

**ORGANIZATION TRAITS UNDER CONDITIONS OF RELATIONAL  
DOMINANCE:  
THE ARCHETYPAL CONFUCIAN ORGANIZATION**

John Dixon  
Department of Political Science and Public Administration,  
Middle East Technical University,  
Çankaya, Ankara, Turkey  
[dixon@metu.edu.kz](mailto:dixon@metu.edu.kz), [johndixon95436@gmail.com](mailto:johndixon95436@gmail.com)

Peggy Pik-Sum Wong  
(Formerly) University of Plymouth  
United Kingdom

***ABSTRACT***

*The essential character of an organization depends upon the tapestry of the social relationships occurring within it. This paper seeks to distinguish the organizational traits that follow the organizational dominance of a socially foreordained web of interpersonal obligation that are brought to the workplace. Illustratively, when these social relationship obligations are informed by Confucianism they delineate the archetypal Confucian organization. Such an organization can be characterized as being benevolently authoritarian, with a rich, varied, intricately interwoven human mosaic. This is because it is people-centered and didactic, accepting and accommodating the moral requirements of a socially sanctioned and reinforced overlay of inclusive, comprehensive, and subtle social obligation that must be fulfilled in the workplace, as elsewhere. The focus of management, which draws upon the power of relationship traditions and customs, is to pursue organizational goals and interests by managing interpersonal relationships and the relationship of relationships, in order to avoid interpersonal conflict and to gain subordinate commitment and compliance.*

Key words: relational dominance, Confucianism, organizational traits

## INTRODUCTION

The essential character of any organization depends upon the tapestry of social relationships—patterns of social actions (interactions)—occurring within it. These relationships portray the meaning-content for the mutual interdependence of the organizations members (Dixon *et al.* 2009), so developing and sustaining the organizationally desired and mutually recognized states of connectedness between them. This relationship mosaic reflects complexities in the way members of that organization choose to interact with each other.

The proposition advanced in this paper is that when social actions in an organizational setting can be attributed to perceptions of the supreme importance of interpersonal relationships that are culturally determined (relational dominance<sup>1</sup>) (Ho 1998, Ho and Chiu 1998, Ho and Peng 1998, Ho, Chan and Zhang 2001, Ho, Peng, Lai and Chan 2001), the resultant organizational phenomena can best be explained by analysis of those relationships (methodological relationalism) (Ho 1998, Ritzer and Gindoff 1992). These relationships are shaped by an inclusive and comprehensive set of customary social role or interpersonal action obligations (expectations)—relational cognitions—arising from an historically and culturally contingent set of socially-elaborated values, traditions, and practices—adherence to which is secured by a set of socially reinforced sanctions in the event of non-compliance. The goal of this paper is to distinguish the organizational traits that follow the organizational dominance of a set of relational cognitions that creates an overlay of an intricate and subtle web of obligation between organizational members. The paper has draws, illustratively, on one example of such set of relational constructs, namely that informed by Confucian<sup>2</sup> ethics. This permits the delineation of the traits of the archetypal Confucian organization.

## SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS UNDER CONDITIONS OF RELATIONAL DOMINANCE

Social relations are the product of the establishment of a state of connectedness between individuals. This connectedness gives rise to relatively stable patterns of social interactions, and results in them coming together because they have some common purpose to fulfill. The social hierarchy in any relational situation is known because the rank and priority of those present is taken to be in accordance with the rigidly hierarchical relationship whether determined by a set of explicit rules (for formal social arrangements) or by trust (for informal social arrangements). This predetermined and socially foreordained ranking and prioritization of the actors involved gives rise to social relations that are the subject of a set of ‘obligatory’ rules of ‘required’ behaviours that choreograph a set of obligatory ritualistic social actions. This follows from each actors’ acceptance that their social relationships are so foreordained. In essence, such relationships can be represented as the portfolio of dutiful action-obligations. These make social actions subject to mutual considerations. The intensity and duration of this mutuality is determined by not only the nature of the interpersonal relationships but also the

---

<sup>1</sup> Relational dependence and methodological relationalism have also been extended to other types of relational-determinant organizational settings. Some studies have identified the relational dimension in bureaucratic organisations in colonial and postcolonial societies, such as ‘psedobureaucracy’, ‘bantu bureaucracy’ and ‘formalistic bureaucracy’ (Pearce 2001: 66), but their predominate relational influence is dependent on the narrower focused traditional family and clan relationships.

<sup>2</sup> Confucius’ (551-479 B.C.) teachings are preserved in the *Analects of Confucius* (Muller, 2004), which were recorded and compiled by his disciples and their followers (Fung 2006, Wen, 2012).

relationship of relationships. Thus, according to Ho (1998: 5), the holistic analysis of social actions and interactions under conditions of relational dependency requires of dialectic logic to be applied to:

- the inner dialectics of each action-taker (the internal relational cognitive processes);
- the outer dialectics of the maze of relational roles (the external interpersonal processes); and
- the interaction between those internal and external processes.

This makes ‘self’ inherently relational, with interactions with ‘others’ conducted on a continuum of mutual obligations.

Under the influence of relational dominance, organizational life is focused on the balancing of relationships. These relational cognitions (inner dialectics) dictate relational roles (outer dialectics), which requires the competencies of self-awareness, consciousness of the ‘other’, and meta-cognition of the relationship of relationships (Ho *et al.* 2001). Hence, analysing a relational situation is complicated because “the social arena is alive with many actors interacting directly or indirectly with one another in a multiplicity of relationships” (Ho 1998: 5). Thus, action-takers are subjected to, or influenced by, the actions of a diverse array of other people, which focuses their attention on the relationship of relationships.

Only by action-takers knowing the foreordained rank, priority, and behavioural expectations assigned to each person with whom they have, or could have, a relationship, can they know the totality of their social reality—their universe of relationships—which they reveal by their behaviour to others in a social whole—family, group, organization, or society. These relationship constructs inform them of the diversity of their ‘*required*’ social roles that they must follow (Ho and Chiu 1998) with respect to their:

- *interpersonal* relationships with another individual;
- *intra-group* relationships with other individuals as members of groups to which they belong (in-groups); and
- *inter-group* relationship with individuals in groups to which they do not belong (out-groups).

Thus, there is a need to understand and appreciate the importance of these relationship constructs in the formulation of action-takers’ intentional mental states—the interface between the *external expectations*—the dutiful action-obligations—and the *internal feelings* held about those expectations (Ho *et al.* 2006)—that give rise to a set of compelling motivation to adopt the ‘*obligatory*’ courses of action. These action dispositions define a distinctive metaphysical perspective on what it means to be human. This can be typified as an ideal-type social actor—a Model of Man<sup>3</sup> (Dixon *et al.* 2009, Hollis 1977)—*homo consanguinitus* (Relational Man)—who is taken to be always adhering conscientiously to the relationship rules, roles, norms, and practices delineated by an historically and culturally contingent set of socially-elaborated values, traditions, and practices. Illustratively, when

---

<sup>3</sup> It must be emphasized that any Model of Man is an analytical construct, which, as Weber ([1903/1917] 1949) pointed out, cannot embrace the infinite diversity of particular phenomena, so making selection and abstraction unavoidable. Moreover, if an abstract Model of Man becomes concrete, as if it actually describes the behaviour of real people, there is always the danger of reification, which Whitehead (1925: 75 and 77) referred to as the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.

these social relationship obligations are informed by the tenets of Confucian<sup>4</sup> ethics, a distinctive set of interpersonal practices is expected to be performed at the threat of experiencing the shame and loss of ‘face’ that comes with their non-performance (Redding 1993).

## HOMO CONSANGUINITAS

*Homo consanguinitas* typifies individuals who understand relational situations as domains in which

- their position is established by the traditional or customary relationships they are expected to have with others present; and
- their social interactions are conducted according to a set of socially foreordained relationships rules and obligations.

Thus, *homo consanguinitas* accept the idea of socially sanctioned constraints being imposed on both their individual decision sovereignty and the determination of their social actions. This guides them to believe that they must engage with others in accordance with those relationship obligation—*I must do what I am traditionally obliged to do*.

In a setting where Confucian ethics prevails, this would be the product of *homo consanguinitas* experiencing a life-long exposure to the ecology of beliefs—Confucian relationship constructs—about what is morally correct behavior (see Li and Wen 2014), giving rise to the belief that by fulfilling their moral obligations they are

- advancing their own self-cultivation towards perfect goodness;
- valuing appropriately the benefits of being in a state of dependence upon others, and/or
- pursuing their familial interests, grounded in the values related to filial piety.<sup>5</sup>

This gives *homo consanguinitas* a distinctive set of perspectives on ‘self’, ‘the other’ and social relationships.

### On Self

Because the social world in which *homo consanguinitas* conduct their affairs is a complex relational environment, their construction of ‘self’——“the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself [sic] as an object” (Rosenberg 1979)—is ‘other’-referenced—an *interdependent self*.<sup>6</sup> As they navigate their way through their social world—as they expect and accept it to be—they are fully aware of the complexity of their network of ritualistically choreographed interpersonal relationships, the importance of reading relational situations correctly, and the reality of mutual interdependency. They are always sensitive to, and ever thoughtful about, the feelings of others and about their own feelings in response. Thus, they emphasize the importance of appropriately acknowledging

---

<sup>4</sup> In Confucian moral principles, there is a clear and layered social hierarchy, defined by age (the older dominate the younger), gender (males dominate females), and occupation (traditionally, in descending order: scholars, farmers, craftsmen, and merchant) (see Liu and Liu 2003: 46).

<sup>5</sup> Under the Confucian meaning of materialism, the income unit is the family rather than the individual, a product of and shared values, belief and attitudes that give rise to familial collective objectives (Ho 2006).

<sup>6</sup> The Confucian concept of ‘self’ (*ji*) according to a Confucian scholar in the *Qing* Dynasty (1644-1912) must be understood as the person (*ren*), which has four meanings: human being, the public, a group of local people, and others (Jiao, cited in Yang 2006: 341). ‘Self’ is where consciousness, knowledge and propriety dwells and it refers to relationships between ‘self’ and ‘others’.

'others' and appreciating their mutual interdependency. Behaving appropriately toward 'others' builds of cooperative relationships, and cooperation, which is seen as the best way of achieving goals. This proposition dominates their perceptions of 'self'. To them, 'self' is at the epicentre of their social network 'webs' (Redding 1993).

They have a need to live up to social expectations, so as to become a *socially idealized self* (Yang 2006). They, thus, fully appreciate the need to confront the challenges of self-cultivation and the avoid spectres of shame and loss of 'face' that comes with social disapproval (Liu and Liu 2003).

**Self-cultivation.** Inner power—will power—determines whether a person, by self-cultivation, can become a good, cultivated or superior person (*junzi*), or remain a person confronting the shame and loss of 'face' because of the public humiliation that comes with social disapproval. Self-cultivation can, in the long run, correct 'bad' behaviors, including the neglect of 'others' by refusing to act in conformity with the Confucian moral code. Self-cultivation can be achieved by a process of learning by self-reflection and by interacting with 'important others' with whom they have social relationships (*The Analects of Confucius* IV, 2).

**Shame.** This is self-rejection due to the perceived rejection by 'others' or to their own sense of shameful personal failure, accompanied by the fear of public humiliation or ridicule (Ho *et al.* 2004: 73). It has the function of promoting *righteousness* and *virtue*, which leads to self-correction (*the Analects of Confucius* XIII. 6).

**'Face'.** This is the emotional response that follows a public expression of approval or disapproval that has been perceived by a person to have resulted in the gaining or loosing of moral or social standing (Ho *et al.* 2007). Saving 'face' is serious matters as 'face' is a determinant of social actions that are essential to relationship building, and to the maintenance and development of interpersonal networks (Redding 1993).

## On the Other

To *homo consanguinitas*, the classification of 'the other' is in accordance with their closeness to 'self'—their psychological distance and their importance: from close family members and father-like figures ('important others'), to associates and friends ('personal others'), to distant strangers ('impersonal others'). So, 'others' are categorized, their status established, so establishing their obligations towards them. 'Important others' are permitted to help shape 'self' construct appropriate meaning and determine behaviours—'self's' consciousness—because they are a worthy influence (Ho 1998: 4). As Confucius said: "The Superior Man (*junzi*)...has no friends who are not of equal (moral) calibre" (*The Analects of Confucius* I-8).

**Human Nature.** To *homo consanguinitas*, people may well be errant, but their behaviour can be changed by adherence to the Confucian relational moral values. Thus, in all relationships there should be respect, self-discipline and self-restraint, loyalty and compliance, and obligations and responsibilities. People are morally obliged, reinforced by social expectations, to practice human goodness. But the tension between the need to satisfy pragmatic material needs and the need to exhibit a consciousness of becoming a good, cultured or superior person—by providing 'personal others' with revealing virtuous acts—has left attitudes towards strangers negotiable. The attentive care given to, and supportive attitude expressed toward, 'personal others' (friends, and associates) stands in contrast to the uncaring

and apathetic attitude towards ‘impersonal others’ (strangers), which is intensified by a severe in-group/out-group dichotomy. The pursuit of material gain, whether for the for the benefit of ‘self’ or ‘others’ has to be justified by a righteous standard of behaviour. Individual intentional mental states must be demonstrably subjugated to relational obligations and duties, because there is social expectation of reciprocal relationships, in conformity with the long-settled Confucian norms.

**Social Connection.** To *homo consanguinitas*, the acknowledged basis of social connections is *guanxi*, a set of unwritten interpersonal behavioural norms, premised on ‘self’s’ relationships with ‘others’ involving a long-term orientation and a set of mutual expectations (Fung 2006). *Guanxi* is a special sense of obligation of one party to another and can involve ceremonial gift exchanges that bind people together into a complex web of obligation and indebtedness (Dixon and Newman 1998, Fung 2006). This complex social connectedness is inclusive of interpersonal, intra-group, and inter-group relationships. It, thus, provides the outline of the game of social interaction, and offers guidance on the trustworthiness of strangers.

**Trust.** The granting of trust by *homo consanguinitas* must be preceded by an examination of where the person to be trusted is located in their relationship network, followed by the confirmation that they adhere to a fundamentally common set of socially accepted relational moral values (*relational-based creditable trust*). This is discoverable by means of an intuitive, intersubjective, interpersonal communications process. Trustworthiness is judged by social role performance. Thus, limited and bounded trust is built up in accordance with a set of reciprocal relationship rules: essentially, “you trust your family absolutely, your friends and acquaintances to the degree that mutual dependence has been established and face invested in them. With everybody else you make no assumptions about their goodwill” (Redding 1993: 66).

The trustworthiness of strangers is known only after engaging in relationship building, involving the presentation of evidence of the reciprocity of relationship obligations (*guanxi*). Trust is maintained by the accumulation of trust credit (*xin yong*)—social capital. Stranger would be regarded as more trustworthy if they have a *guanxi* relationship with the trustors, or with a third person who has a close relationship with the trustors, which enables them to mapped strangers onto their relationship network.

## On Social Relationships

These are grounded in moral obligations shaped by the ethical propositions that endorse the absolute relevance of the virtuous human qualities—akin to Aristotle’s ([350 BC] 2004) virtue ethics (*ethicai aretai*)—because being of excellent character ensures that moral obligations are habitually met. Confucian ethics shape moral obligations by giving practical guidelines on how *homo consanguinitas* must behave in order to achieve the virtuousness that comes with adhering to a set of socially acclaimed moral and ethical rules that govern human relationships. The outcome sought is the realization of the ideal Confucian society<sup>7</sup> (Bond and Smith 1998, Fung 2006, Redding 1993, Ho 1995, Nisbett 2003). The following human qualities should, thus, be embedded in any social relationship:

---

<sup>7</sup> This is one in which social integration and social solidarity are sustained by people being neither calculating nor self-focused (*The Analects of Confucius* IV, 12); recognising hierarchy and ranking (III, 7); and recognising diversity and socialisation (XVII, 2).

- *humanness (ren)*—being benevolent and seeking perfect goodness, so become a model of a good, cultivated, or superior person (*junzi*);
- *propriety (li)*—behaving in the appropriate way—with proper speech, body language, and manners—given the status, age, and gender of the recipient and the situations in which the social interaction takes place (Muller, 2004);
- *righteousness (yi)*—being fair in the performance of the social obligations that are appropriate to particular individuals in particular situations; and
- *virtue (de)*—being virtuous by cultivating humanness, achieved by acting with propriety.

The resultant ethical behavioural standards are:

- *mutuality*—showing respect by the mutual acknowledgement of ‘others’ in the appropriate way;
- *reciprocity*—having good intentions, amenable attitudes, valuing friendship and brotherhood, and respecting teachers and elders;
- *self-discipline*—being self-restrained, even when it is an arduous struggle;
- *loyalty*—behaving obediently, dutifully, and with propriety, so being faithful to those with a higher social ranking; and
- *obligation*—being ethical, honest, and trustworthy, and valuing social harmony (by fulfilling all moral obligation).

Role performance, according to Ho *et al.* (2006: 25), is dominated by “the overriding potency of interpersonal relationships, relative to individual and situational factors, as the determinant of social actions.” Thus, the ethical standard—manifesting as dutiful action-obligations—is flexible, varying according to the relationship and the situation. In a high complexity network of relationships, however, social role performances can be dilemmatic because of the need to balance diverse relationships and obligations in order to carry out them all out, which can result in a need to weigh (Ho *et al.* 2007):

- propriety and righteousness against genuine feelings (*zhen chi*);
- righteousness against any material gain that can be made from a personal relationship; and
- the granting of trust against preserving ‘face’.

Ignoring relational ethics, or simply not achieving the appropriate balance in social relationships, would, of course, produce an unsatisfactory social role performances. This would lead to relationship unfairness, and, eventually, to a breakdown in both trust and those relationships. This has profound implications for organizational life.

## THE ARCHETYPAL CONFUCIAN ORGANISATION

*Homo consanguinitas* would see an organization as a collection of people—each in their own complex, dynamic, and dominant obligation network—who come together in order to achieve common ends. This would embrace the pursuit of organizational goals and interests—as articulated by a benevolently authoritarian governing elite—but only not so as to compromise the securing and safeguarding of the interests of each member’s obligation network. Vertical workplace relationships between supervisors and subordinates would be unequal. Horizontal workplace relationships could be either equal or unequal relationships, depending on status, age, gender of work colleagues, prioritized as family members, friends and associates, and then strangers. Involuntary and voluntary relationships at work would reveal emotional and supportive roles. The involuntary—and most important—relationship

would be with family members, requiring intense loyalty and cooperation. Voluntary relationships—essentially, with associates or friends—would be bonded by the gratification of pragmatic needs, solidified by the building of obligation, trust, and friendship. Relationships with ‘impersonal others’—strangers—would be distant, guarded, and sometimes defensive, depending on the level of trust that has been achieved. Engagement bond in both vertical and horizontal interpersonal relationships would be mutuality, respect, loyalty and compliance, and obligations and responsibilities.

### **Organisational Governance**

Those who govern an organization would enjoy much autonomy because they would accept moral responsibility for the wellbeing of those who give them loyalty and obedience (*benign authoritarianism*) (Liu and Liu 2003). This is in accordance with the Confucian tradition of *paternalism*—embracing “the themes of hierarchy, responsibility for the whole organisation, mutual obligation, family atmosphere, personalism, and protection of the employees” (Redding cited in Bond 1992b: 78). Paternalistic governors would maintain social order by drawing upon the Confucian concept of the natural cosmic order, grounded in values related to filial piety—of the Five Cardinal Relations (*Wu Lan*)—between father-son, friends, older brother-younger brother, sovereign-subject, and couples—the father-son relationship is the most significant and constitutes the model for all the other relationships (Ceng 2004, Rarick 2007). They would be guided by their moral rectitude, grounded in their relational virtues (revealing the breadth of their virtue and propriety through their actions). In other words, employees would have their duties defined according to their obligations towards ‘important others’, in harmony with their social roles. Thus, organizational governance would emphasize people rather than rules and procedures. Harmony would prevail only for as long as virtue prevails because all the relevant social duties have been performed and obligations are met.

The constraints on organizational governors would relate to their own interpersonal duties and obligations, particularly their responsibility to meet the mutual expectations of fulfilling social duties and obligations,<sup>8</sup> and the shame and loss of ‘face’ they would experience if they fail to do so (Liu and Liu 2003: 51, see also Fung *et al.* 2003). The Confucian governor would, thus, lead by seeking, achieved by the cultivation of *humanness*, through the enactment of *propriety*, leading to *benevolence*, which is the key to maintaining good organizational order.<sup>9</sup>

### **Structure**

This would be a centralised informal hierarchy, with a well-defined humanistic dimension. It would be highly centralized, with varying degrees of formalisation and complexity. It would be dominated by a highly complex set of obligation networks, making it informal, and certainly personal (Bond 1992a, Redding and Wong 1992). This structure would have little techno-structure, few standardised work procedures, little specialised work

---

<sup>8</sup> **“If you govern them [people] by means of virtue and control them with propriety, they will gain their own sense of shame, and thus correct themselves (2-3)”** (*The Analects of Confucius XIII, 6*).

<sup>9</sup> **“If you govern with the power of your virtue, be like the North Star. It just stays in its place while all the other stars position themselves around it”** (*The Analects of Confucius II, 1*).

tasks, and few precisely define job roles. But it would have specialised social roles, duties, and a unity of direction and direct control on the basis of traditional paternal authority (Redding and Wong 1992: 277-278).

## **Culture**

This would permit little questioning of the orders given by any legitimate organizational authority. But it would be people-centred and didactic, with an emphasis on social role performance—reinforcing the appropriateness of conducting in the workplace virtuous interpersonal acts that signal reciprocity, mutuality, and breadth of virtue and propriety. Indeed, the embedding in an organisational culture of relational moral values, and their integration with the issues of role performance and ‘face’ determines the degree of employee discretion over the performance of organizational roles and task. Such an organizational culture would tolerate, if not actively support, of both nepotism and favouritism.

## **Ethics**

The informing Confucian moral values—the Confucian Five Cardinal Relations—gives clear moral guidance on those relationships. This universally applicable moral knowledge informs all horizontal relationships (between working colleagues) and vertical relationships (between superiors and subordinates). Following these moral guidelines, an organizational member’s duties and obligations would be clear to all. ‘Important others’ would have to be shown respect (by meeting all required obligations and responsibilities), loyalty, and have their instructions obeyed. Management ethics would be premised on the principles of *humanness*, *propriety*, and *righteousness*—thus emphasizing flexibility, appropriateness, propriety, and good faith (*The Analects of Confucius* I-12, III-19, III-26 and IV-13).

## **Trust**

Within the Confucian organization, members would be bonded by trust-based contracts. The vertical and horizontal relationships would be largely informal and significance emphasis placed on trustworthiness, the result of building trust credit (Redding and Wong 1992: 281). Thus, each person would have a set of trust-based relationships with superiors and acquaintances, built upon the basis of reciprocity. Building trust credit develops and consolidates long-term interpersonal relationships. Thus, a favourable trust assessment would promise future repayment. But, trusting involves risks.

## **Management**

The major task of managers in a Confucian organization would be to pursue organizational goals and interests by managing the interpersonal relationships and the relationship of relationships. The informal processes that take place within hierarchical (command-and-control) processes are those embedded in the social order. Thus, immediate—important and personal—‘others’ would have a central role, as such relationships cultivate the informal communications and dispute resolution processes within the formal organizational arrangements. Management’s role performance is driven by the interpersonal relationship rules embedded in the obligation networks. Loyalty, compliance, and trustworthiness has to be mutual, because employees who accept their assigned duties and obligations expect to gain management’s protection.

External control would be preferred, involving informal and personal rules relating to inputs and processes being formally transmitted as obligations and duties through the obligation network, thereby achieving mutual control. Employees would be assessed on their objective role performance (Ho *et al.* 2007) and managers on their paternalist actions (Redding and Wong 1992: 279). Indeed, management legitimacy would be based on paternal authority (grounded in the conduct of their social roles), maintained by trust accumulation (social capital accumulation) and reciprocity norms (emphasizing trustworthiness, compliance, and loyalty).

**Management Style.** This would be parental, directive, and authoritarian, with high-relationship and high-personal-task behaviour patterns. The intent would be to keep future action options open, which would involve communicating only general instructions, leaving the subordinates to deduce the precise requirements, so as to avoid being blamed in the event of failure and, thus, avoiding any risk of losing 'face'. Indeed, a person's responsibility, reputation, and authority "rest on his capacity to intuit the right strategy" (Redding and Wong 1992: 278). These management behaviour patterns are related to the leadership dimension of 'initiating structure', 'consideration', and 'moral character' (Bond 1992b: 77-78). Management is, thus, about avoiding blame and the attendant loss of 'face'.

**Human Behaviour.** Confucianism proclaims that people aspire to a harmonious life. Organizational behaviour would reflect the importance of harmony. It would be presumed that members would be satisfied with the attainment of harmonious, albeit ritualistic, interpersonal relationships. Organizations would, then, be able to anticipate the behaviour of members on the basis of their individualized a set of the obligatory choreographed social role performances. This makes behaviour subject to self-control, group control, and social control, achieved by the integration of aspirational relational cognitions—*humanness*, *propriety*, and *righteousness*—and self-disciplinary emotional cognitions—*shame* and 'face'.

**Motivation.** This would be by means of a set of intrinsic motivators (such as security, safety, self-cultivation, interpersonal obligation, harmony, shame, and 'face'), all of which would have to be compatible with *humanness*, *propriety*, and *righteousness*, which are the relationship rules and the ethical principles that govern social engagements. So, by enabling members—as family bread-winners—to meet their family's physiological, safety and security, interpersonal affiliation, and esteem needs is a significant motivator, because it enable them to maintain family affiliation, and so remain under its protection, and to preserve 'face' and avoid the shame that follows the failure to fulfil familial obligations.

In Confucian organizations there would be a clear instrumental connection between work effort and reward—material security and enhanced social status—that motivates people to work harder. The link is the traditional value of filial piety—"hard work is "a sense of responsibility [to family and] ultimately based on the onus of duty which turns into practice" (Kahn cited in Redding 1993: 6). This responsibility becomes more intense when there is high social pressure and high sensitivity to social influence, for this pressure could only be relieved when there is a guarantee of future prosperity, given material and esteem insecurity. Advancing family material wellbeing is also essential to maintaining family esteem needs within a status-conscious culture. The perception of work and reward is, thus, closely linked to the conception of family duty as an obligatory relational contract, reinforced by social expectation that creates rewards of desirable behaviours. This is encouraged by the social

expectation that filial piety maintains social stability and ensures material wellbeing. In the words of Chinese proverb: ‘among hundreds of virtue acts, *hsiao* [filial piety] be the first’.

In contrast, laziness would have negative connotations readily construed by highly sensitive social networks (Redding and Wong 1992). Non-conformity with group norms makes group identity insecure. Undesirable behaviour would be discouraged by the threat of being shamed, as a result of being incapable of fulfilling family duties and obligations, with the resultant risk of losing ‘face’. This, ultimately, would result in the loss of trust in social relationships and, eventually, would cause alienation from relationship networks.

**Power and Compliance.** Management power would be modelled on familial relationships. Tradition is a powerful source of authority, as *humanness, propriety, righteousness* guide people’s daily behaviour. The traditionally beliefs—social hierarchy, the Five Cardinal Relations, and the theory of moral rectification (*zheng ming*)—are deeply embedded in Confucian social life. They are effective means of regulating individual and group behaviour, and influencing the outcomes of fate. Because luck influences events, and events and people are interrelated, fate plays an important role in the outcomes of social actions. Such influences determine the degree of dependence a person has on ‘others’ in an organisation.

Compliance would be voluntary on the basis of a cognitive commitment to accept the paternalist commitments advanced by Confucian managers. Confucian thinking emphasises governing by ethics (doing what is virtuous and exercising moral restraint). Thus, Confucian managers’ would be expected to perform acts that reveal their paternalism. In so doing, they would perceive paternal acts advancing their own self-cultivation, thereby moving them towards achieving *humanness*. On this basis, their followers would grant them then right to paternal authority, thereby enabling them to issue directive rules (those that ask, command, demand, permit, or caution). Thus, the assigning of duties and obligations in vertical relationships are primarily due to the actions of paternal father-figure managers. Employees willingly exchange loyalty, compliance, and trustworthiness for management’s protection. Thus, manager-employee relations are sustained by a personalised tacit moral code.

**Decision-Making and Analysis.** The organizational decision-making processes would be highly autocratic. Who makes decisions would be defined by membership of trust-presumed relationships. The decision-making process would be dynamic and decisions open to constant revision, so they would be changeable and rarely submitted to any external scrutiny.

Decision-relevant information would be that which can be verified by a wise person, who would draw upon traditional knowledge, as well as upon rational deductions and empirical evidence. If information is not so verified, its validity is denied, so becoming expressions of emotion or belief. Once, however, information is so verified, it would be analysed and interpreted by decision-makers applying relationally bounded rationality—the instrumental assessment of the cost and benefits of the decision options after consideration has been given to relational factors.

Decision-makers would try and find the relationally rational way of proceeding to the making of a decision. Their emphasis would be on making a reasoned decision, but with relational dominance constraining organizational considerations. This approach to decision making is made possible because relational and organisational goals always overlap. Decision-makers would willingly compromise organisational goals in the face of obligation and ‘face’ issues that require re-balancing the obligation networks, so as to save ‘face’ and assuage interpersonal conflicts. They would prioritise a decision’s organizational and relational importance, its urgency, and its value contestability. With respect to relational

importance, decisions would be made intuitively on the basis of two criteria: relational costs (who loses) and relational benefits (who wins).

**Communications.** Communication between a superiors and subordinates would not be open. It would be subtle and socio-emotional in style. Reciprocal communication, both verbal and nonverbal, and cultural restraint on personal displays of emotion, would make the act of communicating a scripted role performance requiring much hint taking.

**Conflict Management.** As the pursuit of interpersonal harmony would be more important than seeking the truth, a high degrees of certainty in human relationships would have to be maintained so as to avoid potential conflicts. Even though conflicts occur, they would most likely be covered up—“[t]he dissatisfaction among the subordinates and conflict between cliques are unlikely to be brought into the open” (Redding and Wong 1992: 280)—or underplayed, in the hope that it could be resolved without negotiation between the parties involved. Thus, interpersonal conflict is best avoided whenever possible.

The basic rule would be that it is better to take preventive action before any interpersonal conflicts happens, the resolution of which could well be complicated, even unachievable. When there is a disagreement with a superiors' judgement the golden rule would be: “honour the hierarchy first, your vision of truth second” (Bond 1992b: 83). Face-to-face confrontation would always be avoided in any way possible at any costs. Disagreement could only be expressed only in indirect and passive way (Ho *et al.* 2007). It would be resolved through the mediation of a third party, someone who could communicate the substance of the disagreement without offending either of the disputing parties, achieved by using mildly ambiguous language. If disagreement and conflict persist, a higher-level third party would be required to use positional authority to resolve the power struggle. In that event, the ‘face’ of both disputing parties would be compromised. The ultimate outcome would be for one or both of them to leave the organization.

## RELATIONAL DOMINANCE’S IMPACT ON ORGANISATIONS

Under the sway of relational dominance, organisations can be characterized as follows:

- Having a structure that a centralised informal hierarchy, and a culture that is people-centred and didactic—“a social setting within which human actors play out their interpersonal roles and psychological dramas” (Bond 1992b: 72).
- Holistically dynamic, with emotion-dominating web of interpersonal relationships—each with customary duties and obligations (social roles)—that create an inclusive and subtle organizational overlay of obligation networks, which give rise to workplace relationships that tend to be harmonious because they are grounded in interpersonal reciprocity.
- Obligated to harmonize job specification with social roles, as the performance of relational duties and obligations is more important than being instrumentally rational, so, strengthening the influence of the informal organisation structure (obligation networks) over the formal organisation structure (rules and procedures).
- Dependent for their organizational harmony upon members having a sense of interpersonal obligations, which means that they must possess a keen altruistic sense of the wellbeing and interest of others, particularly ‘important others’ (otherwise the formal rules and practices would signify nothing) and perform

their relational duties and obligations with complete devotion, sincerity, and appropriateness.

- Able to maintain organisational order because subordinates are responsible to 'important others' for their social behaviour, and are subject to the disciplining effect of socially reinforced sanctions in the event of non-compliance, which is the social lubricant that maintains social harmony.
- Required to find relationally rational ways of making of decisions, such that decision-makers willingly compromise organisational goals in the face of obligation issues, grounded in relational costs (who loses) and relational benefits (who wins), that requires a re-balancing the obligation networks,
- Governed and managed by people who are aware that they need to meeting their customary relationship duties, obligations, and responsibilities, in order to build organisational harmony.

## CONCLUSION

The essential character of an organization depends upon the tapestry of social relationships occurring within it. Social relationships are the product of the patterns of social interaction between people in a dynamic complexity of relational situations. This contributes to their 'self' identity and to their social identity as members of that organization (manifesting as its distinctive culture, grounded in the accepted organizational norms, shared beliefs, symbols, and narratives). These mutually recognized states of interpersonal connectedness portray the meaning-content of those interactions for their mutual interdependence and for the self-assessed subjective worthiness of those involved, both of which inform their choice of future courses of social action.

This paper has distinguished the organizational traits that follow the dominance of an organization by a socially foreordained web of interpersonal obligation that are brought to the workplace. By way of illustration, when these social relationship obligations are informed by Confucian moral principles, they delineate the archetypal Confucian organization. Such an organization can be characterized as having a centralized informal hierarchy; as being benevolently authoritarian; and as having a rich, varied, and intricately interwoven tapestry of organizational life. This is because it is people-centered and didactic, thereby being willing to accept and accommodate an inclusive, comprehensive, and subtle overlay of socially sanctioned and reinforced social obligations, which must be fulfilled in the workplace, as elsewhere, as socially sanctioned the moral requirement. The focus of management, which draws upon the power of relationships grounded in traditions and customs, is to pursue organizational goals and interests by managing interpersonal relationships and the relationship of relationships, so as to avoid interpersonal conflict and to gain organizational commitment and compliant behavior.

The organizational traits that follow the organizational dominance of a socially foreordained web of interpersonal obligation that are brought to the workplace define a distinctive organization form. It is one that stands in clear contradistinction to the impersonality of organizations in which people are individually responsible to themselves for their behaviour towards others, albeit within organizationally prescribed rules, which makes them insensitive to those they see as abstract others.

## REFERENCES

- Aristotle [350 BC] 2004. *Nicomachean Ethics* (tr. Ross, W. D.). Available at: <http://www.etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/mirror/classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html> (retrieved: 2 March 2007).
- Bond, M. H. (ed.) 1992a. *The Psychology of the Chinese People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bond, M. H. 1992b. *Beyond The Chinese Face: Insights from Psychology*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Bond, M. H. and Smith, P. B. 1998. *Social Psychology Across Cultures* (2nd ed). London: Prentice Hall Europe.
- Ceng, Z.-X. 2004. "Contemporary Interpretations of Confucius Ethics." *Classics and Interpretations*, 9.  
Available at: [http://philosophy.sysu.edu.cn/2/jdjsx/info\\_Show.asp?ArticleID=686](http://philosophy.sysu.edu.cn/2/jdjsx/info_Show.asp?ArticleID=686) (retrieved: 23 May 2008).
- Chen, T.-K., Sculli, D. S., and Chan, F. S.-K. 2001. 'Relationship Dominance—Rethinking Management Theories from the Perspective of Methodological Relationalism. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 16 (2): 987-1008.
- Confucius [200 B.C.] 1885. *The Book of Rites* (vol.1) (tr. Legge, J.) (Sacred Books of the East, 27). Oxford: Clarendon Press. Oxford.  
Available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/like/> (retrieved: 18 December 2007).
- Dixon, J. and Newman, D. 1998. *Entering the Chinese Market: The Risks and Discounted Rewards*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books.
- Dixon, J., Dogan, R., and Sanderson, A. 2009. *The Situational Logic of Social Actions*. New York: Nova Science
- Fung, Y. L. 2006. Confucius. Available online at:  
<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/stanford/entries/confucius/#ConSoc> (retrieved: 15 January 2008).
- Fung, H., Lieber, E. and Leung, P. W. L. 2003. "Parental Beliefs about Shame and Moral Socialisation in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and The United States." In Yang, K.-S., Hwang, K.-K., Pedersen, P. B. and Daibo, I. (eds.), *Progress in Asian Social Psychology: Conceptual and Empirical Contributions*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Ho, B. 2006. "Confucian Businessmen." *CSR Asia Weekly* 2 (Week 43).
- Ho, D. Y. F. 1995. "Selfhood and Identity in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism: Contrasts with the West." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 25 (2): 115-139.
- Ho, D. Y. F. 1998. "Interpersonal Relationships and Relationship Dominance: An Analysis Based on Methodological Relationalism." *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 1 (1): 1-16.
- Ho, D. Y. F. and Chiu, C. Y. 1998. "Collective Representations as a Metaconstruct: An Analysis based on Methodological Relationalism." *Culture and Psychology*, 4 (3): 349-369.
- Ho, D. Y. F. and Peng, S. Q. [1998] 1999. "Methodological Relationalism and its Application in Eastern and Western Cultures." *Sociological Research*, 4: 34-43 (in Chinese), translated in *Sociology* 1: 9-18.
- Ho, D. Y. F., Chan, S. F. F., Peng, S. Q., and Ng, A. K. 2001. "The Dialogical Self: Converging East-West Constructions." *Culture and Psychology*, 7 (3): 393-408.

- Ho, D. Y. F., Chan, S. F. and Zhang, Z. X. 2001. "Metarelational analysis: An Answer to 'What's Asian about Asian Social Psychology'." *Journal of Psychology in Chinese Societies*, 2 (1): 7–26.
- Ho, D. Y. F., Fu, W., and Ng, S. M. 2004. Guilt, Shame and Embarrassment: Revelations of Face and Self." *Culture and Psychology*, 10 (1): 64-84.
- Ho, D. Y. F., Ho, R., and Ng, S. M. 2006. Investigative Research as a Knowledge-generation Method: Discovering and Uncovering." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 36 (1): 18-38.
- Ho, D. Y. F., Peng, S. Q., and Chiu, C. Y. 2007. *The Dao of the World and of the Human Heart: An Investigation in the Psychology of Chinese People*. Beijing, CN: University Press.
- Hollis, M. 1977. *Models of Man: Philosophical Thoughts on Social Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Li, Y. and Wen, H. 2014. "Confucius (556–473 BC)." In Helin, J., Hernes, T., Hjorth, D., and Holt, R. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Process Philosophy and Organization Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liu, J. H. and Liu, S.-H. 2003. "The Role of the Social Psychologist and Social Science in the 'Benevolent Authority' and 'Plurality of Powers' Systems of Historical Affordance for Authority." In Yang, K.-S., Hwang, K.-K., Pedersen, P. B., and Daibo, I. (eds.), *Progress in Asian Social Psychology: Conceptual and Empirical Contributions*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Muller, C. (tr.) 2004. *Translation of the Analects of Confucius*. Available at: <http://www.hm.typ.jp/~acmuller/contao/analects.htm> (accessed 19 February 2008).
- Nisbett, R. 2003. *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why*. The Free Press, New York.
- Pearce, J. 2001. *Organisation and Management in the Embrace of Government*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, London. 162 pp.
- Rarick, C. A. 2007. "Confucius on Management: Understanding Chinese Cultural Values and Managerial Practices." *Journal of International Management Studies*, 2 (2). Available at: <http://www.jimsjournal.org/3%20Charles.pdf> (retrieved: 6 January 2007).
- Redding, S. G. and Wong, G. Y. Y. 1992. "The Psychology of Chinese Organisational Behaviour." In Bond, M. H. (ed.), *The Psychology of the Chinese People*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Redding, S. G. 1993. *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism*. Berlin, DE: Walter de Gruyter.
- Ritzer, G. and Gindoff, P. 1992. "Methodological Relationism: Lessons For and From Social Psychology." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 55 (2): 128-140.
- Rosenberg, M. 1979. *Conceiving the Self*. New York: Basic Books.
- Weber, M. [1903/1917] 1949. *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (trs. Shils, S. N. and Finch, H.). New York: Free Press.
- Wen, H. 2012. *Chinese Philosophy* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitehead A. N. 1925. *Science and the Modern World*. New York: Macmillan.
- Yang, C.-F. 2006. "The Chinese Conception of the Self: Towards a Person-making Perspective." In Kim, U., Yang, K.-S., and Hwang, K.-K. (eds.). *Indigenous and Cultural Psychology: Understanding People in Context*. New York: Springer.