

# 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.