

Human Resources, Religion and Beliefs in China: An Attempt to Explain Professional Conduct and Attitudes by the Ancestors Worship

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Many management studies have tried to establish links between management practices and religions, Mutch (2006) for the Presbyterian church, Pesqueux and Danziger (1991) for Protestant and Jewish religions, El-Gamal (2006) and Ali (2005) for the Muslim religion Faure (2003) and Chen (1993) for Chinese religions or Vaujany (2006) for the Catholic religion. Interest in managerial studies connecting religion and management lies in the description of practices, beliefs or religious beliefs that directly or indirectly influence attitudes and professional behaviors (Mutch 2006). With regard to the management in China, the main work (Chen & Faure 1997; Lin 1997; Fernandez & Zheng 2008; Goxe & Gao 2010) describe strong connections between behavior and human resources official religions (Confucianism and Taoism in particular). However, in the case of Chinese culture, religious values are constructed from traditional beliefs that unite older mainly around the worship of ancestors. Granet (1922) is also unambiguous about this: 'In fact, there is belief in China roughly defined as beliefs about ancestors'. The Chinese observed, long before the emergence of Confucianism, ancestral beliefs they never lost because they correspond to popular practices related to nature and family worship that have not been overturned by religions official (Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism) and remains very much alive in Chinese everyday. Also, it seems important to qualify the approximation management-religion that is made to explain professional behaviors of Chinese. Our goal is not provided to challenge the existence of cultural determinants in management styles and work behaviors in China but rather to study the place of ancient ancestors worship and especially in the construction of these behaviors. For that, through a survey of Chinese employees backed by an analysis of traditional culture and writing system, we reveal major cultural determinants of work attitudes in China. Our main concern being to link the main literature on Chinese traditional culture and those relating to human resources management in China. From a principal component analysis, our first results seem to confirm, in the construction of modes of thinking and acting of human resources in China, the central role played by ancestors worship as had identified key work on Chinese culture (Granet, 1922; Lagerwey and Fava 1997; Jullien 1995; Gernet 2001). A study purely religious of Chinese human resources cultural values seems to us very inadequate as spirituality goes beyond the strict framework of the official religions. We will return to investigate this point for approaching more fully other cultural elements not mentioned here (worship of heaven and earth, nature worship in particular) to gauge their place in the construction of modes of thought and action in China.

Field of research: Human resources management and Chinese traditional culture

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