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## Finding Commonality: the first principles of the leadership thought of Theodore Roosevelt and traditional Chinese culture

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## **Finding Commonality: the first principles of the leadership thought of Theodore Roosevelt and traditional Chinese culture**

### **Cover Page Footnote**

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# Finding Commonality:

## *The First Principles of the Leadership Thought of Theodore Roosevelt and Traditional Chinese Culture*

### **Abstract**

*This paper argues that, while the imperative to find global solutions to complex problems like climate change and resource management is agreed, dominant ethical and intellectual thought leadership in many western nations impedes progress. The Cartesian binaries of western post-Enlightenment culture tend instead toward oppositional binary divides where each 'side' assumes to be the whole and not a part. And the present and future similarly assume precedence over the past. The paper points to systems thinking as both a method and a practice of wise leadership of past western and eastern societies, including their conservation of natural resources. Two historical case studies, one of President Theodore Roosevelt, the other of ancient Chinese sages, explore common features of a social vision and the thought processes that created these.*

### **Introduction**

In November 2019, the Director of Harvard University's Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Professor Michael Szonyi, expressed his cautious optimism that China and the United States would work out where the best areas for their future bilateral cooperation and competition lie. He invents the name 'coopetition' for this dynamic of apparent opposites. One area where such activity is vital, he asserts, was climate change (Szonyi, 2019).

It is unsurprising that, as the world's two largest economies engage increasingly with each other on the global stage, scholars should write about the need for reconciliation of their powerful cultural differences as a first step for these negotiations. The literature from across the disciplines has become prodigious (see, for example, Brezina & Ritomsky, 2010; Rošker, 2008; Lin, 2011; Tierney, 2018; Liu & Macdonald, 2016; Pan, Valerdi, & Kang, 2013). Two major cross-disciplinary themes emerge. The first is the historic tendency toward increasing specialization in Western knowledge construction; the second, the apparent exclusion of affect and experience in the knowledge-making process. In contrast, it is argued, Chinese thought traditions have continuously valued the specialized parts within the larger whole, while the dimensions of affect and sensory experience are incorporated with the rational, to produce an integrated knowledge of phenomena.

The paper presents an exploratory cross-cultural case study that challenges this binary position between Western and Chinese thought and supports Szonyi's cautious optimism.

The method employed in the development of the paper also endeavours, in microcosm, to enact the spirit of macrocosmic bilateral cooperation Szonyi encourages. It presents a piece of collaborative action research which aims to identify some shared first principles of historical, ethical leadership in the United States and China within the constraints of the authors' backgrounds.

The paper begins with a description of the method and its rationale. The paper's operating principle is that exploratory, cross-cultural research effort ought to support the identification of commonalities, against the popular political assumptions of negativity and otherness more typically portrayed in the media. Systems thinking is a sub field of leadership theory, in which scholars have reflected on cross-cultural practice between the West and China (Pan et al., 2013). It offers a theoretical rationale for this operating principle. This is also outlined in the method section.

Two cross-cultural case studies of ethical leadership follow. These aim to draw a direct, descriptive comparison between the shared first principles of United States and Chinese civic and conservation leadership thought. The first is drawn from the more philosophical writings of President Theodore Roosevelt. The second from comparable writings of traditional Chinese philosophy. The sole focus of the comparison will be to locate shared principle rather than to critically analyse the texts or to draw on competing textual evidence within or between the two cases.

## **Methodology: Theoretical, Practical and Ethical Considerations**

### **1. Systems Thinking**

Leading systems thinker and trainer, Peter Senge, asserts that:

*There is nothing that is going to connect us around the world with the extraordinary variety of social and economic conditions in which we live, except our commonality* (Senge, 2003).

The first principle of mining and acknowledging our often invisible "mental models" is one of five essential practices Senge identifies in his seminal leadership text, *The Fifth Discipline* (Senge, 1991). That practice becomes even more imperative when the tenets of leadership must be considered across cultural boundaries. The implication of his quote is that, in circumstances where commonality appears least likely, the first principle should be the generosity – and harder work in our often-competitive political economies – of identifying common ground.

The rationale for using systems thinking as a framework for selection and interpretation of the textual evidence for the paper is explained, before proceeding to an outline of the paper's method.

Systems thinking is a field of leadership theory increasingly recognized as essential to addressing complex global problems, including climate change (OECD, 2017). Both Western and Chinese scholars are active in the field. Some debate between them has been competitive, contesting, for example, the ancient Chinese cultural origins of core precepts, or an overly mechanistic approach by Western researchers (Pan et al., 2013). Some argue the need for greater inclusion of the principle of "Ren," of Daoist disinterest, of the intuitive and introspective, and the relational in systems thinking. Jifa Gu and Zhichang Zhu have formulated a Chinese-specific approach. They call this WSR, or Wu-li, Shu-li, Ren-li, which translated, "means to know, to sense and to care for." They argue that this will resonate with Chinese leaders because:

*compared with their Western counterparts, the Chinese uphold a cultural tradition which focuses more on Guanxi (social relationships), which may be among members of a family, within or between organizations, and within society as a whole. This is in contrast to Western thinking, which focuses more on relations between humankind and the material world. Oriental culture is also primarily concerned, at the very start of any action, with moral considerations of the consequences of social interactions. As we see it, the result of this tradition is that, in social life, the East extends greater respect to the “common good” and/or “group benefit”. Chinese philosophy since ancient times has been characterised by its belief and intention toward harmony and holism. The three major ancient Chinese philosophical traditions (Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) all emphasize harmony: e.g... the unity of Yin (the negative, lunar, feminine, soft, etc.) and Yang (the positive, solar, masculine, hard, etc.); the unity of Zhi (knowing) and Xing (doing), etc.*

Although they argue strongly for the recognition of deep cultural difference between Western and Chinese systems thinking, their approach shares a good deal with the systems thinking principles of Senge and his colleagues.

Senge, an M.I.T. scholar, represents a sub-field of systems thinking which assumes an ethic of care as fundamental to problem-solving. He also enjoys an established reputation in, and knowledge of, Chinese leadership practice. Regarded as one of the 25 leading strategic thinkers in the West, Senge was named one of China’s 1000 leading talents. Indicative of this cross-cultural reach, *The Fifth Discipline*, was a best-seller in both the West and China. His scholarship is grounded not only in his work with leading United States’ private organizations, such as Walmart, GE, and Unilever, but also with government organizations (Senge, 2006).

Senge’s systems thinking argues the need for both the West and China to return to the leadership wisdom of their histories. He argues that this is vital in the West to correct the dominance of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Cartesian dualism, reinforced by the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. So, standardized has the habit become of focusing on the part rather than the whole, and on the intellect alone in problem-solving, that Senge has shifted his attention more recently to education to remedy this. He argues that:

*the first fundamental goal, the real aim of all true systems of education, is to help each person realize their possibilities as a human being. Second is to help societies evolve to foster social and ecological well-being. Healthy economies are only healthy in the long term if they are in harmony with the larger social and ecological systems on which they depend. Economies do not exist in a vacuum, even though our current dominant indicators like GDP pretend that they do. This is not just a romantic ideal – in today’s world of worsening social and ecological imbalances, it is now a pragmatic imperative (Senge, 2018).*

In summary, he declares, we need to re-learn how to comprehend phenomena with our “head, heart and hands.”

## **2. Applying a Systems Thinking Approach**

### ***Background***

Academic research and teaching have an epistemological culture located firmly in Enlightenment thinking and reinforced by the Scientific Revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see for example, Immordino-Yand & Damasio, 2007). That tradition accounts not only for the highly specialized nature of disciplines, but also for the binary and adversarial nature of debate within and beyond the academy (Meadows, 2001)). But the method

selected for the paper runs contrary to that tradition. It offers an exploratory account of one approach to finding commonality, rejecting at this exploratory stage, the traditional academic imperative of negative critique in the early search for common ground. This approach reflects the ‘real world’ of management and leadership where both theory and practice are in play in unfamiliar settings where establishing trust is an imperative first step.

### ***Choosing Co-Authorship***

The practical determinants of theoretical framework, authorship, evidence base and structure proceeded from a four-week research visit by the Australian author to the Chinese university where she first met the co-author. The original intention had been for sole authorship using the findings of the research in China. But this changed to a choice of co-authorship when the opportunity to practice the principle of finding commonality became a real possibility. The visit itself permitted the nuanced exchange of information, impossible in non-face-to-face collaboration between strangers. It also allowed the building of trust between the researchers. The bilingual proficiency of the Chinese researcher, especially in written English comprehension, allowed for the emergence of the unanticipated choice of the evidence base for the case studies, including the more expansive choice of Chinese texts, written in Mandarin, inaccessible to the principal, monolingual author.

### ***Comparative Approach***

The research question was: *Does Theodore Roosevelt’s thought about civic society and conservation have some resonance with traditional Chinese thought?*

The evidence base of primary sources, core to historical enquiry, was decided as it became clear that the shared possibility was text. Both Roosevelt and ancient Chinese philosophers were prolific documenters of their practical philosophy, allowing for a comparison of like with like source. (The dissimilarity of comparing an individual leader with a broad-based cultural leadership was clear. But it seemed justifiable based on the well-established difference of the relative cultural emphasis based on the individual in the West and the collective in China).

### ***Historical Approach***

An historical approach based in comparative literary, philosophical text enabled the search for commonality in leadership thought, as it promoted simultaneously the trust between the collaborating researchers. It avoided the possible contention, misunderstanding and offence involved in comparing contemporary issues of civic and conservation ideals in China and the United States. But an indirect contemporary comparison remained implicit because of the prominent role played in present leadership by traditional Chinese culture and wisdom. A similarly implicit comparison with contemporary Western civic leadership is offered by Roosevelt’s thought.

### ***Selection of Case Studies***

Senge’s first discipline of interrogating and rendering explicit “mental models,” or the often-hidden assumptions individuals bring to conversation, demands a level of articulate self-knowledge that is highly challenging between people well-known to one another. The complexity is considerably amplified when the following dimensions are added: cross-cultural socialization, language, gender, age, professional background and disciplinary training. The principal author is female, in her sixties, an English-speaker, has a professional background in educational strategy, with a doctorate in the history of

environmental science. The co-author is male, in his thirties(?), has Mandarin as his first and English as his second language, and is a young career academic with a doctorate in ancient Chinese philosophy.

Apart from the comparability of the text-based evidence, the choice of case studies was based also on the pragmatic need for the two authors, coming from such different backgrounds, to be able to find common mutually intelligible ground.

In summary, the method of the paper seeks to enact Senge's call for the "search for commonality" within the constraints of language, culture, and discipline.

### **Case Study 1: Theodore Roosevelt: Thinking With "Head, Heart and Hand"** **Introduction: The "Conservationist President"**

President Theodore Roosevelt has been called the "Conservationist" President (U.S. National Parks Service). The sweeping changes wrought during his administration in the management of the nation's natural resources have been widely documented (see, for example, Schullery, 1986, Brinkley, 2010). But the risk of concentrating on any one facet of Roosevelt's presidency is that it segregates that part from the whole of his way of seeing and acting in the world. Attention can also slip too quickly into an examination of the "what" and "how" of leadership, rather than the deeper "who" or "why" of leadership thought (Senge et al., 2005). This case study will focus on the latter, beginning with Roosevelt's large civic vision. It will reveal why he thought about the natural environment in the way he did. The evidence is his direct voice, as expressed in his non-political writing. He was a man of letters who published and presented in places accessible to a reflective general readership as well as a scholarly one. The multi-volume collection of his writings illuminates the first principles of Rooseveltian thought, demonstrating the inseparability of his view of the natural and social worlds (Roosevelt, 1926).

The comparison presented by the paper may well have appealed to Roosevelt himself. He was both a nationalist and an internationalist, seeing these as mutually reinforcing positions (Roosevelt, 1910). His brokering of peace in the Russo-Japanese War was in part enabled by his extensive knowledge of those countries, as well as China. His willingness to persuade Congress to return the United States' share of the Boxer Rebellion Indemnity, in order to foster cross-cultural exchange between China and America, also points to a proclivity for seeking the common ground between apparent binary, cultural divides. For him, juxtaposing opposites highlighted distinctive features of both while also suggesting how these might fit inside a comprehensive whole. We will see Roosevelt doing this with a variety of themes, implicitly and explicitly challenging a Western epistemological bias toward binary and adversarial position-taking, unless the moral weight of opposition made this imperative.

This is not to deny the singularity that was part of Roosevelt's *modus operandi*. But even in those circumstances when a measured consideration seemed far from the reality of single-minded assertion of the right – most obviously at times of war – there is evidence in the writings, which articulate his views comprehensively, of his need to reach a balanced resolution of his own opposing perspective.

Roosevelt may also have approved of an historical narrative approach to the comparison. He read fiction and non-fiction voraciously from an early age, using the accessibility of story in his own writing to ground abstract concepts. He sought to persuade the full range of his potential audience by offering examples of experience with which they could identify. The rigor and impact of story in cultivating social change is increasingly acknowledged by scholars (Griffiths, 2017). Roosevelt was himself a President of the

American Historical Association. He saw the past, present, and future as a natural, cyclical continuum of learning about the human condition – a temporal system.

## **The Writings of Theodore Roosevelt**

The name *Theodore Roosevelt* can conjure a popular caricature of a bellicose warmonger and avid wildlife hunter. This draws on his time as rancher in the Dakota Badlands, as Rough Rider in the Spanish-American War, and as big-game shooter, nationally and internationally. It is a caricature which captures his disciplined, nineteenth-century manly vigor, but belies the complexity of his social and political leadership (Gable, 1986).

Roosevelt was also a voracious reader and learner as well as a prolific and accomplished writer for a range of audiences. A reasonably distinguished Harvard graduate, he had entered college with the intention of becoming a natural scientist. He left with his interest in the natural world intact, but his concerns about the specialization of the sciences had led him to identify his other talents in literature, history, and political science. He headed toward his political destiny. The writings on which this paper will draw are taken from essays and lectures he gave after leaving office, when his thoughts were well-honed by direct experience of the body politic. Penned in the final decade of Roosevelt's life, they reflect a distillation of his thought from the preceding five. The selection is representative of the fourteen-volume collection of his published works. Grouped into three themes, the first highlights the core elements of his civic vision. The second points to the distinctive method of his thinking process. The third focuses on his leadership of environmental reform. The purpose is to demonstrate how the third was a distilled part of the holistic vision of the first two. He was a systems thinker long before the term was coined, and in ways described above by Senge, Gu, and Zhu.

### **1. Civic Life**

#### ***"Citizenship in a Republic"***

This lecture, delivered to an audience at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1910, outlines the characteristics of ideal citizenship in a republic. He saw the process of industrialization as a necessary distraction from civilizing influences on a society, beyond its economic well-being. The U.S. industrialised decades later than most of Europe, arriving at the end of that process in the second decade of the Twentieth Century (Yi, 2015).

Once in place, the American people could "turn back to try to recover the possessions of the mind and the spirit," argues Roosevelt. In that process, leaders of thought and action (inseparable to Roosevelt) see that the "life of material gain" for the individual or for the nation can only ever hope to be a foundation from which to reach for higher ideals.

The formative unit of a republic, he declares, is the average man and woman. But the responsibility for encouraging their right duty rests with leaders whose standard must be much higher. That standard includes "cultivation and scholarship," but these run second to more essential qualities. A sound body is important, but less so than a sound mind. Most vital is character, "the sum of those qualities which we mean when we speak of a man's force and courage, of his good faith and sense of honor." He nominates self-restraint, self-mastery, common sense, courage, and resolve, alongside a readiness to accept individual responsibility while acting cooperatively with others. Individual initiative is a worthy quality but, he argues, must be kept in balance with collective goals:



*As society develops and grows more complex, we continually find that things which once it was desirable to leave to individual initiative can, under the changed conditions, be performed with better results by the common effort.*

A sense of duty is the guiding principle of the good citizen, demonstrated before all else in the home and the family and earning a living to support those who materially depend upon him. (The historical reality of a traditional family structure at that time is less important here than the exercise of the principle of loving duty). Only after that can he “help in the movements for the general well-being.” Roosevelt has no grievance with the multimillionaire if he has earned, and is willing to expend, his wealth in the service of the public good. But he believes that “beyond a certain measure of tangible success,” increasing wealth slides in importance to other things. “It is a bad thing for a nation to raise and to admire a false standard of success; and there can be no falser standard than that set by the deification of material well-being in and for itself” he asserts.

He respects neither the pride of the self-styled “practical man” who eschews all talk of morality or decency, nor his opposite number, the man of impossible idealism, who constantly “makes the impossible better forever the enemy of the possible good.”

Active class hatred, in either direction, he regards as forms of arrogance. To dismiss or seek to crush a man because he is poor is abhorrent. But so is any destructive effort, driven by envy, to damage the life of the wealthy.

A sense of citizenship was not to be contained within the nation. “The state, the aggregation of all individuals, owes [a duty] in connection with other states, with other nations,” he asserts. But, as one must first exercise duty in relation to the home, so a “man must be a patriot before he can be, and as the only possible way of being, a good citizen of the world.” And the basis of that engagement with other nations by statesmen should be “on the same basis in which an honorable man would treat other men.”

### ***“The Home and the Child”***

In this lecture, delivered as part of a series titled “Realizable Ideals,” Roosevelt expands on the home as the central location of citizenship. (Again, it is necessary to focus not on the content of the traditional roles he describes, which will always reflect the specificities of historical circumstance, but on the first principles governing relationships.)

He was strident in his view that “everything in our civilization rests upon the home; that all public achievement rests upon private character.” Every man and woman were duty bound to realize their ideals primarily “with those most intimately thrown with him or her.” He practised what he preached as the volume of *Letters to his Children* testifies (Bishop, 2006). Neither great public service nor great material acquisition could hope to “atone for the lack of a sound family life.” An important part of that was to have a good time. Roosevelt, like his parents, was no Puritan!

In that historical context, he conceived the ideal of womanhood as the bearing and rearing of “a number of healthy children.” But a man should also be disqualified from the suffrage, he believed, if he did not make his first duty that of “efficient home-maker,” a good and loving husband, a wise and loving father. This meant teaching children to fulfil the duties of American citizenship to themselves and to others. Daughters should not be encouraged to be simply pretty and idle in comfortable families. Nor should fathers treat

their sons with undue harshness. This was a distorted type of Puritanism; men should be loving and affectionate towards their sons:

*Make him your companion, make him your friend; do all you can for him; and then make him understand that in his turn he must do all that he can for you and for the rest of the family.*

Whatever the content of the familial roles he prescribes, the more profound substance is the loving and respectful reciprocity between intimates. That generous spirit could then be expanded into the public life of the citizenry.

## **2. The Balance of Opposites**

In the examples above it is Roosevelt's ethic, his rational heart, which is most on display. The following examples point highlight the workings of his rational mind. But there is ethical argument here too. The heart and the mind are not to be segregated. In fact, his discipline of invoking opposite perspectives can be seen itself as an ethical principle. His belief in democracy means giving a generous hearing to both sides of a matter.

### ***"The Thralldom of Names"***

In this essay, he argues that there is a need to look beyond names to their substance. Descriptors, such as "socialism," "liberty," "democracy," can mean different things to different people. He argues that equal amounts of violence can be done by rampant corporatism as by militant unionism. In his words, "despotism is despotism, tyranny tyranny, oppression oppression whether committed by one or by many individuals, by a state or by a private corporation" (Theodore Roosevelt Center, 1909). It is the action taken that has value, not the name under which it is taken.

Government should be at arms-length from the influence of the rich who use it improperly for their own interests. Though corporations are vital to modern business, he argues, the courts and the public have allowed them to debase both politics and business. That said, he argues it would be equally wrong to place the control of government in the hands of demagogues who seek to penalize business enterprise and destroy wealthy businessmen. That would be the undoing of the entire community. "The tyranny would be the same in each case, and it would make no more difference that one was called individualism and the other collectivism," he asserts.

Striving for a healthy social system will represent the sum of many moral, intellectual, and economic forces, he declares, and each force must depend partly on the whole system. Each of these forces is needed foremost to "develop a high grade of character in the individual men and women" who comprise the nation. As simple as it may sound, he does not pretend the job of improving society is other than challenging. It is infinitely painstaking, he says, "full of stumblings and disappointments but can also contain deep satisfaction in the striving after betterment."

### ***"Biological Analogies in History"***

Roosevelt read broadly and deeply about natural as well as human history. In this essay, he draws analogies between Darwinian evidence of non-human species' survival or transformation, and a vast array of ancient human civilizations. His thesis is that, for all the great advances in science in the previous half century, the field has begun to assume an explanatory role in human affairs that goes well beyond its capacity, and that the public has believed this false assumption.

Applauding the work of Darwin and Huxley, he uses this to frame the stories of various ancient and modern civilizations. He argues that over time every civilization rises, declines, morphs or collapses, as do species in the natural world, but with a complexity of cause and effect inexplicable in terms only of the natural sciences.

Despite, or because, of his comprehension of human history, he argues the value of citizens striving for the ideals of a civic society. Worthy civilizations are remembered and revered, looked to for future learning of principles that are sustaining, if not permanently so.

The record of human history confirms him in the view that deep respect is owed cultures and systems of government different from that of the United States, or of other European-based societies. The test of mutuality, of sustainable co-existence, is not the imposition of the elements of one culture on another, he argues, but the respect shown between nations, the same that ought to be shown between one person and another.

### ***“The Search for Truth in a Reverent Spirit”***

In this essay, based on his review of several books by scientists and philosophers of science, Roosevelt reiterates his argument of the danger of looking to scientific materialism (or economic materialism) for the solution to all the mysteries of human existence. Such a claim reveals the same hubris as religious extremism, he argues. Instead true scholarship is founded on the humble principle of not knowing, and of perseverance driven by that uncertainty.

He worries that the general public is inclined to accept a claim to certainty science seems falsely to offer but does not doubt that “advance in scientific discovery...has been...of such priceless worth to mankind,” although he believes this has been largely in the field of technical and mechanical invention, or natural history. The prominence of the Western scientific revolution means the country is “in greater danger of suffering in things spiritual from a wrong-headed scientific materialism than religious bigotry.” he concludes.

Scholars who are men of both science and philosophy are the true sages, Roosevelt believes. William James is one. He argues the paradox that:

*...physical science, if studied properly, shows conclusively its own limitations...that beyond the material world lies a vast series of phenomena which all material knowledge is powerless to explain...ordered by religion...which...if loyal to itself, work[s] according to its own nature as a spiritual activity, striving to transform men from within and not without, by persuasion, by example, by love, by prayer, by the communion of souls...and such a religion has nothing to fear from the progress of science, for the spirit to which it is loyal is that faith in duty, the search for what is for the universal good and for universal love, the secret springs of all high and beneficent activity.*

Bishop Brent is another. He declares “the only setting for any one part of the truth is all the rest of the truth” and further that “the only relationship big enough for any man is all the rest of mankind.” Scientific knowledge has no power to decide, for example, that the “prime articles in our universal faith” are the “doing of duty” and the “love of our fellow men.” Science alone is an imbalanced leader.

### 3. The Natural World

#### *"The Conservation of Wild Life"*

In his writing on conservation, Roosevelt continues the theme of the role of both science and the humanities in thought leadership. In this essay, he reviews three books on wildlife conservation.

He laments the scientific trend to reductionist descriptions of majestic forms of wildlife to their mere physical characteristics in the "driest of dry books." The growing association between the clinical language of science and what society is coming to view as truth is a concern for him. In Ruskin's prose he sees a valuable counterpoint. On display, he says, is:

*a delight in nature which can never be felt save by the man whose pulses throb with sheer delight in the spring sense of budding things, in the music of birds, the rustling of trees, the running of brooks, and in the wind-flaws in glassy lakes; a delight which can never be interpreted to others unless by one who is also master of the great art of putting fine thoughts into simple, clear, and noble words.*

He abhors the fact that the extensive slaughter of the nation's wildlife happened coincidentally with the century which witnessed the "greatest advance in material civilization." But he is relieved that early in the new century, there is a general international awakening of the need for "keep(ing) for our children's children, as a priceless heritage, all the delicate beauty of the lesser and all the burly majesty of the mightier forms of wildlife."

Similarly, society was "fast learning that trees must not be cut down more rapidly than they are replaced"; that neither beasts nor birds are the property of the people living today, but of unborn generations "whose belongings we have no right to squander." He applauds those who are beginning to understand that wildflowers "should be enjoyed unplucked where they grow" and others who concede it is "barbarism to ravage the woods and fields."

Roosevelt welcomed the international conservation movement. He delighted in the fact that America had led the way in the creation of the world's first national park, Yellowstone, but equally that the British, German, African, and Asian, countries were creating similar sanctuaries, and now overtaking that initiative. However, he warns against complacency, likening the effort to "warfare against the forces of greed, carelessness, and sheer brutality" which could still inflict "literally irreparable damage."

True to his non-binary thinking and ethic of utility, he declares that the nation's first duty is to protect its beautiful or useful mammals and birds from excessive killing, or "indeed, from all killing." But, once genuinely protected, species will increase so rapidly that it then becomes imperative to kill them. He insists on the distinction between those "true believers in hunting as a manly and vigorous pastime" and the "game-hog" or "wealthy epicure." (Again, the historical context of *manliness* needs to be kept in mind. The conservation principle here is the ethic of hunting).

Writing in 1915, he ends the piece wistfully. The preservation work being done in Africa by Germans, English, French, and Belgians demonstrated how much these societies resembled one another. In the present state of world war, it was, he said, "cruel to think that their splendid purposes and energies should now be twisted into the paths of destruction."

### ***“Our Vanishing Wild Life”***

Reviewing another book on the destruction of wildlife, Roosevelt compares a contemporary complacency with the willingness of the same “civilized people” to regard disdainfully their medieval ancestors who destroyed great works of art, or “sat slothfully by while they were.” The public treasures Attic temples, Roman triumphal arches, and Gothic cathedrals, but he considers it a reflection of a “low state of civilization” when they do not also appreciate that it constitutes “vandalism wantonly to destroy or to permit to the destruction of what is beautiful in nature, whether it be a cliff, a forest, or a species of mammal or bird.”

But he remains heartened by the expansion of the conservation movement in the country. A growing awareness of the need for drastic action rightly challenges the “folly and wickedness” of having permitted “perhaps two to three per cent” of the people to destroy the animals and birds in which “the other ninety-seven per cent have an equal ownership.”

He is not immune to the aesthetic of great art, but concludes emphatically that the nation’s purchase of a Rembrandt or Raphael is “in no way or shape such a service at this moment as to spend the money which such a picture costs in helping...the missionary (conservation) movement.”

### ***“The Conservation of Natural Resources”***

A primary function of Roosevelt’s autobiography, published in 1913, was to recount the significant achievements of his administration, to name and thank key advisors. Chapter eleven, *The Natural Resources of the Nation*, begins with an expansive tribute to Gifford Pinchot who he declares to be the single most important figure in formulating and realizing policy in forestry and public land management (Roosevelt, 1913). This innovation stimulated the rise of a broad-based conservation movement based on the same principles of stewardship of public resources.

But running through the descriptions of fighting for forestry, for irrigation in the West, for legislation to protect and preserve wildlife and birds, and to create national parks, is a single set of principles. He led the setting of a balanced policy agenda, considering various, often opposing points of view, filtered through the umbrella principle, articulated by Pinchot: achieving “the greatest good for the greatest number, in the long run” (Miller, 2001).

In what Yi Wen terms, the “detonation” of the Industrial Revolution in America from 1850 to 1920, Roosevelt’s ability to reconcile powerful opposing rights and goods was vital to realizing the above principle (Wen, 2015). At the time of his first inauguration in 1901, he declared that:

*...it was as little customary to favour the bona-fide settler and homebuilder, as against the strict construction of the law, as it was to use the law in thwarting the operations of the land grabbers. A technical compliance with the letter of the law was all that was required.*

The public viewed the nation’s natural resources as inexhaustible. Yet there was no real knowledge of what these resources were. And the relationship of conservation to the nation’s welfare was embryonic. This included the place of the farmer in society, who was

seen simply the producer of food, with no government attention paid to the broader quality of his and his family's life.

It was not surprising that Roosevelt then used his first address to Congress to declare that "the forest and water problems are perhaps the most vital internal problems of the United States." In 1902, Congress would approve an act to enable irrigation of the arid west, but funding for the United States Forest Service took a further three years of persuasion, as the data collected on the country's natural resources was being disseminated to the media to muster public support.

During his administration, national forests grew from 43 to 194 million acres, with a workforce of 500 increasing to more than 3000. All land that was found to be suitable for agriculture was opened to settlement. The railroads and other corporations were strictly regulated in their use of the forests. Irrigation began to transform "the social aspect of the West" replacing "huge, migratory bands of sheep herded by the hired shepherds of absentee owners" with "actual homemakers, who have settled on the land." In addition, the creation of five national parks, fifty-one bird sanctuaries, and national monuments such as Muir Woods, established his presidency as defined by the innovation of conservation.

By 1908, the conservation movement was so embedded in the public consciousness that Roosevelt called together the governors of all states and presidents of relevant national societies for a conference on the theme at the White House. The National Conservation Commission of 1909 was the result, and its report to Congress described by Roosevelt as "one of the most fundamentally important documents ever laid before the American people." A subsequent suggestion by the Commissioners "that all nations should be invited to join together in conference on the subject of world resources, and their inventory, conservation, and wise utilization" was accepted, but allowed to lapse when Roosevelt left office.

Each of these measures was noteworthy, he believed, in "its material accomplishment" but even more so for its contribution to the civilized society he and his advisors sought. This is declared unequivocally in the principles he enumerates, and which inform much of his other writings.

Firstly, the principle of a nation "handling its own resources and exercise(ing) direct and business-like control over them."

Secondly, "that the rights of the public to the natural resources outweigh private rights and must be given first consideration."

Thirdly, that "it is better for the Government to help a poor man to make a living for his family than to help a rich man make more profit for his company." (He said that this principle was too sound to be fought openly but was challenged in closed quarters by Congressman in the sway of special interests).

Fourthly, that "whoever (except a bona-fide settler) takes public property for private profit should pay for what he gets." (This, he said, caused the bitterest of antagonism of all amongst the special interest groups).

But, in the end, it was not simply efficient and sustainable public utility that was at stake. It was the spirit of a civilization that mattered, and the country's natural resources played a sustaining role in that. In Roosevelt's words:

*The things accomplished ...were of immediate consequence to the economic well-being of our people. In addition, certain things were done of which the economic bearing was more remote, but which bore directly upon our welfare, because they add to the beauty of living and therefore to the joy of life.*

Roosevelt has been described by many sympathetic biographers as containing dualities, as a renaissance man, as a man full of contradiction (Dalton, 2001; Ricard, 2011; Cullinane, 2017). Leading the nation wisely meant for him depending upon a synthesis of his affective, intellectual, and experiential knowledge. It meant depending upon a capacity to establish the merits of opposing, perhaps multiple, points of view to arrive at decision with rigorous integrity. But, paradoxically, arrival at an ultimate decision was framed by a singularity, an ethic, a disciplined compassion for the ordinary man, one which was the foundation of his whole worldview. It was this consistent application of "head, heart and hand" that saw the nation take great strides in conserving its essential resources and their beauty. But conservation sat within a suite of progressive measures taken to advance the collectivism of his democracy, built on the back of the individual citizen's duty and love.

How does this exploration of the essential features of Roosevelt's thought leadership compare with those of traditional Chinese culture?

The second case study draws its evidence from ancient philosophical texts. The themes of Roosevelt's thought are used as the basis for this exploratory comparison.

## **Case Study 2: A Comparative Snapshot of Ancient Chinese Thought Leadership**

### ***A Selection of Writings from Traditional Chinese Culture***

#### **1. Civic Life**

Like Roosevelt's advocacy of the ethical elements of an ideal citizenry, Confucians aimed to shape personal virtue. Of all the Confucian virtues, *Ren*, a concept similar to benevolence in Western culture, is the primary ideal in shaping an individual's view and practice of their own life, and their contribution to family, national, and international life.

#### ***The Virtue of Ren***

*Sage* and *Junzi* are the two Confucian terms used to describe a morally ideal person and a moral person respectively. How does one become a *Sage* or a *Junzi*? The key is the practice of *Ren*.

From this virtue flows other Confucian virtues. Of these the most important are respect, tolerance, sincerity, diligence and generosity. Mencius, a Confucian philosopher, believed that human compassion was the critical starting point for the development of *Ren* (Confucius, 1983).

Though *Ren* is the ideal goal of a person's life, one cannot realize it simply through its exercise in individual isolation. In traditional Chinese culture, family is the foundational environment for the practice and development of *Ren*.

The *Great Teaching (Daxue)*, a classic Confucian book, locates the first duty of an individual's ethical practice within the family. Family happiness is realized through the individual's efforts to perfect self-cultivation. The exercise of balanced, impartial judgement is key. One must allow for the co-existence and resolution of beauty and ugliness, of good and evil (Zeng, 1983). Only by exercising this mental discipline, informed by compassion, can one live a right life and play a part in nurturing respectful family life. The *Book of Changing (Zhou Yi)* describes how family happiness is achieved by the contribution made by father, mother, son, daughter, and so on. It offers a practical guide to exercising the virtue of *Ren* (Ji, 2011).

However, the practice of *Ren* ought not to be limited to the family alone. Confucians believe that *Ren* is exercised by the individual in relation to the nation, and ultimately to the world. *Yi Jing*, for instance, declares that "correction in [the] family results in stability in the world" (Ji, 2011). The *Great Teaching* enumerates the steps to be taken as one expands their practice of *Ren* from family to nation to world: "the correction of heart-mind leads to physical self-cultivation; physical self-cultivation leads to family happiness; family happiness leads to good governance of the nation; good governance of the nation leads to world peace" (Zeng, 1983).

If family happiness is the core purpose of the practice of *Ren*, a state of world peace is its aim. As the ethical scope of an individual citizen expands from family to nation and finally to the world, the meaning of *Ren* shifts from being the exercise of practical daily virtue to the principle of an enlightened human spirit practised on the global stage.

## **2. *Zhong Yong* and *Tai Ji*: The Balance Between Opposites in the Human World**

The spirit of *Ren* is achieved through a mastery of balancing opposites in the search for truth. There are two terms for describing this practice: *Zhong Yong*, the Confucian golden mean, and *Tai Ji*, the operation of *Ying Yang*.

### ***Zhong Yong*: The Balance Between Ethical Opposites in Society**

The highest goal of Confucianism is to become a *Sage*, a leader able to take the virtue of *Ren* from family practice into the world. *Ren* demands the practice *Zhong Yong*, a method of defining and balancing ethical opposites.

*Zhong Yong* is the process of finding the balance between two opposing extremes in order to find an inclusive state. For example, in the functioning of the family the *Great Teaching* warns against preferential treatment of family members according to one's personal bias.

*Zhong Yong* helps to achieve family harmony through the exercise of acknowledging and respecting individual difference. Family happiness is the domestic reflection of *Ren*; *Zhong Yong* is the method of achieving *Ren*.

Confucius himself spoke highly of the practice of King *Shun* (2287-2067 B.C.). He commended his commitment to balancing opposites by asking probing questions about complex matters of state and investigating ways in which ordinary citizens could achieve a sustainable quality of life for themselves while also contributing to collective well-being (Kong, 1983).

By extending the practice of *Zhong Yong* outwards from the family to the nation and the world, citizens are encouraged to actively contribute to achieving the same harmony on a



national and global scale as they aim for on a domestic level. Zhong Yong refers principally to the functioning of social relationships. But it has an equivalent in striving for the same balance in the natural world.

### ***Tai Ji: The Balance Between Opposites in the Natural World***

*Tai Ji* refers to *Ren's* method of balancing opposites in the natural world. There are two essential opposites in the natural world: *Yin* and *Yang*. Translated literally, *Yin* is the dark experienced when a cloud blocks the sun, while *Yang* is the light when the sun shines through (Kim, 2018). *Yin Yang*, in the book *Zhou Yi* mentioned above, are likened to the positive power of *Heaven (qian)* and to the negative power of *Earth (kun)*. *Yang (Heaven)* is also likened to “father” and *Yin (Earth)* to “mother”; through their interaction, they are responsible for the creation of all life (Ji, 2011). So, *Yin* and *Yang* symbolize the creation and continual changing of all things in the natural world. And *Tai Ji* describes the process of locating a state of balance, or harmony, between *Yin* and *Yang*.

### **3. *Tian Ren He Yi: The Balance Between the Human and Natural Worlds***

Traditional Chinese culture regards the *Tian Ren He Yi* as the highest pursuit. It means the harmonious state between man and nature and is the umbrella term encompassing *Zhong Yong* and *Tai Ji*.

*Tian Ren He Yi* encouraged the ancient Chinese to balance the interests of the human and natural worlds to achieve their mutual, harmonious, and sustainable development.

In Confucianism, Mencius pointed to examples. “Observing the laws of planting results in plenty of cereals; not putting fine nets into fishponds leads to sufficient fishes and turtles; observing the law of felling brings about enough woods.” Mencius defined the laws of nature and encouraged people to observe them for aesthetic as well as practical reasons. If people cut down trees excessively, nature would lose its natural beauty and harmony would be broken. His simple principle declared that “if nature is properly protected, everything will grow well; if not, everything will die.”

Daoism and Buddhism also promote the balance between man and nature. Laozi (571-471 B.C.), the founder of Daoism, declared that “man imitates the earth, earth imitates heaven, heaven imitates the Dao, the Dao imitates nature” (2006). In the Dao, (“the Way”) heaven, earth, and humans are the four key elements of the universe. As the final component, it is ultimately man’s responsibility to learn from and imitate heaven, Dao, and earth, or nature, in order to realize the Daoist harmony between the human and natural worlds.

Buddhist eco-philosophy has been widely researched. Many books, such as *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, *Buddhism and Ecology*, and *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environment* insist that Buddhist philosophy remains inherently eco-friendly and attune to the natural environment (Swearer, 2006). Buddhist Chan master *Yi Cun* (822-908B.C.) picked a snakelike branch in a mountain and declared “it’s natural, not fake.”. Another Chan master, *Da A* praised *Yi Cun* as a real man because of his ability to appreciate and preserve natural beauty (Puji, 1984). Buddhism, especially Chan Buddhism, opposes man’s excessive consumption of natural resources. It demands striving for the harmonious coexistence of man and nature.

China’s leadership in the twenty-first century increasingly refers to the wisdom of traditional Chinese culture as the philosophical rationale for the choices it makes about

balancing the needs of the nation's social, economic, and environmental future. Xi Jinping has said:

*Building an ecological civilization is vital to sustain the Chinese nation's development. We must realize that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets and act on this understanding, implement our fundamental national policy of conserving resources and protecting the environment, and cherish the environment as we cherish our own lives. We will adopt a holistic approach to conserving our mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, and grasslands, implement the strictest possible systems for environmental protection, and develop eco-friendly growth models and ways of life.*

In so doing, he relies not only on the ancient principle of reconciling, what some consider the opposites of, the human and natural worlds. That holism has a temporal dimension, too. The past, the present, and the future each offer their own perspective on wisdom and mutually inform one another. At a birthday celebrating the birth of Confucius Xi he declared:

*We should stick to the principle of making the past to serve the present and combine excellent traditional culture with modern culture, so that we can strive to have innovative development of traditional culture.*

It is not inconceivable to imagine Roosevelt expressing similar sentiments.

## **Conclusion**

This paper used systems thinking, as developed by Senge and his colleagues at M.I.T., to both frame its method and analyse its subject matter. In both it sought to enact the ethical imperative, declared by Senge, of searching for commonalities.

### **1. Method**

But, in so doing, the findings of the paper can only claim an exploratory status. The necessary constraints of the research method had an impact on its analytical depth. Choosing co-authorship rendered the method its own form of case study; it was a deliberate exercise in collaboration which enacted Senge's call for a search for commonality. But differences between the authors that were not only linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural, but also professional and demographic, imposed natural limits on the choice of primary sources and the depth of analysis within and between texts. However, those same constraints offered the benefits of widening the selection of Chinese texts, as well as deepening their analysis from a lens from inside the same cultural heritage. The approach was a deliberate enactment of the opposite of the binary, adversarial, and Cartesian one more typically employed in political and popular media commentary on the relative virtues of Western and Chinese culture – and the more sophisticated form this approach takes in most academic research.

### **2. Case Studies**

The exploratory nature and limitations of the research are acknowledged. But the systematic alignment of Roosevelt's writings with their common elements of ancient Chinese philosophy offers preliminary evidence of the potential for bilateralism in the search for commonality. It also reinforces the first principles of systems thinking argued by Senge, Gu and Zhu.

These textual examples highlight many common civic principles. Most notable is the shared social vision from which conservation principles are derived. There is a recognition of opposing points of view on conservation, as on other social and political matters. But, when couched within an articulated view of the civic whole, this opposition becomes a constructive dynamic informed by what, in Roosevelt's terms, is "the greatest good for the greatest number, in the long run." And that civic vision is determined, in both the Rooseveltian and Chinese cases, by invoking the integrated wisdom of the "head, heart and hand." The purely rational must be integrated with the affective and experiential dimensions of human understanding and knowledge-making. In both cases the ideal of family acts as a training ground for new citizens in learning and practising the dynamic between managing self and common interest. The obligation and spiritual satisfaction of balancing individual and collective interest, initially learned and practised there, radiates outward toward a less personalized, but similarly careful, interaction between productive citizens and societies, having potential global reach for those who become corporate and political leaders.

But Roosevelt's thought processes, as represented in these examples of his more philosophical writings, are not necessarily typical of contemporary corporate or government thought, where competition between ideas and political economies may push any cooperative principle aside. Roosevelt's successful leadership offers an empirical and instructive challenge to the highly specialized, rational and binary thought, which Senge argues has become entrenched in Western societies by the dual impact of the Industrial and Scientific Revolutions. Senge also warns about its appearance in Chinese leadership. Adversarial, ideological debate may assume that it is working towards a synthesis derived from the pitting of a thesis and antithesis against each other. But the absence of a clearly articulated civic vision, within which this dynamic occurs, combined with an expectation that one side will dominate over the other, loses sight of Roosevelt's proclivity to embrace the elements of apparent opposites, and to see the dynamic movement towards truth that this more complex thinking could offer. He had an appreciation of paradox and its function inside a civic ideal of society that reflects some of the features of ancient Chinese philosophy, such as *Yin Yang*, *Ren* and the ethical continuity between the private and public spheres. Recapturing his ethic and epistemology offers lessons in a more enlightened and constructive view of political and cultural compromise.

In Roosevelt's conservation thought, a natural extension of his encompassing civic vision, there were similar first principles to ancient Chinese wisdom. As he fought for measures that would benefit the natural environment, he also promoted a sustainable economy. Where current debate can assume a mutual exclusivity between the environment and economy, he argued their interdependence, and shared civic framework. While born and raised in New York City, perhaps the densest urban environment in the West, he had an innate or learned view of the entwining of humanity and nature, of the interdependent well-being of one with the other.

At the core of these textual examples of Rooseveltian and Chinese philosophy is a representation of systems thinking, of the kind of leadership thought and practice which institutions around the globe increasingly acknowledge as necessary to solve the existential dilemmas confronting the world. Each prioritizes the whole over the parts,

while acknowledging the interdependent dynamic between them. But “thinking” in systems implies the other elements of human understanding, named by Senge, and represented also in the textual sources, as “heart” and “hand.”

The principle of trust and human sympathy, which underpinned the choice of co-authorship of this paper, was an enactment of the call to search first for commonalities.

Michael Szonyi’s cautious optimism, that the United States and China would work towards a bilateral understanding of the best areas for their future cooperation and competition introduced this paper. Peter Senge’s imperative of searching first for commonalities was its driving principle. Its conclusion is that systems thinking, as exemplified in both the writings of Theodore Roosevelt and ancient Chinese philosophy, offers a framework within which that Szonyi’s and Senge’s pragmatic, civic ideal may be achieved, including the critical dilemma of climate change. It further suggests that the adversarial binary divide which could exist between ‘cooperation and competition’ has the potential to be a constructive dynamic of opposites leading to a middle, mutually beneficial middle way.

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