Editorial

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1   Introduction

A quick search of Google Scholar provides us with more than 206,000 hits for the search term "Confucius", 241,000 hits for "Confucianism" and 355,000 hits for "Confucian". Searching the Scopus database, there are more than 11,300 hits for "Confucius" and 22,400 hits for the search term "Confucian". The gold-standard database Web of Science (Core collection) yields more than 1400 hits for "Confucius" and more than 4400 hits for the search term "Confucian". These statistics attest to the ubiquity of the Confucian legacy across the social sciences, as it continues to expand and be (re)interpreted to suit the changing political economy landscape and arising socio-cultural issues.

The exponential growth of all things Confucian (as opposed to *about* Confucius) in the Web of Science since 2008 (73% of all hits) and since 2010 within Scopus (72% of all hits) goes beyond mere correlation with China's rapid socio-economic rise and Western (mis)understanding of it (Davies and Rašković, 2017; Kroeber, 2016). There is more to the story. It is spearheaded by the perceived challenge that China seems to pose to the identity of a global West and occidental culture (see Fukuyama, 2019). While this is by no means the first time in recent history that the West has struggled with the "otherness" of the East (see Rašković et al., 2020), the scale and ubiquity of this perceived challenge has been exacerbated by the global economic and financial crisis. The latter, as a black swan-type event (Taleb, 2010), shifted the narrative from clashes between civilisations (Huntington, 1996) to feverous debates over world order and the prophecy of Thucydides' trap.

Such discourse will take on new meaning in a post-COVID-19 world where China is likely to become a lightning rod for deep-rooted anger, fear and anxiety in many parts of the world. We can expect this especially in the USA, where President Trump's administration has sought ways to deflect both attention and resentment of the American people over mounting challenges and eroding identity as the undisputed leader of the free world. Drawing on 15,000 years of human social development history, the alleged Western global rule is expected to end around year 2103, if one draws on the historical analysis of Ian Morris (2011) in his highly acclaimed *Why the West Rules – For Now?*

For the present, most debates are increasingly dominated by politics of identity (Fukuyama, 2019) and appear to be less interested in traditional understandings of political economy, history or socio-cultural differences. A simple illustration of this is the fact that the predominant body of contemporary Confucian-related research within both Web of Science and Scopus over the last decade, let alone across popular (business)

media, comes from the global West (with the USA representing more than 45% of the whole body of work in Web of Science, as an example).

Western fascination with Confucianism goes back to Marco Polo in the 13th century and is not just a simple by-product of the Age of Discovery (Morris, 2011). It likely also has something to do with the similarities between East Asian Confucian culture and so-called "Italian Confucianism" – both sharing distinct social capital mechanisms and the prevalence of family bonds (Fukuyama, 1995). As Italy became the cradle of the European Renaissance, Marco Polo's fascination with the Middle Kingdom in the East spread through the old continent (Morris, 2011). Much later, the special relationship between "the Beautiful Country" (the Chinese name for the USA) and "the Middle Kingdom" (the Chinese name for China) became instrumental for both countries (Pomfret, 2016).

For a long time, the East Asian Axial-Age sage was compared to other Axial-Age thinkers in the West, such as Aristoteles (Koehn, 2019). Gradually, however, *our* Western interest turned from all things about Confucius to all things Confucian in a remarkable example of attribution error. It underwent a series of shifts in focus: from understanding Confucianism as a "religion of common sense" (Nisbett, 2003, p.15) to a Western fascination with neo-Confucianism, as a role model for "Benevolent Despotism" by the likes of Voltaire, Hume and Europe's enlightened "Philosopher-Monarchs" (e.g., Katherine the Great) (Warner, 2016, p.609), towards a more contemporary interest in Confucian capitalism (Redding, 1993) and Confucian management (philosophy) (Tsang, 2009). Over the last decade or so, it has morphed and "mutated" into an obsession with New Confucianism, perceived as a type of malign statecraft (Norris, 2016) and influenced by the revival of a new type of civilisational clash (Huntington, 1996).

Even within economics and management, our interest in Confucianism has shifted from curiosity about the East, to studying the transformations of East Asian Confucian tiger economies between the 1960s and 1990s (Vogel, 1991), to an active pursuit to understand Confucian management (Hill, 2006), Chinese management (Warner, 2016) and/or Asian management (Hofstede, 2007) against the broader brush strokes of so-called "Asian values" (Jenco, 2013; Kim, 2010). As identity politics started seeping into management and organisation, the curious traditions of exploring the East gave way to a much more defensive agenda for curtailing Chinese statecraft (Norris, 2016), worries about the rise of a Leninist-type state (Lardy, 2019; Ko, 1999) and the so-called "cosmopolitanization" of Confucian culture (Tan, 2015).

Despite the absence of organised violence, economic nationalist pundits have started to paint Confucian capitalism and Confucian management as existential threats to Western prosperity (Navarro and Autry, 2011) and its core institutional principles (e.g., Li and Alon, 2020). They have often reduced any indigenous elements of Chinese or East Asian management philosophy and culture to an allegedly malign Confucian chimera (Barney and Zhang, 2009; Liu, 2014) – in the process mistaking Confucianism for a uniform normative theory of ethics (Nichols, 2015) and a realist interpretation of East Asian culture (Tamaki, 2007). As Nisbett (2003) so eloquently pointed out, Confucian philosophy is but one of the spices making up the delicious dish that is East Asian philosophy.

Even within international management scholarship, cross-cultural studies and any other disciplines with a particular interest in contextual richness, it has become increasingly hard to escape the narratives of identity politics or the orthodox Western-centric onto-epistemology (Tsui, 2006; Warner, 2016). Often, management scholars have

failed to understand the profound colonial undertones in Western understanding of and approach to Confucian management. One such example would be the concept of Confucian entrepreneurship, which has been closely associated with Confucian capitalism since Deng Xiaoping's call for glorious entrepreneurship at the end of his southern tour in the early 1990s. A recent historical genealogy by Smith and Kaminishi (2020, p.26) showed that the concept "emerged from texts produced by nineteenth-century Western missionaries, merchants, and other observers of China whose worldviews were coloured by colonialism".

According to Pomfret (1998), Confucius has achieved epic proportions, something akin to Jesus Christ in the West. Even if this is true only in cultural terms, the irony of the analogy cannot escape us. Like that of Jesus, the legacy of Confucius suffers from what I would call the so-called Bible syndrome. Much like the Bible, our understanding of the legacy of this East Asian Axial-Age thinker has been based on interpretations and re-interpretations of his students, followers and contemporaries. It has often been driven by the thinking needed at the time, to borrow from Ian Morris (2011). In the process, we have seen Confucian thought evolve from metaphysical teachings about life, to a more humanistic and rationalist philosophy of life focused on establishing harmony with the universe through social relationships, to a reinvented socio-political ideology of neo-Confucianism in the Tang, Song and Ming dynasties (which started to expand to South Korea, Japan and beyond), to a more recently invented New Confucianism in the 20th century – which was interrupted by China's rejection of all things old during the Cultural Revolution – only to become a tool of statecraft by the Chinese political establishment in its newfound pursuit of the Chinese dream for a rejuvenated civilisation.

Today's view of Confucianism has mushroomed from general thinking about management theory (influenced particularly by Peter Drucker's and Geert Hofstede's work) to more or less natural applications of Confucian principles across an array of functional areas within management (e.g., human resource management, entrepreneurship, marketing, corporate social responsibility) and a plethora of organisational levels (e.g., from corporate governance to managerial decision-making, from pricing strategies to knowledge-based competitive advantage and learning) (see Tsui, 2006).

In this process, the legacy of Confucius has turned from a noun (Confucianism) to an adjective (Confucian) within contemporary management research. Too often, it has been employed as a synonym for anything Chinese or even East Asian. This has obstructed the necessity to clearly distinguish between a possible theory of Chinese management vs. a Chinese theory of management (Barney and Zhang, 2009). Too seldom have we in fact asked ourselves the question of what is actually Confucian in our understanding of Confucian management, or Chinese management for that matter.

Within the management and organisation literature, Tsui (2006) has highlighted the distinction between a predominant "outside-in" approach vs. a less prevalent "inside-out" approach to the contextualisation of Chinese management research. While the former (outside-in) has applied Western onto-epistemology to study a range of management phenomena (e.g., from human resource management to cross-cultural negotiations and crisis management), which should not be a priori discounted (Whetten, 2002), the latter (inside-out) seeks to understand the influence of various types of embeddedness and social structuration of management phenomena against the backdrop of China's many transformations and paradoxes (e.g., economic transition, socio-economic mobility, institutional evolution, paradoxes of tradition and modernity, etc.).

It is this set of tensions which has motivated the topic of the Confucian/Chopsticks management special issue in this journal. It is as much based on the analogy of a simple pair of chopsticks, which become useful only when used jointly, as it is driven by the adjective "imbued" within the title of this special issue.

2   From a pair of chopsticks to Confucian/Chopsticks management

The concept of Confucian/Chopsticks management should be seen as an extension of the concept of Confucian/Chopsticks marketing proposed by Fam et al. (2009) in a special issue of *Journal of Business Ethics*. Drawing on the example of chopsticks, as an analogy for business models, Fam et al. (2009) pointed out that a pair of chopsticks essentially comprises two individually functionless sticks which become useful eating utensils only in harmony. They went further:

> *Analogous to the intricacy of eating with chopsticks, marketing effectively to East Asian consumers entails identifying and understanding local customs, traditions, values, and consumer behavior. Success also depends on how well marketers harness networks composed of government officials, religious bodies, suppliers, distributors, and consumers. A deep appreciation of local cultural values is key to Confucian/Chopsticks marketing.* (Fam et al., 2009, p.393)

Fam et al. (2009) saw Confucian legacy as both a set of axiomatic "pragmatic rules" to govern relationships among people in order to achieve harmony and a type of "doctrine that mandates honesty within families, businesses, and governments" deeply embedded in East Asian minds and based on virtue ethics (*ibid.*, p.393).

This special issue expands their initial conceptualisation and focuses on the need for cross-context conversations between Eastern and Western management and business practices (Whetten, 2002; Tsui, 2006). Such interest has unfortunately faded into the background in times of identity politics and a polarised understanding of cultural differences between "the West" and "the East", despite their many similarities and complementarities (Venaik and Brewer, 2019). It especially emphasises the role of contextual understanding of (relational) international business phenomena (Harzing and Pudelko, 2016) and its place within management theory (Tsui, 2006), against the backdrop of strategic and operational mechanics of adaptation to a specific business environment (Ferreira et al., 2011).

However, this special issue does not approach "Confucianism" as a homogenous normative theory of virtue ethics (Nichols, 2015) nor just an axiomatic view of the world that generates a normative model of human life (Liu, 2014), or even a realist interpretation of East Asian culture (Tamaki, 2007). Instead, it approaches it as a *legacy* (Warner, 2016; Liu, 2014) that has had an important influence on myriad aspects of humanity as a complex and holistic "family system" (Liu, 1998).

According to Warner (2016), the following three elements can be considered the main pillars of Confucian legacy:

1   A normative model of human relations, based on inductive reasoning, which covers three basic human relations: the guidance of subjects by rulers, the guidance of sons (children) by their fathers and the guidance of wives by their husbands.

2 The five constant virtues (*wu chang*) of benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*) and fidelity (*xin*). Among them, benevolence is considered a supreme virtue achieved through relationships governed by social capital (*guanxi*), rites (*li*), dignity (*mianzi*, or the concept of face) and reciprocal obligations (*renqing*).

3 The so-called doctrine of the (golden) mean, which seeks harmony through the pursuit of a middle way – emphasising the relationship between actors and/or a need to find compromise between any opposing perspectives (extremes).

With regard to the onto-epistemology aspects of Confucianism, it is also noteworthy to mention the five core principles of Confucian thinking especially relevant for scholarship (Liu, 1998, p.262):

1 The spirit to assert what is here and now and to let everything go, for nature to take its own course.

2 A holistic, all-embracing approach to wisdom.

3 The importance of warmth and compassion (related to the concept of benevolence).

4 The wisdom of how to perpetuate one's own (indigenous) culture.

5 Not just a world view, but in fact an *attitude* that the whole world is one family.

3 About the special issue

The special issue on Confucian/Chopsticks management is organised as a double issue. It includes 11 papers. They provide a good balance in terms of "Western" and "Eastern" co-authorships, as well as the breadth/coverage of specific East Asian Confucian countries and territories (not only China and Taiwan but also Japan and Korea) and depth of probing into various areas within the management literature (from business ethics and etiquette to human resource management, marketing, customer relationships and negotiations). In terms of the latter, the 11 papers making up this double special issue can be organised into four topical groups.

The first group of papers provides an introduction to the topic and the general idea behind the special issue as a cross-context conversation on Eastern and Western management practices (Whetten, 2002). The two papers in this group overview the key elements of Confucian management philosophy deeply rooted in philosophy of virtues, address the differences and similarities between Chinese and Western business practice and contextualise their findings in terms of contemporary management practices.

The first paper, by Nibing Zhu, Zhilin Yang, Shaohan Cai and Haohao Sun, looks at the differences between Chinese and Western business practices. They draw on cultural differences in Confucian and Anglo-American cultural archetypes and discuss the corresponding managerial implications in terms of the five virtues in Confucian philosophy. The authors present an interesting case of a pharmaceutical retail chain, Tong Ren Kang, from Shanxi province, with over one hundred stores. They illustrate the influence of Confucian philosophical principles in nuanced ways and show the common Confucian threads between internal processes, operational strategies and external customer strategies. Among these, the practice of "acquaintance recommendation"

related to the virtue of trustworthiness is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the company's Confucian-style management philosophy. Another aspect would be the vagueness and implicitness of their internal organisational rules and regulations (which one would not expect within the pharmaceutical industry).

The second paper, by Balázs Vaszkun, Sára Koczkás, Tseren Ganbaatar, Kuo Chi-Hsien, Yanghang Yu, Yuan Yao, Balázs Sárvári and Munkhbat Orolmaa, is motivated by a more fundamental question of Confucius' influence on management today. It echoes the works of Peter Drucker and his contemporaries (e.g., Rarick and Gallagher, 2000). The authors start by discussing the influence of Confucianism on both the relational (hierarchy, ethics and leadership) and personal aspects of management (behaviour and virtues). They employ a qualitative study based on 30 semi-structured interviews with 22 Confucian managers from mainland China and Taiwan and 8 managers from Europe and Mongolia, as the control group. Testing a conceptual framework derived from the analysis of Confucius' *Analects*, the authors find that while many Chinese managers believe Confucianism to have a strong influence on Chinese management (54%) and the behaviour of managers (40%), a vast majority were familiar only with a few seminal concepts and "were unable to identify specific sources or ideas about Confucianism, or offer a general definition of it" (*ibid*.). This and their other findings support more the notion of a Chinese theory of management rather than a normative theory of Chinese management.

The second group of papers relates to a stronger cultural lens applied to various management phenomena and performance outcomes. A paper by Hongjun Zhao and Zhonghui Ding focuses on Confucius' home province of Shandong, which even today represents the most conservative and traditional part of contemporary China. Analysing the national database of Chinese industrial enterprises in Shandong Province (which today counts more than 100 million inhabitants), their study shows that firms in a business environment with particularly salient Confucianism tend to generally have lower business costs, have a higher debt ratio, display increased trust in their business partners, have higher labour productivity and pay higher employee wages. They tend to pay less tax to the state and have a lower productivity level compared to firms in other environments within China. Perhaps most interesting is the authors' measure of Confucianism, where they take the numbers of Confucian temples and memorial archways for chaste women as a proxy of the salience of Confucianism in a given business environment.

Next, the paper by Kim-Shyan Fam, Djavlonbek Kadirov, Ahmet Bardakci, Davor Vuchkovski and James E. Richard presents a fascinating study about the extent to which Confucian business ethics and etiquette influence relationship performance across various stages of a business relationship (inception, development, maintenance, dissolution). Analysing a survey of 583 businesspeople from several Chinese business hubs, the authors find that in terms of business ethics, relationship fairness and relationship stability drive relationship performance at the growth and maintenance stages. With regard to the special role of *guanxi* (*quanxi*), the authors' findings show that such type of social capital becomes more important in the growth and maturity stages. This finding challenges the predominant view of the boundary-spanning role of *guanxi* in the inception stage of business relationships in China (e.g., Liu and Gao, 2014). True to the chopsticks analogy, the authors further tease out distinct business etiquette archetypes and link them to specific stages of the business relationship, showing an overall importance of socially acceptable protocols for business relationships. While the authors

add to a more nuanced understanding of how business orientation effects performance (via business etiquette and ethics), their findings on the significant gender differences in the growth stage of business relationships are particularly interesting.

The last paper in this group, by Gregor Pfajfar and Agnieszka Małecka, draws on the popular Yin Yang Chinese cultural framework developed by Fang (2012), which is grounded in a dialectical philosophy of continuous change, simultaneous contradiction and holistic relationship principles (Nisbett, 2003). The authors analyse the impact of Confucian virtues on Chinese negotiation strategies across multiple case studies. Their findings show a dynamic and relationship goal-oriented approach among Chinese negotiators. Rites and rituals are invoked in the case of distributive negotiations of a more transactional nature, while benevolence, compassion, honesty, righteousness and faithfulness govern integrative negotiations where long-term value creation is pursued.

The third topical group contains four papers which address organisational relationships (human resource management) and customer relationships (marketing). The first paper in this group, by Hong-Jing Cui, Feng Yao, Tai-Yang Zhao, Tjong Budisantoso, Er-Shuai Huang and Xiao Yang, looks at the influence of Confucian values on customer relationships in the context of a product crisis. The authors examine customer loyalty and forgiveness in a product crisis. Analysing a survey of 354 Chinese consumers, the authors find that Confucian values have a positive influence on customer loyalty and forgiveness. Empathy and attribution play an important mediating role, while purchase experience and perceived severity act as moderators. Their empirical results nicely complement the recent conceptual work by Wang and Laufer (2020), which shows that significant contextual differences in China affect both triggers of crises in China vis-à-vis the West and specific crisis management strategies deployed in a crisis situation.

The second paper, by Hsiaoping Yeh, combines ethics and exploration of customer trust in addressing the effect of business method plagiarism on customer trust in an online market environment. Providing a cultural comparison of American ($n = 382$) and Taiwanese customers ($n = 401$), the results show that Taiwanese customers tend to be more forgiving compared to their American counterparts when reputational and quality experiences can still be obtained from the misconducting retailer. The value of this comparative study lies in the specific unpacking of trust according to a series of Confucian virtues (trustworthiness, dignity, justice, propriety), as well as the broader implications of this study in terms of Fukuyama's (1995) work on trust.

A third paper in this group, by Nada Zupan, Robert Kaše, Matej Černe and Matevž Rašković, provides a four-country comparative study of 953 undergraduate students. It examines the anticipatory psychological contracts (APCs) of young labour market entrants in two Confucian East Asian countries (China and South Korea) and two Central and East European countries (Poland and Slovenia). Drawing on the concept of Confucian work ethic, the results shows distinct APC patterns for employee and employer obligations, with strong generational culture. Nonetheless, higher performance orientation (balanced APC) in terms of employee obligation and higher loyalty (relational APC) in terms of employer obligation among Chinese and South Korean respondents show that even for this global generation of future labour market entrants, Confucian work ethic still has an effect.

The last paper within this group, by Zhixia Chen, Jie Xu, Yanghang Yu, Shangan Ke and Yi Zhao, explores the link between power distance and supervisor ostracism within Chinese organisations, further moderated by procedural fairness. A survey of 396 employees showed power distance to be positively related to supervisor ostracism,

procedural fairness to be negatively related to supervisor ostracism, and procedural fairness also playing a moderating role in the relationship between power distance and supervisor ostracism. This study sheds light on the Confucian cultural antecedents of supervisor ostracism, heavily steeped in hierarchy but also potentially offset by procedural fairness.

This brings us to the last pair of papers within the fourth topical group. These papers address the influence of a Confucian legacy on business practices and relationships in Japan and South Korea. The paper by Balázs Vaszkun and Takashi Saito looks at the prevalence of Confucian legacy in contemporary Japanese business practices and style of management. Distinguishing Japanese management style in terms of its economic and "psychological" aspects, the authors adopt the organisational governance approach emphasising relationships, which sets apart an Eastern approach to management from a Western one (Filatotchev et al., 2020). Using a questionnaire with 16 specific statements relating to beliefs about Japanese management style, the authors' survey of 353 Japanese employees shows that Confucian values have a strong influence on the psychological aspects of Japanese style of management, infusing it with parental responsibility of managers and the emphasis on employee loyalty. On the other hand, the economic aspects of a Japanese style of management seem to be unaffected by Confucian values.

The last paper, by Alison Pearce, Katarzyna Dziewanowska, Rose Quan and Ilsang Ko, looks at Confucianism as a lens to compare successful business relationships between South Korea and Europe. Evaluating critical cases in a series of long-running EU-Korean collaborative relationships, the authors address the impact of Korean Confucianism on relationships with EU counterparts. The authors show Korean Confucianism to be "a major positive influence on the ability to initiate and develop sustained working relationships to achieve increasingly complex and ambitious aims" (*ibid.*). In the end, the authors propose a framework that outlines a series of "combining approaches" which facilitate a synchronised adjustment of Korean and European values, much like a pair of chopsticks. An essential element of such approaches is, for example, the engagement in common rituals. This not only breeds respect and trust, but also facilitates behavioural adjustment essential for successful long-term business relationships between East and West.

4   Acknowledgements

I would also like to thank all the reviewers involved in this special issue for volunteering their time and expertise and for engaging with the papers in a critical yet constructive manner. Every paper underwent at least two rounds of reviews and was usually reviewed by three different reviewers. In most cases, the papers were reviewed by reviewers from both the West and East Asia, with diverse disciplinary backgrounds. Lastly, I would like to thank the authors. Without their curiosity, creativity and fruitful international and (often) cross-cultural collaboration, this special issue would not see the light of day. The fact that the special issue was expanded from an original single to a double issue is perhaps the greatest testament to the quality of their work.

I hope this special issue can help strengthen cross-contextual dialogue essential for academia, as consciousness of society. I hope it can help curb the viciousness of identity politics in the hands of demagogues and populists, which threaten to weaponise science. I hope it will introduce the *European Journal of International Management* to a broader audience of curious, open-minded and benevolent scholars – not just in Europe, but also in East Asia and well beyond.

He waka eke noa = we are all in this together (an old Māori proverb).

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