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***Unthought* or a Contribution to Leadership Scholarship from a Chinese
Perspective – Based on François Jullien’s work**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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Abstract

This theoretical thesis is based on the work of French philosopher François Jullien. The thesis considers issues and challenges in existing leadership scholarship as an outcome of the Western cultural lens. Jullien's work investigates Western and Chinese thinking traditions and recognises that the emergence of a cultural scholarship is heavily influenced by the ways the sensory world is categorised. The categorisation of reality on the basis of 'being' influences aspects of the sensory world a scholar is attentive to and created conditions for the emergence of Western scholarship. The Chinese ideographical language categorised the world on the basis of motion and produced a scholarship that is attentive to silent motions in the sensory world and not identifiable "being" and studies the propensity of things and not identity. By taking a Chinese perspective to reinvestigate Western thinking and vice versa, Jullien's work makes a contribution by uncovering how separate cultural traditions contribute to each other by revealing insights that are unavailable from only one cultural scholarship (Jullien, 2014, 2015). Jullien calls the knowledge that emerges from between cultural thoughts *unthought*.

This thesis aims to address the question of *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* Following Jullien's approach, I investigate leadership through a Chinese lens provided by Jullien's work and uncover unthought in existing leadership scholarship by revealing insights about leadership from a Chinese perspective. This insight adds

to leadership knowledge and provides alternative ways of approaching leadership through silent tendencies behind the emergence of identifiable aspects of leadership.

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Introduction to the Thesis

Issues in Leadership Scholarship Through Jullien's Lens

Contemporary leadership scholarship faces a variety of emerging and enduring issues and challenges such as dualism (Fairhurst, 2011), the theory-and-practice divide (Alvesson, 2019; Alvesson & Einola, 2019), contradictions amongst theories (Collinson, 2011) and ethical issues in practice (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2013; Marquardt et al., 2018; Rost, 1995). Scholars have employed diverse approaches to resolving leadership-related issues and challenges, including conceiving leadership as found in nature (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985), a property of the individual leader (Allison & Goethals, 2013, 2016; Avolio, 2005), an outcome of the collective (Ford & Harding, 2018; Gronn, 2002; Western, 2014), socially constructed (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Ford et al., 2008), relational by nature (Drath et al., 2008), processual by nature (Crevani, 2018), and practice-based (Raelin, 2011). Despite the continuing efforts to make sense of leadership, many issues persist. This research intends to contribute to leadership scholarship and address some of the enduring problems in leadership scholarship not by participating in the existing discussions and debates but by approaching leadership through a thinking structure of Chinese thought that emerged from outside of the Western categorisation of reality.

This PhD is grounded in François Jullien's work and inherits his assumption that problems and issues are created by the perception of a cultural scholarship, which inherits the cultural value system, priorities and preferences. Jullien is a French philosopher, Hellenist, sinologist, and

philologist, and his work studies bodies of thought in association with the cultures from which they emerged. In Jullien's work, the term *thought* refers to a type of discourse produced by a culture, rather than in a historical period as in Foucault's work. Jullien (2015) recognises that many aspects of a culture, especially the way its language categorises the sensory world through words and grammatical structure, influence how the sensory world can be conceived, experienced, and investigated by the culture. Jullien suggests that there are value systems, priorities, and preferences inherent in a cultural categorisation of reality; it influences the aspects of the sensory world culture it is attentive to and unaware of, as well as what is considered by the culture as the basic unit that makes up the sensory world. Language, as the carrier of thought, provides an environment for a cultural scholarship to emerge, and, as a consequence, the development of thought from within a cultural scholarship shares many common assumptions, thinking frameworks and structures. In Jullien's work, a "cultural thought" refers to the discourse shared by the members of a culture and functions as the basis for thoughts to emerge within the culture. Jullien (1995) studies thought as traditions. The term *tradition* pertains to what the entire culture has in common. The spontaneous emergences, developments and evolution of thoughts in a cultural scholarship throughout time are understood as a thinking tradition because they share the same categorisation of the sensory world, inheriting a particular value system, priorities and agendas.

Jullien started to investigate Chinese thought to diverge his thinking from a Western perspective with which he was too familiar. Jullien (2015) had been living, breathing, growing, and being trained in the Western environment, and had recognised in his 20s that he could not separate his

thought from the habitual thinking frameworks inherited in the Western tradition. Jullien's (1995) work uses Chinese thought as a lever to free himself from the limits imposed by his taken-for-granted cultural thought, and re-enter Western thought and reinterrogate its habitual ways of approaching reality. Jullien chose the Chinese tradition because it had mainly developed free from Western influence until the late-16th century. Additionally, Chinese thought is carried by an ideographical language, which contains characteristics and categorisations of the world distinct from the alphabet-based Indo-European languages. Jullien selected the Chinese thought from the 1st millennium BCE to the late-16th century and took the Chinese perspective from this period as a place of exteriority to reinvestigate the Western tradition. Doing so allowed Jullien to become aware of the taken-for-granted cultural norms that limited his thinking. In Jullien's work, the Chinese tradition is not studied for its own sake but to contribute to his philosophising. Using a Chinese perspective as a lever, he finds that the validity of knowledge, the fundamental questions about reality, the importance of meaning, truth, identity, and the theory-and-practice partnership are all manifestations of Western thought, from its unique conception of reality, value system and purpose of its scholarship which the Chinese tradition does not share.

Based on Jullien's work, the ways leadership is conceived, investigated and problematised, as well as the types of leadership knowledge that existing scholarship produces, are made possible by a Western categorisation of the sensory world. Jullien (1995) suggests that Chinese thought does not conceive a metaphysical reality: consequently, the "existence" of leadership is not of interest to Chinese thought. Leadership is not inherently separated between theory and practice from a Chinese perspective, nor is it divided on the basis of agency, process, ontology, or

epistemology. Existing challenges in the theorising of leadership such as dualism (Fairhurst, 2011), subject-object divide (Collinson, 2011) and the lack of distinctive definition in many emerging theories (Alvesson, 2019; Alvesson & Blom, 2018) are not inherent problems from a Chinese way of approaching the leadership phenomenon. Rooted in Jullien's work, this philosophical research aims to contribute to existing leadership scholarship by approaching leadership through the ancient Chinese system of conceiving, thinking about and making sense of reality described in Jullien's philosophical studies. By using the Chinese perspective as a lever, this PhD research aims to gain unique insights about leadership that are unavailable from a Western lens and add to leadership knowledge in ways that are outside of the strength of existing scholarship, as well as providing alternative interpretations and/or ways of resolving and/or disappearing some of the enduring issues in leadership scholarship.

Personal Motivation

Growing up in China, in the first 17 years of my life, I lived and breathed Chinese culture and wisdom. I have learnt about and was proud of the amazing achievements of my ancestors, their knowledge on health, the body, medicine, martial art, military strategies, arts, crafts, cooking, and the wisdom of life, both recognised and unrecognised by the West. After spending roughly 20 years in New Zealand and 10 years in academia, I have learnt that ancient Chinese wisdom, even though not mainstream, has also been utilised by Western thinkers in philosophical, social, and scientific fields (Jullien, 2015; Needham & Wang, 1954).

In my academic journey, I have often faced the problem of not being able to capture the meaning of the Chinese language using English words. Unlike the use of the English language in everyday life that seem homogenous to me, in academia, many Western terms such as virtue, truth, reality, and consciousness are associated with their philosophical origins in academic studies. They are no longer words that can universally express life experiences. Consequently, I cannot simply use the English language to express my ancestor's wisdom without first defining many concepts in their Western origins. However, I am highly aware that the foundation of Chinese thought neither emerged from ancient Greek thinking nor was developed by Western thinkers.

Expressing Chinese thought using English in academia often makes me feel that my cultural wisdom is colonised by the thoughts of the thinkers throughout European history and is interpreted under its paradigm.

I came across François Jullien's work 2 years into my PhD studies, and it provided me with many answers to my problem above. Jullien's approach to thought as a tradition helped me understand that the problems, I encountered in working with Chinese thought are a product of imposing one culture's biases onto that of another. His work explains that while Western thought privileges logic, and learning occurs through reasoning and argumentation, the ancient Chinese prioritised living in the midst of change, and did not separate themselves from the sensory world (Jullien, 2015). Consequently, Chinese thought was produced for a different purpose to Western scholarship, and classical Chinese literature focuses not on reasoning but on providing examples for the learners to develop and learn from in everyday life. For example, Confucius said that: “三人行，必有我师焉” (*san ren xing, bi you wo shi yan*), which translates as: “of every three

people I meet, there is at least one person I could learn from” (Ames, 2010, p. 1). It advises people to find lessons to learn in every encounter and not rely on a teacher’s intentions. Jullien (2000) also explains that, unlike Western scholarship grounded in reasoning and logic, Chinese thought is practice-based; as such, learning is a process of maturation through training in everyday life and not acquiring intellectual understanding through reasoning or logic per se. Insights like these helped me understand that my struggle to utilise Chinese wisdom lies in communicating thought produced in a Chinese system, in a Western system. Jullien’s work helped me to realise that the Western thinkers who have utilised some of the Chinese wisdom in academia are not necessarily the people who fully understood Chinese thought but were the ones who could successfully translate the Chinese thought into the Western structure for Western readers to conceive intellectually through reasoning and logic.

While scholars who employ Jullien’s work often praise him for being able to break away from the existing (Western) structure of thinking (Chia, 2014; Persson & Shrivastava, 2016), his work provided me with a better understanding of the Western way. Jullien’s goal is to “re-enter” the Western tradition after having taken a Chinese perspective. As someone who has a Chinese perspective, I find that the skill I need, and my biggest challenge is to be able to verbalise and communicate Chinese wisdom in the Western form of reasoning. Jullien’s work gives me the voice to do so. The way he describes and explains Chinese thought provided me with valuable insights into how Chinese wisdom could be communicated to Western scholars without being fully imprisoned by Western words, concepts, or conceptions of reality. Through Jullien’s work, I have become more aware of my own taken-for-granted cultural biases, and the origin of

Western tradition. Basing this PhD research on Jullien's work, especially the Chinese lens he describes, I also hope to communicate Chinese wisdom to a broader audience by re-entering my cultural tradition through a Western lens.

Potential Difficulties in This Research

The biggest difficulties of this study are indeed to do with the cross-cultural translation of thoughts. One language does not facilitate the reality of another language. Based on Jullien's (1995) work, Western concepts are often considered independent beings with separated identities, while Chinese characters represent tendencies in the world, that is ever-in-motion and not definable. As such, words and phrases in the English language cannot directly translate Chinese thought. Consequently, I intend to help Western audiences acquire an intellectual understanding of a Chinese perspective using the English language and do not expect the audiences to experience the reality of a Chinese person. To do so, I follow Jullien's strategy by explaining several key concepts in Chinese thought, and I use these key components to explain and describe Chinese thought and the reality it conceives in a Western form of reasoning.

Additionally, this PhD research relies on Jullien's work that has been translated into English from French, which is only roughly one-third of his total work. There could be many misinterpretations in this process of translations between the three languages. To deal with this potential issue, I centre employ a personal lens.

A primary contribution of Jullien's work lies in the Chinese lens he describes, and I live one such lens. Because my Chinese perspective is not intellectualised or described but lived, I obtain a

high level of competency in the Chinese lens as well as occupying a position of exteriority to Western thought, that is unavailable to a scholar who has not dedicated themselves to living and experiencing Chinese thought. To contribute to existing leadership scholarship through a Chinese perspective, I use Jullien's words and ways of explaining Chinese thought as my voice to communicate the outcome of approaching leadership through its lens.

Research Question and Objectives

Recognising the potential of Jullien's work, the question of this PhD research is

How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?

This question is addressed in three steps and through three objectives. They are:

- Identify habitual patterns in Western thinking embedded in existing leadership scholarship.
- Investigate leadership through a Chinese perspective (based on Jullien's work).
- Distinguish the insights revealed from a Chinese lens in this research that are unavailable in existing leadership thinking.

The primary contribution of Jullien's work is the knowledge and perspective that he made available between cultures; as such, addressing the research question is not about participating in existing leadership studies but recognising what is available from one cultural lens that is absent or underdeveloped in the other. The first step this research takes is to identify habitual-thinking patterns behind the emergence of leadership theories. The insights clarify the categorisations of reality in the Western tradition that produced the condition for leadership thoughts to emerge,

change, and develop. The second task is to acquire an understanding of leadership through the Chinese thinking structure. A Chinese understanding of leadership functions as a frame of reference to reveal what a Chinese lens could perceive that is unavailable in existing scholarship. The last objective is to distinguish and describe what the contrast between the cultural thoughts reveals.

A basic assumption I have is that a Chinese lens could prove to be helpful for existing leadership scholarship. Jullien's work on the Chinese tradition could add new layers of sophistication to leadership scholarship, provide additional insights about leadership, and perhaps provide tools for approaching leadership-related issues from another angle.

Thesis Structure

This philosophical research thesis is configured in three parts. The first part explores François Jullien's work; this includes his central idea, motivation, findings, and criticism of his work. Part I also clarifies the key terms and concepts in Jullien's work and discusses Chinese thought. After summarising Jullien's work, Part I then explains the research design of this thesis, including the theoretical framework, methodology, and how I address the research question.

The second part of this research thesis focuses on existing leadership literature. It addresses the objective of identifying habitual Western thinking patterns inherent in existing leadership scholarship. Here, existing leadership scholarship is investigated not for the knowledge it has produced, but instead discusses the categorisation of reality that existing leadership theories have emerged from, developed, and modified. It identifies how each categorisation of reality

influences the ways leadership is thought of, and the types of theories it produces. Doing so clarifies the conditions that enabled the emergence of leadership thought, which could provide a frame of reference to identify the difference in the environment that produced Chinese thought.

Additionally, this part of the research also studies how theory-and-practice partnership functions in existing scholarship. Based on Jullien's work, the theory-and-practice partnership is the basis on which Western thought engages reality, which also provides an environment for Western scholarship to function and engage with the sensory world. However, because they require two separate sets of skills, there is often a gap between them to be filled. Investigating leadership scholarship's attempt to fill this gap provides insights into how existing thought diverges and/or functions within the Western structure.

Part III of this research focuses on investigating the leadership phenomenon from the Chinese perspective described in Jullien's work, and it aims to address both of the remaining objectives: *Conceive leadership through a Chinese perspective, and Distinguish the insights revealed from a Chinese lens in this research that are unavailable in existing leadership thinking.* Because leadership is a Western concept, the investigation of leadership in this research relies on the information about the phenomenon provided by the existing scholarship. Thus, the process of conceiving leadership involves the constant interplay between the knowledge provided by existing scholarship and the reinterpretation through a Chinese lens. In Jullien's work, he sees each culture's thought as a separate thread, and the process of taking one perspective to reinterpret the knowledge produced by the other and vice versa as the "weaving" of a net

(Jullien, 2015). The last two objectives of this research are simultaneously addressed in the process of weaving the net, as conceiving leadership through the Chinese lens involves discussing the interpretation of leadership from a Western perspective and reframing it from a Chinese perspective. What the net catches is what is in between thoughts, which is the original contribution of this research.

Finally, the conclusion of this research lists the potential value and contributions that Jullien's work, and his understanding of Chinese thought could provide for leadership scholarship. This part of the thesis distinguishes implications for applying for Jullien's work in leadership scholarship and provides suggestions for advancing leadership research based on the findings of this PhD project.

Part I:

François Jullien and His Work

François Jullien: Background

This PhD research aims to address the question of *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* Part I of this thesis contributes to this project by providing an in-depth discussion of François Jullien and his work.

François Jullien is a French philosopher, philologist, sinologist, and Hellenist. His work is often associated with French philosophers like Durkheim, Mauss, Granet, Lévi-Strauss and others that Gauchet (2011) calls the school of “Western decentralisation.” This emerging school of thought aims to diverge philosophy from the familiar philosophical questions of ‘being’ and ‘truth’ by attempting to think outside of a Western conception of reality. According to Gauchet, Jullien has carried this decentralisation further than his predecessors through his investigation into Chinese thought and brought it to its actualisation by providing an alternative approach to living outside of Western metaphysical reality, and ways of functioning beyond a theory-and-practice partnership.

Throughout his career, Jullien has published many journal articles and over 30 books on philosophy, strategy and aesthetics; his work has been translated into Spanish, German, Italian, Portuguese, English, Chinese, and Vietnamese. This PhD study is primarily grounded in the 13 pieces of literature (12 books and one book chapter) currently available in the English language. The contents of these books cover a range of Jullien's studies, including that on the separation between the Chinese and the Western conceptions of reality (Jullien, 2000, 2002, 2014); different understandings of being human (Jullien, 2007c), priorities for living (Jullien, 2014, 2020),

aesthetics (Jullien, 2007b, 2012, 2016), approaching issues and resolving problems (Jullien, 2000), as well as the different cultural preferences in functioning (Jullien, 1995, 2004b, 2011).

Below are the names of the books in the order of their publication in English.

- *The propensity of things: Toward a history of efficacy in China* (J. Lloyd, Trans.). Zone Books, 1995.
- *Detour and access: Strategies of meanings in China and Greece* (S. Hawkes, Trans.). Zone Books, 2000.
- *Did philosophers have to become fixated on truth?* (J. Lloyd, Trans.). In F. Jullien (Ed.), *Un sage est sans idée: Ou l'autre de la philosophie* (pp. 803–824). Seuil, 2002.
- *In praise of blandness: Proceeding from Chinese thought and aesthetics* (P. M. Varsano, Trans.). Zone Books, 2004.
- *A treatise on efficacy: Between Western and Chinese thinking* (J. Lloyd, Trans.). University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
- *The impossible nude: Chinese art and Western aesthetics* (M. De la Guardia, Trans.). University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- *Vital nourishment: Departing from happiness* (A. Goldhammer, Trans.). Zone Books, 2007.
- *The silent transformations* (K. Fijalkowski & M. Richardson, Trans.). Seagull Books, 2011.
- *The great image has no form, or on the nonobject through painting* (J. M. Todd, Trans.). University of Chicago Press, 2012.

- *On the universal: The uniform, the common and dialogue between cultures* (M. Richardson & K. Fijalkowski, Trans.). Polity, 2014.
- *The book of beginnings* (J. Gladding, Trans.). Yale University Press, 2015.
- *This strange idea of the beautiful* (M. Richardson & K. Fijalkowski, Trans.). Seagull Books, 2016.
- *From being to living: A Euro-Chinese lexicon of thought* (K. Fijalkowski & M. Richardson, Trans.). Sage Publications, 2020.

Jullien’s work has been widely studied by philosophers, sinologists, artists, and social scientists across disciplines, but is currently underrepresented in organisation studies. I found just over 20 articles from a handful of scholars who utilise Jullien’s work. Amongst the articles, only three studies in the leadership field mentioned Jullien more than once. In recognition that Jullien’s work could potentially benefit leadership scholarship, this research project is an initiative to leverage the resources-for-thinking provided in Jullien’s work.

Jullien’s Philosophical Adventure

In his 20s, Jullien describes himself as a young Hellenist who intended to reflect and critique his own thinking limits and boundaries. Jullien’s (2020) Hellenism background taught him that to philosophise is to diverge thinking, that “each philosopher becomes a real philosopher to the extent that he (or she) separates himself (or herself) from those coming before him (or her) or, to make the point more precisely, *opens up a divergence* in relation to them” (p. 175). Striving to be amongst “real” philosophers, Jullien desires both physical and mental spaces to separate his

thought from the far-too-familiar philosophical questions about ‘being,’ ‘truth’ and ‘God.’ To diverge his thinking, Jullien was seeking a suspension from his knowledge and awareness of everything existential, which includes all that he could conceive as thinkable, knowable, doubttable and questionable. Jullien (2020) describes this suspension as a state where,

I no longer knew what resembles or doesn’t resemble, what does or doesn’t differ, what earlier landmarks suddenly waver to the point that I began to be amazed at what my language makes me say and think, so as no longer to be a prisoner (or perhaps a dupe?) of a game (or of an “I”) I had not chosen. (p. 193)

Jullien’s decision to enter China (both physically and philosophically) was an attempt to free himself from the confinement of his own thinking so that he could diverge from it and philosophise.

A Philosophical Approach to China

As a philosopher, the uniqueness of Jullien’s work lies in his attempt to diverge thinking across space rather than time. Jullien (2020) suggests that most philosophers’ philosophies are from the *past*, from “what has already been thought and sedimented in Europe” (p. 175). Jullien is interested in freeing himself from all that is familiar, so instead of studying historical biases and taken-for-granted norms, Jullien deals with those between cultures. Jullien recognises that the evolution of a cultural thought results from a series of choices and decisions made by the culture throughout history. These choices could have been made due to circumstantial needs, crisis, economic conditions, political priority, preferences and other factors. However, as thinking continually evolve, the least questioned past choices become taken for granted and eventually

are solidified as the foundation for asking other questions and making new decisions and choices. These taken-for-granted choices become the bed of the continuous evolution of the cultural thought throughout time, are inherited generation after generation to the point that they can no longer be recognised as biases in thinking from within the culture (Jullien, 2014, 2015). Jullien considers thoughts that share the same set of historically inherited system, structures, and/or modes of thinking, as a family; this is because they are manifested from the same source, or rather, the same way of organising reality (Jullien, 2015, 2020).

In Jullien's work, *unthought* refers to the taken-for-granted biases and/or preconceptions that a family of thought cannot distinguish from within. "Unthought" is a product of cultural habits of thinking that are deeply rooted in the family of thought, passed down for centuries and millennia, and have been culturally and historically taken for granted. Jullien's studies suggest that unthought is only detectable from a place of exteriority. In his work, Jullien employs Chinese thought as a lever to interrogate, critique, and reflect on Western thinking. In this process, he also reveals the unthought of a Chinese perspective through a Western lens. Jullien (2020) explains that it is through the "exteriority of these thoughts, that each can themselves be grasped, in the encounter with the other, in what they do not know about themselves, and can prove what they have not thought about, hence stimulating (themselves in) thought" (pp. 186–187). Because unthought is produced in the in-between space of the cultures, as one culture's unthought is revealed by the scholarship of the other, unthought of the other culture is uncovered in the same process. Unthought is coproduced by the cultures combining their perspectives.

Anthropology of *difference*

Jullien has considered to acquire unthought through existing anthropological studies of China, *sinology*; however, he finds that anthropology classifies and investigates culture based on a Western perspective and often fails to take the perspectives of the cultures it studies.

According to Jullien (2020), anthropology is a study of *difference*, and difference assumes a universal way of categorising cultures under the same genre, which varies from perspective to perspective. Jullien understands that cultures arrange reality differently, have separate value systems and are engaging diverse relationships with the sensory world. For example, Chinese thought does not recognise a subject-object causal relationship, nor is its understanding of reality centralised on the human. As a consequence, human behaviours, attributes and meaning that often holds significance in Western scholarship are not the basis for understanding culture through a Chinese lens. Jullien proposes that difference is a tool of typology; it preconceives the “other” as in the same system of arranging reality such as a genre, type, or species. It is only through classification that difference is identified.

Jullien (2015, 2020) claims that the discipline of anthropology emerged during the European colonisation period (15th to 20th centuries) and formed around peculiarly European values. Consequently, pre-existing classifications of cultural variables often reaffirm the colonisers’ sense of superiority over the colonised. Furthermore, Jullien (2020) suggests that “by establishing its criteria from the outset as well as by constructing typologies, anthropology places itself straightaway under the vocation and authority of science, being above all devoted to

determination” (p. 190). Therefore, through the classification process the knowledge produced about a culture is filtered through a system of validity that functions to produce identity to be differentiated and compared with others of the same classification. It is an approach to culture on the basis of difference and not divergence. Jullien believes that the outcome of an anthropological study is often a generalisation of the culture from a singular perspective and cannot represent a culture’s richness; its thought, or its perspectives (Jullien, 2015, 2020).

Additionally, being a classificatory system, thinking through difference is intimately linked to identity, an arrangement of perceptions of reality (hereafter called ‘reality’). Jullien recognises that anthropology preconceives cultures as separated entities with relatively stable identity, and that defining a cultural identity is a prerequisite for comparing the resemblance and disassociations between the cultures. However, Jullien (2020) also disassociates his own philosophy from the idea that cultures have an identity; this is not only because cultures are constantly evolving, but because cultures have different ways of arranging, experiencing, interacting with, and relating to the sensory world and they are not isolated. Cultures constantly influence and are influenced by each other in spontaneous ways. On this basis of understanding cultures as having different value systems, priorities and agendas, based on their foundational relation to the sensory world, Jullien argues that unthought cannot come from outside of a culture, but instead happen somewhere in-between cultures.

One discipline devoted to understanding Chinese culture is sinology – a branch of anthropology dedicated to studying Asian countries. In sinology, Chinese thought is often categorised under

philosophy and is studied based on the way Western philosophy is often traditionally produced and evaluated. Jullien's approach is different from the traditional sinologists. He argues Western philosophy emerged in ancient Hellenist Greece as the discourse for truth, which he proposes is a concept that the ancient Chinese did not have. Jullien suggests that the ancient Chinese also did not conceive a metaphysically divided reality where truth is covered by lies and essence hidden under appearances. From this observation of the differences between cultural traditions, Jullien argues seeking 'truth' could not have been the purpose of the ancient Chinese thought (Jullien, 2002). Jullien (2020) suggests that anthropology (and sinology), uses Western classification systems to decide what is important and unimportant, what can and cannot be studied, and what can and cannot be considered as valid knowledge. Consequently, mainstream anthropology is inhibited in its ability to fully enter a different cultural system such as the Chinese one, because it uses concepts and values that cannot possibly understand Chinese ways.

Studying Cultural Thought Through Historical Methods and Direct Translation. Jullien (2011) acknowledges that apart from sinology he also considered several other common ways of approaching Chinese thought, such as tracing the culture through its history and analysing already translated documents. Historical methods have been popular amongst philosophers because they allow a systematic study of the evolution of the culture's thought in a process of progression. But Jullien recognises it as a Western method and says it is only effective when a Western thinker traces European history. There are cultural biases, preferences, and agendas that can still impact understanding another culture's history. For instance, generally speaking, European history tends to be centralised around events or moments of rupture. These moments

are seen as the defining moments of history and the starting point of a new timeline. This tendency often produces a narrative of history as a sum of important moments with periods of silences in between. Jullien (2004b) suspects that as the Chinese and Western civilisations developed separate from each other, there is a possibility that Chinese thinkers may be attentive to and/or prioritise different aspects of history. Indeed, Jullien's later findings suggest that the Chinese did not conceive history as linear progress of continuation and that the moments of rupture were also not privileged over the more silent periods; additionally, these attention-grabbing moments were not regarded as the starting points of change but their consequences.

Alternatively, the direct translation of the ancient Chinese text is a popular way of studying Chinese thought; in fact, most of the existing leadership studies that employ Chinese thought draw their insights from translated texts. However, Jullien is sceptical of one language's capacity to communicate the meanings of another, especially between the languages that are separated in terms of their *phonetic* and *ideographical* natures. Jullien recognises that European languages cannot convey the same reality that the Chinese language does and vice versa. For example, the Chinese language "has no morphology – neither conjugation nor declension – and has almost no syntax (classical Chinese, at least)" (Jullien, 2015, p. 3). It also does not have a Western equivalent of a noun (Chia, 1996; Prince, 2005). A sentence in the Chinese language cannot produce the same experience as that of the Indo-European languages. Jullien proposes that translation, especially between languages of separate natures, imposes assimilation, synonymy, and/or equivalence. Jullien's (2020) later work has found many problems that sinological studies inadvertently produce through direct translation. For examples,

translating 法 *fa* as “law,” without wondering what a law is when it doesn’t respond to any idea of justice and serves only as an oppressive apparatus aiming to maintain, among the so-called Chinese “jurists” of Antiquity, an authoritarian – not to say totalitarian – order; or to translate 信 *xin* by “sincerity,” without wondering what such sincerity can be when it means sticking to what one has said rather than saying what one thinks – in other words, conducting oneself in a reliable way. Or to translate one or another term (*zhi* 志, *yi* 意,...) by “ideal,” without questioning the conditions of possibility of such ideality in China since the dividing in two of the “ideal” in relation to the “real” isn’t emphasised. (Jullien, 2020, p. 196)

These translations can be crucial factors for producing misunderstandings and misinterpretations of Chinese thought. Jullien asserts that language is a culture’s categorisation of reality; direct translation forces one way of categorising reality to express the experience of another. Or, in another way of expressing this effect, it forces one way of organising information to fit into the configuration of the other. Jullien says that it is a common practice for one culture to translate another’s language as if their categories are homogenous and objectively interchangeable. But, “under the translation, in the shelter of established equivalence, the hidden misunderstanding remains intact” (p. 197). Based on this understanding, Jullien believes that relying on direct translation also does not allow him to enter Chinese thought.

Divergence. Jullien (2015) studies Chinese thought to diverge thinking from a Western perspective; to do so requires him to take a Chinese perspective and depart from Western systems of thinking and arranging reality that he is familiar with. “Entering Chinese thought,

then, is to begin to question ourselves according to its perspective, according to its implications and expectations” (p. 3), and not forcing one’s own cultural thought to fit into the frameworks of the other. To do so, one must move away from one’s own perspective, habits of thinking, and familiar questions about reality (like the questions about being, God and Truth in philosophy). Jullien’s philosophical approach to China separates itself from sinology by not taking the stance of a scientific observer of China, as he understands modern science as grounded in Western categorisation of reality and value system. From this perspective, one cannot enter Chinese thought and take its perspective by filtering the knowledge of the ancient Chinese through a Western lens. This is why Jullien (2020) suggests that divergence, unlike difference, does not require a system of arranging reality because it refers to the *distance* between the subjects and does not require them to have identities. The value of studying culture though lies in what becomes available from the in-between space co-created by the two cultures through their encounter. Jullien proposes that “It is by measuring themselves against the other, by remaining, so to speak, (sus)pending from it, that the *divergence* is appreciated” (p. 179). This space contains what is available to one culture that is absent from the perspective of the other. Through divergences, the space between cultures provides resources for learning; it is through the perspectives of the other that a culture re-examines itself. Unlike in anthropology that categorises cultures as variations for comparison, Jullien’s philosophical approach recognises cultures in terms of fertility-of-thought to reflect on each other’s taken-for-granted norms, biases, and value systems, and discover aspects of the reality that is unavailable from one own cultural frameworks (Jullien, 2014, 2020).

Jullien likes to remind readers that he is a philosopher and stresses that his approach to China is not sinological nor anthropological. Jullien's work is often miscategorised as sinological and/or anthropological and I examine these debates about his work in more detail further on in Part 1.

Entering Thought Through Language. Jullien eventually decided to try and enter Chinese thought through the medium of language. His writing reflects his general attitude to language as a 'carrier' of thought – whether it is phonetic or ideographic – to convey a particular way of categorising and organising reality (through words and grammar) that a linguistic community uses as the basis of thinking through life's issues and challenges (Jullien, 2015). Jullien (2015) explains that the creation of words and grammatical structures is a primary manifestation of culture. Thus it is vitally important to the ways people within that culture think about, relate to, operate in, make sense of, and investigate what they conceive of as reality. As thinking evolves and choices are made to deal with the changing circumstances and problems of a society, the structure of language and thinking becomes taken for granted. Language affects a thinker's cognition, such as by categorising the way reality is organised, and influences aspects of the sensory world that the thinker can be attentive to and aware of. In this thesis, I follow Jullien and discuss language and thought as if they are interchangeable. I also follow Jullien in contending that preconceptions and/or biases are inherent in a language system, and because these systems are taken-for-granted, such implicit biases are often overlooked. This is not to say that language systems determine thought or culture, but language is clearly inextricably interwoven into the ways people in a particular linguistic and cultural system approach life.

Jullien (2015) clarifies that language's influences on thought is not deterministic; he says that "I don't assume that language determines thought, but I do consider that thought exploits the resources of its language – that is, its *fertilities*" (p. 188). Thought is expressed with words and is affected by the biases inherent in the ways words categorise reality. Grammatical structures also affect thought patterns. Language provides the conditions for thinking to manifest which nurtures attentiveness towards certain aspects of life and living while at the same time limiting other ways of conceiving of the world.

Jullien (2015) recognises that a *sentence*, including the vocabulary it uses, is bound by a predetermined set of grammatical rules, grouping, and organisation of the language; they together create the condition for thought to emerge. Based on this understanding, Jullien proposes that language is prior to an idea "because the *sentence* is its very deployment" p. 20). An idea is carried by a sentence, and, as such, it is bound by the language's grammatical rules, structure, and system of organising words. What differentiates a philosopher is their sentence, not the idea. While philosophers are commonly known for their ideas, the linguistic rules and categorisations of reality that create the condition for the coming-to-be of an idea are often taken for granted. To Jullien, the powerful influence that language has on thinking lies in that it is taken for granted by the linguistic community. Carried by the same language or linguistic family, cultural thoughts often share a common conception of reality, mode of thinking, questioning, and way of producing knowledge (Jullien, 2015). Jullien believes that the limits of his imagination, capacity to doubt and question reality, is associated with his awareness of the choices that language has already made for his thinking. Jullien also argues that the lack of awareness of

language's influence on thought may have also limited the thinking of past philosophers. He suggests that despite their attempts to diverge their thoughts from a focus on 'being' and its associated ontology as a foundation for knowledge claims, contemporary Western philosophers (he identifies Derrida, Levinas, and Heidegger) were limited because they employ a Western language system rooted in a linguistic tradition: Jullien (2020) calls this tradition/system a *language of being*. For instance, Jullien saw Heidegger's focus on 'being' in his work as an attempt to understand the universal nature of being human, but also as a symptom of this traditional *language of being*. Jullien's work thus identifies language systems and traditions as providing a particular conception of 'reality', which then produces value systems and cultural preferences. In this thesis, I draw on Jullien's arguments to assist me to identify the limits of the leadership scholarship tradition (albeit agreeing that it is a diverse field where some seminal work is influenced by recent revolutions in Western thought brought about by post-structural linguistics, but still, I will contend, within a tradition of thinking in a Western way). I also discuss some of the ways certain leadership scholars have tried to break out of the thinking habits they are self-aware of (e.g. through process ontology and/or using art to provide new ways of perceiving the world).

Language of Being. Jullien refers to languages in the Indo-European linguistic family as Western languages. What these languages have in common are their phonocentric and alphabetical origins. A phono-centric language functions to name identifiable things and actions with sounds. Jullien calls the Indo-European languages the *language of being* because the languages evolve around the identification of things (including actions) – nouns and verbs. The

phonocentric nature of the Indo-European languages produces an experience of the world that sees it in terms of separated 'beings', and, as a consequence, the priority of Western scholarship revolves around the identification of independent and distinct forms.

According to Jullien (2002), the ancient Greeks conceived the world on the basis of identifiable forms and believed that their language could literally represent the physical world so that learning about the world could be achieved through words. Jullien suggests that since the Western philosophical tradition is part of the Indo-European linguistic family and is still influenced by ancient Greek philosophy, Western thought has also inherited this predisposition to the world as identifiable and understandable through language. This Western tradition is based on a particular view of the sensory world which carries into the writing of its language.

Importantly, the Chinese did not inherit, and so do not share, these predispositions.

Western philosophy, especially those branches that takes reason as central asks "what *is it*?" This question implies that the topic of its inquiry is an inanimate object that has a literal existence with a distinct identity, but Jullien (2002) insists that separating the sensory world on the basis of 'existence' and 'nonexistence' is a Western cultural creation. This is a fundamental challenge to many Western philosophical and ontological assumptions about the ways that people perceive reality; so essentially it questions the foundations of Western thought in its entirety.

Whether or not leadership scholars accept Jullien's argument (and I canvass critique later on in Part 1 and return to it again in Part 3), Jullien's philosophical critique of Western thought deserves more attention, especially considering the need for more East-West understanding in

contemporary times. Jullien believed that, as a French European, he could enter Chinese thought by imaginatively immersing himself in a Chinese sensory world. By doing so Jullien's purpose was not to critique Chinese thought, but to diverge his thinking from his own Western tradition in order to enrich continental philosophy and help the two cultures understand each other better. The space between two cultural traditions he called 'unthought'. This place of critique – unthought between two cultures – is where I also locate my critique of Western leadership scholarship. I explain further on in Part 1 more about this position in the section *Personal Motivation*, that as I am a Chinese person who has spent most of his life outside of China, in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thus I have a unique position vis-à-vis unthought that requires me to explain my lens in more detail, including how I can enhance Jullien's work as a Chinese person who already lives between two worlds, but also the limits of my perspective, since my formative years have been spent in China and so my lens is in some ways unavoidably Chinese.

More about the Western and Chinese Tradition The term *tradition* indicates shared customs passed down from generation to generation by a community. Jullien's work includes the thoughts of two traditions: both the West and the Chinese. The term *Western tradition*, which Jullien uses frequently, is not unique to Jullien's work; it is also present in the works of a long line of philosophers, including Foucault, Derrida, and Heidegger. This Western tradition seems to be identified through three main components by Western philosophers: language, culture, and patterns of thought (e.g. what Foucault might call a discourse).

As previously mentioned, when I use the term Western language, I am referring to the ones that have Indo-European origins. These languages are often grouped for similarities in their phonetic nature, function, and grammatical structures and conjugations. Jullien is not unique in making this assertion. Cultures within European linguistic families have frequently interacted throughout history, and have had profound and long-lasting influences on each other's languages, cultures and thinking patterns (Jullien, 2014). In speaking of Western philosophy and its impact on culture, Jullien is usually referring to philosophers from European countries, including France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Netherlands. Aligica (2007) confirms that Jullien's use of the term 'tradition' refers specifically to Western European culture in general, which Jullien sees as founded in ancient Greek philosophy (Jullien, 2002). Even though Western European culture is distinct from that of the Greeks, and arguably very diverse, ancient Greek philosophy is widely studied by Western philosophers such as Kant, Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault. These European philosophers are studied by leadership scholars and so provide a particular philosophical language, and value system, that is typical in Western knowledge institutions such as universities. The frequent use of the term West in Jullien's work indicates the tradition that belongs to the Western European culture, rooted in Greek-originated *habits of thinking*, and is carried by the linguistic family of Indo-European languages. Grounded in Jullien's work, this thesis also uses the terms West and Western consistent with Jullien's use of them. I do, however, acknowledge the diversity of thinking in the Western tradition, and the fluidity and flexibility of European languages, that enables an astonishing amount of cultural and linguistic innovations. However, in this thesis, my concern is with the Western traditions that limit the ability of

leadership scholars to fully embrace (without colonising) Chinese thought as a vehicle for alternative ways of thinking about leadership. This ability relies on leadership scholars being able to take a position of exteriority to leadership in their own thinking, and so in the next section, I explore more about how a Chinese tradition might provide this possibility for an alternative thought.

The Chinese Tradition as Exteriority. Jullien (2015) studies Chinese thought because he suspects that his own thinking is constrained by his own Western assumptions that he cannot detect unless he takes a perspective from a place of exteriority. He says that he chose Chinese thought because,

a thought as elaborate as “ours” (in Europe), but without there being any suspicion of influence or contamination between them: it is an *elsewhere* that doesn’t belong to the system of alphabetical composition, and one whose writing responds to the other possibility, which is ideographic rather than phonetic. (p. 177)

Jullien further explains that China has had very limited Western influence throughout its history. It is also “very different from the case of India which was able to communicate with Europe through the Indo-European language (Greek and Sanskrit having the same grammatical roots and categories)” (p. 78). The Chinese language provides the vivid, even alien, exteriority Jullien needs to distance himself from Western thinking.

Geography is another reason why the Chinese tradition is an ideal choice as an exterior position. Geographical factors have played a role in separating the Chinese language and thought from the

Indo-European linguistic family. The diversity in terrain and resources that come with continental weather and atmospheric (compared to oceanic) conditions produced hospitable conditions for the Chinese civilisation to thrive and might also have contributed to the ancient Chinese's appreciation for the natural principles of nature including the diversities and abundances that change brings. In contrast, the relatively small and isolated island-based communities of ancient Greece, accompanied by frequent natural disasters and a lack of resources, may have contributed to the fundamental ancient Greek conception of humans as separate from nature and need to master the exterior world. The Greeks, Jullien proposes, saw nature as chaos and they had to fight the elements and impose order to survive. This relationship to nature was pivotal in the development of the divergent thinking traditions; and became manifest in the priorities, agendas and value systems which underscore taken-for-granted habits of relating to the sensory world and approaching situations (Jullien, 1995, 2004b, 2011).

The third exteriority the Chinese tradition can bring which is valuable is to do with its thought. Jullien (2014) suggests that Chinese thought was mostly developed independently from the European influence until the 16th century when the first evangelical missions disembarked in China. Clearly, there has been considerable cultural and trade exchange occurring between the West and China for centuries, so in order to maximise his distance from the habits of his own Western thinking, Jullien selected a period of Chinese thought before any significant encounters with missionaries; the first Chinese literature 易經 *yì jīng* (written in the 1st millennium BCE) until the end of the 16th century (pre-Jesuit influence). Jullien sees this period in the Chinese civilisation as most separated from Western influence. Jullien's work uses these three

exteriorities as spaces outside of the Western tradition to reinterrogate Western thought and discover its unthought that could not otherwise be detected without a frame of reference.

In this thesis, when I refer to the Chinese tradition and Chinese thought I am primarily discussing ancient Chinese thought of this period when Western influences were negligible. I am mindful that the application of ancient Chinese thought in the contexts of contemporary life and leadership concerns is complex and problematic, not least because of the rapid westernisation of many aspects of Chinese life in the past century (e.g. individualistic-orientation). Nevertheless, even though this thesis uses ancient Chinese thought as one position of exteriority, ancient Chinese traditions will help me reflect on the limitations of western thought, which in turn will encourage cross-cultural understanding. Many of the cultural patterns I discuss regarding ancient Chinese thought persist in Chinese business culture today, including preferences for long-term thinking, harmony over conflict, and *guanxi* in conducting businesses, which values human factors such as connections, relationships, and trust before nonhuman factors such as product and price (Chang, 1976; Chen & Miller, 2010; Fang, 2016; Rarick, 2009; Zhu & Li, 2016).

Catching Unthought

Jullien (2015) recognises that entering a tradition requires him to separate from his own thinking patterns. He recognised it was impossible for him to ‘enter’ China without first learning about it using a familiar language and way of making sense of the sensory world. His dilemma was that “By not translating them [the Chinese characters] you will leave them aglow in some distant exoticism, by wanting to translate them you will immediately enclose them within a foreign language, your own, and deprive them of their coherence, remove them from their implicitness”

(p. 4). Ultimately, Jullien decided to express the two cultural thoughts as well as his philosophy in a Western language (French) for a Western audience; this meant using a Western language to facilitate not only his thought but also that of the ancient Chinese. Jullien (2020) believed this to be a difficult task, but not an impossible task. He says that the process of studying both cultural thoughts using the same language “could only be done by small moves and successive shifts letting something thread its way in from the outside and so beginning to open up, accommodate and amalgamate” (p. 195). It requires the same language that facilitates Chinese thought to continue to accommodate, decategorize, and recategorize itself in relation to the Chinese language and thought. As a phrase in one language is not necessarily explainable with that of another, one should not expect smooth or fluid translations in learning about cultural literature. Instead, this process must be done “without expectation of a flash of brilliance or of a forced entry, without immediately hoping for a great synthetic presentation, through a revelation, of ‘what’ the ‘other’ would be (of what Chinese thought would thus be when expressed in European terms)” (p. 195). In this process, Jullien could eventually use the thoughts of both cultures as levers to enter and re-enter each other’s thoughts, which he calls the *weaving of a net*.

Jullien (2020) says that whilst Western philosophy questions ‘being’, Chinese thought is immersed in living. The Western reoccupation with ‘being’ prioritises identification and description while the Chinese study of living can only occur in the midst of everyday life. Chinese thought prioritises constant motions, embodies living, and is centred in the interrelations that influence motion. To Jullien, “The question of ‘being’ or the thought of ‘living’ is the principal articulation, or generic alternative, that will enable us to perceive this net, in filigree,

mesh by mesh” (p. 204). With each component of a culture’s thought as a thread, a net can be created only through the interplay between the two systems of thought. A mesh signifies a domain of study; weaving is a constant process of re-examining and reflecting on the domain from both cultural perspectives.

To study unthought, Jullien often takes one concept at a time, such as 淡 *dan* (blandness), 勢 *shi* (propensity), the nude, or beauty. He investigates the concept on the basis of the domains in which it was frequently used, such as painting, calligraphy, wisdom, literacy, poetry and education, military strategy, and diplomacy. Jullien produces an understanding of the concept from each domain of the study and re-examines the understanding he previously acquired in relation to the new insight acquired from the new domain. Jullien learns about each concept in each culture and analyses it across domains to form a coherent understanding. He also compares the Chinese concept with a Western term that has similar importance to identify the distance between the two cultures’ thinking and value system. Jullien (2020) says that in this process,

a place will only gradually be found for coherence in our language and spirit by means of progressive accommodation, by surreptitiously and, step by step, cracking it so as to introduce it, patiently, tirelessly, by unwriting and rewriting, by deviating and reformulating, by nudging them so that they link up and do so through a slow acculturation. (p. 194)

Additionally, to express the divergence of thought in his work, Jullien often titles his books with the interplay between concepts such as *The Greatest Image Has No Form* (Jullien, 2012), *Detour*

and Access (Jullien, 2000), and *From Being to Living* (Jullien, 2020). The titles are designed to intrigue the reader with the divergence of cultural logics. Similarly, many headings in his work also tend to pair Chinese notions with Western concepts like “Essence/Valency,” “Resemblance/Resonance,” “Presence/Pregnancy,” “Goal or Consequence,” and “Action or Transformation.” Jullien’s association of a Chinese concept with a Western one is not to create binaries between them but to learn about one in relation to the other. Through the distance co-created by considering these counterparts apart and together, Jullien tries to capture unthought. Thus Jullien pays attention, in the ways that he places divergent thoughts next to each other, to the ways the reader’s understanding is enhanced. Meaning-making is not just the responsibility of the author, but also of the reader who must engage with Jullien’s writing, also with an open mind willing to be changed.

By facilitating Chinese thought in a Western language, Jullien finds that the learning of Chinese wisdom allows him to recognise the many choices that were made by the two cultures in the emergence of their thoughts. Jullien (2004b) has reassessed the Western habitual preferences for the identifiable, visible, and stable. Chinese thought has shown him that “the visible aspect of an effect is of minimal importance” (p. 104). Rather than directly tackling the symptom of a situation, from Chinese thought Jullien has learnt the value of allowing the inherent effect of a situation to come about “without having to make any effort or expend any energy, and also to prevent any rejection on its part, in other words to get it (the situation) to tolerate us” (p. 104). Doing so allows one to transform a situation in one’s favour with minimum resistance and destruction. Alternatively, Jullien (2020) proposes that “Chinese thought, as it comes out of its

‘Taoist’ (Daoist) thinking upon meeting the ontological thinking of Europe, also experienced a liberation (and, above all, a release from its ‘royal way’ – in other words, in fact, from its autocratic regulation)” (p. 204). Jullien’s work does not abandon one thinking tradition for the other, or put one tradition under the other; instead, he recognises the fertility of a culture’s thought as a resource for contributing to another culture. By taking the perspectives of each other, cultures can continue to appreciate each other’s contribution to humanity, while drawing from the fertility of each other’s thinking to grow and develop in a partnership of mutual respect and admiration.

The Chinese Approach to the World Based on Jullien’s Work

Jullien’s strategy for catching unthought has allowed him to produce a coherent understanding of the Chinese tradition from outside of the metaphysical and Western structures and frameworks for engaging life. This Chinese way of conceiving and approaching reality is the most important contribution of Jullien’s work both as a system of thought in itself and as a mirror for reflecting on existing Western thought.

Guided by Jullien’s work, this research intends to use Jullien’s descriptions of Chinese tradition to create divergence from the Western cultural lens from which leadership is approached. I aim to contribute to leadership scholarship through the unthought that emerges in the distance between the cultural thoughts. To answer the research question, *How can François Jullien’s work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* I need first to describe the Chinese way of approaching the sensory world, and potential issues related to taking an approach based on

Jullien's work. The next sections describe Jullien's findings on the Chinese tradition and criticisms of his approach from traditional sinological studies.

The Chinese Language and Thinking Patterns

Language, as I have argued following Jullien, is entangled with thought, and the way language categorises the material world is a manifestation of culture (Jullien, 2015). Chinese ideographical language does not share common roots with the Indo-European linguistic family. Jullien recognises that, inherent in the Chinese language, is a set of orientations to the world that created a very different set of habits for thinking and engaging with life (Jullien, 1995).

This view on ideographic language is not unique to Jullien. It is shared by other philosophers interested in language's role in shaping how reality is produced. David Abram is a philosopher whose work is commonly associated with new materialism and recently founded terms such as ecopsychology, ecophenomenology and ecological linguistics. Abram (1997) explains that ideographical and phonetic-based alphabetical languages produce different forms of cognition, especially in terms of one's relationship with the sensory world. Abram says that ideographical symbols contain animals, birds, plants, landscapes and natural phenomena such as sunrise and rainfall. When using ideographic language, one thus conceives the self in relation to the sensory world in a more direct and visceral way. Phonetic-based alphabetical language creates a different relationship between the language user and the sensory world. Abram suggests that phonetic written words, in contrast to ideographic writing,

no longer refers us to any sensible phenomenon out in the world, or even to the name of such a phenomenon (as with the rebus), but solely to a gesture to be made by the human mouth. There is a concerted shift of attention away from any outward or worldly reference of the pictorial image, away from the sensible phenomenon that had previously called forth the spoken utterance, to the shape of the utterance itself, now invoked directly by the written character. (p. 100)

What is written in phonetic languages is closer to the writer's intention to accurately describe the world. The alphabetical language allows the writer to have a dialogue with their "own visible inscriptions, viewing and responding to his own words even as he [sic] wrote them down" (p. 107) and creates a sense of self with autonomy and independence from others and the rest of the sensory world. On the other hand, ideographical language produces an interrelatedness between the language user and the sensory world.

Cognition through reflexivity and dialogue with one's own words enables a relationship with one's own sense of self which is relatively independent of the sensory world. This relationship with words created the possibility for the emergence of philosophy, in which the philosopher is in constant interaction with their previous statement. In contrast, Abram (1997) observes that a Chinese person using ideographic language tends to refer to the sensory world to provide examples to explain things rather than defining them using Western logical formation or reasoning. In relation to my own practice in writing this thesis I have noticed that when I explain Chinese concepts in English, I often use examples from the natural world. For example, I might use the example of plants growing and dying to infer that Chinese logic is dynamic and attuned

to the natural rhythms of the world. Referring to phenomena in the natural world is an important part of both trying to explain how Chinese thought works, but also to accentuate how different the thinking traditions can be, and this is why stories and sometimes Chinese parables are used in this thesis; to both explain and highlight divergence so that unthought can be represented.

Jullien's work is consistent with Abram's. Both authors explain that the two language systems have cognitive tendencies which created unique environments for different types of scholarship to emerge for alternative purposes. For example, Western language is often critiqued as being largely responsible for the development of an autonomous sense of self, and also binary thinking which is considered highly problematic by most critical scholars. These tendencies in the language system have exacerbated proclivity to separate the human from nature. Both Abrams and Jullien see these tendencies as in some way to do with a language system which privileges one thing over another because of language binaries (e.g. masculine/feminine; Western/Eastern; man/nature). Language itself is part of the problem and its capacity to provide solutions is limited. To be fair, destabilising restrictive binary frames of reference is now central to much of Western philosophy's work, and this is also true of leadership scholarship, as I shall explain in Part 2 of this thesis. In Part 2, I shall show how using unthought can help us understand many of the conundrums in leadership scholarship.

Philosophy also uses a specific type of language that is separated from everyday use and projects the purpose and outcome of philosophy as outside of day-to-day living. Alternatively, grounded in a language that functions in inciting the sensory world, Chinese thought uses everyday


language. Its focus is on the recognition of the interactions and propensity in the silent transformation in the sensory world, as its purpose is embedded in the everyday practice and development of a holistic way of conceiving, relating to, and participating in the midst of spontaneous motions produced by the interplay of factors on a day-to-day and moment-by-moment basis (Jullien, 2002, 2015, 2020). I shall return to this important point in Part 3 when I reconsider the implications of this thesis because making philosophy more relevant to everyday life is now of great concern to many contemporary leadership scholars.

No Separation Between Human and the Sensory World. In these next sub-sections, I explain in more detail how Chinese ideographic language functions. This is an important sub-section because later I connect ancient Chinese wisdom to understanding contemporary conflicts. I lay the groundwork for my later arguments that ancient Chinese wisdom is not only relevant for understanding the limits of Western thinking. It can also help us reflect on contemporary leadership issues since the basic nature of Chinese ideographic language has not changed since ancient times (Graham, 1989; Hansen, 1993; Needham & Wang, 1954).

The Chinese language is ideographical; its basic components are ideograms and pictorial symbols. Each 字 *zi*, or Chinese character links the language user with the sensory world (refer to Figure 1), and ideographical characters convey meaning through the combination of multiple pictures. Thomas (2017) provides examples of the ideographical characters: “Doubling the element 木 (*mù*, tree) results in 林 (*lin*, woods), its tripling in 森 (*sen*, forest). Combining 女 (*nǚ*, woman) and 子 (*zǐ*, child) produces 好 (*hǎo*, affection)” (p. 29).

Figure 1

Pictographic Chinese Characters

	山	mountain
	水	waterway
	馬	horse
	木	tree

From *Chinese Script: History, Characters, Calligraphy*. (p. 21) by Thomas (2017)

Ideographical language ‘incites’ what is in the sensory world as it provides the language user with the direct sensory experience of a situation, event, or phenomenon (Jullien, 1995). Like watching scenery or witnessing an event, a Chinese character produces a holistic experience about the aspect of reality that it incites. It does not engage the reader in the way an English word or expression does. Influenced by the aspects of reality that the language makes its users attentive towards, Jullien recognises that Chinese thought privileges the acquisition of holistic experience over making sense through logical progression or intellectual enlightenment from reasoning (Jullien, 1995).

Privileges Flow Over the Static. The conception of reality as a coherent system of regulation is facilitated by the basic components of the Chinese language. A 字 *zi* or Chinese character does not represent a fixed object, nor does it recognise a static “existence” with an “inherent nature.” The Chinese language does not have the Western equivalent of a noun, and a 字 *zi*, the fundamental building block of the Chinese language, indicates a tendency that is in itself in

motion. As the Chinese conceive reality in its entirety as one system of regulation, every tendency is in a constant and spontaneous process of regulation from emergence and development, to decline and reversal. However, this process is not linear; just like snow melting depends on factors such as temperature, weather and environment, change occurs circumstantially and spontaneously. As these factors change, the state of the snow also alters. In Chinese thought, change is a product of the interactions between multiple moving tendencies (Jullien, 2011).

Privileges Nonbinary Over Discrimination. In the Chinese language, 詞 *ci* or a “phrase” is formed with the combination of 字 *zi*; it indicates phenomena and events in life. Even though the differences between each 字 *zi* are recognised in the Chinese language, as they are in English, in Chinese 詞 *ci*, or a phrase, is formed through a unique partnership of the characters. The Chinese language, in combining 字 *zi*, captures a sense of life experiences in motion and process - the products of collaborations, co-creation, and partnerships between multiple tendencies. The differences between 字 *zi* are not the basis for differentiation in the same way as words might function in English but are instead treated as the foundation for connection between things. In other words, the emphasis with 字 *zi* is on the interrelationship and not the things themselves. Because an aspect of reality differs from another, it does not share the same strength and weakness and can contribute to the other beyond the other’s capacity. The sameness produces the need for an alternative, and difference is conceived as the prerequisite for collaboration and providing value. The Chinese language thus crafts a view of the world that is a product of collaboration and partnership of diverse and different forms in which life, phenomena and events

are the products of the constant interactions between a myriad of intertwining and ever-changing tendencies (Jullien, 1995). Many Chinese phrases, especially those inherited from ancient times, express a reality that is the partnership between opposing tendencies. This includes common phrases like 多少 *duō shǎo* (more, and less) for “how many” or “how much,” 大小 *dà xiǎo* (big, and small) for “size,” 轻重 *qīng zhòng* (light, and heavy) for “weight,” 长短 *cháng duǎn* (long, and short) for “length,” 东西 *dōng xī* (east, and west) for “things,” 买卖 *mǎi mài* (buy, and sell) for “trade,” 山水 *shān shuǐ* (mountain, and water) for “landscape,” and 风水 *fēng shuǐ* (wind, and water) to represent the cosmic flow of energy.

Jullien suspects that this privileging of partnership in the Chinese language has been part of Chinese thought from its emergence as a discernible culture. Jullien recognises that both the ancient Greeks and the Chinese conceived the material world with a twofold logic. By naming something, even with an ideographic symbol, something is foregrounded to notice and consequently, something or everything else is backgrounded. However, whilst the ancient Greeks conceived a metaphysically divided reality where being is preferred over nonbeing, truth over lie, and essence over appearance, the Chinese did not privilege one side over another. Rather, the ancient Chinese embraced opposites as inseparable partners that coproduce a regulatory reality because opposing forces were found in every situation (Jullien, 2002). Jullien recognises that this early divergence between the two traditions created a fundamental separation in the directions in which their ways of thinking about the world evolved.

Because ancient Chinese wisdom privileges partnership, the Chinese conceive every aspect of reality as in a constant process of influencing and being influenced by each other, potentially able to nurture or harm each other depending on the type of interactions of which they are part (Jullien, 1995). This creates an understanding that there is no absolute good or evil. As every aspect of reality is conceived as having both opposing potentials, every action can produce benefit or harm regardless of one's intentionality. Consequently, the key to prosperity is not the action one takes so much as when to take the action and to what degree the action might affect the development of a situation (Jullien, 2004b). This difference in the ways of thinking becomes important in this thesis when I consider issues to do with politics and ethics, which are primary concerns of critical leadership scholars. Chinese thinking patterns just do not employ ethics and politics in the same way as is done in Western philosophy. Chinese wisdom is not silent on matters of fairness, equality, justice and so on, but it approaches the challenges quite differently, from outside the frame of Western thinking. I return to these issues in Part 2 to accentuate the differences. I also discuss issues of politics and ethics in Part 3 and the conclusion to explain the potential problems of applying ancient Chinese wisdom into contemporary Western leadership contexts, and pitfalls to be avoided.

Chinese Thought as the Study of Propensity

Jullien (2011) argues that the ancient Chinese did not centre their scholarship on human perception or meaning-making, but on the principle in which nature functions. The ancient Chinese understood reality through *propensity*, which is a coherent reoccurring system of regulation initiated prior to human existence which functions independently from human

perception and meaning-making. Like every other aspect of the sensory world, humans are participants in the propensity of their environment. They are constantly influencing and being influenced by their environment, which includes both human and nonhuman, and life forms and lifeless objects. No one aspect of the sensory world is separated from each other, or free from external influences. Based on this understanding, the Chinese tradition does not recognise a subject-object relationship in the world in the same way as the West, and instead conceives life as one whole complex, hazy, instinct, and undifferentiated process of manifestation that is neither identifiable nor measurable (Jullien, 2004b). The visible and invisible, stable and flux, clear and hazy, distinct, and ambiguous, silent and attention-seeking aspects of the sensory world are equally important in Chinese thought because motion is not static and is a moving process that includes a tendency's emergence, growth, development, transformation, decline, diminishment, and renewal. In the propensity of things, each moment of change influences the upcoming change, and the potential effect of the change that is coming about, and the development of a motion, is coproduced by every aspect of change (Jullien, 2011). Consequently, the ancient Chinese thought prioritises the principle of motion in the sensory world, and not human intentionality; it strives to detect and function according to the propensity of things and not take action based on predetermined human ideals.

According to Jullien (1995), propensity is to do with disposition as truth is to do with being. Disposition here refers to the arrangement of things, and the foundation for all propensities in the world is the dispositions of Heaven and Earth. Jullien repeats that without a metaphysical conception, Heaven, in Chinese thought, refers primarily to meteorological phenomena, while

Earth is related to geographical and geological factors. Both Heaven and Earth are understood as ever-in-motion, and

Because of the Earth's situation – it is beneath Heaven yet also matches it – its “propensity,” always leads it to “conform with and obey” the initiative emanating from Heaven. Earth and Heaven, through their “disposition,” embody the antithetical and complementary principles presiding over everything that happens. (p. 222)

Even though propensity emerges and develops spontaneously, it follows the principle of regulation, or 道 *dào*. Without needing to predict the exact weather or temperature of every moment, the day eventually turns into night, spring into autumn, the rainy season becomes the dry season, and the cycle continues to renew itself inexhaustibly. Following the regulation principle of 道 *dào*, nothing stays the same and everything is in a regulatory process of growth, decline and renewal. And it is from the configuration of Heaven and Earth that the entire process of the world stems.

Jullien finds that since the book 易經 *yijing* (produced in the 1st millennium BCE), the Chinese conceive the sensory world in its entirety as a self-regulating system that requires no interference of a superior being. The principle of this regulation is called 道 *dào*. Just as flowers strive to blossom, trees ought to bear fruit and rivers flow downstream, the ancient Chinese recognise that prosperity is available and inherent in the natural propensity of things (Jullien, 1995, 2002). Consequently, one could acquire order or any kind of prosperity by relying on the propensity of

things, or in other words, the spontaneous motions in which situations naturally unfold and develop.

Without the concept of being, Jullien proposes that the ancient Chinese did not organise the sensory world in relation to visibility to the sight; instead, they conceived reality as a constant largely invisible process in which most motion is silent, indistinct, and ambiguous, but full of potential. This experience of reality is only available through the Chinese language. Every character indicates a tendency, which is inclusive of the motion's entire range of potential manifestation from a silent, undifferentiated, and unstable moment of emergence to the possible development to a visible, stable and distinct state. Jullien, reinforced by his assumption that thought relies on a compatible language to facilitate its evolution, suggests that this reality is inexpressible by a language of being that divides the sensory world based on distinct, separated, and independently definable identities (Jullien, 2011).

The Interplay of 陰 *Yīn* and 陽 *Yáng*. Jullien suggests that the Western and Chinese traditions conceive opposites very differently. Much Western philosophy uses an argumentative structure to arrive at understanding: through dialectic processes one argument is given in relation to another to reach a new and better understanding of reality. The Chinese, however, understand duality, 陰 *yīn* and 陽 *yáng*, as opposing tendencies. Tendencies are not defined at their ends, but by their emergence. 陰 *yīn* refers to the contractive force in which darkness, cooling, humidity, and winter are embodied; and 陽 *yáng* represents the dispersing energy such as that provided by the sun, heat, dry atmosphere, and summer (Jullien, 1995). Jullien proposes that the ancient

Chinese perceive that a tendency, whether 陰 yīn or 陽 yáng, as it emerges, is inclined to grow into infinity. Explaining the comment in the book *Laozi* (1989) that the loudest sound is said to be silent and that the strongest colour is invisible, Jullien explains this is because the ancient Chinese saw that the loudest sound mutes all sounds while the strongest colour is blinding. They both become the background, and the basis for recognising other sounds or colours, except that nothing else can be recognised as they are all covered by the strongest sound or colour (Jullien, 2012). Similarly, what is invisible in darkness could become visible in the light; and what is identifiable is the interplay between factors that influences identifiability in the environment and not the inherent nature of the form. As the environment changes, the identifiability of a form also modifies. Based on this understanding, Chinese thought approaches a motion *with* the situation so that the propensity of a tendency is inseparable from the factors that influence its motion.

Propensity is Situational. It is important for my thesis to discuss propensity in a situational context, because it is easy to conflate and misrepresent ancient Chinese wisdom as promoting opportunistic situational leadership or taking advantage of a situation without consideration of outcomes. To appreciate the difference I need to explain how propensity, situation and disposition work together to leverage potential, but always within a Chinese worldview that is mindful of the relationships between things and processes.

Jullien (1995) uses the term *situation* to indicate the Chinese prioritisation of disposition. Contrary to a causal relationship where an active subject is pinpointed as the direct cause of a measurable outcome, propensity is understood as a product of the interplay of multiple factors.

Just as the disposition of Heaven and Earth initiated the propensity of everything, Chinese thought conceives most situational factors that affect the propensity of things as beyond human control. For example, the growth of a foetus within a womb is not directly determined by the foetus' nor the mother's conscious intent. There are multiple factors at play, such as safety of the environment, resources, nutrition, health, and potential support that are available. The outcome of a pregnancy is produced by the constant interplay of these factors, which are also ever-changing throughout the pregnancy process. The study of propensity monitors an entire manifesting process; it prioritises the potential effect that is coming about over the identifiable outcome of the moment.

Jullien (1995) proposes that this Chinese approach is an alternative to causality thinking, which has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy. This is because causality conceives the human agent as an active subject whose action could have a direct causal effect on an outcome; the Chinese study of propensity suggests that the development of a situation as a motion is the product of interplay between factors. Jullien clarifies that the Chinese also recognise that action produces an immediate effect, but the impact of the effect is not determined by the action itself, but by the propensity of a situation. Consequently, rather than relying on action to directly cause a desirable outcome, Chinese thought prefers to “go along with the flow of the phenomena, profit from their dynamism” (pp. 223–224) by taking advantage of the natural tendency inherent in the situational disposition.

According to Jullien (1995), Chinese thought recognises that the setup of a situational disposition creates a circumstance, and this circumstance produces a tendency that affects the motion's continuing development. For example, a job loss is not in itself a circumstance; instead, it is produced as an interplay of the job loss, financial state, expenses, and connections a person has to find a new job. A person who has money and connections to get a new job is not in the same unemployment circumstance as one who is on the edge of bankruptcy, has multiple mouths to feed and has no connections. The different circumstances produce separate tendencies and are likely to lead to various choices and directions in the way a person's career manifests. With time, each factor affecting the situation also changes according to its own propensity; some could manifest in favour of a person while another becomes unfavourable. The new circumstance then produces another tendency that either supports the continuing manifestation of one's situation in the same direction, or functions as an obstacle that delays, slows down, or even reverses the previously made progress. Chinese thought conceives the propensity of a situation as a consequence of the accumulation of circumstances throughout a tendency's manifesting process. The motion of propensity is understood and studied through 勢 shì.

勢 Shì. 勢 shì indicates the motion in the propensity of things, including a newly sprouted and energetic tendency for growth that emerges as well as the powerful momentum of a rock rolling down the hill that is inclined to further its effect. Jullien (1995) suggests that 勢 shì is amongst the most commonly used and least elaborated concepts in classical Chinese literature. He interprets this as a consequence of 勢 shì being perceived as self-explanatory and taken for granted as a cultural norm in Chinese thought. 勢 shì is silent, it could indicate the direction,

speed, and strength as well as the effect of a tendency's development. In a situation, each circumstance produces a tendency that either contributes to an existing 勢 shì of manifestation or against it. As tendencies accumulate throughout circumstances, the momentum of the 勢 shì strengthens, and picks up the speed of its manifestation. The development of a situation could also be slowed down, neutralised or reversed if the emerging circumstances produce accumulated tendencies against the motion of an existing 勢 shì.

Water is the most used metaphor in ancient China to understand the effect of 勢 shì. Like water, the direction of a stream is easily changeable by the obstacles on its course, but the stronger the 勢 shì, the more powerful its effect becomes. As its 勢 shì continues to accumulate, water becomes a flood, and the momentum or 勢 shì behind its motion makes the flood unstoppable. Instead of moving according to the obstacles of the terrain, the powerful 勢 shì allows the flood to shape and modify the landscape (Jullien, 1995, 2004b).

The effect of 勢 shì is suggestive, not deterministic, present, identifiable, or measurable. Jullien (1995) finds that 勢 shì does not fit naturally into any Western word because it is often silent and invisible, indistinct and not inherent in a being. Jullien suggests that the study of being relies on the identification of presence, but in the Chinese study of propensity, presence is a moment in a motion, and is a consequence of the manifestation of 勢 shì. Chinese thought studies motion and not form, it prioritises the process of manifestation and not an identifiable moment of the motion. The goal of Chinese thought is to leverage the effect produced by the silent 勢 shì before it comes about or materialises and not identify an already-manifested outcome to reproduce it in

the future. The primary purpose of studying propensity is to leverage the potential inherent in the 勢 shì.

Detecting Propensity to Leverage Potential. According to Jullien (1995), 勢 shì produces potential. He explains that potential, in the study of propensity, refers to an absolute potential of a tendency to continue its development. It is like a weed emerging out of the earth in the spring that is inclined to grow, and the inevitable tendency of a flower to decline after blossoming. Potential is an effect that is not yet present but will come about as a consequence of the regulatory principle of propensity, or 道 dào. When reality is conceived on the basis of motion, potential provides knowledge on the effect of the motion that is yet to come.

Jullien suggests that the ancient Chinese prioritise nurturing potential. Farming and drawing a bow are both understood as nurturing potential. Farming relies on the inherent potential of the crops to bear fruit as archery relies on the piercing potential inherent in the arrow or bolt; these activities do not directly cause an effect. Instead, they provide the condition for the potential inherent in things to actualise themselves (Jullien, 1995). While hunting pursues a predetermined goal at the time and is pure effort, farming could produce sustainable abundance with far less effort. Similarly, hunting with a bow and an arrow is safer and requires less effort than with a blade. Consequently, the nurturance of potential is often seen as more efficient and prosperous than direct approaches. Instead of trying to produce an ideal outcome by recreating a prototype, the Chinese tradition prefers nurturing the environment to maximise the potential for the desirable outcome to emerge. Nevertheless, even the most fertile land cannot make an already-

cooked seed grow, and a broken arrow cannot pierce anything regardless of how the bow is drawn. Potential is a product of the interplay between a tendency and its environment, and is not determined by an active subject (Jullien, 1995).

Jullien (1995) suggests that potential does not guarantee an outcome because it is unmanifested *or* has not yet come about. As change occurs spontaneously, a modification of the environment such as weather and the fertility of land could result in a plant slowing its development, or even reversing its process of growth and lead to its decay before it ever flowers or bears fruit. A potential is either 陰 yīn or 陽 yáng, favourable or unfavourable, and the manifestation of a phenomenon is a process of accumulating potential. As a tendency exceeds its capacity to develop, or its momentum of growth is neutralised, it can be expected to decline and potentially diminish. From an undifferentiated state in the soil, new tendencies can again emerge. Jullien finds that in Chinese thought, potential is only studied in relation to motion and its effect that is not yet present but is coming about. The motion of a tendency in the Chinese tradition is studied through 勢 shì (Jullien, 1995).

Effect and Spontaneity. What the potential produces is the effect of 勢 shì. Like the arrival of blossom and harvest, the effect only becomes measurable after it comes about. According to Jullien, the ancient Chinese did not focus on the measurable aspects of an effect but instead, how it could come about in order to be an effect of 勢 shì. Jullien (2011) suggests that what makes an effect leverageable is that it must come about spontaneously and naturally. “Natural” or 自然 zì rán refers to a process of spontaneous manifestation (Jullien, 1995). 自 zì can indicate an

autonomous and self-regulative tendency, and 然 *ran* refers to ignition and/or jumpstarting. Jullien proposes that an outcome can only be an effect when it takes place of its own accord. For example, a crop can produce grains, but in order to do so, it must grow according to its own pace. The grains are produced when the crop's internal 勢 *shì* continues its growth and actualises itself, but if one forces the crop to grow by physically pulling it higher, it disrupts its inherent 勢 *shì*. As a consequence, the crop produces no effect from the 勢 *shì*, and instead, having disrupted and depleted its inherent 勢 *shì* for growth, the form of the crop becomes a mere corpse and dies. An effect is a product of the silent tendency inherent in a situation. For an outcome to be an effect, the natural propensity of things must not be disrupted; otherwise, the form produced is merely a corpse or an appearance of the desired outcome with no actual effect. In order for an outcome to be an effect, it must be the 自然 *zì rán* or natural consequence of 勢 *shì*, and cannot be a product of desire, predetermined plan, nor premeditated ideal.

自然 *zì rán* is the foundation for leveraging the potential imbedded in 勢 *shì*. Jullien (1995) uses the common ancient Chinese military custom of disregarding the order of the ruler to explain the Chinese prioritisation of the 自然 *zì rán*, or spontaneity. Disregarding the order of the ruler (or 將在外軍令有所不受 *jiang zai wai jun ling you suo bu shou*) is a mutual understanding between the military commanders and the rulers during warfare in ancient China. Because circumstances change spontaneously, a general is allowed to prioritise the propensity of a situation over direct orders from their superior (Jullien, 1995). Jullien recognises that Chinese thought did not have theory, as a theory is generated independently from the propensity of things. He believes that the Chinese reliance on propensity functions against theory, as following the propensity of things

requires flexibility and adaptability while the act of theorising functions to form an identity. A theory is rooted in an idea that belongs to the philosopher, while an effect is inherent in the propensity of things in the sensory world, self-evident, and is separate from human opinions (Jullien, 2020). Privileging 自然 zì rán (self-ignited, naturally), Chinese thought prioritises the detection of 勢 shì, and not the modification of behaviour, identity, or ways of working together. 勢 shì indicates the potential effect that is coming about for one to take advantage of. Acquiring a desired outcome in the Chinese tradition is not a product of humans taking the role of the active subject, nor modification of the 自然 zì rán (self-ignited, naturally) aspects of human activities like behaviour, attributes, identity, mindset, or ways of working together, but a consequence of function in relation to 道 dào, or the principle of regulation that is understood as the source of all manifestations. These points about 自然 zì rán and the general lack of theory in Chinese thought becomes important when I discuss the theory-and-practice divide as an issue in leadership scholarship, in Part 2 and Part 3 of this thesis. The division between theory and practice has the consequence of separating everyday practice from the realm of conceptual thought which is a challenge for the West but is available in Chinese in everyday life.

道 Dào. 道 dào refers to the regulatory process that is the source of inexhaustible transformation and renewal in the sensory world (Jullien, 1995). As an agricultural civilisation, the ancient Chinese recognised that the same source could produce infinite manifestations in different environments under separate circumstances. For example, an apple seed could evolve into a variety of colours, sizes, shapes, and tastes of apples when planted in different environments and circumstances, including the fertility of the land, weather, temperature and season changes. All

possible diversities of the same type of apple can be seen as manifestations of the same source in its interplay with unique situations, environments, and/or circumstances it is fertilised in. The source is where a tendency initiates, its manifestation process starts, and where it eventually returns to after its tendency depletes.

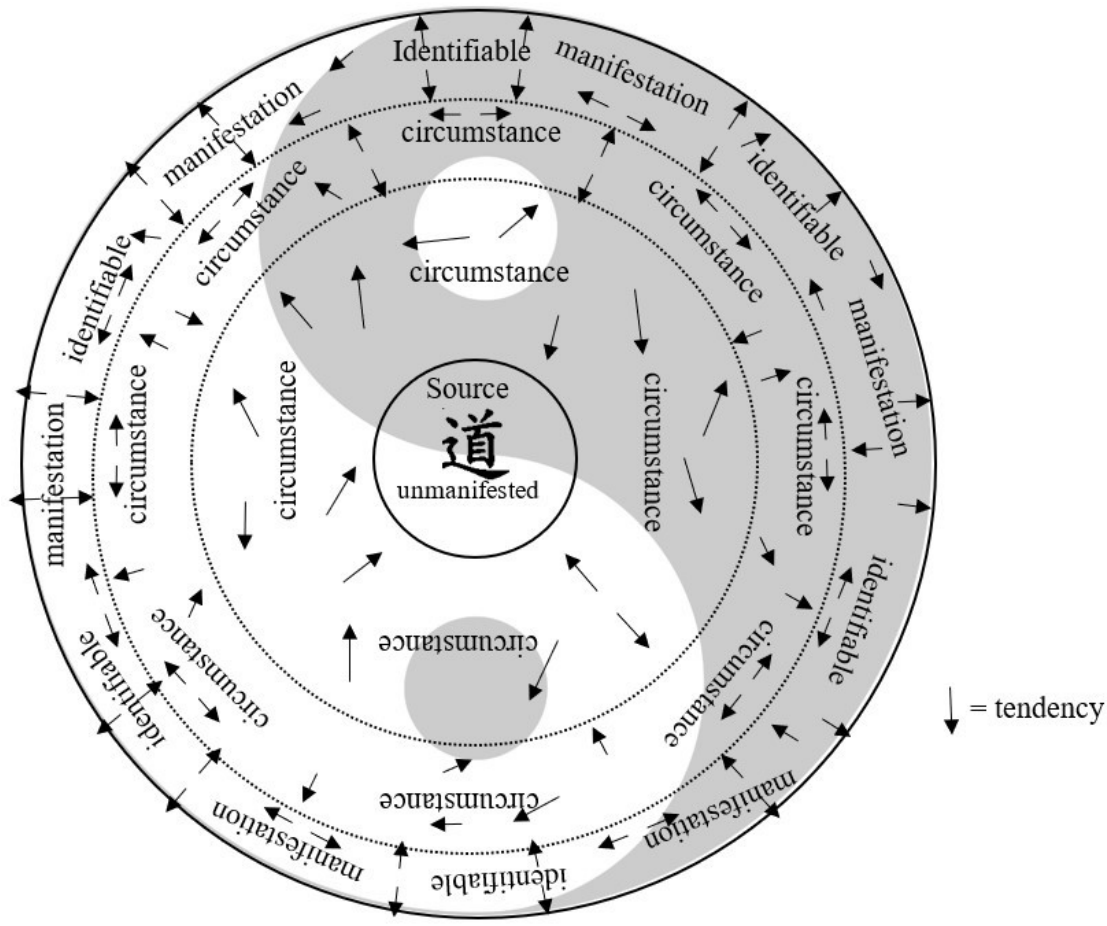
Jullien (2011) suggests that 道 dào is characterised in ancient Chinese literature as vague, ambiguous, and undefinable because it does not represent an identifiable form but is *transition* itself. Transition has no form and is the process of constant change. According to Jullien, the Chinese see that the sensory world endures because it is ever manifesting. The sensory world can continue to manifest because it constantly renews and transformations itself; this is only possible through constant transitions. As transition, 道 dào is not a linear process as it does not have an end. 道 dào is understood as inexhaustible because of its capacity for manifestation (Jullien, 2004b). The Chinese understand 道 dào as a regulatory process coproduced by the partnership between opposing tensions (陰 yīn and 陽 yáng). Just as the day ends when the night starts and the night fades as the day returns, the ancient Chinese recognised that it is through the alternation of opposing tendencies that reality continuously modifies itself without exhaustion (Jullien, 2004b, 2011). 道 dào allows tendencies to emerge, develop, complete their regulatory cycle, and return to the source to be manifested again (See Figure. 2). The myriad of forms, styles, and/or variations of a phenomenon are seen as different manifestations from the same source. The source circumstantially produces a tendency that grows, develops, exceeds its potential, eventually declines, returns to the source, and is renewed into another unique expression of its source under a different circumstance. The diverse identifiable forms of a phenomenon are thus

the spontaneous expression of the same source in different combinations of circumstances and situations. Infinite manifestations emerge from the same source, that is 道 dào (Jullien, 2002).

Silent Transformation as the Preference of the Chinese Tradition

To summarise, based on Jullien’s descriptions, 道 dào, as a regulatory principle, is invisible but is the source of all manifestations in the world. Propensity moves through 勢 shì, a silent process of transformation and renewal of which the identifiable forms are only a small part. 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng are the opposing tensions that influence the propensity of things, as a silent 勢 shì

Figure 2 Chinese Conception of Reality



exceeds its capacity to extend, it reverses as its opposing 勢 shì emerges and picks up momentum. From this summary, it is evident that ancient Chinese thought prioritises the silent and invisible motions that produce and influence spontaneous changes (both visible and invisible) in the world. What is most important in the silent transformation process is not the visible forms in a static state, but the invisible tensions that are building and/or depleting in the manifesting process of the motion. Based on Jullien's work, the systems and structures of ancient Chinese thought allow the silent motions of the world to be detected and taken advantage of to acquire prosperity. The following sections list several main features of the Chinese tradition that enable the study of the silent propensity of things.

Indirect Approach. Jullien (2000, 2002) finds that compared to Western thinkers, the ancient Chinese preferred an indirect approach to a situation. He mentions that since ancient Greek times, truth and justice in the West were decided in public in the form of debate, based on the spoken words of the speakers. Reasoning is the weapon in this duel in which the winner becomes the holder of truth when their reasoning succeeds in persuading the public that he or she is right and the opponent wrong. Jullien suggests that by inheriting Greek thought, the Western tradition continues this preference for confrontation. His study suggests that public debates and organised voting in politics are duels in the same fashion, in which the winner and loser are produced directly from the event in a confrontational, decisive and clear manner. This is also the case in the justice system where defence lawyers and prosecutors take opposite sides, and the judge and/or jury play the role of the decider(s) of truth and justice based on the reasoning and evidence they have heard from both sides. Similarly, Jullien (2000, 2002, 2004, 2011) suggests

that frontal attack has consistently been selected in medieval Western warfare as the preferred way of approaching warfare. Jullien's studies find that the ancient Chinese tradition prefers acquiring a desirable outcome with minimum confrontation and destruction: governing and warfare both strive for submission without force or domination; teaching is done without imposing a correct answer onto the student; while a lesson is learnt when a student comes to their own realisation experientially (Jullien, 2000).

Having used Chinese thought as a lever, Jullien finds that an important reason for the Western tradition preferring a direct approach is connected to its privilege of being. Categorising the sensory world on the basis of being, a problem is theorised as caused directly by an identifiable being. This conception of reality produces a direct causal relationship between beings where resolving a problem is often directly associated with the elimination of an identifiable being (Jullien, 2000).

Without a metaphysical conception of reality, Jullien (2002) says that the ancient Chinese conception of reality is a product of interrelationships and not a sum of independent beings. A situation or an outcome, in any state, is not seen as having an independent nature. Instead, it is understood as a product of the interplay between factors. Under this conception of reality, a problem is a circumstance produced by the situational disposition. It has no inherent nature but is a symptom of the temporary interplay between the situational factors. Based on this understanding, resolving an issue is about harmonising or reharmonising the interplay between ordinary aspects of reality, or the propensity of the situation in ways that favour one's agenda.

When the sensory world is understood as a regulatory process, nothing is inherently right or wrong. A problem is created by an agenda against the spontaneous movement of a motion and its identifiable manifestations.

According to Jullien (2000), the indirect approach is also understood as efficient, as the direct and confrontational approach produces destruction and attracts resistance; however, modifying the interplay between the situational factors at play allows the problem to disappear without needing to be tackled, and does not damage the natural flow of the situation's propensity.

Alternatively, directly eliminating the visible symptom/s and not harmonising the propensity of the situation will produce different types of problems.

Efficiency Over Efficacy. Jullien (2004b) recognises that another reason for an indirect approach is that Chinese thought privileges efficiency, and he understands efficiency in contrast to efficacy. Jullien suggests that efficacy is to do with effectiveness, which is often associated with achieving a predetermined goal or ideal. Effectiveness measures the outcome of the intended actions in relation to the ideal, while efficiency is to do with acquiring maximum profit (in the general sense – i.e. not just money) with minimum effort.

Jullien proposes that the Chinese tradition associates confrontation with effort as it forcefully imposes a meaning, ideal, or way of being onto reality. This effort is understood as disruptive to the natural propensity of things, and because it does not function according to the 勢 shì of a situation, it invites resistance, which increases the effort to acquire the desired outcome. Because the propensity of a situation evolves spontaneously, premeditated plans, goals, and designed

actions fixate themselves on an end that resists spontaneity. A premeditated plan is separated from the natural propensity of a situation, and disregards 勢 shì. Based on this understanding, the only way to acquire a predetermined ideal is through pure effort.

Efficiency in Chinese thought requires the positioning of oneself in alignment with the 勢 shì of the situation and relies on the natural propensity of the situation to carry one to the desired outcome. An action is not inherently productive, and it can encounter resistance, increase effort, and become counterproductive when performed against the 勢 shì. As a consequence, being active is not conceived on the basis of action, but on 勢 shì. Only when an action is taken in alignment with 勢 shì can it be potentially productive; and in situations where being inactive could facilitate the development of a favourable 勢 shì, no action is more productive than any action (Jullien, 1995, 2004b, 2011). In the study of propensity, positioning oneself in alignment with the 勢 shì is the key for efficiency as it allows one to continue profiting from the situation throughout its developing course with minimum effort.

Influence. Jullien's studies (1998, 2011) also unveiled that the Chinese's fondness for an indirect approach is also evident in their preference for influencing a situation through manipulation over persuading with reasoning. Based on Jullien's understanding, persuasion implies a binary position between the parties involved in the situation, and is an act of imposing one's idea, value or agenda onto the others with words, with the intention of winning them over through direct confrontation using reasoning. On the other hand, Chinese thought prefers an

indirect, subtle and nonconfrontational approach that prioritises silent transformation, over time, over an immediate victory.

According to Jullien (2000), influence, in Chinese thought, is subtle, silent, and discreet. It is associated with the constant dripping of water that eventually produces a hole in the middle of a rock, and the constant flow of water around a stone over time that gives the stone a smooth surface. In these cases, the water does not force the rock to change, but constantly influences the rock's shape to evolve in a particular way. Through subtle influence, the hole occurs in the middle of the rock changing it, but not damaging it; the transformed rock with the hole in the middle now appears as if it formed around the waterdrop. Similarly, by constantly caressing a stone by moving around it, the stone in the river also changes its shape according to the water current without the river noticeably imposing a particular shape onto the stone. The power of influencing is subtle, silent and constant; it is understood as capable of creating significant change through silent and undetectable transformation. This way of acquiring a desirable outcome is done with minimum effort, without confrontation or resistance, and is the preferred way of approaching a situation for the ancient Chinese (Jullien, 1995, 2004b, 2011).

Influencing is understood as efficient. Jullien (1995) explains that the Chinese military strategy treatises prioritise manipulating the enemy general to constantly make choices that favour their opponent and eventually lead to their own defeat. Jullien suggests that Chinese thought understands human traits and attributes not as inherent in 'being' but circumstantial. Even a wise and calm commander can make rushed decisions and take high-stakes risks in the face of

overwhelming external pressures. Instead of engaging in a battle in which the victory is not certain, a strategist could set a trap and wait for the enemy to walk into it by influencing the enemy commander to perceive the immediate attack as the best circumstantial option.

Influencing is not done through the direct persuasion of a human agent but by manipulating the situational factors in warfare. For example, if the strategist could cut enemy supplies, it would pressure the enemy commander to resolve the war quickly. Similarly, sending rumours that increase the distrust between the enemy commander and their political leader could result in the ruler's perception of the commander's defensive position as conspiring against him or her and having an alternative agenda, and fearing of the commander's military power of command. This could result in pressure from the enemy's own court to resolve the warfare quickly or lead to changes to the commander's power, freedom of command and even replacement. Also, disputes between political factions in the enemy's court could add pressure for an immediate victory to stabilise or disrupt certain political power. Chinese thought conceives a decision, trait, attribute, or quality of an individual that is not inherent in their being, but is the interplay between the person and the circumstance they are in. Jullien suggests that based on his understanding, influencing is a matter of adding to the 勢 shì that favours certain types of activities (offensive), over its opposition (defensive). When a 勢 shì accumulates an overwhelming momentum, the desired effect becomes almost inevitable.

Prioritising the silent transformation, the power of influence is suggestive; it does not force but creates an environment that continuously makes certain choices and decisions more appealing over others. Jullien (2002) sees persuasion and physical actions as effort and force; they will

receive resistance that leads to continuing efforts because they are imposing. Alternatively, when an environment is created to make people thirsty and hungry, they will willingly perform the actions of eating and drinking and pick the food and liquid that has been designed for them to take. Because the decisions are made by the people, there is no resistance from them, nor is there effort for the designer of the situation to impose the items onto the people. When the 勢 shì is powerful, its suggestive power becomes overwhelming. Jullien suggests that the most efficient military strategists could create the illusion for their enemies after a defeat that their failure was destined despite their free will. Influence through manipulation is preferred in Chinese thought because it is nonconfrontational, requires minimum effort, and acquires maximum gain with minimum cost. Clearly, this issue of influence has many implications for leadership, and I return to develop some of these points in relation to leadership scholarship in Part 3 of this thesis.

Relying on Receptivity

According to Jullien (2020), receptivity is the foundation for Chinese thought and the basis for learning, development and functioning. It is “before all virtues, the very principle of the Sage’s conduct” (p. 15). It is the basis for Chinese thought as an idea is to philosophy, and it is the foundation of the Chinese understanding of efficiency. Jullien says that receptivity is about allowing the environment and the propensity of things to inform one’s thoughts. Chinese efficiency is to do with allowing the propensity of a situation to carry one to prosperity.

Receptivity is the key for detecting propensity because a propensity is understood as ever-present and occurring in the sensory world and is not centred around one’s meaning-making. To detect motion in the sensory world requires space in the mind to receive or be informed by the sensory

world. Jullien finds that receptivity is contrary to an idea of a philosopher. He says that ideas are initiated from the philosopher's thinking, which is what prevents receptivity. To be receptive, one must maximise the space to be informed, which, according to Jullien, includes not having an opinion, bias, or idea. "If we advance an 'idea,' we then impose a 'necessity'; consequently, the fact that we maintain this 'one should' results in an arrested position in which the mind becomes bogged down and no longer evolves" (pp. 15–16). The more one initiates thinking, and reacts to one's own feelings, moods, or attachments, the less one is receptive. It is only through space in the mind that the propensity of the sensory world can be conceived holistically. By being receptive, a sage is not attached to any idea or position and is always open to being informed. This receptivity allows him or her to detect subtle changes in the propensity of a situation as it occurs and adapt to it spontaneously and seamlessly.

Jullien proposes that receptivity is undervalued in the Western tradition as a result of privileging being. Associated primarily as the active subject, in social studies, the human agent tends to play the role of the initiator, who imposes order onto chaos through their intended action (Jullien, 2020). This Chinese understanding of receptivity, on the other hand, contradicts the active role of the subject; it makes not-initiating the foundation of acquiring knowledge, having no attachment to an idea as the condition for committing to a course of development, and inaction the basis for action. With an understanding of reality where order, prosperity, transformation, and renewal are all available in the natural propensity of things in the sensory world, the Chinese tradition prioritises the ability to detect, receive, and be informed by the sensory world and its propensity, which is understood as self-evident. Receptivity produces space in the mind that is crucial for

receiving a holistic and unbiased perspective on the propensity of things without being contaminated or clouded by one's own attachment of any kind.

The Way Chinese Thought Manifests

Jullien's (2020) work approaches cultural thoughts as manifestations of the tradition they belong to. Western tradition has manifested into countless theories and philosophies, while Chinese thought has far fewer manifestations in terms of schools of thought. One of the most chaotic times of Chinese history is also what most sinologists see as the golden age of Chinese thought. The period of 诸子百家 *Hundred Schools of Thought* lasted from 6th century BCE to the year 221 BCE, the year the country was unified under the 秦 *Qin* dynasty (Gernet, 1996; Needham & Wang, 1954). As the name of this period suggests, over 100 schools of thought emerged during this time of Chinese history, but unlike Western thought that continuously expands and differentiates, the diversity of Chinese thought reduced. There are several reasons why these traditions evolved in seemingly opposite directions.

Grounded in the Chinese language that directly incites the sensory world, the ancient Chinese consider the effects in the sensory world as self-evident. At the end of the 6th century, the 周 *Zhōu* dynasty collapsed, and the civilisation broke into numerous independent states. Taking a Chinese interpretation, this is the evidence that the ruler failed to detect, interpret, and operate in relation to 道 *dào*, or the regulatory principle of the world. As Jullien's (1995) work continually suggests, Chinese thought is immersed in the motions of everyday living and strives to manipulate and produce favourable effects. Understanding that order is inherently available in

the propensity of things, restoring harmony became the calling for Chinese scholars. Over 100 schools emerged in a time of disorder to produce order and harmony. Alternatively, the unification of the civilisation in 221 BCE is interpreted as evidence that order was somewhat restored; as a consequence, the need for restoring order declined.

The second reason for this decline of thought is that ancient Chinese wisdom is immersed in living, so it does not demand uniqueness in thinking or ideas as much as receptivity and adaptability to the changes occurring in everyday life. Living is a matter of competency. Western scholarship strives for knowledge, which is a product of reasoning and logical progression, and thinkers build on the knowledge of philosophers from the past. However, competency, which ancient Chinese wisdom favours, is the result of practising and training; one cannot simply evolve beyond the past sages if one has not reached the same level of competency.

Another reason why Chinese thought does not expand to infinite new theories like Western philosophy is that it is nonexclusive and strives to obtain a holistic understanding of propensity. Unlike Western philosophy grounded in unique ideas, Chinese schools of thought share each other's thinking. A holistic perspective does not invalidate other perspectives but can explain and include all partial views. As thoughts continue to develop, and schools effectively incorporate more and more of the other's thoughts, most schools of thought are eventually absorbed by a few. The most dominant schools that have endured and had the most profound influence on the Chinese civilisation are Dàoist and Confucian thinking.

Based on Jullien's (1995) understanding, the two schools share the same understanding of 道 dào; they merely proposed separate ways of acquiring prosperity (Jullien, 1995). Generally speaking, Dàoists propose that one should position oneself in relation to the propensity of a situation, while Confucians suggest that one should find and maintain the middle position in every situation. By positioning oneself in alignment with 勢 shì, a Dàoist allows themselves to be carried by the propensity of a situation and prosper throughout the entire course of the situation's development with minimum to no effort. To be in the middle position, on the other hand, is to be 道 dào, or the source of inexhaustible manifestation, and is understood as a position of equilibrium. As one does not take a side, one takes no risk of acting against the 勢 shì. In the middle position, one is hidden from attention-grabbing activists, and as a consequence, has no enemy, and invites no conflict. By continuously remaining in the middle position, one cannot fail, regardless of the volatility of the situation, and being hidden allows one to seek the most favourable time to take the most appropriate action.

Jullien understands the Confucians as moralists, as they propose that by imitating 道 dào or the source of manifestation, the civilisation would maintain prosperity, and the country would have harmony and admiration from its neighbours. War is seen as caused by the disharmony of 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng, a failure of maintaining the middle position. Confucians would thus prefer to resolve issues diplomatically rather than through warfare (Jullien, 1995). Compared to Confucianism, Dàoist principles were the basis for most practices such as military strategy, politics, diplomacy, medicine, and martial art. Jullien suggests that throughout Chinese history, Dàoism has often been seen as relying on the order provided by regulation produced by nature

while Confucianism represents human efforts to find balance; thus, people tend to follow Confucianism when the civilisation prospers and Dàoism when a dynasty is in turmoil. Governances in ancient China were dominated by Confucian thought since the 1st century BCE during the Han dynasty until the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911CE. Prosperity in the country is thus seen as the success of the deliberate human effort to find the equilibrium in the propensity of things; alternatively, turmoil is the evidence that the human effort has failed, many people thus abandoned Confucian thought and sought alignment with the natural propensity of things to restore order (Jullien, 1995).

As a practitioner of Chinese arts of martial art and calligraphy, I primarily follow a Dàoist approach to life. Jullien often refers to Dàoists as realists; and as such, I prioritise prosperity from situations while also employing certain Confucian ways tactically. I find that the middle way allows me to remain in a place of potential for action while not losing opportunities by being temporarily inactive. However, unlike Confucian scholars, I employ the middle way only pragmatically until the propensity of a situation is detected and can be leveraged.

My position influences my choices on how to interpret leadership in this thesis, which will be studied predominantly under a Dàoist influence. There are also reasons to do with resonances between Daoism and leadership that lead me to prefer to use Daoism. One reason is that organisational operation is often concerned with efficacy, and Jullien's study of efficacy is dominated by Dàoist thought and its principles in military strategy and diplomacy. Additionally, from a Chinese perspective, leadership is understood as a motion. A motion is dualistic at each

moment, as it either moves towards or away from a direction. A Dàoist perspective could provide insights that contribute to existing leadership thought, including producing powerful leadership and harnessing its potential effect to acquire prosperity.

The Confucian middle way is a space of equilibrium, or the neutralisation of motions. In principle, the Confucian preference functions against the emergence of ‘leadership’ and the development of powerful leadership motion, and instead, it prioritises neutralising leadership’s motion and minimising its effect. Although taking a Confucian perspective would produce its own insights and practices regarding leadership, in this thesis I privilege a Daoist approach.

Philosophy vs Wisdom

Jullien (1995) suggests that instead of philosophy, Chinese thought is a form of wisdom; and “the Chinese tradition defined wisdom as relying on the tendency objectively at work at the heart of phenomena in order to allow oneself to be carried along and succeed in one’s undertakings” (p. 230). To clarify, Jullien explains that (Western) philosophy is grounded in the study of being, is fixated on truth, a game of words and reasoning, and is the property of a philosopher. On the other hand, Chinese wisdom concerns everyday living, which is spontaneous and the product of constant interactions between visible and invisible, stable and unstable, and distinct and undifferentiated aspects of reality in which humanity is only a tiny part. Chinese wisdom studies the world as one regulatory motion and process (Jullien, 2002). Jullien explains that because the propensity of things is ever-in-motion, and is independent of human detection, wisdom is ever-present in the sensory world, and it is self-evident. Unlike truth, this wisdom does not need to be

spoken and requires no persuasion. Philosophy, in contrast, is grounded in the uniqueness of an idea of a philosopher which discriminates against others; the ancient Chinese schools of thought share many similarities because wisdom does not exclude views, positions, or opinions but seeks to form a holistic understanding that is inclusive of all of its partial views. Philosophy thus has a history because its philosophers have a historical location; yet wisdom has no history because it is ever-present (Jullien, 2002).

Jullien (2002) suggests that in the West meaning might have taken over truth as the basis of modern philosophy. A philosopher thus poses themselves as an accurate maker of meaning of the subject of their study. Like a Western philosopher, a sage of Chinese wisdom also recognises that human meaning-making about things is not always accurate. However, instead of trying to make the most accurate meanings, they bypass it entirely by following the propensity of things and not their own meaning-making. Consequently, a sage is indifferent to meaning; he or she sees life as the regulatory process in which it functions and does not try to make meaning. A sage does not take pleasure nor pain in action, nor does he or she impose judgement. A sage simply does what is necessary to profit from a situation's natural process of transformation and renewal without disrupting the spontaneous manifesting process of things. As a consequence of their efficiency, the sage's actions are blended in the natural motion of things, nothing they do seems out of the ordinary and, as a consequence, they attract no attention, and they receive no resistance. Whether the sage is a strategist, politician, martial artist, or a teacher, he or she transforms situations in the same way seasons transform the land, water changes the landscape, grass grows, and flowers bloom. That is, taking advantage of the natural propensity of things that

are understood as already and always in motion independent of human detection or opinion (Jullien, 2011).

Chinese wisdom is a holistic perspective that interprets information and produces knowledge. A perspective is embodied and can only be acquired as a craft through consistent practising and training in an apprenticeship over time. The ancient Chinese sages teach not by providing answers but by helping the student to obtain a holistic perspective. Jullien (2000) proposes that “The Chinese tend to think of the process of apprenticeship as a *maturation* (rather than as intellection)” (p. 251). To help the learner’s maturation in the wisdom, the sage only incites the aspects of reality that the learner takes for granted by showing the limitation of the learner’s understanding, but leaves the learner to apply the lens to come to a conclusion by themselves (Jullien, 2000). It is the journey of applying the lens, and process of functioning in relation to 道 *dào* that is most important for maturation of wisdom, and not the knowledge one acquires at the end. It is through apprenticeship and the slow accumulation of sensitivity towards aspects of reality one takes for granted that wisdom slowly matures. Through apprenticeship, the learner becomes more and more immersed with wisdom over time, until it becomes their natural way of perceiving and relating to reality, and eventually functioning in relation to 道 *dào* in every situation by simply reacting to the spontaneous changes without having to stop and break the natural flow of the situation to reassess and/or theorise. To help a student develop, Jullien (2000) recognises that a teacher’s job is leading the students to the door and letting them walk through it by themselves. Consequently, Chinese thought is not grounded in reasoning or logic but lived in practices, training, development and maturation over time. Following Jullien’s work, in this

study, I use the term philosophy to refer to Western thinking traditions, while Chinese thought, which is a lived process of practice and maturation, is a form of wisdom. In other words, ancient Chinese thought is not philosophy in the Western sense of the word, but it is an enduring wisdom tradition that influences the way many Chinese think and act in contemporary times.

Sinological Criticism of Jullien's Work

The Swiss sinologist Jean François Billeter is the founder and former director of the University of Geneva's sinology department and has been Jullien's biggest critic (Thorsten, 2014a). One of Billeter's (2006) issues with Jullien's sinological work is that Jullien approaches Chinese thought as a whole as one tradition. As a sinologist for his entire career, Billeter recognises that the ancient Chinese texts and the meanings they convey have been manipulated for political purposes throughout the ancient dynasties. Billeter accuses Jullien of disregarding the political influences that have potentially altered the authenticity of the texts throughout Chinese history.

Indeed, a common understanding shared amongst Chinese and European sinologists alike is that the classification of schools did not exist during the Warring States period (535–286 BCE) when their thoughts emerged (Graham, 1989; Hansen, 1992; Needham & Wang, 1954). It was the political effort by the 武 *Wǔ* Emperor of the 漢 *Hàn* dynasty (157 BCE–87 BCE) and his favoured Confucian scholars that strengthened the voice of Confucian scholarship in the country by grouping separated independent thoughts into arbitrarily created schools. This strategy was aimed to minimise the influence of other thoughts (Graham, 1989, 1991; Hansen, 1992; Needham & Wang, 1954). Consequently, sinologists like Billeter suggest that the authentic

meaning of the ancient texts can only be acquired individually and independently from other texts categorised within the same school of thought. To free ancient texts from political manipulation, sinologists like Billeter also study individual texts without the notes of later commentators. He considers commentators as advocates for the political powers in later dynasties, and their comments as accompanied by the political agendas of the ruling party at the time (Billeter, 2009). Contradicting Billeter's approach, Jullien studies Chinese thought holistically as one whole tradition and approaches early texts with the later commentary notes (Billeter, 2006).

Billeter (2006) is also critical of Jullien's understanding of the Chinese language, suggesting that the Chinese characters cannot be approached as static Western concepts and cannot be studied in isolation as a Western term or distinction. A common sinological understanding is that because each character in the Chinese language represents moving tendencies and not static forms, the meanings of Chinese characters are relational, relative, and can only be understood in relation to each other and not separately, character by character, or phrase by phrase, like many words in a Western language (Graham, 1991; Hansen, 1981; Needham & Wang, 1954). Grounded in this sinological tradition, Billeter prioritises the acquisition of meanings based on the holistic impression he acquires from the text and does not dwell on the independent meaning of a particular character or a phrase. Contrary to Billeter's approach, Jullien (2004a) deconstructs Chinese thought through key concepts. He sometimes produces an entire book around one Chinese concept, like 淡 *dàn* (blandness) and 勢 *shì*, and often uses these concepts as the cornerstones to understanding Chinese thought.

Amongst many criticisms, Billeter (2006) also criticised Jullien's method of jumping between the Chinese and Western thoughts; he says that "Jullien forgets to say if he is the judge or the player in this encounter" (p. 47). According to Billeter, Jullien seems to refuse to stay in either sinology or the Western tradition as he constantly jumps from one to the other and fails to learn anything from anyone systematically. Consequently, his creation of 'China' is the selective broken pieces of insights that he weaves together and is not representative of Chinese thought in its holistic form.

Billeter launched the book *Contre François Jullien* (2006) with the sole purpose of attacking Jullien's work from a sinological point of view. This book eventually became the start of a long-lasting heated debate between scholars across fields. In 2007, Jullien replied to Billeter's critique in his lengthy riposte called *Chemin Faisant: Connaître la Chine, Relancer la Philosophie* (On our way: Knowing China and relaunching philosophy). In the riposte, Jullien first doubles down on what he calls tradition as grounded in language and not of specific schools of thought or individual thinkers. Language, he says, is the 'carrier' of thought; studying the tradition is to investigate the habits of thinking that the entire culture shares and takes for granted through time (Jullien, 2007c).

Jullien (2007a) says that he does recognise that political background could influence the interpretation of ancient texts, but he disagrees with Billeter's assumption that thoughts can be suppressed or completely altered by political powers. Jullien perceives that different political beliefs and agendas in the same tradition are all manifestations of the culture's habits of thinking.

This is to say that political manipulation might affect the original meaning of a text but it does not have the power to make it any less Chinese, as it is carried by the Chinese language.

Similarly, he justifies including previous commentators' notes as they reveal the evolution of thought in the linguistic community from their past thinkers in different political and historical circumstances, and Jullien regards them as important references for studying Chinese thought as a tradition.

Regarding Billeter's argument that each ancient Chinese text must be studied independently and not as the school of thought in which it is classified, Jullien (2007a) proposes that he studies Chinese thought as a whole and based on schools of thought because he recognises that the classical Chinese literature cannot be treated as different pieces of Western philosophical work, and that Chinese thinkers are not philosophers. Based on Jullien's (2002) understanding, "Philosophy thinks in terms of exclusion (true/false, being/nonbeing)" (p. 807). His work recognises that Chinese thought is grounded in a nonexclusive understanding of reality; it prioritises the obtainment of a holistic perspective inclusive of other perspectives. Consequently, the classical Chinese schools do not differentiate themselves from each other as Western philosophical schools do. Instead, they strive to share and include each other's views to form a holistic understanding. Moreover, all ancient Chinese classics are thought to be the products of collective anonymous authors; they are not a product of an individual philosopher who needs to be studied based on the uniqueness of their idea (Graham, 1989, 1991; Hansen, 1981, 1993). Because each classical writing is a product of the collective and continuous evolution of thought,

Jullien (2007a) chooses to approach Chinese texts not in isolation but in relation to each other to acquire a holistic cultural conception of reality.

When it comes to issues regarding the Chinese language, Jullien agrees with Billeter that the Chinese language functions more for experiencing rather than defining reality; and the meanings are more relative than the function of words in a Western language. However, this does not mean that the key Chinese concepts should not be clarified or explained to the Western audience.

Jullien's priority is on helping Western audiences effectively understand Chinese thought in a philosophical context; his concern is for the Western scholars who have not acquired the means or skill to conceive reality outside of the Western paradigm (Jullien in De La Robertie et al., 2017). Because their readings of the Chinese literature might have been influenced by their default Western conceptualisation of reality, value system, and biases, Jullien chooses to use the Chinese and Western concepts as levers to demonstrate the divergence in the two traditions' way of thinking and approaching reality. In other words, Jullien's work prioritises bridging cultural thoughts and divergent thinking over doing sinology for its own sake.

In the same year of Jullien's reply to Billeter's critique, Parisian scholars strongly defended Jullien's position in the collective volume *Oser Construire: Pour François Jullien* (Daring to construct: For François Jullien; Chartier, 2007). Scholars such as Bruno Latour, Paul Ricoeur, and Alain Badiou joined the debate. In 2014, German philosopher Thorsten Thorsten (2014a) shed light on the escalation of this debate amongst French-speaking scholars. He says that

Since none of those books has been translated and only a few English reviews and blog posts are available, few people outside France have followed this debate. In France, the debate has been intense though confused as well as politicised, and this has often prevented the inference of general conclusions that could be of importance to an academic field larger than that of sinology. (p. 218)

With the participation of more and more scholars, the debate has escalated into one of the most heated debates in recent sinology and appears to be still ongoing.

One recent debate recorded in English is the exchange between Swiss philosopher Ralph Weber and German philosopher Botz-Bornstein. In his article “Controversy Over ‘Jullien’ or Where and What Is China, Philosophically Speaking?” (Weber, 2014a), Weber emphasises two motives behind Billeter’s critique that are beyond the content of Jullien’s work. One motive relates to the line of sinology that Jullien does and Billeter’s deep distrust of contemporary Parisian sinologists. Weber (2014a) suggests that beyond Jullien’s work,

Billeter is also opposing a whole line of doing sinology, comprising Victor Segalen (1878–1919), Marcel Granet (1884–1940), Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930), and Pierre Ryckmans (alias Simon Leys, 1935–2014), whom he charges for having relied on and perpetuated the “myth of China’s alterity” that eighteenth-century French philosophers such as Voltaire first propagated. (pp. 361–362)

This line of sinology projects China as an opposite to Western thought. According to Billeter (2006), it makes Chinese thought attractive but in an inaccurate fashion. Weber (2014a) suggests

that Billeter is also suspicious of these scholars' agenda. Many Parisian sinologists and philosophers tend to manipulate and "embrace Jullien's picture of a 'philosophical China' as the imaginative equivalent of a republican elitism which they [the French] think they themselves embody" (p. 362). Based on this understanding, Billeter's actual accusation seems to be that Jullien is imposing his own ideology on Chinese thought and is not doing sinology (Billeter, 2006; Weber, 2014a).

Even though Weber (2014a) praises the important contribution of Jullien's philosophical work, he aligns with Billeter's position and suggests that Jullien's authority as a sinologist is questionable. Because Jullien's interests lie only in using Chinese thought to reflect on his own thinking, Weber suspects that Jullien has selectively ignored the aspects of the Chinese culture that do not spark his reflection or challenge his thinking. Weber says that "China seems to end up as a fiction firmly upheld and updated in Jullien's head" (pp. 370–371). Weber also accuses Jullien's work of not doing sinology justice and claims that the China Jullien speaks of is a component in his theorising, and not the real China.

To challenge Weber, Botz-Bornstein (2014a) suggests that the real reason behind the heated debate is neither analytical methods nor sinology, but the debate between philosophy and philology. The biggest difference between Jullien and many traditional sinologists is that while most sinologists prioritise the study of China through concrete information and evidence, Jullien's sinological work is rooted in reasoning and philosophical methods (Botz-Bornstein, 2014a). Sinologist Kubin (2007) suggests that "in general sinologists do not know how to think

because they either do not want to, are unable to or not authorized to think” (p. 102). This is because their job is only to accurately understand and represent Chinese cultural thought and not create anything original per se. But Jullien is a philosopher. Botz-Bornstein (2014a) proposes that by definition, philosophers approach questions with reasoning and not through empirical findings and investigate “situations not through descriptions and systematizations but through highly abstract forms of thinking” (p. 221). This is a process of philosophising that is unfamiliar to traditional sinologists. Kubin (2007) and Botz-Bornstein (2014a) both recognise that Jullien’s work has a significant contribution and important implications in advancing knowledge beyond sinology and Hellenism. Carpanini (2016) praises that “his [Jullien’s] research is able to challenge somehow the tacit disciplinary boundaries of the study of European thought and the study of Chinese thought” (p. 70).

Weber (2014b) responds to Botz-Bornstein’s comments by criticising him for making the debate about philology versus philosophy, which polarises Billeter as “old philologist,” and Jullien as “genuine philosopher.” Thorsten (2014b) clarifies that he does not necessarily question Billeter’s expertise in sinology; his shortcoming lies in his lack of ability to philosophise beyond traditional sinology. On the other hand, Jullien not only studies sinology, but also utilises the knowledge of sinology to philosophically challenge thinking, create understanding for both the Chinese and Western traditions, and advance human knowledge and wisdom by utilising the fertile resources of thinking inherent in both cultures. Both Kubin (2007) and Botz-Bornstein (2014a) agree that Jullien might have far more to teach us than sinologists like Billeter.

This debate seems to be still continuing, but because Jullien's work opens the possibilities for an alternative framework of thinking it is becoming popular in social studies and amongst organisation scholars. Although far from mainstream, Jullien's work can still be found in studies of organisation strategy (Chia, 2013, 2014; Chia & Holt, 2009; Chia et al., 2007; Shrivastava & Persson, 2014; Steers et al., 2012), human resources management (Persson et al., 2017; Persson & Shrivastava, 2016), sustainability (Persson & Wasieleski, 2015; Shrivastava & Persson, 2018), leadership ethics (Capurro, 2013), cultural leadership studies (Schedlitzki et al., 2017), as well as leadership knowledge and theorisation (Chia, 2003; Chia & Holt, 2008; Ivanova & Persson, 2017; Nayak & Chia, 2011; Steers et al., 2012). Jullien's work has been praised and implemented across organisation studies by many organisation scholars who explore new ways of approaching issues beyond existing tools and frameworks.

The Theoretical Framework

This research uses the voice that Jullien gives to Chinese thought to explain and demonstrate the effect of applying the Chinese lens to leadership scholarship. The question of this research is *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* So far, Part I of the thesis has explained that Jullien's work is the study of thinking patterns, particularly Western and ancient Chinese thought. Grounded in Jullien's work, addressing the research question is not about continuously developing thought within the same tradition but about contributing to existing leadership scholarship from the perspective of Chinese thought; that is, investigating leadership through the systems of the Chinese tradition.

Not Looking at Chinese Leadership

It is important at this point to stress that this research employs Jullien's philosophical approach to Chinese thought but it is not an anthropological study of leadership in a Chinese context. As discussed in a previous section, Jullien (2020) has distinguished between the discipline of anthropology as a study of difference and his philosophical approach that provides a space to diverge and expand thinking. He explains that anthropology groups all cultures in the world as one genre that can be investigated, understood, and compared under a relatively universal set of categories (although there is a diversity of approaches to anthropology and as a field it has changed significantly in the past few decades). Jullien's philosophical approach associates a scholarship's criteria for studying and evaluating the world with the value system, priorities, purposes, and agendas of the culture in which it emerges. Based on this understanding, Jullien argues that by taking a Chinese perspective, he is able to diverge thinking from the Western ways of categorising and approaching the sensory world. While most cross-cultural leadership studies take an anthropological perspective based on a Western epistemology, this research is grounded in Jullien's understanding and approach to culture, and not how culture, or specifically Chinese culture, has been employed in leadership scholarship.

Schedlitzki et al. (2017) recognise that most cross-cultural leadership studies conceive culture merely as a context to test or modify Western theories, and this is also the case for studies that utilise Chinese thought. Jullien (2020) recognises that the separate categorisations of the sensory world between cultures produce different cognitions and experiences of reality; his work demonstrates that the separate ways Western and Chinese traditions categorise the world

produces separate scholarships to serve different purposes. By taking one cultural perspective to reinterrogate that of the other from a place of exteriority, Jullien's work can distance itself from its origins and escape at least some of the challenges that arise from being mired in one's own cultural perspectives and thinking habits. The study of culture as 'difference' stereotypes a culture and so it remains restricted as a way of thinking (Edward, 1979; Jullien, 2015). Some leadership scholars have used traditional anthropological approaches to leadership, but they can only illuminate leadership in a limited way. Examples are studies on transformational leadership (e.g. Lei et al., 2019; Li et al., 2018), visionary leadership (e.g. Jia et al., 2004), and servant leadership (e.g. Liu et al. (2015).

Jullien's work argues Chinese wisdom perceives the sensory world on the basis of motion and not being, so unique and distinct aspects of the sensory world are not privileged over the silent process of manifestation in which they are participating. Motions are not inherently separate from each other and have no distinct identities. Chinese wisdom has neither ontology nor epistemology in the classic Western sense, because the purpose of learning about motion is to take advantage of its propensity. As Jullien's (2020) approach enables more than one cultural perspective, he recognises that the two cultures he is concerned with do not see the sensory world in the same way nor for the same purpose. This research is grounded in Jullien's approach to culture, which acknowledges cultural differences but does not emerge out of anthropology.

As a study of thought, Jullien's work is not limited to understanding the Chinese culture but contributes to the expansion of thought for both Chinese and Western scholarships. However, in

leadership scholarship, his work is only utilised by a handful of researchers. These studies have provided alternative frameworks for thinking about leadership as a concept from outside of a traditional Western perspective. For example, grounded in Jullien's work, Capurro (2013) offers an approach to leadership that prioritises potentiality over predetermined ideals, and recognises the value of nonaction and spontaneity in the leadership process over action and control. Steers et al. (2012) use Jullien to suggest that leading is associated more with cultural cognition and less with style; as a form of organising or way of working together. Leadership studies utilising Jullien's insights remain sparse and few employ Jullien in an extended way.

Outside of the leadership field, Jullien's work is also seldom utilised in organisational studies. The most active current advocate of Jullien's work in organisational studies is Professor Sybille Persson. Persson's work currently covers a variety of fields including human resource management (see Persson et al., 2017; Persson & Shrivastava, 2016; Persson & Wasieleski, 2015), strategy (Ivanova & Persson, 2017; Shrivastava & Persson, 2014) and sustainability (Shrivastava & Persson, 2018). Drawing on Jullien's thought, Persson's work critiques Western frameworks of thinking, including the theory-and-practice relationship, subject-object relationship and the traditional Western causality framework. Instead of *managing* human behaviour, she prioritises spontaneity in strategy to *support* employees' personal and professional growths by nurturing their inherent tendencies.

The most well-known organisational and management studies scholar of Jullien's work is Robert Chia. His first heavy use of Jullien's work is in the last chapter of his book with Holt, "The silent

efficacy of indirect action,” in *Strategy without design: The silent efficacy of indirect action* (Chia & Holt, 2009). Chia and Holt (2009) use five of Jullien’s books to explain a Chinese-based fluid, indirect, change-based, and lived understanding of strategy. In this book, Chia and Holt summarise that,

Jullien’s project is one of using a growing and deep familiarity with a foreign world view in order to reflect upon the habitual projects of Western people that typically go unnoticed. These projects can then be held up for scrutiny; their naturalness is unconcealed; we are thinking about them. (pp. 206–207)

Nayak and Chia (2011) discuss Jullien’s views on “blandness” in their chapter “Thinking, becoming and emergence: Process philosophy and Organization Studies.” They use Jullien’s lens to explain that it is possible to have “the opposing tendency jointly at work in the becoming of things” (p. 294) without producing a binary. Chia also wrote two articles “In Praise of Strategic Indirection: An Essay on the Efficacy of Oblique Ways of Responding” (Chia, 2013), and “Reflections: In Praise of Silent Transformation – Allowing Change Through ‘Letting Happen’” (Chia, 2014) that expand on his past work on change management and strategic thinking. Both articles are rooted in the same four books of Jullien’s, *The Propensity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China* (1995), *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece* (2000), *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese thinking* (2004b), and *The Silent Transformations* (2011).

Like other organisational scholars that employ Jullien’s work, in Chia’s studies, Jullien’s work is utilised to expand the scope of existing ways of thinking. Unlike many cultural studies that

provide insights about culture as a context, scholars who employ Jullien's work attempt to expand the canon of leadership thinking. Chia's work is popular amongst processual leadership scholars, especially processual and practice-based scholars. However, while Chia's work is heavily cited by leadership scholarship, Jullien and the Chinese tradition are almost invisible in the works of processual and practice-based studies. Interestingly, the works of Whitehead and Bourdieu, whom Chia sometimes uses alongside Jullien, are also commonly cited in processual and Leadership-as-Practice (or L-A-P) literature. As Jullien's work has not penetrated leadership processual scholarship, even through Chia, Chinese concepts have not yet been explained in depth in relation to the leadership literature. It is here that my thesis makes its major contribution; bringing Jullien directly into conversation with leadership studies.

Based on Jullien's work, the contribution of this research lies in the unthought in leadership scholarship that the Chinese tradition could reveal. Unthought is uncovered between cultural traditions because the separate cultural ways of categorising the sensory world produced different environments for the emergences of separate types of knowledge. To unveil unthought, this research is centred more in the environment in which Western thoughts are situated, and not leadership ontology, epistemology, truth, meaning, or knowledge, that are manifestations of Western agendas, value systems and priorities for approaching leadership.

In the rest of this thesis, I use the terms Chinese thought and Western thought to denote the divergent patterns of thinking characteristic of each tradition. To be clear, I recognise that ways of thinking are not uniformly shared by all members of a culture. Cultures, as Jullien recognised,

are dynamic and constantly adapting and shifting to changing circumstances, and people have individual differences and preferences. What is more, any cultural group consists of sub-cultures and differences in approaches, which are often in conflict. Many contemporary individuals from the West and China move between cultures fluidly and these developments mean there is much more cross-fertilisation between cultural traditions than there has been in the past. My focus, as with Jullien, is on distinguishable patterns in thinking that are typical of traditional Western philosophy and ancient Chinese thought. The generalisations I make about these two cultures are for the purpose of providing a unique perspective on leadership scholarship to highlight some enduring issues and some potential alternatives.

To sum up, based on Jullien's descriptions, Chinese thought conceives the propensity of the sensory world, or how nature functions, as the basis for human functioning and decision making in life. Alternatively, Western thought centralises on the 'I', who is the basis of thinking about and making sense of the world (Jullien, 2002). The West's views on ethics and associated political questions are an example of the significance of this early divergence between thinking patterns. Aspects of the world that serve human agendas are conceived as good and/or bad.

Ancient Chinese thought did not share this view on ethics. Taking the perspective that the world facilitates all lives, Chinese thought does not conceive any aspect of the world as inherently wrong, bad, or problematic. Because they prioritise the sensory world, Chinese wisdom bases its understanding of prosperity on the regulatory principle that provides the condition for the inexhaustible renewal and transformation of all life (Jullien, 2002). Chinese wisdom involves learning how to take advantage of the propensity available with minimum disruption to the other

aspects of the sensory world and their propensities. In contrast, Western thought conceives human intentionality, including the production, modification and/or development of an idea, meaning-making, opinions, and decisions as the basis for acquiring prosperity. Chinese thought strives to function according to the principles of the sensory world, which requires an individual to be receptive and adaptable to the spontaneous changes that occur in everyday life. Conversely, Western scholarship centralises human experience, choices and decisions, and imposes the human ideal onto the sensory world through intentionality and action.

For leadership scholarship, particularly in the critical tradition (e.g. as overviewed by Parker (2002)), this lack of attention to ethics and politics is problematic. My intention in this thesis is to use the Chinese lens that Jullien articulated in order to reflect back on leadership scholarship, aiming to assist it to overcome some enduring challenges already recognised in leadership and organisational scholarship by those who often now discuss the need to break out of established ‘habits of thinking’ (Carroll et al., 2019; Crevani, 2019a; Ford et al., 2017; Ivanova & Persson, 2017; Kelly, 2014; Parker, 2002; Persson et al., 2017; Raelin, 2016c; Wilson, 2016). I do not dwell on political and ethical dilemmas in the same way that a Western leadership scholar might, because my purpose in this thesis is to offer an alternative way. I do recognise that ancient Chinese wisdom, by seeking to be apolitical and not concerned with ethics in the Western sense, has some limits in terms of what it can provide to critical leadership studies and the criticism of Jullien that he is not concerned enough with politics has some validity (Billeter, 2006). I return to some of these points in Part 3 when I discuss the implications of this thesis for the development of leadership scholarship.

Based on Jullien's work, this PhD research aims to distinguish the cultural environments, including value system, priorities, preferences and agendas that produced the condition that allows existing leadership thoughts to emerge and modify in specific ways, and towards particular directions. It unveils leadership unthought from the in-between space of cultures by identifying the habitual Western ways of thinking that influence leadership scholarship and investigating leadership from a Chinese perspective.

What is Possible, and Not Possible Through This Research

Jullien's (1995) work explains the different characteristics of the Chinese and Western languages as an important factor that produced the divergence in the two traditions' scholarship.

Consequently, what is possible through this research is directly associated with the question: *Is it possible to harness the power of the Chinese tradition by using the English language?*

Every concept represented through any language system provides a unique way of categorising the world and so cannot be fully nor even accurately translated by the categorisation of another language (Derrida, 1976; Jullien, 1995). The representation systems of English (and French) and Chinese ideographic languages are quite different in nature as I have already explained. Every language functions to assist its linguistic community to make sense of the world and this thesis uses the English language because it aims to inform Western thinkers with a sensemaking tool to which they are receptive. Also, this thesis is being presented within a Western knowledge academic system and so is beholden to some of its expectations for a thesis in a Western discipline (leadership studies) and has to be presented in English. As already discussed, it is

impossible to accurately or fully express thought carried by the Chinese language using the English language. However, it is possible to use the English language to help thinkers in the Western tradition obtain a level of intellectual understanding of Chinese thought; it is what Jullien did in his work and is what this thesis also attempts to do.

Jullien (2004a) employs important Chinese concepts such as 陰 yīn, 陽 yáng, and 道 dào. These concepts come from the Chinese language; they express the way the Chinese language describes the world. Because they are key components in Chinese thought, Jullien focuses on these concepts to help Western readers acquire an intellectual understanding of the Chinese tradition. Following Jullien's method, I also use a hybrid of English and Chinese languages in this research, with the Chinese concepts forming the core of explaining Chinese thinking and the English language as the familiar language for the readers to facilitate a logical progression through reasoning and discussions. By doing so, I hope to craft a vision of acquiring prosperity from a Chinese approach to leadership using the English language and the Western scholarly tools of reasoning and logical progression. This is essentially the way I employ my net, as Jullien does, to capture and communicate the central ideas in this thesis. In the next section, I explain my choices in more detail.

Methodology

In this section, I provide a more 'conventional' discussion of my methodology in the contexts of the Western academic knowledge system I am working within. Because it would be inconsistent with my basic premises, as I have explained so far, I clarify my method to show how I am

producing knowledge in a Western knowledge system, rather than providing a discussion of my philosophical approach (e.g. ontology and epistemology) as is usually expected. In this section, my focus is mainly on my positionality as a person who still strongly identifies as Chinese, even though I have spent most of my life now in Aotearoa New Zealand. I am also married to a Mexican person and step-father to our children (currently separated from me in Mexico due to COVID19 travel restrictions). To make matters more complicated for me, I decided to use a Frenchman, Jullien, who wrote in French about Chinese ideas which I myself read after the French was translated into English as I do not speak fluent French. This complicated positionality has been negotiated by me as a Chinese student in a Western knowledge academy. Many tensions and issues have arisen which have both limited me but also enabled me to provide a unique point of view, and so in the next section, I provide a discussion of some key issues I encountered as well as the ways I dealt with them.

My Positionality

In this section, I describe how my positionality as a Chinese PhD candidate who identifies strongly with a Daoist way of life has impacted my PhD journey and the way I have interpreted Western leadership scholarship. I begin by explaining a little background about myself and also Jullien. I then cover four main tensions I experienced that helped me hone my lens and approach. Jullien was a European who spent over a decade in China and was married to a Chinese woman. I have also been influenced by both China and the West. I spent the first eighteen years of my life in China and have been in New Zealand for over twenty years. My journey has included

many phases. I went through a Westernization phase when I first came to New Zealand. As I adopted a Western way of living, I had a choice of selecting between a Chinese and Western way to live and deal with different situations. Multiple cultural perspectives are common for migrants. As soon as one has more than one cultural perspective, choices and preferences appear in every situation. And life for me, and I imagine also for many migrants in the world who obtain more than one cultural perspective, is a process of continuously finding the most effective, suitable and/or appropriate way of living and being in every single situation we encounter. Both Chinese and Western cultures have benefited me immensely and my personal background has been essential in my research journey. I want to use my experience to help leadership researchers enter into another cultural perspective through Jullien's work. However, my personal life circumstances as explained here have also meant this journey has been full of tension and difficulties for me. I have tried to use these tensions to my advantage to grow myself and develop my thesis to help others.

To begin to explain my positionality vis-à-vis my thesis I outline tensions experienced as I decided to forgo an empirical practice-based PhD and start a theoretical one. When I began my thesis, my proposal was in the area of leadership development. I have always wanted to help potential and actual leaders develop using the principles of the Dao, and I came to the management discipline from a background in Education. I am an experienced practitioner of Tai Chi and so my initial PhD plan was to run Tai Chi training sessions with learners, probably in a tertiary education setting, and use a participant action methodology to ascertain the efficacy and outcomes of the learning programme. This plan was developed under the guidance of my

supervisors, who felt it was best and probably easier to do an empirical PhD that catered to my previous background and strengths, rather than a solely theoretical PhD, and a strong focus on just one thing is essential to complete on time. I considered using ancient parables as part of an instructional approach to help participants learn about the Chinese way. I also thought I might use Sun Tzu's *The art of war* as an instructional text.

In my initial year, I had many conversations with my supervisors about the use of *The art of war* and Lao Tzu's teachings (often understood to be the foundation of Dao). For instance, at one point I proposed using a story from writings attributed to Lao Tzu about a ruler who decides to kill his wife and daughter in the interests of the long-term benefit of the people in his care. One supervisor did not think this teaching would work in the context of a leadership development course and was very concerned about both the message (which she saw as the sacrifice of females in the interests of order), and the types of conversations it might provoke in a learning context. As another example of tensions, I engaged in several discussions with another supervisor about the foundational texts of Dao, and how I should use them. He considered that I should read the original texts and interpret them as the foundation of my thesis. I considered this option, did not feel I had the skills needed to write a thesis on text interpretation and I did not understand why my interpretation was appropriate or necessary to understand the texts, although I do understand the importance of not misrepresenting sacred texts such as those ascribed to Lao Tzu (and probably assembled from his teachings by his acolytes well after he died). Despite these potential issues I wrote a confirmation document based on a participant action study with the finer details of what was in the actual curriculum still being decided.

At confirmation I encountered an engaged panel excited about my study and its potential. They could see from my confirmation that what I was most interested and passionate about was Chinese ideas and communicating them to a Western audience in a leadership context. In what I understand is quite an unusual move in a discipline that prefers empirical PhD work, they advised me to write a theoretical PhD if that was where my passion and interest lay, and they felt that would make enough of a contribution to knowledge to meet the criteria for a PhD. After the confirmation, I discussed the recommendations with my supervisors, and they agreed I should continue with a theoretical PhD. To ensure that the PhD contributed to leadership scholarship I asked a well-known critical scholar in the field of leadership studies to join my supervisory panel. She had been on my confirmation panel and had shown a strong interest in my work and its potential and agreed to become a supervisor. I provide this information about my initial journey to confirmation to stress that from the outset I thought using Dao as a way to teach and learn about leadership was viable and made complete sense, that my way of thinking did not fit easily into the Western knowledge system, and I did not really anticipate the contradictions and issues my journey would lead me into.

My second set of tensions came from this decision to do a theoretical PhD and involved appreciating the difficulties of what I was trying to do when I initially thought it was fairly straightforward and finding an authentic voice to speak from outside the academy whilst still being part of it.

Having decided to take a theoretical approach, the tensions between the Western ways of knowing and my own became even more manifest. For instance, as I was already reading the leadership development scholarship, I came to understand that debates within leadership about the theory-practice divide did not make much sense to me since from a Daoist perspective there is no such thing as a practice-theory divide in the first place. The tension represented by this example caused profound problems for me which I describe more next.

A major challenge for me has been locating myself in the Western knowledge tradition because my whole approach is based on trying not to be within the Western knowledge system but to critique it from the outside using a Chinese lens. I have spent much time and thought as I have written this thesis, and it has been through its many iterations, struggling to find my voice in the Western academy. As I am someone who is comfortable in both the West and China, I was acutely aware that I was sitting in a paradoxical situation where I needed to justify my thesis as part of the Western knowledge system, but I did not, at least initially, understand how I could resolve the internal contradictions that came with the approach I chose. As I struggled with this dilemma one of my supervisors suggested Jullien might help. Ralph was familiar with Jullien because of his work in aesthetics and has a longstanding interest in China. Because Jullien had some existing legitimacy within the academy I began to read Jullien. Over the next year, I read all of Jullien's books and felt a deep resonance with his appreciation of the Chinese way of being in the world. I continued to meet with my supervisors and discuss Jullien's ideas, but Jullien was not a scholar they were very familiar with (except for Ralph). Reading Jullien's work was not enough for me, especially as I had no one in New Zealand who shared my growing passion for

his work, and so I began some correspondence with Professor Sybille Persson, who is the management and leadership scholar most engaged with Jullien's work. This led to a three-month sojourn to France on PhD leave, mostly funded by myself but also my School, where I spent time with Prof Persson and met a number of other scholars who engaged with Chinese thought in Europe. My encounter with Jullien and these mainly French scholars, early post-confirmation, enabled me to find my voice so that I could express myself and the validity of my Chinese approach, within the Western academy. This period in France was critical for me as Prof Persson's care and attention towards me boosted my confidence in what I was doing; she believed in the value of my approach. She also introduced me to the debates and critiques about Jullien and helped me see them in a French context. In addition, this sojourn in France helped me feel more confident that the Chinese-English-French translation processes and my understanding of Jullien was appropriate. As a Chinese person who speaks fluent Mandarin and English and has a grounding in ancient Chinese wisdom through Dao practice, I feel I also may have added some value to their work understanding China through Jullien. I do understand that translation is never seamless, but I became a part of a welcoming linguistic community that reads Jullien in French, and so I was able to test and check my understanding of his work and this helped me profoundly. Prof Persson's interest and support helped sustain me throughout the rest of my journey when I hit the inevitable down periods of writing a PhD, especially in isolation in Auckland during COVID19 lockdowns and the separations from my family.

The description in the paragraph above about how I initially encountered Jullien and how I engaged with his thought is provided to reinforce how my positionality has not been a static

thing but is related to my constantly moving body and mind engaged in a practice of doing. My Chinese ‘lens’, although it appropriates a French scholar which may seem incongruous, has been achieved through a genuine engagement with his work and French scholars who also read his work. My journey has been a process of translation and engagement where I have moved through different approaches and lenses from cultures that are familiar to me, and are not, so that I can find my voice to find legitimacy in a Western knowledge-producing system.

When I consider where I might stand in regard to a Western methodology - epistemology and ontology - I am in a paradoxical and difficult situation. Initially, my instinct has been to eschew Western epistemology and ontology entirely as this thesis is a critique, after all, of its limitations vis-à-vis its capacity to encompass methods for knowing the world. My focus is on using a Chinese lens which is without these ways of understanding the world. However, to achieve a PhD in Management I do need to demonstrate how my thesis fits into, or doesn't, Western epistemological and ontological ways of viewing the world. I have engaged throughout my thesis, in discussions with my supervisors and through my writing, with several ways to shape my approach using methodological approaches familiar to Western knowledge academies. I discuss some of those in the next section where I discuss ontology and epistemology in relation to my thesis and what I have learned.

The third set of tensions for me in terms of my positionality was understanding who the audience was for this thesis. That is, who in the leadership discipline would be interested and want to read my work? What thread of leadership scholarship was I contributing to? To me, this seemed self-

evident, at least initially, but as I progressed through my thesis, I became more aware that others have travelled a path before me with similar intentions, although they have taken different routes and utilised different resources. In particular, I came to realise that I did not fit at all seamlessly into any identifiable streams of thought within leadership studies itself. I am doing a thesis in leadership because I am interested in leadership, but the Chinese lens I adopt through Jullien approaches leadership differently. I feel drawn towards critical approaches because they also question the centrality of the human in leadership and organisational theories (Chia, 2005, 2013; Knights, 1997; Parker, 2002). There is also a resonance between my work and indigenous leadership scholarship because indigenous researchers also draw from ancient wisdom traditions to offer something new (Smith, 2021). Here my positionality is, currently, based on my ability to understand all of these fields well enough to contribute to them. For instance, regarding indigenous approaches, they come out of an experience that is foreign to mine. Although China has experienced colonisation, and I certainly feel colonised quite often as someone in a Western academy trying to express my cultural uniqueness, I nevertheless am not indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand, and I do not have the same experiences of colonisation. Coming to terms with my positionality in Aotearoa New Zealand as a Tau iwi Chinese immigrant Kiwi is something that is still a work-in-progress for me, and I did not feel indigenous scholarship was the right audience for my work or where I could make my contribution. Critical management theory also has its challenges in terms of my contribution and audience. I have had many vigorous and constructive conversations with my supervisors, especially Janet, about posthumanism and reflexive questioning of the human subject and Western knowledge in relation to critical theory regarding

post-structuralism, feminism, and ethnic studies and other branches of Western thought that have spun out of anti-humanism. Janet constantly returns to questions of politics and ethics and finds the lack of politics and ethics in the Chinese way as I present it problematic. All of my supervisors have constantly reminded me of the gap between ancient wisdom practices and contemporary leadership dilemmas and expressed concern that ancient wisdom can be mobilised to effectively mind-control populations, and that it might explain the acceptance of the Chinese way of governing. I do understand at least the general nature of their concerns and questions, but I don't agree with all. I have always seen my PhD journey as a conversation between different ways of being in the world and understanding it. I do not have all the answers to these questions, and they are beyond the remit of my thesis. These questions have meant that I am actually unsure of who the audience is for my thesis within leadership studies. What I have tried to do is to identify where the key theoretical tensions are in leadership studies generally and where patterns of Western thought have constrained leadership scholars' ability to overcome theoretical impasses. I have then focused on those places to explain how and why a Chinese lens can help cast a new light on the problem spaces in theory. This is the limit of what I think I can contribute to a PhD thesis but in the future, I look forward to exploring more some of the questions and concerns my thesis provokes. Because of the importance of China globally and the thirst for understanding about China in the West, I do believe this thesis will find its audience.

My statement on my positionality above aims to demonstrate reflexivity in my approach as I have come to terms with the Western knowledge academy and how it has shaped this thesis. I have explained my unique positionality vis-à-vis Jullien to explain how I have employed my

‘Chinese lens’ to reflect on Western leadership scholarship. I acknowledge my lens has limitations and there are many questions yet to be answered, but the intention of this thesis is to start a discussion between cultural traditions where each is treated with mutual respect and acceptance of their differences, which are sometimes profound and difficult to navigate. Nevertheless this thesis on unthought, which is not so much on the impossibility of thinking as the necessity for entering into a mode of thinking between cultures aims to provoke those conversations.

In the next section, I return to Western epistemology and ontology to demonstrate where my thesis might be understood vis-à-vis this tradition.

Subtle Realism and my Approach

This section introduces why I think subtle realism is probably the most resonant methodological approach for my work. I need to first explain that I have experimented with and thought through several methodological approaches as I have engaged with my supervisors, reading and writing, throughout this thesis. I do not intend to go through all these approaches in depth, but just quickly introduce how the journey I explained above was shadowed by consideration of approaches and why my movement through several approaches is not a weakness or a lack of clarity, but part of the essential nature of my lens and process of discovery that is part of this lens. During my initial confirmation year, I read about narrative theory and participatory action research in development contexts. As my Masters was in education and directly engaged with the works of Dewey (2004) and Freire (1993), I felt relatively comfortable with this approach

because it combined theory and practice in movement, but I abandoned it after my confirmation as explained above. Then because I was taking what might be seen as a cultural approach to knowledge creation, I read work on cultural approaches to organisational studies (Denzin et al., 2008) and leadership scholars who used that approach (Al-Mansoori & Muammer, 2019; Chen & Mason, 2017; Gram-Hanssen, 2021; Ruwhiu & Cone, 2013). In particular, the emic and etic literature (Chen & Miller, 2010; Fang, 2016; Zhang et al., 2014) seemed relevant and so for a while, I used this approach to help me understand how to explain cultural approaches between the West and my Chinese lens. However, since my thesis is theoretical and not empirical, I abandoned this approach for Jullien who became paramount, and I focused on understanding his method which he calls 'unthought' and I have emulated. During this time most of my discussion about my thesis with my supervisors was about how I should present my argumentation. Because my thesis was seen as 'philosophical' (although we agree it is better described as theoretical) it was the argumentation strategy that was considered to be more important than a methodology per se at this point. My process has been a conversation, and adjustment of my thesis towards clarity, transparency, trust and credibility through the process of trying to occupy the space of unthought and convince my supervisors and then eventually of course an examination panel of its contribution. During this time I experimented with a number of writing methods as I tried to find my voice. For instance, at one stage I drafted my argument following Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* with propositions in numbered statements. At various times I tried to write about contemporary leadership cases in the West (never in China) and I did experiment with using these as pivotal moments in my arguments, but my supervisors did not find them convincing in

that they raised more questions than they answered. In particular, this is where issues around ethics and politics and their application in real-life situations became issues for them. For this reason, I have kept my arguments on Chinese thinking to ancient Chinese wisdom and distanced them from contemporary leadership cases.

Looking back on my PhD journey, and writing this section, the Western methodological approach that resonates most with me is ‘subtle realism’. Subtle realism recognises, as I do, that there is a physical ‘reality’, but the approach is critical towards the assumptions behind the human production of knowledge and denies the human capacity to grasp a phenomenon in its entirety (Blaikie, 2007; Hammersley, 2018). Subtle realism also proposes, like me, that the activities of searching for knowledge are grounded in cultural, social or political agendas, priorities and preferences. Proponents of subtle realism propose that knowledge acquired in any culture is not truth as such but, rather, information about a phenomenon related to the cultural assumptions about the world and the agendas for engaging the phenomenon (Blaikie & Priest, 2019; Hammersley, 2018).

Subtle realism is a critical method commonly adopted in cultural and ethnographical studies when researchers want to radically question their own cultural assumptions. In his work, *What's wrong with ethnography?* Hammersley (2018) proposes that the purpose of learning about another culture should be to understand its perspective and not judge the culture based on a pre-existing value system. According to Hammersley, subtle realism retains awareness of both an independent sensory world and the subjectivity of the observer situated in it. It addresses the

incompatibilities between the two dominant ethnographical approaches, naïve realism which conceives every culture as producing knowledge that reflects the objective reality, and relativistic idealism, which makes cross-cultural learning impossible by suggesting that different cultural bodies of knowledge are inherently separate social creations without a foundation in the factual realm.

Subtle realists have the following approaches to epistemology:

1. Scientific statements are not seen as true or false descriptions of some external reality, but rather as creations of the scientist which are taken to be true.
2. The acceptability of a scientific statement is not the product of the application by scientists of some universally valid criteria or set of 'objective' standards of evaluation. Rather, such acceptability is construed as the product of the scientist's 'subjective' apprehension of reality, which is usually derived from, or indeed determined by, the socially sanctioned conventions that dominate the scientific communities to which they belong.
3. The truth or falsity of statements is 'underdetermined' by their observations of empirical data: observation cannot provide objective control over scientific statements because a theory-neutral observational language is not available. (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 63)

This approach recognises that there is a value system embedded in the way language categorises and structures reality, and this is an important part of my approach also. Words and concepts

within a language represent cultural assumptions about the world and its components; they do not represent how the world is objectively separated. The approach assumes that “Any conclusions about external reality cannot be separated from the cognitive, social and emotional processes that have led them to those conclusions in which language is regarded as a vehicle for creating rather than reflecting reality” (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 67). From this perspective, and my own, the validity and value of knowledge are not objective, but inseparable from a cultural assumption about reality and the purpose for engaging it (Blaikie & Priest, 2019; Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Scientific, social scientific, and philosophical studies are enquiries about social, political and cultural conventions, cultural knowledge and truth function to address the purpose of the culture based on its conventional understanding of the world, but do not have inherent validity from outside of the culture. Another tenet is that subtle realism recognises that there are no superior cultural value systems, morality, and/or ethical practices, but differences in their understandings of the world, priorities and focuses (Ben-Menahem, 2006). A sense of superiority encompasses biases and judgements: as soon as one judges, one takes one perspective over another, creates the Other in binary, and closes oneself off from learning from another.

This methodological approach seems consistent with Jullien’s suggestions that the separation between the Chinese and Western tradition is the manifestation of different cultural conceptions of reality, value systems, priorities, preferences and purposes for engaging the sensory world. The separation between cultural thoughts provides opportunities for one cultural thought to contribute to another through what Jullien calls unthought. Unthought emerges from the in-between space of the cultures and this space is produced by the separated cultural assumptions,

conceptions of reality and purposes for engaging the world. My research can be understood through subtle realism as it aims to contribute to existing leadership scholarship through a Chinese lens, by revealing aspects of leadership, ways of dealing with leadership-related issues, and/or acquiring prosperity through leadership available in the Chinese tradition that are unavailable in existing leadership scholarship. I have woven my net and tried to capture thought between cultures. I am not French. I am Chinese and so my lens is different from Jullien's. I cannot be him. But I can employ his method which I have explained previously, in my own way, to try and capture scholarly leadership thought. Subtle realism is the Western philosophical tradition that resonates most with me for the reasons explained above.

Alignment of Jullien's work with Other Methodological Approaches

Social constructionism is another widely accepted approach for explaining social reality and thought and is often used in ethnographic studies. Social constructionists believe that reality is a product of a complex process of interpretations, interactions and negotiation (Blaikie, 2007; Gomm, 2008). Social constructionism is relevant to investigate cultural thought as an ongoing process of construction, reconstruction and negotiation of a collective's values, priorities and assumptions. Social constructionism provides a wide range of options for entering into understanding how people interpret reality and my study has drawn on these concepts. This study is influenced by social constructionist perspective because Jullien's thought is likewise influenced by soc con ideas, even if it is not a label he applied to himself.

My thesis is not an original study of a Chinese perspective but, rather, applies to leadership studies the Chinese lens already described in Jullien's work. This research is based on Jullien's work, which is philosophical, grounded in reasoning and logical progression. In Jullien's work the Chinese tradition is not studied for its own sake, but to challenge his thinking, reflect on the aspects of the Western tradition he takes for granted, and to develop his own philosophy. In other words, a Chinese perspective is a place for diverging thinking, and provides a frame of reference to contribute to Western philosophy. While China is an uncommon choice as a place to diverge thinking, Jullien insists that his strategy for developing philosophy is no different from others who used historical norms and discourses as the places to diverge their thinking (Jullien, 2015). Similarly, this research employs the Chinese lens described in Jullien's work to diverge leadership thinking from Western thinking habits. This attempt is similar in intent to Crevani bringing Doreen Massey's work on sociomaterial space to understand leadership process (Crevani, 2018, 2019a, 2019b), Chia's employment of Whitehead's process ontology to study organisational change (Chia, 1999), and Raelin's employment of a practice-based ontological approach to leadership (Raelin, 2016d). One of the biggest separations between the Chinese lens and Western approaches is that Chinese thought does not recognise it has an ontology or an epistemology, and, therefore, it is more challenging to grasp (Jullien, 1995). The purpose of employing the Chinese lens is to produce a frame of reference for developing leadership thinking.

This research deals with two cultural traditions that categorise the world in separate ways. Subtle realism's acknowledgement of both a physical world independent from the human interpretation

and the idea of reality as socially constructed gave me some confidence that I could communicate to Western scholars in ways they already appreciate, exploring two cultures equally valid and different impressions about the sensory world based on their separate assumptions, value systems and conceptions of reality (Johnson & Duberley, 2000).

Further Challenges

A first further challenge of this research comes with using reasoning itself to help the readers enter a cultural lens and to conceive leadership. In an age of globalisation, many people migrate to countries other than their own, immerse themselves within the new culture and adopt its perspective over time. Adopting a cultural perspective is an experiential process of learning, practising and maturation over time; it can include intentional learning and practicing, and being unintentionally influenced by the environment. It is a holistic experience and competency. Reasoning, in contrast, using language and reasoning as the sole medium for someone who has never experienced living, breathing, relating or socialising in another culture makes cross-cultural understanding more challenging.

The privileging of reason in academia makes knowledge produced from a Western perspective the basis for validity; by default, it invalidates non-Western perspectives (notwithstanding many changes in New Zealand to include Mātauranga Māori in knowledge institutions). To diverge thinking, which is a precondition of making a contribution to scholarship within this system, researchers often ground their studies in Western philosophers (e.g. Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault). When looking for alternative thinking paths, researchers often forget about other

cultures' thinking traditions and perspectives. This pattern is also evident in leadership studies, including both traditional and critical leadership studies (although to be fair there are some attempts by non-European scholars to bring alternatives, e.g. indigenous scholars, and those from the global South (Eyong, 2017; Forster et al., 2016; Gaggiotti & Marre, 2017; Haar et al., 2019; Roque Urbieto, 2021; Ruwhiu & Elkin, 2016; Spiller et al., 2020; Sveiby, 2011)). Unless a culture is specifically named, terms in leadership scholarship such as *organisation*, *leadership*, *history*, *development*, *growth*, *problem*, and *ideal* refer exclusively to Western constructs and Western social, political and historical issues. As Jullien recognised with regard to anthropological studies about China, what often happens to cultural thoughts is that they are interpreted based on Western thinking structures, classifications and systems of validity (Jullien, 2020). Western scholarship unconsciously centres knowledge development in Western thought. To identify the unthought between the two cultural systems of thinking a primary challenge of this research lies in how to bring out the voice of a Chinese conception of reality, value system, and preferences within a scholarly system that centralises a Western perspective.

To minimise the influence of the Western value system on the description of a Chinese perspective, this research does not follow a habitual Western ontology-epistemology structure. Instead, it divides the description of Western and Chinese thought into two different parts of the research to show that they are two separate systems of thought. Part II of this research prioritises identifying the habitual Western thinking structures behind the emergence of existing leadership theories, and not the theories themselves. Doing so clarifies that the focus of this research lies in the separate cultural habits of thinking that influences the emergence of leadership thinking. Part

III follows a similar structure by first identifying Chinese thinking habits that frame its approaches to reality before applying them to conceive leadership. In addition to explaining a Chinese perspective on an aspect of leadership, I also add phrases such as ‘*instead of*’, or ‘*is not*’ to further clarify the separations between a Chinese perspective and a common interpretation of the same situation from a Western perspective, which assists the identification of unthought the Chinese perspective brings.

A second further challenge of this research is using the English language to explain the Chinese categorisation of reality. I use English, which itself as I have argued previously in Part 1, already inherits a unique cultural value system, categorisation of reality, priorities and preferences. Using the English language as the carrier of this research makes it impossible to escape the influence of its assumptions and value system, and this can make the unthought in-between cultures more difficult to identify.

I address this inevitable issue in the following way. I do not expect the English language to fully represent or communicate a Chinese perspective in this research. Instead, the primary concern of this research is to show a separation between cultural traditions and the potential contribution to leadership scholarship that a Chinese lens can bring. To do so I follow Jullien’s method and centre my descriptions of a Chinese lens around several key distinctions. By creating distinctions, certain terms stand out not as mundane carriers of information but as points of focus. Using distinctions as the focal points of my explanation and application of Chinese thought can be an effective way to facilitate the understanding of a Chinese perspective through

a Western lens and identify unthought. I will also use Chinese characters to separate a Chinese concept from the assumptions and value systems inherited in the English language that carries this research, and this helps to remind the reader of the basic differences reading an English word versus a Chinese ideograph can bring to the reader.

A third challenge comes with the separate preferences and habits in which the ancient Chinese and Western thinkers approach situations. This research is conducted by providing an argument and this style of reasoning is commonly used in Western scholarship to propose, discuss and debate ideas. This style may seem normal to Western eyes. It is important to appreciate that a Chinese perspective as I employ it in this thesis is a largely taken-for-granted system of thinking that functions as the basis for producing thought. Reasoning relies on awareness, and one can only engage in reasoning with what one is aware of and not what is taken for granted. Jullien's work deals not with what scholars are aware of from within the cultural tradition but with cultural norms and the habits of thinking that they take for granted and cannot discover from within. Jullien's work brings awareness to the taken-for-granted, which allow discussions and reasoning to be applied to what was unaware of and undiscussed. I am aware that by discussing Western scholarship through a Chinese lens this research is in danger of projecting a Chinese conception of leadership as an idea or a model of leadership that, like other Western leadership theories or models, emerged from its own cultural foundations. This is not my intention. Instead, my intention is to contribute by bringing awareness of an alternative way of engaging with reality to what I argue is largely taken-for-granted in the Western leadership academy.

Research Design

The research question is: *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* I am to answer this research question using three objectives:

- Identify habitual patterns in Western thinking embedded in existing leadership scholarship.
- Investigate leadership through a Chinese perspective (based on Jullien's work).
- Distinguish the insights revealed from a Chinese lens in this research that are unavailable in existing leadership thinking.

Jullien (2020) did not have a strict method to reveal unthought. To him, method “implies that both a goal might ostensibly be assigned (‘after’ which one sets off: *meta*) and an approach (a ‘path’: *hodos*) might then be determined so that the goal might be attained” (p. 44). Method creates a causal relationship based on a premeditated design and is not appropriate for his work. To Jullien, it is not using a method that allows him to enter Chinese thought but taking its perspective through lived experiences; by being immersed in the Chinese culture and maturation over time. Only after he has already entered the culture can he find the appropriate way of learning about it. A method is an obstacle to achieving his goal “also because it always passes from ideas to things, never having anything to attribute to things other than what we clearly perceive within the idea of them” (p. 45). As introduced earlier, Jullien considers his way of uncovering unthought as a weaving of a net. In this process, the Western and Chinese thoughts are the two threads that weave the net, with each thread representing a cultural habitual-thinking framework. Through their constant interplay, a net is formed, and unthought is caught in the in-

between spaces. This research adopts Jullien's approach and aims to catch unthought in existing leadership scholarship through the interactions between two cultural thoughts.

A uniqueness of this research is that leadership is a Western concept; it has been written about in the West for over 2,500 years. As I have argued 'leadership' in the West is a product of categorising reality under Western languages' preferences and approaching situations based on a Western value system. These characteristics suggest that existing leadership knowledge is the first thread in the catching of unthought, as the weaving of the net relies on reinterpreting existing leadership knowledge from a Chinese perspective. Based on this understanding, this research is designed as follows.

Part II of this research aims to address the first objective of this research and identify habitual patterns in Western thinking inherent in existing leadership scholarship. In this part of the thesis, I obtain the Western thread of the net by distinguishing the environment in which existing leadership thinking emerges. Based on Jullien's work, this part of the research identifies how Western conceptions influence the emergence of leadership thinking, including the directions of thinking about leadership, and what existing scholarship considers are basic components of leadership, aspects of leadership that are seen as important, and the focuses of leadership studies. All these aspects of leadership scholarship are seen in this research as manifestations of the Western tradition, including its value system, priorities and agendas.

Discussion in Part II is facilitated through two ways Western thinking is structured through ontology-epistemology paradigm and theory-and-practice partnership. I shall show how basic

ontological and epistemological assumptions, even as they attempt to differentiate themselves from each other to contribute to knowledge, still develop knowledge under the same cultural conditions. I follow Jullien (2002) in his explanation of the models by which the Western tradition engages the sensory world, especially in regard to the theory-practice domains.

Identifying how leadership is studied within the Western tradition can provide insights into the aspects of leadership that existing scholarship is attentive to, the directions of thinking about leadership, and how it attempts to acquire organisational prosperity from leadership. These insights can provide a frame of reference for uncovering unthought through a Chinese perspective.

Part III of this research identifies the Chinese thread of the net by studying leadership through its scholarship, and addresses the remaining two objectives of this research:

- Investigate leadership through a Chinese perspective (based on Jullien's work).
- Distinguish the insights revealed from a Chinese lens in this research that are unavailable in existing leadership thinking.

As a tradition that conceives the world through silent tendencies and not being, this part of the research first investigates the implication of studying leadership through a Chinese lens. The second step is to identify the aspects of leadership that are considered key components of Chinese thought, including 陰 yīn, 陽 yáng, 勢 shì, and 道 dào. Next, this part of the research applies the Chinese model for acquiring prosperity to the study of leadership and analysing how the above components can function to coproduce prosperity in Chinese thought.

The propensity of leadership produced in Part III of this research, as well as the ways in which it functions to fulfil the purpose of Chinese thought, are the basis for uncovering unthought in existing scholarship. Using a Chinese lens as a frame of reference, this research hopes to obtain sufficient unthought in between the cultural traditions to address the research question: *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?*

Part II:

Thinking, About Leadership:

**Identifying the Thinking Frameworks Behind the Emergence and
Development of Leadership Thought**

Part II: Introduction

The research objective of Part II is *Identifying the habitual Western thinking embedded in the existing leadership scholarship*. To address this objective, this part of the thesis clarifies the Western habits of thinking behind the emergence, modification and development of existing leadership thinking. The insights revealed here will function as a frame of reference to identify the distance between Western and Chinese conceptions of and approaches to leadership.

A primary focus of Jullien's work is identifying the cultural categorisation of reality that produces environments to facilitate the emergence of thought. To provide insights about leadership from a Chinese perspective unavailable through a Western lens, it is important for this Part II of the research to identify the cultural thinking habits and the value system, preferences and agendas that influence the emergence and development of leadership thinking. This is the research objective of *Identifying the habitual Western thinking embedded in the existing leadership scholarship*. By addressing this objective, the research clarifies the cultural lens that made the emergence, modification and development of existing leadership thinking possible. This insight can then be a frame of reference to distinguish what a Chinese perspective can contribute to leadership scholarship.

Part II of the thesis first identifies how leadership thinking manifests within the Western tradition in relation to its cultural value system, priority and agenda for approaching the world. I then discuss how leadership scholarship functions within the theory-and-practice partnership, which Jullien (1995) understands as the Western structure for engaging the sensory world. Lastly, I

summarise how Western habitual thinking influences the development of existing leadership thought.

To be clear, whilst in Part II of the thesis I focus on distinctive features I acknowledge there is considerable diversity within both Western and Chinese thought traditions. In this part of the thesis my purpose, however, is to delineate these traditions of thinking, in order to highlight how Chinese thought can provide a different lens on the leadership phenomenon.

An important feature of the Western philosophical tradition is that it has long been critical of its own philosophical assumptions. This reflexive capacity accelerated after WWII when the experiences of the war and the holocaust, in particular, caused a revolution in Western philosophy. Deconstructionism, post-structuralism, post-structural feminism, ethnic and racial theory, psychoanalytical approaches and others, all gathered momentum in the decades from the 1960s onwards, and have deeply influenced some leadership approaches, especially in critical leadership studies (Grint, 2011; Wilson, 2016). I provide a brief review of the contributions of this literature in the *Critical Leadership Studies* section, and I explain how the Chinese approach I advocate resonates with, but also profoundly differs from existing critical leadership approaches. In the rest of Part II I focus on what is distinctive in the tradition of leadership studies as an offshoot of a Western philosophical tradition, in order to establish a discernible lineage in leadership theories which I also discuss in Part III and the conclusion of this thesis in section *Findings and discussions*.

Entitative Categorisation of Reality and the Environment It Produces For Thought

Jullien (2002) suggests that with a language that prioritises naming the identifiable forms, Western thought is attentive to independent, distinct and visible beings. An entitative categorisation of reality thus comprises the traditional Western conception of reality as constituted by separated beings. The understanding of an entity is heavily grounded in the study of physical objects in the Western tradition and follows Aristotle's laws of physics. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle (1994) proposed three laws as the laws of philosophy: the laws of identity, noncontradiction and excluded middle. The first two are the laws of physics; these laws suggest that a physical object can only have one unique identity, either existing or not existing and cannot simultaneously be both. The law of excluded middle is a law of logic that is based on the assumption that the two laws of physics are true. This law proposes that a statement can be either true or false, without a third alternative. Categorising reality through an entity-based perspective produces an understanding where leadership is made up of separate human agents who are independent or interdependent entities, with each obtaining a unique identity.

Conceiving reality on the basis of being has made the Western tradition highly attentive towards identifiable aspects of the sensory world and has also produced a focus on causal relationships that are centred on the human agent. Aristotle (1994) theorised change as caused directly by an identifiable being, which often translates into the conception of the human as the active subject in causal relationships. The Western privileging of the human and the conception of the human as the cause of change are important cultural biases for engaging reality that influences the directions and focuses in studying leadership.

Self-Concept and Its Influences on Leadership Thinking

Centring on the human, leadership scholarship in the Western tradition is largely focused on aspects of being human such as traits, attributes, behaviour, mindset, skillset, meaning, discourse, relationality and working activities. One important manifestation of privileging the human in Western thinking is that it brought the concept of the ‘self’ to leadership studies. Conceiving of the human as the cause of leadership, the concept of the self thus came to play an essential role in forming ontological understandings of leadership. This section provides examples of two primary ways that the self is understood, which influenced the manifestation of leadership thinking in the Western tradition. They are essentialist and social-constructionist understandings of the self.

Essentialist Self. An essentialist self is a traditional conception of humans as each having an independent and universal essence, rendering us being and acting in certain ways (Bass & Bass, 2008; Grint, 1997). Under an essentialist understanding of the self, leadership is often understood as the property of the individual leader, leadership is the sum of individual agents, and the leadership process is a process of interpersonal exchanges amongst agents, often between the leader and follower parties (Grint, 1997; Hosking, 1988; Yukl, 2010).

Social-Constructionist Self. Social constructionism conceives of the self through meaning and understands meaning as socially constructed. The self, from this perspective, is inherently relational; it emerges and is thus constantly changing in social interactions (Clarke, 2018; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006). According to Carsten et al. (2010), “The social

construction perspective posits that individuals create and interpret reality as they interact with their environments” (p. 545). As a consequence, social constructionists believe that leadership is not a matter of the individual leader’s identity, attribute or behaviour, but is associated with a much more complex social process. Social-constructionist scholars tend to understand leadership as not having an inherent *essence*, its existence is not seen as inevitable, and it is considered to have no deterministic nature (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Weick et al. (2005) believe that leadership is a product of the complex process of *sensemaking* in the organisation. They propose that *sensemaking* “unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances” (p. 409). The organisation is understood as a process of organizing and reorganising meaning through *sensemaking*; leadership is thus understood as a form of organizing.

Despite these differences, by conceiving leadership as caused directly by human action, the concept of the self is the foundation of leadership’s ontology in Western thinking.

Leadership Ontology

Based on Jullien’s work, this research understands that the Western tradition approaches reality through an ontology-epistemology paradigm. Categorising the sensory world on the basis of being, the ancient Greeks studied ontology to distinguish a being’s existence (Jullien, 2002). In leadership scholarship, I argue that an ontological position decides what aspect of leadership is

important for its investigation, underpinned by deciding on the fundamental makeup of the leadership reality and its unit(s) of analysis. These components produce an environment that influences the emergence and development of thoughts within it. A myriad of thoughts can emerge within an ontological position, with innovations on an epistemological level, but those innovations are simultaneously nurtured and limited by their ontological conception of leadership.

The following sections discuss several influential ontological approaches to leadership that emerged from the essentialist and social constructionist understandings of the self.

Leadership Thoughts under an Entitative Ontology

An entitative ontology is the foundation of most leadership approaches (Grint, 2011). Drath et al. (2008) recognize a flood of leadership theories that emerge throughout the twentieth century, which, despite their diversity, all share an entitative conception of leadership. According to Drath et al., an entitative ontological position “is an expression of commitment to the entities that are essential and indispensable to leadership and about which any theory of leadership must therefore speak” (p. 635). Jullien recognizes that Western scholarship is traditionally a scholarship of ‘being’ and suggests that the entire system of producing knowledge is grounded in a conception of reality rooted in separate and independent entities (Jullien, 1995). An entitative ontological approach to leadership inherent in this traditional conception of reality includes the ways it understands and studies agency and process.

Epistemological Innovation of Entitative based Theories

Mainstream leadership theories have emerged, modified and developed within an entitative ontology, but consistently assume an essentialist self as an inherently independent and separate entity and that leadership comprises interactions amongst individual agents. Conceiving the individual leader as the basis for studying leadership, understanding leadership thus becomes concerned to epistemologically distinguish which aspect of an individual can directly cause leadership. Efforts to answer this question are the source of a flood of mainstream leadership theories (Grint, 1997; Yukl, 2010). Here, I provide examples of the epistemological innovations that have emerged from within this ontological framework.

Carlyle (1841) seemed to think that an individual's inherent traits make him a leader. Carlyle traced through European history and acquired the impression that history is nothing but the biographies of “great men.” Grounded in an essentialist understanding of the self, the theory is based on the assumption that every great leader is born with certain traits that enable them to lead. Carlyle’s work identifies the traits that these men possessed and displayed and defines leadership based on what he claims are the identifiable features of a successful leader. The leaders Carlyle studied are exclusively men, and the traits he identified are later recognised as exclusively masculine traits. He proposes that the job of human society is to identify individuals who were born leaders and put them in authoritative positions to produce effective leadership.

Later, a behavioural perspective proposed that what makes a leader is their behaviour. This theory suggests that successful leaders share behaviour patterns that can be learned (Avolio,

2005; Day et al., 2014). Behavioural approaches assume a direct causality between the leader's behaviour and the followers' action and understand leadership as a behavioural formula that an individual who obtains authoritative positions could imitate to cause desired leadership outcomes (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Dotlich, 2003; Porter et al., 1977). Situational/contingency theories then developed from a behavioural perspective but still conceived leader behaviour as the direct causer of leadership. One such theory suggests that competency and performance readiness of the followers or other contextual factors influence the leader behaviour the organisation require; it proposes that leader must select the appropriate behaviour in relation to the situation he is presented (Geir & Lars, 2018; House & Aditya, 1997).

A highly influential stream of research in mainstream, entitative conceptions of leadership in recent decades has been the focus on leaders who are seen as charismatic, transformational and authentic. Charismatic leadership theory describes a leader who can arouse "followers' own needs for achievement, affiliation, and power" (Conger & Kanungo, 1998, p. 16) through commitment and embodiment of emotionally appealing visions, beliefs and ideals. The theory conceives the follower's perception as the basis for their following behaviour; the theory understands leadership as caused by the leader's charisma (Klein & House, 1995; Shamir et al., 2018). Similarly, transformational leaders are said to empower followers to become leaders and do so by responding to the follower's needs and "by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 3). In transformational leadership theory, the followers' self-perception and identity are also to be modified by the leader (Grint, 2011; Hogan & Judge, 2013; Naresh et al., 2012). Authentic

leadership scholars propose that the leader's authenticity towards the followers could produce followers' trust, engagement, commitment, loyalty and productivity and that this is what produces leadership (Cotter-Lockard, 2018; Kinnunen et al., 2016; Ladkin & Spiller, 2013; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Authenticity, in this case, refers to the leader's openness and willingness to share information about him or herself, including values, beliefs, as well as competency, strengths and weaknesses. The success of authentic leadership is thus said to lie in the individual leader's self-knowledge, self-awareness, and internalization of certain moral perspectives.

The examples above demonstrate that conceiving leadership through an essentialist self can still allow diverse ways of thinking about leadership to emerge. However, based on Jullien's work, this research also recognises that the same understanding of the self also functions to limit leadership theories from thinking about leadership from outside of their given ontological framework. This is especially so as an entitative ontological approach to leadership frames thoughts with a 'tripod' structure of investigating leadership through the components of leader, follower and common goal, as discussed next.

Structure for Studying Leadership in an Entitative Ontological Environment

Drath et al. (2008) argue that leadership is often approached under three fundamental components within the entitative categorisation of reality: leaders, followers, and their common goal (also known as the entitative tripod). These three components frame the way leadership is investigated; hence the emergence and development of leadership theories and knowledge under

the entitative categorisation of reality are products of the different interplays between the three components and/or different points of interest within one of the tripod elements, such as leader traits vs leader behaviour, as examined above. Most mainstream leadership theories are produced from within this way of categorising reality. Within the entitative tripod, leadership is thus commonly understood as the process of one individual influencing a group to achieve a common goal (Antonakis & Day, 2018; Bass & Bass, 2008; Drath et al., 2008; Northouse, 2016; Rost, 1993).

The Leader Component. Mainstream leadership studies prioritise the leader component and are thus characterised by leader centrism. Alvesson (2011) recognises that “Most studies of leadership focus on how a person identified as a leader is behaving or interacting with a group of subordinates and/or broadly is ‘managing’ the organisation” (p. 154). Inherent to a leader centric tendency, mainstream leadership scholarship considers the individual leader as the cause of leadership and that leadership is conceived as what the leader does (Bass & Bass, 2008; Grint, 1997; Yukl, 2010).

The Follower Component. The follower is another component in studying leadership within an entitative reality. Leader-centred theories tend to conceive followers as empty vessels filled by the leader’s injection of meaning (Yukl, 2010). In these theories, followers are approached as a bundle, with their contribution at times completely ignored, and their activities often conceived as responses and reactions to the leader, who is the dominant agent or the causer of leadership (Grint, 2011). Even though an outcome is coproduced by every member of the organisation, the

individual leader takes all the credit and is understood as the cause of the followers' behaviours as well as the outcome (Bass & Bass, 2008; Yukl, 2010).

The common goal. The common goal between the leader and the followers is another component in entitative conceptions of leadership. A goal is measurable and intimately connected with immediate profit. The goal is a predetermined ideal that functions as the basis for evaluating employees' effectiveness. Leadership's function is to bridge the gap between the ideal and the outcome in organisational life (Yukl, 2010). In most leader-centric approaches, the individual leader is the dominant agent who influences different aspects of the followers to increase the followers' productivity and make them produce the ideal outcome.

As the above analysis demonstrates, when investigating leadership in an entitative conception of reality, a myriad of leadership thoughts emerge through interplays amongst the three components or varying ways of conceiving a given element. This conception of reality functions as a lens that both enables and limits thinking. Importantly, this entitistic orientation is the case for both leader-centric theories as well as plural forms of leadership that intend to move away from leader-centric thinking, to which I now turn.

Entitative Thinking in Plural Forms of Leadership

Plural leadership thinking arises with the postheroic leadership movement, which intends to shift the focus of leadership thinking from the individual leader to what a group could achieve together (Etcher, 1997; Fletcher, 2004). Despite their collectively based focus, these plural understandings of leadership still conceive leadership entitatively. In this section, I demonstrate

how the entitative framework influence group-oriented thinking by using three popular plural forms of leadership: collective leadership, Shared leadership and distributed leadership as examples.

Collective leadership theory is intimately associated with Denis et al. (2012), focusing on the group of leaders at the top of the organisational hierarchy. Instead of an individual leader, this approach recognises a leadership group as the direct cause of leadership. This theory understands the emergence of leadership “as a coalitional phenomenon both throughout the organisation and among leaders at the top” (Denis et al., 2010, p. 75). Collective leadership theory thus maintains an entitativistic orientation; it focuses on the leader component of the entitative tripod. This theory modifies the leader component from an individual to a group. Even though the leadership group is understood as more than the sum of the individuals involved, the group function in the same way as the leader component in the entitative tripod, as it interacts with the follower unit and the common goal.

Also focusing on the group achievements, Shared leadership studies the informal leadership within a team setting and conceives leadership as a multidirectional, discursive and relational process of sensemaking amongst all team members (Bergman et al., 2012; Clarke, 2018; Pearce et al., 2010; Wood & Dibben, 2015). Grounded within an entitative conception of reality, Shared leadership thus also understands leadership in terms of traits, skills and behaviour. The theory suggests that it is impossible for one individual leader to enact every aspect of being a leader; as such, leadership can be shared by multiple individuals. Because the different aspects of being a

leader are shared by multiple individuals, shared leadership believes that decision-making and responsibility are to be shared amongst team members. Shared leadership especially recognises the value of the hierarchical structure in the organisation; its purpose is not to one-sidedly issue commands but to facilitate the leadership process. Marichal et al. (2018) suggest that “Vertical leaders are expected to create empowering conditions for teams, fostering shared leadership instead of controlling and commanding them directly” (p. 54). In shared leadership, an informal leader is temporarily identified as one who exhibits a particular trait or behaviour that embodies leadership. The informal leader changes when their specific leadership quality no longer produces a needed effect for producing a collective outcome. Shared leadership “Corresponds primarily to work teams where decision making is shared among members whose actions alternate and who mutually influence one another” (Fox & Comeau-Vallée, 2020, p. 571). This perspective thus still exhibits an entitative conception of reality as leadership remains studied through the interplay amongst the components of leader, follower and common goal.

Distributed leadership is often used interchangeably with shared leadership. While shared leadership is understood as a result of collaboration, a distributed approach perceives leadership as a product of the social system that includes multiple teams and deals with a number of leadership decisions simultaneously (Clarke, 2018). In this model, leadership is often distributed based on an individual’s competency in relation to tasks, goals, and/or priorities. Because it understands leadership as competency-based and task-oriented, distributed leadership generally changes informal leaders less frequently than in Shared leadership. Like the other plural forms of leadership, distributed leadership also conceives leadership on the basis of leader, follower and

common goal. In this form of leadership, both the leader and follower are divided on the basis of task and competency, and leadership remains to be goal-oriented human activities.

Despite their uniqueness, an entitistic orientation remains embedded within the three plural forms of leadership discussed above, each of which still locates leadership in entities such as leaders, followers or their common goals. The models are goal-oriented and outcome-based in terms of what they see good leadership as enabling, and the understanding of a collective is divided into leader-and-follower groupings. Collective leadership conceives of a leader group. Shared leadership proposes that ideal leader traits, attributes, skills and behaviours can be shared amongst multiple individuals, rather than one leader figure. And distributed leadership divides the leader role in relation to a range of tasks and not a general overall influence. Pluralistic leadership thought shifts the focus of leadership studies from an individual leader to the accomplishment of the collective and how this can be achieved. Even though these plural forms of leadership contrast themselves from the individual based leadership thinking by distributing what they understand as leadership, their innovations remain within an entitative conception of reality.

To summarise, an entitative conception of reality provides a lens that filters what can be conceived as constituting the phenomenon of leadership. The essentialist self and the three components for studying leadership make certain types of thinking available while also limiting other leadership thought. Within the environment produced by these aspects of an entitative reality, most leadership theories conceive leadership as the property of the individual leader. The

leadership process is understood through the interplay amongst the leader, follower, and goal components. Emerging from within the same entitative environment, pluralistic forms of leadership modify the understanding of the leader component but nonetheless persist in thinking about leadership in entitative terms. An entitative conception of reality has nurtured a myriad of leadership theories, but it simultaneously limits the possibility for thoughts to emerge from outside of the essentialist self and the entitative tripod. However, every component of the entitative tripod has received criticism from critical scholars for their inadequacy to understand leadership.

Criticism Towards an Entitative Approach to Leadership

The continuing development of leadership thinking from within an entitative framework has produced diverse leadership theories and also their criticisms. Every component in the entitative conception of leadership has encountered criticism as well as the entitative conception of leadership itself. The critiques are as vast and diverse as the leadership theories; the following provides examples of some of the key critiques for mainstream leadership thought.

The Leader Component. Meindl et al. (1985) find that mainstream scholarship neglects many potentially negative impacts of leaders/leadership by seeing them/it in an exclusively positive light and portraying them/it as heroic individuals who could singlehandedly determine the fate of an organisation. The mainstream romanticism towards leadership results in the privileging of the leader role in organisational life. Leadership is typically perceived as being about doing good and making a difference, but being a leader's actual meaning and responsibility remain

ambiguous (Blom & Alvesson, 2015; Grint, 1997; Meindl & Shamir, 2007; Wilson, 2016). Blom and Alvesson (2015) suggest that the lack of a clear definition unconditionally privileges the hegemonic superiority of the leader. This allows positive organisational outcomes to be attributed to leaders while having no clear job description to be held accountable for negative results.

The Follower Component. Many critical scholars have criticised the mainstream projection of the follower as passive recipients and/or empty vessels in a leadership process. Particularly Meindl et al. (1985) proposed that the romanticism of the leader undermines the contributions and impacts of the followers in the leadership process and critiques leader centric thinking for its exaggeration of the significance of the leader, both positively and negatively. Because followers decide whom to follow, Meindl et al. propose that they are the creators or deciders of the leader and not mere subordinates of a hierarchical position. They suggest that a leader is neither a position nor a self-proclaimed role; instead, it arises through being honoured by followers. Meindl et al. find that many leaders are ordinary people who perform tasks without thinking of themselves as demonstrating leadership behaviour or associating themselves as leaders.

Follower centric studies examine followers' perceptions, influence, identity and sensemaking in the leadership process and suggest that the effectiveness of leadership and the legitimacy of a leader are heavily influenced by follower perceptions, choices and decisions (Bligh, 2011; Blom & Alvesson, 2014; Meindl & Shamir, 2007). Followercentrism recognises the value of leading; however, this perspective understands "leader emergence as generated in the cognitive,

attributional, and social identity processes of followers” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 86) and not the leading behaviour of the leader. Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) propose that the presence of leadership is often identified through the followers’ responses to an individual leader and not the behaviour of the leader per se: “individuals attempting to be leaders are only legitimized in the responses and reception of those willing to follow them” (p. 96). As such, the behaviour of following is said to be more detectable than leading behaviour and the more dominant indicator of the presence of leadership. As a consequence, the follower, not the leader, is the defining factor of leadership. Furthermore, follower-centrism suggests that followers’ choices change over time and significantly impact the leader and effectiveness of leadership. As such, leadership is here conceived as the property of followers and not the leader (Meindl & Shamir, 2007).

The Common Goal. The common goal is the least discussed component of the entitative tripod (Drath et al., 2008). In the tripod relationship, the goal represents the predetermined ideal of an organisation that leadership functions to produce in practice. Chia and Holt (2009) propose that it is a common practice for Western organisations to function on predetermined goals and that every aspect of organisational life, including leadership, are understood primarily in relation to the goal and much less so in relation to the spontaneous process of practice and interactions that produce an outcome. The goal functions as an ideal that discriminates outcomes before they are even produced. Additionally, Chia and Holt (2009) suggest that ideal is often created with limited knowledge about the sensory world, is theorised only based on what is already known; the predetermined goal in a business organisation is often understood in relation to capital,

material and resources. Functioning based on a predetermined goal reduces the world and the outcome of organisation life into identifiable resources and materials.

Drath et al. (2008) recognise that conceiving organisational life in relation to the predetermined goal and its attainment reduces the outcome of leadership to measurable products and profits. It neglects the complex relational process of leadership occurring on a daily basis that influences the collective's experiences and meanings. In other words, leadership is an emergent, relational, dynamic process, and not the instrument that bridges a predetermined organisational goal and the outcome produced in practice.

The Concept of Leadership. The concept of leadership itself is also criticised for being romanticised by mainstream scholarship (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Collinson et al., 2018; Ford et al., 2008). Collinson et al. (2018) suggest that while Meindl et al. (1985) recognised the potential problems of the heroic halo around a leader, they failed to realise that this halo is also around the leadership concept. However, in both cases, “salvation is promised either by an individual hero or a collective hero in this world – but it is still a hero” (Collinson et al., 2018, p. 1642). Collinson et al. recognise that many theories glorify leadership and project it as art, a tendency that produces a perception of leadership as extraordinary, larger-than-life and separate from other activities that occur in organisational life. Like the effect of romanticising the leader, the romanticism towards leadership attributes all organisational outcomes (both positive and negative) exclusively to leadership, while ignoring the influence of other forms of organising. The romanticism towards the leadership phenomenon distorts the way it is approached and

investigated. Collinson et al. (2018) urge the field to deromanticise leadership by critically studying how leadership is and has been romanticised. By learning to understand the production of “seductive image of the hero and its various interrelationships with the continued allure of romanticism in leadership studies” (p. 1642), Collinson et al. suggest that leadership scholarship could enter a post-romantic phase that helps the concept to be related to and approached more realistically, not as the only cause for an organisational outcome but one of many forms of organising activities that influence organisational life. This de-romanticism, both of the individual leader and the leadership phenomenon, moves leadership thought away from the tendency of associating the leader and leadership exclusively with the moments of rupture and towards the more ordinary and gradual processes of organising that occur on a day-to-day basis.

Many criticisms of the entitative conception of leadership are enduring and recurring issues. The persistence of these issues has contributed to attempts to move away from an entitative ontology, seeking ways of understanding leadership from outside its limitations, hence the emergence of alternative ontological positions.

The Social Construction of Leadership

Although both manifestations of the Western tradition, the separation between social constructionists and entitative thinkers starts from their differing understandings of the self (Bohl, 2019; Crevani, 2018; Ford et al., 2008; Grint, 2005). Conceiving a self as inherently relational, social constructionists approach organisational meaning as co-produced by a collective and as more than the sum of individuals’ meaning-making (Drath et al., 2008;

Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Prioritising the co-produced meaning, social-constructionists focus more on the meaning-making process over individual agents. Social constructionist thought has been the foundation for several key alternative ontological approaches to an entitative conception of leadership.

This section describes several key features of the social constructionist approach to leadership, and then I consider several important social constructionist critiques of the entitative conception of leadership. Lastly, I identify ontological approaches that emerged from social constructionist approaches to leadership and discuss the environment they produce for thinking about leadership.

Notable Features of Social Constructionism

Co-produced Meaning and Sensemaking. Social constructionist approaches to leadership tend to focus more on the meaning co-produced in the leadership process than individual agents' attributes or behaviour (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Grint, 2005). Leadership is often conceived as a relational process of sensemaking that occurs spontaneously and discursively in organisational life. "Sensemaking refers to the complex, socio-psychological processes through which organisational actors interpret organisational phenomena and thus socially construct or enact their 'realities'" (Clarke, 2018, p. 34). Weick (1995, 2012) and Weick et al. (2005) study sensemaking in organisations extensively and propose that sensemaking is the central activity in which the ongoing process of organising evolves. Sensemaking focuses on the process of producing meaning and "unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the

social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Sensemaking occurs as actors produce retrospective causal maps influenced by their own past experiences while continuously interacting with their environments and with each other.

Situational-based Approach to Leadership. Social constructionists tend to reject the essentialist understanding of truth often embedded in the mainstream understanding of leadership, and instead, they interpret leadership situationally (Crevani, 2018; Kelly, 2014; Wilson, 2016). Grint (2001) suggests that “what counts as a ‘situation’ and what counts as the ‘appropriate’ way of leading in that situation are interpretive and contestable issues, not issues that can be decided by objective criteria” (p. 3). Social-constructionist scholars believe that multiple conflicting truth claims could simultaneously be present in an organisation in any given situation. Kelly (2014) proposes that as a word, leadership is an empty signifier that is not itself definable; it requires other words such as joining it with military, organisation, public, or contrasting it with management to contextualise and localise it so as to produce a specific meaning to the word leadership. Similarly, Wilson et al. (2018) also suggest that the meaning of leadership varies based on the primary tasks required for different roles, such as supervisory management, human resource management, entrepreneurship, organisational strategy and governance. Wilson’s (2016) historical analysis also points out that leadership discourse has changed throughout European history in relation to the dominant narrative, political agendas and priorities of the time

Social constructionists thus tend to identify how contextual and/or situational factors shape what is seen to constitute leadership

Leadership as a discursive process. Social constructionists also understand the leadership process as emerging discursively from the day-to-day communications. It finds that different discourses emerge through the spontaneous and interactional process of communication, negotiation and renegotiation, and that leadership also emerges through the ongoing production of discourses on a day-to-day basis (Fairhurst, 2007, 2008). The primary interest of the discursive approach is to study the social process in everyday working lives, and its key questions include “How a designated leader enacts his or her role; how identities relevant to the leadership process are constructed in interaction; and what influence and organizing processes exist in interaction” (Larsson, 2017, p. 174).

Focusing on the process that produces the everyday discourse of leadership, discursive leadership research privileges empirical findings over theoretical reasoning (Fairhurst, 2008). A discursive approach separates the leader from leadership and the leader position; its findings often suggest that the hierarchical position can only hold logistical power and that leadership is produced in the communicative process and not by the leader. In a discursive process, pairs such as leader/follower, individual/collective, leading/following and leadership/followership are constantly evolving through complex and spontaneous interplays between consent/dissent and control/resistance; they are not fixed entities in a binary relationship (Collinson, 2011; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Grint, 2005). Instead of approaching leadership dualistically, Collinson (2005)

takes a dialectic approach to study the tension between the seemingly opposite parts, to explore the complex discursive process of interaction between them. Collinson suggests that dialectical thinking emerges from the critique of dualism; it focuses on the relation and tension between opposing but interdependent forces and does not conceive them as inherently separated entities.

Social constructionist approaches to leadership prioritise the meaning-making process in a leadership process over the individual agents and understand leadership as co-produced meaning, not the property of an individual agent (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Ford et al., 2008; Grint, 2011). Functioning as a lens, a social constructionist approach nurtures the thoughts that prioritise shared meanings and outcomes and simultaneously produces an unwelcoming environment for the further development of entitative-based approaches to leadership. Social constructionism has produced alternative ontological approaches to leadership from those of an entitative perspective.

Relational Ontology and DAC (Direction, Alignment, and Commitment)

Grounded in social-constructionist thinking, Drath et al. (2008) study leadership in a non-entitative reality. Drath et al. intend to move away from the entitative tripod by replacing the basic components for studying leadership, the leader, followers, and common goal, with relationally-based terms of direction, alignment, and commitment (DAC).

Drath et al. (2008) understand leadership as inherently relational and recognise that most leadership studies are rooted in the entitative tripod (leader, follower, and goal). From a relational ontological perspective, they suggest that “The meaning of the terms leader, follower, and shared goals is not fixed; the meaning is continuously being framed and reframed from

context to context and from one time to another” (p. 640). Drath et al. propose that these three components are not inherently important to leadership scholarship and instead are manifestations of the entitative conception of leadership.

Taking a relational position, Drath et al. understand the meanings that are co-produced by a collective are more than the sum of individual meanings, that the knowledge and activities a collective obtains are not measurable on an individual basis, and that relationality is ever-present in an organisation such that “Individuals do not only enter into relationships, but are also brought into being by those relationships” (p. 641). Based on this understanding, Drath et al. (2008) propose to replace the entitative tripod and study leadership using the relationally-based terms of DAC. Drath et al. suggest that:

Adopting such an ontology would mean that talk of leadership would no longer necessarily involve talk of leaders and followers and their shared goals, but would necessarily involve talk of direction, alignment, and commitment. Likewise, to practice leadership would no longer necessarily involve leaders, followers, and their shared goals but would necessarily involve the production of direction, alignment, and commitment (which may or may not involve leaders and followers). (p. 636)

In the DAC framework, leadership is not the result of direct influence by agents but a product of relationality. Direction emerges within an organisation through shared vision amongst members. Alignment refers to the unity in the working activities amongst organisational members and results from collaboration and coordination. Commitment is to do with the collective’s

motivation, which is also a relational product and is embodied in the organisation's culture. A culture comprises basic assumptions that the group shares. This can include social causes, organisational success and familial love that inspires "the willingness of individual members to subsume their own efforts and benefits within the collective effort and benefit" (p. 647). Drath et al. (2008) propose that the interaction of beliefs and practices at the collective level produces commitment and is the source of leadership.

The DAC approach is an attempt to fundamentally change the categorisation of reality in which leadership is investigated. Using DAC as the ontological language allows leadership to be investigated as a shared sensemaking process, beyond the interpersonal exchanges between or amongst separate entitative parties, and fundamentally alters the conception of leadership from *having* a process to *being* processually-based.

Within the wider environment produced by the Western tradition, the three fundamental components of *direction*, *alignment*, and *commitment* produce an environment at an ontological level for thinking about leadership. This environment nurtures the emergence of relationally-based thinking which is hostile towards entitative thoughts. Theories produced through the interplays amongst the leader, follower and common goal will not be considered as valid theories if they are studied within the DAC framework because they cannot sufficiently address relational-based questions. This demonstrates that the fundamental components for studying leadership provide the foundation for studying leadership and influences how leadership can and cannot be thought.

The DAC model is an important work that attempts to modify the ontological nature of leadership. It has influenced the development of alternative approaches to leadership and is frequently cited by processual and practice-based scholars. However, it is not without shortcomings; Crevani and Endrissat (2016) suggest that the DAC model is preoccupied with moving away from the entitative conception of leadership, especially decentring itself from the individual leader and fails “to fully explore the potential to decentralize leadership to ‘the activity of doing work’” (p. 27). Furthermore, the DAC model is also criticised from a processual ontological position for its reliance on human intentionality. When leadership is conceived processually, as inherently a recurring process of becoming, Crevani (2018) suggests that it does not require shared beliefs, alignment in activities or a collective commitment to producing direction and outcome. Based on Crevani’s critique, the entire categorisation of reality created by DAC is inadequate for obtaining a holistic understanding of leadership, just like its entitative tripod counterpart of leader, follower, and common goal.

A Processual Categorisation of Reality

Another categorisation of reality for studying leadership is produced by Crevani’s work. Like Drath et al., Crevani (2018) also attempts to move away from an entitative conception of reality and produces another categorisation of reality to facilitate the study of leadership. She recognises an entitative tendency in the study of leadership process and that most studies on process still project agents as “closed and stable entities that do not change in the interaction in which they participate—processes thus means movements of stable entities” (p. 4). Even in a turn from individualistic to collective-based leadership, new prototypes like collective, shared, and

distributed leadership merely categorise groups and teams as the basis for producing leadership and do not directly improve our understanding of process. Leadership is inherently processual, and it does not rely on the intentionality of the human agents to produce that process. Aligned with Drath et al.'s (2008) proposition for a language change, Crevani (2018) and Crevani et al. (2010) also believe that an ontological shift is required to understand the leadership phenomenon.

To conceive leadership processually, Crevani (2018) employs process ontology. Process ontology conceives being on the basis of motion and not entitative form. It is developed from the work of Alfred North Whitehead (1929), who proposed that what is traditionally perceived by Western scholarship as an entity, or what Aristotle considered as substance, is temporal in nature. Whitehead believed that “the actual world is a process, and that process is the becoming of actual entities” (pp. 30–31). Prior to Crevani’s work, Nayak and Chia (2011) also took a process-ontological perspective to study organisational change. They propose that change is prior to an organisation and that individuals within the organisation have no concrete identities; they “are not naturally autonomous units but instead are relatively stabilized nodes in a dynamic and evolving network of relations” (p. 289). Rooted in process ontology, Crevani (2018) intends to “redefine leadership in terms of processes and practices organized by people in interaction, and study that interaction without becoming preoccupied with what formal leaders do and think” (p. 78). To facilitate a processual approach to leadership, Crevani frames her study as leadership work. She explains that work focuses on the “ordinary, repeated, not necessarily intentional,

spatiotemporal conversational achievements” (p. 19). It is through this spontaneous and complex process of interactions occurring in the mundane activities of organising that leadership emerges.

Crevani’s work is also heavily influenced by the work of the British social scientist and geographer Doreen Massey, especially for her understanding of space. Massey (2005) understands a geographical space not as a passive object but as the product of interplay between the material space and social construction. Massey proposes that space is political because the awareness of space does not exist prior to one’s identification with it. Space is therefore constantly being reconstructed in relation to the interaction between the material space and people, communities, organisations, and countries’ associations with space.

Based on Massey’s work, the unit of analysis in Crevani’s (2018) approach to leadership is the sociomaterial space in the workplace that all individual agents are a part of, which spontaneously generates meaning. Crevani proposes that a function of leadership is restructuring reality; she frames her study as the study of leadership work to indicate that her focus is on the interactional process repeatedly occurring in the leadership phenomenon that produces, negotiates and restructures the sociomaterial space. She suggests that the organisational space is inseparable from the people who influence it; it is sociomaterial and constantly being reconstructed in the spontaneous interactions in everyday organisational life. Crevani conceives leadership as a recurring interactional process of structuring and restructuring of sociomaterial space and thus offers an understanding that leadership is a process of becoming. This means that leadership’s motion is not produced by the intentionality of any agent but is a product of its processual nature.

A uniqueness of Crevani's processual approach is that it is awareness of the motion of leadership. She uses Massey's concept of trajectory to explain the process of change occurring in a sociomaterial space. A trajectory represents the story-so-far, in the continuous process of becoming. It indicates a motion produced across space/time by either or both human and nonhuman phenomena and is a product of interaction with other trajectories. Massey (2005) understands "space as the dimension of multiple trajectories, a simultaneity of stories-so-far. Space as the dimension of a multiplicity of durations" (p. 60). Based on this understanding, Crevani (2018) considers "the simultaneity and multiplicity of trajectories constitute space as trajectories develop in relation to one another" (p. 7). The direction enacted in leadership work is constantly changing through interactions, including unresolved conflicts, ambiguities and debates, in an "ongoing shaping of relational configurations (movement in the co-evolution of interrelated trajectories)" (p. 8). As the direction of leadership is produced and reproduced in the ongoing shaping of relational configurations in the organisation, it is also not directly associated with the intentionality of an individual. Crevani recognises that the space produced in the leadership process is in a process of ever restructuring itself through conflict, negotiation and interactions.

Crevani (2018) proposes that the ongoing motions of leadership work and the interplay between multiple trajectories function to produce and restructure a relational configuration; this configuration produces a distinct meaning within the sociomaterial space and is the primary focus for studying process in her work. Crevani (2018) understands relational configuration as being "made of stories-so-far that coevolve, becoming more or less temporarily anchored in

different kinds of positions” (p. 9). It is studied through positioning and issue. Positioning “is both a repertoire and a location related to that repertoire” (p. 9). It refers to where the selves are located in conversation in relation to the ongoing restructuring of the leadership process. Positioning influences the way a relational configuration develops. Issue is considered as a trajectory/story-so-far, it is a product of interpretation; it is what demands attention and is “an important aspect of how organizing is directed” (p. 9). An issue is a trajectory that interacts with other ongoing issues (or trajectories). New issues will also emerge, and it is through the constant interplay between different trajectories that the relational configuration in leadership work is constantly shaped and modified. Based on this understanding, a leadership direction is formed through the interplay between positioning, which provides temporary anchoring points for the relational configurations under development, and the issues that produce motion from the anchoring points. This suggests that the direction in the leadership process is not determined, nor can it be caused by any individual agent, but is an outcome of the ‘clearing for action’ that is available from within the particular organisational situation. Clearing is associated with space. Crevani uses this term to express that the activities in the leadership process are influenced by the sociomaterial space in the organisation, by what actions have become possible and constrained within the different relational configurations and the structure of the temporal space. Based on this understanding, the outcome of a leadership process is associated more with the possible actions that the sociomaterial space made available as well as unavailable, rather than directly correlated with action or agency (Crevani, 2018).

Making the sociomaterial space the unit of analysis creates a unique environment for certain types of leadership thinking to emerge while minimizing others. Leadership is understood as produced by the sociomaterial space that is co-constructed by the spontaneous interactions amongst every aspect of the space, both human and nonhuman (Crevani, 2018). Conceiving sociomaterial space as the basis for studying leadership, Crevani proposes that meaning is inseparable from the environment. This suggests that neither individual behaviour nor relationality are the determining factors for producing leadership.

Perceiving leadership through a processual lens, the entitative approaches which, as discussed earlier, have dominated Western thinking, would be far less likely to have emerged, much less to have secured the hold they have over the mainstream of leadership studies. Hence yet again, we see that fundamental assumptions scholars make about the nature of reality and the nature of the self has a profound effect in shaping how leadership can be sought of. In what follows, I now turn to explore another recent alternative to the entitative tradition, that of leadership-as-practice.

Leadership-as-practice

Leadership-as-practice makes practice, not the practitioner, the basic unit of analysis (Raelin, 2011). Practice, as the unit of analysis, refers to human activities that produce a collective outcome. It is understood “as routine bodily activities made possible by the active contribution of an array of material resources” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 4). The practice approach conceives the everyday mundane activities occurring in the leadership process as the site for meaning-production and understands leadership as emergent in the complex working activities that

produce the day-to-day organisational outcomes. The practice perspective also inherits a Western habitual privileging of meaning and studies leadership to extract meaning from the day-to-day practice. Categorising reality through practice, human intentionality, experiences, beliefs and identities are all in a process of change and modification and are therefore not the basis for studying leadership. According to Raelin (2016a), the agency in the leadership process begins at the

dialogical exchange among those committed to a practice; in particular, that the parties display an interest in listening to one another, in reflecting upon perspectives different from their own, and in entertaining the prospect of being changed by what they learn. (p. 137)

Agency in practice is not individually based but collaborative. It is understood as emerging through the relationality in the process of practice which goes to producing an outcome. In this process, Raelin (2016b) suggests that “participants (to the activity) constitute but are also constituted by the discursive and intersubjective practices of participants within a nexus of activity” (p. 6). An organisational outcome is also not produced based on the intentionality of any party, but through the collaborative agency that emerges out of practice. It is grounded in the routinised bodily activities amongst organisational members as the products of their continuing collaborative efforts of “meaning-making, identity-forming, and order-producing activities” (Raelin, 2011, p. 7).

With practice as the unit of analysis, leadership is conceived on the basis of the social reality produced in the process of mundane working activities that produce outcomes. According to

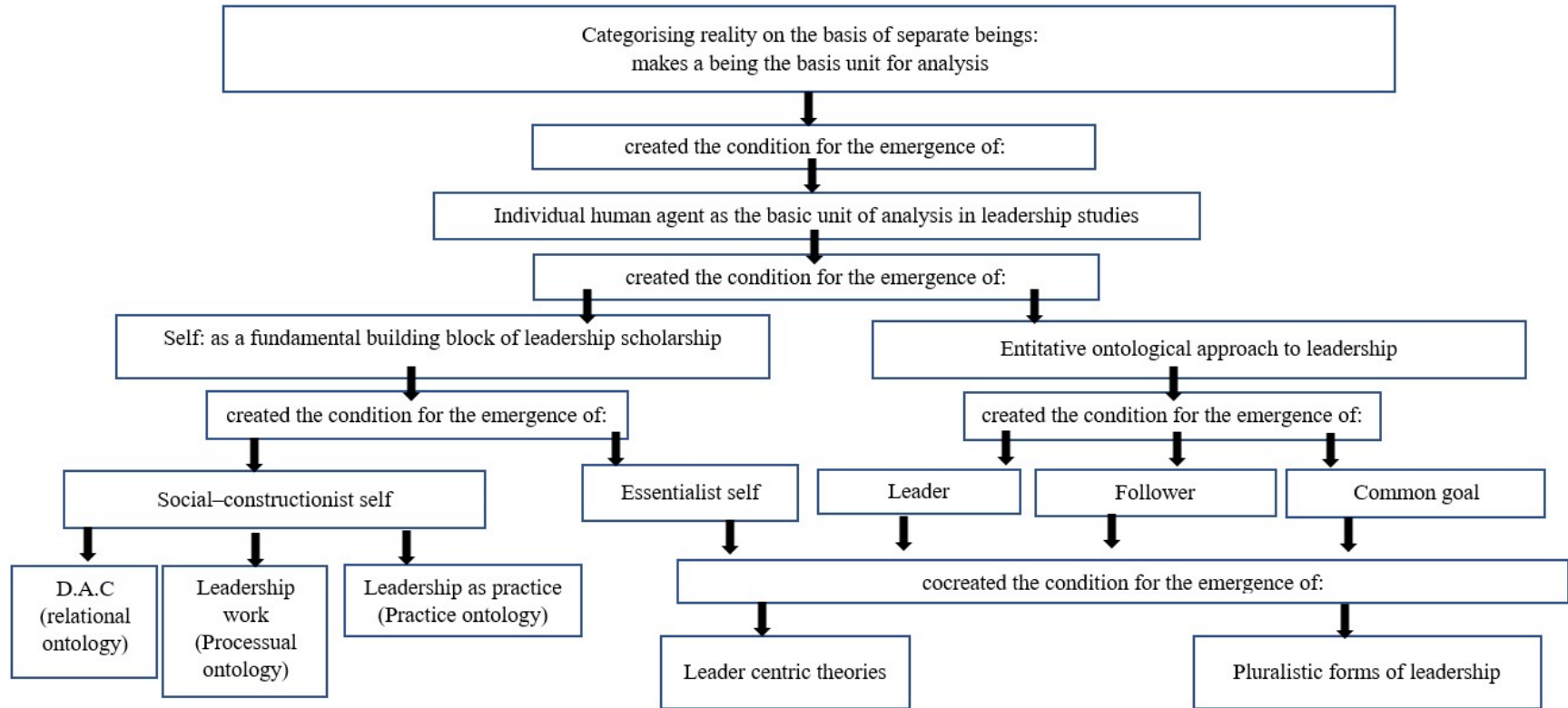
Raelin (2011), “A practice is a cooperative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome” (p. 196). The mundane practices that produce day-to-day outcomes are understood as the centre from which sensemaking processes emerge and evolve around. “Sensemaking and knowing are thus foregrounded, but they are located in the material and discursive activity, body, artefacts, habits and preoccupations that populate the life of organizational members” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 7). Aligned with Crevani’s (2018) processual approach, practice is understood as situated in the unique sociomaterial space that is coconstructed by participants in the process and, as a consequence, the outcome of practice is unique. Knowledge is also socially shared, produced and embodied within the organisational space and is only partially articulable in discourse. Unlike Crevani’s work which focuses on the relational configuration in the construction of the sociomaterial space, Leadership-as-practice prioritises the social reality which emerges in the mundane activities of producing outcomes. Raelin (2011) understands the source of leadership as “the negotiation of shared understanding among a group of interacting individuals” (p. 203). It is through the continuing evolution of the shared understanding, and not the intentionality or activities of any individual agent, that organisational practices spontaneously occur in day-to-day mundane working activities and collaborations.

A practice-based approach decides what aspect of leadership is most important for the phenomenon, and therefore influences how leadership can be sought of. Raelin’s practice approach conceives leadership through a collaborative agency and social reality that occurs in the day-to-day practice; both components resist dividing leadership into leader and followers.

This approach reveals the complexity and spontaneity in the production of everyday discourses that studying leader, follower, and common goal separately cannot inform. Thoughts are influenced by the environment it emerges; if leadership has only been sought of through a practice-based approach, most leadership theories would not have existed.

Thus far, this chapter has covered a lot of territory in terms of leadership thought. I have discussed how the privilege of 'being' in Western value system influences leadership thinking and the directions of its development. I have also discussed that within the wider Western tradition, each ontological positioning also influences thought by deciding the most important component(s) for studying leadership. I demonstrated that thoughts are inseparable from the environments they emerge; an environment, both on a Western cultural and ontological level, contain value systems and proprieties that influence how leadership can be approached, and what aspect of leadership that the thinkers should be attentive to. Each environment contains its own biases; it nurtures the emergence of certain types of leadership thinking while simultaneously discriminating against others. I have demonstrated that the mainstream leadership theories simply cannot be considered as valid theories under the value systems of DAC, processual, and practice-based ontological approaches to leadership. In other words, the validity of thought is not determined by the thought itself, but by the value system and priority of the wider environments in which it is situated. This environment can be produced by a way of conceiving reality from within a cultural thought and can also be the cultural tradition itself. To sum up, the argument that has shaped my analysis of this material, Figure 3 below shows how key foundational assumptions and positions flow through to shape the nature of what is thinkable.

Figure 3 Lineage of Western Thinking that Influences the Emergence and Development of Leadership Thinking



The Categorisations of Reality and Thought

Based on Jullien's work, this research understands thought as inseparable from the environment of its emergence. So far, Part II of this thesis has demonstrated that studied in the Western tradition; the ontological position decides the basic unit of analysis for investigating the leadership phenomenon. The basic unit of analysis functions both as the source for thoughts to spontaneously emerge on an epistemological level and also limits thinking beyond this source. A unit of analysis prioritises a certain aspect of leadership, and simultaneously others become less pertinent or disappear entirely from the analysis. The more a certain aspect of reality is made important, the less attentive the thinkers within the environment are towards other aspects of reality deemed less important. Each leadership theory mentioned in this study is a manifestation of what its ontological position conceives as important for the leadership phenomenon. Each ontological position makes certain aspects of leadership and certain types of knowledge available, while others are rendered unimportant or invisible; table 1 below provides a summary of these points (see Table 1).

Table 1*Categorisations of Reality in Leadership Studies*

	Ontology			
	Entitative	Relational	Processual	Practice
Focus/Unit of analysis	Individual agent	Relationships	<u>Sociomaterial space</u>	Practice
Knowledge made available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self, identity • individual attributes, behaviour, meaning, feelings • interpersonal exchanges between/amongst entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shared direction • alignment in work • collective commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trajectories that coproduce meaning • <u>sociomaterial space</u> • relational configuration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>collaboratory agency</u> • social reality produced in practice

In an ontology-epistemology paradigm that frames Western thinking, an ontology produces the environment to facilitate epistemological innovations. Table 1 demonstrates that leadership knowledge is produced in relation to the aspect of reality an ontological position focuses on, and that these are exclusive categories. A focus on sociomaterial space, for example, simply cannot produce individual-based knowledge, while knowledge produced when privileging relationships is insufficient for understanding leadership when the basis for studying it is conceived as practice.

Jullien's work also identifies another aspect of the Western tradition that frames leadership scholarship: the theory-and-practice partnership. Jullien (2002) proposes that Western tradition relies on the interplay between theory and practice to acquire prosperity in the sensory world. This is to say that the production of a theory, including its ontological-epistemological paradigm

and the types of knowledge that it considers relevant and valid, function to fulfil the purpose of a ‘theory’ in theory-and-practice partnership.

Bridging the Theory-and-Practice Gap: Leadership Development

The theory-and-practice partnership frames Western scholarship and divides its engagement of the sensory world into two separate processes of theorising and practice. Grounded in a conception of reality on the basis of being, Jullien (2002) recognises that the theory-and-practice partnership was created by the ancient Greeks to impose human ideals onto the sensory world. In this partnership, a theory is valuable for its function of informing practice, while practice has the potential to actualise the theory in the sensory world (Jullien, 1995, 2004b). It seems that a leadership theory requires an ideal to function in the theory-and-practice partnership. An ideal is a prototype, often to be reproduced in some ways; as such, identifying and describing the identifiable features have been a priority in leadership theories. Mainstream scholarship often describes individual attributes and behaviours, while collective-based leadership thoughts describe ideal ways of facilitating interactions and distributing responsibility and tasks. However, Crevani’s processual approach prioritises describing the trajectories that co-produce the sociomaterial space and has not proposed an ideal; as a consequence, it has not yet received much attention in leadership development. On the other hand, Leadership-as-practice also focuses on describing the social reality occurring in everyday practices, but because Raelin proposes an ideal of ‘leaderful practice’, developing Leadership-as-practice becomes possible. Raelin (2011) decided on an ideal organisation and a way of practice to be the basis of developing leadership. He proposes that leadership is not the same as practice because leadership

functions to produce pragmatic outcomes while practice “can be an intersubjective collaborative process that can reproduce and transform social realities” (p. 203). This understanding has resulted in the emergence of ‘leaderful practice’ and ‘leaderful organisations’ as the representation of Raelin’s democratic value system; both ideals have been utilised as the basis for many Leadership-as-practice development efforts.

Raelin (2020a) conceives of a ‘leaderful organisation’ as the representation of democratic leadership, and ‘leaderful practice’ as the basis for developing leadership from a practice perspective. Leaderful practice is a way of functioning within the organisation on a daily basis which Raelin considers as democratic. Raelin understands democracy as a system of governance in which power is deliberately lodged in people. However, he proposes that democracy is always in a fragile state due to hierarchical power structures and control in organisations; even within collective forms of leadership such as shared leadership and distributed leadership, democracy is often elusive and temporary. The leaderful practice is grounded in the cocreation of a community by every member’s free expression, spontaneous engagements and interactions. It is the “direct participation by involved parties through their own exploratory, creative, and communal discourses” (Raelin, 2011, p. 204). Every individual’s freedom to do so within an organisation is understood as leaderful practice. Grounded in Leadership-as-practice perspective, Raelin studies and develops leadership to facilitate leaderful practice and produce leaderful organisation (Raelin, 2011, 2020a; Salicru, 2020; Woods, 2016). This ideal proposed by the theory is the basis for engaging practice and conducting leadership development.

As two separated crafts, the values of theory and practice lie in the partnership roles they play for each other (Jullien, 1995). Theory and practice can form different types of partnerships. In a traditional theory-and-practice partnership, theorising is privileged; the theory functions to describe an intellectualised form by the human agent and practice acts to reproduce it in the sensory world. This relationship is also present in most mainstream leadership scholarship. However, other ways of engaging the sensory world also emerged out of this theory-and-practice partnership. Practice has also been used to inform and produce theory. For example, in Leadership-as-practice theory, Raelin (2011) promotes action research as the method or methodology for using practice to inform theory (Raelin, 2011, 2020b). Doing so is to produce the Leadership-as-practice theory to function within the framework of theory-and-practice partnership. The utilisation of the potential value of the theory in practice is done afterwards, separately. However, this research studies neither theory nor practice but, rather, the underlying framework through which the Western tradition engages life. Using practice as a method to produce theory remains about theory and not how Western tradition engages life and is not the interest of this research. In existing leadership studies, prosperity in organisational life is acquired through leadership development, which bridges the gap between theory and practice. Organisational prosperity, here, represents the purpose for approaching a situation, and its meaning depends on the ideal proposed by the theory.

Leadership development thought functions to bridge the theory-and-practice gap; developmental theories attach themselves to leadership theories and aim to reproduce the aspects of leadership identified in these theories in organisational life. Consequently, the primary focus of leadership

developmental thought is pedagogical, and the developments in leadership developmental thinking predominately occur in pedagogical methods and methodologies, not in questioning the concept of leadership (Day et al., 2014).

Leadership development is generally separated into two disciplines, leader development and leadership development. Leader-focused development is based primarily on leader centric theories, and leadership development tends to be more influenced by processual perspectives (Carroll, 2019; Carroll & Levy, 2010; Day et al., 2014). The term leader development is commonly used interchangeably with leadership development by mainstream leadership scholars. This type of approach develops leaders based on the mainstream understanding of leadership as initiated by or an attribute of an individual leader. Following the focus of leader centric theories, which are individual attributes, behaviour and skills, development programmes prioritise the expansion of an individual's capacity to influence others in a leader role (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Kjellström et al., 2020). Depending on the leadership theory that the development is based on, it can include building skills such as empathy, persuasion and problem solving and individual-based knowledge and personal growth in areas such as self-awareness and the acquisition and/or exhibition of attributes such as confidence, certainty and authenticity (Avolio, 2005; Brungardt, 1997; Day et al., 2014). The purpose of leader development is to reproduce the qualities and behaviour described in the leader centric theories in the individual participants by directly modifying their experiences of the self, others and the organisation and/or life situations through psychologically-based coaching, training and developmental

technologies (Avolio, 2005; Bass & Bass, 2008; Brungardt, 1997; Day et al., 2014; Shamir & Eilam-Shamir, 2018; Sinclair, 2009).

Leadership development seems to play the same role in attempting to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The primary difference between the two types of developments, being pedagogical, results from the types of theories the developmental intervention is based on, not on modifying the role leadership development plays in leadership scholarship. Leadership development separates the role of the individual leader from the leadership process and focuses more on expanding a collective's capacity to produce leadership in an organisation (Day et al., 2014; Van Velsor et al., 2010). It is heavily influenced by the Social-constructionist approaches to leadership, which conceive leadership as emerging in the complex and inherently relational and interactional organising processes (Ford et al., 2008; Ibarra et al., 2008; Kennedy et al., 2013). Instead of describing aspects of an individual, Social-constructionist leadership theories tend to describe processes. This has been understood in interpersonal, relational, processual, and/or practice-based terms (Crevani, 2018; Raelin, 2016d; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012).

Leadership development functions also to reproduce in organisations the process/es described by the theory. Due to the shift in the focus of the theories, leadership development focuses more on working with groups and modifying the collective interactions, relationality and outcomes over individual agents and their behaviour.

The focus on the collective has often made leadership development an identity workspace (Ibarra et al., 2008; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Petriglieri, 2011). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) find

that many organisations regulate a shared identity through induction, training and promotion procedures, as means of controlling and influencing the personal identities of their members. Identity work refers to the intentional “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising (of) the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626). Based on the understanding that leadership is relational, modifying collective identity within the organisation has become a popular focus in developing leadership from the Social-constructionist standpoint (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Petriglieri, 2011). The modification of identity could include building on, letting go, maintaining, shaking up and deconstructing existing identities, or constructing and experimenting with new identities (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Ford et al., 2008; Ibarra et al., 2008; Karp & Helgø, 2009; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013; Petriglieri, 2011). Instead of developing the skill set of an individual in leader development, leadership development as an identity workspace often develops one’s leadership mindset (Kennedy et al., 2013; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013).

Similarly, the way Leadership-as-practice development functions remains to be within the theory-and-practice partnership. A uniqueness of Raelin’s (2011) thought lies in that he privileges the value of practice to theory over the more traditional theory-dominant approaches; however, the basis of leadership development is not practice but the Leadership-as-practice theory. This is evident when all these developmental efforts focus on pedagogical methods to facilitate the participation of the people, which is what the leaderful-practice ideal proposed in theory. Salicru (2020) proposes eight different ways of modifying people’s psyches and participation to produce the leaderful-practice ideal proposed by Raelin. Denyer and James

(2016) propose three general principles to Leadership-as-practice development: 1) reviewing and renewing the leadership concept held by learners and their organisation; 2) surfacing and working with leadership processes, practices, and interactions; and 3) working in the learners' context on their organisational problems and adaptive challenges. These three principles represent the fundamental desire for leadership development to modify what emerges in the process of spontaneous everyday organisational practices. This is because they imply three assumptions: 1) people's conception of leadership is the basis for producing leadership and can be problematic; 2) spontaneous processes, practices and interactions that are lived in everyday practices are problematic and need to be modified; 3) leadership developmental specialists know better about resolving organisational issues than people who practise and live them on a daily basis. Every one of these principles functions to impose something absent from the spontaneously emerged everyday practices and what they all impose is the leaderful practice described in the theory. By attempting to reproduce the ideal of the theory, which in the case of Leadership-as-practice is leaderful practice, leadership development from the practice perspective follows the same framework of bridging the theory-and-practice gap.

Overall, then, my contention is that what varies from theory to theory is not the traditional function of leadership development (bridging the theory-and-practice gap), but pedagogical methods and approaches based on the ideal forms of organising and outcomes described by the theory. Leadership development theories follow leadership theories, as leader development theories follow leader centric theories. While leader development is essentially a form of personal development, leadership development tends to focus on developing harmony and

coherence for groups to work together. This is often done by modifying individual and/or collective identity. The different priorities and pedagogical methods produced in leadership development theories are a consequence of the content of the theories they follow. By reproducing the description of the theory in the sensory world, the role leadership development plays in leadership scholarship, remains to be the bridging of the theory-and-practice gap, consistent with Western thinking more generally. This review of leader/ship development literature thus suggests that leader/ship development is the guardian of the theory-and-practice relationship passed down in the Western tradition since ancient Greek times. This role remains the same throughout the development of leader/ship thinking in the last 3 to 4 decades.

Challenges in Leadership Development

The existing leadership development field has yet to prove its ability to bridge theory and practice, at least according to quantitative/positivist perspectives about what constitutes ‘proof’. Day et al. (2014), for example, find that the effects of leader qualities such as authenticity and charisma are difficult to measure. It is difficult to quantify the impact of these attributes and behaviour on another human being, and even more complicated when one considers the timeframe and duration of these effects. Additionally, it is also difficult to pinpoint which of a subordinate’s behaviours is influenced by the leader and which is not. Similarly, the correlation between a leader’s performance, the number of months they have been working and the outcome are also unclear. Past life and work experience also influence the decisions, competency, knowledge of the individual, and their response to the leader. Also, because individuals learn at

different paces and timeframes and utilise their learnings in spontaneous and unpredictable ways, the outcome of the programme is often unmeasurable (Day et al., 2014).

The development of leadership skills is also said to require self-motivation and gradual refinement, which invites the questioning of the effect and sustainability of any outcomes produced by leadership development programmes (Day et al., 2014). In addition, effective leadership is understood differently from worker to worker, department to department and organisation to organisation; hence many scholars recognise that the positive outcome of one developmental programme is not necessarily reproducible in another organisation. Consequently, the same programme cannot function as the basis for producing continuing success across organisations (Eubanks et al., 2011; Hooijberg & Choi, 2000).

Despite efforts to reproduce theory, both with sophisticated coaching and training technologies and some matching of different types of development according to the organisation's condition and circumstances, leadership development faces the enduring issue of bridging a seemingly impossible gap between theory and practice (Day et al., 2014; Schweiger et al., 2020).

Additionally, continuing developments in leadership thinking constantly demand leadership development be reimagined as it forces the field to reassess what is to be developed/modified (Carroll et al., 2008; Crevani, 2018; Ibarra et al., 2008; Majd & Ammar, 2020; Schweiger et al., 2020).

This research does not directly address existing challenges in leadership development, but simply considers them as issues in acquiring prosperity through a theory-and-practice partnership. The

theory-and-practice partnership provides a frame of reference for identifying the potential contribution of a Chinese model of acquiring prosperity, which draws on different understandings.

Critical Leadership Studies

This section discusses critical leadership studies as it plays a vital role in diverging leadership thinking in existing scholarship. As mentioned throughout Part II of this thesis, many important changes in existing leadership scholarship emerge from critical leadership studies. Critical leadership thinking is influenced by a wider field of critical management studies. Critical management studies comprise various approaches including structuralism, critical realism, feminism, post-structuralism, deconstructionism, postcolonial theory, and cultural studies (Alvesson & Willmott, 2003; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Gabriel, 2009; Parker, 2002). It often criticises dominant ways of organising and managing and looks for new approaches. For example, Weick (1995, 2012) challenges the traditional conception of organisation which implies a stable identity. He suggests that a constant process of evolving through spontaneous and ongoing processes of sensemaking is actually what is involved. Based on this understanding, Weick proposes that organisation should be understood as a process of ongoing organising, and not as having a fixed identity. Parker (2002) problematises the mainstream Western construct of management which privileges control over nature, predetermined structure over spontaneous human being activities, and directly associates the human ability to control things and people with positive organisational outcomes. Parker suggests that conceiving management as concerned with controlling reality is itself a problematic

way of relating to and engaging with life and the source of many organisational, social and political issues. Critical leadership studies adopt many critical management approaches but focus particularly on the nature, cause and effects of leadership.

Critical leadership studies challenge the dominant narrative of mainstream leadership thinking, and includes a wide range of approaches. Most critical scholars differentiate themselves from mainstream leadership perspectives by “drawing attention to the asymmetries of power relations in order to explore possible forms of transformation or emancipation” (Evans et al., 2013, p. 13). While post-heroic leadership scholars such as Fletcher (2004) might suggest that the traditional heroic leadership style has been effective in the past, some critical leadership scholars argue that the hegemonic power dynamics in leadership made heroic leaders seem effective, by crediting them with the merits of the collective. These critical scholars would often dismiss the effectiveness of the traditional leadership style altogether (Alvesson & Spicer, 2014; Ford, 2005). According to Collinson (2011), critical leadership studies:

... challenge hegemonic perspectives in the mainstream literature that tend both to underestimate the complexity of leadership dynamics and to take for granted that leaders are the people in charge who make decisions, and that followers are those who merely carry out orders from ‘above’. (p. 181)

So, critical scholars claim to challenge the assumptions of the mainstream leadership literature such as functionalist and even sometimes interpretive approaches to leadership. Often the criticism is that functionalists define leadership solely by the leader’s actions, ignoring issues of

power, ethics, context and the meaning actors attribute to what is perceived as leadership. They also challenge the interpretive approach to leadership for its lack of criticality. Critical scholars argue that the meaning of leadership cannot be understood from a limited organisational context alone (Alvesson & Spicer, 2014; Collinson, 2011). Wilson (2016) suggests that social and historical contexts also affect the nature, meaning, and function of leadership. Alvesson and Spicer (2014) suggest that critical scholars generally:

... seek to denaturalize leadership by showing it to be the outcome of an ongoing process of social construction and negotiation. They try to study it reflexively by reflecting on how the researcher and her assumptions and methods are implicated in producing the phenomena of leadership. Finally, they aim to treat it nonperformatively (noninstrumentally) by breaking away from attempts to optimize leadership. (p. 10)

To do so, critical scholars ask questions about whether leadership is always desirable, especially considering the possibility that it may be more about creating domination, excess control and self-enhancing images, rather than effective organization and direction of tasks. They also tend to unpack blind faith in the curative powers of leadership, while being sceptical about whether leadership is actually needed (or happening) in many situations (Alvesson & Spicer, 2014).

Critical leadership scholarship has also drawn on feminist, critical race and indigenous perspectives. Feminist scholars point out the heroic archetype is masculine and reinforces masculine traits and norms such that the very idea of the 'leader', with its individualist ontology, focused on adventure and risk, cements processes that exclude women and fails to reflect the

lived experiences of (most) women nor their experiences of leadership (Ford, 2005; Ford et al., 2008; Sinclair, 2009). Similar criticisms are launched against the post-heroic perspective which, although at least more relational and process-oriented, still discusses leadership as an abstract and disembodied process and rarely acknowledges the gendering that is occurring even within the knowledge production practices of scholars themselves (Ford, 2005; Ford et al., 2008; Sinclair, 2009). Critical race and indigenous critical management scholars discussing the leadership concept have also pointed out how the post-heroic concept continues fundamental problems in the heroic concept as, for example, ‘heroes’ are often engaged in colonising endeavours which continue in new forms (Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Rosette et al., 2016; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014).

Critical leadership studies often poses itself in binary with the mainstream scholarship; has been a powerful driving force behind the divergences in existing leadership thinking. As leadership thought departs from its entitative origin, and continues to evolve, some past patterns of thinking still remain in existing scholarship.

The Leadership Scholarship within the Western Tradition

Part II of this thesis investigates existing leadership thought through the ontology-epistemology paradigm and theory-and-practice lens that frames Western scholarship and identified several sources for leadership thinking to emerge within the Western tradition.

Within a focus on ontology-epistemology, a given leadership ontology shapes what aspect of leadership is important for investigation, which produces an environment for certain thoughts to

emerge while inhibiting others. This research demonstrates that by making an individual agent the focus for leadership investigations, an entitative ontology can produce a myriad of theories that study different aspects of an individual that might make them a leader. By making relationships the ontological basis of leadership, the DAC model sees leadership as an outcome of shared direction, alignment in work and collective commitment. Perceiving the leadership phenomenon through this lens, individual-based knowledge may no longer be relevant to leadership investigations. When sociomaterial space becomes the basis for studying leadership, as Crevani (2018) suggests, leadership's motion is produced regardless of the intentionality of the members. As a consequence, the study of leadership through sociomaterial space no longer requires knowledge about the shared meanings produced by the members, as in the DAC model. This lens seems to have diverged further from the DAC model, with the leadership phenomenon investigated in terms of trajectories co-produced by human and nonhuman factors in an environment. Alternatively, by studying leadership through practice, Raelin (2016d) emphasizes the process of co-producing an outcome. The practice perspective makes the co-produced outcome the key feature of leadership. The knowledge of leadership concerns the social reality produced in the everyday mundane process of working and producing outcomes. When focussed on individual agents, leadership might seem like a different phenomenon than when perceived via a different focus, such as the sociomaterial space. Each ontological position is an angle that perceives leadership in particular ways, that makes thinkers more attentive to certain aspects of leadership than others and which makes certain knowledge or ways of knowing available while

inhibiting others. As a consequence, through taking different ontological positions the production of leadership thought can emerge in very different forms.

Part II of this research demonstrates that an ontological position functions as an environment and can significantly influence the emergence of leadership thought within it. The Western tradition, which functions as a general environment that has produced leadership scholarship, influences leadership scholarship produced within its domain. I have identified that the focus on the human activities in leadership scholarship is a result of the Western cultural privileging of the human in its value system. The privileging of the human is rooted in the ancient Greek language's privileging of being (Jullien, 2002). This value system manifests into the diverse focuses on different aspects of the human in leadership studies, including traits, behaviour, attributes, styles, identity, skillset, mindset, competency, interpersonal exchanges, meanings, discourses and ways of working together. This bias continues to be reinforced by the ongoing development of the Western tradition in its understanding that motion is caused directly by a being and that a human agent is the active agent in a subject-object causal relationship (See Aristotle, 1994). The privileging of the human influences the focus of existing scholarship, including the content and knowledge available. This part of the research has also identified other ways that Western thinking is structured, including the ontological-epistemological paradigm as the foundation of knowledge and the theory-and-practice partnership as the foundation of how improvements in 'prosperity' can be achieved.

Jullien's work proposes that cultural thought and knowledge are situated in the culture's circumstances, agendas and priorities (Jullien, 2000, 2014, 2015). A cultural paradigm such as that of the Chinese, which divides reality not on the basis of forms but on the basis of tendencies and which conceives reality processually, creates a different environment for the emergences and development of a type of knowledge that does not stem from an entitative and static root (Jullien, 1995, 2007c, 2018). This is to say that because the different traditions originated from separate environments, what might be ground-breaking from one perspective might be apparent from another. While the Western tradition might be entering a particular relationship with the world, another culture might have been in that relationship since the beginning of their civilisation; and many cultures may very likely be in different types of relationships with the world that others have not yet entered and still cannot imagine.

Tracing through the continuing modifications of leadership thinking, there seems to be a developing tendency for leadership thinking to become more fluid and collective-oriented (Grint, 2011; Raelin, 2016d; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). This tendency is evident within an entitative conception of leadership with the emergence of plural forms of leadership. This tendency further expands through the emergences of the relational, processual and practice-based ontological approaches to leadership. In the process of this change, agency starts to be approached relationally, as self-in-relation. This sense of self is not separate from others but emerges in interaction and relation with others in the spontaneous process of living (Clarke, 2018; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Agency is also conceived processually, as produced in the interaction between agents. This agency is in a constant process of manifesting and unfolding in social engagements

(Crevani, 2018). From a practice perspective, agency is also understood collaboratively and emerges in the everyday activities of practice that produce collective outcomes (Raelin, 2016d). All these developments thus offer critiques of and alternatives to the entitative position adopted by mainstream leadership studies.

Additionally, scholars have started to highlight the spontaneous and ambiguous aspects of leadership. Leadership is understood to comprise complex interactions, relationality and habitual ways of functioning in performing day-to-day mundane organisational tasks and as being unmeasurable (Carroll et al., 2008; Crevani, 2018; Raelin et al., 2018). The focus of such leadership studies moves from performance and competency towards the spontaneous interactions, unconscious and habitual activities that occur in the complex everyday organisational life, which produce direction and outcomes (Bolden & Gosling, 2006; Carroll et al., 2008; Chia et al., 2007; Crevani & Endrissat, 2016; Raelin, 2016d).

The Chinese tradition, coming from a processual conception of reality and a coherent motion-based system of engaging life situations, could function as a lever to illuminate areas that are still unthought of in contemporary scholarship's processual lens and provide insights about the aspects of leadership phenomenon that are currently unavailable through a Western lens. The characteristics of Chinese thought can thus potentially contribute to existing leadership scholarship, especially to its developing tendency for conceptualising leadership fluidly, processually and collectively. Part III of the thesis thus intends to answer the research question:

How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership scholarship? by approaching leadership through the Chinese tradition described by Jullien.

Part III:

道 **Dào of Leadership – Applying Jullien’s
Chinese Lens to the Study of Leadership**

Part III Introduction

To reprise my basic argument in Part I, following Jullien my contention is that the value system, priorities and agendas embedded in the Chinese language, culture and environmental context produced a unique environment for thoughts to emerge in China (Jullien, 1995). The ancient Chinese conceived the sensory world differently from the Western philosophical tradition's origins. Consequently, each tradition developed a unique perspective on the sensory world, and from this original divergence of approaches to the world - including value systems, cultural preferences and priorities – each developed different ways of approaching phenomenon. The two different cultural traditions have since formed different preferences for approaching knowledge about the world and have developed from these preferences different ways of dealing with life's challenges. Jullien's work suggests that unthought emerges in the space between cultural traditions. In Part II of this thesis, I have identified habitual patterns in Western thinking inherent in existing leadership scholarship. Part III of this thesis now aims to demonstrate the ways in which leadership can be studied through my interpretation of Jullien's Chinese lens. Knowledge about leadership revealed through this Chinese perspective can then function as threads which, when combined with leadership knowledge produced under Western influences, enables the two cultural traditions to weave the net that catches unthought in existing leadership thinking.

When thinking about leadership in Part III, I am not focused on Chinese or Western leadership practice as such but, rather, cultures' systems for engaging the sensory world and how that impacts their views of the world. Every aspect of a cultural tradition is a part of the entire system that functions coherently as a whole, and the knowledge that a culture produces is inseparable

from its value, priorities, preferences, agendas and purposes for investigating life. Based on the above understanding, Part III of this thesis applies a Chinese lens to investigate leadership.

Following Jullien's thought, what is considered important by a cultural tradition is a consequence of its value system and biases (Jullien, 1995). The ancient Chinese investigated the sensory world to take advantage of silent motion and leverage its effect. Centred on this purpose, Part III of the research only focuses on the aspects of leadership that a Chinese perspective requires for serving the cultural purpose of investigating reality, regardless of its relevance in existing leadership thought.

Part III of this research aims to complete the following objectives:

- Investigate leadership through a Chinese perspective (based on Jullien's work).
- Distinguish the insights through a Chinese lens that are unavailable in existing leadership thinking.

First, the research objectives are addressed by identifying how the value system and priorities embedded in the Chinese categorisation of reality can influence one's approach to leadership.

Then, in the next step, I identify the aspects of leadership, and leadership knowledge a Chinese perspective requires to serve its cultural scholarly purpose. Lastly, I discuss how Chinese thought acquires organisational prosperity through leadership's motion.

Studying Leadership through Propensity

In Part 1 and Part II of this thesis, I have identified propensity as being a key concept for both understanding Chinese thought, and for identifying where Chinese thought might be able to offer an alternative to help leadership scholarship understand its central conundrums and, perhaps,

move beyond them. This section identifies four threads of Chinese thought relevant to propensity: seeing the world as motion; privileging silent aspects of the sensory world; prioritising the influence of the environment; and privileging the 自然 zì rán (the spontaneously emerging aspects of the sensory world) over human designs. These are four threads in my net I weave to produce my understanding of how ancient Chinese thought can assist leadership scholarship in the West to develop by showing an alternative that has emerged in a society that is not so attached to many of the enduring problems leadership scholars are currently trying to overcome (e.g. static models – through process ontology, and overly humanistic approaches to organisational life and behaviour – through posthumanism).

In this section, I do use some familiar contemporary examples in order to explain the Chinese concept of propensity and stress why it is relevant to leadership, but it is important for the reader to recall that my thesis's contribution is not a treatise on Chinese leadership, but is focused on making a contribution to leadership scholarship by using a Chinese lens to highlight how leadership scholarship's theoretical trajectory manifests conundrums, and by offering an alternative approach to leadership which can potentially sidestep many (but not all) of leadership scholars' limitations. The examples I use in this section are to help Western readers understand propensity and see the relevance of it to leadership.

The World is in Motion

Based on Jullien's work, the Chinese engage with the sensory world on the basis of motion, not being and as a consequence, Chinese thought privileges motion. Leadership, based on this view of the world, can only be approached through motion.

Motion, in Chinese thought, is not directly associated with opinions, beliefs, ideals, meaning, or intentionality. Rather Chinese thought conceives of motion as the basic nature of the world. Like the motion of the sun, day/night cycle, and season, motion is conceived of as the sensory world; it is always present. Through this lens, everything that happens in an organisation is motion that is not just embodied by the collective in the organisation, but everything outside it also.

This collective includes every member and entity that influences motion. Because Chinese thought is more attuned to motion, it is motion that is the focus of the thought and therefore the practices. Motion and movement are detectable, and their significance is self-evident in Chinese thought. Cultural practices include activities that both accelerate the development of the motion or slow it down; supporting it or moving against it. In everyday life, these practices can be seen most obviously in Tai Chi, which is based on understanding the propensity of motion and silence and acting in harmony with it. Thus, when appreciating motion, and applying it to possible manifestations of leadership, Chinese thought conceives only of action in motion, or non-action in motion. Thus, it has evolved itself, at least in ancient thought, no notions of leadership that separate out the leader from the follower (there are concepts of 'ruler' and 'governance' but I come back to these later because I also need to discuss translation issues), nor does Chinese

thought conceive of leadership as autocratic or democratic, hierarchical or flat, or with other specific identifying terms used to describe Western concepts of leadership. Motion, in Chinese thought, is not an action of an individual either; motion embodies the entire society, institutions and society (in the widest sense including the nonhuman), and which also includes complex interactions amongst all life. Conceiving leadership's motion as the unit of analysis prioritises the self-evident movement of a collective in the interests of all life. The Chinese approach to motion is not passive, even when there is nonaction. Because Chinese thought conceives an effect or outcome as produced by the movement of a motion, motion is leveraged with the effect produced by its movement. Because motion is mostly silent, it is important to also appreciate the silent aspects of the sensory world as another characteristic of propensity.

Privileging the Silence of the Sensory World

The Chinese language does not pinpoint meaning in the static way that Western languages can do. The ideographic nature of the written language is iconographic; or, in another way of appreciating this point, a picture says a thousand words and so the effect of language is less specific and more diffuse. The style of communication means that the language contains within it silence. This manifestation of culture is often explained in cross-cultural communication texts (reference here) as being high context communication, as opposed to low context communication. For example, a typical Chinese restaurant front-of-house worker will often be able to take food orders from a large group of people without recourse to writing the order down by relying on their observations to memorise the orders, whilst in the main, a European front-of-house worker will write every individual order down to ensure they get it correct. This simple

example shows how this principle manifests in everyday life. The Western waiter focuses on the meaning of the verbal order which must be written down in words to be understood, whilst the Chinese waitress will remember the orders from all the cues she gains from the environment and interactions between people and the environment (perhaps where they are sitting and with whom) as well as the verbal order, and she does not need to write it down to embody what she has learnt about the patrons. To appreciate the silent tendencies of the sensory world, and how they might relate to leadership, helps to reintroduce the concepts of change and 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng.

Because motion is innate, Chinese thought recognises that change is the basis of life. Jullien (2011) suggests that change, for the ancient Chinese, is not directly associated with the nature of a form, but the propensity of its environment like the day-night cycle and seasonal change. Propensity is conceived through the spontaneous alternation of the 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng tendencies. As introduced in Part I, 陰 yīn indicates a contractive tendency, and 陽 yáng tendency is an expansive tendency. Both tendencies are silent, not definable by identifiable features but can simultaneously embody all things in constant motion. For example, autumn and winter are seen as dominated by contractive tendencies; during these seasons, the entire landscape and every identifiable form within it embody the 陰 yīn tendency. 陰 yīn can also represent darkness, which at night, every identifiable part of the environment embodies. The ancient Chinese categorises the sensory world through silent motions which can manifest in the space between related symbols. So, for examples, the phrase “size”, or 大小 *dà xiǎo* is the interplay between the character big 大 *dà*, and small 小 *xiǎo*; the phrase “weight” 轻重 *qīng*

zhòng combines the characters for “light” 轻 *qīng* and “heavy” 重 *zhòng*. “Length” 长短 *cháng duǎn* is understood through the interplay between “long” 长 *cháng* and “short” 短 *duǎn*. The ancient Chinese privileged these silent tendencies in the sensory world and conceived their interplay as the source for the inexhaustible manifestations of transformations and renewal in the world. This silent propensity is the source of the inexhaustible manifestations of the world, and thus the driving force behind what can be sensed in the world. If we apply these ideas in a general way to manifestations of leadership in relation to the meaning of propensity, we can conceive of how leadership is a different phenomenon to that represented in the West (Jullien, 1995).

If we attempt to connect these ideas to leadership (still provisionally in the general sense for the purpose of explaining the relevance of propensity), we can conceive of a silent propensity that is behind the emergence of leadership manifestations. For instance, in an organisational context, a silent tendency might be a social or political movement (e.g. action against climate change), that inspires the spontaneous emergence of leadership manifestations that assist this collective desire. This characteristic of propensity – its silent movement – is manifest in many highly visible contemporary contexts such as Chinese art, methods of teaching and learning, and Chinese poetry and literature, many of which are discussed by Jullien in his works. But because human action is always embedded in material economic and technical relations of power, propensity does not necessarily aid only positive and constructive activities. In this sense it is important to understand that propensity as I am describing it here is completely apolitical and without ethics in the Western sense of the concepts, as I have introduced earlier in Part I and reinforced in Part

II. Any manifestation of propensity, even art, can reinforce oppression, strengthen domination, and promote discrimination. It is important to appreciate that Chinese thought because it prioritises seeing the world in relation to propensity, takes a much longer-term and hands-off view of human and nonhuman flourishing. The focus is also always on the good of the collective and not the individual. There is probably no better example of how this successfully manifests in contemporary life than the Chinese approach to stopping the spread of the COVID19 virus. They have prioritised collective wellbeing and the local populations have largely accepted public health restrictions for the collective health of the country. The USA and the UK have had more difficulty containing the virus because socially embedded neoliberal conceptions of the primacy of the self and self-interest have drastically interfered with public health initiatives to control the spread of the virus (Andréosso-O'Callaghan et al., 2022; Mair, 2020). I return to these important issues about good and bad, politics and ethics, and what my thesis can and cannot offer to leadership scholarship later in Part III.

Another important indicator of the silence of propensity is its manifestation, not only in the environment, but simultaneously in the embodiment of the constant movements and flow of human activities. This is most obviously significant in contemporary contexts in decision-making (Jullien, 2011). When the world is approached from the perspective of silent movement, it is not the human activity of making a decision that is significant or relevant. What is the focus is the silent movement in the world and how the human (collective or individual) is positioned in relation to that to respond to its forces? Again, there is no right or wrong decision (in the Western sense of ethical decision-making) to make in response to the world's forces. One can

perform different tasks and take separate actions at different stages of fulfilling the same desire; a change in the intensity of the desire can also modify the action one takes; the fulfilment and abandonment of the desire can also alter one's action. Thus, to a Westerners eye's Chinese decision-making can be seen as indecipherable, enigmatic and duplicitous. But actually, a different set of principles are operating that simply does not valorise what is decipherable, does recognise the centrality of silence which Westerners can misread as enigmatic or mysterious, and responds to situations as they emerge and does not believe that holding to an original decision if circumstances change, or even that making a 'decision' as such in the first place is important. In the next section, I introduce a third characteristic that provides some more awareness of the layers to propensity.

Prioritising the Environment

Chinese thought, as I have explained it in this thesis, understands motion as situated in the whole environment. This trait of Chinese thought is pertinent to both propensity as I am explaining it, and leadership. The influence of the environment and propensity's role is easily mistaken for normative situational leadership and so here I also emphasize why this is not the case from a Chinese perspective.

Ancient Chinese thought enabled understanding that all tendencies in the world originate from regulatory processes on a global level, including the rotation of the earth, the day-night cycle, wet-dry alternation, seasonal change, and so on (albeit that 'the world' pre-contact was almost exclusively Chinese). These regulatory processes were seen as providing conditions for life to

spontaneously emerge, grow, decline, renew and transform. The processes occur at all levels and include tendencies that produce nonhuman animal life, plants, mountains, rivers and minerals, as well as human life and all human forms of life such as communities, nations, societies, organisations, families and so on. As a part of the wider propensity of the earth, tendencies at different levels all participate in the wider regulatory processes of the earth's propensity, both influencing and influenced by each other's motion in a part-whole relationship of interactions.

In his book *The Propensity of Things*, Jullien (1995) uses the word 'situation' to translate 形势 *xíng shì*. In 形势 *xíng shì*, situation or 形 *xíng* refers to the 'disposition of a situation', which includes every factor that produces an environment and that affects the emergence and development of a motion in a situation. The situation produces an environment, and the interplay amongst the situational factors play a critical role in influencing motion. For example, economic conditions, technology, industry, resources, social conditions, political conditions, cultural and religious factors, weather, temperature, seasonal changes and many other factors can influence the motion of leadership in an organisation. The spontaneous interplay amongst these situational factors produces a circumstance. Nothing in this process is independent or inherently separated from another. Motion is not produced by its own inherent nature but by the interplay amongst factors in its environment.

This perspective differs quite profoundly from situational leadership in the West. Situational leadership poses that no single 'style' of leadership (e.g., transformational or transactional) is the best. Situational leadership is focused on people in the organisation and to an extent on the

situation which may involve environmental conditions such as a plant closure. To effectively lead an organisation through such a difficult event, situational leadership suggests effective leaders respond using a method appropriate for the task so that they can influence the group effectively. Thus, situational leadership privileges the idea that effective leaders (individuals) choose between a range of actions appropriate to a situation (Blanchard et al., 1986; Geir & Lars, 2018).

Chinese thought is different. For a start, ancient Chinese wisdom does not have the concept of free will, but conceives the human awareness, choices, and actions as constantly in a process of influencing and being influenced by the environment (Jullien, 1995, 2014). Human experiences, choices, and decisions are all made available and limited by the resources, decisions, and choices available within an environment. Through a Chinese lens, each circumstance produces a unique motion that influences the development of a leadership tendency. Circumstances are ever-changing, and leadership's motion is thus constantly modifying itself. The focus is not on the leader, nor one or even several situational factors, nor on choosing an appropriate leadership response from a selection of options.

Chinese thought recognises that one's value system, agendas, priorities and knowledge is heavily influenced by the environment. From this perspective, the development of leadership's motion is the product of the constant interplays between the leadership tendency and the modifications in the environment where the motion is situated, and leadership is not caused directly by human intentionality, meaning, or activity. To understand leadership's motion, it is more important for

the Chinese to study how other motions in its environment influences propensity, than identifying the human activities that occur within the motion of leadership.

The Privilege of the 自然 zì rán

Chinese thought prioritises the silent motion produced by the driving force of human activities by recourse to the concept of 自然 zì rán. As mentioned in Part I of this thesis, 自然 zì rán refers to the natural and/or spontaneously emerging aspect of the sensory world. The propensity of things, even though silent, is understood as self-evident and considered as 自然 zì rán in Chinese thought (Jullien, 1995). Just as a harvest is available in the propensity of the plant, nature facilitates the emergences, growth, decline, renewal, transformation, and abundances of every species on earth without human interferences. Jullien (1995) translates 自然 zì rán and uses the short-hand word ‘prosperity’ to discuss this aspect of propensity and this can cause some misunderstanding for Western readers (the differences are discussed in a later section).

The ancient Chinese conceive prosperity as inherent in the propensity of things, and not human opinions or ideals; as a consequence, acquiring prosperity is to do with functioning within the propensity of the sensory world – 自然 zì rán – and not human opinion, meaning, or ideals. Propensity is 自然 zì rán, and is self-evident, ever-present and observable in silent motions, and not human experience, desire or ideals. Here I explain this by using the example of a harvest of crops. A harvest of crops, understood through 自然 zì rán, is not solely determined by human intentionality or meaning but has propensity, or motion that produces effects in the sensory world, and so the harvest is not directly associated with human intention or ideals. Although a

harvest of crops might appear to be an example of man-made prosperity it is not the same. When 自然 zì rán is prioritised, human meaning is considered selective and excluding, and is constantly being modified, re-evaluated and integrated according to what the 自然 zì rán informs; so it is not a privileged basis for judgement, taking action, or acquiring prosperity, so the crop has propensity understood in relation to all other forces in the environment and is not understood solely for its financial benefit.

Notwithstanding the above, 自然 zì rán does have some association with ‘valuable’. Existence itself represents functionality and compatibility with the environment. In Chinese thought the value of money is functional and so it requires no debate. Its value is taken as self-evident. The propensity within which value is created is ever-changing as circumstances change and situations develop seamlessly in the sensory world moment by moment. Because 自然 zì rán is nonexclusive of the factors influencing the situation, and as circumstances continue to modify a situation, human motion is significant in that it can also shift and change seamlessly within the spontaneous propensity of the situation. Based on this understanding, a Chinese approach to acquiring prosperity does not interfere with the already-present and circumstantially functioning motion. This aspect of propensity – prosperity – is described here in relation to how prosperity manifests in ancient Chinese thought around something simple - the harvest of a crop. When it comes to interpreting human action/s – for example, leadership – within the sets of propensity forces, it becomes more necessary to understand the practice-theory split in Western thought and how the Chinese conceive of how humans work within these sets of forces. I return to this problematic issue for leadership scholarship later on in Part III when I discuss this issue.

Leadership through a Chinese Lens

From an ancient Chinese perspective, when ‘leadership’ (in any of its Western manifestations) is understood through the Chinese concept of propensity, then leadership is merely one force amongst many others in a context that can facilitate a situation to benefit a collective.

In the next few paragraphs, I communicate the nature of this Chinese way. To be clear, I am aware that this explanation might be taken to imply a ‘normative’ account of leadership – it may appear to propose how leadership *should* be done and not engage with the world critically. As I have explained in previous sections of this thesis, my intention is to use ancient Chinese thought as a lens on Western leadership scholarship, I also provide an example of how leadership can be thought of from a Chinese perspective in order to provide an alternative approach to existing leadership models. It is not to prescribe an ideal way of dealing with leadership. My explanation of propensity below in regard to the way that a Chinese view of leadership – leadership-propensity – can manifest, is simply one thread in the net of understanding I am weaving.

To draw this thread, I use an example from a Chinese context and way of thinking. An organisation can be seen as a small village on a mountain in spring on a rainy day. Countless mountains and rivers are influenced by a season like spring; the mountain produces the environment for the village. The mountain’s temperature, available resources and its spontaneous movements are influenced by the change of the wider landscape and the season; the condition of the mountain provides the village with the potentials for prosperity while simultaneously limiting the possible lifestyles, decisions, choices and knowledge of the village. The rain also affects the

village both directly to the lifestyle of the people and indirectly by affecting the mountain. The rain can nurture the growth of lives and resources in the mountain, but heavy rain can make the soil loose and result in landslides. The position of the village in relation to the mountain also influences its lifestyle, and all of these factors are ever-changing as a part of the much wider propensity of the earth. The tiny village and the temporary motion of the collective – while it might seem like it is produced out of freewill or autonomous decision making – is actually largely insignificant compared to the available choices and decisions for the village, which are predetermined by the wider environment. The ancient Chinese recognise that the environment influences the types of opinions that are available. A village that lives next to a river in a valley has a unique lifestyle. This village has its own environment, including atmosphere and resources, which predetermine the choices and decisions that the mountain villagers have. They may not even be consciously aware, throughout their entire life, that living next to the river has provided the unique conditions for their lifestyle and choices. In the grand scheme of things, the choices of the village, and the motions it produces, is like a leaf's choice of how to spin while being carried by the wind.

Based on this understanding of human action as being insignificant, leadership can only ever be a motion embodied by a collective as it is produced by the entire environment, both human and nonhuman. Any leadership motion is influenced by the constant changes in the wider environment and so a leader (in all manifestations of leadership) is like the leaf being spun in the wind. Human meaning, decisions and behaviour are not the direct cause of leadership, because

the types of meaning, decisions and behaviour that are available are the consequences of the environment where they are situated.

This view of leadership does not centralise human experience but instead places the locus of movement in the outside world. Chinese thought suggests that ‘free will’ (choice) is a fantasy; merely the experience of having choices about what one could or could not do, while unaware of the influence of the wider environment that limits one’s capacity to imagine beyond the reality one can conceive. Because the propensity of the sensory world does not function based on a human decision or ideals, the silent motion of a collective also does not emerge based on an individual’s decision. Chinese thought recognises that a tree can influence the ecosystem of its environment, and its environment can influence the growth of the tree. However, human activities can influence the propensity of the environment (the tree and the human are interdependent since the human is part of the environment) but within the contexts of the environment which also influence the human activities that can be performed.

So far in this thesis, I have been tracing the threads of ancient Chinese wisdom (Chinese thought) and placing them next to Western thinking about leadership to capture their relations to each other and find new ways of thinking about leadership. However, there are several problems with applying ancient wisdom traditions to contemporary contexts, the most acute and obvious of which is the use of the teachings of any sage to further the political and economic agendas of certain groups in society over others. Contemporary China is not ancient China and so an argument could be made that the current Chinese elite use the propensities that remain culturally

within China that are manifestations of the ancient sages and their teachings, to bolster their own political and economic power. The complex difficulties of manoeuvring through this argument were one reason I chose not to examine Chinese leadership in contemporary contexts but instead to simply use ancient Chinese thought to reflect upon Western leadership scholarship traditions.

However, it is pertinent here to point out that the ancient Chinese did not concern themselves in their philosophies with the human ability to create destruction; again, this would have been simply understood and taken for granted. Instead, they focused on the human in harmony with the world. So, to use a contemporary example to show how the Chinese way might manifest in a leadership context for the purpose of explaining the relevance of propensity, I use here the example of global warming. Climate change and global warming are simply manifestations of the world out of kilter through a Chinese lens. That does not suppose a passive acceptance of climate change, but instead that the world needs to be brought back into alignment through understanding the propensity of things. The sensory world represents the potential for prosperity, where all abundances are available. Just as weeds sprout in the spring and harvest occurs in the autumn, acquiring prosperity is about taking advantage of the propensity of things that the sensory world has already made available for every lifeform. This is done by following the motion of the sensory world, not against it. If we consider the context of Chinese leadership around climate change, then the criteria for understanding China's response needs to appreciate that the way of thinking is quite different. It remains always concerned with collective prosperity (no doubt first for China, but also the world since this is a global problem), and they would not approach the problem as a 'fight' against climate change, but in a more indirect way that

manipulates the conditions rather than the symptom. This approach can be easily misunderstood by the West which is somewhat conditioned to seeing the same issue (climate change) through the prism of their own conditioning as a fight between evil capitalism represented by the primary extraction industries (oil and coal) against the survival and flourishing of the world.

Throughout human history, countless communities have acquired prosperity, and many have expanded into vibrant civilisations. Chinese thought sees past prosperities as evidence that prosperity is available through leadership-propensity. The propensity of things, like the change of seasons, and the day-night cycle, even though silent, is understood by the ancient Chinese as ever-present and self-evident. The Chinese way to acquire prosperity tracks the self-evident motions in the sensory world to harness the prosperity embedded in its propensity.

In the next section, I draw a thread connecting the Chinese understanding of propensity in motion with notions of leadership.

Introducing Leadership-Propensity

In this discussion, I connect the Western concept of leadership to the Chinese idea of propensity in motion. In order to differentiate the meaning and signify the appropriation of the term leadership in this new context, I use the term leadership-propensity, which indicates the significance of movement and a shift in the meaning of the concept.

As introduced earlier, motion is studied in Chinese thought through silent tendencies.

Leadership-propensity can thus be seen as a silent force that drives the emergence and

modification of identifiable human activities. This tendency can be a need, desire, or other silent social and/or political commitments. Through a Chinese lens, there is no inherent difference between the leadership-propensity that drives human activities in an organisation and the silent tendency that drives the growth of a tree, blooming of a flower, or the rolling of a snowball downhill. They are all 自然 zì rán and detectable aspects of the sensory world that produces effect are that their propensities are separated from human intentionality or meaning.

From a Chinese perspective, leadership-propensity is intimately connected with the environment in which it emerges. An organisation and every member within it are a part of a community, society, nation and the world, and is influenced by motion at wider levels such as associated with an industry, society, religion, nation, resources, and nature. Each environment has its own propensity. An industry is always in a process of developing and evolving in relation to technology and political influences, and the tendency of a society is also constantly changing. As the silent motion emerges from within the organisation, leadership-propensity embodies the complex interplays amongst all tendencies that influence the members' lives. As such, a leadership-propensity, even though emergent from a human organisation, embodies concerns beyond the organisational context, and can incorporate social and political commitments. The organisation is, in this case, an environment in which its members express their tendencies in a collective configuration. As a consequence, leadership-propensity is not the property of the organisation, nor is it controllable by the organisation.

The ancient Chinese recognise that leadership-propensity tendencies emerge from circumstances, and as circumstances are modified. Leadership-propensity can alter an organisation's course. The development of leadership-propensity is the motion, which is an outcome of an accumulated interplay amongst tendencies across circumstances and over time.

Leadership-propensity is a driving force behind activities that can create manifestations of what looks like individual leadership. However, Chinese thought conceives these manifestations of leadership as signs and signals for detecting the silent motion behind them. What looks like leadership to Western eyes is not leadership-propensity. Leadership-propensity can manifest into different human activities under separate circumstances, and the development of the tendency can result in constant changes in identifiable behaviours. But what makes an identifiable human activity leadership-related is the tendency behind it, and not the activity itself.

In Chinese thought, motion is studied in relation to components of 道 dào, 勢 shì, and propensity in partnership with 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng. I want to clarify that I use the term 'collective' in this thesis to refer to people who produce leadership-propensity and 'organisation' to refer to the institution within which this leadership-propensity collective is situated. This is because leadership-propensity, as motion, is produced by the people and not the organisation as an institution per se. On the other hand, the organisation does influence the motion of collective leadership-propensity by being situated in the environment and influencing the environment it then produces. The development of the leadership-propensity motion involves the interplay between the collective and the dynamic situation of the organisation.

道 Dào

The ancient Chinese understood that a tendency emerges from 道 dào or the source for manifestation. 道 dào functions like a seed, which represents infinite potential. 道 dào of leadership is the source in which leadership's motion emerges. Like a seed, 道 dào represents infinite potential for manifestation but not manifestation itself. This is because a seed does not produce anything by itself; it produces a tendency through interaction with the soil (environment). No life can emerge in separation from its environment; as such, leadership-propensity is a circumstantial manifestation of 道 dào under organisational conditions.

To be a seed, or source for manifestation, 道 dào of leadership-propensity must be inexhaustible. According to Jullien (2012), 道 dào describes neither a truth, prototype, nor meaning; instead, it indicates “where nothing is obstructed by specification, where the determining character of form has not yet come into play, and where haziness, between *there-is* and *there-is-not*, is the very rationality of existence” (p. 47). Only when 道 dào has no actuality can it manifest into all possible forms; as soon as it takes one form, it obtains an identity that discriminates other forms, which limits its potential to manifest into them. From this perspective then, in the West leadership can be autocratic, democratic, leader-centric, follower-centric, masculine, feminine, hierarchical and distributed. But the 道 dào of leadership-propensity cannot be any of them.

Adopting my Chinese lens through Jullien, these leadership terms are nonsensical to leadership-propensity. To take a leader-centric form is to differentiate it against follower-centrism, and a hierarchical organisational structure differentiates it against a flat structure. Leadership-

propensity can be identified in an environment, but it is hazy and fuzzy hence making it a difficult concept to explain in English. Nevertheless, from a Chinese perspective, as the circumstantial outcome of 道 dào is its interaction with the environment, it does not differentiate different styles and types of leadership in the ways that Western leadership scholarship has defined them – using terms such as followership and so on. Chinese thought instead uses the concepts of 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng to differentiate aspects of different situations to explain how circumstances alter 道 dào manifestations – I discuss this more in the next section. Leadership-propensity seems vague, hazy and indistinct to Western sensibilities, but it is not mysterious.

Following the logic of Chinese thought as I have traced its thread so far in this section, 道 dào of leadership-propensity in an organisational context is the source for the silent tendency of the collective to emerge within the organisation. As mentioned in a previous section, this motion is the driving force behind identifiable organisational developments, which reflect needs, desires or other commitments. However, approaching leadership scholarship in the West through my lens, I understand that needs, desires, and commitments are temporary and circumstantial, and 道 dào is the manifestation source that arrives from all life, not just human life.

I conceive 道 dào of leadership-propensity as the lifeforce of the collective. By lifeforce, I mean the force that drives the survival and prosperity of a species. As a seed is planted, the lifeforce produces a tendency in its interaction with the environment that insists on growing and expanding until it exceeds its limit. Under different circumstances, the lifeforce of a collective in an organisation can manifest into infinite decisions and behaviours ranging from fighting to

fleeing, loving to hating, protecting to killing, and giving to taking. As the lifeforce of the collective, 道 dào of leadership-propensity includes the complex interplays amongst the tendencies within the organisation on individual and subgroup levels. Again, Chinese thought sidesteps the identification of the complex activities that can occur within the lifeforce of leadership-propensity and is more interested in its potency for producing motion.

Like the potency of a seed that influences the potential for the growth and development of the lifeform, 道 dào influences the potential power and effect the leadership-propensity a collective can produce. As the lifeforce of the collective, the potency of leadership-propensity's source is directly related to any organisational members' association with the collective. The more unified a collective is, the more powerful motion a collective can potentially generate with consistency and regularity. On the other hand, a lack of interest by members to be a collective can make it less likely for the collective to produce powerful leadership-propensity motion. The more divided a collective is, the more likely it is that a collective will produce a weaker motion. The more potent the source leadership-propensity, the stronger its lifeforce, then the more likely leadership-propensity will survive, grow, develop, endure turmoil and obstacles, and produce a powerful effect. Alternatively, a weaker motion produces less effect and is more vulnerable to potential negative influences that its environment can present. Indeed, the developing motion of the tendency is not a linear process of movement from A to B; instead, it is studied in Chinese thought in relation to 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng tensions.

陰 yīn and 陽 yáng

I introduced 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng in Part I, so here I develop the thread of the concept that relates to leadership-propensity. 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng do not indicate precise directions of a motion, but the nature of a tendency. 陰 yīn indicates a contractive

tendency, which can represent a tendency for survival. The primary goal of a survival tendency is self-preservation; it intensifies experiences of danger, threat and vulnerability. On the other hand, 陽 yáng tendency strives for expansion. When a tendency develops from being at the mercy of the environment into a powerful force that could modify the

environment, its tendency also alters from survival oriented to prosperity based. A silent motion of leadership-propensity is ever-modifying through complex interplays amongst multiple factors across levels, and its direction is ever-modifying; but the complex process and spontaneous modifications of motion are studied through 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng, or in relation to the nature of the tendency as contractive or expansive.

Chinese thought recognises that even in a process of expansion, there can be circumstances that need contraction; there are 陰 yīn tendencies in a 陽 yáng motion and vice versa. In fact, the Tai Chi symbol (Figure. 4) indicates that the source of 陰 yīn is 陽 yáng and vice versa. This is because the ancient Chinese understand value not as inherent in the world, but a product of the propensity of things. For example, human qualities such as loving, caring and empathy can only be seen as valuable by societies lacking them. When the world is filled with love, it is no longer

Figure 4 The Tai Chi Symbol



(Law & Kesti, 2014, p. 5)

an identifiable need and becomes an identifiable and taken-for-granted aspect of life. Human emotions, experiences, including collective organisational discourses, are understood as produced by the complex interplays amongst 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng tendencies across multiple levels.

Leadership-propensity emerges as 陰 yīn or 陽 yáng, but as both organisational circumstances and the complex interactions from within collectives are constantly changing, more and more leader-propensities are produced. These emerging circumstantial tendencies influence the course of leadership-propensity's development, and the development of a leadership-propensity's motion is a product of accumulated momentum of the circumstantial tendencies over time and is also either 陰 yīn or 陽 yáng. The momentum of leadership-propensity can be understood through 勢 shì.

勢 *Shì*

勢 shì indicates the strength, speed, range of a motion's development, and is what the ancient Chinese relied on to take advantage of motion. As mentioned in an earlier section, the organisation is not the only context that influences leadership-propensity. Every organisational member is constantly influenced by multiple aspects of the world, including natural resources, industry, social, political, religious, cultural and environmental issues; and the outcome of the interplay amongst these factors are lived by the individual and embodied in their decisions, choices, value systems and activities on a moment-to-moment basis. The organisation is a context in which any individual's own tendencies are expressed in a particular configuration. As

a driving force behind the collective, the motion of leadership-propensity in an organisation is an outcome of the complex interactions of the tendencies within the organisation and embody the interplay amongst all factors that can affect life, including personal, professional, familial, communal, religious, cultural, social, political, environmental and other unidentified levels. In other words, a leadership-propensity within an organisation is a manifestation of all factors that influence the organisational members' lives. This is to say that leadership's motion, even though emergent from within an organisation, is not directly produced by the organisation; it reflects motions at multiple levels, including organisational, social and national. From this perspective, one cannot simply 'develop' leadership-propensity by modifying identifiable human activities within the organisation. The organisation is a context in which complex tendencies in the world manifest in a particular collective configuration. As such, leadership-propensity as 勢 shì is not directly controllable by the organisation.

The development of leadership-propensity motion, or the collective's driving force behind activities in an organisation, is a process of accumulating 勢 shì (momentum). Organisational members are constantly interacting with multiple aspects of the world, and the influence of different aspects of life varies from person to person. As circumstances are ever-changing, so are people's value systems, priorities, decisions, and choices. The spontaneous changes within a collective lead to constant modifications in leadership-propensity's motion. Chinese thought understands that leadership-propensity's power and potential effect are a product of 勢 shì, or the accumulated momentum over time. Like a stream of water that a dam can easily block, weak 勢

shì can be at the mercy of its environment; a powerful 勢 shì can be an unstoppable flood that dominates its environment and changes the landscape it passes through.

勢 shì of a collective is influenced both by the organisation, and 勢 shì at levels beyond the organisation. From within the organisation, 勢 shì could be to do with the alignment of organisational members' tendencies. But the alignment of tendencies is far more than the mere agreement amongst the members. 勢 shì in this sense is not the same as referent power or other forms of power leaders might use to influence others (French & Raven, 1959). 勢 shì here is related to the intensity of a collective's driving force. This is because 勢 shì indicates the potential for prosperity, which is continuous, can include the increase or decrease in the quality of work, and productivity over time. Strong momentum is produced by the high intensity in the collective's driving force and indicates potential for producing consistent, high-level effects. On the other hand, even if most members of a collective are agreeable with each other, the collective can still produce a weak 勢 shì. The lack of intensity in the collective's driving force does not obtain potential to generate high productivity nor produce a powerful impact. Additionally, if the 勢 shì is increasing, it indicates that the potential impact of the collective is likely to continue to expand, and as 勢 shì decreases, the collective becomes less motivated, and the effect they produce, both quality and consistency are likely to decline.

If the leadership tendency within the organisation is aligned with 勢 shì at a wider level, the collective can potentially acquire prosperity beyond the limit of an organisation. An organisation is a part of wider tendencies such as those produced by a society, nation, environment, available

resources and technology; and is likely to be more prosperous by following the value system of the society and policy of the government, rather than against them. For example, a social tendency to live healthily and organically, a technological tendency to maximise digitalisation, and a government tendency to decrease pollution by using green energy is likely to prosper, expand and gain market shares, and/or receive support and funding. On the other hand, organisations against these tendencies tend to decline, lose market share, and lose support from stakeholders. Changes at these levels are beyond the operation, management or 勢 shì from within the organisation. 勢 shì at wider levels can influence some industries to decline and even disappear while other industries thrive. If 勢 shì within the organisation form alignment with 勢 shì at a wider level that is still picking up momentum, the organisation can become a leading force in the 勢 shì at the wider level (like Tesla for electric vehicle) and can potentially have long-lasting prosperity.

What 勢 shì indicates is the *potential* that can be leveraged. Potential refers to the silent energy that drives the growth of a weed or flower. It is not a potential for a predetermined end, but an absolute potential that could continue to develop its motion (Jullien, 1995). Potential can be understood by the drawing of a bow in archery. Drawing a bow does not directly produce an effect; and instead, it builds 勢 shì and produces potential. The power of an arrow's effect is intimately associated with the potential in the drawing of a bow. The more potential the drawing of the bow produces; the more powerful an arrow's effect can potentially be.

勢 shì indicates potential; it does not directly determine an outcome but is suggestive of its direction. The momentum of 勢 shì, like a powerful wave, can become overwhelmingly suggestive of certain outcomes over others, and make them almost inevitable. From a Chinese perspective, leadership-propensity is caused by the overwhelming potential accumulated in 勢 shì that spontaneously expresses itself through moments of rupture. A specific event is one of the possible ways to express the silent motion of leadership, but not the only way to cause change. The outcome of leadership-propensity is a consequence of 勢 shì; the more 勢 shì a leadership tendency contains, the more potential it obtains, and the more powerful its effect can potentially be.

勢 shì is built spontaneously over time, and cannot be directly produced nor reproduced. Like the ripening of an apple and blooming of a flower, the actualisation of a 勢 shì is situational and cannot be enforced. The modification of human behaviour, meaning, or any other activity can only change the form of leadership that appears, and not the silent tendency that drove its emergence. Direct modifications to behaviour or meaning might disrupt the 勢 shì that is already accumulating potential. In order to accumulate 勢 shì and leverage its effect, every aspect of leadership-propensity must evolve spontaneously (自然 zì rán). Recognising that propensity and powerful impact are embedded in the spontaneously emerged leadership-propensity, Chinese thought would not acquire prosperity by modifying identifiable aspects of leadership (in the Western sense), but by taking advantage of the already present 勢 shì of leadership-propensity.

Acquiring Prosperity Through Leadership-propensity's 勢 Shì

Chinese thought conceives effect as produced by motion, and that prosperity is inherent in the propensity of things. The previous sections have identified how a silent motion was understood by the ancient Chinese, and I have introduced the thread of leadership-propensity to show how a Chinese approach to leadership (leadership-propensity) provides an alternative to leadership in the Western sense of the word. The following sections now introduce the thread of the net that relates leadership-propensity to prosperity to discuss how organisational prosperity can be acquired through leadership-propensity from a Chinese perspective.

Prosperity Through Propensity is Not a Problem

Chinese thought acquires prosperity, not by directly tackling perceived problems, but following the propensity of things in which prosperity is available. Jullien suggests that the Western tradition tends to tackle issues directly, while the Chinese prefer to deal with them indirectly (Jullien, 2000). What Jullien calls a direct approach is the tackling of a problem, but 'problem' is a matter of perception. Based on Jullien's work, this Western tendency to directly associate change, growth and development with problem-solving is grounded in Western habitual ways of conceiving life as human against nature, and its traditional perception of human intentionality as the basis for producing order out of chaos. The privilege of the 'problem' is common in leadership scholarship, with a standard format of beginning a study by identifying a problem to be resolved. The critical tradition also embodies this tendency in leadership studies, which makes criticism and critiques the primary purpose of the scholarship.

The ancient Chinese did not associate prosperity directly with perceived problems. Instead, they understand prosperity as inherent in the sensory world, available in the propensity of things.

From this perspective, every aspect of leadership-propensity is a part of, and are a partnership that coproduces, the propensity of leadership in which prosperity is available. Propensity is the source for diversity and abundance; leadership-propensity enables 道 dào to continue its manifestations to produce prosperity for a collective. This is a key point for critical leadership scholars to appreciate about classic Chinese thought; nothing is inherently wrong in the propensity of things, and so nothing is innately wrong with prosperity. The propensity of things, like moment-by-moment changes in the weather, temperature, and seasons, is subtle and often undetectable. It is like the mundane everyday activities of working in an organisation. It is not until something out-of-the-ordinary happens that attention becomes focused; a problem is perceived because it disrupts the ordinary. But because Chinese thought understands the propensity of things as the constant alternation of 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng tendencies, there is no inherent nature to ‘problem’, the ordinary can become out-of-ordinary and vice versa. Every aspect of leadership-propensity that can be temporarily perceived as problematic can also be a resource for acquiring prosperity in other circumstances.

Chinese thought prioritises motion, and understands problems as circumstantial, a temporary symptom of the interplay amongst situational factors (Jullien, 2000). A problem disappears as the configuration of the factors that influence it changes. Based on this understanding, the ancient Chinese prioritises environmental factors and their influences on the propensity of the situation. 勢 shì alters as the interplay amongst the situational factors change, because the motion

of leadership-propensity is understood in relation to 勢 shì. When 勢 shì becomes favourable for the organisation, the problem disappears. On the other hand, directly resolving a problem does not guarantee prosperity, but produces the absence of a perceived problem. How important a problem is in relation to prosperity is a matter of perception; associating prosperity with problems makes the identification of problems the basis for studying leadership. Because the problem is perceived, seekers of problems can always find them.

Seeing the world as a problem to be solved is embedded in binary thinking, and eliminating the problem is the taken-for-granted outcome. But this approach is destructive to potential resources important for prosperity. From my Chinese perspective, an action has no inherent nature and could produce both benefit and harm depending on the circumstance. Taking a broad approach to Western thought and characterising it as fundamentally binary, an action is understood in relation to the problem it is supposed to eliminate. Conceiving reality in binary terms as one thing differentiated from another, by default sees the world as inherently problematic, and able to be ‘solved’ by humans alone. The ‘harm’ of a solution is undetectable because it focuses only on the elimination of the problem, and whether or not that can be demonstrated, and not the propensity of a situation.

This Chinese perspective provides a narrative that does not directly tie one’s own lack of prosperity to the external problems one perceives; instead, prosperity is to do with one’s own perceptions, sensitivity towards the propensity of things, and skill to acquire prosperity by taking advantage of 勢 shì. From this Chinese perspective, all problems will disappear, and more

problems will come. Prosperity is not directly associated with problems, but the propensity of things. As a part of the propensity of things, prosperity is always available. From this perspective, there will always be communities and organisations that are prosperous and can continue to acquire prosperity.

Chinese thought recognises that prosperity is in the propensity of things, which is ordinary and mundane, and embodies most of the everyday life. Being prosperous is about leveraging the prosperity available in the propensity of things, and leadership-propensity's 勢 shì is accumulated day by day in a dance with the everyday.

Acquiring Prosperity with Efficiency

Jullien (2002) understands that the Western tradition acquires prosperity through the theory-and-practice partnership, but in Chinese tradition, prosperity is acquired through what he calls the propensity-potential model. Because prosperity is understood as inherent in the propensity of things, to acquire prosperity requires one to detect the 勢 shì in the propensity and leverage its potential by aligning it.

Jullien (2004b) proposes that the Chinese prioritise efficiency and he clarifies efficiency by contrasting it with effectiveness. He recognises efficiency consists of acquiring maximum profit with minimum action, while effectiveness requires a frame of reference such as a plan or a predetermined goal. This is because effectiveness is often measured on the basis of action in relation to the fulfilment of the ideal (Jullien, 2011). On the other hand, the propensity-potential model relies on the already present motion(s) in the sensory world; not to alter them, but to take

advantage of their already-present propensity. Unlike effectiveness, efficiency is not evaluated based on action, but the effect one can leverage. The Chinese tradition would not suggest modifying agents within an organisation or impose how they should work together; this is because direct modification of an agent or a group requires constant effort and is likely to vary from case to case. A Chinese approach would allow the most circumstantially suitable forms of leadership to come about spontaneously in each circumstance with minimum to no interference to its propensity. It leverages the effect of a leadership tendency by aligning the organisation with the already-present 勢 shì.

Jullien's (2000) suggests direct modification of an agent or a group is seen as inefficient from a Chinese perspective. Direct modification is understood as confronting, out of the ordinary, sudden, and a moment of rupture. It is a loud statement that publicly declares an intention in the open and makes itself visible to all forces against it. Consequently, a moment of rupture attracts attention, invites maximum resistance, and is, therefore, not efficient. In a process of acquiring prosperity through leadership, direct modification of an agent or a collective's identity, behaviour, attribute, or ways of working together is understood as a lack of efficiency from a Chinese perspective. This is because these activities are highly noticeable to the organisation members, and are imposed onto them, disregarding their preferences and choices. As a consequence, these activities are likely to encounter a variety of types and levels of resistances from different members at different stages of being modified. Even if one assumes that the modification is permanent, more modifications are constantly needed as personnel change.

Chinese thought strives for efficiency, so it privileges the 自然 zì rán. The 自然 zì rán, or a spontaneously emerged form of leadership-propensity, is the outcome of the spontaneous interplay between the complex environment and the motion of the collective under the circumstance. The existence of leadership-propensity is the self-evident proof of its functionality under the circumstance. In the version of Chinese thought I privilege in this discussion through Jullien, no theorising is required. Nor is there any of the things associated with Western thought; identification, logic, or reasoning. As a consequence, taking advantage of the spontaneously emerged motion of leadership is more efficient than creating a leadership ideal or prototype than trying to impose it onto everyday organisational life. Before I further explain how Chinese thought acquires prosperity, I introduce another thread to my net of understanding; what organisational prosperity is through a Chinese lens.

Organisational Prosperity

Jullien (1995) suggests that cultures strive for prosperity, and they study the sensory world to serve this agenda. Jullien did not specifically define prosperity so here I assume, as introduced previously, that prosperity in the Western sense is closely associated with financial wealth. In this section, I employ a Chinese understanding of prosperity based on my interpretation of Jullien's description of Chinese thought. In this section, I hope to show how an organisational leadership-propensity's major aim is to acquire prosperity.

To start, it is important to appreciate the role of long-term thinking in Chinese thought and why this is the case. Applying Jullien's work (2004b) we can appreciate that the Chinese language

facilitates a dialogue between the motions in the sensory world and human activities. Prosperity cannot be defined by language but is understood through sensory phenomena such as the bloom of a flower or the ripening of a fruit. As mentioned in Part I of the thesis, the ancient Chinese conceived time as circular, and this relates to why there is an alternation of 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng. Prosperity is not a linear process of growth and development, but the accumulation of cycles. A tendency, whether that facilitates the growth of a flower, weed or animal, is ever being nurtured and challenged on a regular basis. While certain lifeforms are nurtured during the day, they are challenged at night. At the end of each cycle, a growing tendency has both been nurtured and challenged, but what differentiates it from a declining tendency is that its potential for growth has increased at the end of one cycle and the start of another, while the potential in a declining tendency is continually depleting across cycles. The development of a tendency is not a linear process, but the accumulation of cycles. Prosperity is associated with the potential accumulated across cycles and is not seen as an immediate or short-term gain. Based on this appreciation of a different way of approaching time and therefore an event, organisational prosperity from the Chinese tradition is understood separately from its common association – an examination of specific events - in most leadership research.

A further difference to appreciate is that a Chinese approach to prosperity not only includes a wider concept of prosperity that is not only attached to financial outcomes (financial outcomes are still important), but also that the potential for prosperity is included in the concept. In leadership research, the effect of leadership is often associated directly with the organisational outcome; this is especially so in functionalist studies (Bass, 1985; Felkins et al., 2001).

Prosperity is intimately linked to the organisation's profit; productivity and outcome are often primary measurements of leadership's effectiveness in mainstream leadership scholarship.

However, regarding Chinese preferences, Jullien (2004b, 2011) uses the term *prosperity* and not *profit* because prosperity for the Chinese is not directly associated with immediate gains of any kind. Jullien's work suggests that Chinese thought prioritises silent motion and the potential inherent in 勢 shì, over any identifiable outcome. Based on this understanding, an organisation's prosperity from a Chinese lens would include both the potential-for-prosperity and profit.

Potential-for-prosperity, as a silent aspect of prosperity, is more important to the Chinese understanding of prosperity than the identifiable immediate profit.

Conceiving reality on the basis of motion, prosperity is a continuing process of accumulation of both potential-for-prosperity and profit. Jullien's work describes that the study of propensity in the Chinese tradition prioritises leveraging the effect of 勢 shì. The power, scale, and endurance of an effect are directly associated with the accumulated potential within the 勢 shì. Like a dam that continues to accumulate potential: when it finally opens, the effect of the water is a consequence of the potential that was built up. The more potential a situation accumulates, the more powerful and long-lasting its effect is likely to be.

An organisation's continuing production of outcome and long-term prosperity is a product of the building and releasing of the potential-for-prosperity and cannot be measured by the immediate profit itself. From this perspective, profit itself does not represent the prosperity of an organisation. This is because profit is an effect of the potential that is already released.

Through this Chinese lens, an organisation does not necessarily need an immediate profit, but it must have the potential for prosperity. Potentiality in the Chinese sense is not associated with a predetermined ideal, but the absolute potentiality for a tendency to continue to manifest itself (Jullien, 1995). This is because an effect in itself represents the actualisation of the past accumulated potential and does not inform anything about the effect that is coming about.

Potential is the source for more effect to be generated; when the potential-for-prosperity exceeds its limit, the reversal process of the situation starts. No more effect will come about when there is no more potential to be leveraged. Based on this understanding, the profit represents already-manifested potential, but it is the potential and not profit that has a more deterministic influence on prosperity. An example to illustrate the difference between privileging the immediate profit and potential for prosperity is the difference between hunting and farming. Hunting privileges the immediate profit but could deplete its potential for future prosperity. On the other hand, farming crops prioritise potential over profit; profit in farming can be leveraged once or twice per year. Farming crops requires continuous nurturing of potentiality without profit for a long period of time, but when its potential is leveraged in harvesting, it produces abundance, long-lasting and/or sustainable profits on a regular basis. It is more likely to produce a prosperous and sustainable life compared to the activities that seek short-term profit, such as hunting a scarce resource and depleting it. If this prosperity is measured by immediate profit, an annual harvest would be a loss three quarters of the year and be regarded as a failure. In economic terms, if a country's gross domestic product (GDP) declines more than two quarters in a row, it is considered an economic depression. But when both the profit and potential are considered, what

is seemingly unprofitable from a short-term perspective can also potentially produce long-term and sustainable prosperity.

Based on the understanding of prosperity outlined above, the potential value of profit is determined by the circumstance of the organisation and not the profit itself. This is to say that profit could also harm an organisation if it depletes its potential. If the acquisition of the profit damages the harmony amongst the situational factors in ways that prevent them from producing favourable 勢 shì, the profit is damaging to the organisation. It is like picking all the apples on a tree regardless of their ripeness. The short-term boost of profit would immediately exhaust this food source and eliminate all the potential for more prosperity. A prosperous organisation is not necessarily the one that makes the most immediate profit, but one that has inexhaustible potential to leverage. This perspective would suggest that the nurturance of potentiality is a more determining factor to the Chinese understanding of prosperity compared to the acquisition of immediate profit. Based on this understanding, organisational prosperity is not to do with the fulfilment of a predetermined goal or producing outcome but generating 勢 shì to accumulate potential for long-term and sustainable prosperity.

So far, this thesis has discussed the collective in Chinese thought because it has been important to stress that the individualism of the West is foreign to this view of Chinese thought I am communicating (understanding that modern China has embraced its own form of capitalism and appropriates Western ways). However, the individual does have a place in Chinese thought, but again in a different way to that which is understood in the West. Potential-for-prosperity lies in

every individual multitudinous organisational member and in the collective. Chinese thought recognises the silent tendency that drives an individual within the collective and conceives the activities of working, productivity, and the outcome one produces as the reflection of any individual's tendency. 勢 shì can influence productivity, quality of work, constancy, endurance, satisfaction, and many other factors because it represents the inherent driving force behind activities. Human activities can be performed for infinite reasons and purposes; one's driving force is the source of acting. An activity is an already manifested tendency, which does not indicate the continuation of the activities in the future. On the other hand, 勢 shì, as the driving force behind the activities, can influence the consistency, development and endurance of performance. When one takes an action to fulfil one's goal, express one's passion, and/or for a cause that one believes in, so it can have completely different implications on the continuing actions compared to acting when forced or out of an obligation. It is the continuing growth and development of one's own tendency that drives an individual to make decisions and act in life and is the basis for producing outcomes. As one works to express one's passion, one is more likely to produce high-quality work over a period of time because one is more motivated to acquire mastery in the work for their own sake and take pride in the outcome they produce. The more 勢 shì behind an individual's tendency, the more productive one is likely to be, and the higher quality work one is likely to do with constancy. An organisation harnesses the development of its members' own tendencies, which is the driving force behind their presence in the organisation, working activities and interactions with other organisational members and the

world in everyday life. Bearing this in mind, the prosperity produced by leadership-propensity is more than the sum of individual members, and still the 勢 shì of the collective.

勢 shì of the Collective and Prosperity

Leadership research is closely associated with the actions of the individual, despite critical leadership scholars' attempts to dismantle the individualist focus of theory in favour of other models such as collective leadership, social movement leadership and other innovations in leadership theory. Chinese thought offers a different way of understanding the collective in relation to leadership, that is not 'against' the individual.

To appreciate the way my Chinese lens approaches the collective it is first important to recognise that leadership-propensity harnesses the power of the collective's 勢 shì and not that of an individual. 勢 shì indicates the strength of the tendency that drives the collective, and acquiring prosperity through 勢 shì of leadership is taking advantage of the power, intensity and longevity of the driving force behind the collective's identifiable activities, and not the activities of individuals nor outcomes themselves. As mentioned earlier, from a Chinese perspective, an action has no inherent nature. A collective performs a range of activities that can sustain an organisation, and from a Chinese perspective, the collective is what sustains any leadership-propensity. Without the collective leadership-propensity just doesn't exist. Thus, the organisational collective and the individual are seen as united.

This perspective on organisational leadership-propensity is obviously not universally shared, even within China. But here I am trying to communicate how ancient Chinese thought in the way

I am discussing it, sees the collective in terms of unity. Powerful 勢 shì encompasses a unified and highly intensive commitment to a cause (which can be a ‘capitalist’ one) shared by the collective. The power of leadership-propensity here lies in the driving force behind the meaningful activities that make organisational life, including learning and performing organisational roles. Driven by a powerful 勢 shì, members are more likely to consistently do quality work, continue to develop themselves, and tolerate aspects of the work they do not enjoy for their own sake when they recognise that every task in the organisation serves their individual and collective causes and commitments. When 勢 shì, the collective, the individual, and leadership-propensity are aligned, individual members associate their personal successes with that of the collective. As long as the shared cause remains and its momentum continues, organisational life will be meaningful to the collective; the same force continuously drives the outcomes they produce. Like a rock rolling down a hill, the more momentum it has, the more unstoppable it becomes. To be clear, I am not saying that this is an appropriate model for leadership in the West; what I am saying is that powerful 勢 shì and leadership-propensity, when working together in a Chinese context, can benefit an organisation and individuals to achieve prosperity. These ideas, although they have ancient foundations in China, still retain utility even in contemporary contexts to help explain how organisational collectives can function in a holistic way.

Western thought tends to think of unity in the way described above in negative terms. But this is not the way that Chinese thought sees unity. 勢 shì in an organisational context is the environment, and cultural norms influence new members and other parties that interact with the

collective. Here I interpret Chinese thinking as recognising that all norms tend towards either 陰 yīn or 陽 yáng; and as organisational 勢 shì continues to develop, individual preferences become normalised. The most powerful 勢 shì is normalised preferences that function as the foundation for lived taken-for-granted norms. This is because a taken-for-granted norm is, without being questioned, fully adopted and embodied by a collective at all times. As a consequence, the collective is unified in the tendency. For example, earlier tendencies for gender equality encountered many resistances on different social, political, and religious platforms. As the 勢 shì of these tendencies strengthens, gender equality becomes normalised and more taken-for-granted. The most powerful 勢 shì is taken for granted as a norm and becomes the default narrative of the collective. As the 勢 shì continues to develop gender equality will become the basis for everyday functioning and faces into the background, becoming unidentifiable. Questioning equality can become strange to the generation of children who grew up in an environment where gender equality is normal. This is to say that the most powerful 勢 shì generated by a collective is one that the entire collective shares and takes for granted as the basis of their daily function, and this way of approaching the world does not obscure inequality the way it is perceived in the West.

Another relevant connection of 勢 shì of the collective to the issue of prosperity is its propensity to build momentum by aligning with other motions that move in similar directions. 勢 shì is a tendency, either 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng; a community, society, nation, and the natural world is constantly moving between the opposing tendencies. An organisation is only ever a part of a wider propensity of society, nation and world. As a consequence, it is constantly being

influenced by 勢 shì at wider levels. For example, a government tendency to clean pollution can negatively affect the mining and petroleum industries, while it positively affects renewable energy and electric vehicle companies. Similarly, a social tendency for organic food impacts the food industry, which benefits certain types of companies and disadvantages to others. An organisation is ever participating in the propensities of the wider environments; if it can form an alignment with 勢 shì at a wider level, it is possible for the collective to acquire prosperity far beyond the limit of the organisational outcome. This tendency of the propensity of 勢 shì to join with other collectives moving in the same direction also means that other social movements such as those that are aligned with initially oppressed groups such as women, can join forces in a sense.

Being aligned with a social or political 勢 shì allows the collective to gain the support of the public, organisations, and/or government, which can lead to an increase in markets, customer base, resources, suppliers, funding and more. Aligning with 勢 shì at wider levels provide the potential for the collective to make an enduring impact on a society or a nation, which can provide supportive and fertile environments at multiple wider levels, which in turn nurtures the long-lasting and sustainable prosperity of the collective.

The Influence of an Environment

Chinese approach nurtures leadership-propensity by prioritising efficiency. Organisational members with leadership-propensity can manipulate the environment within which propensity emerges to engage more efficient outcomes. This is not a direct approach in the sense of Western

cultural change management where a new value system is imposed onto members, even if it is well-meaning and progressive. The Chinese way is more indirect and involves manipulating the conditions to encourage the value system to emerge 'spontaneously' if the conditions are right. An environment is where the collective is situated and is the basis for everyday functioning. It is like the day-night cycle that influences human activities but does not directly command what people have to do. The influence of an environment is subtle, occurs from moment to moment; because they are blended in the propensity of things, and so they seem ordinary and unnoticeable. As such, human influence on the environment can encounter minimum to no resistance, heightening efficiency in this way of thinking. Chinese thought in this regard can be likened to the constant dripping of water day by day that drills a hole in the centre of the rock without cracking it, and the slow darkening process of the day that occurs subtly, so that one is already situated in darkness before noticing it. This is why ancient sages proposed influencing to leave no trace. Similarly, a military strategist can subtly manipulate the course of warfare and defeat the enemy without the enemy knowing the strategist's involvement in the warfare (Jullien, 2004b). Leadership-propensity is constantly influenced by factors at multiple levels and is not controllable by the organisation, but the organisation, as one of the environments in which leadership-propensity is situated, can influence the motion of leadership-propensity to a certain degree.

To explain the influence of the environment using a metaphor, the function of an organisation as an environment can be understood as a mirror that reflects light. A mirror cannot control the sunlight, but it can be a medium that concentrates the scattered sunlight to focus the rays. In a

similar way, leadership-propensity does not belong to the organisation and is uncontrollable by the organisation, but the organisation can still influence its configuration. The organisation is where members gather; so it is the context that makes them a collective and not separated individuals. The environment that the organisation produces is like the surface of the mirror that directs the light. It can focus the light into a concentrated ray or make it even more scattered. Leadership-propensity, with powerful 勢 shì, which is the product of concentrated momentum, can provide an environment that nurtures the unity of the organisational members by focusing on environmental forces in a way to illuminate an organisation's purpose. The basis for Chinese thought to acquire prosperity is through spontaneously emerged motion; to nurture an organisation's potential for prosperity is to maximise the possibilities for leadership-propensity to emerge.

Leadership-propensity Potential and 道 dào

What the organisation as an environment nurtures is 道 dào, or the source for leadership-propensity's manifestation. The 道 dào of leadership-propensity is the source for producing powerful 勢 shì. As mentioned in an earlier section, 道 dào is identified in this research as the lifeforce of the collective, which concerns the collective's survival and prosperity. Because leadership-propensity is produced by the collective, the unity of the collective is directly associated with the potency of 道 dào. This can be explained with a flying rock that makes more impact on a target than a handful of sand of the same weight because each grain of sand functions individually and cannot produce a concentrated force like the rock. Leadership-propensity's effect is to do with the momentum of the collective; the more a collective is unified

as a group, the more members are likely to form an alignment with leadership-propensity over time, and the higher there is a possibility for the collective to produce powerful 勢 shì in the leadership-propensity process. In the following paragraphs, I outline examples of how this could be done: first, by nurturing the bond of the collective, and second, by nurturing and the bond of the members with the organisation as an environment. By being committed to both the organisation and each other as a collective, the collective can be a potent source for producing powerful leadership-propensity that spontaneously prioritise the collective interest, and function in alignment. My intention here is not to reify a normative view of traditional leadership practice in the West, but rather to draw another thread in the net of unthought between Chinese thought and leadership scholarship to show how a different way of perceiving the world can manifest in practice.

Nurture the Bond of the Collective. To nurture the organisation members' bond with the collective, the organisation needs to function as a community. This could include HR practices such as hosting social and cultural events such as birthday celebrations, anniversaries, and individual and/or collective achievements. It can also provide services such as single's match-up, relationship counselling, and providing financial support for employees. The organisation can also facilitate networking amongst members and encourage them to help and support each other in spontaneous ways as a community. When there is a strong bond in the collective, members are likely to be protective of it, attached to it, and might commit to its prosperity as one's own. When this is the case, the leadership-propensity that emerges from within the collective is likely to be in the interest of the collective, and therefore likely to gain momentum over time.

Nurture the Bond Between the Members and the Organisation. The organisation is, ideally, an environment that facilitates the tendencies of its members. As mentioned in earlier sections of this thesis, using my lens, I see organisational members' inherent tendencies as being the driving forces behind their activities; this includes being in the organisation and being a part of a collective. To have a potent lifeforce, one way is to provide a fertile environment for organisational members to facilitate their own growth and development, so that they associate their own survival and prosperity with that of the collective. This means that the organisation can become the instrument for every member to explore, develop, innovate, and acquire success and fulfilment for their own lives. One is likely to leave the organisation when it can no longer facilitate the continuing development of the member's tendency. Consequently, nurturing a strong bond between the member and the organisation is to facilitate the development of the member's tendencies in the organisational environment. And when the organisation can facilitate and nurture its members' tendencies in most aspects of their lives, the members' lifeforce forms a unity with that of the collective. Members cannot abandon the collective as it represents their own prosperity and fulfilment. As the members become fully committed to the survival and prosperity of the collective, leadership-propensity emerges in the organisation, is more likely to benefit the collective, and the members are more likely to adopt it. As a consequence, leadership-propensity is also more likely to gain more momentum over time. The members' commitment to the organisation must be 自然 zì rán (self-ignited or spontaneously formed), and not a product of manipulation or domination. Because prosperity is a long-term organisational concern, deception

and oppression, even though they might produce immediate positive effects for an organisation, are likely to produce 勢 shì against the organisation in the long run.

Traditionally, China is an agricultural country, and the thought that evolved in this context reflects an understanding of prosperity as the nurturance of potential. To nurture both the organisational member's bond with the collective and the organisation, the organisation can function as the fertile environment that maximises the potential for them to emerge. The following section provides an example of how an organisation can provide such an environment. Because my Chinese lens reveals a unique approach to leadership, I find it important to provide an example of the types of thinking that can manifest from approaching leadership through this lens. The following strand privileges my Chinese view as I interpret leadership-propensity as an alternative to the Western tradition through Jullien. I am not arguing that this is my preferred way of doing leadership in the West, but simply gathering another strand to capture unthought. There are tensions between this way of thinking and that of the West, but I return to these tensions and unpick them more in relation to the development of leadership scholarship later in Part III.

An Organisational Environment that Nurtures Leadership-propensity 道 dào

道 dào represents the potential for leadership-propensity to emerge and manifest; there are two components to the potential for manifestation, one is the space for leadership-propensity to emerge, and the other is to nurture a potent 道 dào, or source for manifestation.

As one cannot fill a cup that is already full, the foundation for leadership-propensity to emerge is the space for it to do so. An organisation as an environment that nurtures leadership potential must maximise the space for leadership tendencies to spontaneously emerge, and this translates to not fixating leadership as a position in the organisation. Chinese thought does not conceive of leadership in relation to identifiable forms such as individual-based or collective, but 勢 shì.

Leadership-propensity, whether individual-based or collective, is understood from a Chinese perspective as circumstantial. The development of a collective motion can at times manifest into an individual-based leadership-propensity, and under other circumstances, a collective form of leadership-propensity. Because leadership-propensity is a product of 勢 shì, leadership-propensity, whether it manifests in an individual or a collective, can become an obstacle for people in other situations because the leadership-propensity being embodied is against the emerging 勢 shì. Imposing one individual or group as the permanent source for producing outcomes limits its manifestation and can also be circumstantially destructive to the collective. Not fixing leadership-propensity allows it to arise circumstantially and also disappear spontaneously.

Not having a fixed position can also prevent or minimise many issues within an organisation.

Power can have both positive and negative effects, and the Chinese lens recognises that domination or empowerment is dependent on the use of power and circumstances. When power is aligned with 勢 shì, it functions to support the interest of the collective; as such, it is empowering to most members. Domination occurs when it is utilised in a way that is against 勢 shì. When circumstances change, the same behaviour that has benefited the organisation could

start harming it. By not having a fixed leader position, the collective can benefit from the effect leadership-propensity and also prevent the potential negative effect of the same behaviour. To maximise the potential for leadership-propensity to emerge spontaneously, it is important not to fixate on a leadership position in the organisation.

A fertile environment facilitates the growth and development of leadership-propensity and 勢 shì. As mentioned in the previous section, a unified collective produces a potent source for powerful leadership-propensity to emerge. Every organisational member is influenced by multiple factors across many levels that affect their lives, but the more they are unified as a unit, the more willing and likely they are to align their own tendencies with that of the collective.

By providing a nurturing environment, members are more likely to form a strong bond with the organisation. This bond is the basis for the members' tendencies to protect, build, and improve the organisation as the organisation is committed to their successes. When the collective is unified and is intimately bound with the organisation as an environment, the collective has a potent life force for producing powerful leadership-propensity under different circumstances.

As a fertile environment that nurtures the potency of 道 dào, jobs function as curriculums to help a member develop based on their own tendencies. Every member of the organisation is at different stages of their own personal growth and development in a separate aspect of being human. This diversity in everyone's personal needs, interests, expertise, and levels of development in different aspects of life allows them to coproduce a dynamic and fertile

ecosystem to learn, grow, develop, and contribute to each other in the organisational context in a variety of ways.

The entry-level jobs in the organisation could best function as introductions to a craft for new employees entering the job and senior employees from other departments who want to explore new passions, learn a new skill, or start a different career. Allowing one to learn to fulfil one's own needs results in meaningful working experiences; working is practising what one learns, and the outcome reflects one's competency and mastery. Entry-level jobs function as a curriculum with a set duration of time that one must commit to for mastering the entry-level. Productivity naturally increases as one becomes more competent at the job, and from this stage, depending on one's own tendencies, one could continue in a senior role to master the craft beyond the industry standard and choose to innovate and transform the craft. Alternatively, if one is interested in exploring another craft, one could enter an entry-level job in that department. Each choice facilitates one's own tendency while continuing to contribute to the organisation in different ways. Following or exploring one's interest creates meaning for one's organisational life; one is more likely to engage in work positively and proactively while being self-motivated. The organisation facilitates these needs and provides resources to nurture and intensify the inherent tendencies that motivate members to be proactive, develop and acquire mastery. These tendencies are resources that could provide leadership-propensity in a profession, innovation, nurturing and other aspects of organisational life.

After completing an entry-level job, there are also many other ways to continue facilitating different tendencies. For example, one could continue to master the craft for one's own interest and fulfilment, leading to an abundance occurring spontaneously within the organisation.

Alternatively, some senior employees might feel the need to mentor others and pass on their knowledge and/or wisdom at a certain time in their careers and lives. These members could be educated in the craft of mentoring; they are the best potential mentors because the inherent need for helping others drives them. These mentors share knowledge, skills, and, more importantly, their love and passion for the job are crucial aspects of producing 勢 shì that intensify the learners' passion for the craft.

These are examples of how jobs could facilitate the growth and development of organisation members' inherent leadership-propensity. In order to produce a potent source for leadership-propensity, every organisation member must, in one way or another, work, practise and pursue mastery for their own needs, desires and fulfilments. The organisation's intention to help its employees must be genuine and wholehearted, for if the member feels that they are being manipulated or forced to work, the source of leadership-propensity might weaken, and it can even turn against the organisation.

Having the jobs function as a curriculum for learning produces potent collective lifeforce. Being flexible and providing the organisation members with the opportunities to learn and practise the type of career they are interested in allows them to constantly be self-motivated and work for their own learning and growing purposes. Facilitating these opportunities can also result in a

strong bond between the members and the organisation, and further nurtures the potency of the collective's lifeforce. Furthermore, the more departments an organisation member becomes involved in, the more connected they are with the organisation as a whole, which influences the organisation's culture. With a strong bond, when a leadership-propensity emerges in an organisation, it is more likely to be adopted by the majority and produce a more powerful 勢 shì. The power of the 勢 shì within the organisation influences its interaction with 勢 shì on a wider social and political level. The more powerful the 勢 shì within the organisation, the more powerful the collective is as a force in a wider 勢 shì. The position of an organisation in the wider propensity of things also influences the potential prosperity it can leverage at that level.

As an environment is provided, the CEO or governors of the organisation no longer need to micromanage or modify any aspect of an agent, but simply allow every member's individual tendency to grow, develop, and interact with each other and the world, produce leadership-propensity under every circumstance. 勢 shì within an organisation is a pulse of the propensity of things in the world reflected by the collective. It is seamlessly aligned with the propensity of things in the world, modifies spontaneously as circumstances change. It provides insights into what a community, society, industry, and the world is heading towards. 勢 shì within the organisation can be an indicator of the 勢 shì at wider levels, as a consequence, following 勢 shì within the organisation is in many ways, also forming an alignment with 勢 shì at a wider environment; which is the basis for sustainable prosperity. Instead of designing organisational and/or leadership ideals, and modifying organisational members individually or collectively, physically, mentally or spiritually with the hope of its ideal can bring prosperity; an organisation

is more likely to stay prosperity through change by following and taking advantage of the spontaneously emerged and developing 勢 shì from within the organisation.

Additionally, as the organisational members participating in 勢 shì and fighting for their own meaningful causes, they are highly motivated and are likely to produce quality outcomes throughout the entire manifestation process of 勢 shì. The organisation can be a cheerleader of its members, help them achieve their goals and successes, and leverage the effect of the members' abundance for as long as a leadership-propensity 勢 shì continues to express itself.

In this Chinese model, the organisation leverages its members' continuing growth, development, successes, and transformations instead of limiting working activities to a predetermined vision.

This model is grounded in deep respect to the 自然 zì rán, which recognises the value of the spontaneously formed motions in the sensory world over human intentionality and designs. Of course, as raised previously, human intention and design is characteristic of modern organisation forms and can be the root cause of many ills facing organisations and societies today. I return to considering the limits of my approach to leadership-propensity to deal with questions of contemporary politics and ethics towards the end of Part III, and identify where future research can focus to overcome this gap between the traditions of the West, which privileges concepts such as ethics and politics to solve problems, and China, which privileges the everyday habits and practices of life to deal with the challenges of life, including those of organisations, inequality and unfairness.

If an organisational environment is fertile, the organisation can provide the conditions for 道 dào of leadership-propensity to flourish, which is the life force of the collective. 道 dào enables leadership-propensity to emerge from within an organisation, for the benefit of the collective, and, if it is of benefit to the collective, then it is likely to gather strong momentum. However, because leadership tendencies emerge and evolve spontaneously, detecting its propensity is a skill, a result of practice and maturation over time, and performed as a moment-to-moment reaction that is not acquired through reasoning. In this regard the process of learning how to take advantage of leadership-propensity becomes pertinent.

Detecting Propensity Relies on Receptivity

In this section, I introduce a strand that attempts to capture the significance of learning in leadership-propensity, with a major insight being the role of receptivity in detecting propensity.

Acquiring prosperity through leadership-propensity requires the detection of 勢 shì, positioning the organisation in the alignment of the 勢 shì, and leveraging its effect. But detecting 勢 shì at different levels concerns the question of: *At what stage of 勢 shì's development can one identify it?* The more powerful the 勢 shì, the more detectable it is, but the later stage of its manifestation contains less manifestable effects to leverage. Alternatively, the earlier one detects 勢 shì, the more potential prosperity there is to be leveraged. However, 勢 shì is difficult to detect in the early stages as its motion is subtle. The skill to detect 勢 shì can only be developed in time through a slow process of maturation.

It is important to appreciate that to detect the propensity of things, the ancient Chinese relied on receptivity and not meaning-making. Jullien (2020) explains that the propensity of things in the sensory world changes spontaneously, so that the form of interpretation itself creates an obstacle to detecting the propensity of things because it is attached to a particular outcome. As one is committed to one idea, the mind discriminates against others; the idea fixated upon then functions as a filter that clouds one's ability to detect the continuing course of a motion as it develops. Thus, unthought itself is a key aspect of ancient Chinese wisdom as a sage strives to overcome this limiting view of the world. Learning to detect 勢 shì is a type of emulation of the ancient sage's skill, which is achieved through practice and habit. These habits continue in China today in many cultural and artistic practices such as martial arts, gardening, art, calligraphy and so on (many of which have been discussed by Jullien) and also, I argue in this section, in orientations to organisational life.

Chinese thought recognises that life is lived on a moment-to-moment basis through spontaneous actions. This orientation is in direct contrast to the way that dualisms - which privilege the exclusion of problems - are lived moment by moment through reactions, and so effects are produced that impact the world in a way that privileges conflict between things. In this way of being in the world, an individual encounters situations spontaneously and reacts to them positively or negatively. A reaction is a response, and it is instantly acted upon as an incident occurs. Reactions are habitual and contain an interpretation of the incident. A reaction is an unconscious act based upon a person's experience of the incident. However, through action, one produces an effect in a reaction that impacts the sensory world at the moment of encounter.

Chinese thinking patterns, however, recognise that life is lived through spontaneously emerged actions in interaction with the world, and not through theorising a separation between society and the natural world. Whilst I acknowledge that in Western philosophy there is recognition of the impact of dualisms on Western thought, especially in the past century (Collinson, 2014; Fairhurst, 2011; Knights, 1997), it is important to stress here that the same recognition has been embedded in Chinese culture and consequently every-day life since ancient times. What is more, process theories in the West and those that recognise the agency of all matter (e.g. in new materialism, see, Bell and Vachhani (2020), and Müller (2019)) are mainly discussed and shared in intellectual circles only using a highly specialised, self-reflexive language. Based on Jullien's work (1995), the aspects of Chinese thought discussed in this research are cultural norms and habits. As such, they are lived, often taken-for-granted, and therefore not actively discussed or questioned. Of course, modern China is more complicated, and I return to this issue when I consider the limitations of my argument later on in Part III.

Returning to this strand on learning and habit, in Chinese thought, actions are lived, habitual, and often taken-for-granted. Chinese thought recognises that the propensity of things has no inherent meaning; meaning is imposed onto the world by people (Jullien, 2004b). In action, one reacts to one's own filter of the world rather than the world itself. As a consequence, if one cannot separate one's dualistic filter from the propensity of things, one cannot detect its motion holistically, and perhaps not be able to recognise 勢 shì until it becomes overwhelmingly obvious at a late stage of its development. For example, the timing of detecting a boulder rolling down a mountain directly influences the available activities one can do to harness its potential power or

avoid the potential harm it can cause. Leadership-propensity's ability to detect 勢 shì directly impacts the organisational prosperity that can be acquired.

Receptivity prioritises *receiving* from the sensory world and not *creating* meaning. It requires emptying one's head and body of ideas, meanings, and interpretations to minimise the attachment to an outcome or discourse and maximise the capability to react to the propensity of things in every moment. The detection of propensity in the sensory world is a product of receptivity at the moment motion occurs. A reaction is habitual and formed in constant repetition through practice. Similarly, developing receptivity is also a process of training and development as becoming aware of the subtlest motions in every motion is a process of maturation over time and can be coached. Chinese thought never experienced the effects of having a mind-body divide, which was in the development of Western philosophy (Descartes, 2009, 2013). So, reasoning and logic are not the basis for competency in Chinese thought. Ancient Chinese thought is lived, and that Chinese sage's unification with the propensity of things is evident through their ability to live the ups and downs in life with ease (Jullien, 2011). Based on this understanding, studying leadership-propensity in the Chinese tradition means to acquire prosperity by taking advantage of the spontaneously emerged motions of propensity in every situation. An organisation's ability to detect 勢 shì and take advantage of motion requires practice; it is lived moment-by-moment in the reaction towards the subtlest changes in the silent motions within the organisation. The opportunity to leverage 勢 shì disappears as the moment passes. To maximise prosperity requires the CEO or governors of the organisation to detect 勢 shì both from within and outside of the organisation, and form alignment with them to leverage

from its potential. And the earlier the organisation can detect the 勢 *shì* and form alignment with it, the more effect there is for it to be potentially leveraged.

Potential Ethical Implications and Concerns of the Chinese Tradition

My way of investigating leadership through a Chinese lens encompasses a cultural value system that provides insights, but there are issues to consider that my perspective is limited in its capacity to illuminate. This section discusses several important ethical implications of studying leadership from a Chinese perspective, because a Western conception of ethics is problematic using the worldview I have discussed in this thesis.

Jullien (2004b) suggests that the ethics that ancient Chinese followed are that of strategy and not morality. He recognises that Western ethics has its root in a metaphysical conception of reality where justice is decided by God(s). However, the ancient Chinese conceives the emergences, development, transformation and renewal of things through the regulatory propensity of the world, such as the day-night cycle and season change. As a consequence, nothing is understood as inherently good or bad, and what is ‘right’ is temporarily produced by 勢 *shì*.

勢 *shì* produces an experience of the norm, the most accepted narrative that has the most support. As 勢 *shì* alters, the previously accepted narrative is challenged more and more until it becomes ‘wrong’ and condemned by the majority. Right and wrong eventually become each other in the propensity of things. A ‘norm’ is a well-established bias produced by 勢 *shì*; any social norm privileges certain people and ways of being while discriminating against others. People who can build a prosperous life with the norm are likely to protect it, while those underprivileged by the

norm are likely to fight against it. From this perspective, any one-sided narrative, whether preaching something as exclusively good or bad, is biased, divisive and discriminative. It is temporary and a product of 勢 *shì*.

Chinese thought characterises the sensory world by its inexhaustibility for manifestation, renewal and transformation, not life, death, or human opinions or values about them. Consequently, Chinese thought does not hesitate to do what is considered ‘necessary’ to follow, form alignment, or modify 勢 *shì*; even those actions that might be considered as immoral from a Western standpoint. This is because the ethical character or implication of an action is not decided by the action itself, but 勢 *shì*. However, Jullien (1995) recognises that while not hesitating is necessary, Chinese sages do not take pleasure in the actions themselves; as a consequence, they also stop an action when it is no longer necessary for modifying or leveraging 勢 *shì*. Jullien says that in a binary conception of ethics when virtue is reflected in the elimination of evil, right is embodied by the confrontation of the wrong, destructions are legitimised by reasoning, and all this is often performed to an extreme end. He claims this might be the reason for radical changes throughout European history which have often been accompanied by mass destruction.

Chinese thought proposes that prosperity is inherent in the propensity of things. Because this way of being privileges the propensity of things instead of centralising on human opinions, for an organisation to acquire prosperity it must form an alignment with 勢 *shì* at wider levels and also produce as much 勢 *shì* as possible. It does not overly concern itself with the complex activities

within the organisation, such as power dynamics or inequalities. They are understood as a natural part of the propensity of a collective and are ever-changing with 勢 *shì*. This style of thinking about existence, even organisational existence, emerges from the ancient belief that the entire earth is ever in a process of alternation between 陰 *yīn* and 陽 *yáng*; there is no absolute equality to any aspect of earth. From this perspective, being ethical is about being strategically adaptive, receptive to 勢 *shì*, and not insistent on following a particular set of values under every circumstance. Because human perceptions of good and right are seen as a consequence of 勢 *shì*, it is ever-modifying. Fixating on any value functions against the spontaneity of life and is thus also against the propensity of things and can potentially harm a collective. To acquire prosperity, an organisation must follow what the majority considers as good and right at organisational, social, and global levels, and change as 勢 *shì* modifies. The Chinese lens shows how prosperity is available without imposing ideals or modifying the spontaneous ways of being and behaving that are inherently valuable experiences of living. However, this lens does not directly consider several ethical issues addressed in existing leadership scholarship, and there are several reasons for this, and implications, which I discuss below.

Grounded in an understanding of the sensory world that is ever-in-motion, ancient Chinese thought does not define or judge a person or behaviour like in the Western tradition. Instead, it accepts all human activities in relation to the circumstances in which they emerge. This approach values people for what they can contribute. However, a potential ethical concern is that unconditional acceptance of every aspect of being human could produce a lack of ethical standards when it comes to behaviour. Because any human activity is understood as

circumstantially valuable, with the potential to contribute to a favourable and/or unfavourable 勢 shì, a negative impact of behaviour is often seen as temporary. The same behaviour can be utilised to produce a positive impact in another circumstance. Because Chinese thought prioritises regulating the environment and not modifying human behaviour, the effect of harmful behaviours could be overlooked and left un-tackled. A society functioning under this value system could result in high levels of corruption, sexual harassment, domination, and other ethical misconduct (as conceived according to Western understandings of ethics).

Additionally, ancient Chinese thought does not judge, discriminate, divide, or condemn any aspect of the world as right or wrong, or good or bad. Instead, it strives to acquire prosperity through a holistic understanding of propensity and considers other perspectives partial. The holistic perspective could help produce a society grounded in understanding each other's (partial) perspectives, not judging one another based on behaviour. However, operating under this approach could also potentially produce other ethical concerns, when seen via a Western perspective. For example, this preference for the holistic approach could be perceived as not separating an individual's contribution from that which causes harm. The Chinese prioritisation of a holistic perspective could lead to evaluating a person in relation only to the overall benefit or harm they produce, resulting in a high tolerance for unethical behaviours when viewed through a Western lens. This preference could, accordingly, make one's valuable contributions function as a cover for unethical behaviours at a less impactful level, and the more valuable one's contribution is, the more one is allowed to act unethically.

The above helps to illustrate some fundamental differences between Chinese traditional thought and Western traditions in the ways that behaviours are perceived, assessed and addressed in respect of their ethicality. Questions about ethics are also related to concerns leadership scholars have regarding leaders' misuse of power. In this thesis, my focus has been to discuss the potential of a Chinese lens for leadership scholarship, and I acknowledge that many questions regarding the role of ethics and politics in organisational life have not been addressed. My arguments regarding Chinese thought have shown how and why Chinese thinking does not directly address issues of inequality, for example, in the same way as critical leadership scholars. Nevertheless, I believe my argument provides an alternative way of thinking about issues such as inequality that I hope other scholars will recognise and pursue in future work.

The Silent Motion of Leadership-propensity

Part III of the thesis addresses the research question: *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership scholarship?* I have been drawing out individual threads of both Chinese thought and Western thought and laying them next to each other to try and capture unthought to transcend the potentials and limitations of both approaches. Part III has answered the research question so far by proposing leadership-propensity as my interpretation of ancient Chinese thinking frameworks and systems described in Jullien's work. Part III of the thesis recognises that the Chinese tradition, with its unique categorisation of the sensory world, contributes to existing leadership scholarship through its awareness of the silent motion of leadership-propensity.

Based on Jullien's work, grounded in its unique language and conception of reality, Chinese thought is more attentive towards the environment in which identifiable forms are situated, and conceives reality on the basis of the silent tendencies that influence changes in identifiable aspects of the sensory world (Jullien, 2020). Applying a Chinese lens, leadership-propensity can be understood through a collective's silent tendencies that drive identifiable collective activities. A silent motion is 自然 zì rán, emerges spontaneously. Chinese thought recognises that prosperity in the sensory world is available without human interference and is inherently in the propensity of things that occur spontaneously moment by moment. As a consequence, 自然 zì rán, a spontaneously emerged and self-ignited driving force behind human activities, is the basis for acquiring organisational prosperity. Through a Chinese lens, I recognise that human forces are part of 自然 zì rán and that this driving force can be embodied by a dominant need, desire, as well as social and/or political commitments in the collective. As a driving force beyond the collective's activities, leadership-propensity can manifest into infinite human activities and forms of organisation but is not limited by them. This propensity is influenced by multiple factors at different levels, from organisational, technical, social, political, religious, to ecological. The organisation is just one of the environments that influence leadership-propensity; but it is where humans interact. However, because leadership-propensity expresses the spontaneous interactions of all factors influencing a collective's everyday lives, it embodies tendencies beyond the organisational level and is therefore not the property of the organisation, nor is it controllable by the organisation.

Chinese thought studies motion to detect its propensity as they recognise that abundance, like the blooming of a flower and ripening of an apple, is available in the propensity of things. Part III of this thesis has also so far unravelled a strand of thought explaining that the Chinese tradition understands life in terms of manifestation, and studies motions through its manifestation process with the components of 道 dào, 勢 shì, 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng. In the study of leadership, 道 dào represents the lifeforce of the collective; it concerns the collective's tendencies for survival and prosperity and is the source of manifestation. 道 dào is like a seed; it represents the inexhaustible potential for manifestation. By planting a seed, the interactions between the environment and the source can spontaneously produce a unique tendency. Similarly, the lifeforce of the collective also produces a leadership tendency in relation to the circumstance of the organisation, and the tendency spontaneously evolves as the circumstance continues to modify it. Chinese thought studies motion not in terms of its precise direction but 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng tendencies, or if the tendency of the motion is contractive or expansive. The manifestation process of a tendency involves the constant interplays amongst 陰 yīn, and 陽 yáng tendencies, the development of the tendency is the produce of its accumulated momentum or 勢 shì. 勢 shì indicates the potential effect a leadership tendency can produce. As more people are committed to a movement, the more strength it can potentially have, and the more intense the collective's need is to make a specific impact, the more insistence it has to produce a particular outcome. As a silent motion, the momentum of 勢 shì indicates the identifiable outcome and the potential outcomes still coming about. The stronger the momentum, the more potential impact a tendency is likely to

produce, and if the intensity of the 勢 shì is intensifying, it indicates a potential impact that is still increasing and seems likely to be longer-lasting.

Part III of this thesis has also unravelled a thread explaining that in Chinese tradition, acquiring prosperity is to do with detecting the propensity of things and leveraging from the effect of its motion. Alignment with 勢 shì allows the organisation to leverage the effect produced by the driving force behind the collective's activities throughout the developmental process of the leadership tendency. This process includes detecting the silent 勢 shì behind the identifiable activities and forming an alignment with 勢 shì to leverage its effect. Detecting 勢 shì is a skill that is a product of training and development of receptivity and matures over time. Receptivity allows one to become more sensitive towards the subtle and silent changes behind the identifiable forms; doing so requires one to create space to detect the movement of the silent motions in the sensory world without being clouded by one's own biases, meanings or ideas about the motion of the tendency.

While detecting the propensity of things takes time, an organisation can provide a nurturing environment to nurture 道 dào, or the lifeforce of the collective, to produce a unified collective or a potent source of leadership-propensity's manifestation. In this thesis, this is understood as achievable by nurturing the bonds amongst members and nurturing the bond between the members and the organisation as a nurturing environment for their growth, development and fulfilment. Through a Chinese lens, Part III of the thesis has unravelled a thread suggesting that a

prosperous organisation does not need to rely on the vision of its CEO. Rather leadership-propensity emerges from within the organisation.

An important aspect of leadership-propensity from a Chinese perspective that is unavailable or underexplored by contemporary leadership scholars is the value of 自然 zì rán, or the spontaneously emerged and ever-present aspect of leadership. The power of the 自然 zì rán is that it is always present and 自然 zì rán evolves seamlessly with the changing world that an organisation is a part of. 自然 zì rán is ever-present and changes spontaneously, and is always circumstantially compatible. It is nonexclusive of any factor that influences the situation. As a consequence, following 勢 shì, which is 自然 zì rán, is efficient, it is more likely that an organisation can obtain long-lasting prosperity, than if it followed the vision of an individual decision-maker, or any particular model of leadership available through theory.

The contribution of Jullien's work lies in enabling me to bring the two traditions into contact with each other through weaving different strands of thought from those traditions. By placing them next to each other the resonances and tensions enable a revelation of unthought or what they each reveal to each other and about themselves. By doing so in leadership scholarship, this PhD research has uncovered unthoughts in existing scholarship through taking a Chinese approach to leadership which reveals the potential of leadership-propensity. This thesis has also recognised the potential ethical issues that the Chinese structures of thinking could produce by prioritising motions on a macro level and overlooking the potential negative impact of everyday unethical behaviour. However, because this research focuses on contributing to existing

leadership scholarship and not the Chinese tradition, my priority remains to explain the unthought that the Chinese tradition could provide for Western thinking, not the other way round.

‘Unthought’ or a Contribution to Leadership Scholarship from a Chinese Perspective

Grounded in Jullien’s work, this PhD research aims to contribute to leadership scholarship, not by directly addressing existing contemporary issues and challenges of leadership per se, but indirectly, by investigating leadership scholarship from a Chinese perspective. Jullien’s work has provided me with a lens and voice to demonstrate the ways in which language and culture categorise the world. By doing so I have been able to explain something ineffable and hard to capture; how the two different linguistic traditions have emerged different ways of seeing the sensory world and how that in turn privileges the way they conceive of life in general but especially in this thesis, my concern is with organisational life. I have suggested, through my interpretation of Jullien’s oeuvre, that what is outside of one cultural conception of reality is, to an extent anyway, unknowable, unimaginable, and unquestionable without another culture to provide a frame of reference. Jullien’s work uses Chinese thought as a lever to reinterrogate Western thinking with the intention of thinking beyond the limits of Western frameworks. He recognises that the ancient Chinese language and categorisation of the sensory world created a different environment for thinking to emerge. This environment produced a scholarship that is separated from the Western tradition, and which provides insights about the sensory world that are unavailable from a Western perspective.

The research question of this research is *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* and is addressed in three parts by completing three objectives.

They are:

- Identify habitual patterns in Western thinking embedded in existing leadership scholarship.
- Investigate leadership through a Chinese perspective (based on Jullien's work).
- Distinguish the insights revealed from a Chinese lens in this research that are unavailable in existing leadership thinking.

Part I has introduced Jullien's work and identified the primary contribution of his work as unthought, which is unveiled between cultural thoughts. Jullien (2002) explains that categorising the sensory world on the basis of it being produced is the condition for the emergence of Western scholarship. On the one hand, in the West, the conception of 'being' as the basic unit that makes up reality makes Western scholarship in general, but not always as I have explained previously, attentive to the identifiable aspects of the sensory world, which has produced a scholarship grounded in the identification and description of being. On the other hand, the Chinese tradition I privilege in this discussion – one based in ancient Chinese wisdom which still has influence in contemporary China (although it has not been my aim to discuss Chinese leadership but to make a broader argument about leadership-propensity) – categorises the sensory world on the basis of motion, which embodies both identifiable and unidentifiable, distinct and indistinct, clear and hazy aspects of the sensory world. It has produced an environment for different types of thought to emerge and has resulted in a separate form of scholarship that serves a different purpose to

Western scholarship. Chinese thought studies motion and does not investigate the sensory world using Western philosophy's basic assumptions where is always an ontological and epistemological dimension to thought (this is not to say these philosophical assumptions cannot be used to discuss Chinese thought in the same way that an indigenous scholar might critique the foundations of a way of thinking with the ideas (e.g. Smith (2021), Stewart (2019))). Motion like that of wind or water is silent, indistinct, undifferentiated, and has no inherent identity. The Chinese wisdom tradition does not identify, describe, persuade, reason, propose or reproduce an ideal, but prioritises detecting the already-present propensities in the sensory world to interact with its flow and prosper from its motion (Jullien, 2015). Jullien recognises that Chinese thought obtains a propensity-potential model in which prosperity is not directly associated with human intentionality, ideal or action, but leverages the accumulated potential in the propensity of things. Jullien's work takes the perspective of one culture to re-examine the thinking of the other and vice versa to distinguish what emerges from between the cultural traditions. He calls the findings unthought, and I both follow and appropriate his argument here to present my proposal of leadership-propensity.

Part II of this thesis aims to complete the research objective of *Identify habitual patterns in Western thinking embedded in existing leadership scholarship* by tracing the development of Western thought that influences its approach to leadership. This part of the thesis identifies that the Western conception of reality on the basis of being resulted in the tendency of conceiving a being to be the cause of change. This led to a centralisation of the human in leadership scholarship and a causal relationship that conceives the human (individual or collective) as the

direct causer of leadership. Conceiving reality through this lens, aspects of human, especially the concept of the self, is made important in Western thought. Part II of the thesis identifies that the conception of an essentialist self and social constructionist self are the basis for leadership ontologies, and most leadership theories innovate on an epistemological level under related ontological frameworks. Part II also discussed that critical leadership studies have played an important role in the divergence of existing leadership thinking and have made significant changes to the ways leadership is understood, related to, and investigated.

Based on Jullien's work, Part II of the thesis also identifies the theory-and-practice partnership as a unique Western model of engaging the sensory world. Theory and practice are often done through separate steps. Practice can be used to inform the theory in theorising; however, this research focuses not on the methods for producing theory but the theory-and-practice partnership that functions as a framework that allows the Western tradition to engage the sensory world and acquire prosperity. Part II of the thesis explains that existing leadership development scholarship functions to bridge the theory-and-practice gap within the theory-and-practice partnership.

The insights acquired in Part II of the thesis include the lineage of Western thought that influences the direction and context of leadership studies, and the theory-and-practice partnership that frames Western scholarship, to provide a frame of reference for identifying the areas of unthought from a Chinese perspective.

In the continuing effort to address the research question of *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* Part III of the thesis unveiled unthought in

leadership thinking rooted in the Western tradition by conceiving leadership through the Chinese conception of reality, systems of thought, and purposes for approaching life. It aimed to complete the two remaining objectives of this research:

- Investigate leadership through a Chinese perspective (based on Jullien's work).
- Distinguish the insights revealed from a Chinese lens in this research that are unavailable in existing leadership thinking.

This part of the research has explained that Chinese thought approaches leadership, not through identifiable human activities, but the silent tendencies that drive the activities. It is attentive towards the influence of the environment on leadership-propensity over the human activities that occur in organisational processes. From a Chinese perspective, no one is the active factor that directly causes leadership-propensity. Leadership-propensity is ever-present in an organisation; it is the interplay between the collective in the organisation and the multiple factors at organisational, social, and global levels which influence the lives of the collective. The organisation is merely one of many environments that influence leadership-propensity and neither individuals nor even collectives of people can completely control its motion, although they can act to intensify a motion or de-intensify it.

Chinese thought studies motion not to change its basic nature, but to detect its propensity and take advantage of the effect of the motion. Part III of the thesis explains that Chinese thought investigates motion by identifying the source for manifestation(道 dào), tendencies of a motion as 陰 yīn or 陽 yáng, and its accumulated momentum (勢 shì). 道 dào, or the source of

leadership-propensity. This 道 dào or source is distinguished in this research as the collective's lifeforce, which concerns the collective's survival and prosperity. The source spontaneously produces leadership-propensity through its interaction with an environment, and so it changes as circumstance evolves. Leadership-propensity can be contractive, prioritise survival, or be expansive, and it always strives for prosperity. The development of leadership-propensity is the product of accumulated 勢 shì over time. 勢 shì represents strength in the driving force behind the activities of a collective; its momentum, including intensity of the momentum, and if the momentum is intensifying or declining, which influences the continuing production of outcomes in an organisation. The more powerful the momentum of the driving force, the more powerful effect the collective is likely to produce throughout the course of the leadership tendency's manifestation. If the momentum is continually intensifying, leadership-propensity 勢 shì is increasing, and the collective is likely to become more impactful over time.

From an ancient Chinese perspective, acquiring prosperity is a result of following 勢 shì to harness the power in the 勢 shì's potential. While this is a skill that requires practice and maturation over time, an organisation can maximise the possibility for its members to produce leadership-propensity by strengthening its bond as a collective and building the bond between the collective and the organisation. Through a Chinese lens, Part III of the thesis layers threads to try and capture how an organisation might build these relationships by providing a nurturing organisational environment that facilitates an ecosystem amongst members and the external environment where experiences, expertise and tendencies are used to help each other, form connections, and acquire abundances in each other's lives. By providing a nurturing environment

for members to facilitate the growth and development of organisational members' own tendencies, the organisation builds a bond with its people and acts cohesively and positively with the contexts within which it operates.

Throughout this research, I have answered the research question: *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* in three parts. Through all of these parts, this thesis recognises that both the Chinese and Western traditions have emerged from their unique conceptions of the world, different ways for engaging life, and have produced systems and structures, including scholarship and wisdom, that cater to their preferences, agendas and values. In this thesis, I have demonstrated that each cultural scholarship functions as a unique lens that filters knowledge that strives to investigate specific aspects of the world while remaining limited in others. This research has not directly addressed many existing contemporary leadership issues and challenges but has demonstrated that enduring problems in Western philosophical theory that impact leadership studies such as dualism, contradictions amongst theories, the subject-object divide, and theory-and-practice separation, emerge from the traditional Western understanding of the world that produced the condition for leadership scholarship to emerge. Both systems have inherited value systems and conceptions of reality. A Chinese perspective prioritises the silent motions behind the identifiable aspects of the world and is more interested in the subtle influences of the changing environment compared to direct modification through direct actions.

In the remainder of this thesis, I elaborate upon the central thesis I have summarised above to clarify my contributions to leadership scholarship, provide practical implications of this thesis, and offer some suggestions for future research.

Theoretical Contributions to Leadership Scholarship

The contribution of this research lies in the unthought discovered between the two cultural traditions. This section highlights several ways in which a Chinese approach to leadership adds to existing critiques and developments in leadership scholarship.

Theory vs practice-based tradition

This research offers a way to approach leadership beyond a theory-and-practice partnership. The privileging of theory in the theory-and-practice partnership is recognised by many organisational scholars in the Western tradition (Chia & Holt, 2008; Raelin, 2016b). In a recent attempt to resolve the theory and practice divide, Raelin (2016b) employed a practice-based ontological approach to leadership. In his work, leadership is conceived through the mundane everyday process of practice as the basis of producing meaning. Raelin (2020b) uses action research to acquire lived empirical knowledge and claims that a practice-based approach to leadership resolves some of the theory-and-practice divide. The Chinese tradition described in this research is a practice-based tradition; this research uses the Chinese tradition as a frame of reference to bring awareness to the aspects of the practice-based leadership theory that remains to privilege theory over practice.

This research explained that in a practice-based tradition like the Chinese thought, learning is done in the process of living and practising, and not via abstracted reasoning. When practice is privileged over theorising, learning is validated by self-evident competency. Competency is a process of practice and maturation over time; practice occurs from moment to moment, in interactions with and inseparable from the environment, circumstance or situation, and competency develops continuously as a result of these experiences. Part II of the thesis explained that a practice-based ontological approach to leadership emerges from Western tradition, which traditionally privileges the mind, reasoning, thinking, and therefore theorising. As a consequence, instead of privileging practice, Raelin uses practice and the ambiguous and spontaneous processes of work as empirical findings to inform theorising. It is through theorising, not practice, that Raelin (2011) produces the ideals of the leaderful organisation and leaderful practice. In Leadership-as-practice theory, the theory-and-practice gap is not filled by practice or in the mundane process of practice, but by leadership development; in a separate process, based on the ideal produced in the theory, like most other theories (Raelin et al., 2018; Salicru, 2020). Its practice-orientation lies in action-based methods and techniques it uses to theorise and develop leadership; but these remain functioning within a scholarly system that privileges theorising. Chinese thought has no Western concept of an ideal, rather, it provides a frame of reference for existing leadership scholarship to recognise the separation between a practice-based thought within the Western tradition, such as leadership-as-practice that habitually privileges theory, and a practice-based Chinese tradition, that is not intellect-based and cannot be validated or invalidated by reason or logic in the Western sense. A practice-based

validity is directly associated with competency, which is self-evident; competency is a constant and ongoing process of practice and maturation over time, it does not require justification with words as it is evident in results (e.g. mastery of an art).

Static vs flux

Another value this research provides is for the existing tendency to conceive leadership as a fluid and flux concept. Conceiving reality through identifiable and stable forms, Western tradition came from an origin that separates the world as the sum of independent entities and privileges the static. This tendency is reflected in the mainstream understanding of leadership as having a universally fixed essence and as the property of an entitative agent (Bass & Bass, 2008; Grint, 1997; Northouse, 2016). There is currently a strong tendency amongst critical scholars to make leadership a more flux and fluid concept. Social constructionists, conceiving leadership as socially constructed actions and meanings have moved leadership study away from an essentialist understanding and departed from a conception of leadership as the sum of entitative agents. For example, in their investigations, Drath et al. (2008), Kelly (2014), Raelin (2011) have separated the socially constructed meaning from the individual agents; these scholars made meaning the basis of studying leadership, and the construction of meaning the centre of their inquiries. Additionally, there is a wider interest in Western philosophy with Deleuzian thought that has resonated with a propensity approach (Bell, 2015; Bensmaïa, 2017; Deleuze, 2001). A Chinese approach to leadership-propensity described in this research brings an awareness of flux and fluidity from a conception of the world based on motion and not being, and so provides an alternative to these currents of thinking that have resonance but also emanate from a different

worldview. The unthought it provides can help scholars to recognise the aspects of leadership studies that remain static and also presents an approach that is a cultural habit and not an intellectual theory where only a few people have the language to understand and appreciate its nuances.

Chinese thought conceives reality through propensity and understands change as ongoing and seamless. A silent tendency, as the basic makeup of reality, has no inherent nature but is produced by the interplay amongst all factors in the ecosystem of the environment. Chinese thought enables us to study leadership-propensity on the basis of motion and not identity.

Identity has been a priority in Western theorising, and even though many theorists now conceive of identity as complex, multi-faceted, contested and fluid (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Kelly, 2014; Wilson, 2016), identity remains in the background of thought, dividing and fixating the world into separate units. The shift from an entitative agency to socially constructed meaning has indeed made leadership theory capable of appreciating fluidity. However, using Chinese thought as a frame of reference, this research recognises that the habitual need for existing leadership scholarship to produce a distinct identity still privileges separation and resists fluidity. Each socially constructed meaning in leadership studies is projected as a unique and distinct unit that continues to divide the seamless motions of change in the world into separated sections. Having Chinese thought as a frame of reference allows existing leadership scholarship to recognise both the steps it has taken to become more fluid from its static origin, but also the habitual static preferences that remain in Western habitual thinking patterns that function as obstacles for it to actually become genuinely more flux and fluid.

Exclusion vs non-exclusion

Inherent in Western habitual thinking is the notion of exclusion accompanied by discrimination, and these habits are most obviously reflected in mainstream leadership scholarship's essentialist, leader-centric and Eurocentric foci (Grint, 2011; Yukl, 2010). In leadership scholarship, exclusion reduces leadership to a universal essence characterised by several attributes and qualities of a heterosexual white male. Critical leadership scholars have been trying to make the concept of leadership more inclusive by acknowledging the contribution of the followers and the value of ethnic, queer and feminine qualities in the leadership process (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Bligh, 2011; Ford et al., 2008; Grint, 1997; Johnson & Watson, 2013; Rosette et al., 2016; Sinclair, 2005). Theorists influenced by social and political considerations also suggest leadership is inseparable from context (Liu, 2017; Wilson, 2016; Wilson et al., 2018). Scholars like Crevani (2018, 2019b) and Ropo and Salovaara (2019) also include a spatial dimension to leadership scholarship to allow the concept to be studied with more complexity. Existing leadership scholarship has become more complex from its essentialist origins. Through a Chinese conception of leadership-propensity my research offers an alternative perspective and brings awareness to aspects of leadership scholarship that remain excluded.

This research has explained that ancient Chinese thought is essentially non-excluding in nature and it understands change as coproduced by the entire ecosystem, including both identifiable and unidentifiable factors (Jullien, 1995). Human intentionality, meaning, and activities are not conceived as what causes leadership, but, rather, it arises as a consequence of a group's interaction with the circumstances created by the constantly changing environment. Thus

leadership-propensity's motion is constantly influencing and being influenced by changes in wider environments. Even though leadership-propensity emerges in an organisation, it often reflects commitments and driving forces beyond the organisation level and is not directly controllable by the organisation.

A Chinese non-exclusion conception of reality brings awareness of the exclusion that remains in a subject-object causality in existing leadership thinking. The study of context, space, time, and parties beyond the individual leader in existing leadership thinking all mount to a recognition of human meaning as the cause of leadership. The knowledge produced in leadership scholarship functions to reinforce a Western subject-object causal relationship of how change is directly caused by human. The Chinese lens employed in this research brings awareness that centralising the human in existing leadership scholarship is excluding; it ignores the powerful if subtle influences of the natural environment, and other forces, and their influences on human value systems, choices, meanings, and the types of motions the humans produce such as leadership. While existing leadership thinking has expanded its understanding of change from being caused directly by one individual to a collaborative agency, the centralisation of humans as the cause of change remains as a habit of thinking.

To further clarify, the centralisation of human in this research refers not to the focus on the agency component in existing leadership scholarship such as leader-centric thinking; instead, it is what is inherent in the habits of thinking about leadership, which is reflected in the existing scholarship's focuses on meaning, whether individually, socially, or sociomaterially-constructed.

Because meaning is produced by human, the focus on meaning is a reflection of the habitual centralisation of human in existing leadership thinking. The contribution of Chinese perspective comes from an alternative habitual thinking framework.

Identifiable vs unidentifiable

Another unthought that the Chinese thought brings awareness to in existing leadership scholarship is the privileging of the identifiable aspects of reality. Western thought traditionally privileges the metaphysics of presence over the absent. This habitual thinking translates to leadership scholarship in its privileging of the identifiable. Following this, mainstream leadership scholarship privileges identifiable human activities such as behaviour, traits, attributes, interactions, and forms of organising. In challenging the mainstream narrative, critical leadership thinkers are becoming more aware of the significance of unidentifiable aspects of leadership, arguing that leadership is a ‘myth’ (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992), ‘fantasy’ (Grint, Holt & Jones, 2018) or ‘disappearing act’ (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003) which rests principally on claims or attributions as to its presence or existence, rather than it being a definitive set of actions, behaviours or characteristics that can be objectively observed. By conceiving leadership as socially constructed, social constructionist scholars can recognise that many aspects of leadership are ambiguous, unidentifiable, and based on relationships with people and things. For example, Crevani (2018) suggests that a leadership outcome is not directly caused by intentional action or decision, but the overall meaning of the group that is complex, ambiguous and produced through the interplay amongst both human and nonhuman factors in a sociomaterial space. Raelin (2011) conceives leadership as shared meaning, produced in the process of work; he also recognises that

the process of producing shared meaning in mundane working activities is ambiguous. Instead of studying the identifiable aspects of agents involved in the leadership process, these thinkers prioritise the meaning-making process of the collective, and have become more attentive to the ambiguous, flux and unidentifiable aspects of the leadership process. Chinese thought prioritises the silent motions and brings unthought and adds knowledge to the existing understanding of the ambiguous and unidentifiable aspects of leadership from outside the current scope.

This research demonstrated that knowledge is produced to serve a cultural paradigm, and that knowledge-production in a tradition contains cultural biases. The recognition of ambiguous and unidentifiable aspects of leadership is still limited because of the role they can play in reinforcing the fixity of the theory-and-practice partnership. For example, in his work *It's not about the leaders, it's about the practice of leadership*, Raelin (2016c) acknowledges that there are aspects of leadership that are unidentifiable and indescribable. He says that “practice concerns how work gets done to achieve an outcome, some of the activities are tacit and, thus, very hard to describe” (p. 126). However, in this article, being unidentifiable and hard-to-describe are positioned as negative and problematic. This is evident in the ‘good’ news Raelin immediately brings that “Some of the activities are, however, both observable and learnable” (p. 126). In the rest of the article, Raelin uses the identifiable activities as the basis for developing leadership, while the unidentifiable and indescribable aspects of leadership remain left alone. This example illustrates that the identifiable is inherently privileged in the habits of theory-and-practice model with which Western scholarship engages the sensory world. In the Western tradition, engaging the world requires the creation of a model, prototype, or ideal. Practice, in the theory-and-practice

partnership, is often directly associated with the creation of this ideal form in the sensory world, which relies on the detailed description of the ideal form. The unidentifiable aspects of leadership recognised in current social constructionist approaches can help to theorise but are limited in their abilities to produce a model to bridge the theory-and-practice gap. As a consequence, the awareness of the unidentifiable aspects of leadership in existing scholarship remains limited. It rarely goes beyond the acknowledgement that the unidentifiable aspects of leadership exist and so its significance is minimised and often not recognised at all. In most social constructionist studies what is unidentifiable is often associated with the collective meaning-making process. This knowledge is mainly used to stress the complexity and ambiguity of the leadership process to validate why a leadership process cannot be studied through an entitative agency but relationally, sociomaterial spatially or in practice. The identifiable aspects of leadership remain the basis for theorising solutions, and the basis for bridging the theory-and-practice gap. The potential effect and power of the unidentifiable aspects of leadership remain almost completely ignored in the Western tradition.

Ancient Chinese thought sees the world as a process of manifestation from the hazy to the distinct and back to hazy; it does not privilege the identifiable over the unidentifiable, or form over no form. A Chinese conception of leadership-propensity as I propose, is a silent tendency. I have stressed that the unidentifiable aspects of leadership-propensity are no less, if not more powerful than the identifiable. The identifiable aspects of leadership-propensity are conceived in Chinese thought as the manifestations of the silent driving force behind a collective. As a frame of reference, a Chinese lens provides an unthought for existing leadership scholarship that the

spontaneous interplays amongst silent tendencies in an environment can have a subtle but powerful influence on a group's value system, priority, agenda, meaning, which can be seen as leadership-propensity. A Chinese perspective also brings unthought that the power of leadership is not in its identifiable form but the momentum of the silent tendency that is not directly identifiable. The identifiable aspects of leadership-propensity are signs and clues of the 勢 shì manifestation.

The above unthought became available in the in-between space coproduced by the Western and Chinese tradition. Because the Chinese tradition has a flux, processual, non-exclusionary conception of reality, its perspective provides unthought for existing leadership scholarship in areas related to these attributes of the Chinese tradition. This research contributes to existing leadership scholarship through common features of Chinese thought absent in habitual Western thinking. Western scholarship emerged from origins that has privileged static and entitative concepts as the basis of knowledge-discovery, while the Chinese tradition started from a conception of reality on the basis of motion. It is through the distance between the two traditions that the intercultural contribution becomes available. A different culture is a mirror for any tradition to reflect on itself from another perspective. Another cultural thought that emerged from a separate origin from both the Chinese and Western tradition might reveal a completely separate set of unthought for existing leadership scholarship. This is to say that a Chinese lens contributes to existing leadership scholarship by providing an alternative conception to what is flowing, flux-like, and processual.

On Organisation

The primary purpose of this research is to contribute to the field of leadership; however, it also has implications for organisational and management studies more generally. The concept of organisation is evolving, especially through the efforts of scholars engaging with critical theory. Critical theories are concerned with the operation of power and the question of who benefits and who doesn't benefit from organisational activities. In this regard, one author of significance to this study is Martin Parker (2002). He supports the concept of democratic organisation as a community of collaboration and cooperation because he sees many modern organisations, and business education more generally, as being trapped in traditional ways of doing things that reproduce the inequities of previous eras. Parker also exposes problems of resolving management issues in traditional ways because of the separation between theory-and-practice which he sees as unhelpful in the education system. He recognises that academic critiques about organisational practices do not directly translate to changes in organisational practice; and that ethical actions often seem to become merely boxes to tick mostly for public relation purposes. Many aspects of this style of critical organisation studies align with a Chinese understanding of an organisation. Grounded in a motion-based conception of reality, a Chinese lens understands a group as ever-changing, in motion, and in interaction with its environment and resonates with the intent, if not the origin, of Parker's arguments.

The view I am providing in this thesis brings awareness to the power inherent in the spontaneously emerged (not controlled) human tendencies in an organisation. I have explained that an organisation can rely on the 勢 shì of this tendency to acquire organisational prosperity.

Alternatively, I have also explained that direct control disrupts the developing momentum of 勢 shì, which can deplete or weaken the accumulated potential-for-prosperity embedded in 勢 shì. If an organisation is to adopt this understanding of causality, by recognising the power of a spontaneously emergent tendency, the need to control can potentially decrease significantly; and as a consequence, democratic practice is, perhaps, more likely to be respected and encouraged.

Another unthought provided by a Chinese lens is an alternative focus in developing an ethical organisation. Organisations can use business ethics as boxes to tick by adopting the (limited) perspective that ethics resides in rule-following (Parker, 2002). Ancient Chinese thought informs us that behaviours are manifestations and do not have inherent nature, as a consequence, no action is inherently ethical. A Chinese perspective often focuses on developing a holistic perspective. A holistic perspective is not a matter of creating binary or judging right from wrong, but the partnership of 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng, which is a relationship with people, the environment and the world, that is lived on a daily basis in embodied reactions not abstracted thinking. A Chinese perspective might prioritise the adoption of a holistic perspective, which is a process of practice and maturation over time. Ethical behaviour is thereby understood to appear as an inevitable manifestation of an organisation's adoption of a holistic understanding of its own prosperity. Consequently, the perspective I am suggesting provides an alternative to critical approaches and resonates with them, even if it does not share the same origins. This is not to say the approach I advocate would necessarily improve Western organisations, because organisational life is immensely complicated, and my focus has not been on improving leadership practice in the West per se, even though I have tried to draw out a thread of what

leadership-propensity might look like in practice. By providing an alternative based on ancient Chinese wisdom, I do, however, show how an alternative can work in a different cultural context. Further research and practice can examine how these Chinese-originating practices might manifest in the West as alternative approaches.

How Chinese thought Can Utilise Existing Leadership Knowledge

Even though cultures produce knowledge for separate purposes, the non-exclusionary nature of Chinese thought allows it to utilise available knowledge in existing leadership scholarship to detect propensity, take advantage of leadership's 勢 shì, and acquire organisational prosperity. From a Chinese perspective, the world is an inexhaustible process of renewal and transformation; every aspect of the world informs something about the process of manifestation and is therefore valuable. The non-exclusionary nature of Chinese thought allows Western knowledge to be utilised to benefit the purpose of the Chinese tradition (Jullien, 1995).

Through my Chinese lens, identifiable aspects of leadership-propensity inform the silent driving force behind it. The identifiable is a sign or clue about 勢 shì and its momentum. For example, heroic leaders tend to appear in times of uncertainty, when people look to follow heroes. On the other hand, when people are competent in their abilities, leadership is more likely to be collective and distributed. The collectively produced meaning indicates the primary driving force behind the group's activities. Identifiable behaviour, organisational structure, form of leadership, and the relationally and sociomaterial produced meaning in the moment-to-moment process of working practice can all indicate the motion of leadership-propensity behind them.

Additionally, monitoring the changes in the identifiable aspects of leadership-propensity over time can also detect the changes in its development and its propensity. Here I am saying that the ways leadership scholars explain leadership may have utility in certain situations, even to explain behaviour in Chinese contexts. I have not discounted this relevance because modern China and Chinese organisations are becoming westernised in many ways. The forms and processes of the different thinking trajectories and the ways they inform organisational change will no doubt produce new forms of thinking and thought that I have not considered in this thesis. Yet, this is where unthought is likely to be most productive. In these spaces where the West and China intermingle and co-produce in practice and create new things, ways of doing things, ways of thinking about things, and new organisational forms, structures, behaviours and solutions to innovatively deal with the problems and uncertainties of the contemporary world and its futures.

How This Research Adds to Existing Organisational Studies That Utilise Jullien's Work

This research also adds to the very few existing leadership thoughts that utilise Jullien's work. This research adds a voice to Jullien's work in organisational studies. As Jullien's thought is barely visible currently in the field, each study that utilises his work significantly increases the field's exposure to Jullien's work and Chinese thought.

Another way this research adds to existing organisational studies that utilise Jullien's work is through the scale in which it applies Chinese thought. Amongst the very few articles in organisational studies that utilise Jullien's work, most only use one or two key Chinese concepts to resolve a Western issue, such as the Chinese understanding of change, 勢 shì, or way of

acquiring prosperity (See Capurro, 2013; Persson et al., 2017; Persson & Shrivastava, 2016; Shrivastava & Persson, 2014, 2018). However, these aspects of Chinese thought are deployed within a Western conception of reality, including a Western understanding of organisation, human resource, leadership and ethics. This PhD research is the first in organisational or leadership studies to construct a Chinese conception of reality before situating the concept of leadership based on what the cultural biases allow. It recognises that a concept is inseparable from the culture and can only interact with other concepts within the same reality. Doing so has made possible the discovery of leadership-propensity as the silent driving force behind human activities, and not meaning, identifiable behaviour, or forms of organising described based on a Western perspective. It is also from a Chinese reality that concepts of 道 dào, 勢 shì, 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng become aspects of leadership-propensity in this research.

Based on the insights acquired, this PhD research offers several further original contributions to leadership scholarship.

Implications of Leadership-propensity as a Main Contribution of This Research

To address the research question: *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* this PhD research identifies Western cultural thinking frameworks behind the emergence of existing leadership knowledge and investigates leadership through the Chinese tradition, which provides a frame of reference to reveal unthought in existing leadership scholarship. The Chinese tradition contributes to existing scholarship through its study of motion. The Chinese understanding of motion is that it is not caused by a being but is part of a

broader motion that participates in the regulatory process of the sensory world as a whole. My arguments about unthought in existing scholarship contribute to leadership scholarship in three main ways.

By employing the Chinese thought described in Jullien's work, this research brings forth an additional dimension to leadership studies: leadership-propensity. Chinese thought conceives reality on the basis of silent tendencies and not one identifiable form. This study recognises that a collective's silent tendency, such as need, desire, or commitment, is what a Chinese lens would understand as leadership. In other words, leadership from a Chinese perspective is the dominant silent driving force behind the collective's activities, and not a particular attribute, behaviour, identity, mindset or way of working together; leadership-propensity. As the driving force, leadership-propensity can manifest into infinite human activities. It is understood that human activities change circumstantially in a process of fulfilling the same commitment. An action can be taken for many reasons; Chinese thought understands that it is the silent driving force behind the identifiable human activities that make them manifestations of leadership-propensity.

Behaviour, identity, and ways of working together are not inherently leadership-related. Based on this understanding, Chinese thought perceives leadership-propensity's power as inherent in the tension accumulated in the silent tendency or driving force; the more intense and enduring a tendency is, the more powerful and long-lasting its effect can potentially be. And the increase in intensity indicates the improvement in the impact and longevity of effect that is coming about, and the decrease in intensity suggests the decline in the future effect of leadership-propensity in the near future.

The Chinese focus on the silent tendency represents a prioritisation of the 自然 zì rán, or the self-evident, ever-present, and spontaneously emerging aspects of life. Chinese thought values the principles of nature, and conceives prosperity as provided by the natural principle of propensity. As a consequence, it conceives motion in the sensory world, not human ideals, as the basis for prosperity. Every component in Chinese thought, including propensity, 道 dào, 勢 shì, and 陰 yīn 陽 yáng are all understood as self-evident and present in the sensory world. Detecting the propensity in the sensory world requires one to prioritise receptivity to the silent motions occurring in the sensory world moment by moment. Meaning and ideas about the propensity take one out of the present moment, and also function as biases that prevent one from sensing the motion of propensity holistically in this process (Jullien, 2020).

Chinese thought adds a dimension of perceiving and investigating leadership-propensity grounded in the observable and self-evident motions in the sensory world, not interpretations. Ideographical symbols in the Chinese language contain animals, birds, plants, landscape and natural phenomena such as sunrise and rainfall. Culture and language are inextricably interwoven and so one conceives the self and reality in relation to the sensory world as it is represented in language (Abram, 1997; Chia, 1996; Prince, 2005; Wierzbicka, 2014).

Ideographical language produces an interrelatedness between the language user and the sensory world; life and its lessons are learnt directly from the sensory world and not through dialogue with oneself (Abram, 1997; Hansen, 1993; Jullien, 1995). I have suggested that this is why it is impossible to explain Chinese thought without constantly referring to examples in the sensory world and using Chinese characters to understand the concept. Investigating leadership through a

Chinese lens provides a way of investigating leadership and acquiring prosperity through the self-evident and ever-present propensity in the sensory world, not based on human ideals.

Adding Knowledge to Leadership Scholarship through 道 dào, 勢 shì, and 陰 yīn 陽 yáng

This research has added to existing knowledge by identifying 道 dào, 勢 shì, and 陰 yīn 陽 yáng tendencies as significant to leadership. These aspects of leadership are unthought in existing leadership scholarship because Chinese thought studies silent processes of manifestation and not form, behaviour, or identity.

In a manifestation process, 道 dào is the source for manifestation that produces a tendency; it is also where the tendency returns to being renewed and transformed. This research distinguishes that the 道 dào of leadership-propensity, or the lifeforce of the collective, is the organisation members' overall association with the collective's survival and prosperity. As the source for manifestation, 道 dào, representing infinite potential for leadership-propensity to emerge, is unmanifested, hazy, and indistinct. It is through the interplay between the source and the environment that it emerges. As a tendency emerges, it is inclined to grow and develop, but as it exceeds its growth and declines, it returns from the identifiable to the unidentifiable, from the distinct to the indistinct source. Leadership-propensity emerges from the collective's concerns for its survival and prosperity, through the spontaneous interplay between 道 dào of leadership-propensity and the environment in which the collective is situated.

陰 yīn and 陽 yáng are opposing tensions that facilitate the interactions, alternations, renewal and transformations of a motion, and are what produces the propensity of things. They are used to

identify the tensions that can embody leadership-propensity. 陰 yīn represents a contractive tendency, and 陽 yáng is expansive. Each motion infinitely extends itself, and it is the constant interplay between them that produces the dynamic states of every aspect of the world and its spontaneous changes. In the interplay between the life force of the collective and the environment, leadership-propensity is produced that is either contractive or expansive, and as circumstances constantly change, the tendency also modifies. The development of leadership-propensity involves constant interplays between the 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng tendencies, and the developing motion of leadership-propensity is the result of the accumulated momentum across circumstances.

勢 shì indicates the accumulated momentum of leadership-propensity, including its speed, strength and potential range of influence. Chinese thought conceives that a leadership effect, like that of a flying arrow or a rock, is produced not by the identifiable object but by the speed and momentum (勢 shì) embedded in the silent development of the motion that carries it. As a silent motion, leadership-propensity is a driving force behind the identifiable organisational activities; its 勢 shì indicates the intensities of the collective driving force. 勢 shì is associated with prosperity in relation to the effect that is coming about, not the immediately measurable outcome. Prosperity and its sustainability are understood to be produced by the driving force of the collective, and not the identifiable activities. The more intense the accumulated tension leadership-propensity obtains, the more powerful and long-lasting its effect could potentially be. The identifiable working activities are consequences and spontaneous manifestations of the silent driving force.

Like the ripening of an apple and blooming of a flower, a 勢 shì is actualised in the spontaneous interplay between its accumulated potential and the situational disposition of its environment. 勢 shì, as an unthought in the existing scholarship, provides a way of understanding and forecasting the power and effect of a leadership-propensity's motion before it comes about.

Chinese thought studies the silent driving force and its momentum behind human activities in the organisation and conceives leadership-propensity as the motion of the collective's driving force. Prosperity is a product of the driving force's momentum. 道 dào, 勢 shì, and 陰 yīn 陽 yáng are used to identify different aspects of the driving force's manifestation process; and is a contribution to leadership scholarship.

A Way to Acquire Prosperity Through Leadership From Outside of a Theory-and-Practice Partnership

By investigating leadership through a Chinese lens, this PhD research provides an alternative way to acquire prosperity, not through leadership development that emerges from the theory-and-practice partnership but by managing it as the momentum of 勢 shì, the silent driving force behind human activities. It understands the driving force behind a collective's continuing actions, not the identifiable activities themselves, as the source of producing powerful leadership-propensity. Unlike an ideal that prescribes the outcome, 勢 shì emerges spontaneously and concerns the potential for prosperity; instead of prioritising the immediate profit, it indicates the effects of the collective that is still coming about; including quality of work, productivity, consistency and sustainability of the effect.

Chinese thought acquires prosperity by detecting the spontaneously emerged 勢 shì within the organisation. 勢 shì can indicate the potential effect of working activities in the organisation before it comes about, including quality of work and productivity. By forming an alignment with the motion of its development, the organisation can leverage the momentum of the driving force and the human activities it manifests, including the continuing change in productivity, development in the quality of work and innovation that are driven by the 勢 shì throughout its manifesting process.

Chinese thought understands this way of acquiring prosperity as efficient because the effect required for detecting and forming an alignment with 勢 shì is considered as minimum compared to directly modifying agents and/or group activities throughout a leadership process to produce an outcome. This research also proposed that an organisation can attempt to maximise the potential power of leadership-propensity's momentum and effect by nurturing 道 dào or the source of leadership-propensity's manifestation. The more unified a collective is, the more potent is 道 dào, the more the members are likely to form an alignment with a dominant tendency of the collective in time, and the more powerful 勢 shì a collective is likely to produce.

Implications for Practice

By addressing the research question: *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* the findings and contributions of this thesis produce several potential impacts for leadership scholarship in terms of its understanding of leadership, ways of approaching situations, and the mainstream understanding of cultural thoughts.

On Organisational Life

The Chinese understanding of leadership, the way I have framed it in this thesis, especially its reliance on the spontaneously emerged and ever-present motions, could potentially result in a shift in the ways organisations operate, from being leader-based to member-based. Unlike collective and distributed forms of leadership that encourage a flat structure because autonomy produces more powerful leadership under certain organisational circumstances, this Chinese perspective brings awareness that organisational members' inherent tendencies are the basis for leadership's effect. From my Chinese perspective, leadership-propensity can take on infinite forms and structures, but the source of its power lies in the inherent tendencies of the organisational members. This understanding directly associates the organisation's prosperity with its members' growth and development, not the vision of a CEO, leader, leadership group, or theorist.

How the Chinese tradition leverages the effect of leadership-propensity could potentially shift a CEO or leadership group's role from being the causer of change to the manager of 勢 shì. A leader, especially as described in leader centric studies, is the causer of change. But regardless of how successful a leader is, they are limited in their ability to influence a collective's 勢 shì.

Through a Chinese lens, 勢 shì is dualistic, limited, and circumstantial; it eventually diminishes, reverses and starts to become an obstacle for another emerging collective motion. Alternatively, a Chinese approach to leadership allows an organisation to leverage the spontaneously emerged driving force behind the collective. Leadership-propensity is always present and in motion and modifies as circumstances change. An organisation only needs to follow the spontaneously

emerged 勢 shì to acquire prosperity without needing to repeatedly persuade and/or modify the members' activities, identities, or value system.

Spontaneously emerged leadership-propensity is the self-evident outcome of the interactions amongst organisational members, which is non-exclusive of all circumstantial factors that influence the collective and every member within it. Leadership-propensity also modifies spontaneously, as circumstances continue to change. The ever-present leadership-propensity is always compatible with the circumstance; its existence represents its functionality. The awareness of the potential power in the spontaneously formed driving force of the collective, and the potential value it can bring could potentially make organisations employee-focused, not necessarily in a hierarchical or flat structure, but to operate with the priority of nurturing the employee tendencies and not the manager or leader's vision.

On Cultural Thought

This thesis demonstrates the value of Chinese thought as an alternative system of conceiving, studying, and functioning in the world, and could impact how cultural thought is related to, valued and approached in academia. Jullien's understanding of Chinese thought emerges from him taking a Chinese perspective, and not following Western thinking frameworks. He is especially aware that anthropology, in which most cultural thoughts are studied, emerged during European colonisation. Jullien suggests that as a Western science discipline, anthropology inherits Western frameworks of thinking that categorise culture based on Western value systems and study cultures for Western agendas. Anthropology produces a Western stereotype of a

culture and its thought, and often marginalises them using Western philosophies that follows Western structures and systems of validation (Jullien, 2015). Based on Jullien's work, this research has demonstrated that Chinese thought contains an entire system of conceiving and approaching reality separate from the Western tradition, and, as a consequence, could reveal insights about leadership that are unavailable within the Western frameworks of thinking.

What Chinese thought reveals in this thesis could bring critical awareness to the potential value of cultural thoughts and the potential obstacle for revealing their benefits by studying them under Western frameworks. Jullien's work and the application of Chinese thought in this research express an understanding of the world's thoughts as far more dynamic than being interpreted by anthropology, and that Western thought is one tree in an entire forest of cultural thoughts. The demonstration of what could be possible through a Chinese lens in this research could further explore and re-examine cultural perspectives and bring more awareness to the potential power and opportunities that cultural lenses could provide for Western scholarship and the leadership field.

Limitations of This Research

There are several limitations to this research, one of which is my limited access to Jullien's work. This study has included Jullien's work currently available in English, but the translated literature is only around one-third of what Jullien has produced in total. Even though Jullien's later work tends to summarise earlier studies before further philosophising, the currently translated books are not his latest work. As a consequence, my knowledge of Jullien's thought is limited to what

is available in English. Additionally, Jullien seems to be a famous figure in France and has had a regular presence in the mainstream French media. There seem to be diverse views about him, and he also does not lack critics. However, most comments and debates around Jullien's work remain within France, and in French, so I was only able to obtain limited appraisals and critiques of Jullien's work in English. However, what I have been able to access in English I have studied carefully and read in full, and I believe this thesis provides an accurate representation of what is available and relevant to my study. I additionally spent three months in France when I was studying this thesis, presented at conference/s, and engaged with French scholars whose first language is French and read Jullien. Consequently, I was able to engage more directly with his scholarship in a way that gave me some confidence in my ability to move between the English and Chinese languages, and Jullien's French worldview.

Another limitation of this research is a lack of focus on ethical issues. Leadership ethics is a big topic in contemporary scholarship, especially amongst critical scholarship. However, a primary task of this research is investigating what is possible through Chinese systems and structures of investigating leadership, not specifically leadership ethics. Additionally, this research has demonstrated that Chinese thought emerges from an entirely separate system of categorising reality, which resulted in an understanding of the sensory world and being human that is fundamentally different to Western scholarship. As a consequence, a Chinese perspective does not enable the studying of leadership ethics especially in contemporary contexts; instead, it begins with questioning how the two cultures conceive humans as a species and understand their relationships with the sensory world. Making ethics the focus was thus beyond the scope of this

project, although I recognise its significance and importance to leadership scholarship and I do not mean to downplay in any way the importance of questions of justice, fairness, equality and human flourishing. It is just that Chinese thought approaches these questions in the main in a different way to Western patterns of thinking about ethics and everyday moral decision-making in organisations and in life more generally. Where it is appropriate, throughout this thesis, I have recognised the tensions between Chinese and Western approaches to these questions and have signalled where future work could be conducted. My hope is that I have enabled a ‘productive tension’ to be visible between the two systems of thought so that future scholarly work can examine these differences in more detail. This approach is consistent with my method of unthought as I discussed in Part I.

This research also did not dwell on the nature of Chinese thought as a lived process, although I have pointed out several times throughout this thesis that Chinese wisdom is shared at the level of culture, even if it is unconscious and possibly only given lip-service (as will always be the case in any culture). Unlike existing leadership scholarship, which is writing based, grounded in reasoning and logic, and shared only by an elite group of scholars and perhaps students to an extent, Chinese thought is a lived process of training, development and maturation over time in which many people from all walks of life participate in the present day. This PhD research has prioritised introducing the Chinese tradition and it has mainly used ancient Chinese wisdom. I have needed to do that in order to retain a focus on my essential message and also because of the increasing cosmopolitan nature of many organisations which is a manifestation of a homogenisation of global culture, in which many Chinese organisations participate, albeit in a

Chinese way. Nevertheless, I have suggested, but not developed in great detail, the contention that Chinese thought is a lived scholarship. However, I recognise that a lived scholarship could have important implications for leadership scholarship, especially for translating ideals or beliefs in everyday life beyond reasoning and judgement. As a lived scholarship, Chinese thought suggests that life is embodied and expressed from moment to moment. Effect in the sensory world occurs in the spontaneous reactions in the everyday process of living. Thoughts only manifest into reality when it is lived as a reaction, not through reasoning and only on occasions when one is highly conscious of one's activities. This aspect of Chinese thought requires attention in a separate in-depth study.

Ethical and Political Implications of the Findings

There are several ethical and political implications that a Chinese understanding of leadership can add to the discussions in existing leadership scholarship.

By investigating leadership through a Chinese lens, this research finds that Western approaches to leadership tend to prioritise the experiences of people within the group while a Chinese approach to leadership prioritises the prosperity of the group over any individual within the group. Western studies privilege the immediate meanings, behaviour, interactions and relationality of the people within an organisation, whereas a Chinese view focuses on the silent motion produced by the group as a whole, and not detailed human experience. This is because Chinese thought understands a group as the environment that nurtures the prosperity of every individual within it.

A Chinese ruler traditionally was a follower of 勢 shì. An ethical governor from a Western lens is often expected to listen and address the immediate concerns of the people. Jullien's (2004) work suggests that ancient Chinese preferred efficiency over effectiveness. It is difficult for a government to fulfil the diverse concerns of all of its diverse people; 勢 shì is not a conscious choice of the collective, but is the self-evident dominant tendency that is lived, present, expressed in everyday mundane lives, and is detectable. A Chinese ruler makes decisions and takes actions in alignment with 勢 shì. By following 勢 shì, a ruler can gain the support of its people not by addressing their concerns one by one, but by silently heading towards the general direction of the dominant tendency.

When life is conceived through a whole/part relationship, the condition for human existence is often understood by ancient Chinese as produced by the existence of earth, and the perseverance of a group tend to be privileged over the existence of an individual member (Jullien, 2014). The value of an individual's opinion, feelings, decision and even life is determined by the 勢 shì because 勢 shì represents the group's propensity. The ruler must act according to 勢 shì with no hesitation. Hesitation and indecisiveness are hesitations in following the dominant tendency of the group, which is a sign of incompetency in governing. In ancient China, people who function against 勢 shì were discriminated against or sacrificed for the group with, perhaps, less consideration or hesitation compared to modern Western societies.

A Chinese conception of leadership prioritises the group over the individuals within it, and values sustainable prosperity of the collective over the immediate experience of the members.

The primary beneficiary of the Chinese approach to leadership is the group; whether it be an organisation, civilisation, or the ecosystem of the world as a whole. Everyone within the group is expected to serve and, when necessary, sacrifice for the group; in return, the group's prosperity functions to continue to benefit the people within it and future generations. A Chinese approach to leadership might work better for cultures where people share conceptions of themselves not as individuals, but as a part of a whole. It might not work for individuals or cultures that privilege the immediate individual experience over the long-term collective prosperity.

Future Research

Throughout this research, I have unravelled many threads as I have tried to uncover unthought with my Chinese lens. In essence, what I have uncovered through this process is an alternative to a Western approach to leadership - leadership-propensity. Approaching leadership from this angle can function as a fertile environment that can potentially provide opportunities to expand our understanding of the silent manifestations that bring about the physical, distinct, and identifiable forms, activities and experiences in the world. A strong theoretical foundation must be laid for this Chinese approach to function as a school of thought. This research has triggered my interest in several possible future projects. In the following section, I propose several opportunities for future research for myself and others.

Knowledge of every aspect of leadership's motion, including 道 dào, 勢 shì, 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng could be further studied through existing leadership studies. Chinese thought prioritises a holistic perspective of the silent motions in the sensory world, but it is less interested in the in-depth

knowledge about the human activities occurring in a motion. Existing leadership knowledge produced in Western scholarship could be valuable resources for studying the 道 dào of leadership, such as the sociomaterial space and social reality that influence and can help to form a powerful bond amongst members within the organisation. In this regard, I suggest following in the footsteps of Deleuzian process ontology into new materialism and critical posthumanism as potential points of connection to explore (Bell & Vachhani, 2020; Bryant & Wolfram Cox, 2014; Hannah & Richard, 2020; Munro & Thanem, 2018). Existing leadership studies can also help identify subtle changes in human activities when circumstance modifies and when 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng tendencies interact with each other. Additionally, Chinese thought suggests that the more dominant the 勢 shì, the more normalised it is amongst people. The existing ways of studying leadership can also help understand how human activities, meaning, and awareness modify as 勢 shì accumulates, changes and declines.

The way organisational prosperity can be acquired through a Chinese approach to leadership is also a fruitful area to study further. 勢 shì is the basis for acquiring prosperity. To maximise potential prosperity, scholars could employ existing ways of studying leadership to investigate how to detect 勢 shì in an organisation, what role an organisation can play to nurture and influence 勢 shì, as well as how to help 勢 shì to manifest into activities that maximise the organisation's prosperity. This can also include learning about how different driving forces such as love, hate, equality, domination, material, and spirituality affect the emergence and development of the silent motion of leadership; if the 勢 shì they produce obtains unique characteristics, and if there are significant differences to the prosperity they produce. Here I

suggest building on where there is an existing trajectory of scholarship interested in spirituality and affect; like the work of Ims et al. (2015), who take an ecological perspective on economics that approach products not through materiality but motion, as processes of creation and distribution intimately connected with nature and society. Ghosh and Mukherjee (2020) propose that business ethics and a sense of corporate social responsibility are intimately connected with an organisation's sense of self. They suggest that spirituality is a holistic perception of business at macro levels, that incorporates an awareness of the long-term and subtle influences that one's environment such as nature and communities play in the prosperity of the organisation. Ethical activities are consequences of obtaining a holistic spiritual perspective and sense of organisational self that are deeply connected with the environment and people.

Additionally, the political nature of leadership informed by 勢 shì is another area to explore further. 勢 shì, both within the organisation and at wider levels, is political in nature. This research did not specifically mention the political nature of leadership because as an introduction and overview of what is possible through a Chinese lens, I want to clarify that 勢 shì is non-exclusive of political concerns, although as mentioned in several places in this thesis, this is not a view necessarily shared by Jullien's critics (Billeter, 2006; Weber, 2014a). But the political domain is of interest to existing scholarship, and it can also have an obvious significant impact on prosperity. When an organisation forms an alignment with 勢 shì, whether from within the organisation or at a wider social and/or political level, the organisation is politically committed to the development of a tendency. 勢 shì is always political in nature (it is one of the forces), so the more aligned an organisation is with 勢 shì, the more potential effect an organisation is likely

to profit from, but the more political it is also. From a Daoist perspective, because 勢 shì is the basis for good, right, and prosperity, following 勢 shì is usually probably favourable. However, Confucian thought usually prefers to be positioned in the middle position, or a place of equilibrium. This allows the organisation to not be disadvantaged during any change and consistently acquire sustainable but not maximised prosperity. The political nature of organisational 勢 shì can facilitate interesting discussions amongst Western, Confucian and Daoist perspectives regarding how political an organisation should be and at what levels should an organisation be political.

Finally, another area of future research is the identification of leadership's 道 dào in a community. While most organisations need to nurture 道 dào, many cultures, especially indigenous communities already embody it. The knowledge provided through a Chinese lens has many resonances with indigenous communities and may assist them in their striving for autonomy, independence, freedom from oppression and colonisation due to financial dependency and the lack of economic power. Of course, China is also sometimes criticised for being a colonising power itself and so exploration here will require acknowledging the nuances and contradictions at play in postcolonial writing (Anand, 2019; Fitzpatrick & Monteath, 2020). Nevertheless, understanding the potential power of 道 dào and how to utilise it to acquire prosperity could help developing communities to produce powerful leadership effects that allow them to acquire economic power, sustainable prosperity, and/or become more autonomous in the face of economic and financial challenges in today's world. Cross-cultural dialogues are an

essential aspect of ensuring the prosperity of the world, and I hope future work built upon this thesis will contribute to the flourishing of all life through mutual recognition and respect.

While I see many directions and opportunities this research can potentially lead to, an immediate research interest of mine is to apply Chinese thought as a frame of reference to other specific aspects of leadership thinking. For instance, I would like to read more on the origins of process ontology. I am also interested in decolonising leadership knowledge. I would like to explore indigenous scholarship in more depth to find the resonances and differences between Chinese thought and, for instance, Māori ways of being in the world (Evans & Sinclair, 2016; Henry & Wolfgramm, 2018; Ruwhiu & Elkin, 2016; Warner & Grint, 2006). I would also like to write about ancient texts such as *The art of war* and interpret them for a Western audience because I feel they are not well understood in leadership or leadership scholarship.

Even though my primary intention is to diverge leadership thinking away from Western thinking habits, there are also ideas introduced in this research that worth exploring empirically using Western research methods. One of my interests is to empirically explore the relationship between 勢 shì, and its influence on organisational activities and outcomes, or answer the question of *How 勢 shì influences organisational activities and outcomes?* The findings of this research suggest that 勢 shì is the driving force of organisational activities; identifiable outcomes, organising structure, power dynamics, productivity and their changes over time are manifestations of 勢 shì. A hypothesis would be that because 勢 shì is the driving force of the collective, centralising working activities around 勢 shì should produce self-motivated

employees who continue to contribute to the collective and improve their skills and productivity for their own meaning and fulfilment. Additionally, another hypothesis is that by centralising the organisational activities around 勢 shì, the circumstantially compatible organisational structures, power dynamics and ways of working together would be created spontaneously and continuously be modified based on the group's circumstantial needs to develop and actualise 勢 shì.

The participants of such research can be any organisation or an organisational department. It should be a group of individuals who has sufficient technical and/or professional competencies to collectively produce an outcome. Throughout such research, the participants work together as a group that has no official hierarchy. This is to allow hierarchies and power dynamics to emerge and modify spontaneously according to 勢 shì.

This research would involve the detection of 勢 shì, monitoring the changes in 勢 shì and its correlation with the identifiable organisational activities and outcomes. It would require information on the changes in many aspects of the participants, including their personal narratives, experiences and also observes their behavioural change throughout the entire research process. Most narrative-based research methods can help acquire information about 勢 shì, but due to the complexity of information the research requires, at this moment, I prefer the multimodal analysis method in ethnographical research methodology (O'Hagan, 2021; Pirini et al., 2018). The multimodal analysis uses a combination of methods including interviews, observations and other qualitative methods to coproduce a narrative from multiple angles.

勢 shì is ever-present and can be detected through qualitative interviews. This means such research would require regular interviews and observations on the participant experiences, motivations, productivity, the form of organising, and power dynamics to detect 勢 shì and its changes throughout the research. By regularly monitoring the changes in 勢 shì and the participants' job satisfaction, productivity and outcomes; the research could find out how the increase and decrease of 勢 shì influences the organisational activities, and the length of time it takes for 勢 shì at different intensity levels to produce identifiable manifestations. The research question of *How 勢 shì influences organisational activities and outcomes* could thereby be answered.

I would also like to return to my original idea of conducting leadership development courses using Tai Chi and Daoist thought and structure a participant observation study. This research introduced an understanding of 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng coexist in every aspect of life. Tai Chi is an embodiment of this conception of reality, and it is lived; a lived practice that is habitual, it influences an individual not strictly on an intellectual level, but in reacting to everyday life. Daoism strives in detecting, following and taking advantage of the propensity of situations, which can be beneficial for businesses. Additionally, Daoism has been taught and learnt for thousands of years; and has developed many unique ways of educating people in intellectual, experiential as well as embodied ways (Fleischer, 1998; Gerstner, 2011; Le, 1995; Slingerland, 1998; Watts & Huang, 2011). Daoist understanding of reality, human development, growth, as well as its developmental methods could become valuable resources for the field of leadership development.

I have two hypotheses for such research. One is that embodying a Daoist conception of reality can help CEOs and executives to a holistic approach to situations where one's initial one-sided experiences, whether positive or negative, are detected, reflected on, and critiqued and not reacted to. Another hypothesis is that because Tai Chi is a lived embodiment of Daoism and is a matter of competency and maturation of time, perceiving situations holistically can be lived as natural reactions over time. This holistic conception of life should be reflected in a CEO or executive's approach to situations should then reflect a Daoist value system, such as acquiring prosperity through partnership, and relating to crises not as inherently problematic but as potential opportunities so that organisational members can learn how to adapt to change and take advantage of its course of development over controlling a situation. Because life is lived in moment-to-moment reactions, practices like Tai Chi can potentially make more impact than intellectual-based teachings.

The participants of such research can be any CEO or executive who is interested in learning about Daoism and Tai Chi. I recognise that many CEOs and executives are already skilled individuals and can also be experts in their fields. In the process of this research, the researcher does not directly teach or give the participants advice on how to govern. Instead, the researcher helps the participants to acquire a Daoist lens to perceive reality and deal with situations based on their already acquired skills and expertise.

This research would also include both qualitative interviews and participant observations as part of an ethnographic study. The researcher would interview and observe the participants regularly

on multiple aspects of their experiences, especially strong one-sided emotions towards situations, to identify changes over time. Embodied practice is lived and influences people on a habitual level. The researcher thus seeks to find changes in the participants' habits of thinking, perceiving, relating to, and dealing with situations as the competency in their Tai Chi practices improve. The findings should inform if and how an embodied practice influences the development of an individual. I could also study the duration or sustainability of this change, which, because it is habitual, I currently assume is long-lasting. I could also compare the effects of Tai Chi practice to the outcomes of existing leadership development programmes that focus on changing mindsets and/or skillsets to understand the potential strengths and weaknesses of the different types of leadership development models.

Summary

This thesis aimed to address the question of *How can François Jullien's work contribute to contemporary leadership studies?* Jullien's work investigates Western and Chinese thinking traditions and recognises that the emergence of a cultural thought is heavily influenced by the ways the sensory world is categorised. Based on Jullien's work, this PhD thesis considered issues and challenges in existing leadership scholarship not as inherently problematic but as manifestations of Western habitual patterns of thinking.

The Chinese lens as a frame of reference brings awareness to the aspects of existing leadership scholarship that remain trapped by past habitual thinking patterns. In this thesis, I have investigated leadership through a Chinese lens provided by Jullien's work and uncovered

unthought in existing leadership scholarship by revealing insights unavailable in existing ways of thinking about leadership. This research contributes to leadership scholarship by adding multiple aspects of leadership 道 dào, 勢 shì, 陰 yīn and 陽 yáng into leadership scholarship for investigating the propensity of leadership; the research also provides an alternative way of utilising the potential power and effect of leadership, not through leadership development, but by taking advantage of the self-evident and ever-present motion of 勢 shì. Insights of this research expand the scope of leadership studies both theoretically and empirically; and have potentially important implications for future studies. Theoretically, researchers can continue to explore the propensity of leadership, its relationship with the identifiable organisational activities, and its implication for leadership and organisational life. Empirically, researchers can investigate the silent motion of leadership in organisations and seek ways to acquire prosperity efficiently, not by making drastic changes to the organisational structure or employee behaviour, but by silently taking advantage of the spontaneously developing 勢 shì.

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