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## **UNDERSTANDING THE NEGLECTED WISDOM OF SUN- ZI ART OF WAR ON LEADERSHIP**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study serve to illuminate in detail the larger issues of research on Sun Zi Art of War by examining it's neglected wisdom and how it influences corporate leaders' change and performance and leadership in a specific case and Chinese corporate leaders in Malaysia in general. All data were coded and analysed using open, axial and selected coding procedures through the inductive analysis based on this study. Themes emerged from the data are pointed to the dimensions of strategic mindset, proper planning and execution and leadership qualities. These evidences further explore and confirm the neglected wisdom of Sun Zi Art of War in terms of values such as swiftness, flexibility as well as overwhelming momentum.*

**Keywords:** Sun Zi Art of War, leadership, change, inductive, analytic, wisdom

### **INTRODUCTION**

In South East Asia, particularly in Malaysia, as a developing nation, most of the the studies were focused on the Chinese business community and organisations which were based on western theories and models, such as the studies by Balasubramaniam (2006), Cheong (1992), Chin (2003), Gomez (1999), Hara (1991), Heng (1992), Jesudason (1989), Jomo (2005), Lee (2000), Lim (1981), Yeung (1999), Yong (1987) and Yoshihara (1988). There is a lack of scholarly in-depth research on and inquiry of Chinese business leadership practices with a display of wisdom based on the knowledge and understanding of Buddhism values, thoughts, morals, traditions and philosophy, apart from the research on overall Chinese business community mentioned above.

There are many approaches in the studies of leaders and leadership but the conclusions are not conclusive (Gill 2011; Yulk 2010; Stogdill 1974; Chemers 1997; Bass 1985, Stogdill (1974), Chermers (1997), Guillen (2010), Whittington et al. (2005), Timothy et al. (2004) and Furnham (2010) focused on trait theories whereas Likert (1961), Dixon (1985), Blake and Mouton (1982), Chomsky (1999), Moller (1994), Timmothy et al. (2004) and Hoel, H., Lards Glaso, Jorn Hetland, Cary L. Cooper and Stale Einarsen (2009) studied the relationship between leadership behavior and leadership effectiveness. Similarly, Wright (2000), Bryman (1992), Hodgson and White (2001), Ciulla (2004) and Goffee and Jones (2000) conducted research on the relationship between situational factors and leadership effectiveness, while Bass (1990), Randell (2008), Bass and Avolio (1994), Popper and Mayseless (2003) and John and Beverly (2007) explored transactional and transformational leadership.

There are a large number of Malaysian Chinese corporate leaders who started their business from a very small family concern to become multi-billion business enterprise. Success stories of personalities such as Robert Kuok, Lim Goh Tong, Lok Boon Siew, William Cheng, Vincent Tan, Lee Shen Jin, Yeoh Tiong Lay (YTL), Teoh Hong Piow, Quek Leng Chan, and many others are commonly splashed across pages in local newspapers, business magazines. Their business acumen, diligence, determination, beliefs, philosophy, and etc have become the hallmark of their many successes. It is noted that most of these entrepreneurs are not highly educated and most of them are very stubbornly oriental and Chinese in outlook and orientation, with minimal exposure to Western theories and approaches of leadership. Their diligence, determination, endurance and hard work, and hence their success in transforming their family businesses into multi-national business concerns across the globe are the focus of discussion in forums and interviews.

The strong oriental character in general and Chinese character in particular in the conduct of their business is a reflection of deeply entrenched or embedded Chinese philosophy, and the ability to act as a result of their knowledge and understanding of the Chinese values, morals, philosophies, strategies, and traditions (Yeung 2006; Xi 2011; Warner 2008). As a departure to the normal approaches to leadership as mentioned above, it is believed that there is a strong need to study leader and leadership in a new light, not being unnecessarily being confined and restricted theoretically, a qualitative research approach should be chosen to explore and examine the potentials of values, traditions, beliefs, morals and philosophies and in facilitating leaders in the transformation of the organizations.

The lived experiences of eminent Malaysian Chinese corporate leaders, their knowledge and understanding of Buddhism philosophy, thoughts, values, ethics, has not been the focus of serious academic study even though it has been variously published in business magazines and newspapers. This experience in leadership is valuable. Virtually every leader achieved success by building on earlier experiences, learn from these experiences, by analyzing them to help solve future problems and meet future challenges.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

While strategic beliefs have always impacted the practice of management, there has been increased interest in the relationship between strategy and business in recent years (Dean, Fornaciari, and McGee 2003; Fry 2003; Abuznaid 2006; Schwartz 2006). Some of this interest has been directed towards an ethical orientation (White 1999; White and Taft 2004; Suen, Cheung, and Mondejar 2007; Yukl 2011), however, the area of study has now been expanded to include other areas of

interest to management researchers. The impact of strategic beliefs on managerial behavior, and how researchers should study this relationship, has become a legitimate field of inquiry.

In a nutshell, Western theories of leadership are generally based on the principles of democracy and individual freedom (Yukl 2010). Organisation's structure developed based on command and control assuming individuals are self-motivated. In comparison, oriental concept of leadership is not as widely studied as Western and most of the Eastern leadership studies are mainly based on superficial narrative studies.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study serve to illuminate in detail the larger issues of research on Sun Zi Art of War by examining it's neglected wisdom and how it influences corporate leaders' change and performance and leadership in a specific case and Chinese corporate leaders in Malaysia in general based on a specific case's exploratory insight. The main purpose of this study hence is to answer the following research questions:

### **Research Questions**

The main purpose of the study is to examine how knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy influences corporate leaders' managerial practices and performance and leadership in Malaysia using an inductive case design. It is primarily a qualitative research, embodying within its framework the inductive paradigm.

Objectives of the study encompassing two main objectives, the study attempts to:

- (1) Examine what is the participant's responses of knowledge and understanding for Sun Zi Art of War philosophy.
- (2) Explain how does Sun Zi Art of War influences participant's leadership and managerial practices.

Specifically, the study attempts to provide answer to the following research questions:

*Research Question 1:* What is the respondent's responses of knowledge and understanding for Sun Zi Art of war philosophy?

*Research Question 2:* How does Sun Zi Art of War philosophy influences leadership?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **SUN ZI ART OF WAR PHILOSOPHICAL PROBING**

Sun Zi emphasized the importance of positioning in military strategy. The decision to position an army must be based on both objective conditions in the physical environment and the subjective beliefs of other, competitive factors in that environment. He thought that strategy was not planning in the sense of working through an established list, but rather that it requires quick and appropriate responses to changing conditions. Planning works in a controlled environment; but in a changing environment, competing plans collide, creating unexpected situations.

The Sun Zi Art of War has been applied to many fields well outside of the military. Much of the text is about how to fight wars without actually having to do battle: it provides suggestions on

how to outsmart one's opponent so that physical battle can be avoided. As such, it has justified as a training guide for many competitive endeavors that do not involve actual confrontation and combat.

Sun Zi believed that war is a matter of life and death. Hence, the highest order of warfare is in attacking or frustrating the enemy's strategy. The *Art of War* can be studied as the following; moral influence; strategy and stratagem as well as organizational capabilities.

### **Moral Influence**

Moral character is seen as one of the most important quality of an effective leader. Moral rules are social contract that must be adhered to. The fundamental factors that determine the success of a war is the 'Way' (Lin 1995). The Way is the underlying factor that makes people think in line with the leader with devoted followership.

Likewise, Wee (2005) stated that moral influence refers to the additional quality of a leader which distinguishes him from other than the playing the role of commander or general. The moral influence is critical in determining the success of organizational endeavours. Recently, there were vast evidences of corporate corruptions and issues of moral decay among the corporate scenes in many parts of the world and caused the crisis of confidence due to immoral or unethical leadership.

Leadership will fail in long run unless it is supported by moral influence. Sun Zi also mentioned that the ability to command is another factor that should be observed. According to Sun Zi, command includes a wise, trustworthiness, sincerity, benevolence, courage leadership behaviour (Lin 1995; Eriksen 2014). The leader needs to establish his moral influence with good personal character before effective leadership. By wisdom, leader should be wise in his thought and actions (Wee 2005).

According to Sun Zi, effective leader uses authority and law to govern the behaviour of followers. In enforcing discipline, a leader must be responsible, flexible and impartial as to reward and punishment is concern. Sun Zi's *Art of War* has drawn an association between living wisdom leadership and strategic leadership theory, suggesting that the existing transactional-transformational construct doesn't effectively lend itself to the ineluctable pace of organizational change manifest in today's geo political environment.

Sun Zi said: "*The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected*" (Sun Zi: 1:1)

The system of thought of Sun Zi manifested a strategic planning decision that should be made prior to any war or confrontation and with the awareness of the importance of prior planning and the calculation of chances of winning the war in terms of careful war (**sheng zhang**). One should be able to obtain the preemptive position on offensive and defensive possibilities. Thus, the main issue of winning in a war is of highest strategic intent and content.

Obviously, Sun Zi's philosophy focused on the five factors that governed the outcome of a war. Nevertheless, initiating a war is considered the last resort to conflict resolution in relation to prior political harmonization. Thus, the practices of wisdom on any confrontation should be utmost encouraged.

## Strategy and Stratagem

Sun Zi believed that a good generalship must know how to attack by stratagem. The success in warfare is determined by the following five factors. Sun Zi said:

“The which knows when to fight and when not to will win. The side which knows the difference between commanding a large army and a small army will win. The side which has unity of purpose among its officers and men will win. The side which engages enemy troops that are unprepared with preparedness on its own part will win. The side which has a capable commander who is free of interference from the sovereign will win.”

Quoted in Sun Zi: *The Art of War* (Wee 2005)

In strategizing, a leader needs to carefully study the strengths and weaknesses of its enemy and his own because the best strategy is to attack the enemy without fighting it. Sun Zi said:

“knowing oneself and knowing others will lead to 100 percent success. Knowing oneself but not knowing others will lead to 50 percent success. Not knowing oneself and not knowing others will lead to 100 percent failure.”

Quoted in Sun Zi: *The Art of War* (Wee 2005)

For instance, Sun Zhi sees leadership (towards war) is a question of vital importance to the state, a matter of life and death, and the road to survival or ruin. Hence, it is a subject which calls for careful study. To assess the outcome of war, a leader needs to examine the belligerent parties and compare them in terms of the following five fundamental factors: The first is the way (*tao*); the second, heaven (*tian*); the third, earth (*di*); the fourth, command (*jiang*); and the fifth, rules and regulations (*fa*). It is he who masters them that wins and he who does not that loses (Wee 2005).

## Organisational Capabilities

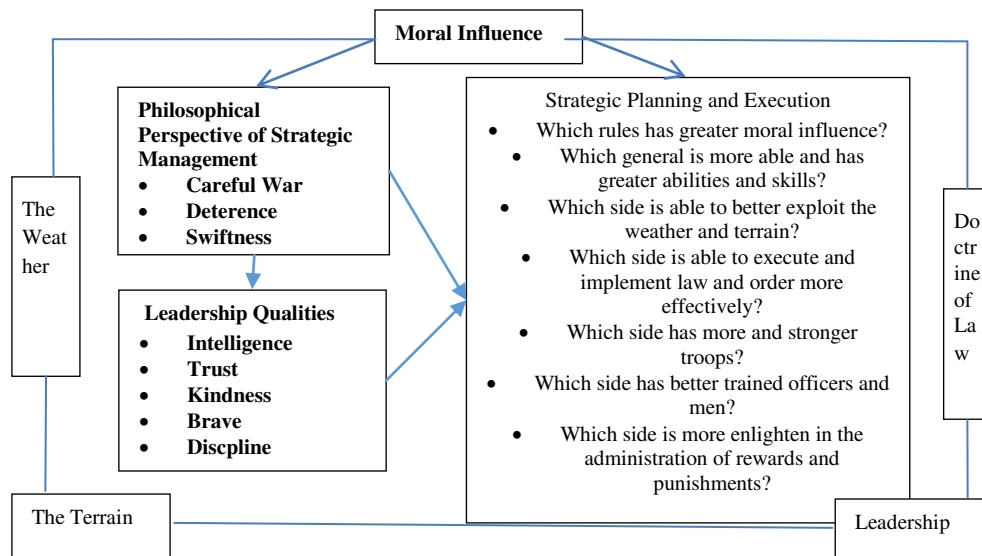
Apart from being a good strategist, effective leader also needs to be able to organize with clear and efficient organizational structure with clear authority, responsibility, accountability, relationship and communication. In the fifth chapter of Sun Zi Art of War, Sun Zi said “There is no difference between administering many troops and few troops, large army or small army. It is a matter of organization and communication respectively.”

Organisational structure is needed to support the strategy in order to achieve the business goals and objectives. In other words, in organisations, it is critical to have an appropriately defined chain of command of authority that flows from the top to the bottom level.

To Sun Zi, having a proper organizational structure and a clear line of authority are important to the success of the troops. In the organizational context, having a clear line of authority with proper reporting relationship is pre-requisite to any organizational success (Lin, 1995 and Wee, 2005).

## Theoretical development and research propositions

The Art of War has been applied to many fields well outside of the military. Much of the text is about how to fight wars without actually having to do battle: it gives tips on how to outsmart one's opponent so that physical battle is not necessary. As such, it has found application as a training guide for many competitive endeavors that do not involve actual combat. Figure 1. Depicts the Five Factors and Three Dimensions of Sun Zi Art of War.



**Figure 1:** The Five Factors and Three Dimensions of Sun Zi Art of War.

Wee (2005) stated that moral influence refers to the additional quality of a leader which distinguishes him from other than the playing the role of commander or general. The moral influence is critical in determining the success of organizational endeavours. Recently, there were vast evidences of corporate corruptions and issues of moral decay among the corporate scenes in many parts of the world and caused the crisis of confidence due to immoral or unethical leadership.

Leadership will fail in long run unless it is supported by moral influence. Sun Zi also mentioned that the ability to command is another factor that should be observed. According to Sun Zi, command includes a wise, trustworthiness, sincerity, benevolence, courage leadership behaviour (Liu 2014). The leader needs to establish his moral influence with good personal character before effective leadership. By wisdom, leader should be wise in his thought and actions (Wee 2005).

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Nevertheless, the system of thought of Sun Zi manifested a strategic planning decision that should be made prior to any war or confrontation and with the awareness of the importance of prior planning and the calculation of chances of winning the war in terms of careful war (**sheng zhang**). One should be able to obtain the preemptive position on offensive and defensive possibilities. Thus, the main issue of winning in a war is of highest strategic intent and content.

Obviously, Sun Zi's philosophy focused on the five factors that governed the outcome of a war. Nevertheless, initiating a war is considered the last resort to conflict resolution in relation to prior political harmonization. Thus, the practices of wisdom on any confrontation should be utmost encouraged.

## **METHOD**

The focus of this study is on the influence of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy on Chinese corporate leaders and leadership in Malaysia. A practical and theoretical understanding of the influence of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy on Chinese corporate leadership will not only contribute to the body of knowledge of leadership studies, but also provide a different perspective on the understanding of the intricacies and complexities of Chinese corporate leadership. Hence, we see two interdependent areas of interests, that is, the practice and theory in the study corporate leadership, within the framework of an understanding of leadership behavior actions, involving knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy, including values, ethics, morals and a review of leadership assumptions, within the context of Chinese corporate leaders in Malaysia, consciously or unconsciously applying their knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy to execute vision and implement change in their organizations.

To substantiate the qualitative assessment and to capture transcendent self-reviews of Participants in this study, we asked questions how Sun Zi Art of War influence their leadership change and performance. To delve into self-awareness and openness to feedback, we asked their views on their companies' problems and future constraints. We probed their appreciation of their leadership and concluded interviews in the content analysis.

The analytic process and the method employed to answer the research questions is presented and organized into four sections: (a) Sampling-selection of participants, (b) instrumentation, (c) data collection, and (d) data analysis.

### **Sampling**

The sample is selected based on theoretical sampling according to the size of the business (capitalization), business type, and performance of corporation based on the various indices as published by Bursa Saham Malaysia (BSM). The operational difficulties of defining corporate performance objectively, on close inspection, permeated with practical and conceptual difficulties. As such, a rather straight forward definition is adopted based on BSM's yardstick of performance standards in corporate performance.

The selection strategy consists of first attempting to obtain a mix of six cases or individuals that would provide diverse background between various corporate entities, and within these cases, to get as much range along the other dimensions as possible. For this study, a sample is then purposively selected based on this diversity for rigorous data collection and in-depth analysis. This is done in line with the aim of providing an initial insight for future greater project in similar vein.

In special situation, the purposive sampling provided the appropriate means to investigate a specialized population of Malaysian Chinese corporate leaders. The exploration of purposive sample allowed for the investigation of element of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy in leadership practices from the participant, which had not taken place prior to this study. Approval had been received from the selected respondent for interviews and data obtained were used for the purposes of this study. An agreement to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of company and individual was signed by both the researcher and participant.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument used in this study was semi-structured open-ended interviews with one chosen participant. Semi-structured interviews are interviews that evolve from inquiry composed of a mix of

structured and unstructured questions. The unstructured questions were open-ended to allow more space of freedom and creativity from the respondent answering the interview questions (Yin 1984).

The semi-structured interviews approach used in this study had provided reasonably rich data within the respondent with the flexibility to probe answers more deeply and gather more information. To relate this study to previous work with leadership research, Interview questions were created based on the literature reviewed and theoretical framework developed. Questions were designed to allow the respondent to reflect upon the element of knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy his experience and practices of corporate leadership.

### **Data Requirement and Collection**

Bennett and George (1997) are of the opinion that the case study method will be more effective if the research design includes a specification of the data to be obtained from the cases to be analyzed. In this study, general and comprehensive questions were formulated applicable to the one chosen case in a class of processes or events relevant to corporate leadership. General questions can be asked from the case to elicit responses satisfying the research objective of the study and to contribute to building of insights that is intended. In this study for example, general questions can be formulated to illuminate the orientation of the participant to the Sun Zi Art of War philosophy that presumably influence his leadership within the framework of facing the challenges and needs of the corporate world.

The study focused on data collection on tracing the knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War from the participant. In keeping the interest in a rich and insightful understanding of Sun Zi Art of War that influences leader's ability to act based on participant's knowledge and understanding or evaluated understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy in response to a particular or combination of situations or environments. Data coding of this study is based on the interviews and all transcripts are coded, codes compared and discrepancies discussed.

### **Validity and Reliability**

According to Strauss & Corbin, (1990), four criteria focus the data's validity in inductive examination. These are (a) constant comparison of exploration discoveries with experiences, (b) the application of exploration discoveries in the field, (c) the abstract nature of the hypothesis, and (d) the hypothesis' capacity produced to be adjusted for application in different contextual situations.

To improve the validity or creditability of this study and in the process of discovering the insights implicit in the data, the four criteria were alluded. In addition, the emerging theoretical framework which inquiries identifying with classifications of open codification are advanced, and the original data is re-evaluated for additional proof. Axial coding, which is the procedure of creating fundamental classifications and subcategories, is in this manner did to trace the connections between categories, and to improve the validity and unwavering quality of the study (Creswell, 2007; Valsiner 2014; Halej 2015)

## **RESULTS**

### **Respondent's Basic Information**

*Table 1: Participant's Age, Educational Background/Level, Experience and Family Background*



Participant	Age	Educational Background	Educational Level	Experience/Family Background
Participant 1 (P#1)	65	Chinese Educated	Teacher Training Diploma	<p>Experience: More than 30 years of MLM experience. Business internationalized into 11 countries with solid MLM expertise. A famous social philanthropist.</p> <p>Family Background: Born in a poor family in Selangor, R#1 has seven siblings in the family. His parents were originally from the Province of Fu Jian in China. The couple worked as farmers without any formal education. Even though the condition of living for the family was very difficult, R#1's parents insisted that their children must go to school for formal education. As a poor farmer, his father had worked very hard in order to save sufficiently for children's education. R#1 completed his secondary education and worked as a school teacher for ten years before migrated to commercial world.</p>

Legend: P#1 is used to represent the participant for this study.

### Within Case Analysis of Responses of Knowledge and Understanding for Sun Zi Art of War Philosophy of The Participant

Table 2 Frequency, Intensity and Consistency of Responses of Knowledge and Understanding for Sun Zi Art of War philosophy Based on the Time Slots During the Interview for Participant One (P#1)

2:30PM 3:10PM 3:50PM  
4:30PM

Sun Zi Art of War	SSSSSSSSSS	SSSSSSSSSS	SSSSSSSSSS
Philosophy	SSSSSSSSSS	SSSSSSSSSS	SSSSSSSSSS
	SSSSSSSSSS	SSSSSSSSSS	SSSSSSSSSS
	SSSSSSSSSS	SSSSSSSSSS	SSSSSSSSSS
	SSSSSSSSSS		SSSS
	SSSSSSSSSS		
	SS		

Legend:

S=Sun Zi Art of War philosophy or values mentioned and discussed (data stripes) by the respondent during the in-depth interview sessions (2:30PM-3:10PM;3:10PM-3:50PM & 3:50PM-4:30PM) .

Based on the findings of the enumerated data, Sun Zi Art of War appeared to serve as an important source of influence on leadership of P#1. As P#1 recollected:

*“I started my business when three aspiring entrepreneurs teamed up to build a network marketing company with the strategic vision to introduce a solid business plan that would enable just about anyone to start their own business with minimum capital. What started from a dream, a vision - soon took shape and catapulted the business into one of the major players in the direct selling industry in Malaysia. In August 2005, my group was listed on the main board of Bursa Malaysia through its holding company, X Holdings Berhad. I would say that this would be impossible without upholding to the values of morality, flexibility that we insisted all the while, as well as our organizational capabilities strategic thinking that contribute to this performance.”*

P#1's leadership is found derived from the evaluated knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi's Art of War. The evaluated understanding of the value of strategic thinking influenced the practice of Sun Zi's Art of War leadership in building moral influence, developing strategies, organizational capabilities and practicing flexibility.

P#1 described as in the following way:

*‘The way I managed the organizational crisis is to face it immediately without delay. This is a strategic approach towards managing changes. The kindness to my staff would help adjust to changes collectively that would ensure sustainability and flexibility of our business operations.’*

This was when P#1 was leading his multi-national corporation, he felt powerless in influencing the macro environment, particularly the political and economic environment. But as the founding CEO and a role model, he had to play his role as a leader. He further described his understanding of Sun Zi art of War philosophy in the following way:

*“We need to be very conservative, when interest was suddenly increased by 30 % to 40% to the record high of 12%, while many companies which were over invested were collapsed, we still surviving and then we became more alert and cautious in managing funds and profitability as well as investment. Thanks to my belief in Sun Zi Art of War that stressed on strategic planning....”*

Clearly, P#1 believed that in a competitive environment, leaders should not too aggressive and being successful was not always performance contingent but being careful in planning and execution of strategy. He further described:

*“In 1998, Si En Ai Foundation was established, it was the first foundation set up by an MLM group in Malaysia. Every year, we consistently led and contributed a large amount from our company earnings to help students from poor families to further their higher education and also helping single parent families with their financial difficulties. The purpose of this foundation is to deliver our love and concern to these weaker societal groups This initiative is utmost important in leadership qualities...”*

P#1 further commented:

*“To my staff, I would encourage my staff to work hard and be honest and be fair to others in all undertaking. I always shared with them, company is just a platform for them to service others, service-oriented attitude is virtue... it will lead to good conduct and better work spirit as a strategic leader...”*

Therefore, P#1 sees his experience which led to the state of strategic mindset:

*“Wisdom includes the understanding of innovation of products and services in order to satisfy consumers at large, understanding of changes of external environment, knowing the business mechanism as well as corporate social responsibilities. We need to consistently improving...and through proper education and continuous effort, we can train our future successors...this is what I expect...”*

It was interesting that P#1 who experienced the transformation of his business transitions generalized his perceptions toward evaluated and overall understanding of the influence of Sun Zi Art of War philosophical values on his understanding in the following list on moral influence mindset and the good way of behaviour:

P#1 recalled, his business performance is mainly influence by the knowledge and understanding of planning, execution and leadership based on Sun Zi Art of War philosophy. He shared his thought at the time:

*“I have leading this group for more than 25 year since it inception. Our group performance was a joint hard work among all of my assistants and staff. Their perspiration and inspiration with me in terms of designing business strategies, managing organisational resources and capabilities had helped the group to shine. Thanks to morality we have established and the flexibility we have cultivated in our business endeavours.”*

It was not difficult to see that P#1's statements show that his deep knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy is based on his evaluated understanding particularly dependent on the deep evaluated understanding on moral influence ( tao ) such as being patience, doing away the inner greed, honesty and fairness, morality and strategic mindset. He has also shown deep and high level of knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War in terms of values such as sincerity, confidence, diligence, good courtesy, faith and being kind, and *chung yung*. P#1 has shown his evaluated understanding in terms of values such as swiftness and flexibility as well as overwhelming momentum. Obviously, P#1 has shown deepest evaluated understanding of the dimensions of Sun Zi Art of War which are the philosophical mindset of strategic approach, planning and execution of strategies and the qualities of leadership. In addition, the understanding of carefulness in deciding commitment to war (careful war), deterrence as well as swiftness in ending war battles were observed.

These perceptions of P#1 were indeed consistent with the teaching of Sun Zi Art of War that considered war as a necessary evil that must be avoided whenever possible. The war should be fought swiftly to avoid economic losses: "No long war ever profited any country: 100 victories in 100 battles is simply ridiculous. Anyone who excels in defeating his enemies triumphs before his enemy's threats become real" (Wee 2003).

Sun Zi Art of War emphasized the importance of positioning in military strategy. The decision to position an army must be based on both objective conditions in the physical environment and the subjective beliefs of other, competitive factors in that environment. Strategy was not planning in the sense of working through an established list, but rather that it requires quick and appropriate responses to changing conditions. Planning works in a controlled environment; but in a changing environment, competing plans collide, creating unexpected situations. These evidences show that P#1 reflected an evaluated understanding of philosophy of Sun Zi Art of War while leading his organization.

In other words, it is observed that P#1 shown a deep insight and a high level of evaluated understanding of Sun Zi Art of War. He was very consistent in terms of mentioning of concepts of Sun Zi Art of War with high intensity. This can be seen from the pattern of the frequency observed.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Previous researchers (Liu 2009; Redding 1990; Wah 2010; Warner 2008; Cheng 2011; Yao 2006) studied extensively that Chinese leadership studies cannot be isolated in context from Chinese wisdom rooted in the rich traditional culture and philosophy. The finding of this study explored how Buddhism philosophy influences corporate leaders and leadership in general and Chinese corporate leaders in Malaysia in particular.

It was not difficult to see that P#1's statements show that he has deep knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War such as being P#1 has shown deepest evaluated understanding of the dimensions of Sun Zi Art of War which are the philosophical mind set of strategic approach, planning and execution of strategies and the qualities of leadership. In addition, the understanding of carefulness in deciding commitment to war, deterrence as well as swiftness in ending war battles were observed.

The finding indicates that even though the participant possesses the knowledge and understanding of Chinese traditional philosophy in general, he has shown higher level of understanding of Sun Zi Art of War hence leading his organization to a certain along the tenets of the Chinese traditional philosophy he subscribed to most. The finding suggests that the participant's responses based on knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy that shown in terms of frequency, intensity and consistency in the qualitative responses/data collected via interviews were quite consistent.

Through the inductive analysis based on this study, the influences of Sun Zi Art War philosophy on leadership have emerged. Specifically, the themes of the influences are pointed to the moral and strategic philosophical values of Sun Zi Art of War. The finding of this study echoed to the most research on related leadership literature (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Eflin 2003; Hersley and Farrel 1997; Holliday and Chandler, 1986; Kakabadse, Korac N., Korac-Kakabadse, A., & Kouzmin, A., 2001; Malen and Kriger 1998; Kriger & Seng, 2005; Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, Goodwin, 2005 and Yang and Bond (1990) where spiritual understanding is seen as critical understanding and action

for complex corporate decision making, applying both knowledge and actions for organizational purposes and reasons.

*Table 3* Summarises the attributes of leadership of the Respondent on his evaluated understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy and the related dimensions of leadership. Acronym is used to facilitate the analytic process of this study.

**Table 3: The Attributes of Leadership of the Participant on his Evaluated Understanding of Sun Zi Art of War Philosophy and The Related Dimensions of Leadership**

<b>Sun Zi Art of War Philosophy- The Strategic Attributes</b>	<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Related to Dimensions of Leadership in terms of:</b>
*Strives to obtain the complete trust and build long-term relationship	SBLTR	-People Management
*Thinks of righteousness and acts without fear	TRWF	-People Management
*Know how to win by using stratagem	KUS	-Leadership Behaviour and Styles -Organisational Design and Structure -Business Strategy and Orientation
*Believes in careful and detailed planning	<i>BCDP</i>	-Business Strategy and Orientation
*Conducts a in proper environmental analysis	CEA	-Business Strategy and Orientation
*Skillful in organizing	<i>SIO</i>	-Leadership Effectiveness and Organisational Performance -Leadership in Managing and Leading Change -Organisational Renewal and Success Leadership Behaviour and Styles
*Always stays flexible	ASF	-Leadership Behaviour and Styles
*Acts according to environment	<i>AE</i>	-Leadership Behaviour and Styles
*Remove barriers between themselves and followers and promote and celebrate the uniqueness of each individual	RB	-People Management
*Able to create a more authentic approach to people management thus building stronger personal bonds	PB	-Leadership in Managing and Leading Change

Table 4 Summarises the participant’s matrix of the effects of knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy reflected as the attributes through leadership dimensions on outcomes/changes of organizational variables during organisational life cycle. The patterns shown that most of the excellent and good performances on organisational variables, such as the organisational growth and renewal, HR and design and structure of the organisation, pro-activeness to changes and organisational culture and climate, appear in the later stages of organisational life cycle. Moving to the effectiveness of management functions and the sustainable competitive advantages, it is quite striking to note that the attributes of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy of the participant were not explicitly reflected comparatively. The attributes were mostly absent. The respondent actually uses a very wide attributes of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy on most of the organisational variables on decision and performances except for management functions and sustainability of competitive advantage.

**Table 4:** Participant’s Matrix of the Effects of Knowledge and Understanding of Sun Zi Art of War Philosophy Reflected as the Attributes Through Leadership Dimensions on Outcomes/Changes of Organizational Variables During Organisational Life Cycle

Attributes Of Sun Zi Art of War Philosophy (Acronym)	Related to dimensions of leaderships in terms of:	Organisational Growth and Renewal	HR and Organisational Design and Structure	Proactiveness to Macro Environmental Change	Effectiveness of Management Functions			S.C .A./ Procedure	Organisational Culture/ Climate
					Marketing	Productivity	R&D		
SBLTR	People Management	C1 B A2 A1	C1 B A2 A1	C1 B A2 A1	C1 B A2	B A2	B A2	C1 A2	B A1
TRWF	People Management	B A2	C1 B A2	C1 B A2		B?			B A2
KUS	Leadership behavior and style	C1 B A2		B A2					
	Organizational design and structure	B A2 A1	C1 B A1	C1 B A1	B A1	C1 A2	B	A2	B A1
BCDP	Business strategy and orientation	C1 B A2	B A2?	C1 B A2	C1?			A2	C1A2A1
CEA	Business strategy and orientation		B?						
SIO	Leadership effectiveness and organizational performance	B A2	C1B	A2?		C1 B?			C1 A2 A2
	Leadership in managing and leading change	B A1	A2	C1 B A2	B?	B A2	B	A2	B A2
	Organisational	C1 A2	C1B	B A2		C1 B A2		A2	B A2

	renewal and success								
ASF	Leadership behavior and styles	C1B A2	C1A2	B A2		B?			B A2
AE	Leadership behavior and styles	A2	A2	A2?					A2
RB	People management	C1B A2 A1	B A1	B A1	B A1	B C1 A2	C1 B	A2	A1
PB	Leadership in managing and leading change	C1 B A2	C1B A2	B A2	A2?			B?	C1B A2

*Legend:**A1=Excellent**A2=Good**B=Average**C1=Below Average**?=Items with less researcher certainty***Conclusion**

This study provided relevant support for the conceptualization of Sun Zi Art of War and the propositions on how Sun Zi Art of War influences leadership change and performance. This study clarifies the conceptual foundation of wisdom of Sun Zi Art of War of these corporate leaders and provides additional insight into the influenced leadership.

The theoretical sampling and its analytical process involved semi-structured interviews which were used in this study had provided reasonably rich data within the participants with the flexibility to probe answers more deeply and gather more information. To relate this study to previous work with leadership research, Interview questions were created based on the literature reviewed and theoretical framework developed. Questions were designed to allow the respondents to reflect upon the element of knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy with their experiences and practices of corporate leadership.

The finding indicates that even though the participants possess the knowledge of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy in general, they shown their higher level of evaluated understanding of Sun Zi Art of War on moral influence rather than strategic dimension, hence, while leading their organizations, ethics and morality are the tenets they subscribed to the most. The participants' responses based on knowledge and understanding of Sun Zi Art of War philosophy that shown in terms of frequency, intensity and consistency in the qualitative responses/data collected via interviews were quite consistent reflecting overwhelmingly the elements of ethics and morality and secondly to the strategic dimension that most confirming studies postulated. (Boal and Hooijberg, 2000; Eflin 2003; Hersley and Farrel 1997; Holliday and Chandler, 1986; Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse, &

Kouzmin, 2001; Malen and Kriger 1998; Kriger & Seng, 2005; Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, Messmann, 2014; Hsieh, 2015; Cheng et al. 2014; Liu, 2014 and Yang and Bond (1990)

This study reveals that specifically for Sun Zi Art of War, spiritual rather than strategic understanding is seen as more critical for complex corporate decision making, applying both knowledge and actions for organizational purposes and reasons.

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## NOTES

The theoretical and empirical substance of the study provided a basis for conceptualizing the interplay between corporate leadership and Chinese philosophy that coalesce to structure how philosophy of Sun Zi Art of War influences corporate leadership.

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