

Applying Strategic Leadership, the Way of the Dragon

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Abstract

Expanding on an earlier paper (Low, 2009), the practitioner-academician author uses the analogy of the Chinese dragon to exemplify critical strategic leadership ways. To the Chinese, the dragon is a divine mythical creature, signifies power, greatness, benevolence, goodness and blessings. Among other things, in emulating and following the way of the dragon, the strategic leader thus leads with example and integrity; (s)he leads justly and with compassion. Relying on the wisdom of the old, humaneness, the *Tao* of the ancient emperors (now practiced by strategic leaders) is put forth; this still has great relevance in an age of rapid changes, and hence its appeal. Positive and harmonious relationships are emphasized, with the country (the world) and its citizens enjoying the 'Big Peace'. Citing various Chinese proverbs, the paper carries several leadership relevance, lessons and insights.

Key words: Leadership, Confucianism, *Tao*, Taoism, strategic thinking

1 Introduction

Why refers to the Chinese or oriental dragon? The Chinese dragon, a celestial mythical creature, is one of the world's most recognized symbols. Many take it that the Chinese dragon originated with the 'Yellow Emperor' Huang Ti who is said to reign from 2696 to 2598 B.C.; the dragon is considered the ancestor of all Chinese. Chinese around the world, proudly proclaim themselves the Descendants of the Dragon ("*lung tik chuan ren*"; CDOT, 2009 or "*long de chuan ren*" – in *hanyu pinyin*; Chen, 2005). Traditionally, Chinese emperors took the dragon as their representation.

Better known as a creature of good than evil, the Chinese dragon is also traditionally the embodiment of the concept of *yang* (male) and is associated with the weather as the

bearer of rain and water in an agriculturally water-driven nation such as China. The *yin* (female) counterpart is the *Fenghuang* (phoenix). Symbolizing power, strength, vigor, vitality, wisdom, resilience and growth, the dragon thus reflects positive values, and the values of independence, perseverance and dedication (Low, 2009: 42).

1.1 The Definition

Defined as supplying “the vision, direction, the purpose for growth, and context for the success of the organization, strategic leadership also initiates ‘outside-the-box’ thinking to generate future growth” (Kotelnikov, 2001). Strategic leaders usually adopt a big picture perspective, choosing to see the global, regional or national perspective rather than the narrow ‘inside-the-box’ [although they may, in fact, function in an uncertain environment on highly complex problems that affect and are affected by events and organizations outside their own.] (U.S. Army Field Manual 22-100, cited in TMCG: The Milum Communications Group, 2008).

Having a long-range view of things, strategic leaders often do not see their ideas come to fruition during their watch and their initiatives may take years to plan, prepare, and implement. In-process reviews (IPRs) might not even begin until after the leader has left the job. This has important implications for long-term planning. On the other hand, some strategic decisions may become a front-page headline of the next morning’s newspapers.

Perhaps of vital importance – because they exert influence primarily through subordinates – strategic leaders must develop strong skills in picking and developing good second-tier leaders. They must also replace themselves. Magnanimous in growing their followers to be even ‘bigger’, smarter and perhaps better skilled than them; organizations grow and benefit.

1.2 The Objectives

Much wisdom exists in the ways of the old and that of Imperial China. Wisdom is a prerequisite for leadership and organization's (nation's) success. And there is much to learn from the Chinese civilization with its long history.

This paper is intended to examine the ways, uncover the gems of wisdom [though we are not saying that there had been no errors or wrong doings] in which the ancient Chinese emperors led and administered the country, the advocacy of steadfast character, goodness, virtue, humane-ness and harmony with the world at large. The essay also carries several leadership relevance and lessons.

2 Strategic Leadership Relevance & Lessons

Water far away cannot help put out a fire nearby. Water far away cannot quench one's immediate thirst. So also, a simple meal before one is good enough to quench thirst and fill one's stomach, and this is not to say we ignore what lies ahead. The ability to plan long term while maximizing performance in the short term is a must for leaders. The strategic leadership significance and lessons are as follows:

2.1 Know Thyself, Know Thy Other Party

"Raise your sail one foot and you get ten feet of wind." (Chinese proverb)

Knowing (and appreciating) one's place in society and others' worth, one should capitalize one's strengths, and eliminate one's weaknesses to be successful in life.

To be a strategic leader, one should know one's people and stakeholders well, and this means preparation, planning, and assessments. By knowing oneself and the other parties, one can seek to better influence and win them over. To paraphrase Sun Tzu (traditional Chinese) (Sun Zi – *pinyin*), knowing and understanding the enemy and oneself, one can engage in a thousand battles without ever being in danger and/or in fact, win.

If one understands oneself without understanding the other party(ies), one's chances of influencing and winning are limited, if not simply, on the average. If one does understand

neither the other party(ies) nor oneself, then one will lose. Simply put, one should understand oneself and the other party(ies) as well as better assess the strengths, weaknesses; opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) of both oneself and the other party(ies).

2.2 Set the Example, Act & Realize the Power of Example

“Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”

“If you don’t want anyone to know, don’t do it.” (Chinese proverbs)

Idle talks should not be encouraged, and actions promoted. One should not fear having faults or shortcomings, but what’s critical is that one should know of one’s faults and be sure or determined to do something about them.

The dragon, as highlighted earlier, is a powerful symbol. The strategic leader’s example(s) can also be powerful. And the strategic leader is much needed. As the Chinese saying goes, ‘when there’s a strong general, there will be no weak soldiers’. The strategic leader sets himself as the standard. With “sageliness within and kingliness without” (Fung, 1948: 8) as well as accomplishing spiritual cultivation, the leader functions well in society. (S)he gets things done. Doing things in the right spirit, such a leader’s actions and examples, speaking louder than words, become very influential.

As argued by Low (2008), in the Confucian context, “a wise man does not readily give utterance to words in case his actions do not live wise up to his words” (Zhou, 2005: 10) “One who talks too much is prone to failure.” (Confucius, cited in Zhou, 2005: 68). Yet on the downside, most leaders may under-sell, under-promote or market themselves. As such, what is then advocated is that leaders should pro-actively set the example, and at that, lead the way. Moreover, they learn from the wisdom and even mistakes of others.

2.3 Better Be A Silent Achiever & Up-keep One’s Integrity

“If the stick is crooked, the shadow cannot be straight.” (Unknown source, cited in Low, 2006, 2000: 139).

Tao follows the natural order; the human mind is originally quiet but is normally clouded by thoughts and desires. Once such mental obstacles are eliminated, then clear mind or perhaps heart will naturally manifest itself, and that is integrity.

Ancient Chinese scriptures have it that:

The false Master is quite ferocious,
But possesses no real power.
The Master does not make such a show,
But his touch is as heavy as a mountain (Chueh Yuan, cited in Lerner, 1976: 119)

Low (2009: 45) speaks of “the turtle cries while laying hundreds of eggs; the cock crows while the hen lays an egg. A great general needs not blow his trumpet. As a leader and a man of true worth, it’s better to be a quiet achiever while up-keeping one’s integrity.

Confucius highlights, “a gentleman is slow to speak but prompt to act” (Chew, 2000: 10). “When the ruler (*leader*) does what is right, he will have influence over the people without giving commands” (Lin, 1994: 199).

“A good leader may be compared to the wind and the common people to the grass. Let the wind blow over the grass and the grass, under the force of the wind, cannot but bend.” (Chew, 2000: 18). ‘Talk doesn’t cook rice’ [or to present its meaning in a positive way, action gets results] but pro-active, through his examples and behavior, a leader thus builds his influence.

Integrity is the purity and clarity of both the mind and heart. “What is planted cannot be uprooted. What is embraced cannot slip away. Your descendants will carry on the ancestral sacrifice for generations without end.” (Verse 54, Lao Tzu, 1990) Integrity’s so critical, and as the Chinese saying goes, ‘Heaven protects the good person.’ This can be taken as bearing long-term gains and benefits both for the leader and his people. And even benefits his descendants. A heart of supreme kindness and goodness is the root of

one's descendents. If one does not commit an evil at the root, then the branches and leaves will be good. If one is absolutely good, then one's descendents will benefit abundantly too.

In maintaining one's integrity, Confucius once said that, "the superior man does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue." Integrity is seen as "the uncontaminated heart" – there is no greed but integrity, "when the heart has no desires, everywhere is paradise. When leading a life of simplicity (*integrity and without attachment*), one knows true joy and beauty of things." (Hong Yingming, cited in Tsai, 1991: 77; *italics mine*).

In essence, the strategic leader's best way to increase his influence is to apply the Golden Rule, the gentleman's code of conduct. In essence, you do unto others what you yourself like, and "do not impose to others what you yourself dislike" (Zhou, 2005: 4). When one follows this tenet, one will not incur resentment of others, and in fact, win others over.

2.4 Practice Humane-ness, the Tao Of the Ancient Emperors (read as Strategic Leaders).

'Behave toward everyone as if receiving a guest.' (A Chinese saying)

The benevolence of the dragon signifies "greatness, goodness and blessings" (CDOT, 2009). Humane (Cleary, 1991: 4), the emperor rules justly and with compassion – after all, he is given the Heavenly Mandate. Positive relationships and harmony are stressed. The country and its citizens are considered as one big happy family; this has its roots in Confucianism.

Relationships rule. Confucius stresses on the importance of the family; and in the family unit, the father is the key figure. A role model, a father is a good example to his children. For the son, it is the son's duty to obey without questioning and honor his father, even after death. When the father dies, obedience is given to the oldest brother. Confucius states in the *Analects*, "Meng I Tzu asked about the treatment of parents. The Master said,

‘Never disobey! ...While they are alive, serve them according to ritual. When they die, bury them according to ritual and sacrifice to them according to ritual.’” (*Analects* II: 5).

Low (2005, 2006; 2007) found that the Confucian notion of *Wu Lun* (especially the father–son relationship) has been as deeply implanted in the father leadership practices both at the organizational and national levels in Singapore. This is beneficial as the strategic leader is indeed caring; Lao Tzu, verse 59 (Mitchell) has pointed out that:

Nothing is impossible for him.
Because he has let go,
he can care for the people’s welfare
as a mother cares for her child.”

And “the best masters are servants.” Grigg (1994: 157). “Gold in the heart is better than gold in one’s purse.” as a Chinese saying goes. Showing care and concern to his followers, the benevolent Confucian leader is thus like a father to his followers. Besides, the family spirit is often fostered, and to quote Confucius:

A true gentleman is in harmony, and is friendly with others though he does not agree with them... (Chew, 2000: 17).

Overall, only when all contribute their firewood can they build up a strong fire. Team work or more appropriately, consensus-seeking culture may be related to loyalty, which is also considered to be a virtue by the Chinese (Bond, 1987, cited in Low, 2002; 2009a). Chinese are taught from a young age to be loyal to their family and kin. Hsu (1984) claims, loyalty to the family will continue to play a critical role among Chinese. Family is important in any culture, but it is extraordinarily so in Chinese culture. But more importantly, “relations among family members provide the human basis for the moral virtues of the Chinese” (Nakamura, 1978, cited in Low, 2002; 2009a). Hsu (1984) has identified some of the significant characteristics of the Chinese family that have a strong impact on Chinese organizations. The Chinese as a people are special in their relationships with others, and a strong emphasis on the importance of blood relations,

parental authority, filial piety and loyalty exists. The late Kwek Hong Png, founder and chairman of the Hong Leong (Singapore) group of companies, for instance, pointed this out when he was expanding his business: Mindful of the old Chinese proverb that when tackling a tiger, one needs the help of one's brothers, I invited my brothers to join my firm. (Kwek, 1987, cited in Low, 2002; 2009a).

It should be stressed that on one hand, attachment to one's in-grouping as well as too much inward thinking and perspective can lead to much ethnocentrism, bias and discrimination. Yet on the other hand, one can also argue that the bigger picture angle here and what this author is emphasizing that of extending out the love, we look at all others – even those outside our racial, ethnic or religious groupings – as our brothers or sisters. In a big-hearted fashion, not keeping in mind the services he has rendered nor should he forget the troubles he has caused, but not forgetting the favors others have done for him, such a leader harbors not feelings against his 'enemy', but promotes peace and love.

As leaders, we treat all more justly and with love and compassion, and perhaps the world will become a better peaceful place. There'll also be more joint work, collaborations, strategic alliances and cooperation with outside organizations and agencies, both within and cross borders.

2.5 Respect Talents & Inspire Followers

“One can easily deal with matters using understanding. It's as simple as using sunlight to melt ice” (Wang Xuaming, 1993: 24).

Strategic leaders have several good, loyal followers or teams. They grow their people and achieve success through the strengths and gifts of their own teams, co-workers and employees. “When recruiting always pay respect to talent, That is the way to make a country (*also read as company or business*) strong and its citizens prosperous. Only the foolish do otherwise.” (Wang Xuanming, 1993: 11, *italics mine*). Strategic leaders appreciate the human capital. Look at Bhasin and Low (2002: 110), Singapore recruits

and selects the best in the world. “Singapore leaders have long realized the need to augment from abroad the limited local talent available at home, especially... technical and managerial expertise.”

Besides, setting the example and being humane and compassionate makes the strategic leaders inspiring to their people. Such leaders [similar to Jack Welch’s leaders who “energize”; Krames, 2005: 49] normally keep their troops highly spirited, motivated and more importantly, their people enthusiastically carry out their orders. And strategic leaders lead their organizations in attaining high level performance. Even punishments and decorations or rewards are carried in strict manner (Chu, 1994: 291). Wang Xuanming (1993: 152) cites one of Feng Menglong, the famous Ming scholar’s masterpiece, that “only with clear commands and strict discipline can an army be trained and ready for war (*competition in the present day context*). Killing one to teach a hundred is a necessary thing to do.” (*italics mine*).

2.6 Employ ‘Big Picture’ Thinking, Be Objective & Love.

Be board-minded, avoid strategies that lack foresight... the tree trunk should always be stronger than the branches. This is true in leading an organization or a country.

Low (2008) has highlighted that even in this millennium, one haunting reality of the corporate world is discrimination at workplace. Bias, prejudice and differentiation treatment rather than actual job-related basis constitute discrimination.

In a Zen (*Tao*) parable, it is highlighted that one needs to have an overall view of a problem before solving it. The strategic leader should be global in outlook, objective and loving. And here, a return to the old fashioned Confucianism would indeed stress on humanism, and universal love for mankind. “A compassionate nature is inherent in sentient beings. All good deeds spring from compassion. One who does not have compassion is no better than an empty shell of a body.” (Hong Yingming, cited in Tsai, 1991)

The strategic leader should also value talent in whatever forms. According to Confucius, “no man is a machine. He should not behave heartlessly like one, or as if others were machines” (Chew, 2000: 5). Besides, detached and un-trapped by power, position and wealth, the strategic leader steadfastly serves. “A gentleman is (*also*) conscious only in the knowledge of others’ comfort; the mean is conscious only of his own comfort” (Chew, 2000: 2, *italics mine*).

The strategic leader is also sensitive to his people’s needs – as real as the flowers in spring; those made of silk pales in comparison; the latter, artificial, lacks natural beauty. Those who are sincere, loving and wise are naturally faster than the ordinary people in solving the problems.

With the leader’s love, there should be ‘Big Peace’, and...

2.7 ‘Prosper Thy Neighbor’

– When There is ‘Big Peace’, There is ‘Big Prosperity’

“*Men in the game are blind, men outside see clearly.*” (Chinese proverb)

True, ancient China often had many wars and internal strife. But the wise Chinese emperor very much avoided wars and violence. Normally non-violence was embraced, and war or violence was deemed necessary as the last resort. To win without fighting is better than winning with losses. “In war, the victorious strategist only seeks battle after victory has been won, where as who is destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory” (Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 3rd century, cited in de Smedt, 1995)

Taoism also influences China very much. The strategic leader should uphold the idea of non-contention. Lao Tzu pointed out that violence and conflict, no matter how tightly controlled, could not help but cause negative side effects. The *Tao* ideal is to solve problems through peaceful means. Those who win using force alone lacked strategies. Those who mastered human psychology and moral values, and are able to use them against the enemy or the other party are truly wise.

Causing harms, war and aggression is indeed bad and should, in fact, be avoided at all costs. Strategies are preferred to the use of force or violence. Sun Tzu once said that 'complete victory is when the army does not fight' (Cleary, 1991: 20). To win without fighting is best; win with wisdom is the surest form of victory. Even in the present-day, peace should indeed be favored as it brings economic growth and prosperity. Look at the Malayan emergency period and the fight against communism in Malaysia and Singapore in the 1970s and 1980's, they were won by giving the people employment and economic advancement. The governments were improving the living standards of their peoples and sought to eliminate or reduce poverty.

Another good example is that of Singapore's (the City-state Singapore has a Confucian heritage cultural model – Low, 2005; 2002) and Malaysia leaders' adoption of a realistic approach, that is, a good neighbor is better than a friend, a few thousand miles away. Like it or not, Malaysia and Singapore are stuck with each other for better or worse, thus it's more realistic to work together and adopt a prosper-thy-neighbor way as in the Iskandar Development Region (IDR) (Wong, 2007) and other projects. [Both countries' prime ministers agreed to set aside 'legacy' problems or take steps to resolve them (Oon, 2009: 1)] In another case, the close security/ police cooperation between Singapore and Malaysia has also led to the recent arrest of the fugitive Mas Selamat who escaped in February 2008 (Goh, 2009: 1).

2.8 Toughen Up & Embrace Resilience

'You think you lost your horse? Who knows, he may bring a whole herd back to you someday.' (Chinese Proverb).

Foster (2003) notes that suffering has its purpose. It can perhaps produce tough or more vital people.

The Chinese saying, "out of the ashes rises the phoenix" signifies the emergence of something good out of a difficult and perhaps painful process, and it is akin to the

purification of gold using intense heat. Here, the dragon is also said to be resilient, overcoming obstacles until success is his. Hence, such a leadership is a resilient leadership, one that overcomes obstacles to attain success and excellence. Such a leader is “energetic, decisive, optimistic, intelligent and ambitious” (Chinese Culture.Org, 2003).

‘Failure is not falling down but refusing to get up’, goes a Chinese saying. One should embrace the spirit of ‘a fall into a ditch makes one wiser’; the strategic leader takes the hit as something positive. **Low (2005c)** speaks of any unexpected misfortune; any sudden hit produces significant physiological and psychological effects. One’s blood pressure rises; the muscles in one’s body tense up, and one’s breathing gets shallow. Adrenaline is pumped in to meet the ‘challenge’; the hit say, a serious obstacles faced, is considered as a gift or a challenge.

Here, take the growing of the lotus for an example; the dirty mud supplies the nutrients for the healthy growth and blossoming of the lotus. ‘He who tasted the bitterest of the bitterness can be a man above men’, goes a Chinese saying; failures and obstacles, the pain have their value. They add to the leader’s growth and develop their character. The strategic leader presses on, he should act with resolve and determination, and not because of a moment’s comfort slacken in one’s efforts; only then will he make progress.

In short, going through muddy waters, like the gentle, delicate lotus, the various handicaps, obstacles, trials and conflicts should not stop the dragon leaders from blossoming or growing.

2.9 Be Creative & Inject Resourcefulness

“A closed mind is like a closed book, just a block of wood.” (Chinese proverb)

The ways in which the wise chooses to solve life’s problems are impeccable. They are like lotus – elegant and beautiful though it emerge from the mud. The strategic leader

needs to tackle all situations in different but clever sort of ways to avoid hardships and disasters and to attain happiness for the local populace.

In life, there are ups and down; there're always cycles. *Tai Chi* (there is no beginning or end) prevails, with interplay of *yang* and *yin*; neither an absolute 'good' nor an absolute 'evil' exists, but instead harmony through balance and the flowing change of the opposite polarities. There is a unity of opposites (for example, "being" versus "non-being"). Or that great fortune has the seed and concealment of misery. And crisis or misfortune has the seed of greatness, resilience, growth and fortune.

Understanding this and reversing the ideas or concepts, the strategic leader can be truly creative, developing various alternative creative solutions as well as coming up with various new products. Ordinarily, people only see one aspect, either *Yin* or *Yang*. One can indeed learn and apply creativity by looking at one side, we are reminded of the other side. What done during the day can creatively be applied and thought through of what can be done for the night. Singapore's Night Safari was born when the former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew thought that the Mandai Zoo should be fully made use of during the night to attract tourists (Low, 2005a: 48; Low, 2005b). Interestingly, Lao-tze indeed reminds us that if out there is Being, there is also Non-being. For example, if you see a baby, you will remember there must be a mother. If you see a son, there must be a father. They always come together and depend on one part or idea that produces each other.

2.10 Embrace Long-term Thinking, Being Patient & Apply Foresight

Tranquil moments: "In a valley of pines, I walk alone with staff in hand..." (Hong Yingming, cited in Tsai, 1991: 82).

When this dragon analogy is applied to strategic leadership, it is linked to longevity and success. And one can construe such a leadership as having vision, long-term thinking and planning which grows the organization's (nation's) strengths and success. This is also coupled with patience which becomes another virtue in the way of the dragon.

Creating a sense of urgency within the organization (nation) is good but not generate too many restructuring, 'workouts', and helter-skelter and cause fatigue to one's people. It's better to capitalize or consolidate your people's strengths than to tire them out unnecessarily. As a strategic leader, the Chinese Emperor would also prepare or work out his generals gearing them for wars and victories. However, he should not tire out his generals, making them tired.

For longevity to happen, a definite need prevails for pauses, meditative breaks or silences. Such is the nature of things so that one can think forward and plan. Such breathing spaces or respites supply quietude and relaxation to add clarity of mind and peaceful thinking. Crooked thinking is avoided; "if there is silence of the mind, nothing can unsettle it." (Hong Yingming, cited in Tsai, 1991: 96). Seriously note that peace comes from within. This is all the more relevant in this age of rapid changes and happenings, otherwise, "the mind is not quiet (and) when the wind blows, the grass moves; one becomes agitated" (Hong Yingming, cited in Tsai, 1991: 96). Low (2009b) speaks of the attendant patience:

a virtue, and something to be appreciated. Besides, when you are patient, your eyes are wide open... You sharpen your human perception for all things beautiful too.

A pertinent point here is that human beings are inclined to be easily excitable. As the common saying goes, 'men trip not on mountains, they trip on molehills'. In handling affairs too, the strategic leader is watchful and mindful. (S)he observes the situation comprehensively and calmly; and when acting thus with reason, (s)he keeps his(her) cool, not falling into error.

2.11 Seize Opportunities, Learn & Apply Training and Overall Growth

"If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people."

"A chicken is hatched even from such a well-sealed thing as an egg." (Chinese proverbs)

Strategic leaders also adopt, as a rule, taking advantage of the situation to render the competition ineffective. Opportunists are those who know how to capitalize situations and with this, come the positive element. Even a crisis (this is related to the saying earlier mentioned: ‘a fall into a ditch makes one wiser’) is seen as (a growth) opportunity(ies). And whenever the competition faces an adverse situation, one should seize the opportunity to strike or fight back. Whenever favorable conditions exist, one should seize the opportunity to strengthen. Generals are warriors, and soldiers are courageous. Soldiers fight well when they have high morale; in the same way, company executives should find ways to boost the employees’ morale. When the employees’ morale and fighting spirit is strong, they should advance to fight the competition.

Get better, or get beaten! Training ‘little dragons’ or soldiers for battle are essential. Likewise, training, coaching and mentoring employees in today’s ever-changing world is critical. Untrained troops, like untrained employees, will only yield casualties, and allow the competition to take advantage of the company’s situation.

The above is tantamount to one of Jack Welch’s key leadership secrets, that is, more specifically, leadership secret number seventeen. Leaders should “provide an atmosphere where people can have the resources to grow, the educational tools are available and they can expand their horizons” (Welch, cited in Slater, 1994: 50) as well as capitalizing opportunities for both individual and organizational growth.

2.12 Apply Flexibility & Agility

“The wise adapt themselves to circumstances, as water moulds itself to the pitcher”

“Of all the stratagems, to know when to quit is the best.” (Chinese proverbs).

The Chinese dragon is said to be flexible, applying appropriate strategy depending on the situation and circumstances. When the competition attacks its head, the Chinese dragon uses its tail to strike. When its tail is attacked, it uses its head to strike the enemy. When the enemy attacks its center portion, both its head and tail will strike the enemy (Low, 2009: 55).

There's wisdom in quick-wittedness, and mental agility is often valued. First gets the oyster, and last gets the shell. Good generals often act or move their troops with lightning speed as those who delay will be on the defensive. It's also like putting a bottle of good wine at the finishing line, those who arrive first enjoy the drinks, and get drunk while those who come later could not even wet their lips. There's much cleverness in Singapore's hosting of Asia's first night Grand Prix, reaping the publicity and benefits of the first mover (Low, 2008a).

Besides, in wars, the generals often use frontal attack methods of waging battle with the enemy yet they adapt to changing circumstance of the war and apply surprise attacks to gain victory. The commander, who knows how to employ surprise attacks is flexible, or as what Sun Zi would say, is like heaven and earth – infinite in transformation and like rivers and streams, flowing endlessly. According to Sun Zi, the principle in deploying manpower and resources is to emulate water flowing from higher ground to lower ground. Just like water changes its course depending on the terrain, so also in military deployment, one wants to change one's course towards victory according to the competition's changing circumstances, confronting him and defeating him (Low, 2009: 55).

Of paramount importance is that of always realizing that there are advantages and disadvantages to any or every course of action. One makes good assessments of them and applies flexibility and maneuverability; here, one turns all types of one's disadvantages to advantages and the enemy's advantages into disadvantages.

Low (2009: 56) speaks of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Chinese brand of communism's survival and in fact it's doing well. It's tempered or made hybrid with capitalism very much as what Deng, the late Chairman once said to the effect that it did not matter whether the cat is black or white as long as it catches the mice. In the 1980s, PRC attempted to combine central planning with market-oriented reforms to increase productivity, living standards, and technological quality without exacerbating inflation,

unemployment, and budget deficits (TDS, 2009). PRC has an economy in which the commanding heights are publicly owned, private sector companies dominate small and medium sized enterprises and foreign owned companies hold significant investments (Anderlini, 2008). Here, flexibility is applied.

A strategic leader thus needs to review the organization's sacred cows. Good traditions should be upheld but bad ones that are unproductive should be discarded.

3 Conclusion

In the final analysis, we should act, bearing in mind that people generally don't change and human beings are creatures of comfort. As the Chinese saying goes, "I dreamed a thousand new paths... I woke and walked my old one." Indeed people normally find it difficult to change and here, I would suggest that we work out and have an action plan detailing a step-by-step approach so that we can change incrementally and gradually – and change we will.

Two pointers should then be adhered and followed through. One, you must have the passion to be a strategic leader, and you need to be earnest, really interested to change... get absorbed, absorb in the change. The secret is losing your life in it, in becoming a strategic leader. It's only when you lose your life that you gain your life, and become a strategic leader.

Two, emulating the dragon in leading and inspiring one's people, the strategic leader should also tap his or hers, and the people's strengths and potential. (S)he needs to let his or her heart go, feel and love; the potential can indeed be great. As the saying: "*wo hu chang long*," or "crouching tiger, hidden dragon" goes and for which the hit movie was named, it reminds us not to underestimate individuals who may have hidden talents and so, all of us need to develop our true leadership potential.

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