

# **A MODEL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP IN UNDERGRADUATES IN XIAMEN, CHINA**

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**Abstract:** There is an increasing need for leadership that values and promotes change and improvement for society in the 21st century. It is especially true for China which has experienced tremendous social and economic growth in many large cities. Higher education plays an important role in the development of such leadership. This research aimed to develop a model for developing socially responsible leadership for undergraduate students in Xiamen, China. This research was conducted using a sequential mixed-methods approach utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods. The study was based on the following objectives: 1) To determine the desired Confucian principles that form the basis of socially responsible behavior of Chinese students; 2) To determine the types of student leadership activities that can promote socially responsible leadership in students; 3) To identify the current type of student leadership activities that promote socially responsible leadership that are available in universities in Xiamen, China; 4) To determine if there is a relationship or a difference between the type of activity, frequency of participation and demographics of students and the level of socially responsible leadership of students in Xiamen, China; and finally, 5) To propose a model for the development of socially responsible leadership for students in Xiamen, China. The literature and interviews identified five core Confucian values: Benevolence, Righteousness, Manner, Wisdom, and Trustworthiness. Leadership activities included workshops, classroom, club, student organization, and games. Five hundred students from a representative university in Xiamen, China, were surveyed. A significant relationship was found among students' demographics, participation frequency, leadership activities, and levels of socially responsible leadership. (four categories of leadership activities with  $p < .05$  they were a significant relationship with

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socially responsible leadership) A final model was developed from the research findings and validated by experts.

**Keywords:** Socially Responsible Leadership; Undergraduate Students; China

## **Introduction**

There are emerging social problems caused by social inequity worldwide due to globalization and economic development. Thus, there is an increasing need for leadership that promotes and develops social change agents in the 21st century to solve social problems. The Social Change Model of Leadership is a suitable model for developing future leaders as university students are the prominent participants in social change and are the future leaders of society (Dugan, 2008; Cheng, 2017). Higher education institutions are an effective platform for enhancing leadership capacity in students (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Dunn & Malherbe, 2017). As China has experienced rapid economic development since 1978, there have been inevitable social problems created by social disparity, such as regional economic unbalancing outcomes (Tsinghua China Data Centre, 2019). Xiamen city is a top economic asset in Fujian province and is suitable for developing future social change leaders. Xiamen's economic development makes an appropriate research setting as problems arising from varying economic development can be demonstrated here. These social problems are caused by social disparity and inequity emerging in the city (Government of Xiamen City, 2016). Therefore, as its future leaders, university students in Xiamen need to develop socially responsible leadership for solving social problems. There is a lack of studies conducted on this topic and in this context. This research incorporates the Social Change Model of Leadership (HERI, 1996), Confucian principles of ethics and behavior, and the Theory of Student Development (Astin, 1984) to develop a model to increase this leadership for future leaders of Xiamen, China.

## **Objectives**

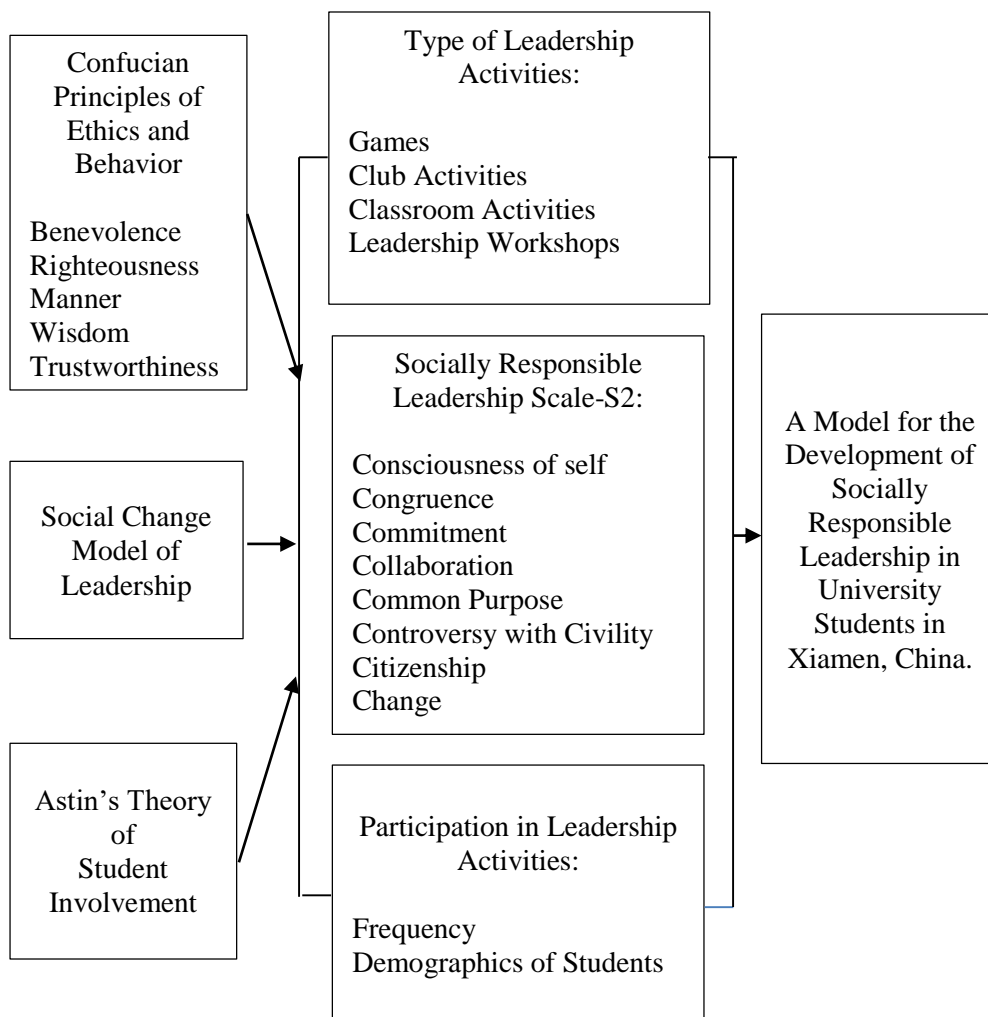
The following research objectives form the basis for this research:

1. To determine the desired Confucian principles that form the basis of socially responsible behavior of Chinese students.
2. To determine the types of student leadership activities that can promote socially responsible leadership in students.
3. Identify the current type of student leadership activities that promote socially responsible leadership available in universities in Xiamen, China.

4. To determine a relationship or a difference between the type of activity, frequency of participation, demographics of students, and the level of socially responsible leadership in Xiamen, China.
5. To propose a model for developing socially responsible leadership for students in Xiamen, China.

### Conceptual Framework

The following figure represents the conceptual framework of the study:



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework depicts the major theories and the key variables of the research. The research included three major theories in the study:

Confucian beliefs and behaviors, the Social Change Model of Leadership, and the Student Development Theory. The key variables include (1) leadership activities: games, club activities, classroom activities, and leadership workshops; (2) the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale-II: Consciousness of Self, Congruence, Commitment, Collaboration, Common Purpose, Controversy with Civility, Citizenship, and Change. The National Clearinghouse Leadership Program authorized use of the instrument; finally, (3) participation in leadership activities: frequency, demographics of students. These are analyzed and combined to develop a leadership model.

### **Literature Review**

The following literature review addresses the three major theories: Confucian principles and ethical behavior, the Social Change Model of Leadership (HERI, 1996) and Student Development Theory (Astin, 1984).

#### *Confucian Principles and Ethical Behavior*

Confucianism is a unique Chinese cultural heritage (Deng, 2011). Until now, Confucianism has played a major role in the cultural heritage of China. Chinese scholars have accepted the role of the five core Confucian values found in practice in modern Chinese students (Chen, 2019). These are (1) *Benevolence* (Ren) which includes notions of love and benevolence; (2) *Righteousness* (Yi), which explains constructs such as right and wrong in judgments and actions; (3) *Manner* (Li), which addresses polite behavior; (4) *Wisdom* (Zhi), which includes intellectual and emotional intelligence; (5) *Trustworthiness* (Xin), which is expressed as trust, honesty, and authenticity (Chen, 2019; Deng, 2011; Hackett & Wang, 2012). Furthermore, related studies have found a difference between Confucian and Western education philosophies (Chen, 2019; Jing & Cai, 2019). For example, Confucian philosophy encourages the teacher-centered method, systematic knowledge, and collectivism (Chen, 2019). However, western philosophy encourages learner-centered ideology, critical thinking, and individualism (Hackett & Wang, 2012). Therefore, these studies support that the Chinese student would better understand and be suited for Confucian philosophy than western philosophy. Similarly, several universities in China have set Confucianist-related lectures and curricula for their students (Chen, 2019; Deng, 2011; Hackett & Wang, 2012; Jing & Cai, 2019). Nonetheless, some studies have indicated that Confucian values could be incorporated to enhance socially responsible behavior for Chinese students. Thus, these studies recommend that potential researchers need to add Confucian principles and behaviors and incorporate them with responsible leadership in Chinese undergraduates. These studies assert that researchers can use theoretical and data triangulation

in the field (Chen, 2019; Cheng, 2017; Deng, 2011; Hackett & Wang, 2012; Jing & Cai, 2019).

### *The Social Change Model of Leadership Development*

The Higher Education Research Institution developed the Social Change Leadership Model in 1996 (HERI, 1996). It was exclusively developed for university students (Dugan, 2008) to promote the perspectives of a social change leader. Leadership is explained as a process, purpose-based, and value-based type of leadership, and it is proposed that every student can be a leader when they want to make a positive social change (Dugan & Komives, 2008). According to Komives & Wagner (2017), the Social Change Model of Leadership includes seven C values with three different levels: (1) Individual-level Values and Consciousness of Self which mainly addresses self-knowledge; Congruence, which addresses consistency with internal values and external behaviors; Commitment, which is the notion of long term investment on making differences; (2) Group-level Values: Collaboration, which includes teamwork and corporation; Common Purpose which is the definite sharing of visions and goals; Controversy with Civility which includes diversity in a group with politeness; (3) Social/ Community level Values: Citizenship which is an awareness of responsible identity; (4) Change which is the desired outcome of the seven C values, which can include growth, change, and development. An evaluation instrument for socially responsible leadership was developed in 1998, named the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale-II. It was developed based on the Social Change Model of Leadership, which includes 68 items that evaluate the eight C values (Dugan & Komives, 2008; Harris, 2020). It is an exclusive measuring instrument of the National Clearinghouse Leadership Program in the U.S. There have been studies that indicate socially responsible leadership has perspectives on the social change leader. It can assist in resolving the social problems caused by social inequity for future youth generations (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont & Stephens, 2003; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Komives & Wagner, 2017; Megheirkouni, 2016).

Furthermore, Chinese society is experiencing social problems such as unbalanced regional development, resource availability, and environmental problems. The nation needs to instill socially responsible leadership to solve the social problems with positive social change perspectives for its future leaders (Jiang & Chen, 2016; Chen, 2019; Cheng, 2017). Moreover, some studies point out that leadership activities can enhance socially responsible leadership. Thus, these studies recommended future research to ascertain if leadership activities and socially responsible leadership are related and their degree of relatedness. These potential relationships can measure the effects of

the demographics of students and socially responsible leadership (Buschlen & Dvorak, 2011; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Goode, 2020).

*Student Development Theory (Astin, 1984).*

This theory, developed by Astin in 1984, mainly addresses student participation in learning programs or activities on campus and how these activities can improve students' attainments and attachments (Astin, 1999). The theory especially emphasizes a viewpoint that student retention is necessary for the process of student development (Astin, 1999; Akram & Shah, 2018). It needs a long-term commitment to a student's learning program or activity (Astin, 1999; Brown & Johnson, 2018). Moreover, several studies have shown that the theory can be applied to qualitative or quantitative measurement in any educational field (Amiranzadeh, 2012; Astin, 1999; Brown & Johnson, 2018). The theory also supports that student retention can be measured by involvement frequency since it was found that different involvement frequencies could lead to different learning outcomes for student involvement (Alexejun & Angelo, 2013; Amiranzadeh, 2012; Astin, 1999; Brown & Johnson, 2018). This research is based on incorporating this theory to enhance socially responsible leadership in Chinese undergraduates. Previous researchers' findings have four categories of leadership activities (Achen, Warren, Fazzari, Hannah & Thorne, 2019; Elizabeth & Retallick, 2016; Engelbrecht, Heine & Mahembe, 2017). They include (1) games, (2) club activities, (3) classroom activities, (4) leadership workshops, and (5) student organization activities. Additionally, the frequency of participation includes five scales (Astin, 1999; Elizabeth & Retallick, 2016; Engelbrecht, Heine & Mahembe, 2017). Related studies found differences between the demographics of students and leadership activities. Future researchers need to measure their research context (Amiranzadeh, 2012; Buschlen & Dvorak, 2011; Dugan, 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Goode, 2020). Thus, the research fills the gap in designing quantitative statistical analysis for measurement. Additionally, few methodological studies question student respondents in relation to what and how frequent is their participation in leadership activities in their universities (Alexejun & Angelo, 2013; Amiranzadeh, 2012; Buschlen & Dvorak, 2011; Dugan, 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Harris, 2020). Therefore, this research hoped to fill the gap by conducting an open-ended question to student respondents about what leadership activities had participated in at the university.

### **Research Methodology**

This study was designed as a sequential mixed methods approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods. For the first objective, a qualitative content analysis was conducted, which employed expert sampling and

collected interview responses from ten Chinese respondents familiar with Confucian studies and student affairs development in university. For the second objective, a systematic literature review found four categories of leadership activities that promote socially responsible leadership in students. This was confirmed by item objective consistency (IOC) by five experts and a pilot study from a random sample of 30 Chinese students. The third and fourth objectives employed random sampling and quantitative statistical analysis collecting responses from students in a representative university in Xiamen, China. The total number of questionnaires distributed was 2,000; 504 questionnaires were returned with 500 valid, for a response rate of 25%. The researcher conducted a quantitative descriptive analysis which included frequencies, means, and standard deviation. For the fourth objective, the researcher conducted quantitative inferential analysis, including an independent samples *T*-Test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and multiple linear regression. For the fifth objective, all data were combined to develop a suitable model for developing socially responsible leadership in undergraduate students in Xiamen, China. The final step was to validate the model, which involved expert validation by three non-Chinese and two Chinese experts who evaluated the model using an adaptation of Stufflebeam's CIPP evaluation model (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014).

## Findings

*Research Objective One:* The researcher found five core values by content analysis of interview transcripts: *Benevolence*, *Righteousness*, *Manner*, *Wisdom*, and *Trustworthiness*. Interview respondents confirmed that these five core Confucian values could support socially responsible behavior. Furthermore, from the literature review, these five values also enhanced socially responsible leadership for students in the Chinese context. Additionally, it was found that there were three ways to practice or enhance Confucianist principles and socially responsible behavior. They include (1) social practice, (2) inheriting Confucianist principles, and (3) socially responsible activities and education.

*Research Objective Two:* Initially, the literature review identified five categories of leadership activities: *leadership workshops*, *club activities*, *classroom activities*, *student organization activities*, and *games*. However, after the instrument's content validity by five experts, the leadership activity and student organization activities were removed as the experts felt that in the Chinese context, participation in student organizations did not have the empowerment level as that in the west.

*Research Objective Three:* Based on statistical analysis, the study also found four leadership activities such as games, club activities, classroom activities, and leadership workshops, as well. The study asked students an open-ended question to find additional leadership activities from students in the representative university in Xiamen. After quantitative content analysis, according to the percentage of responses, an additional three types of leadership activities were found: volunteer and environmental clubs which were grouped with club activities; simulation-related activities, which were grouped into games because the activities were conducted with the student organization and clubs in the Chinese context. There was some overlap, but clubs were found to be more empowering than student organizations in the Chinese university context. Furthermore, the statistical analysis found socially responsible leadership values such as *Citizenship*, *Consciousness of Self*, *Change*, *Common Purpose*, *Collaboration*, *Controversy with Civility*, *Congruence*, and *Commitment*. The leadership values of *Citizenship* were the highest in the Chinese context. However, all values were high.

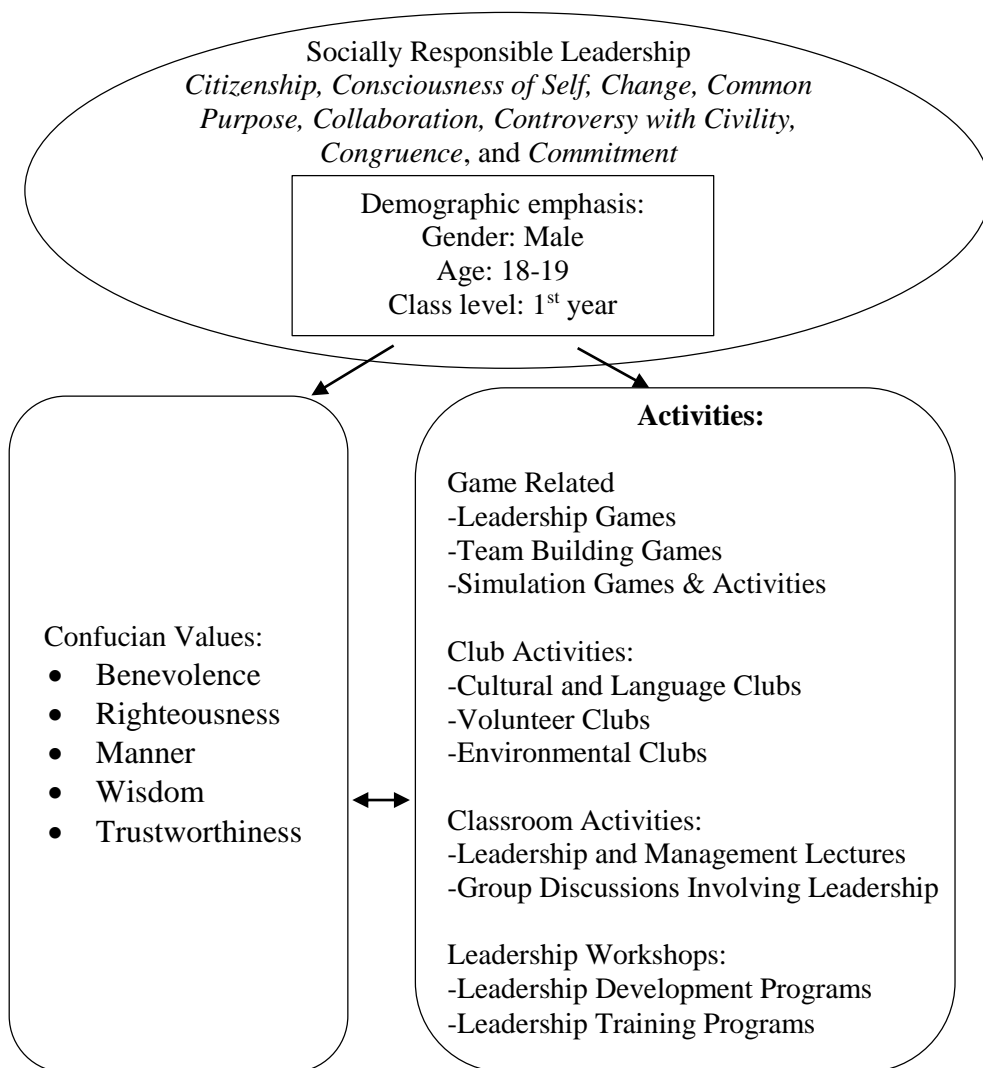
*Research Objective Four:* Based on multiple linear regression analysis, the researcher found four types of leadership activities that had a significant relationship with the eight dimensions of socially responsible leadership values. (all four categories of leadership activities with  $p=.000<.05$ ). From results of the independent t-test and one-way ANOVA, the researcher found that the demographics of students have a significant difference in eight dimensions of socially responsible values: male students had a lower level of socially responsible leadership than female students ( $p=.038<.05$ ,  $t=-2.085$ ,  $M(\text{males})=3.83< M(\text{females})=3.92$ ); students aged 18-19 have a lower level of socially responsible leadership than other age groups ( $p=.011<.05$ ,  $F=3.740$ ,  $M(18-19)=3.77< M(20-21)=3.91<M(24 \text{ and older})=3.92< M(22-23)=3.93$ ); first-year students had a lower level of socially responsible leadership than other year groups ( $p=.012<.05$ ,  $F= 3.709$ ,  $M(1^{\text{st}} \text{ year})=3.77< M(2^{\text{nd}} \text{ year})=3.91< M(3^{\text{rd}} \text{ year})=3.92< M(4^{\text{th}} \text{ year})=3.93$ ). From the two-way ANOVA, the researcher found a significant difference in the demographics of students, frequency of participation, and four types of leadership activities. Male students have lower participation in leadership activities than females ( $p=.000<.05$ ,  $F= 23.675$ ,  $M(\text{males})=2.42< M(\text{females})= 2.47$ ); students aged 18-19 had lower participation in leadership activities than other aged groups ( $p=.000<.05$ ,  $F=19.492$ ,  $M(18-19)=2.39< M(22-23)=2.40< M(20-21)=2.46< M(24 \text{ and older})=2.47$ ); first-year students had lower participation in leadership activities than other class level groups ( $p=.000<.05$ ,  $F=19.195$ ,  $M(1^{\text{st}} \text{ year})=2.39< M(3^{\text{rd}} \text{ year})= 2.42< M(2^{\text{nd}} \text{ year})=2.46< M(4^{\text{th}} \text{ year})= 2.50$ ). *Research Objective Five:* Based on data from all previous research objectives, the study proposed a model that included three components: 1). The Five



Confucian values; 2). the eight dimensions of socially responsible leadership values; and 3). The four types of leadership activities, along with the emphasis on developing Socially Responsible Leadership, especially for males between 18-19 in their first year of university. The following figure depicts the model developed and validated by experts.

### **A Proposed Model for the Development of Socially Responsible Leadership for Chinese Undergraduate Students**

**Figure 2: *The Proposed Model for the Development of Socially Responsible Leadership for Chinese Undergraduate Students***



### *Evaluation of the Model*

The preliminary model was evaluated by five experts familiar with university student leadership development. They included three non-Chinese experts and two Chinese experts who were either working or teaching in student affairs and/or student development. An evaluation of the model based on the CIPP (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). The evaluation framework was utilized along with the expert intuition method. The five experts individually gave scores on the preliminary model, of which those greater than 0.60 (acceptable level) were acceptable.

### *Explanation of the Model*

Firstly, the five core Confucian values are included as values that can promote socially responsible behavior for students and fit with the Chinese context. They include *Benevolence*, *Righteousness*, *Manner*, *Wisdom*, and *Trustworthiness*. Thus, Chinese undergraduate students can participate in the following approaches to enhance their socially responsible behavior and practice Confucian values: (1) social practice; (2) inheriting Confucianist principles; (3) socially responsible activities and education. Secondly, four categories of leadership activities can enhance socially responsible leadership. They include (1) Games (leadership building, team building, simulation); (2) Club activities (cultural and language clubs, volunteer clubs, environmental clubs); (3) Classroom activities (leadership and management lectures, group discussion involving leadership); (4) Leadership workshops (leadership development programs, leadership training programs). Thirdly, the model includes components of socially responsible leadership appropriated for Chinese undergraduates. They include *Citizenship*, *Consciousness of Self*, *Change*, *Common Purpose*, *Collaboration*, *Controversy with Civility*, *Congruence*, and *Commitment*.

Finally, there are implications of the model related to demographics of students as follows: (1) Implications on Gender: encourage male undergraduates to participate in more club activities and leadership workshops to enhance their total level of socially responsible leadership, citizenship, consciousness of self, change, and commitment. (2) Implications on Age: encourage students aged 18-19 to participate more in games and club activities to enhance their total level of socially responsible leadership, citizenship, consciousness of self, change, common purpose, and commitment. Furthermore, encourage 18-19 students to participate more in classroom activities to enhance their congruence. (3) Implications on Class Level: encourage first-year students to participate in more games, club activities, and leadership workshops to enhance their total level of socially responsible leadership, citizenship, consciousness of self, change, common purpose, and

commitment. Especially, encourage first-year students to participate more in classroom activities to enhance their levels of congruence.

### *Application of the Model*

The model may help enhance student leadership abilities by providing a framework or guidelines for planning appropriate activities in the Xiamen context. Moreover, as the representative university is a large university in Xiamen, the model may be applicable for use in similar universities in urban areas. Secondly, the model could be used as a guideline for student affairs practitioners or other administrators involved in extra-curricular activities administration to provide and schedule activities to suit students' needs at various year levels. Thirdly, the model may serve as a guideline for developing co-curricular activities related to leadership courses or leadership development. Finally, by focusing on Social Change Leadership and Confucian values, the model puts forth two major perspectives that may benefit students and the Chinese context.

### **Discussion**

This study confirmed five core Confucian values that are congruent with promoting socially responsible behavior in Chinese students. As Confucianist principles are unique to the cultural heritage and traditions of Chinese culture, it more readily adapts to the context and the understandings of Chinese students (Chen, 2019; Deng, 2011; Jing & Cai, 2019). Secondly, the study found four categories of leadership activities that can enhance socially responsible leadership in Chinese students. According to the research findings, the four categories of leadership activities are also confirmed in the literature review. Moreover, after collecting the questionnaire, the study also confirmed additional leadership activities representative of the university context in Xiamen. These are volunteer activities, environmental-related activities, and simulation-related activities. Thirdly, the researcher found eight components of socially responsible leadership appropriate for Chinese undergraduates. According to the research findings, the researcher found the eight components of socially responsible leadership appropriate for Chinese university students: citizenship, a consciousness of self, change, common purpose, collaboration, controversy with civility, commitment, and congruence. However, the research findings differed from those related to western scholars and local Chinese studies. For example, western university students had a higher score on an individual level of components of socially responsible leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Goode, 2020; Harris, 2020; Komives & Wagner, 2017), as well local Chinese studies indicated that Chinese university students had a higher score on group level components of socially responsible leadership (Cheng, 2017; Jiang & Chen, 2016; Chen, 2019).

The study was hopefully able to fill a methodological gap. The study followed findings from the methodological literature review, such as the review advised that future researchers should conduct theoretical triangulation and data triangulation in further studies (Dugan, 2008; Harris, 2020; Jiang & Chen, 2016; Jing & Cai, 2019). As this study was conducted as mixed-methods research, using multiple theories and several data sources, it hopefully adds some additional information.

### **Recommendations**

For recommendations, future research can extend the research scope to include other contexts. As this research was conducted in the Xiamen context, potential researchers can conduct related research in other cities and universities in China. Secondly, potential researchers may also make use of data triangulation to provide different perspectives, such as obtaining information from instructors and other groups that can evaluate student leadership development. Thirdly, potential researchers can extend studies to include different research methodologies. For example, the researcher conducted sequential mixed methods research, qualitative and quantitative research. However, future researchers can work on concurrent mixed methods research or mixed explanatory methods research and quantitative exploratory research or qualitative studies according to their research objectives. Finally, practitioners for the model in the future may consider upgrading the model application. The study confirmed applications of the model to enhance socially responsible leadership for male students aged 18-19 and first-year students by four available leadership activities and five Confucian values. However, if practitioners want to enhance socially responsible leadership, they could upgrade the application of the model to include descriptions of time and other aspects.

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