

A STUDY ON APPLYING THE CHINESE WUXING CONCEPT TO MANAGEMENT

Chiao-Pin Bao¹, Nai-Chieh Wei², Tsung-Ji Lin³, Shu-chuan Chen⁴

¹Department of Industrial Management,
I-Shou University, Kaohsiung City 84001, Taiwan

²Department of Industrial Management,
I-Shou University, Kaohsiung City 84001, Taiwan

³Department of Industrial Management,
I-Shou University, Kaohsiung City 84001, Taiwan

⁴Department of Industrial Management,
I-Shou University, Kaohsiung City 84001, Taiwan

Abstract

Cultural footprint represents the combination of non-verbal and numerous managerial arts. This is quite the same either in the Chinese or the Western world. Simply put, management can generally display a culture's inner essences. The current study adopts the concept of Wuxing, or Five Elements (i.e. wood, fire, earth, metal, water), from Chinese culture for management by interpreting the spiritual essence and behaviors of Wuxing. Take two managerial practices for example, "Wuxing music" was utilized in hospitals for curing the patients with different Wuxing temperaments, and "Wuxing educational causes" were also adopted in schools. Both cases show outstanding results and performances. The author believes that the application of Chinese "Wuxing" concept to management can usher in a brand new epoch for the contemporary management system and Chinese management field.

Keywords: Culture, management, Wuxing, Chinese culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultures depict the historical paths of human lives and the evolution of human civilization. Chinese culture is extensive and profound, and its theoretical basis for natural phenomena had existed quite early. In *Shang Shu* (Chapter: Hong Fan), the cosmology of natural evolution and the nature of Wuxing concept were explicitly described. This study attempts to apply Chinese Wuxing concept and its five natural elements into today's management theory in order to provide feasible and substantial insights for management. Management can be considered as a type of art. The study aims at exploring the Chinese Wuxing concept and its core essences to conduct business management and drive business performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As indicated by Luo (2005), management theories enable Chinese enterprises to achieve their business goals and become powerful competitors in the international market. Chinese management theories and the related research focus on how to attain the spirit of "unity of heaven and human beings" stated in *I-Ching* (i.e. *The Book of Changes*) and to reach the harmony between human and human, human and things, as well as human and environment. In Guo's (2008) study, he suggested the fundamental basis for management lies in the holistic

perspective of social groups and cultures, showing cultural factors are integral to management. Gong (2010) categorized management theories into three types: "Cultural Management", "Behavior Management", and "Scientific Management". Among these, enterprises conduct "Cultural Management" based on cultural factors. Wang et al. (2015) mentioned management has two dimensions: explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge; they thought of tacit knowledge as the driving force for the behaviors led by cultural values. From the viewpoint of Xie et al. (2019), only when one understands the cultural values and cognition, can he guides the adoption of management theory.

Wang (2007) pointed out *Shang Shu* (Chapter: Hong Fan) was the foremost article illustrating the Wuxing concept (i.e. Five Elements including wood, fire, earth, metal, and water). The features of these five elements were described below: (a) Woods can grow in a firm and pliable manner; (b) Fire gives the sense of warm and uplifting; (c) Earth breeds crops and incorporates everything; (d) Metal can be obtained via transformation; (e) Water delivers moisture and runs toward the ground. At the time, Wuxing's abstract cultural meanings were explicated with physical phenomena. Yang (2016) stated the elements of Wuxing are more than external factors; rather it can also reflect one's internal personalities.

Personalities can be divided into five elements (i.e. Wuxing):

In Guan's (2008) study, *wood* personality is "talented, tough-minded and benevolent"; *fire* personality is "clever, impatient, and passionate"; *earth* personality is "trustworthy, loyal and careful"; *metal* personality is "active and intrepid" and thus a perfect candidate to be an executor"; *water* personality is "resourceful and changeable". According to Lu (2009), people with *wood* personality are gentle yet determined; people with *fire* personality are lively and enthusiastic; people with *earth* personality are sympathetic and agreeable; people with *metal* personality are disciplined and honorable; people with *water* personality are modest and ingenious. Yi (2017) focused on examining people with wood personality. Resembling growing trees, they possess the will of moving forward, work actively and consistently so that they can overcome various difficulties and often become leaders.

3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Cai et al. (2001) employed Wuxing rhythms to treat the tumor patients having five different Wuxing personalities. As evidenced by the research results, the adoption of Wuxing rhythms for medical treatment has delivered significant effectiveness and opened a new chapter for the application of Wuxing elements in management.

Chen (2016) showcased the use case of Chinese Wuxing elements of the Fifth Guang Gu Elementary School, Wuhan City, and explored how Wuxing elements affected its educational ideas and campus environment. After years of efforts, it has grown from an unknown school with around 300 students to a popular school with more than 2400 students. Its "Wuxing educational ideas" not only win unanimous praises from students and parents but is also highly recognized across the whole society. With the "Wuxing educational ideas", the Fifth Guang Gu Elementary School has indeed built an educational brand managed with Chinese cultural elements. This is another success story of Wuxing elements in the management field.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The use cases of Chinese Wuxing elements (i.e. wood, fire, earth, metal, water) in medical and educational fields have been quite successful. It is believed that the application of Wuxing elements can also enhance performance in business management. The management ideology can represent the overall aspects of social and cultural communities, and thus the management philosophy and implementation in different societies may be different. Guo's (2008) study reveals Japanese management (take Toyota's detail-focused style for example) differs from Western management (the example illustrated the innovation-driven management science from the U.S.); each of them has their own advantages, but the key differences mainly originate from their different cultural backgrounds. Management integrates cultural essences and scientific approaches. It is shown the actual driving force of both Chinese management and Western management is their cultural essences. Therefore, to develop a complete set of Chinese management theory incorporated with the profound Chinese Wuxing elements is helpful to apply Chinese cultural elements into managerial execution, achieve enterprises' business goals, and further drive the economic development, maintain social stability, and fully present the value of management.

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Author Profile



Tsung-Ji Lin received the M.A. degree in Tajen University Department of Recreation and Sport Management in 2014. He has served at Taiwan Railways Administration (TRA) for decades. From 2018 on, he has begun to dedicate to the training and managerial sector in TRA.