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THE WATER-LIKE DAOIST BIG-FIVE THEORY FOR BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SUPPORT

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Abstract

The Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory for business and management has been developed based on the ancient Chinese *Dao De Jing* (or *Tao Te Ching* or *The Power of Dao*) by Laozi/Lao Tzu in about 550 BC (also sometimes referred to as *The Book of Laozi*). The main ideas of Daoism focus on harmony with nature (i.e., *Dao* or *Tao*) and harmony with human beings (i.e, *De* or *Te*). Lee and team (Lee, 2003, Lee et al, 2008; Lee et al., 2013; Lee & Holt, 2019) developed the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory, which includes altruism, modesty/humility, flexibility/resilience, honesty/transparency, and gentleness and perseverance, as an alternative to the mainstream Big-Five theory. The current paper examines quantitative data, generating the 20-item Daoist Big-Five scale (Lee et al., 2013), and qualitative evidence in support of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory of Personality. Findings highlight, for example, the utility of this theory for facilitating effective leadership, navigating group dynamics and fostering collaborative efforts, promoting conflict resolution, and encouraging greater harmony with the natural world, including plants, animals, landscapes, and other humans. While this theory is very promising, further validation of this model and more research into its' applications are warranted.

Keywords

Daoism, Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory, Daoist Leadership Styles, Conflict Resolution, Collaborative Work

> "At any rate, the *Tao Te Ching* is evidence that mysticism was important in China once, and the continued interest in its scripture indicates that it can be so again. The message of the book is still of general interest, and that is important in a day when the old compartmentalization of the world is so shaken by the idea of 'One World.' In 'One World' the *Tao Te Ching* would be quite at home."
>
> ----- (Blakney, 1955, p. 49)

Introduction to Daoist Philosophy related to Business and Management

Many researchers are familiar with the Big-Five factor theory of personality in psychology. Different from the mainstream Western Five-Factor Model (see John & Soto, 2022; McCrae & Costa, 1987; McCrae & John, 1991), this article elaborates on a non-Western five-factor theory, the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory of Personality for business and managment. So, what is the Water-like Daoist Theory exactly? To understand the Daoist Water-Like Big-Five, we need to address its background and the basic principles that underlie this theory. More specifically, we need to address two basic questions. First, what is the background of Daoism, as a philosophy, not as a religion. This question provides insight into the basic philosophical principles that are the foundation of the Daoist Theory of Personality. Second, based on these principles, more explicitly, what is the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory?

With respect to the origin of Daoism and concept of Dao, much research has previously been done (see Johnson, 2000; Lee & Holt, 2019; Watts, 1961, 1975). According to Lee (2003, 2004, 2019; Lee et al., 2015), Laozi was the father of Daoism. Research suggests that Laozi was born in the central part of China (near the Yangtze River) over 2,500 years ago (Lee, 1991, 2000; Sima, 1994; Yan, 1999). His actual name was Li Er (or Lee Er) and he served as an official historian for the Zhou dynasty. All his life he pursued the 道 Dao (or Tao) and 德 De (or Te). 道 Dao can mean a road, a path, the way it is, the way of nature, the Way of Ultimate Reality, and or may refer to the Rules/Laws of Nature. According to Blakney (1955), in the eyes of the Chinese, 道 Dao does not only refer to the way the whole world of nature operates, but also signifies the original undifferentiated Reality from which the universe is evolved. 德 De means humanistic behavior/virtues, character, influence, or moral force. Simply put, Dao means harmony with nature, including all animals, plants, and objects in the natural world, whereas De means harmony with other humans.

According to historical records (Sima, 1994; also see Fei, 1984) and research by Lee (2003), Kongzi (i.e., Confucius) went to study Dao and De with Laozi and, therefore, Laozi was seen as a mentor for Confucius. Because Laozi was not pleased with the decline of the Zhou dynasty and was sick of the ongoing wars in which people killed each other, Laozi decided to live in a mountain as a hermit. He resigned from his official position as a historian in the Chinese Imperial Capital in Luoyang (near the Yellow River in central China) and traveled west with his ox through the Han Ku Pass. This location is where Laozi stayed (nearby) and composed a five-thousand-character/word classic, *道 德 经Dao De Jing*, which is also sometimes referred to as *The Power of Tao and Te* (or *The Book of Laozi*) (Lao-Tzu, 1993; Shi, 1988; Sima, 1994; Wing, 1986; also Lee, 2003). Because Laozi is the founder of Daoism, this paper only focuses on Laozi's Daoism. That is, we will not address any Daoist ideas related to other Daoist philosophers (e.g., Zhuangzi, Liezi) after Laozi.

Paradoxically, on the one hand, technical knowledge about Chinese Daoism is not widely encountered in the West (see Lee et al., 2018; Lee & Holt, 2019; Yang & Wang, 2009). On the other hand, research shows that many of the Daoist ideas promulgated by Laozi are in fact influential today worldwide, though they may not be labeled specifically as Daoist in origin (see Lee, 2003, Lee, 2016; Lee et al., 2015). For example, except for the *Bible*, Laozi's classic book Dao De Jing is the most widely translated and published book in the world (Lee et al., 2008). If Daoism means a way of life, then Dao and Daoist ideas philosophically and practically have produced a far-reaching useful impact on different arenas (e.g., sciences, humanities, religion and spirituality, physical and mental health, daily life practices).

For example, according to the research by Lee's research, *Dao* means the harmony with the natural world or the universe, whereas *De* means harmony with oneself and other human beings (Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2008). Other publications focusing on Daoist psychological theories (Lee, 2003; Lee & Holt, 2019) further emphasize the philosophical and practical applications of Daoist ideas. For example, examining Laozi's Daoism (previously called Taoism), Lee (2003) expounded the following humanistic issues from the perspective of ancient Chinese philosophy: (a) the principle of *wei wu-wei* (or following the noninterference or nonaction) or spontaneity and natural way; (b) openness and tolerance; (c) water personality; (d) high regard for females and mothers; (e) moderation and avoidance of extremes; (f) the welfare of others and the world; and (g) opposition to war and love of peace. Further developing these ideas (Lee, 2003), this paper elaborates on the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory of Personality (also referred to as wateristic personality style), including how it was developed, theoretically, and how it is supported, empirically.

Wateristic Characteristics and the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory of Personality

As per Lee (2003, Lee et al., 2008), water personality is one of the main Daoist theoretical views. Lee and colleagues have done much research on water-like personality style in the past decades (e.g., Lee, 2003, 2016; Lee et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2015; Lee, 2019 Lee & Holt, 2019). So, precisely what is the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory of Personality?

The most effective way to comprehend Daoism is to focus on a metaphor that describes Daoist principles using water (i.e., water-like or wateristic characteristics). To Laozi, the best quality or value is like water. We human beings, including therapists or administrators, should learn from water because water always remains in the lowest position and never competes with other things. Instead, water is very helpful and beneficial to all things. In his time, Laozi observed that human conflict (e.g., fighting, killing, wars) was most likely to occur if everyone wanted to compete and to go after their own interests (e.g., moving or fighting for more material, more fame, or higher rank). Thus, if we are altruistic and humble (or modest), human conflict might be reduced.

Why is the best like water? In his writings, Laozi used water as a metaphor many times to explain the leadership style of the Sage. More specifically, water is altruistic and always serves others; that is, water is modest, flexible, clear and transparent, and soft, and yet, also powerful (or perseverant) (Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2008, Lee & Holt, 2019).

First, Water is Altruistic

All species and organisms depend on water. Without water, none of them can survive. What does water get from us? Almost nothing. A good Daoist individual (e.g., a leader, therapist or administrator) should be as altruistic as water. For example, Laozi advocated a "water personality." We, as human beings, including leaders, should learn from water because it always remains in the lowest position and never competes with other things. Instead, water is very helpful and beneficial to all things:

> The highest value (or the best) is like water,
> The value in water benefits All Things
> And yet it does not contend,
> It stays in places that others despise,
> And therefore is close to *Dao*
>
> (*Dao De Jing*, Chapter 8).

Daoism recognizes that the ultimate goal of sages is to serve their people without the desire to gain for personal benefit or gratitude. Laozi stated in his book that “The best are like water, good at benefiting all things without competing for gaining” (Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 8). This entails selflessness as an essential attribute of a leader, which is realized in accepting people’s aspirations as one’s own. “The sage does not have aspirations but adopts those of the people as his own” (Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 49). Only when a leader does not have his own ambitions can he truly serve his people for their benefits.

Second, Water is Very Modest and Humble

Water always goes to the lowest place. As stated in Chapter 8 of the *Dao De Jing*, although water benefits all things, it does not contend and always stays in the lowest places that others despise. Being humble and modest is necessary for good leaders to appreciate and understand the Dao of things, and always be ready to learn and be alert to overconfidence in the self. While many Westerners often value and enjoy a sense of authority, assertiveness, aggressiveness, and competitiveness, Laozi encouraged people to have a water-like characteristic—that is, to maintain a low profile and to be humble and modest, especially in the face of the Dao or nature, and to be very helpful and/or beneficial to others.

To Laozi, modesty or humbleness (humility), willingness to help and benefit others, and the ability to maintain a low profile (just like water) are qualities essential to an individual who wants to influence others:

> The rivers and seas lead the hundred streams
> Because they are skillful at staying low.
> Thus they are able to lead the hundred streams
>
> (*Dao De Jing*, Chapter 66).

In Laozi’s opinion, those who are humble and modest not only exist in good harmony with others, but they are effective leaders, just like the rivers and seas.

The sea, for instance, can govern a hundred rivers because it has mastered being lower. Being humble is important for sages because it enables them to accept people’s goals as their own and to attract and unite people around themselves. Just as the sea accepts and embraces all rivers coming its way--muddy or clear, large or small--leaders who humble themselves before people draw people towards them and gain people’s trust. This does not belittle leaders but strengthens them instead. When leaders do not discriminate against those coming their way, they will have people of all abilities around them. When they place themselves below people and praise them for their abilities, leaders will boost the self-esteem and confidence of the people, who will in return be more eager to carry out tasks to their full potentials. That is why Laozi said “The person who knows how to motivate people acts humble. This is the virtue of no rival and uses the strength of others” (Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 68).

Third, Water is Very Adaptable and Flexible

Water can stay in a container of any shape. This flexibility or fluidity lends a great deal of wisdom to us. Wise individuals (e.g., leaders, therapists and administrators) can adjust themselves to any environment and situation just as water does in a container. Resilience is important. Lu Jin Chuan, a contemporary Daoist master and philosopher, once said that water has no shape of its own but that of the container (Lu, 2001). Maintaining flexibility and adapting to the dynamics of change, like water following its path, are probably the best options for us. There is no such thing as the best leadership style or governing method across time and context, but the best principle is being flexible and fluid, and finding the appropriate way for here and now.

Fourth, Water is Transparent and Clear

An effective individual should be honest and transparent to others. The most honorable individuals (not only leaders) are usually clear and forthcoming, like water. Though Western Machiavellian or other deceptive approaches might work temporarily, being honest and transparent is one of the big ethical concerns in modern management. So long as it is not muddied up, water itself remains clear and transparent. In Chapter 15, Laozi stated, "Who can (make) the muddy water clear? Let it be still, and it will gradually become clear." Metaphorically, human beings by nature are naïve and honest. Social environment and competition (i.e., like muddiness) make them unclear. The clarity, transparency, and honesty of water are all characteristics that are most appreciated by Laozi.

Finally, Water Is Very Soft and Gentle, but also Very Persistent and Powerful

If drops of water keep pounding at a rock for years, even the hardest rock will yield to water. Over time, water can cut through rock to form valleys and canyons. The style of sages should be similarly gentle and soft, but perseverant and powerful. Here is an example of what we could learn from water:

> Nothing in the world
> Is as yielding and receptive as water:
> Yet in attacking the firm and inflexible,
> Nothing triumphs so well
>
> (Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 78).

Since, there is nothing softer than water, yet nothing better for attacking hard and strong things, there is no substitute for it. Its softness enables it to tolerate all kinds of environments, gathering strength without wearing it off at an earlier stage. And the resolute and perseverance of water help it to cut its path through hard rocks and wear away mountains. It is very important for a therapist or an administrator to recognize the dialectical relationship as such and to acquire the resolute and persevering characteristics of water.

Simply put, these five water-like personality characteristics are based on the Daoist principles of *Dao* (harmony with nature, or the Natural Way, or naturalness) and *De* (harmony with other human beings, or being humanitarian, or humanistic) described by Laozi and introduced above (see Lee et al., 2008, Lee, 2019; Lee & Holt, 2019). Here is a diagram of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory of Personality.

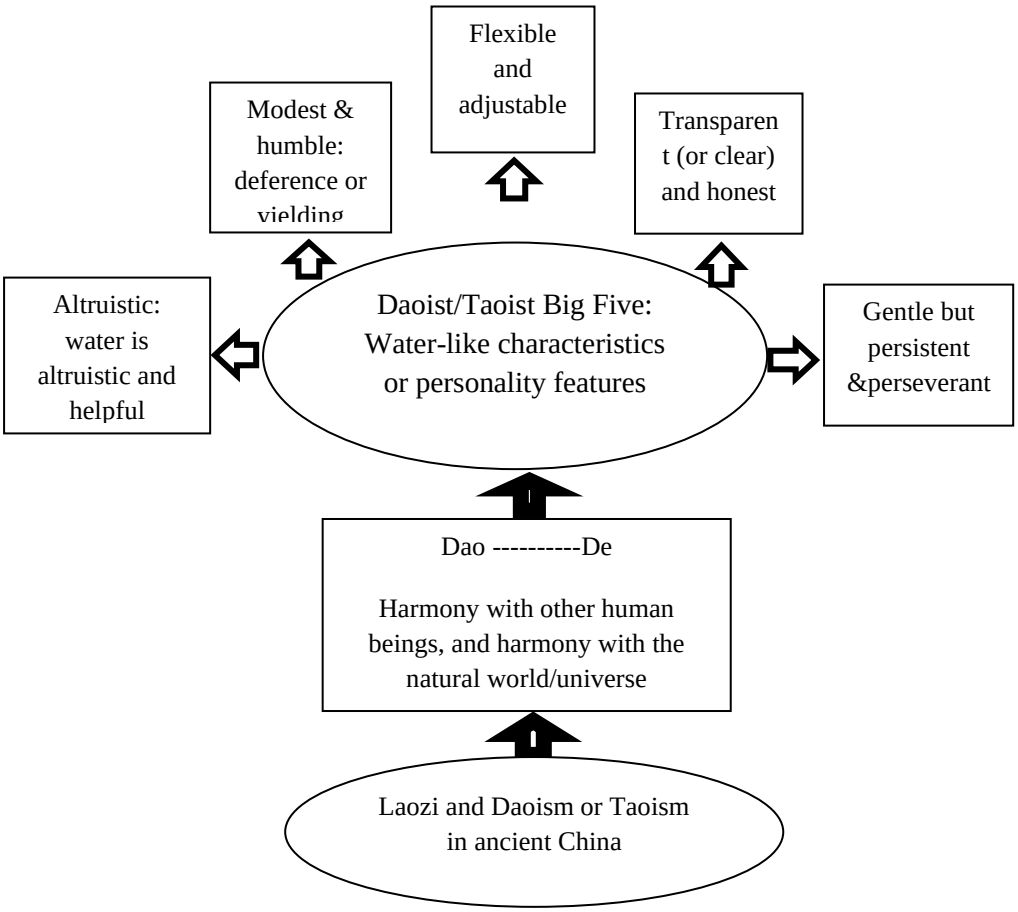

Figure 1: **The Water-like Daoist Theory of Personality (i.e., the Daoist Big-Five)**

Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory: Factor Analysis, Reliability and Its Scale Development

To examine these five personality characteristics, Lee and colleagues (2013) conducted a cross-cultural study which aimed to investigate how student participants of different cultural and gender backgrounds responded to the Daoist Big-Five (i.e., altruism, modesty, flexibility, honesty, and gentleness and perseverance) dimensions. Participants (N=448) from the People's Republic of China and the United States were asked to make judgments on a series of traits and behaviors thought to be representative of the five personality dimensions. For use in the Daoist Big-Five theoretical model, measures were gathered from various sources, including those by Kibeom Lee and colleagues (Ashton & K. Lee, 2008; K. Lee & Ashton, 2004; K. Lee et al.,, 2008; K. Lee et al.,, 2009), as some of the items used in their measures reflected the domains of altruism, modesty, flexibility, and honesty. Example items include, "I try to give generously to those in need" (altruism), "I want people to know that I am an important person of high status" (modesty-reversed), "People sometimes tell me that I'm too stubborn " (flexibility-reversed), and "If I want something from a person I dislike, I will act very nicely toward that person in order to get it" (honesty-reversed). Questions related to the perseverance domain were adapted from Duckworth and colleagues (2007). For example, "I finish whatever I begin."

The compiled items were given to participants and then factor analyzed, which yielded five factors that were labeled perseverance, modesty, altruism, flexibility, and honesty. Results revealed differences in judgments as a function of culture and gender. Initially, the factorability of the 26 water-like personality (Daoist Big-Five) scale items were examined. A total of six items were eliminated because they did not contribute to a simple factor structure and failed to meet a minimum criterion of having a primary factor loading of .4 or above and a cross-loading to more than 1 factor with .3 or above. A final analysis of principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted based on the 20 items with orthogonal rotation (varimax). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .74, which indicates a good, reliable factor. Barlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2(171) = 1633.98$, $p \leq .001$, indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Five components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and, in combination, explained 48.01% of the variance. As can be seen in Table 1, the factor analysis yielded five factors that were labeled as perseverance, modesty, altruism, flexibility, and honesty. In particular, Factor 1 represents Perseverance and accounted for 13.63% of the variance, and those items in this factor are related to persistency and diligence. Factor 2 represents Modesty and accounted for 10.65% of the variance, and those items in this factor involve modesty and, opposite of modesty, self-enhancement. Factor 3 represents Altruism and accounted for 8.35% of the variance, and those items in this factor are related to generosity, sympathy and helpfulness. Factor 4 represents Flexibility and accounted for 8.12% of the variance, and those items in this factor are related to rigidity or inflexibility (opposite of flexibility). Finally, Factor 5 represents Honesty and accounted for 7.25% of the variance, and those items in this factor pertain to deception and dishonesty (opposite to honesty). In sum, the five factors obtained from the empirical data were consistent with, and helped to support, those in our theoretical model (see Table 1).

	Rotated Factor Loadings				
Items	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
I am a hard worker.	.594	-.114	.152		
I finish whatever I begin.	.608		.299		.133
I am diligent.	.727	.108	-.170		
I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.	.548	-.299		.174	.227
I have achieved a goal that took years of work.	.795	.192	.171		
Setbacks don't discourage me.	.688	.117	.271		
I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is.		.557	.350	.129	
I want people to know that I am an important person of high status.	-.172	.539	.151		.141
It wouldn't bother me to harm someone I didn't like.	.142	.713	-.111		
I am an ordinary person who is no better than others.		.658		.177	.252
I try to give generously to those in need.	.274	.147	.725		
I have sympathy for people who are less fortunate than I am.	.233	-.106	.777		
People see me as a hard-hearted person.		.307	.491	.361	
People sometimes tell me that I'm too stubborn.			.120	.664	
People sometimes tell me that I am too critical of others.		.110		.634	
When people tell me that I'm wrong, my first reaction is to argue with them.				.606	.150
I find it hard to compromise with people when I really think I'm right.		.173	-.259	.588	-.108

If I want something from a person I dislike, I will act very nicely toward that person in order to get it.					.700
I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me.	-.136	.183			.594
I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.	.101		.136		.695
Eigenvalues	2.73	2.13	1.67	1.63	1.45
% of Variances	13.64	10.65	8.35	8.12	7.25

Note. Factor 1 = Perseverance, Factor 2 = Modesty, Factor 3 = Altruism, Factor 4 = Flexibility, Factor 5 = Honesty (The data from Lee et al, 2013).

Table 1 ***Factor loadings and communalities based on a principle components analysis with varimax rotation for 26 items (N = 448)***

Based on these five factors, we also obtained reliability scores across items. The internal consistency for each of the scales was examined using Cronbach's alpha (see Table 2). Scores for Perseverance (6 items) were acceptable (α = .76), scores for Modesty (4 items), Altruism (3 items) and Flexibility (4 items) were moderate (.56, .60, and .53, respectively) and, for Honesty (3 items), were poor (.46). Looking across culture, specifically, the internal consistencies for Chinese participants ranged from .30 to .74 on these factors, whereas the internal consistencies for American participants ranged from .49 to .78 (see Table 2).

	Overall	Chinese	Americans	Items
Perseverance	0.76	0.74	0.78	6
Modesty	0.56	0.3	0.64	4
Altruism	0.6	0.63	0.58	3
Flexibility	0.53	0.42	0.59	4
Honesty	0.46	0.4	0.49	3

(The data from Lee et al, 2013).

Table 2. ***Reliability Scores in Cronbach's Alpha***

From both tables above, these factors are generally consistent with the Daoist Big-Five Theory, except that the order varies slightly. That is, our theoretical Water-like Daoist Big-Five model are Altruism, Modesty/Humbleness, Flexibility (or resilience), Honesty/Transparency, and Gentleness/Perseverance, whereas the factor analysis indicated the following order: Perseverance, Modesty, Altruism, Flexibility, and Honesty (see Table 3).

1.I am a hard worker.
2. I finish whatever I begin.
3. I am diligent.
4. I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.
5. I have achieved a goal that took years of work.
6. Setbacks don't discourage me.
7. I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is.*
8. I want people to know that I am an important person of high status.*
9. It wouldn't bother me to harm someone I didn't like.*
10. I am an ordinary person who is no better than others.
11. I try to give generously to those in need.
12. I have sympathy for people who are less fortunate than I am.
13. People see me as a hard-hearted person.*
14. People sometimes tell me that I'm too stubborn.*
15. People sometimes tell me that I am too critical of others.*
16. When people tell me that I'm wrong, my first reaction is to argue with them.*
17. I find it hard to compromise with people when I really think I'm right.*
18. If I want something from a person I dislike, I will act very nicely toward that person in order to get it.*
19. I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me.
20 I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.

Note: 1. It is measured on the scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). 2. Those with * should be reversed. Items 11-13 measure altruism; Items 7-10 measure modesty/humility; Items 14-17 measure flexibility/resilience; Items 18-20 measure honesty/transparency; Items 1-6 measure perseverance).

Table 3 ***The Water-Like Daoist Big Five Scale***

A cautionary note is in order. Although the reliability scores (i.e., Cronbach alpha) are acceptable, the score for Honesty is slightly low (.46). Therefore, despite obtaining initial empirical support for this 20-item Daoist Big-Five scale, further research validation and application is still warranted.

Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory: Additional Quantitative Evidence

First, in a recent study of organizational psychology, evidence has shown that the Daoist leadership style based on the water-like personality tended to display more favorability, empowerment, and democracy (FED) in comparison with Western agentic leadership style (see Zhou, Lee & Jacobs, 2022). Overall, mean scores across the FED factor indicated that the Daoist water-like leadership (M = 4.27) was perceived to have more FED than the agentic leadership (M = 3.95), t (381) = 5.34, p < .001, Cohen's d = .60. Further, MANOVA on the main effect of leadership style was significant, Pillai's trace = .231, F (3, 373) = 37.338, p < .001, and follow-up ANOVAs indicated that Daoist water-like leadership had higher scores than agentic leadership on individual FED variables (see Table 4).

Dependent Variable	Agentic (N=178)	Daoist (N=205)	F	ηp^2
Favorability	4.02 (.69)	4.38 (.43)	89.931**	.193
Empowerment	3.91 (.83)	4.16 (.54)	52.507**	.123
Democracy	3.91 (.79)	4.27 (.50)	105.832**	.220

Note. **p < .001. (The data from Zhou, Lee & Jacobs, 2022).

Table 4 ***Results of Leadership Style on Dependent Variables***

What do these results indicate in relation to the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory of Personality? Although the results of Zhou et al. (2022) did not directly test the Daoist Big-Five model, explicitly, it does provide support for the underlying philosophical theory (i.e., water-like approach). Implicitly, Daoist leadership style tends to display more favorability from followers and is more empowering, more gentle, and more democratic to others. That is, these characteristics, respectively, embody Factor 1 (Helpful and Altruistic), Factor 5 (Gentleness and Perseverance) and Factors 2 and 4 (Modesty and Transparency).

Qualitative Support for the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory

In line with quantitative evidence in support of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five, recent work on collaborative writing by Chen & Lee (2019) provides robust, rigorous qualitative evidence for this theory. Collaborative writing involves two or more members who perform writing tasks together (Ede & Lunsford, 1990), and offers a setting in which interpersonal dynamics, and best practices for those interactions, can be examined. In an ideal or perfect world, group members would share the same cognitive knowledge, linguistic abilities, skill sets, and/or other key features. However, in reality, some members may be better or stronger in their language proficiency, whereas others might not be as proficient. This highlights important questions about group dynamics, including teamwork and collaboration. For example, how would members of these groups feel when differences in their abilities, knowledge, and skills exist? Furthermore, when such differences do exist, do these impact group members differently? We address these issues (teamwork, collaboration, or group dynamics) based on the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory in great length following.

Altruism in Collaborative Writing

Daoism recognizes that the ultimate goal of sages, or cultivated individuals, is to serve their people without the desire for personal benefit or gratitude (Lee et al., 2013). That is, these individuals should see others' benefits beyond their own. However, this is hard to achieve in collaborative writing groups where strong writers and weak writers are arranged to work together. What benefit, if any, can higher-proficiency learners gain from working with lower proficiency partners? Yu and Hu (2017) examined whether, how, and what stronger writers can learn when collaborating with lower-proficiency counterparts in Chinese context. The study found that strong writers who had positive attitudes about peer feedback and benefited from peer collaboration, also had their own goals and motives for peer feedback. In this case, writers with higher proficiency were more altruistic because they focused more on feedback-giving than feedback-receiving.

Empirically, Chen (2015) studied 12 groups of English as a second language (L2) learners' attitudes towards collaborative writing and found that students who had more positive attitudes towards collaborative writing were more altruistic, whereas those who had negative attitudes were more self-oriented. For example, as discussed by two different groups from this study (Chen, 2015), consider the following experiences.

One group of two female members had a pleasant time working as a team. Sali was from South Africa and Iptam was from Saudi Arabia. Because they were from different countries, both individuals were very delighted to

speak in English. Sali, who was a stronger writer, led the writing in terms of organizing thoughts, making sure the group was on topic, and pointing out mistakes. She explained her suggestions patiently and, only if the confusion was not cleared up by the team, confirmed with the instructor in a timely fashion. Iptam was a less proficient writer. However, she remained positive as she thought through the suggestions Sali made for changes and made sure she gave her own opinion on the differences. They communicated and collaborated effectively and smoothly. Sali and Iptam both had positive attitudes towards collaborative writing, which they stated during their interviews:

> "…I always think group work is more perfect than individual work. The benefits of writing with others I guess, is that we would share ideas. I can get help from my teammate, and I can offer my stuff to my partner. I like to share things and help others" (Sali, interview).

> "I think there are many benefits of writing with others. It encourages the students to write well in the class, improves student's skills, makes the work easier and save a lot of time that you may spend when you are not involved in a group. But the best of collaborative writing is I can help my teammate. Her English is not that good, I feel happy that I can teach her what I know. I act like a teacher. I enjoyed it" (Iptam, interview).

We can see Sali and Iptam are both willing to help others, which contributed to successful collaborative writing experience. This shows support for Factor 1 of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five – Altruism.

Modesty and Humbleness (or Humility) in Collaborative Writing

Water nurtures all things, but it does not contend. Water stays in the lowest place, which symbolizes maintaining a low profile and being humble and modest. Being humble does not mean doing nothing or lacking ability. Rather, according to Laozi (1961), those who are humble and modest not only exist in good harmony with others, but are also effective leaders. The power of humility is sea-like. Collaborative learning would not be effectively implemented if group members were not modest or humble. Chen & Yu (2019) found that ineffective or unpleasant partnership may negatively impact team attitudes, which could further break down the entire morale of the team.

This happened in a group of three male students who were all from Saudi Arabia (Chen, 2015). Amal, Bazi, and Hakim found it difficult to collaborate as a team. Because Amal's personality was strong or arrogant, he found it hard to listen to other's advice. Amal would become impatient with group discussion. He fought for his opinion and got angry once there was a disagreement. This situation was encountered by the group many times. Despite this, to keep the writing going, Bazi was accommodating and humble, whereas the third member, Hakim, expressed unhappiness with Amal's aggressive behavior. From the follow-up interview, the group did not feel they benefitted from collaborative writing and no one reported enjoying the teamwork. One group member, Bazi, explained:

> "I never worked with anyone who is so angry. He [Amal] had a nice experience with Saud and Abu (his classmates in Grammar class). I learned a lot and had a nice experience about the teamwork. Amal tried to use big words that I don't know. When I ask him, he was angry. I was disappointed" (Bazi, interview).

Bazi expressed clearly that if he had a more polite and respectful teammate, this collaborative writing would have gone better. The situation where Amal was impatient with the group discussion brought down the team's enthusiasm. Originally, Bazi and Hakim responded favorably to collaborative writing. However, in the end, they both felt frustrated and disappointed with the activity. This shows support for Factor 2 of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory – modesty and humbleness, which is very important in teamwork and group collaborative efforts.

Adaption and Flexibility in Collaborative Writing

As water is very adaptable and flexible, it can stay in any condition to influence others. This flexibility and fluidity can elicit the features learners most benefit from in learning and using language in collaborative writing. Research on the effectiveness of implementing collaborative writing in L2 learning has been discussed and reported by researchers (Dobao, 2012; Shehadeh, 2011; Shi, 1998; Storch, 2005; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2012). Many factors that might affect the effectiveness of collaborative writing have been discussed in previous studies, such as group size, teacher influence, types of prewriting discussion, the role of collaborative writing in writing assignments (Dobao, 2012; Shi, 1998; Storch, 2005), and writing assignment focus (McDonough, 2004). However, most of these were external factors. Very little research has focused on specific internal factors related to the student. For example, unique idiosyncrasies that could potentially influence language learning, such as a L2 students' attitude towards collaborative writing. As related to being adaptable and flexible, in other words, are students willing to change their own ideas and accept the ideas of others? Do students tend to adopt partners' suggestions?

Among those who believed collaborative writing might be helpful, or at least worth trying, the primary reason for this belief was that collaborative writing provides an opportunity to scaffold ideas and obtain shared information, a process which also requires learners be adaptive to accept others' suggestions and be flexible to changes their own opinions. In the study conducted by Chen (2015) on students' attitudes towards collaborative writing, results demonstrated that students evaluated collaborative writing more favorably in relation to how easily they tended to accept suggestions and change writing products.

For example, several students reported that they benefited from sharing ideas and being corrected by partners in the collaborative writing process. As suggested by Sada, "My grammar is not good. My partner corrected my grammar...I tell my partner some new words, and we use in the writing. Our writing is better than if I do it myself" and, as stated by Adeel, "The benefits are sharing information, and to social[ize] with the partner. The changing is very important. It was helpful to find different words. And correct each other's mistakes" (Chen, 2015). These responses help to demonstrate the benefit of having water-like features (i.e., flexibility, resilience and adaptation) to maximize the efficacy of collaborative writing implementations (e.g., scaffolding ideas, improving text accuracy, and developing social skills). This shows support for Factor 3 of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five – adaptation and flexibility.

Transparency and Clarity in Collaborative Writing

Perhaps the Daoism quality that Laozi (1961) most appreciates is the clarity and transparency of water. People should be honest and transparent to those around them. Perhaps the Daoism quality that Laozi most appreciates is the clarity and transparency of water. In a lot of situations, being honest and transparent is one of the big ethical concerns in working with others. In collaborative writing, learners should clearly understand that group members work as a team and are evaluated as a team. They are not competitors. Therefore, when making suggestions and offering what they know to the group, teammates must strive to be clear, transparent, and honest.

From a sociocultural perspective, interactions between learners offer great opportunity for language learning (Storch, 2013). In this process, assistance provided by the expert effectively enhances the novice's current state of knowledge. The distance between the potential state which novice learners can achieve and the novice's current state of knowledge is referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In helping novice learners achieve their possible language potential, stronger writers need to be transparent and clear. If the strong writers reserve their assistance and see the novice writers as their competitors, collaborative writing will not be successful.

This was investigated by Chen (2015) who examined Chinese English as foreign language (EFL) learners' perceptions towards collaborative writing. Findings indicated that students who did not work as an effective team tended to have individuals who blamed their group members and were reluctant to offer assistance to the team (Chen, 2015). The following example illustrates two female students, Hong and Jing, who were not responsible for their group work. Hong was a strong writer with high language proficiency but arrived late for group work and was constantly sending personal texts during the collaborative writing process. Due to this, the other student, Jing, spent most of her time writing on her own, despite her language proficiency being relatively lower. Although Hong did not agree with what Jing wrote, she refused to give opinions. In the interview with this group, they each said,

> "[Jing] did not listen when you gave instructions. She was writing from the beginning. She did not know how to write the hook, because she was absent that day. I do not want to teach her. That would cost me much time," and, "[Hong] text messaged all the time. I do not think she would like to work together. I did all the work, but she did not seem agree with me. However, when I ask her questions, she was reluctant to tell me" (Hong & Jing, interview).

As conveyed by the interview, Hong and Jing disliked each other's attitudes and did not improve their writing by working together (Chen, 2015).

It is likely that the unpleasant group relationship arose because they were not transparent and honest with one another. In this way, group members being honest and unclear may create an unpleasant group atmosphere. To increase the efficacy of collaborative writing, language learners and instructors should be aware of this dynamic, as well as other reasons for why unpleasant group interactions may come up (e.g., being selfish or having conflicts of interest). This shows support for Factor 4 of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five – transparency, honesty, and clarity.

Softness (or Gentleness) and Persistence in Collaborative Writing

Softness (or gentleness) and persistence are important for collaboration, and are also very effective and powerful tools to help with teamwork dynamics. With respect to water, a drop of water is very soft and gentle as an individual unit, but together, many drops of water can have great impact. In working with others, individuals should embody softness by politely providing their own opinion. However, being soft does not mean giving in on disagreements (i.e., not defending one's opinion). In a similar way, with disagreement, individuals can be powerful by critically rethinking and reflecting on their own perspective and, conscientiously, defending their opinion. When individuals are not soft or polite enough, conflicts may occur. This can be seen in the story of the three group

members described previously (for Factor 2 of the Daoist Big-Five theory). Amal was aggressive towards his other two group members and, consequently, all three individuals were angry with the group work.

Interestingly, differences in collaborative writing among students may be seen as a result of varying cultural backgrounds. For example, due to their different cultural thinking styles, students from collective cultures (e.g., China, India, and Saudi Arabia) may tend towards being more communal or group-oriented (e.g., likely to agree with each other) in a project, such as collaborative writing, whereas students from individualistic cultures (e.g., Europe) might tend to be more independent (Dobao, 2012; Triandis, 1995). Other aspects of being more group-oriented (i.e., collectivistic) that affect interpersonal dynamics includes communication constraints regarding caring about others' feelings, being cautious to maintain harmony, and having concerns about "saving face" (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Ting-Toomey and colleagues (1991) found that students from collective cultures were concerned about "saving others' faces" (i.e., maintaining one's reputation and avoiding loss of respect from others). If students are too soft and do not defend themselves, discomfort and conflict may occur.

Storch (2005) illustrates this process in a study conducted among 23 intermediate L2 learners who were asked to complete a writing task in pairs. Findings indicated that a few students did not like collaborative writing due to both a lack of confidence in their language skills and fear of hurting other's feelings (Storch, 2005). Consistent with these findings, Chen (2015) also found that personality and cultural backgrounds can affect students' attitudes towards collaborative writing. For instance, consider the following two examples:

Kee, who was from South Korea, saw some merits in doing collaborative writing. However, in his holistic view, the disadvantages outnumbered the advantages. He was extremely concerned about criticizing others because, in his perspective, criticism and pointing out mistakes is considered inappropriate, impolite, and hurtful to others. The explanation he provided reflected both personal (e.g., personality) and cultural influences:

> "When I had collaboration writing, I didn't want to fight with my partner so, I avoid conversation. I choice individual writing, because I don't want to give harm to my partner. I don't like to talk negative things" (Kee, interview).

A similar concern regarding feeling awkward or impolite when discussing differences in opinion was also mentioned by Chinese student, Kexi. During collaborative writing, Kexi would constantly nod (disapprovingly) while working in her group. However, she did not explicitly express a dislike of group work. This lack of expressing dislike was culturally consistent with the responses of other people from collective cultures. Due to the group-oriented cultural mindset, Kexi felt restricted when expressing her own opinion. She said, "I don't like to tell Moha he is writing something I don't agree. I feel shy or bad to tell him. He is my friend. It's ok he writes in his way. Arguing is not good" (Kexi, interview).

The two examples of Kee and Kexi help to illustrate the benefit of the Daoist idea and principle of yin-yang (i.e., balance) in collaboration and teamwork. That is, in order to reduce conflicts and work more effectively as a team, individuals should strike the balance between being too soft and too powerful. This shows support for Factor 5 of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five – soft (or gentleness) and perseverance.

Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory: Other Qualitative Cases

To further support the theory, we turn to two additional cases. The first case is that of Zhou Gong Dan. About 3200 years ago (c. 150 BC), Zhou Gong Dan assisted his brother King Wu in defeating the Shang Dynasty (see Sima, 1994). When King Wu passed away, his son and successor, King Cheng, was too young to rule, so Zhou Gong Dan served as regent. He managed the nation very well, but when King Cheng grew up, Zhou Gong Dan stepped aside and let King Cheng exercise full control of state affairs. In the opinion of Laozi and Confucius, Zhou Gong Dan was a typical Sheng Ren (i.e., Sage, or Saint) because just like water, he was humble and served for the interest of the nation instead of his own desires or interest (see Sima, 1994). This story exemplifies two components of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five, Factor 1 (altruism) and Factor 2 (modesty).

The second case comes from more recent history and underscores the utility of Daoist ideas and principles to help build a harmonious relationship (i.e., conflict resolution) between a leader and a follower. For example, Robert Rosen made a cogent case that 21st-century success will belong to leaders (CEO's) who develop a 'global mindset' that goes beyond the limits of any single country's culture or approach (Lee, 2019). This point is illustrated in the following case (see Burton, 2000):

> A CEO of an association found herself with a seemingly unsolvable dilemma. Her new president, whose company recently dominated the industry, asked her to do something blatantly unethical: Use association funds to pay for travel of his four top Latin American customers to the association's trade show. Her supporters on the board secretly advised her to comply because they felt their businesses would be at risk; the association's attorney advised her to go along — after all, what the president was suggesting wasn't "illegal." What to do? She could make a grand stand and lose her job (the president had already subtly threatened her on another occasion) or she could comply but lose her soul. It was a clear dilemma. However, she chose non-action. First, by

deliberately not responding for several days and, second, by meditating on the situation. She stilled her mind and allowed her outrage to dissolve. An hour later in the meditation, she heard the words, "Turn it on its head." She had it! These four individuals could put on a seminar about trade issues in Latin America. The association needed an international focus: Why not start with Latin America? The resulting program was the genesis of a major international initiative. Going beyond either/or thinking (and the self-righteousness that accompanies a "right" and "wrong" approach) and cultivating "non-action" and flexibility enabled her to act within her ethical limits, developing something new and creative from this and-both perspective (Burton, 2000, or Lee et al, 2008).

From the above contemporary case, there are at least two implications from the practice of Daoistic leadership style. First, consistent with flexibility (Factor 2) and gentleness and persistence (Factor 5) in the Water-like Daoist Big-Five, sometimes it is wise to decide not to act (i.e., positive non-action). Time and patience (i.e., *wei wu wei*) are important characteristics of Daoistic leaders. Second, Western leadership style draws from individualistic-type thinking, which is largely based in either/or, whereas a more Daoistic leadership style is more holistically oriented and encompasses both-and thinking. The Western approach suggests that we cannot have both ways. On the other hand, Daoist philosophy suggests that, just like *yin* and *yang* (i.e., opposite but mutually-arising forces), both can be had.

Conclusion

Based on Laozi's philosophy, the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory of Personality is applicable for business and management studies. The five factors or characteristics of the water-like personality style are: altruism/helpfulness, modesty/humility, flexibility/resilience, honesty/transparency, and gentleness/perseverance. This theory is supported by both quantitative data and qualitative evidence. However, this theory will still need more research. As acknowledged, the 20-item Daoist Big-Five Scale (Lee et al., 2013) needs more replication, validation, and application, both experimentally and in natural settings. For example, how valid is this new scale in clinical practices and natural settings? Can we further validate the utility of this scale, experimentally? Can we apply the Water-like Daoist Big-Five to other settings, such as education, health, politics, and other arenas? Future research will be performed to address this.

The Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory of Personality and other aspects of Daoist leadership offer a unique and innovative perspective that is different from the mainstream American or Western business and management studies. This diverse perspective adds further richness to our understanding of the psychology of the human experience. In this way, briefly clarifying the implications and importance of the Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory for future research on business and management is worth mentioning.

First, for the human species, harmony with each other is imperatively necessary for our existence and function. Are we in harmony with each other as human beings? The (brutal) reality is that no, we do not appear in harmony with one another. We human beings constantly face a variety of human conflicts (e.g. violence, killing, genocide, wars, hatred or hostility) with each other. These conflicts occur both within (e.g., mass shootings) and outside the United States (e.g., the current Ukraine-Russian war, current conflicts involving Israel and the Middle East). Developed as a humanistic philosophy by Laozi nearly 2,500 years ago (see Lee, 2003; Lee, et al., 2008, 2009), in a world increasingly likened to a kind of global village, Daoism may become more relevant, valid, and appreciated. Like the residents of a small village, we cannot afford to ignore human relationship problems that affect people on a personal and global scale (e.g., interpersonal and intergroup/cultural relationships, ethnic conflict or ethnic cleansing, hate crimes, discrimination and violence against certain populations and demographics, like women and minorities).

Second, harmony with nature or the universe (e.g., plants, animals, and the natural environment) means peaceful ecological interdependence, interrelationship, and coexistence. Are we human beings in harmony with the other-than-human world? Unfortunately, no. There are many ecological and environmental problems around the world that impact our existence and coexistence with the larger web of life (e.g., global warming, pollution, destruction of natural environment, overexploitation of natural resources, loss of species and biodiversity). Laozi encouraged us to follow Dao (harmony with the external natural world or universe) and De (harmony with other human beings). Thus, as we face increasingly, serious human conflicts and environmental problems, Daoist ideas prove to be more urgent and imperative today than in the past. Perhaps Daoist ideas can provide us, as scientists and humanistic scholars, with solutions to the major world problems.

The Water-like Daoist Big-Five Theory for business and management (i.e., altruism, modesty/humility, flexibility/resilience, honesty/transparency, and gentleness/perseverance) is one small step in a long return towards harmony with nature and harmony with each other as human beings. To synthesize this theory across varying contexts is a meaningful and important endeavor, and will likely come with difficulties and challenges. However, all the more reason that should at least try.

As Laozi stated in Chapter 64, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with every single step" (*Dao De Jing*).

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