



# Confucian moral roots of citizenship behaviour in China

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which Confucian moral standards may serve as a moral root of employees' organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

**Design/methodology/approach** – The approach is conceptual, based on research within the field.

**Findings** – This paper suggests that the moral characteristics of Confucianism (based on a strong body of empirical studies): harmony, group orientation, *guanxi* (relationships), diligence, self-learning and thrift, are the great virtues of the indigenous forms of OCB in the PRC, including helping co-worker; individual initiative and/or functional participation; group activity participation; self-development; social welfare participation; promoting company image; voice; protecting and saving company resources; interpersonal harmony and keeping the workplace clean; and keeping departmental harmony and coexistence in adversity.

**Originality/value** – First, this paper contributes to the extant knowledge as to the ways in which Confucian moral standards may affect Chinese exhibition of OCB. Second, this paper contributes to discerning Chinese economic success on employees' OCB performance with recourse to its traditional cultural heritage of Confucian moral standards. Finally, it highlights the presence of voice as a type of OCB which may be attributed to China's opening up to the West.

**Keywords** China, Organizational behaviour, Citizenship, Confucianism, Group behaviour, Self-managed learning

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## 1. Introduction

The influence of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) upon workplace success has attracted much research interests and there is a strong body of empirical research. Podsakoff *et al.* (1997), Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1997) and Walz and Niehoff (1996) reported that organisational success may be attributed to OCB. Podsakoff *et al.* (2000) in their meta-analysis (three samples, 462 work teams) demonstrated that OCB may be responsible for about 19 per cent of the variance in performance quantity and 18 per cent in performance quality, respectively; about 25 per cent of the variance in financial efficiency indicators and about 38 per cent of the variance in customer service indicators. Thus, the contention that OCB may contribute to organisational success seems not to be in doubt.

Effective labour models and organisational performance were cast as virtuous exponents of work as a practice (MacIntyre, 1988). Nur and Organ (2006) reported in



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their study of management-by-virtues as practiced in Christian firms, that where a management philosophy and practice were based on virtues derived from religious beliefs, the management-by-virtues firms were characterised by more committed, more satisfied employees, and there was a higher incidence of employees' OCB than in the comparison firms. Similarly, Bond (1991) proposes that Chinese management philosophy emphasises that morality is the foundation of all things. Also, in the People's Republic of China (PRC), Snell and Tseng (2003) reported that the Chinese engaged in OCB since OCB and Chinese socialist virtue are more likely to be interactive.

China's rapid economic development is often viewed as a miracle (Stiglitz and Yusuf, 2001). It is already the fourth largest economy in the world, expected to become the second largest by 2030 (Lehman Brothers, 2005) and in the context of the current global financial crisis, this may well happen sooner. Various authorities have identified the Confucian values underpinning Chinese culture that are relevant to Chinese economic success (Redding, 1990, 2002; Bond, 1996). The extant literature indicates that there are three main sources of moral standards in contemporary China, namely: Confucianism, Chinese socialism and the universal moral codes and judgments (Snell and Tseng, 2003). Snell and Tseng (2003) have investigated the ways in which Chinese socialist virtues as moral standards in the PRC affected employees' OCB. However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no research examining the relationship between Confucian moral standards and OCB in the PRC.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between OCB and Confucian values in the PRC. Having examined the indigenous forms of OCB in China, this paper opens with a discussion of Chinese moral characteristics, particularly Confucianism. Finally, the map between OCB and Confucian moral standard is investigated.

## 2. The construct of organisational citizenship behaviour

Organ (1997) and Podsakoff *et al.* (2000) defined OCB as behaviour that "supports the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place" (Organ, 1997, p. 95), which is "relatively more likely to be discretionary, and relatively less likely to be formally or explicitly rewarded in the organization" (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000, p. 549), and in aggregate, leading to the improvement of organizational effective functioning. Based on quantitative and qualitative evidence of OCB dimensions in the Western literature, we identify 11 OCB dimensions in the West: helping behaviour or altruism; conscientiousness or functional participation; courtesy; sportsmanship; civic virtue; advocacy participation; loyalty; voice (Farh *et al.*, 2004); self-development (Soon *et al.*, 2005); taking charge (Morrison and Phelps, 1999) and intra-organizational volunteerism (Peloza and Hassay, 2006).

On the other hand, there are 12 types of OCB in the PRC, including helping co-worker; individual initiative and/or functional participation; group activity participation; self-development; social welfare participation; promoting company image; voice; protecting and saving company resources; interpersonal harmony and keeping the workplace clean (Farh *et al.*, 2004) and keeping departmental harmony and coexistence in adversity (Shi *et al.*, 2004).

Table I shows the comparison and contrast of common and specific OCB forms between the PRC and the West. We used the terms "common" and "specific" in describing OCB forms for ease of discussion since it is not reasonable to propose a construct in only

Western OCB construct	OCB construct in China
<i>Common</i>	
Altruism	Helping co-workers
Civic virtue	Group activity participation
Conscientiousness functional participation	Taking initiative
Loyalty	Promoting company image
Voice	Voice
Self-development	Self-development
Intra-organisational volunteerism	Social welfare participation
<i>Specific</i>	
Courtesy	Keeping departmental harmony
Sportsmanship	Coexistence in adversity
Advocacy participation	Protecting and saving company resources
Taking charge	Interpersonal harmony
	Keeping the workplace clean

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**Table I.**  
A comparison of OCB forms between the West and China

two cultures (though highly divergent), which would be sufficient for demonstrating that a construct is unique (Farh *et al.*, 2006).

The common dimensions of OCB in the PRC include: taking initiative (similar to conscientiousness and functional participation in the West); helping coworkers (similar to altruism in the West); group activity participation (similar to civic virtue in the West); promoting company image (similar to loyalty in the West); social welfare participation (similar to intra-organisational volunteerism in the West); self-development; and voice. Moreover, some of the extended OCB dimensions of: coexistence in adversity; protecting and saving company resources; and keeping the workplace clean have also been mentioned by Western scholars (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000), but have not been empirically validated.

The OCB dimensions specific to the PRC include interpersonal harmony and keeping departmental harmony. They have not been conceptually and empirically reported as OCB dimensions in the Western literature. The importance of harmony in the PRC will be discussed in the section relating to Confucian moral standards. However, four major dimensions of OCB in the West were not reported in the PRC: sportsmanship, courtesy, taking charge and advocacy participation. Lam *et al.* (1999) found that compared with employees from Australia and the USA, employees from Hong Kong and Japan were more likely to consider sportsmanship and courtesy as in-role behaviours. Finally, we note that taking charge and advocacy participation have not been identified in China as OCB dimensions. Advocacy participation refers to behaviours targeted at other members of an organization and reflecting a willingness to be controversial (Van Dyne *et al.*, 1994). According to Farh *et al.* (2004), such behaviour indicates an individual's intention and potential to be controversial, while Chinese culture stresses the importance of harmony, making it less likely for such behaviour to be displayed. We also speculate that in a high power distance culture, employees are less likely to assume responsibility on their own in playing a key role in affecting change.

### 3. Confucian moral standards

In contemporary Chinese organisations, although employees in China may not even understand the specific Confucian doctrines (of course, they vaguely know the concepts

of harmony, thrift, etc.), Confucian moral standards may implicitly and explicitly regulate Chinese behaviour since Confucian doctrine and tradition are deeply rooted in their minds and to some extent employees codes of conduct may be attributed to Confucianism. There is no doubt that Confucianism serves as one main source of moral standards in China (Ralston *et al.*, 1999; Roberts, 1996; Jacobs *et al.*, 1995; Laulusa, 2008).

A number of empirical studies have shown that Confucianism is still highly influential in the PRC in spite of China's increasing exposure to the West (Ralston *et al.*, 2006, 1999; Roberts, 1996; Jacobs *et al.*, 1995). For example, Ralston *et al.* (2006) found that the Confucian perspective of work dynamism based on an individual's level of search for virtue remained stable between the period of 1989 and 2001, whilst Chinese values on Confucian moral discipline in 2001 increased significantly compared with their research findings in 1989.

Therefore, we review the relevant Confucian moral standards before examining the influence of Confucian moral standards on Chinese display of OCB. This approach is predicated by a number of key scholars: Lockett (1988) and Björkman and Lu (1999) (for human resource management practice); Child and Warner (2003) (for organisational culture); Zhang *et al.* (2006) (for management performance); and Wang *et al.* (2005) (for human resource development practice). It is suggested that Confucian moral standards are likely to be more group and relationship-oriented and place a higher value on thrift and harmony (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). Also, Confucianism highlights the values of thrift and hard work, harmony and cooperation (Lim, 2003). It is also held that Confucian moral standards are characterised by diligence, thrift, co-operation and learning (Oh, 1992). Based on the extant literature on Confucian moral standards, we report the followings six aspects as Confucian moral standards: harmony; group orientation; *guanxi* (relationships); self-learning; diligence and thrift as important Confucian moral codes and judgements.

### 3.1 Harmony

Confucianism focuses upon the importance of social harmony as a moral standard (Ginsberg, 1975). Leng (2005) explained the social harmony by using different terms in different social orders. At the national level, *guo-tai-min-an* (the country being prosperous and the people living in peace), *tai-ping-sheng-shi* (times of peace and prosperity); at the interpersonal level, *an-ju-le-ye* (people living and working in peace and contentment), *he-zhong-gong-ji* (work together with harmony and faithfulness in the times of difficulty); at the family level, *jia-he-wen-shi-xing* (harmony between family members prospers everything) are likely to highlight the social value of harmony.

Consequently, the Chinese tend to build and maintain harmonious relationships in their workplace since their organisation may be viewed as a big family (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Liu, 2003). In addition, conflict is avoided and cooperation is stressed based upon the guiding principle of social harmony (Liu, 2003). However, social harmony depends not only on the building and maintenance of harmonious relationships among individuals, but also on the protection of an individual's face or integrity (Lockett, 1988; Liu, 2003; Björkman and Lu, 1999). "The Chinese concept of *mianzi* means giving face and showing respect for others regarding their social status and reputation in society" (Wang *et al.*, 2005, p. 318). "*Mianzi* is based on the respect expected from the other party" (Wang *et al.*, 2005, p. 318). Saving others' face may be

more essential than to protect one's own (Buttery and Leung, 1998). For example, criticism of anybody in the workplace should be done in an indirect way to save face and maintain harmony in interpersonal relationships. Therefore, social interactions should be on the level that nobody loses face and preserves harmonious relationships. "To maintain face means to stay trustworthy and to honour obligations in one's social interactions" (Wang *et al.*, 2005, p. 318).

### 3.2 Group orientation

Earley (1989) has drawn attention to the fact that the Chinese expect and value the moral standard of collective outcome or group orientation. According to Romie (2002, p. 17), "group orientation in China refers to the family, extended family, clan [...] up to and including the Chinese culture". Conformity to group opinion is the subordination of personal interests to the attainment of in-group goals of co-operation and group welfare (Earley, 1989; Triandis, 1988; Hwang, 1987; House *et al.*, 2004). The group orientation develops the workers' tendency to view their organisation or work group as a symbolic family (Liu, 2003). The Chinese word for family is *jia*. A group is big family (*da-jia*). The country is referred to as national family (*guo-jia*). Confucianism maintains that a human being is not primarily an individual, but rather a member of a family, which implies that the Chinese are interdependent. Being a member of a family, one is expected to contribute one's share to the betterment of the family (Liu, 2003). Chinese individuals are likely to view themselves as part of a specific group, team, or unit, and a significant difference is made between "insiders" and "outsiders" (Bond, 1996):

The "we" group is the source of identity, protection, loyalty, trust and dependent relationships. People are integrated into strong, cohesive groups who protect them and demand loyalty throughout their lifetime (Romie, 2002, p. 17).

For example, Ralston *et al.* (2006) found that Chinese from Mainland China and Hong Kong increasingly valued the importance of the well-being of co-workers, and such value changes may contribute to the economic development in the PRC.

### 3.3 Guanxi

In reality, the word *guanxi* "is not found in the Confucian classics; instead the word *lun* is used" (King, 1991, p. 67). "Lun refers to moral principles regarding interactive behaviours of related parties" (Chen and Chen, 2004, p. 308). In the Confucian society, people are interdependent rather than independent (Markus and Kitayama, 1998). Therefore, the relationship among related parties is more likely to be important. The Chinese are more particular than Westerners in giving priority to people having particular relationships with them (Trompenaars, 1994). *Guanxi* serves as important cement in holding group cohesiveness (Redding, 1990; Yang, C.F., 1995; Luo, 1997; Xin and Pearce, 1996; Bian, 1994; Yang, 1986; Osigweh *et al.*, 1993; Wong *et al.*, 2003). In principle, the moral codes in interpersonal interaction for Chinese societies require "sincerity" – that individual ethic is truly appropriate to the specific relationship of mutual dependence because it optimizes benefit for both parties (Drucker, 1981, p. 166-7) and "in the case of conflict between material and spirit [in *guanxi* interaction], people should pursue the spiritual direction rather than the material one" (Yang, 2003, p. 14). However, in practice, Yang, C.F. (1995) stipulated the five reciprocity principles within a Chinese social ethic as applied to *guanxi*:

- (1) when a person offers a favour it should be accepted;
- (2) when a favour is given one is obligated to return it;
- (3) one should attempt to return the favour promptly;
- (4) when asked for a favour, one should comply (at least in part); and
- (5) one should wait for the favour to be returned, not request its return.

Hence, reciprocity of favours serves as the currency in maintaining and upholding interpersonal *guanxi* exchange, which is a particular structure of social transactions (Redding, 2002). Such a moral standard is similar to the Western theory of norm of reciprocity, which refers to a set of socially accepted rules regarding a transaction in which a party extending a resource to another party obligates the latter to return the favour (Gouldner, 1960).

### 3.4 Diligence

The diligent work ethic was developed throughout Chinese history. Mencius argued that when a person is given a great responsibility, heaven may test him with hardship and frustrated efforts in order to toughen his nature and show up his inadequacies. As a result, the attitude of diligence is developed, which is transcended into an individual's personal life. To accomplish their task goals is honourable and respectable for Chinese who are determined, diligent and prepared to endure continuously encountered hardships regardless of favourable or unfavourable conditions (Li, 2002), since Chinese believe that diligence creates fortune. According to an ancient Chinese proverb, "Hardworking creates earlier spring" (*ren-qin-chun-la-zao*) (Wang *et al.*, 2005, p. 318), which serves as a guideline for Chinese to be diligent. In addition, Westwood and Lok (2003) argue that there is a social and moral requirement for Chinese to be diligent and persistent in work, to make a contribution to the family's material well-being. "Chinese people treasure every minute in their lives by working hard and meeting deadlines" (Wang *et al.*, 2005, p. 318).

### 3.5 Self-learning

The importance of learning or education is strongly emphasized by *The Analects of Confucius* (Yuan, 2001) (a record of the words and behaviours of Confucius and his students). Chen's (2005) study showed the influence of Confucius' teachings on Chinese self-development in acquiring, reflecting, contributing, selecting and executing of knowledge to reach spiritual and moral development at work.

### 3.6 Thrift (Jian)

Thrift (*Jian*) is a major characteristic of the Chinese virtue. Hofstede and Bond (1988, p. 18) and Hofstede (1991, p. 68) explain this value as follows: "The value of 'thrift' leads to savings, which means availability of capital for reinvestment, an obvious asset to economic growth." In the PRC, it is generally honourable to be thrifty and dislike waste. At the individual level, there are more financially stable institutions resulting from liking to save and dislike of borrowing. In the workplace, the employees are careful with organizational economy and finances, and their actions affect the financial situation of the firm.



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#### 4. The relationship between Chinese OCB and Confucian moral standards

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Having examined Chinese characteristics of moral standards, particularly Confucianism and the indigenous OCB construct in PRC, now we explore the ways in which Confucian moral standards influence Chinese exhibition of OCB. Pun *et al.* (2000) and Su *et al.* (1998) state that although the term “OCB” does not appear in Confucian ancient texts, the ideas certainly do and Chinese with a stress on individual morality would go the extra mile for their organisation. Tan (2005) put forward that Confucian values are perfectly consistent with a Western conception of citizenship since Confucianism views citizenship rights and social responsibilities as mutually dependent. Huang (2008), from a neo-Confucian perspective, argues that one reason that people perform moral actions is because their motivation for morality is based on self-interest: to seek one’s own joy. Furthermore, the relationship between Confucian moralities and OCB may be explicated by the following statement: “the person who adheres to Morality is a moral person, and Morality is the conformity to the rules of right conduct; moral or virtuous conduct” (Peng, 2007, p. 29). However, at the workplace, one should note that the relationship between employees’ moral self-efficacy and OCB may be influenced by the organisation’s moral climate, including formal moral governance based on procedural justice and open dialogue rather than ideology, coercion or laxity, trust in leader’s moral characteristics rather than the politics of domination, disempowerment manipulation or sponsorship (Snell and Tseng, 2002).

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##### 4.1 Guanxi, group orientation, diligence and taking initiative

*Guanxi*, group orientation and diligence are more likely to foster Chinese displays of taking initiative. First, Blakely *et al.* (2005), Li and Wan (2007) and Chang and Hackett (2007) found that in China, employees may display more discretionary effort in their workplace than Western employees since their motivation in engaging in OCB arises from their managers’ and co-workers’ expectations. Considering the importance in the relationship-oriented culture of China (Hofstede, 1997), it may be appropriate to argue that OCB, particularly taking initiative, is derived from an individual’s obligation to meet their employers’ and co-workers’ expectations (for example, the work of Kitayama *et al.*, 2004). In addition, taking initiative may reflect employees’ effort of placing collective interest in the workplace, which could uphold their level of *guanxi* with their managers and co-workers. Therefore, high level of interpersonal relationship (*guanxi*) is developed as open-ended, potentially long-term relationship and any difficulty that arises is worked out to the long-term benefit of both parties (Hui *et al.*, 2004a, b). For example, Wong *et al.* (2003) reported that displaying taking initiative is important in maintaining high quality of interpersonal relationship (*guanxi*).

Second, group orientation may enable the Chinese to develop a strong sense of duty towards their subordinates, co-workers and superiors because under the group orientation culture, Chinese would prioritise group interests over individual interests and support the goals of the group and protect the group welfare (Blakely *et al.*, 2005). In Chinese society, high levels of group orientation in the workplace facilitate the development of employees’ group (team) identity, family membership identity and perceived insider status (in-group membership) since group orientation can enhance employees’ collective identity, which may also increase group potency, and ultimately group performance such as taking initiative. Also, group orientation involves employees’ motivation that cares about:

[...] the welfare of one's group, which serves to promote social systems and collective interests and the transform from "I" to "we" due to the fact that the self is defined in terms of group membership (Johnson and Chang, 2006, p. 551).

As such, individuals tend to internalize the goals and norms of their group and derive satisfaction when they successfully fulfill their social roles and obligations (Johnson and Chang, 2006). Thus, everyone needs to work hard and to look after the whole work team and organisation's interests.

Finally, in Chinese culture, diligence is honourable and respectable, and therefore, workers are more likely to come in early and leave late as special forms of taking initiative in order to complete their work. Diligence may lead to the Chinese notion of non-specific behaviour at work; for example, a line manager would not require specific job demands but pursue general guidelines and goals that allow employees to "have considerable leeway for task accomplishment" (Pun *et al.*, 2000, p. 331).

#### 4.2 Guanxi, helping co-workers and social welfare participation

*Guanxi* seems to be the moral source for helping co-workers and social welfare participation. First, *guanxi* and helping co-workers are not mutually exclusive. *Guanxi* implies the Chinese rules of the norm of reciprocity (*bao* in Chinese or *pao* in Cantonese), which requires favour, obligation and return of favour in the organisations (Yang, C.F., 1995). Helping co-workers in China includes both work-related help and non-work-related personal support among the workplace. The closeness, tightness and significance of interpersonal *guanxi* enable employees not only to have rights to receive, but also obligations to contribute to the welfare of the other party (Westwood *et al.*, 2004). High level of *guanxi* where obligations are often diffuse and unspecified, and where no standard or values against which gifts, favours, or contributions can be measured is present, co-workers can reciprocate the diffuse, unspecified, and weakly time-bound obligation through their exchange of work-related and personal help in the workplace and outside the workplace. Hence, helping co-workers is one employee's positive regard toward another employee, which requires a returned favour from the help recipient as Yang (1957, p. 291, cited in Westwood *et al.*, 2004, p. 374) states that the Chinese believe that:

[...] "the reciprocity of actions [...] should be as certain as a cause-effect relationship, and, therefore, when a Chinese acts, he normally anticipates a response or return." He also notes that whilst the notion of reciprocity is evident in all societies, in Chinese society it has particularly "wide application and tremendous influence in social institutions".

Second, Chinese emphasis on *guanxi* may also transcend into the field of public relations through firms' participation in social welfare. Cutlip *et al.* (2000, p. 6) defined public relations as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the public on whom its success or failure depends". In China, the government is considered the most important stakeholder for firms (Taylor and Kent, 1999). We argue that social welfare participation is a corporate moral standard that firms develop *guanxi* with government to meet quotas for state-sanctioned social activities (such as blood donation and tree planting). It is stated that firms taking part in such social activities are aiming to build positive image and good public relationship with the government (Shaw, 2005; Farh *et al.*, 2004). For example, firms like Motorola China developed a good relationship the government



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and local government agency based upon their active participation in social welfare to contribute to the common welfare of the society (Shaw, 2005).

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#### *4.3 Group orientation, group activity participation and promoting company image*

Group orientation appears to be the driving force for group activity participation and promoting company image. First, in China, perceiving others as one group means that one is viewed as a family member (Yang, K.S., 1995; Hwang, 1987; House *et al.*, 2004). This group orientation prescribes the member's role expectations in the social structure (family, organisation and society) (Yang, K.S., 1995; Hwang, 1987; House *et al.*, 2004). Bond (1991) describes how Chinese think of themselves by employing more group-related concepts such as family than do Americans. Confucianism maintains that a human being is not primarily an individual, but rather a member of a family, which implies that the Chinese are interdependent. Being a member of a family, one is expected to contribute one's share to the betterment of the family (Liu, 2003). Hence, after becoming a member of a specific work team and/or non-work team, Chinese employees become involved in the activities organised by such group to build a strong, cohesive in-group for the purpose of gaining identity, protection, loyalty, trust and dependent relationships. Hence, active participation in the activities organised by the specific group or organisation is vital in maintaining their membership within the group.

Second, once Chinese employees regard people as members of a family, they may be willing to exert effort that will be manifested in loyalty to that group. Chinese individuals are likely to protect group outcome as they are part of a specific group, team, or unit (Bond, 1996). Group orientation creates a big sense of family (Liu, 2003). In this case, the organisation may be viewed as an extended family. Consequently, employees may have personal attachment to their organisation, displaying their loyalty throughout their lifetime to their "family" (organisation) to protect its reputation and strength.

#### *4.4 Harmony, interpersonal harmony and keeping departmental harmony*

Harmony may serve as the moral codes and judgements for interpersonal harmony and keeping departmental harmony. Leng (2005) argues that at the interpersonal level, *an-ju-le-ye* (people living and working in peace and contentment), and *he-zhong-gong-ji* (work together with harmony) may guide Chinese to develop and maintain interpersonal harmonious relationships. Likewise, *jia-he-wen-shi-xing* (harmony between family members prospers everything) is likely to push Chinese to view other departments as members of a big family, so keeping that departmental harmony is of great importance in the Chinese workplace (Liu, 2003; Leng, 2005).

#### *4.5 Diligence and keeping the workplace clean*

Diligence may guide Chinese to clean their workplace without it being a clear job requirement. In the West, "cleanliness is next to the Godliness", is rather important, and therefore, may not be a specific form of OCB. In Western research, "keeps workplace clean" has often appeared as just one item in the larger "compliance" or "conscientiousness" factor. Perhaps, it has not emerged as a factor unto itself because offices and factories in North American have been placing much emphasis on how the workplace looks to visitors. And perhaps, many workplaces in China have historically

not had as much resources to devote to maintenance and cleaning, so it is appreciated when workers do this on their own. Increasingly in the West, cleaning is outsourced so it is not considered as an in-role expectation. However, in the PRC, Farh *et al.* (2004) argue keeping the workplace clean relates to the early economic stage of development of China. However, we consider the diligent Chinese moral characteristic creating the Chinese notion of non-specific behaviour at work and the broader defined guidelines and goals for task accomplishment by Chinese managers (Pun *et al.*, 2000) may foster individual employees cleaning his/her workplace to gain respect and recognition from their supervisors.

#### *4.6 Self-learning and self-development*

Self-learning is a moral and spiritual source for Chinese employees' display of self-development. Based upon the great calling for individual learning by Confucius, Chinese employees are no longer satisfied with their education. In order to achieve their educational goal, they are proactive rather than reactive to develop their professional knowledge and skills, to master the change of external environment and to reach their spiritual enrichment advocated by Confucius (Li, 2002).

#### *4.7 Thrift and protecting and saving company resources*

We argue that the thrift characteristic of the Chinese may drive an extra effort in minimising the damage, and waste of their company resources (and Confucius taught the Chinese to value the products and working efforts of others) (Hofstede and Bond, 1988).

#### *4.8 Group orientation, harmony and coexistence in adversity*

Group orientation and harmony may be moral principles for Chinese engagement in coexistence in adversity. First, group orientation makes Chinese employees conform to societal norms and their members. For example, if they leave in times of organisational trouble, they would be viewed as selfish and would not be identified as belonging to the inside group by their previous superiors and colleagues, which are the source for identity, protection, loyalty, trust and dependent relationships (Earley, 1989; Triandis, 1988; Hwang, 1987; House *et al.*, 2004; Romie, 2002). Second, harmony morality requires Chinese to go through "thick and thin" with their organisation. The Chinese saying, *he-zhong-gong-ji* (work together with harmony and faithfulness in time of difficulty) (Leng, 2005) or bearing hardship (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987) requires Chinese workers to pull together and maintain harmony when encountering organisational hardship and adversity (the Chinese believe that harmony creates unity in resolving problems).

In Table II, we summarise our discussion on the conceptual linkage between Confucian moral codes and judgments and their influence upon Chinese employees' display of OCB. However, it is also asserted in Table II that except for voice, other forms of OCB are derived from Chinese moral values as discussed above. However, Chinese social harmony may discourage one's engagement in voice behaviour. For example, Chinese social harmony depends not only on the building and maintaining of good relationships among individuals, but also on the protection of an individual's *mianzi* and/or face (Lockett, 1988; Liu, 2003; Björkman and Lu, 1999; Wang *et al.*, 2005). The literature tends to view face and *mianzi* as the same meaning. We prefer to

differentiate between the two. *Mianzi* represents a more Western conception of “face”, “a reputation achieved frequently through ostentatious display of wealth (automobile brands, conspicuous consumption, wanton waste)” (Romie, 2002, p. 27). On the one hand, face means a reputation achieved through success in life, respect from others, dignity of oneself and integrity of oneself by demonstrating moral character or some other desirable trait (education and position) (Romie, 2002; Wang *et al.*, 2005). The differences between face and *mianzi* can be illustrated by the following example. When a subordinate makes an honest mistake, the supervisor would seek to maintain his “face” as praise for his honesty. Maintaining the “face” of others may be more essential than protecting one’s own (Buttery and Leung, 1998). On the other hand, when a subordinate makes an unacceptable mistake, the supervisor would criticise them indirectly and alone, to enable them to understand what is wrong without others’ being present. “To maintain face [and/or *mianzi*] means to stay trustworthy and to honour obligations in one’s social interactions” (Wang *et al.*, 2005, p. 318). The Chinese communication style is indirect, as individuals try to minimise the loss of face and preserve harmonious relationships (Gao *et al.*, 1996). Hence, although stress on social harmony does discourage voice in the workplace, studies by Farh *et al.* (2004) and Shi *et al.* (2004) suggest that voice is a type of OCB in China, and therefore, it may be explained by China’s opening up to the West.

## 5. Conclusion: theoretical contribution and suggestions for future research

With evidence from the extant literature in our discussion above, we provided a conceptual linkage between Confucian moral standards and OCB in the PRC. Our contributions are as follows: first, we contribute to the extant knowledge as to the ways in which Confucian moral standards may affect Chinese exhibition of OCB. Confucianism, Chinese socialism and the global moral codes and judgments are three main sources of moral standards in contemporary China (Ralston *et al.*, 2006, 1999; Roberts, 1996; Jacobs *et al.*, 1995), Snell and Tseng’s (2003) have examined the influence of socialist virtues upon Chinese OCB. Although a number of empirical studies showed that Confucianism is most influential in the PRC, even with China’s increasing exposure to West (Ralston *et al.*, 2006, 1999; Roberts, 1996; Jacobs *et al.*, 1995), there has been little effort in advancing our knowledge on how Confucian moral codes and judgment may actually affect Chinese employees’ decisions in displaying OCB. Hence, we take a first step in mapping the conceptual relationship between OCB and Confucian moralities.

Confucian moral standards	OCB
<i>Guanxi</i> , group orientation and diligence	Taking initiatives
<i>Guanxi</i>	Helping co-workers and social welfare participation
Group orientation	Group activity participation and protecting company image
Harmony	Interpersonal harmony and keeping departmental harmony
Thrift	Protecting and saving company resources and keeping the workplace cleaning
Self-learning	Self-development
Group orientation and harmony	Coexistence in adversity

**Table II.**  
Chinese moral standards  
and OCB

Second, this paper is likely to contribute to discerning Chinese economic success derived from employees' accumulated effort of OCB at work with recourse to its traditional cultural heritage of Confucian moral standards. OCB, as a theoretical construct and applied concept, has been found to be related to organisational success (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1997, 2000; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1997; Walz and Niehoff, 1996). Virtuous exponents of work for organisational success have been theoretically contended and empirically supported both in the West (MacIntyre, 1988; Nur and Organ, 2006) and in the PRC (Bond, 1991; Pun *et al.*, 2000; Snell and Tseng, 2003; Su *et al.*, 1998). Various scholars have identified the Confucian values underpinning Chinese culture that are relevant to Chinese economic success (Redding, 1990, 2002; Bond, 1996). Although a number of works have explored the influence of Confucian values on management practice (Björkman and Lu, 1999; Child and Warner, 2003; Lockett, 1988; Wang *et al.*, 2005; Zhang *et al.*, 2006), our work may be the first attempt, to the best of our knowledge, in explicitly investigating the relationship between Confucian moral standards and one important form of performance domain, i.e. OCB. Finally, we also reported that voice as a type of OCB in China (Farh *et al.*, 2004; Shi *et al.*, 2004) may be explained by China's opening up to the West with recourse to the teachings of Confucian doctrine.

We hope that our review will provide a guide to the perplexity over the extant know-how of the ways in which Confucian moral standards may influence individual employees' OCB by reviewing both Confucian moral values and OCB in an emerging economic super power (the PRC). However, the paper is based on our theoretical discussion and there may be several limitations that further research should address. First and foremost, is how Chinese individual differences in moral values and beliefs of socialist virtues, Confucian moral standards and universal moral codes and judgments may affect OCB intensity, since culturally inspired individual values may act as the psychological mechanisms on OCB. Second, organisational and situational context may affect an individual's display of OCB, whereas individual belief in Confucian moral standards may serve as the moderator between these organisational and situational variables and individual OCB.

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