

Religious Thoughts, Ethnic Values and Their Impacts on Business Management*

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Abstract

This study explores how religious thoughts may work through their impacts upon the values and culture of an ethnic group (the “Hakka” in this case) so as to influence entrepreneurs and the management practices in the group. Together with other folk religions, Buddhism has a deep root in Hakka societies. Such a deep root exerts tremendous impacts upon the Hakka values and culture. This research investigates the compound impacts of Buddhist thoughts and ethnic culture on the business and management philosophies of Hakka enterprises. A total of 22 Hakka entrepreneurs were interviewed. Although not all of them claim to be Buddhists, they are generally open-minded and receptive to Buddhist thoughts. Their management styles, practices and philosophies are quite compatible with both the Buddhist and Hakka values. Based on the result of this study, we propose a preliminary Buddhism-based management model for Hakka enterprises.

Keywords: Hakkaology; Hakka Culture; Hakka Enterprises; Buddhism; Business Management

1. Introduction

Max Weber (1947, 1958), a pioneer in the investigation of the impacts of religious thoughts on economic activities, believes that Protestant ethic is the spiritual foundation of capitalism. That is, the Protestant ethic has fostered the social psychological conditions which make possible the development of capitalist civilization in the Occident. He suggests that the connection between economic rationalism and a sense of religious responsibility stems from the ethics of ascetic Protestantism. Using a similar analysis, he further concludes that due to the effects of the Confucian ethos, rational entrepreneurial capitalism would be retarded in societies influenced by the Confucianism (Weber 1951, p. 104). Weber’s thesis of the incompatibility of the Confucian ethos and rational entrepreneurial capitalism has been challenged by the so-called “economic miracles” of many East Asian countries. Chung et al. (1989) suggest that Confucianism does offer motivational mechanisms for East Asian capitalism which parallels the profit-seeking drive in Western capitalism. Thus, Confucianism is compatible with and has facilitated Asian capitalism by its influence on managerial values and practices. Regardless the validity of the Weberian theses, his pioneering works contribute tremendously to the study of the roles of religion in economic development. Indeed, religion can be a formidable force in shaping business and economic activities which are undoubtedly an important part of culture. By the same token, there is a need to look into how religions affect business and economic activities through culture.

In the management literature, there have been studies exploring the impacts of Buddhist thoughts (particularly Zen Buddhism) on management styles. For example, Pascale and Athos (1978, 1981) discussed the relationship between Zen Buddhism and Japanese management. Unfortunately, their rather shallow understanding or even misunderstanding of Zen Buddhism has resulted in wrong conceptions about such relationship. For example, they consider “ambiguity” to be what Zen is all about and consequently the management should purposely “create ambiguity”. This is certainly not a correct understanding of Zen and, in fact, can be a dangerous attitude toward management. The Hakka is an ethnic group which, although a minority, plays important roles in both political and economic arenas of Asian countries. For example, the late premier Teng Xiao-Ping of China, the late premier Lee Kuang-Yew of Singapore, former and the newly elected presidents of Taiwan, are Hakkas. The Hakka people have migrated all over the world. Many of them have outstanding achievements in various lines of business or career. During the past few decades, the study of this ethnic group (known as “Hakkaology”) has gradually received more attentions from academic researchers (Chang, 2007).

However, there is a relative dearth in looking into the impact of religions on the Hakka culture, not to mention how religious thoughts may influence the management practices of Hakka enterprises through the force of the Hakka culture. Like most folk religions, Buddhism has a deep root in Hakka societies. Such a deep root implies tremendous impacts which Buddhism exerts upon the Hakka culture. A cursory look at the Hakka culture shows many traces of Buddhist thoughts which have been ingrained in Hakka people. For example, the Buddhist concepts such as giving, performing good deeds, the law of cause and effect, etc., are well accepted and practiced by the Hakka people. Such impacts certainly deserve more attention by Hakkaology researchers.

The study of the impact of religions on organization management can and should be viewed in the broader context of cultural approaches to organizations and, in parallel, the cultural exploration in social sciences (e.g., Morrill, 2008; Smircich, 1983; Weeks and Galunic, 2003). Cultural roots play an important role in shaping both the conceptions of organizations and the resultant management styles. This fact has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Allaire and Firsirotu, 1984; Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Burrell and Morgan, 1979, Deal and Kennedy, 1982). Threading such investigation through the factor of ethnic cultures (e.g., Hakka) can be fruitful and valuable to the understanding of organization management. This is indeed a fertile but yet-to-be-cultivated field of study.

This study explores how Buddhist thoughts impact the business and management philosophies of Hakka enterprises. Through interviews and various forms of continuous interactions with over twenty Hakka entrepreneurs, we gain a good understanding of the roles which Buddhism plays in Hakka culture and in the management styles of Hakka enterprises. This study not only identifies important issues for Hakkaology research, but also widens the perspectives on Hakka cultures. It also gains valuable insights into the cultural approaches to organization sciences (and social sciences, for that matter).

The rest of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 briefly describes how the research was conducted; Section 3 reports and discusses the research findings; based on the research results, Section 4 presents a preliminary Buddhism-based management model for Hakka enterprises; finally, Section 5 concludes the paper and suggests directions for future research.

1. Research Protocol

To investigate the impacts of Buddhist thoughts on the business and management philosophies of Hakka enterprises, we contacted over 30 and successfully interviewed a total of 22 entrepreneurs with varying degrees of in-depth investigation. As shown in Appendix I, these entrepreneurs represent a variety of businesses, including manufacturer and exporter of automobile parts, restaurant owners, publishers, retailers, etc. Interviews were conducted via telephone, e-mail and face-to-face discussions. There is at least one “follow-up” conversation with each of the interviewees. In most cases, three or more conversations were conducted. The purpose of the follow-up interviews is not really for “longitudinal study”, but to detect any significant changes in their viewpoints as well as to gain insights into their mentality in management practices. Like most social phenomena, the causal relationship between Buddhism, Hakka value and the management styles and philosophies of Hakka enterprises may not be easily proved or verifiable. However, the connections are quite obvious. The research methodology employed in this study is a “triangulation” approach – an attempt to look at issues or phenomena from different perspectives and to connect dots among salient phenomena. Such triangulation over the 22 entrepreneurs and the time dimension provides us a “good feel” of the relationships between Buddhist thoughts and Hakka values, as well as their impacts on the management practices of the Hakka entrepreneurs.

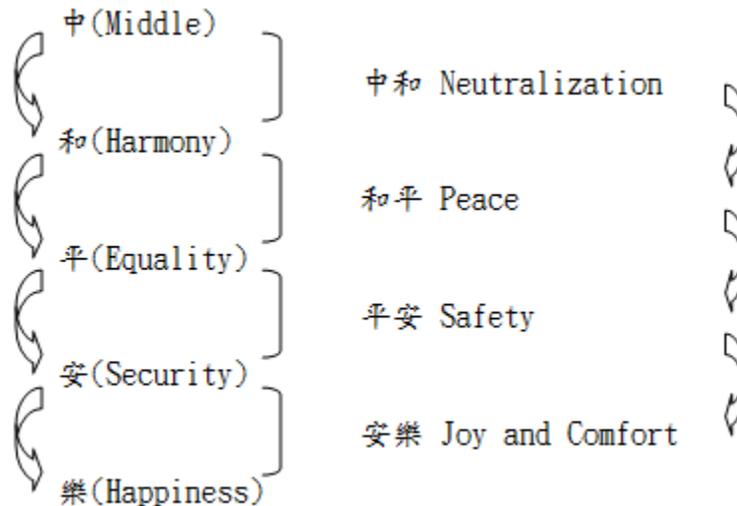
A set of selected Buddhism-related topics were used as guidelines for interview. We asked the interviewees about their understanding of these concepts. What do they think about these concepts? Have they related or applied these concepts to their management practices? What are the results of the applications? We also encouraged them to go beyond the selected topics and freely talk about their management styles, practices and philosophies. Memorable experiences, episodes of unusual events, stories and lessons, etc. are particularly welcome. The selected list of topics is briefly described as follows:

(1) **Oneness.** The Western philosophy and thus the Western management philosophy and practices are built upon the foundation of dualism, such as subject vs. object, leader vs. followers, etc. Despite the notion of “synthesis”, Hegel’s Dialectics starts with the opposition between thesis and anti-thesis. While oneness can be considered the anti-thesis of dualism, the true oneness should transcend the dualism between oneness and dualism. Ironically, the notion of transcendence is itself dualistic. By the same token, the true oneness should

“transcend” the contrast between dualities such as one versus many. Such transcendence then leads to the concept of “Middle Path of Eightfold Negations” – the doctrine established by Bodhisattva Nagarjuna: (there is) no production, no extinction, no annihilation, no permanence, no unity, no diversity, no coming, and no going”. Following the same logic, one can push for further transcending beyond the duality of transcendence and non-transcendence. This is what Zen masters often calls for – one step upward. One should keep going beyond and return inside, simultaneously. In other words, one should be “in the world but not of it” (Rosenbaum and Magid, 2016; p. 2).

(2) **The Middle Path.** The concept of Middle Path is crucial to the harmony of an organization and to managerial effectiveness. Figure 1 sketches such a relationship.

Figure 1. The Middle Path and Harmony



Any deviation from the middle entails disharmony. On the other hand, maintaining the middle and harmony can neutralize potential negative forces in organizations. Furthermore, harmony goes hand in hand with equality. They facilitate each other to insure peace. Equality is definitely a prerequisite to a peaceful state. After all, any inequality is likely to cause agitation or unrest which again often poses threats to security and safety. Finally, safety and security, fundamental to Maslow’s construct of hierarchy of needs and is a necessary condition for happiness. In business management, it is generally true that happy employees are quality and productive employees. Thus, the Middle Path is crucial to both effectiveness and efficiency in organization and management. Although Figure 1 presents a “logical sequence” of causes and effects, we need to recognize that the five “elements” are not only equally important, but also “five-in-one”. That is the true meaning of Oneness and the Middle Path.

(3) **Emptiness.** In a critical review of the mindfulness movement, Chung (2017) suggests that, to understand the true mindfulness, we need not only to revisit the (Theravada) Buddhist root of mindfulness, but also to go beyond the duality of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. Such transcendence would recognize the “True Mind” as the true “mind” in the notion of “mindfulness”. The True Mind, also known as True Nature, Self-Nature, True Suchness, etc., is the essence of all things. Without getting into a lengthy discussion on the True Mind, we simply refer it to another commonly used term, *emptiness*. In Buddhism, emptiness does not mean “nothing”. Rather, it implies “infinite possibilities. Furthermore, emptiness characterizes the true nature which is inherent in all things (i.e., all manifestations of the true nature).

(4) **The Law of Cause (with Conditions) and Effect.** In Buddhism, there is an important thesis: “All dharmas (i.e., all things) are empty while the Law of Cause and Effect is never empty.” The Law of Cause and Effect can be considered the law of Nature or a “Universal Truth”. Since the Law of Cause and Effect is itself one among “all things”, why should it be the exception and be “never empty”? The answer lies in the three properties of any causal process. First, all causal relations are a “transformation” process. All causes invariably lead to some effects. Any episode of going from causes to effects is a transformation or a transition process. Second, all transformation or transition processes are continuous and ceaseless. Since the so-called “states” are transitory (as the result of the simultaneous production and extinction of states) there will be literally no “gaps” between states.

Consequently, the transition or transformation processes are always continuous. Third, any process is just a collection of numerous cyclical and endless processes consisting of numerous combinations of causes and effects. Any cause is an effect of past causes. Any effect will be the cause for future effects. Thus, any process is a cyclical process of causes and effects. Any “state” is, in fact, simultaneously the effect of past causes and the cause for future effects (i.e., future “states”). With these three properties, the Law of Cause and Effect is said to be “never empty”. Causes will produce effects only “when conditions are right”. Conditions are thus called secondary causes. The effects are called “conditional occurrences”.

(5) **One-Mindedness.** During the past decades, the notions such as “mindfulness”, “one-mindedness” and their potential applications to organization management have received substantial attentions from management scholars (e.g., Argote 2006; Langer, 1997; Levinthal and Rerup, 2006; Weick, et al. 1999; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006; Good et al., 2016). However, the mindfulness movement has not captured the complete meanings of the relevant concepts in Eastern or Buddhist thoughts. “Mindfulness” has quite commonly interpreted as “a focused or concentrated mind”, particularly “attention to the present moment”. As Chung (2017) points out, deeper appreciation of the state of one-mindedness or “true mind” are yet to be cultivated.

The above five subjects in Buddhism are indeed important thoughts in Hakka values. In addition to the inquiry into how various Buddhist concepts impact management practices, we encourage the interviewees to freely talk about their management practices, experiences, memorable moments in their business and careers, their own views toward both Buddhism and Hakka values, etc. These are valuable information for exploring the impacts of Buddhism upon Hakka culture and subsequently upon managerial practices. We particularly welcome open discussions on the various issues related to this study.

2. Findings and Discussions

Although not all of the Hakka entrepreneurs with whom we have exchanged ideas are self-claimed Buddhists, they are generally open-minded and receptive to Buddhist thoughts. They all agree that Buddhist thoughts and Hakka values are quite compatible. They also share the same feeling that both Buddhist and Hakka values are well reflected in their management styles, practices and philosophies.

Among the five Buddhist concepts listed in the interview guideline, the Law of Cause and Effect are most commonly applied, one way or another, by Hakka entrepreneurs. The “oneness” and the Middle Path concepts are the close second. Most Hakka entrepreneurs treat the “mindfulness” or “one-mindedness” concept with a “common sense” attitude, not necessarily in the context of “true mind” in the Buddhist literature. The “emptiness” concept seems to be rather abstract to most of them. Like most people would, they interpret the notion of “emptiness as “non-attachment”, meaning the need to let go of worldly things. Such an interpretation is certainly over-simplified. Conversations during the interview series not only enhanced their understanding of Buddhism, but also made them realized that their management practices were indeed influenced by the Buddhist thoughts (and the Hakka values). The findings in each of these and related topics will be discussed below.

The Law of Cause and Effect

This law seems to be part of the deeply ingrained Hakka values. The Hakka entrepreneurs repeatedly emphasize the importance of having “good intention” or “good will.” One should not sacrifice righteousness for profit. One should not seek benefit at the expense of others. The “law of retribution” – one would be rewarded by his or her good deeds and have to pay back for “evil” deeds – should be the “cardinal rule” in conducting business. This is the foundation of business ethics. It would be interesting to further compare such attitudes with the Western management theories and business ethics.

The owner of a small business gave the following “testimony”: A majority of his employees is Hakka. He claims that he treated all his employees (including the non-Hakka) as family members. (He believes that the “family” concept is one of the core Hakka values). He has been quite generous to his employees in terms of pay and fringe benefits. One time during the economic downturn, his company ran into deep financial trouble. He insisted to keep all employees on job even though there was really not much work to do due to lack of business. Many of his employees proposed voluntary pay cuts. He hesitated because he claimed to be a “typical Hakka” who is “hard-neck” (i.e., being “stubborn and perseverant” and able to “swallow anything”). Eventually, he accepted their good-will, but not their offer. The business turned around sooner than expected. He firmly believes this is indeed the law of cause and effect at work.

One of the Hakka entrepreneurs believes that the law of cause and effect is the most appropriate description of his (up and down) career. He was quite successful in his limousine service business. But, according to him, greed made him change his business goals. He could not resist the temptation of making more money when he was invited as a partner to invest in China. Because he was too naïve and had a blind trust on wrong people, he was kicked out of the partnership and lost all his investment. Interestingly, he claims that trusting people too easily should not be a Hakka personality. However, he believes that Hakka people tend to be too simple-minded, if not naïve, in terms of human relations. He took responsibility for his failure by citing the law of cause and effect. He is not alone. Most of the Hakka entrepreneurs in this study express their appreciation of the importance of the causal law (and the law of retribution) in business management. They believe this is particularly true in “change management”. They agree with Aristotle’s assertion that all changes are caused. A business process, like any process, consists of numerous causes and effects. As mentioned earlier, it is an important doctrine in Buddhism that “all dharmas (i.e., all things) are empty while the Law of Cause and Effect is never empty.” Most Hakka entrepreneurs are receptive to the aforementioned three fundamental properties of any causal process. These three properties also have profound implications for business management. First of all, any causal process is a “transformation” process. In business management, all organizational activities can be viewed as a transformation process which transforms or converts inputs into outputs. One entrepreneur comments that one can visualize the business processes as a continuous transformation process of causes and effects. Such a perspective helps the management trace the process of causes and effects and thus the “root causes” of problems, to effectively “control” the causes and the conditions so as to produce the favorable effects.

Second, all transformation or transition processes are continuous and ceaseless. However, in Buddhism such continuity is seen simply as an illusion. According to Aristotle, change is going on constantly. There is a simultaneous production and extinction of the states. As a result, there are literally no “gaps” between states. This is why the transition or transformation process is said to be “continuous.” On the other hand, the so-called “states” (consisted in any process) are transitory because of the simultaneous production and extinction of states. States are transient and inexistent. The “going-from-here-to-there” mentality in the traditional change management model is not valid because when you get there, there is no *there* there. The getting there assumption is nothing but to create the illusion of certainty where there is none. This is what the ancient philosopher, Lao Tzu, referred to as “trying to understand running water by catching it in a bucket.” Finally, any process is just a collection of numerous cyclical causes and effects. Most Hakka entrepreneurs have firm belief in the Law of Cause and Effect. They claim to be able to easily accept “fate” or “destiny” by which they really mean accepting whatever had happened and whatever might happen. However, they also believe that “fate” or “destiny” can be changed. That is, you can, to some degree, have control over your own destiny. That is why many of them emphasize the importance of managing “conditions” (i.e., “secondary causes”). Since (right) conditions are important for the production of (desired) effects, it is somewhat misleading to call them “secondary (causes).” Some entrepreneurs even suggest that the task of management should be defined as nothing but to create favorable “conditions” for their business – the conditions which convert causes into desired effects. All Hakka entrepreneurs interviewed in this project agree with Master Sheng-Yen’s advice on coping with problems (FADL): Face them, Accept them, Deal with them and Let go of them.

Oneness

Many Hakka entrepreneurs have an interesting interpretation of the notion of “oneness”. They emphasize the importance of “whole picture” or “big picture” in business management. This is particularly true in making strategic decisions. With the “oneness” concept, one should not overlook any (however minute) aspect of the business. All aspects are equally important. The oneness concept should also be extended to the time dimension. That is, big picture implies long-term view, visions, etc. The oneness concept also implies “integration.” Integration leads to minimizing, if not total avoiding, dualistic opposition, contrasts, or even conflicts. Substantial tasks in management are conflict resolution in nature. Indeed, one may consider the task of organization management as nothing but to dissolve any conflicts or dualities. From this perspective, the oneness concept is closely related to the Middle Path thesis and the entailed issue of organizational harmony, as shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 should be treated as an integrated whole. One Hakka entrepreneur made an interesting “conjecture”. He suggested that having a big picture (e.g., a global perspective) can be considered an important trait of the Hakka people. His explanation: The Hakka people have migrated to places all over the world. It is inevitable for them to develop global perspectives and a long-term view. On the other hand, historically the Hakka people, being a minority, usually live in relative disadvantageous environment.

They are often “forced” to look for all kinds of options for survival and thrival. Consequently, they develop the habit of taking multiple perspectives. Such a habit is consistent with the Buddhist motto: Multiple perspectives and deep perspectives together will give rise to complete and perfect perspectives.

The Middle Path Thesis

This thesis suggests that we should not be biased to any polar views which certainly include dualistic polarization. Always keep it in the middle, as the name implies. The Hakka entrepreneurs generally agree with the “logical sequence” shown in Figure 1. That is, keeping in the middle is prerequisite to organizational harmony. Harmony entails equality. Equality avoids agitation or unrest. Finally, peace is the necessary condition for happiness. One can carry this one step further to assert a management principle – happy employees are quality and productive employees. It is a common sense that people would not do good jobs if they are in bad mood. A harmonious organization also provides a better *chi* (energy, atmosphere, or “magnetic field”) for working environment. Thus the chain in Figure 1 suggests that the Middle Path is crucial to both effectiveness and efficiency in organization and management.

Another interpretation of the Middle Path thesis is the avoidance of being too much or not enough. One Hakka entrepreneur, whose company has been in business of manufacturing and exporting auto parts for years, illustrates the Middle Path thesis with his strategy in Customer Relationship Management (CRM). A few years ago, he was making the decision of locating his warehouse in the United States. Among many criteria for choosing the best location, the proximity to customers is generally considered one of the most important concerns. Customers will definitely be happy if suppliers are in close vicinity so as to enjoy fast shipments and services – one of the important Just-In-Time practices. Under competition, suppliers are likely to locate closer to customers and to develop close ties with them. However, this particular Hakka entrepreneur gave a different perspective. He reasoned that, if you locate close to customers, they may take things for granted. If you keep them at a reasonable distance, you can reduce the unreasonable demands from you customers – “they won’t bother you if it’s not convenient for them to do so.” He believes that he is applying the art of the Middle Path thesis. Interestingly, after five years of operating the warehouse at a distance, he accepted the invitation by one of his major customers to relocate his warehouse to inside the customer’s manufacturing facility. This arrangement is certainly the most convenient for the customer. When asked whether this practice would be “too close for comfort”, the Hakka entrepreneur admitted that cost consideration took the first priority in this relocation decision. After all, he was offered to use the facility for free. Moreover, he saved the extra shipping expenses from the distant warehouse. With a sense of humor, he justified his new decision with, believe or not, the Middle Path theory: you have to transcend the duality between the Middle and the two sides. In other words, one should not be attached to and insistent on the Middle.

Mindfulness

As pointed out earlier, the current mindfulness movement has not captured the true meaning of mindfulness, not to mention the concept of “True Mind” in Buddhism. Particularly in Mahayana Buddhism, the notion of “True Mind” refers to the true nature or the “essence” of all things. The attainment of the True Mind is the ultimate goal for all Buddhists. Thus, the true mindfulness should be based on the True Mind.

With the exception of two or three truly devoted Buddhists, most Hakka entrepreneurs in this study treat the “mindfulness” or “one-mindedness” concept with a “common sense” attitude. That is, they do not see it in the context of “True Mind” in the Buddhist literature. But their attitude toward “mindfulness” and their management practices are quite consistent with the implications of the “True Mind” concept. For example, one Hakka entrepreneur talks about one episode of his experience in making “big decisions”. He was facing the decision of acquisition of a small company. He was torn between pros and cons related to the purchase. Then he made a point to take a three-day break and leave the decision completely behind. For three days, he enjoyed hiking and sight-seeing, without a single thought placed upon the “big decision”. He literally tried to empty out everything from his mind. After he got back, he had much clearer head (i.e., fresh and “pure” mind). He made the decision to go ahead with the acquisition which turned out to be a very good move. He really cherished that three-day off. Several Hakka entrepreneurs reported similar experience, perhaps not so drastic as “leaving the scene”. As common sense dictates, if decision makers can “empty” out delusive thoughts and afflictions from their minds, they will definitely have a clearer head to make better decisions. This is yet another “testimonial” for the assertion that emptiness means infinite possibilities. It also implies that true mindfulness means being able to accommodate all these infinite possibilities.

Other Buddhist/Hakka Values

In addition to the above five topics, we encourage interviewees to have open discussions on their own management practices, experiences, memorable (good or bad) moments in their business and careers, as well as their views on various issues related to this study. We would like to detect any Hakka and/or Buddhist “flavors” in their inputs. This part of exchanges proves to be very fruitful.

Perhaps due to the fact that Hakka people are big on “blood ties”, most Hakka entrepreneurs have one way or another emphasized the importance of the “business-as-family” concept. That is, they tend to consider a business firm as a family and treat employees as family members. Many of them feel the obligation to look after their employees. Unless absolutely necessary, they try their best not to lay off workers. It should be noted that, although being big on blood ties, they do not discriminate against non-Hakka people, in hiring, compensation, rewards and promotion, as well as in employee welfare in general. Several Hakka entrepreneurs purposefully pointed out that they are in business to take care of people, rather than simply to make money. By taking care of people (e.g., customers, employees, etc.), the business will take care of itself.

It is interesting to note that most Hakka entrepreneurs are very receptive to quality concepts prevailing in the management literature, even though only a few are well-versed in such literature. For example, in the discussion on “Improving Perfection” as a quality concept (Klopp, 1991), they really appreciate the idea that quality consists of three ingredients: attention to details, hard work and dedication. One of them even points out that these three ingredients are quite compatible with the generally accepted description of Hakka people – “hard neck” (i.e., stubborn, insistent and persistent), thrifty and diligent. Indeed, dedication requires “hard neck”. Hakka people are generally hard workers because historically the Hakka people were living in relatively underdeveloped areas. For the same reason, they are generally thrifty. When you are thrifty, you will definitely pay attention to details – to seek opportunities for saving here and there. This attitude is something more than the advice that a penny saved is a penny earned. As one entrepreneur puts it, “Save nickels and dimes now; they will be needed for a lot of businesses ventures in the future.”

Another Buddhist idea which the Hakka entrepreneurs frequently mentioned is the notion of “yuan” which is commonly translated as “conditions”. There are many more subtle connotations of this term. In organization management, it may mean affiliation, connection, or relation in the cases of human relations. It may also mean opportunities for actions. Hakka entrepreneurs often emphasize the importance of building good connections. They also talk about the need to be ready when opportunities knock. As one Hakka entrepreneur puts it, “In life or in our careers, you often need someone, some powerful people or “guarding angels”, to lend you a hand. But you must prepare yourself and get ready to take advantage of such help or opportunities.” He points out the importance of creating (and controlling) the right conditions for the presence of the powerful people. Building good connections and positive affiliations is one way to create such “right conditions”. Preparing oneself for taking advantage of the help from powerful people is the typical example of “controlling the conditions”.

One unexpected, but not surprising, finding of this study is that most of the Hakka entrepreneurs show great sense of humor. Perhaps this is simply a natural (and necessary) tendency for hard-working people, particularly in adverse circumstances. A sense of humor not only provides relaxation, but also makes people see things philosophically so as to carry them through adversity. Thus, this quality should go hand in hand with the Hakka traits such as hard work and “hard neck”. This should be an interesting topic for future studies in Hakkaology. Interestingly, people should also find that the Buddha indeed has great sense of humor too. We can appreciate the Buddha’s sense of humor in many sutras (i.e., the Buddha’s teachings), particularly in the forms of stories, metaphors, analogies, etc. Such sense of humor can facilitate not only teaching and learning, but also communication in organizations. A sense of humor is also valuable in transcending duality or in dealing with ironic situations.

3. Toward a Buddhism-Based Hakka Management Model

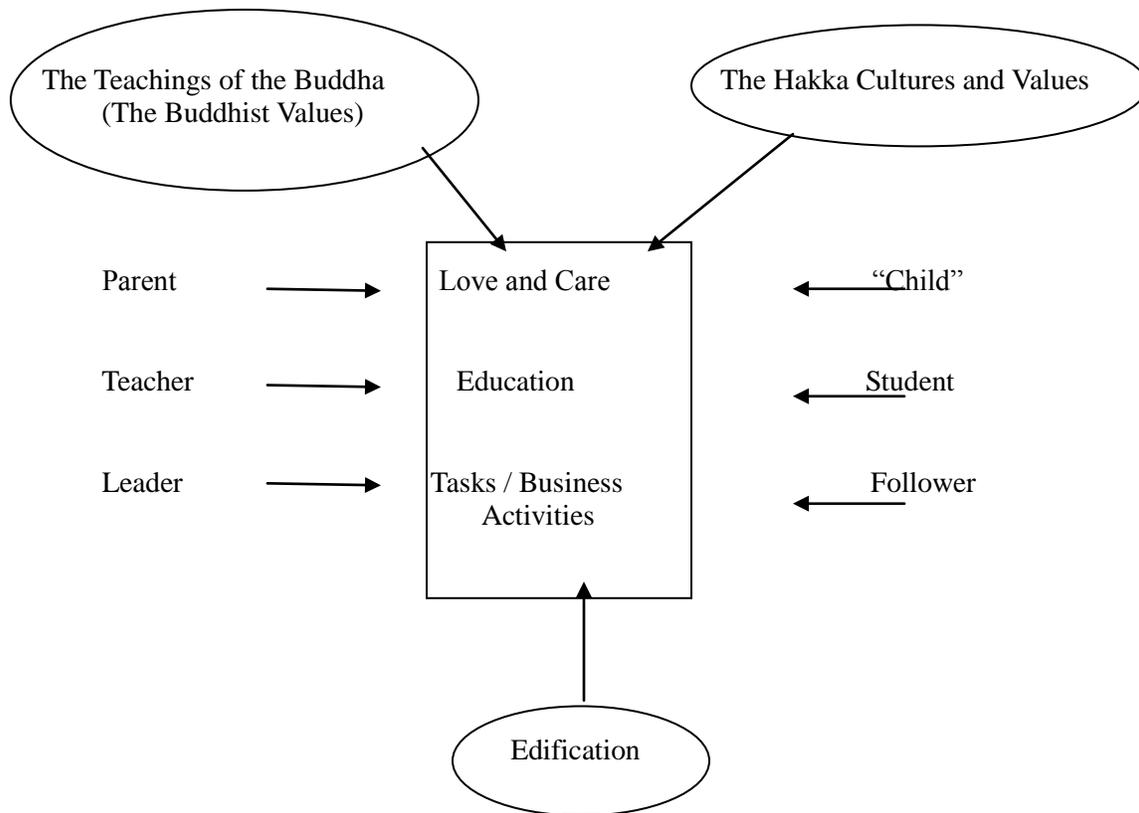
From the result of this study, we develop a preliminary Buddhism-based Hakka management model. The model incorporates both the Buddhist concepts and the traits and values of the Hakka culture. The model is adapted from the framework for partnership developed by Chung and Chung (2008). This framework is compatible with many important values contained in both Buddhism and Hakka culture. Such compatibility and connection are summarized in Table 1. These values become the foundation and guidelines for organization activities. Figure 2 shows the Buddhism-based Hakka management model.

Table 1. The Buddhism-Hakka Connections in the Leader-Parent-Teacher Triad

| Traditional Concepts | Modern Concepts | Buddhist Values | Hakka Values |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Leader | Leader | Four Types of Benevolence * | Reverence for Ancestors, Deities, etc. |
| Parents | Parents (Love and Care) | Filial Piety (Compassion) | Filial Piety (Cherish “blood ties”) |
| Teacher | Teacher (Education and Edification) | Respect Teacher (The Buddha as the “Original Teacher”) | Respect Teacher; Respect Books and Papers |

* The four types of benevolence include those received from parents, teachers, the nation (and its leader), and all sentient beings.

Figure 2. A Buddhism-Based Hakka Management Model



It is commonly believed that a leader is at the “center” of an organization. However, an important teaching in Buddhism is: there is no difference among the (True) Mind, the Buddha and all sentient beings. In other words, they are all equal. Similarly, all organization members are equal. Any organization member is both a leader and a follower simultaneously – that is, they are all 1partners. Consequently, any organization is really a “centerless network” – a network of partners. Every member is a center. Regardless positions (in the organizational structure) or functional roles, all members are equal because they are partners (Chung and Chung, 2008). A CEO has an equal status (although more than likely not equal pay) with a sanitary engineer (i.e., a janitor) – they are partners. If every organization member is a “center” of the organization (or the web, the network, for that matter), then what kinds of role does he or she play? That is, what are the roles of a “partner” plays? Figure 2 shows that, in addition to being both a leader and a follower simultaneously, any organization member should be both a “parent” and a “child” and be both a teacher and a student, simultaneously.

In interacting with colleagues, organization members are teaching each other and learning from each other. Thus, any organization member is a teacher and a student at the same time. Each organization member is also a parent and a child simultaneously. Generally speaking, we can define a parent as someone who is on the giving end, while a “child” on the receiving end, of love, care, etc. Every human being needs love and care. Any human being is not only capable of giving love and care, but also has the tendency to do so. Indeed, it is a human nature to love and to care. Thus, any organization member can and should be a parent and a child simultaneously.

In summary, any organization member plays the six roles of leader/follower, parent/“child” and teacher/student *simultaneously*. That is, they love and care for each other; they learn from each other; and they carry out tasks or organizational business activities by both leading and following each other. Like the six roles being an integrated *one*, the “activities” associated with the three pairs of relationship (i.e., love and care, education, and business tasks) are also an integrated *one*. The three types of activities are indeed inseparable.

Chung (2011) suggests a cultural-politics perspective for Hakkaology research. Cultural politics is “the complex process by which the whole domain in which people search and create meaning about their everyday lives is subject to politicization and struggle” (Angus and Jhally, 1989). The evolution and development of Hakka values and all activities which Hakka people engage in would necessarily involve the search and creation of meanings while such processes are inevitably subject to “politicization and struggle”. Chung (2011) contends that the notion of “edification” can best serve as the characterization and strategy for the evolution and development of Hakka culture (or for any culture or sub-culture, for that matter). Obviously, the management practices of Hakka enterprises are no exception. –

The notion of “edification” is adapted from Rorty (1979). He coined this term to stand for the project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking. Thus, implicit in this term is a dynamic and interactive process which goes on in all human relations. The term “edification” is used in place of “education” because the latter may give the (wrong) impression of being simply “the transfer of knowledge.” The aim of edification is at continuing a conversation – conversation with oneself and with others -- rather than at discovering truth. The purpose of continuing conversation is to enhance understanding, consciousness and awareness, rather than just “knowingness.” Thus the notion of “edification” serves well for describing the dynamic interactive process of business activities, love/care and education as discussed in Figure 2. Indeed, all three types of organizational activities which partners engage in -- love/care, education/learning, and tasks/business activities – involve “continuing conversations.” Effective partnership relies on organization members constantly striving for the enhancement of understanding, awareness and consciousness. These concepts can be best summarized by the following three premises associate with the edification and re-description (Chung, 2007, 2011).

- *Edification enhances people’s consciousness and awareness, rather than knowingness and pigeonholing, of what goes on in the field.*
- *Edification helps people expand their horizons of understanding.*
- *Edification encourages people to re-examine and revise their frameworks of understanding.*

The edification philosophy entails at least two closely related requisites for successful management through the process of constant re-description (i.e., a continuing conversation). First, the edification philosophy advocates open-mindedness and therefore the importance of both extending horizon and widening perspectives. This is consistent with the aforementioned “oneness” concept – the importance of “big picture” and “whole picture”. Second, the edification philosophy encourages creativity for coming up with new and novel descriptions. Open-mindedness can remove many unnecessary constraints and obstructions to the generation of creative ideas required by the re-description activities. With extended horizon of understanding and widened perspectives, one becomes more receptive to new and novel ideas. One will be able to see bigger pictures. This, in fact, helps one maintain strategic focus. Such mentality also sets one free from the fixation on his or her own value systems, conceptual frameworks, or favorite descriptions. (This is consistent with the Buddhist value of “non-attachment”). One then becomes more conscious and aware of the circumstances and more sensitive to changes in the environment. There are at least two ways to enhance both open-mindedness and creativity. First, one may find it productive to use metaphors freely so as to facilitate the re-description process. Metaphor has usually been defined as a trope involving a transfer from literal to figurative meaning. (Calder, 2003, p. 45) Aristotle even defined it as a sort of deliberate category mistake and the application of an “alien name.” In this way, one meaning is created out of another. Scientists often generate new metaphors through a cognitive process when they want to suggest a new hypothesis.

Rorty (1991) points out that metaphors are necessary for gaining knowledge, even though they did not express knowledge (p. 168). Metaphors also offer a very promising alternative to traditional theorizing approach. One can freely use metaphors and extend them to different problem settings without worrying about issues such as replicability and generalizability. As Frisina (2002) puts it, “We can let go of the effort to describe the world ‘as it is’ and enjoy the unmitigated pleasure of creatively playing with metaphors that we use to constitute ourselves and the world around us.” (p. 38) The notion of “continuing re-description” suggests that these descriptions can hardly be qualified as “truth” – because they are changing constantly. Another important way to enhance open-mindedness and creativity is to develop habitual “mindfulness.” Langer (1997) specifies the concept of mindfulness as a state of active awareness characterized by the continual creation and refinement of categories, an openness to new information and a willingness to view contexts from multiple perspectives.

Earlier we mentioned that most of the Hakka entrepreneurs in this study show great sense of humor and that such sense of humor can facilitate not only teaching and learning, but also effective communication in organizations. During the re-description process, stories, metaphors, analogies, etc. are often used. Such usage can easily spark people’s sense of humor and therefore should be incorporated into the above Hakka management model.

4. Conclusions

This study investigates the impacts of Buddhist thoughts on the business and management philosophies of Hakka enterprises. We interviewed a total of 22 entrepreneurs. They represent a variety of businesses. A set of selected Buddhism-related topics were used as guidelines for interview. Our study finds that, although not all of the Hakka entrepreneurs in this study are self-claimed Buddhists, they are generally open-minded and receptive to Buddhist thoughts. Their management styles, practices and philosophies are quite compatible with both the Buddhist and Hakka values.

Among the five Buddhist concepts used as the guideline for interview, the Law of Cause and Effect are most commonly applied by Hakka entrepreneurs. The “oneness” and the Middle Path concepts follow closely. They consider the “mindfulness” or “one-mindedness” concept just a “common sense” for conducting business, without specifically referring to what is called the “true mind” in the Buddhist literature. The “emptiness” concept seems to be rather abstract to most of them. They interpret it as nothing more than the notion of “non-attachment” or the need to let go of worldly things. However, they do agree with the assertion that emptiness implies infinite possibilities.

Based on the result of this study, we propose a preliminary Buddhism-based Hakka management model. Both Buddhist and Hakka values are integrated in this model. Since it is “preliminary”, the model should be further enhanced by incorporating more Buddhist theses and Hakka values. For example, in the Buddhist literature, the following eight factors are considered important perspectives one should take when dealing with worldly affairs: Essence, Phenomena, Functions/Applications, Causes, Conditions, Effects, Universals and Particulars. These eight factors provide an analytical framework for studying business management and therefore should, one way or another, be incorporated into business management processes.

Future studies should also be directed to more comprehensive and comparative investigation of the impacts of Buddhism (and other religions) upon other ethnic groups or subcultures. In this way, we can have a better understanding of the unique characteristics and styles (if any) of Buddhism oriented Hakka business management, as contrast to those in other subcultures. Also, the relationships between religious thoughts and ethnic values, as well as their impacts on management practices can be generalized and theorized. Similarly, the proposed Buddhism-based Hakka management model needs to be further tested in different environments. After all, as suggested by the aforementioned “edification” concept, the evolution and development of the Hakka culture, of Hakkaology, and of the Hakka business management model, etc. should be a process of continuing conversation and endless re-description.

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Appendix I

List of Hakka Businesses Participated in this Study

(We do our best to preserve the privacy and anonymity of the interviewees)

1. Accounting Firm
This accounting firm specializes in international and domestic, business and personal taxes. The company is headquartered in the U.S. But it has extended its business to East Asian countries.
2. Architect
The architect received a master's degree and a Ph.D. degree from universities in the United States. After he returned to Taiwan, he first became a partner in an architect firm and later had his own company. As both an architect and a developer, he established his business and reputation in Central Taiwan area. Sadly, he passed away in April, 2011.
3. Auto Parts Design, Manufacturing and Export
The company was founded more than thirty years ago. Currently it has over 100 employees. The company Headquartered in Southern Taiwan with warehouses and offices in the U.S. This Hakka entrepreneur started his business in lumber and building materials. He then moved into the manufacturing of parts, mainly auto parts. He had built a solid export business in light systems for recreation vehicles. As the global economy went south, he successfully shifted the business to the manufacturing and export of sirens for police cars, ambulances, etc. During the past decade, he purposefully diversified his ventures into service industry, namely the motel business. This latter venture accounts for about 10% of the company's overall profit. It provides a cushion for the company's financial health. This is particularly important move since the export business is too sensitive and vulnerable to the global recessions.
4. Car Dealer
This is, in fact, a failed joint adventure in China. Before this failure, the Hakka entrepreneur did have a successful transportation company (focusing on limousine services) in Southern Taiwan.
5. Convenient Stores (2)
One traditional, the other franchisee of a major chain. The traditional store is just a typical Mom and Pop store.
6. (Director of) Branch Office of a Nonprofit Organization
Founder of a branch organization of a Buddhist foundation in a major (Midwest U.S.) city.
7. Engineering Consulting (2)
One received his Ph.D. degree in Civil Engineering focuses on water-related projects. The other received his Master's degree in Civil Engineering concentrating on "structure engineering".
8. Engineering Design (2)
One has aerospace industry as major clients. The other is a software engineering company. Both are in California, U.S.A.
9. Food Processing
Global operations with plants in both Taiwan and the U.S.
10. Orchid Farmers (2)
One engages in farming only, the other also in sales.
11. Publishers (2)
They are publishers of magazines and books, one founder of a magazine and the other successor. The latter has expanded the operation into publication of additional magazines and books. One of magazines specialized in Hakka culture and news and celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2010.
12. Restaurants (3)
One owns 3 restaurants, another owns 3 at different times, and the third one owns 4 at different times. The first is in Taiwan while the latter two in the U.S.
13. (Senior Executive of a) Utility Company
The senior executive has a master's degree from the U.S. Before joining the company, he had work for television maker, a company of Formosan Corps, and one research institute. He even had a short stint in teaching technical college.
14. Tea Sellers (2)
One has an on-line business in selling tea, but not a very successful venture.