Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, the economies of which are now growing rapidly. Again, the exact extent of Chinese business interests and economic contribution cannot be exactly determined, but is widely accepted as extremely significant: 'dominate[ing] trade and investment in every East Asian country except Korea and Japan' (Kraar 1994a: 45). In the Philippines, the Chinese comprise only about 1 percent of the population but control over half of the stockmarket.[1] In Thailand they are a more significant element in the population (between 10–14 percent) and again account for half the country's wealth. Indonesia presents a similar picture with a 4 percent population component, but a 75 percent control of stockmarket wealth. They have, despite a sometimes precarious minority status and periods of persecution, forged significant liaisons with the controlling political-military caucus in Indonesia. Malaysia is somewhat different since ethnic-Chinese comprise about one third of the total population. It is widely argued that they dominate the commercial sector and 60 percent of the stock market, leaving the public sector to the *bumiputra* (indigenous Malays) and the professions and labour organization to the Indians. Redding (1990: 31) estimates that the Chinese control between 60–70 percent of the locally-owned economy.

What is also of significance is the sense of collective identity shared by the OSC and the extent of their business contacts and networks throughout the diasporo, albeit if at times on family, clan or language-group lines (Hamilton et al. 1990; Kao 1993; Kraar 1994a). So strong is this sense of collective identity that Redding (1995: 62) suggests, 'It is ... psychologically one region if not legally one country, and it is permeated by networks of cooperation which ignore national boundaries', and that such cooperativeness is highly significant since it 'converts an otherwise disparate group of entrepreneurs into a significant economy, whose power is normally hidden from view due to the simple fact that it cannot be represented in any national statistics'.

That economic power is becoming of even greater importance because of the extensive links now being forged back into the mainland. OSC capital accounts for around 80 percent of the direct foreign investment into China since the 'open-door' policy was initiated and in coastal China this now amounts to almost US$200 billion (Kraar 1994b; Redding 1995). Much of this is channelled through Hong Kong. Intra-regional trade and investment has also grown very rapidly. Of the US$43,333 million invested in the emerging economies of East Asia (China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines) between 1986 and 1991, over 46 percent was from the Asian NICs (Korea, Taiwan,

Hong Kong and Singapore) (see Redding 1995; Kohut and Cheng 1996).

Singapore requires special comment here. Even though the population is around 75 percent Chinese, the penetration of direct foreign investment has been more pronounced, such that as much as 55 percent of the population work in foreign-owned companies. Whilst the socio-political context remains firmly Chinese and there have been overt attempts to induce Confucian values, there has been a more wholehearted embracement of modern Western (and Japanese) management styles and practices. It is therefore questionable whether the type of distinctive 'Chinese management' orientation argued for in the other locations is as apparent in Singapore.

The situation with respect to South Korea is also problematic. Whilst there is no ethnic affinity, there are those who argue for a common cultural legacy, particularly through Confucianism, and for the inclusion of South Korea in the 'Confucian League' (Kao et al. 1994; Chao 1994; Hofheinz and Calder 1982). Certainly, the Post-Confucian Hypothesis alluded to above includes South Korea. There are strong grounds for asserting some similarities between the management/leadership styles of the OSC and South Korea, even if the dominance of the massive *chaebols* means that the institutional conditions are very different.

For the purposes of this paper then, the OSC are taken as including those communities in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Macau, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines where there is a common ethnic identity, a presumed shared cultural legacy and a sustained value system. We are further asserting a degree of commonality in business and management orientation (noting the caveat about Singapore) that is distinctive *vis-à-vis* 'Western' orientations, but not without internal differences. We also tentatively incorporate South Korea into our discussion whilst recognizing differences in institutional framework and industrial policy.

Ethnocentrism, Leadership and Culture

Leadership *per se* may be a universal phenomenon, but conceptions of it and the styles and practices associated with it are not (Fatehi 1996; Ronen 1986). As one of the most persistent and trenchant critics of the universal, culture-free assumptions concerning the applicability and transference of U.S. leadership conceptions across cultures puts it, 'Whatever a naive literature on leadership may give us to understand, leaders cannot choose their styles at will; what is feasible depends to a large extent on the cultural conditioning of a leader's subordinates' (Hofstede 1980b: 57). It is not only a matter of leader-led relationships, cultural assumptions and values about the nature and function of power and authority, the structuring of relationships, styles of interpersonal

interaction, desirable and efficacious leader and subordinate characteristics, and the leadership situation, all entail different conceptualizations and enactments of any role akin to leadership. For example, all Southeast Asian countries are collectivist and high power-distance cultures, whereas the U.S. and Northern European countries are individualistic and low power-distance cultures (Hofstede 1980a). U.S. culture tends ideologically towards democratic and participative leadership principles, but in other cultures there is evidence of an acceptance and legitimation of more directive and autocratic leadership styles (Badawy 1980; Deyo 1978; Kenis 1977; Komin 1990b; Redding and Casey 1975; Wyatt 1989). Such differences in basic cultural-value orientations clearly frame the issues of power, authority and leadership in different ways. As Smith and Bond (1993: 157) have suggested, 'Western theorists . . . have long been in the habit of contrasting autocratic with democratic leadership and thinking of hierarchy as the opposite of participation. When we find that, in many parts of the world, power distance and hierarchy are part of a social structure which is also collectivist and participative, we must begin to look carefully at the generality of the Western model.'

The conception of the managerial leadership task, then, varies across cultures and a number of value orientations and other factors are associated with this. This non-universality, culture-boundedness and non-transferability of leadership theories and models has been increasingly recognized (Adler 1991; Fatehi 1996; Hofstede 1980a, 1980b; Smith and Peterson 1988; Triandis 1982–3; Westwood and Chan 1995). Cross-cultural differences in leadership style may result from differences in values (Bass et al. 1979; England and Lee 1974; England et al. 1974; Posner and Low 1990; Posner and Schmidt 1992), needs and need structures (Bhagat and McQuaid 1982), risk perception and response (Bass et al. 1979; Cummings et al. 1971; Ronen 1986), cognitive styles (Maruyama 1974; Redding and Martyn-Johns 1979) and personal background factors. For example, personal values, shaped by the wider culture into which the person is socialized, affect leadership style by determining how a manager perceives and defines a situation, tackles problems and decisions, approaches interpersonal relations, interprets ethical behaviour, and responds to organizational pressures (England and Lee 1974; England et al. 1974).

Despite the above, the dominant theoretical perspectives on managerial leadership, emerging as they do from the United States, have at times assumed universality or, in the absence of alternatives, promoted it by default. Much of the research on leadership conducted outside the United States has tended to proceed via the application/replication of U.S. theories and methods. Such assumptions of universality and replication tendencies have led to depictions of leadership, power and authority issues in other countries remaining embedded in U.S. theoretical frameworks and thus captive to the ideology of its managerial discourse. This entails, ultimately, further intimations of universality since

any observed differences are still represented in, or refracted through U.S. discourse and conceptualized as variations from or dimensions of U.S. models. The most common representation of difference, reflecting the ideological proclivities of the United States has been that of more pronounced inclinations towards autocratic and directive forms of leadership in other parts of the world, including Southeast Asia. Too often this is either left unelaborated, presented as one point on a continuum still encompassed by the U.S. view or, more perniciously, depicted as a backward stage in the development towards enlightened leadership styles through which the West has already passed. Such attributions are, at best, ethnocentric and at worst colonialist and imperialistic. They are also simply inadequate and incomplete formulations.

Such critiques are not confined to the specificities of particular models or theories, but may extend to questioning whether the general notion of leadership, as broadly conceived in the U.S. corpus, is meaningful elsewhere, and specifically in the OSC context. As Hofstede (1980a, 1980b) has cogently argued, theoretical formulations are not value-free, but are inevitably imbued with the culturally informed values and assumptions of their originators. U.S. leadership theories/models are thus, in part, an embodiment of the assumptive and value base of that culture and, to that extent, are culture-bound and very different to those which prevail among the OSC.

The Notion of 'Headship': Towards an Alternative OSC Conceptualization

In the course of the author's ruminations on organizational leadership in the OSC context, a purchase on the contrast that can be perceived there was located initially, paradoxically enough, through comments in the Western literature. Bass and Stogdill (1990) note that 'leadership' only appeared in English-language usage in the first half of the 19th century, and that prior to that, the notion of 'headship' was more prominent. The term has been elaborated on by Gibb (1969) and Holloman (1986).

A key point of delineation is that headship is inherent to given social structures and is imposed on followers, whereas leadership emerges in a social context and is accorded by the followers to the leader (Holloman 1986). A person who attains the status of head typically does so through some means outside of the leader-led relationship (e.g. inheritance). The occupancy of that position provides a legitimized and accepted right to determine the ends and means of the group. A leader, however, has the role conferred upon him/her by followers, contingent upon their perception that the leader exhibits qualities or behaviours that are viable, credible, and appropriate to their needs and the tasks and issues at hand. Headship is more a function of ascription than

achievement. Traditionally, in Chinese contexts, a person is born into a headship position and is thereby expected to display leadership by virtue of that background and position: this is the reverse of the situation in the West where people who show leadership capabilities or qualities are then made into leaders.
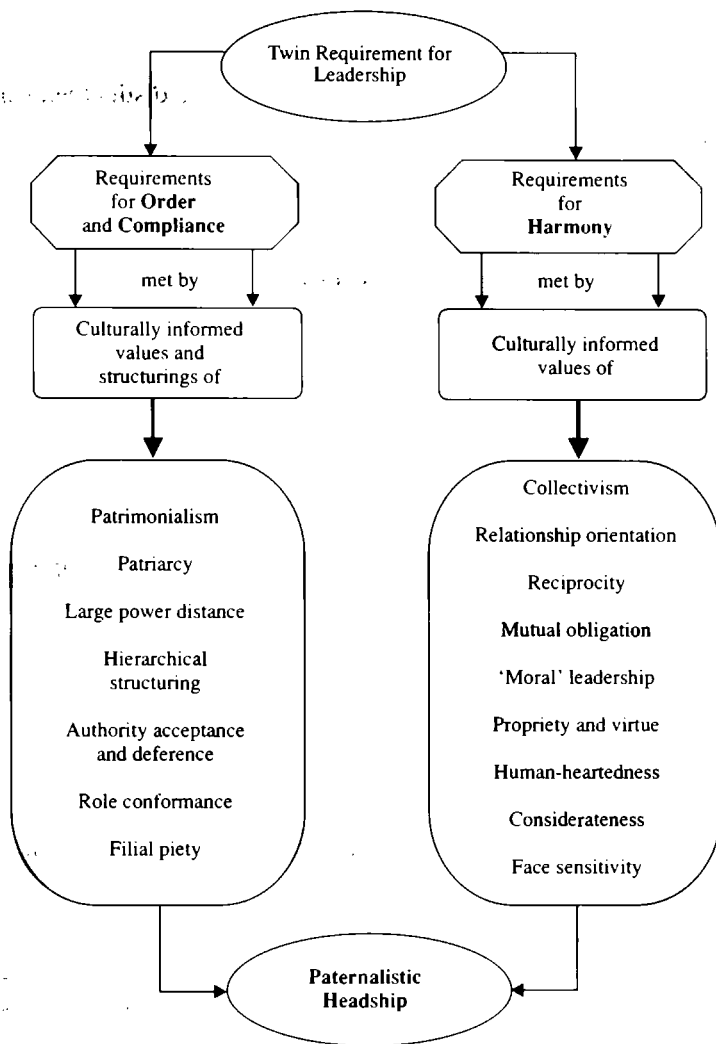
Further important distinctions are also noted. A head's authority is derived from some extra-group, structural power differential, is less contingent upon the individual's behaviours/qualities and cannot be withdrawn at the whim of the members. Headship is maintained through the extant structural arrangement and not by a spontaneous and ongoing recognition by followers of the leader's contribution to group success and progress. A leader's authority derives from the followers' concordance with the special qualities/behaviours exhibited by him/her, and is subject to this sustained spontaneous legitimation. Under headship, a significant social gap is maintained between the group members and the head; this is seen as a necessary part of the relationship and is contrived by the head, and expected by followers. The objectives to be pursued by the group are selected and imposed by the head in line with his[2] interests and not internally determined by the group itself; nor is a common interest or consensus assumed or deemed necessary. There is little or no sense of co-joint interests, actions or shared feeling in pursuit of the given goal(s).

Whilst this conception of headship, derived as it is from Western sources, does not adequately map the situation in OSC organizations, it is closer to those realities than North American notions of leadership style and behaviour. It is particularly apposite in the context of the numerically dominant family-owned and managed enterprises among the OSC. In OSC contexts, the head of the company will assume strong and centralized control, and function in a paternalistic fashion. More importantly, this headship will be clearly legitimized by the organization membership and the rights of the head will not be questioned or challenged.

A Model for 'Paternalistic Headship'

The remainder of the paper is an exploration of a distinctive form of *paternalistic headship* which prevails in OSC contexts. A conceptual model is developed that builds on the cultural assumptions and values associated with leadership-like structures and relationships in the OSC context and extrapolates them into a plausible and coherent framework. The model is supported by empirical evidence, where it exists. The paternalistic headship of Chinese family businesses is taken as the strongest case and as paradigmatic for headship in other situations. The broad features of the framework are encapsulated in Figure 1 below and are detailed in the accompanying discussion and in a subsequent figure.

Figure 1
Model of
Paternalistic
Headship

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                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │  Twin Requirement for   │
                        │       Leadership        │
                        └─────────────────────────┘

        ┌──────────────────┐            ┌──────────────────┐
        │  Requirements    │            │  Requirements    │
        │  for Order       │            │  for             │
        │  and Compliance  │            │  Harmony         │
        └──────────────────┘            └──────────────────┘
              met by                          met by

      ┌──────────────────┐            ┌──────────────────┐
      │ Culturally informed│          │ Culturally informed│
      │ values and        │           │ values of         │
      │ structurings of   │           │                   │
      └──────────────────┘            └──────────────────┘
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Patrimonialism

Patriarchy

Large power distance

Hierarchical structuring

Authority acceptance and deference

Role conformance

Filial piety

Collectivism

Relationship orientation

Reciprocity

Mutual obligation

'Moral' leadership

Propriety and virtue

Human-heartedness

Considerateness

Face sensitivity

Paternalistic Headship

The starting point is the assumption of two basic requirements for any headship situation. The first is for order and compliance. To be able to function as head, some form of order that structures the relationship between the head and others is required, and also some basis upon which the others accept the head and comply with his intentions and directions. This is true of leadership situations anywhere, but the basis for it and the manner of its accomplishment varies. The second require-ment is fundamentally embedded in the OSC cultural traditions and value system — social harmony. There are trenchant socio-cultural injunctions for the establishment and maintenance of social harmony in all OSC contexts. Such harmony is not based on equalitarian or egalitarian presumptions, nor upon mere exchange values, rather it

flourishes even in an environment of clear and acknowledged power distances and inequalities.

This dual requirement structure is distinctive, especially in view of the structural and interpersonal mechanisms through which the requirements are met. For example, Scandinavian cultures may have requirements for forms of social harmony in the workplace, presumably underpinned by their femininity orientation (Hofstede 1980a), but the requisite order and compliance are not achieved through the type of culturally-inherent hierarchical ordering, large power distance and paternalistic autocracy found in the OSC case. Latin American cultures have similar inclinations towards ascriptive hierarchical order and autocratic leadership, but the requirements for harmony are not as pronounced nor do they manifest themselves in the same manner.

The requirements are in dynamic and interdependent relationship: the one mutually supporting and reinforcing the other. An OSC head is likely to be fully effective when both requirements are met — if either is not, then a potential weakness exists. There is a subtle admixture of clear patriarchal authority with ready compliance, together with harmony maintaining postures which involve concern and considerateness and elements of moral leadership. This symbiotic, twin requirement has been clearly expressed in Asia. For example, in the case of Taiwanese organizational heads: 'A primary concern in all social relationships centres on the maintenance of harmony and stability. The achievement of harmony occurs not through equality but through the acceptance of socially approved rules of behaviour based on ordered hierarchy' (Silin 1976: 36). In South Korea: 'The leadership of Korean enterprises needs to be noted for its dual inclination toward both authority and harmony' (Cho 1991).

Paternalistic headship is thus a role which combines discipline and authority with fatherly concern and benevolence. The label is chosen to reflect that, in preference to mere *paternalism*, mainly because of the negative associations this carries in the West. The same is true of another option which draws on the North American argot — *benevolent autocratic* style. Ignoring the negative connotations, 'paternalism' has value through resonating with the familistic, fatherly roots of the orientation. 'Headship' reflects the traditions of strong authority rights and serves to uncouple the OSC orientation from the Western baggage associated with 'leadership'. Forms similar to paternalistic headship have been documented in Korea (Cho 1991; Lee and Yoo 1987; Shin 1984; Yoo and Lee 1987); Singapore (Chong 1987); Philippines (Andres 1989; de Leon 1987); Taiwan (Chen 1991; Silin 1976); Hong Kong (Redding 1990; Redding and Wong 1986; Westwood and Chan 1992; Wong 1985, 1988); Indonesia (Widyahartono 1991); Malaysia (Hamzah-Sendut et al. 1989) and Thailand (Komin 1990a and b; Thompson 1989).

The model elaborates the cultural ground by which these twin requirements are met among the OSC and goes on to describe elements of the

paternalistic headship style thus engendered and the types of strategies and tactics employed to operate and sustain it.

Requirements for Structures of Order and Compliance Achievement

The central issue here is: What values and structural arrangements support the occupancy of headship, legitimize its enactment and secure compliance? As indicated, OSC cultures are large power-distance cultures, whereby widely unequal power distributions are seen as natural and proper. Those in headship positions, occupied via existing structural arrangements, are assumed, by both the head *and* followers, to have the right to exercise power and authority in clear and strong ways. Such power and authority are legitimized, accepted as right and proper, and challenges are not viewed as desirable or appropriate. A clearly delineated hierarchical structuring of relationships is seen as the natural way of ordering things — 'the way things are'.

There are deep-rooted cultural values and traditions that sustain this orientation. These delineate what is culturally appropriate with respect to authority and power — their form, structure and manifestation. Weber (1951) expressed the foundation for this when he characterized the form of domination prevalent in the Chinese context as *patrimonial*, and linked it to the patriarchal traditions whereby absolute power is invested in the male head of the household. Patriarchal and patrilineal traditions persist among the OSC today to a greater extent than in most Western cultures. Bond and Hwang (1986) argue that Chinese leadership is modelled on this fathers' role as household head, and Bond (1991: 73) explicitly states that 'The effective model for leadership systems like the Chinese is thus the wise and loving father'.

Patrimonialism is inextricably linked with familism and, even today, the family is accorded a pre-eminent position in OSC social systems; more so than in the United States and most of Northern Europe. Power and authority are concentrated in the male family head and based upon the acceptance and legitimation of the rights of the patriarch. Note, however, that such strong power exists only to facilitate the *maintenance and perpetuation of the family and its interests*. The family head has absolute power for this purpose, and expects and receives respect and obedience from the rest of the family on that basis. Commenting on patrimonialism as the persisting power system underlying contemporary enterprise governance in OSC contexts, Redding (1990: 155) delineates three related themes:

1. Such a power form cannot really exist unless it is connected to ownership: it is the non-separation of ownership and control in the Chinese case that facilitates the flourishing of patrimony in Chinese enterprises.
2. It embodies a distinct style of leadership (which Redding labels as benevolently autocratic).
3. It entails high levels of personalistic relationships in organizational

contexts as opposed to the impersonal/neutral relationships prescribed by the Western bureaucratic tradition.

With the Confucian ethic — emphasizing clear hierarchical relationship structures and respect for authority — the patrimonial legacy receives support and legitimation from a cogent and, at times, officially sanctioned social philosophy. Under its auspices, people are required to accept their positions in the delineated scheme of things and to play their part in sustaining the system. Challenges to authority and the 'natural' order are not countenanced. This is encapsulated in the Confucian precepts of the so-called 'Five Cardinal Relationships' or *wu lun*, which delineate a hierarchical power structure over key societal relationships. The *wu lun* are dyadic sets of unequal, mostly hierarchical relationships between emperor–minister, father–son, husband–wife, older brother–younger brother, friend–friend. Although the power structure is differentiated and unequal (except for the latter), mutual obligations and reciprocities are inherent in the relationships. The person in the dominant position expects and receives obedience, deference and compliance, but in return should respect the dignity of the lower party and provide appropriate care and concern. Chinese large power distance, the concomitant hierarchical structuring of relationships, and the acceptance and non-challengeability of authority are rooted in this tradition (Bond and Hwang 1986; Pye 1985; Whitley 1992).

Similar values and traditions help constitute the hierarchical structuring and respect for authority in Korea and elsewhere in East Asia (Chung and Lee 1989). The Korean equivalent of the *wu lun* is the *orhyun*; a vertical hierarchy of duties and relationships from emperor down to individual families which 'was recognised as the correct moral structure of society . . . the existence of this hierarchy and observance of proper duties and relationships in this vertical structure were and still are considered to be the defining point that makes human society moral in nature' (Meek and Song 1993: 294).

The core Confucian, familistic value of *filial piety* combines with others, such as the *wu lun*, to provide social rules which support patriarchal structures. Such rules have been codified in classic texts such as 'The Book of Filial Piety' (*Xiaojing*), but persist as implicit social norms. Respect, deference and obedience to the patriarch, and authority figures generally, have become entrenched in mundane child-rearing practices. The clear hierarchical structuring, role conformance and respectful and deferential postures are made apparent to children from an early age. In many respects, filial piety functions as a model: 'the proper relationship between father and son became the paradigm for all hierarchical relationships in a moral society' (Janelli and Janelli 1982: 283). People are obligated to accept their allocated role positions and not to threaten or challenge the structural arrangements. They can be expected to assume the duties attached to their roles and carry them out without question. Such role conformance is seen as natural and morally correct. Respect

and compliance are concomitant attitudes and behaviours inherent in the structured relationships and not something heads have to court through their own behaviour. The socialized values of respect, deference, conformance and dependence, anathema to the Western mindset where socialization practices foster independence, questioning and individualism (Yang 1986), are essential elements in the maintenance of a complex and intricate social system among the OSC.

The continued strength of familism means that these structural forms, and the accompanying roles and role requirements, stand as a paradigmatic model for other social formations, including organizations. This is especially so in the context of the non-separation of ownership and control and the predominance of familistic, small-scale enterprises that prevail throughout much of the OSC context (Limlingan 1986; Redding 1990; Wong 1985, 1988; Wu 1983; Yoshihara 1988). Such enterprises were the core of industrial organization in most economies (although there are significant variations in industrial organization and policy), and the driving force behind the highly successful export-led industrialization and growth witnessed in the past three decades (Limlingan 1986; Wu 1983; Yoshihara 1988). Still in 1991, 84.8 percent of registered companies in Hong Kong employed less than ten people, and in 1992 approximately 50 percent of even manufacturing enterprises employed less than 50 people. Family ownership is not confined to these small-scale businesses: approximately 50 percent of Hong Kong's stock market capitalization is attributable to just ten business groups, most of which have controlling interests in family hands. In Taiwan, out of the 100 largest firms, accounting for 20 percent of national GNP, all but two are owned and controlled by an individual or a family. Even larger, ostensibly publicly-owned enterprises invariably have critical and controlling capital in family hands (see Chen 1995; Clegg 1990; Kraar 1994a; Whitley 1992).

This preference for familistic, owner-managed enterprises already reflects the strong desire for the maintenance of family control over economic activity. It is suggested that the basic rationale for business in Southeast Asia is founded upon familistic considerations and the prime directive for enterprise owners is the inter-generational maintenance and perpetuation of the family's well-being, prestige and prosperity (Silas 1987). There is a degree of isomorphism between the business as an economic–social entity and the family as a social–economic entity: 'According to Confucian ethics, "family" is the most fundamental revenue and expenditure unit, within which every member contributes his or her income to the common family fund while each one has a right to obtain a portion of it, with the rest belonging to the family as a whole' (Chen 1995: 85). The Chinese businessman's headship simulates family patriarchy, and his authority and power is accepted as natural, proper, absolute, paramount, unchallengeable and his rights inviolate. The goals of the enterprise are unilaterally decided and are not up for discussion or scrutiny by anyone else. The head is not

required to display leadership qualities or behaviours, in the Western sense, in order to achieve the required compliance from members, his perceived legitimacy as the rightful occupant of that position is sufficient to secure it.

This section has provided a brief account of the socio-cultural conditions that provide a warrant for an OSC head to achieve the necessary level of order and compliance. The value base and concomitant structural arrangements that support headship are quite different from those by which Western leaders achieve order and compliance.

Meeting Requirements for Harmony

It must be remembered that the above constitutes only one side of paternalistic headship. A common error in the West is to perceive these power and authority arrangements in isolation or in partiality and inappropriately conclude that they reflect clear inclinations and structural inducements towards sheer authoritarianism, autocracy or even despotism. If the headship role only entailed these elements, then that conclusion may be justified, but the twin requirement for harmony introduces an additional set of role obligations and responsibilities that significantly circumscribe the apparent absolutist nature of heads' power. The importance of harmony, and related values such as human heartedness, mutual dependence and 'face', is prevalent throughout the OSC communities. The culture is collectivist and relationship-centred. Paternalistic headship behaviours and styles reflect this. They are exercised within the complexities of relationships and the norms and informal rules that govern them.

The Western characterization of OSC headship as merely 'authoritarian' is an inappropriate depiction emanating from an ethnocentric evaluation, from *within* the confines of Western discourse, of a different way of ordering things. Psychological studies purporting to show higher levels of conformance and social acquiescence (Tarwater 1966; Wang 1981) sometimes engender misleading, value-laden evaluations of harmful dependency orientations and weak-willed, unquestioning conformity to authority which inhibit 'proper' self and moral development (Soloman 1971). An alternative, 'indigenous' interpretation of Chinese conformity and acquiescence is that it is a 'prudent and expedient motive to avoid disrupting the present relations. It has nothing to do with a lack of autonomy or self-assertion' (Wong 1982: 11). Conformity is thus linked to socially functional notions of interpersonal harmony and collectivism. Similarly, studies on Chinese moral development following Kohlberg's model (1969, 1976), depict mature Chinese as attaining Stage 4 moral reasoning: authority orientation (Cheng and Lei 1981; Chern 1978; Kohlberg 1969). However, an in-cultural interpretation sees this, again, in terms of collectivism and harmony maintenance. A Chinese identifies with the goals and expectations of the collective to which he/she belongs and 'judges things from a perspective which

he believes is shared by other "typical" members of the society or group. He upholds social norms and rules to avoid censure by the authorities, to avoid feelings of shame, guilt and anxiety, *and to maintain the social order for its own sake*' (Yang 1986: 133). Conforming behaviour is thus a rational recognition of existing socio-structural arrangements and the paramount value for maintaining harmonious social relations.

Such requirements are not only incumbent upon those in subordinate positions, but also those in superior ones. The apparent 'authoritarian' power of the OSC head is circumscribed by the same social injunctions to sustain harmony and accompanying cultural pressures for considerate and proper behaviour. It is this singular admixture that provides the distinctive flavour of paternalistic headship. Sheer autocracy without harmony maintenance is culturally somewhat inpalatable.

Harmony is a deeply embedded social value, common to both OSC and Korean cultures, emphasized in the dominant religious and philosophical traditions — Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism — and other cultural values. In Korea, the neo-Confucian concept of harmony between human beings (*inwha*) is a central tenet and is reflected in many Korean corporate management philosophy statements or mottos (*sahoon*) (Meek and Song 1993: 292–293). Among the OSC it is a primary orientation with respect to how they view their world, selves and relationships. Such traditions stress harmony between people and their environment, intra-personal harmony and, of most significance here, harmony in social relationships. Harmony is not a central construct in Western ideology where proximate value orientations are based upon notions of equality, egalitarianism and consensus. This is not the case among the OSC where harmony is partly accomplished through following the rules of proper behaviour within the status hierarchy.

OSC heads then, confront heavy social expectations that they conduct themselves so as to maintain proper social harmony, both within the group and between themselves and the members. A head, seen to be so concerned, will be respected and have the support of the group. He *can* function by meeting the structural requirements for order and compliance, that is, if he has a legitimately perceived right to occupy a headship position and if others accede to that authority through subscription to the inherent hierarchical arrangements. To be really effective, however, he also needs to meet the requirements for social harmony as this helps foster more solidaristic sentiments and consolidates beneficial bonds of mutual obligation and reciprocity. The exhibition of proper and considerate behaviour by the head provides valuable support to the maintenance of order and compliance. Its absence transgresses social norms and expectations and may entail weakened legitimation followed, possibly, by tacit withdrawal of full support and cooperation.

As noted, the two requirements are inextricably entwined and complementary. The authority and hierarchy structures are supported by displays of proper behaviour, considerateness and the pursuit of harmony. At the

same time, role adherence, conformance to hierarchical order, respect and deference to authority are essential in the creation and sustaining of an harmonious system. It has been suggested in the case of Korea, for example, that Confucian ethics 'concerning vertical and horizontal relations must be observed in order to establish stability in the family and society through harmony' (Cho 1991: 23, citing Hahn 1988).

Among the OSC, persisting cultural norms and traditions help to structure and maintain harmonious relationships. *Li* is the expression that covers the traditional implicit rules of propriety and proper behaviour. The concept of *li* '. . . subsumed a whole range of behavioural expectations, including loyalty to superiors and respect for one's elders . . . *Li* was thus a system of moral behaviour which was not codified law' (Louie 1980: 10–11, after an interpretation by Wu 1917). It serves to cultivate an awareness of what is appropriate in any given social situation and so effectively to structure social interactions and relationships. The Korean equivalent is *ye*, and, again, conformance to these social rules has high moral force and is considered essential to the maintenance of order and stability. '*Ye* provide basic organising principles that define appropriate role behaviour for individuals in the junior and subordinate role of an interpersonal relationship . . . Social order and coordinated action are maintained by understanding one's respective role duties in a senior or junior position and, in turn, observing these duties rigorously' (Meek and Song 1993: 297). *Filial piety* is another value complex sustaining hierarchy and structuring relationships: beyond the simple father–son exemplar. These cultural rules and roles mean that whilst relationships may be unequal, they are also *reciprocal* and contain *mutual obligations*. Filial piety, for example, whilst demanding loyalty and obedience from the child, also places inescapable obligations on the father to protect and nurture the child. In general, Chinese social relationships are characterized by similar forms of mutuality and reciprocation: including that between head and subordinate.

Another important Confucian concept is *Jen*. The nearest translation is 'human heartedness', but it is best understood to mean that an individual's very claim to personhood depends upon their capacity to take full and proper account of others as persons. It requires that people show consideration for others in recognition of their humanity and of how their own behaviour would be experienced if directed at themselves. This is the mark of the moral person (Silin 1976: 35–36). It is also a mark of paternalistic headship. An ideal paternalistic head should be a morally superior person who aims to follow the ideals of 'civilized' behaviour. This is achieved by adhering to the principles of *jen* and key Confucian virtues such as propriety, filiality, fidelity, righteousness and wisdom. Such values and behaviours are the admired and respected mark of the 'Confucian gentleman', and are expected from a head. Indeed, Chinese 'leadership' has been labelled as a 'virtuocracy' (Pye 1985). It is again argued that this value complex is transferred into organizational contexts. Organization heads may have 'patriarchal'

rights, which are broadly sufficient for the legitimized exercise of authority, but effective headship is enhanced by fulfilling the requirement for harmony and by adhering to social expectations. The display of such qualities is valuable in generating genuine solidaristic relationships which furnish a qualitative strength to the headship. They draw forth positive and supportive subordinate responses which reciprocally facilitate the acceptance of strong authority and the achievement of compliance. Again, apparent absolute power is circumscribed by a moral ethic. It is this that provides additional legitimacy for headship (Bond and Hwang 1986; Pye 1985; Redding 1990; Silin 1976).

The *face* issue is also of relevance. Whilst subordinates should seek to protect and give *face* to the superior, the superior should also take care not to damage the *face* of subordinates. An absolute exercise of power without concern for the subordinate *is* a damage to *face*. Equally, to bow weakly to tyrannical power is also to lose dignity and *face*. Any treatment that does not respect the humanness of others can lead to a loss of *face*. However, it is important not to over romanticize these prescriptions. The power position of the head also means that he may 'take face' and engage in other shaming and humiliation tactics if he perceives the need to punish or bring into line a recalcitrant subordinate.

Thus, OSC paternalistic heads are able to assume an 'authoritarian' posture and to expect and receive compliance, obedience, loyalty and deference from subordinates. Strong cultural values and traditions legitimize this, leading people to accept it as natural and normal. However, there exists an equally strong set of socio-cultural pressures moderating the behaviour of an autocratic head. In general terms these can be covered by the need to maintain harmony. Other values such as *face*, mutual dependence and obligation, reciprocation, considerateness, human heartedness and respect for others and their human dignity, all combine to guide the nature of superior–subordinate relationships.

There is an important caveat here. Much of the above represents something of a prescriptive and idealized account. It is certainly true that the patriarchal authority of the head *is* generally inviolable provided the position occupancy has social legitimacy. The roles of father and patriarch undoubtedly have this within Confucian familistic traditions, and, by extension, the owners and heads of businesses have the same kind of legitimized rights and authority. The position of professional managers is much less clear. The natural tendency to defer to authority positions and the status hierarchy will be inherent in most superior– subordinate relationships, including manager–subordinate, but there is considerably less legitimized authority in the role of manager compared with that of business owner/head. The professional manager, as an employee, receives most legitimacy not through sheer role occupancy and location in the status hierarchy, but rather by proxy — through being seen as an agent of the owner/head. An element of personalism

enters here. A manager's legitimacy is not automatically guaranteed by the role, but is contingent upon the perceived strength of his/her relationship with the head. Where this is perceived to be strong, especially if through some form of familial connection, then the proxy will be clear and the manager's legitimacy accepted and responded to. If, however, it is weak or non-existent and the manager does not have the full trust and support of the head, then his/her legitimacy is more fragile and the capacity to exact ready deference and compliance from subordinates more circumspect.

In reality, relationship quality governs much of the force of the harmony obligations. Family business heads typically seek to structure their organizations around personalistic relationships based on trust and mutuality. Naturally, family relationships inherently possess these qualities and heads prefer to locate family members in key organizational positions. Where this is not possible, they favour people with whom there is some type of in-built and reliable basis for a relationship; for example, people from the same clan, kinship, language/dialect or heritage group. Sometimes, people not connected in this way may attain the status of quasi-family members, with similar bonds of mutuality, by sustained support and loyalty. Beyond this level, affinity between the head and employees is more restricted, but still the quality of the relationship is important. Employees who have demonstrated their loyalty and respect can attain a trusted status and expect some consideration from the head. Full-time, permanent employees in key organizational areas may enjoy this privilege. Those who have been unable to establish any kind of relationship with the head or his valued proxies, and especially those in temporary and non-essential positions, are in a much less enviable position. They will be considered merely as paid employees and production components who are highly dispensable. Where there is no meaningful relationship, there are limited requirements for mutuality and reciprocation and less social compulsion to act in accordance with the type of 'moral' requirements outlined above. In these situations, the preservation of harmony is still important, but it may only have a surface quality — an external presentation of harmony — that masks a more impoverished reality.

Such organizational relationships can be graphically depicted in the form of sets of concentric circles with the head in the centre and progressive circles of diminishing relationship quality — and therefore trust, loyalty and mutual obligation — as one goes away from the centre. This is shown in Figure 2 below.

The Exercise of Paternalistic Headship

Paternalistic headship is made manifest by a number of elements that 'flesh out' the form in behavioural and structural terms. The more important, though not exhaustive, elements are represented in Figure 3.

Figure 2
Levels of
Relationship in
OSC
Organizations
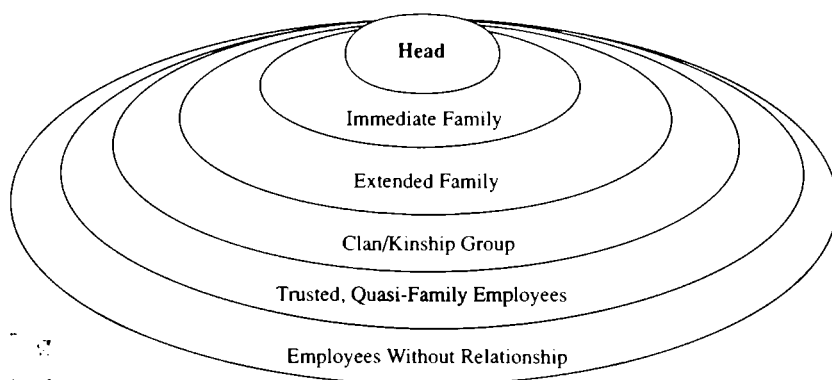
The General Structural Context for Paternalistic Headship

Paternalistic headship leads to, and is reciprocally enabled by certain structural arrangements. This is a natural consequence of the issues discussed under the requirements for order and compliance achievement. The large power distance and accompanying inclinations towards clear hierarchical structuring, the patriarchal authority structures and the acceptance of, and deference to, authority have clear implications for organizational structuring, particularly when considered in conjunction with the familistic, owner-managed form of many OSC enterprises.

The issue of *personalism* is extremely important in the OSC organizational context. It more properly belongs to the relational context of paternalistic headship, but it also has important implications for structural preferences and forms and so is accorded a special position in the schema.

The extent and centrality of personalism in OSC organizations contrasts with the Western bureaucratic legacy built upon an ideal of impersonality. The Weberian bureaucratic ideal posits an abstract and impersonal rule system for the achievement of organizational order and the governance of relationships and behaviour. Persons and personal relationships are effaced; it is positions and their impersonal relationships in a formal system that matter. Organizational order is not assured in the OSC context on that basis. A clearly delineated status hierarchy may be in place, but it is overlaid with networks of personalistic relationships and implicit social rules for proper behaviour. An explicit rule system is unavailable to guide people's behaviour and they can only judge how to behave properly in the context of known or assumed relationships. The quality of personal relationships assumes a far greater weight.

Personalism is reflected in many aspects of organizational and management practice. For example, loyalties and commitments are not to system abstractions, but to persons. Policies, decisions and procedures introduced by heads are not viewed as abstract, impersonal, or separable

Figure 3
Elements of
Paternalistic
Headship
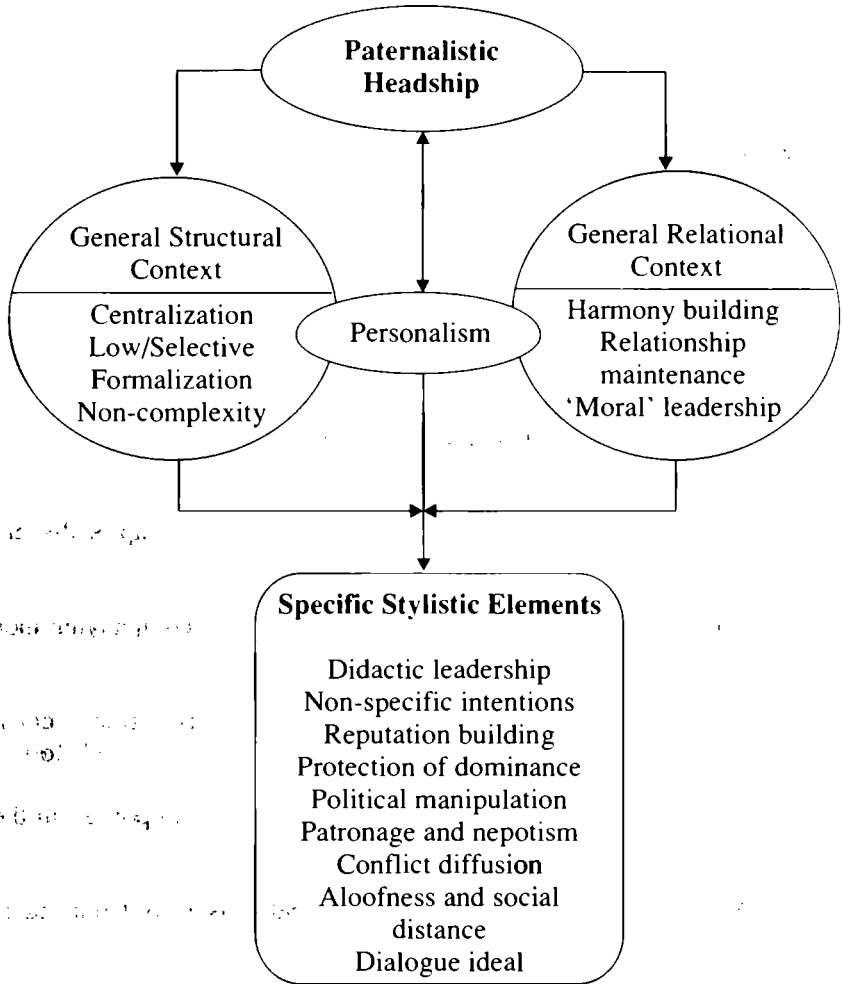
from the person who introduces them. Indeed, decisions themselves are more likely to be based upon personalized knowledge and intuition than upon open information or analytical methods and objective criteria. Managers and heads need to maintain personalistic relations with subordinates and present ideas and appeals to them based upon the quality of the relationship and in a subjective, not a distant and depersonalized, manner. Furthermore, subordinate evaluations are based on subjective judgements of the whole person, not objective measurements of separated aspects of performance.

It is the collectivist and relationship-centred culture that engenders this level of personalism. Personalistic bonds based on relationship, reciprocity, mutual obligation, and informal rules of proper behaviour become a necessary alternative when order is not pursued through juridical means, and inevitable when formal, impersonal bureaucracies are

avoided. Emphasis ineluctably shifts to the quality of personal contacts and relationships; upon who a person is and who you know. It is incumbent upon heads to cultivate and maintain proper relationships within the organization. It is this which provides the solidaristic support for his authority and enables effective action within the cultural parameters. Sustaining a strong position may depend upon the quality of the obligation networks he builds up, including those outside the organization. Even such external business contacts are highly personalistic and are often not governed by legalistic elements such as formal contracts (Chen 1995; Hamilton et al. 1990; Sit and Wong 1988).

Such personalism is not only critical to relationships but also to organizational structuring. It entails higher levels of informality and flexibility, and is an alternative to formal, impersonal structuring. In general, OSC organization structuring tends to be kept to a minimum: unelaborated, simple and flexible. The organization functions of coordination and control are not viewed abstractly and impersonally and thus in need of formal systemization. Instead, 'they will be viewed in specific concrete terms, be contingent upon context, and be personalistic and relationship specific, utilising implicit, even moralistic, mechanisms' (Kirkbride and Westwood 1993: 328). Empirical evidence for the relatively lower level of structural complexity in the case of Hong Kong organizations is provided Redding and Pugh (1986) and Redding (1990).

Structural unelaboration includes relatively low levels of differentiation and structural complexity. In particular, there is a tendency not to build extensive staff/support units onto basic line-function structures. This is partly a consequence of high centralization (see below) where activities, which might elsewhere be delegated to specialist managers or other professionals, are kept under the head's control. It also reflects a distrust of the professional: 'To have a personnel department . . . or a financial analyst, or work study function, is to bring into the organisation a possible challenge to managerial authority. Expert power can undermine the power of relationship or patronage . . .' (Redding 1990: 162). Heads will retain decision-making control over such issues. It should be noted that such structural non-complexity also has non-culturalist determinants reflecting the needs for flexibility and speedy response, given the exigencies of the business environment in which these enterprises exist. In some cases it also has to do with the inclinations to smaller size, in which case, such additional units are seen either as unnecessary or as an unwarranted expense.

An unsurprising structural concomitant of paternalistic headship is high levels of centralization. Heads assume the patriarchal right to make unilateral decisions on matters pertaining to all aspects of the business and to determine which are significant issues to be retained for their judgement. Of course, the fact that heads are invariably equity owners, who naturally seek to protect their own financial resources, complements the cultural tendencies towards centralization. Subordinates

are permitted limited access to, and engagement with, decision-making processes. The rules, criteria and methods by which decisions are reached are not open to public scrutiny (Bond 1991: 85), and the head is not so widely accountable for decisions as a U.S. manager. The authority structuring means that subordinates generally accept this situation and neither expect to be involved in the decision-making process nor consider it appropriate to question or challenge the decision-making right, or decisions of the head.

Empirical evidence in the case of Hong Kong supports this depiction of high levels of centralization (Pugh and Redding 1985; Redding 1990; Redding and Pugh 1986; Wong 1985). Hong Kong organizations were shown to be 27 percent more centralized than U.K. equivalents (Redding 1990: 161–162). Heads consider certain areas as critical, and information and decisions related to them will not be discussed with others. These include issues concerning the general condition of the organization, its direction or strategies, financial matters, and important personnel issues. Such matters are considered to be the private domain of the head, his family and/or trusted parties only. There may be some selective decentralization on basic operating issues.

High personalism and centralization are conducive to low levels of organizational formalization, and, whilst this is generally true, there is some complexity in the issue. Comparative U.K.–H.K. research does not reveal any significant difference in overall levels of formalization (Pugh and Redding 1985), but closer examination shows selective formalization with basic operational activities being quite extensively formalized whilst other functions, such as personnel, much less so. It seems that Chinese heads are keen to formally control essential front-line activities, often where spans of control are larger anyway, whilst retaining direct, personal control over other functions. It could also be that the quality of the relationship between heads and basic operating staff cannot be assured and thus heads are more wary of relying upon personalistic controls.

The General Relational Context for Paternalistic Headship

Given the general requirement for harmony, the obvious paramount issue in terms of the relational context for paternalistic headship is harmony building. Here we simply emphasize the manifestation of this in behavioural terms under the auspices of a paternalistic style.

Heads need to be seen to engage in behaviours and display values and attitudes that build and maintain harmony in the group/organization. Apart from the cultural imperative, this is also necessary, given that a harmonious set of tightly woven relationships is the social glue that holds the organization together in the absence of a bureaucratic rule system and extensive formalization. Effective headship, under which genuine loyalty, commitment and solidaristic sentiments are generated, is contingent upon the head's behaving in socially appropriate ways so

as to sustain harmony. However, we should note again the dynamic interdependence here. The existence of clear and agreed-upon hierarchical and authority structures — and the social rules for compliance — allowing for the establishment of order and compliance, reciprocally generate the very conditions for a naturally harmonious social pattern. As long as people accept and accede to those structural arrangements and stick to their roles, as culturally they are obliged to do, harmony is maintained. That this is so, becomes perhaps the essential task of the paternalistic head. In Korea, for example, heads need to display benevolence, concern and affection, whereas subordinates are expected to 'understand their subordinate position and dependent roles and fulfill them precisely and with sincerity . . . Social order and coordinated action are maintained by understanding one's respective role duties in a senior or junior position and, in turn, observing these duties rigorously' (Meek and Song 1993: 296–297).

Without dealing with specifics, some of which will be covered later, the essential means by which harmony is sustained is through establishing and maintaining proper relationships with others: both internal and external to the organization. This does not imply friendly 'chumminess' between heads and others, or a diminution of the power or social distance between them. Rather, it means that heads are publicly seen to be adhering to expected attitudes and behaviours, working to maintain harmony, and exhibiting a cognisance of the full personhood of others. The relationship needs to be personalistic and not one of an abstractly superior position to an abstractly subordinate one. In general terms, relationships must be managed in ways that give recognition to complex expectations of obligation, mutuality and reciprocation.

Relationships are more readily maintained when heads display the type of moral leadership outlined earlier. Not 'moral' in the sense of conformance to high or universal principles, but rather of behaving within situations and relationships in culturally required and expected ways. For the paternalistic head, this has at least two facets. First, he needs to be seen to adhere personally to rules of proper and virtuous behaviour and thus serve as a model for others. Second, he needs to signal that the power inherent in the role is not being exercised purely for his own self interest, but on behalf of the collective, taking account of the well-being of all concerned. This does not at all imply disbursing the organization's wealth and resources to members in some egalitarian fashion. The collective to which he is primarily obligated and for whose benefit his power should be exercised is his own family. This primacy accorded to his family members, and others in close relationship to him, is fully recognized and legitimized by others. Taking account of family interests would, in itself, be considered as proper and moral behaviour. Ideally, the head should also not completely neglect the well-being of other members. Specifically, he needs to reciprocate subordinate compliance and loyalty with considerateness, human heartedness and a recognition of their personhood.

These ideal prescriptions should not be overemphasized. It needs to be remembered that these obligations only really have force where there is a quality relationship between the head and the members. Low level, and non-essential staff with limited relationship connection with the head will not be privileged to these types of reciprocities. Furthermore, the harmony may have more of a surface quality than real substance. The imperative is not to allow conflict and dissensus to become overt and disrupt the apparent order of the system. The smooth surface may mask a tougher and more volatile depth.

Specific Stylistic Elements of Paternalistic Headship

This section will briefly document some further and more specific aspects of a paternalistic headship style. We draw on existing research where it exists, but much of what follows is more speculatively based on anecdote and extrapolation. A full, systematic, research-based exploration of the mechanics of paternalistic headship remains to be undertaken. This presentation makes no claims to exhaustiveness.

In his study of Chinese enterprise leadership in Taiwan, Silin (1976) coined the unusual phrase *didactic leadership* to capture the essence of the leadership style. The term is complex, embedded with more than one meaning. At one level, it metaphorically depicts the head in a form of master–novice relationship with subordinates. The head is an exemplar, and particularly a moral one, that subordinates should strive to emulate. At another, albeit related, level, the term denotes a more calculating and strategic posture on the part of the head. As exemplar, he conveys to subordinates how he achieved success and what is expected of others if they are to emulate and contribute to that success. However, he will not do this explicitly because of 'his superiority, social distance and concern for secrecy' (Whitley 1992: 62). Instead, followers are expected to infer from the head's actions and indirect pronouncements what his beliefs and intentions are and to align their own behaviour accordingly. 'As moral inferiors [signalled by their subordinate position] they cannot question these beliefs, or even discuss them formally, and are expected to accept the . . . [head's] decisions as a product of superior wisdom' (Whitley 1995: 62 — citing Redding and Wong 1986).

Furthermore, given the centralization, lack of formalization and personalism, the head is the organizational information focus. Only he will have a full picture of the totality of the organization: its status and possible future direction. Such a nodal position means that he will possess, and make strategic use of, information, knowledge and expertise in relation to the organization and its business. The personalism and lack of formalization ensures that knowledge and information is not objectified and made open to scrutiny by others, but remains the private

domain of the head. This becomes a valuable power resource and he will strategically and selectively release information to subordinates. No other individual will have full access, and thus no one will have as full and complete a picture. Subordinate dependence on the head is enhanced by this strategy and it further strengthens his power position.

The politically strategic use of information under *didactic leadership* emasculates subordinates by depriving them of the information necessary to have a clear idea of what is going on in the organization. This is exacerbated by heads' inclinations to be extremely *non-specific about their intentions*. They rarely explicitly reveal plans or intended lines of action to subordinates, nor do they clearly say what is expected of the subordinate. This partly results from the fact that intentions and plans are often in loose, tacit forms — based on the head's intuitive judgement, grounded on his extensive experience and personal immersion in his business environment — rather than having been formulated systematically and objectively. It is also, however, a further manifestation of the didactic style and a high context communication culture (Hall 1976) in which subordinates are supposed to be able to pick up subtle cues from the context of the head's words and behaviour and correctly infer what he wants. Even basic instructions and directions may not be explicit or formalized, and this further reinforces the need for personalistic relationships. A measure of subordinate loyalty and good followership rests upon the capacity to understand and interpret the head's obscure intentions (Silin 1976; Redding and Wong 1986). The undisclosed and tacit nature of intentions has the added value of allowing heads to retain flexibility. Open declarations and formalizations reveal plans and intentions for public scrutiny, and therefore assessment. Despite strong patriarchal power and rights, heads are still judged in terms of performance and business acumen; particularly in terms of being able to correctly intuit a successful course of action.

Heads are very mindful of these expectations of social and economic performance and of their reputations. In the status-conscious cultures of the OSC, reputation is of high significance. Not only 'face' and social prestige depend upon it, but also the more pragmatic capacity to maintain good business relations and strengthen the admiration and respect of the members of the organization. The most treasured asset of a Chinese businessman is *xinyong* — which connotes both good reputation and solid credit-worthiness (Kraar 1994a). Heads build reputations through being seen as successful intuitors of the business environment and establishing a solid track record of good decisions and outcomes. *Reputation building* is also accomplished by the head being perceived as possessing virtuous qualities, exhibiting moral leadership, and protecting and enhancing the well-being of his family. Reputation building in external relations is critically important, and heads need to expend considerable time and energy to building up good relationships and promoting their image in the business community. It is vitally important

to be known as someone who is reliable and trustworthy: someone who will honour a business relationship. A good reputation has particular acuity in the OSC context because of the personalism and the lower level of formality and legalism. Because business and organizational relationships are not governed by contractual and legalistic mechanisms, the quality of personal relationships and the attributions of good reputation and integrity become crucial.

Despite the clear authority of the head and the prescriptions for 'moral leadership' and harmony, they engage in strategies and *political manipulation* designed to *protect their dominance*. In particular, they seek to diminish and downplay the role and contributions of others and to ensure that success is attributed to them. This partly reflects the limited and bounded trust existing between people who have not established a special relationship, such as that between the head and a non-family organization member (Redding 1990). It also derives from the importance of the reputation requirement and the need for heads to be seen as a competent performer.

The *didactic style* is one strategy contributing to this. Heads are centralized repositories of critical knowledge and information; others have limited access. By strategically manipulating this position they can disempower others and strengthen their seeming omnipotence. In addition, they will, in many other subtle ways, contrive to diminish the contributions of others so as to lessen the apparent impact and significance of what they have done. The lack of formalization also aids in this tactic. Duties and responsibilities are not fixed and clearly formalized, but remain somewhat vague and fluid, capable of being redefined and altered by the head. This fluidity weakens the position of subordinates and increases their dependency on him.

The centralization, didactic style and lack of formality make it extremely difficult for others to construct alternative views of organizational issues and to mount a credible challenge to the head. Indeed, heads make it clear that alternative and challenging views are not welcome and will be interpreted as a challenge to their authority and an act of disloyalty. Subordinates need to show that they understand and are supportive of the head's implicit intentions in order to achieve the status of a good and loyal follower. Good ideas and successful actions by subordinates will not receive praise or commendation from the head, they may even be appropriated by him and it would generally be considered fitting for him to take the credit. Subjective performance evaluations also make subordinates dependent upon the head's will. Strategies and tactics of this nature serve to bolster the head's position whilst simultaneously diminishing that of others, thereby enhancing the dependency relationship.

An unsurprising corollary of paternalism is the role of patron, and an extensive system of *patronage* is an important part of heads' operational armoury. They can use the power and the resources at their disposal to do favours and provide things for others. The reciprocity norms embed-

ded in the social system mean that a subordinate so patronized feels a binding obligation to return the favour. Resource and power differentials obviously make full reciprocation difficult, so either the subordinate remains perpetually indebted to the boss, or attempts to reciprocate by displaying dedication, hard work and loyalty. Heads can make use of patronage in strategic and differential ways so as to construct a binding network of gratitude and obligation.

Nepotism is widely practised in OSC contexts and does not have the kinds of negative connotations it holds in Anglo-American contexts. Indeed, in collectivist and familistic cultures, heads have a moral duty to try and ensure the well-being of their family members. Thus, heads frequently place family members or kin in key organizational positions. This partly reflects expected familistic solidarity and obligation, but is also a strategic measure, since the level of trust in out-group, non-family members is low and heads would normally be unwilling to cede any organizational power to people with whom they did not have a strong relationship — and family connection is a firmer guarantee of that. OSC organizations very commonly have a controlling cabal of family members in directorships or other senior management positions. If immediate family members are not available, then extended family members, and if not them, then wider kinship groups, or people from the same clan or province, in successively weaker links of trust. As described earlier, organizations often have concentric circles of bonded relationships, from an inner core of blood relatives, to an outer core of non-aligned organization members.

Many of the above tactics and strategies make it clear that the requirements for, and salience of harmony do not necessarily entail an apolitical or tension-free environment. Despite the clarity of the head's position and the hierarchical ordering, a substantial amount of covert political activity often pervades OSC organizations. This tension and the apparent contradiction is not a flaw in the analysis — any complex social system will have similar types of tensions and incoherences. A number of the facets discussed above contribute to the politicized nature of the system. It is, firstly, a consequence of the prevailing personalism and absence of formality. In addition, the head's didacticism, divide and rule strategies, secrecy and non-specification of intentions, generate a degree of uncertainty, and means that order for those at levels below the head and his immediate coterie is, at least in part, a negotiated one. Other organization members, particularly second-line managers, are kept unsure about the nature and quality of the relationship anyone has with the boss and their own relative status in the fluid structure. Subordinates strive to establish their own relationship and status, to get near the head and receive his patronage. They can be manipulative so as to become privileged to information and be in a position to more accurately intuit his intentions. Often, this will be done individually, but sometimes it leads to the formation of cliques and other groupings. This fragmentation may be tacitly encouraged by heads as a further

enhancement to the dependency of divide and rule. There may be a pervasive political underbelly to the organization.

The above should not, however, be allowed to give the impression of an arena of open conflict and instability. The primary, shared aspiration is still for a harmonious system. The appearance of harmony and good relationships is what is culturally valued, even though it may merely be a veneer masking a m ore fragmented, politically riven and anomic reality. *Open* conflict is not culturally acceptable and is widely viewed as a threat to harmony and the viability of the total system. Conflict-avoiding is a common characterization of OSC culture: overt expressions of emotion and anger, open confrontation, and challenges to authority structures are culturally devalued and seen as threatening to the carefully constructed harmonious system (Kirkbride et al. 1991). Thus, in spite of the politicking, a head's prime responsibility is to foster *conflict diffusion*: to ensure that open conflicts do not erupt and to be prepared to intervene to diffuse potential conflict situations. The emphasis is upon conflict prevention and diffusion since OSC cultures typically have restricted mechanisms for resolving conflict once it has developed, but elaborate mechanisms for preventing it emerging (Westwood et al. 1992). A key activity of heads is to be alert to the situation and invoke these mechanisms judiciously so as to maintain the appearance of harmony. The collusion of organization members with the cultural injunctions against overt conflict and confrontation, especially in unbalanced authority situations, means that this is not a particularly arduous task.

Another potential misinterpretation resulting from the complexities of paternalistic headship is the impression that the personalism and relationship orientation mean that heads should be on intimate, friendly terms with organization members. Requirements for harmony and considerateness do not imply this. Paternal heads sustain a *social distance* between themselves and others. This is consistent with the patriarchal role and the father–son type of relationship. Heads seek to maintain the dignity and authority of their position and not to dilute it by in any way equalizing the relationship. Silin (1976: 66) sums this up: 'Superiors must convey an impression of aloofness . . . the boss is preferably a person of considerable stature and reserved, taciturn deportment'. Subordinates are, again, generally collusive; they are respectful, deferential and may even be in awe of the 'boss'. It is not seen as appropriate to attempt to bridge the social gap and they would not feel comfortable if such a thing were initiated, even by the head. This is necessary to sustain the role conformance and hierarchical structuring so important to the whole ordering of the system. Relationships are not unfriendly, but there will be limited, rather ritualistic socializing in which social distances are preserved. Emotional bonds between superior and subordinate are unlikely to develop. This is an important issue since the limited and bounded **trust** between non-family members makes the establishment of close relationships undesirable. There is a tactical point

too in keeping subordinates at a distance, since it prevents an emotional bond developing which may entail dangers of reciprocal obligations for the head.

Close friendly relationships are not necessary, but, as was made clear earlier, ideally, heads should behave in ways that reaffirms and does not do violence to the personhood, dignity and 'face' of the subordinate. The notion of the *dialogue ideal* was originally used in the Thai context (Thompson 1989) to describe a head's orientation towards subordinates that seeks to meet these requirements, but it is felt to have wider applicability. It means that heads work to sustain open and informal communication with subordinates. They need to have personal contact with them and be able to indicate that they are aware of their prevailing sentiments and views. At the same time, an opportunity is afforded by which subordinates are able to sense the expectations and intentions of the superior. This is likely to occur in highly informal exchanges between the two, in unscheduled exchanges, or at arranged social gatherings such as company dinners and picnics — which are extremely popular in OSC businesses. It does not take the form of formal consultation procedures and mechanisms found in Western organizations, nor is it intended or expected to provide a means for subordinates to make a substantive input into decisions or problem solving, and definitely does not reflect any employee rights of involvement or consultation. It is a subtle feeling out of sentiment and the primary function, once again, is to preserve harmony by allowing the head to appear to be concerned about the dignity and personhood of the subordinate.

Conclusion

The essential problematics of leadership may be universally manifest, but the nature of the relationship between led and leader, the warrant for the right and the capacity to lead, the shaping and enactment of leadership style and behaviour, the exercise of leadership, and the requirements and expectations of followership, can all exhibit cross-cultural variability. It has been argued that the dominant orthodoxy in management theorizing about leadership is constituted by, and remains ineluctably tied to, the specific cultural milieu of the United States. These approaches to leadership are culture-bound through being deeply embedded in a particular set of values and assumptions. The universality and cross-cultural transferability of U.S. leadership formulations is challenged. This has high acuity given the extensive promulgation, by design or by default, of those formulations to the rest of the world — and to OSC as much as anywhere. This critique is used as the basis for a detailed consideration of an alternative, culturally-informed warrant for 'leadership' in the OSC context. This alternative conceptualization is based on a model that draws on the deep-seated and persisting cultural values and assumptions prevailing in that part of the world —

an assumptive base that is markedly different from the one upon which the U.S. formulations are based.

The core of this alternative resides on the heuristically deployed notion of *headship* and the distinctive dual formations of hierarchy and patriarchal authority with harmony building/maintenance and 'moral' leadership. OSC *paternalistic headship* is constituted through a distinctive admixture of clearly delineated and legitimized patriarchal authority, together with a reciprocal obligation for paternal benevolence and 'virtuocracy'. This formation is embedded in the cultural values and structures of the OSC, grounded particularly in the centrality of the family unit, the values and structures of which form a paradigmatic model for other societal structures and relationships. The structural and behavioural manifestations of the style are delineated in the latter part of the paper. A set of particular structures and practices are presented which, whilst not tension-free, combine to provide a coherent account of paternalistic headship within the OSC context that is in sharp contrast to the depictions and prescriptions of the North American leadership corpus.

The presentation serves to warn against untrammelled and unthinking transference/take-up of U.S.-based models and practices of leadership in OSC contexts. It calls for caution in the practice of North American managers doing business or re-located to the region and for the importation and imposition of training and education practices that draw uncritically on the U.S. models without due sensitivity to the cultural differences and specificities of how leadership is conceived of and practised among the OSC. It also calls for more confidence in an indigenous OSC approach that builds naturally on prevailing cultural norms and values, and for a closer examination and more detailed reporting and support for this highly viable alternative to the U.S. orthodoxy.

Notes

1. These, and most of the estimates below are taken from *The Economist*, 19th March 1996, Special Report.
2. The use of the masculine form here is not a neglectful sexism but rather a reflection of the patriarchal realities that persist in OSC contexts. The role of the *head* will, in the vast majority of cases, be a male since this is the traditional gendered structuring of relations. The masculine form will be retained whilst discussions of OSC heads is pursued.

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