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# #Huawei #China: Nothing is more important than you being inspired and empowered!

[Prof. Ying Zhang RSM, Erasmus University Rotterdam](#) | March 18, 2017 | [0 Comments](#)



**On 16 March, 2017, Huawei (West Europe) and Rotterdam School of Management set up a collaboration based on smart education and digital transformation, covering an overarching collaboration on research and education, between Europe and China. The leader of the collaboration programme, Professor Ying Zhang<sup>1</sup>, in this article shares her brief observations and ideas about Huawei's success as the representative of Chinese multinationals.**

Ren Zhengfei, as the founder and the "spiritual guru" of Huawei, has been legitimizing Huawei as a company for employees (with himself only sharing 1.4%). Most studies about Huawei's success argues on its collective ownership structure, ignoring the foundation of such a structure from an ex-ante point of view, which not only grants employees an equal right to own their endeavours and returns on the basis of legal structure of "ownership legitimacy", but also acknowledges and respects employees' equal identity to strive for better conditions and collectiveness. Huawei is an employee-collectively-owned company, but is also a "planet" infused with respect to hardship, a strong striving attitude, and raising and praising strivers.

Therefore, the purpose of a company is altered, from being financial-oriented to collectively striving for collective goodness. This consists of two spheres of action: the value sphere and the system sphere. In the value sphere, Huawei sticks to the principles of being collaborative, open, striving, humble, abstracted in its core value: taking customers as the first and striving effort as the foundation ("以客户为中心,以奋斗者为本" in Chinese), being the foundation of Huawei culture, rooting in Huawei's hearts; being upheld by Huawei people; and bringing Huawei to its current position and move forward (Huawei's commitments to their own core value). In its system sphere, working with stakeholders is the key. The value sphere acts as the axis of 'Huawei Planet', guaranteeing that Huawei is more self-conscious, while the system sphere serves as "Huawei Energy" to connect Huawei with each other (internal and external members) efficiently.

These two spheres have co-evolved. The value sphere of Huawei sticks to the tradition of Chinese philosophy (four spheres of living built on Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism – an innocent sphere, utilitarian sphere, moral sphere, and transcendent sphere), while the system sphere has been continuously upgraded by learning from the global leading partners. Thus, the concept of Huawei's customer-first core value can be unfolded. The implementations of such are on Huawei's daily strategy and behavior: (1) customer-centre is a mindset taking stakeholder-based views and the vision of helping the world prepare for a digital (sharing) economy, which paves a path to an equality-based social-economic structure. (2) collaboration implies learning to share with stakeholders on their concerns, values, tension, responsibility, benefits and by doing so, innovation can be emerged and respected, with joint endeavours with stakeholders. Examples of such are numerous, and happen everyday with Huawei's stakeholders. The well-known cases are Huawei as the first one rescuing ICT infrastructure for clients, onset disasters, during the earthquake in Chile and Japan, as well as the war in Iraq and Libya.

To interpret Huawei's success in an equation, I propose the collective prosperity that Huawei appreciates as the dependent variable; while being collaborative, open, being striving, being humble as independent variables. All the variables can be sub-categorized into the internal and the external, as well as subjected to individual, and to the sum. From an input point of view, collectiveness requires being open, being humble, and collaborative in both attitude and action, which I call it Mentality-Behavioral Property (MBP). From an output point of view, collectiveness implies generating open phenomena, shared platform/economy, humble culture, and striving with collaborators, which I call it Intellect Property (IP). IP can be referred to "the spirit", while MBP can be referred to "the empowering process". Importantly, this equation is not a one-time one-way simulation, but recycles over time, which means that MBP generates IP; IP endogenizes MBP. In terms of the cross-effect, Mentality-Intellect Property is served by the Value Sphere, while Behavioral Property is served

by the System Sphere. Therefore, the Value-System Spheres, MBIP System, Four Spheres of Living all together (with an order) decode the Huawei's success. Variables in this equation do not simply create effects (collective prosperity) alone; instead, taking effect by pairing the other team of concept/commands: "being competitive, being tough, and being ambitious". The pairs are not conflicted, but complemented. Studying on Huawei's catching up, being humble is for self to others and for self to be more self-conscious, while being tough is for self to self in immersing personal goals with company's collective goals in order to approach to the moral sphere of living (or even beyond); being ambitious is for self to self in imprinting own-dream on company's collective dream, however measured by being "competitive" for self to self in striving for a better solution for clients (and other stakeholders).

In addition, this ideology of Zhong Yong (Doctrine of the Mean) in the tradition of Chinese philosophy within the stream of Confucianism is reflected in Huawei practice as well, where Huawei takes the notions of its application on being of objectivity, sincerity, honesty, and improvement through self-watchfulness (in one of ways of Zhong Yong's guidance), meaning learning from others to improve self during the process of self-cultivation via self-education (high R&D investment), self-discipline(focusing and concentrating), and self-questioning (improving from problem-solving). In terms of collaborating with stakeholders, Huawei's practice is reflected well by Zhong Yong's guidance in Leniency where Huawei has been trying to perfect their capability in understanding, eliminating concerns, and holding tolerance towards stakeholders, particularly towards their customers (customer-centered strategy).

To some extent, it is not fair to simply claim the reason of Huawei's catching up and its great success to their particular organizational culture, or their tougher system of management practice (as many discussions externally). In my view, the analysis regarding this should be holistic, meaning that we should not just focus on how well and how fast Huawei learned from western management practice and capable to tailor-make their management outfit but also must understand the role of their core value in such a holistic system. As discussion aforementioned, the value side and outfit (system) side are complemented and constitute Huawei's catching up construction, by which Huawei is able to practice their daily management (which they either acquired or learned from collaborators (such as operational, accounting, and human resource management systems), and able to do self-cultivation process through self-education, self-discipline, and self-questioning. This mechanism is down to the core of their cognitive notion of carrying customer-first and thrive-pride value. Huawei is a perfect example of Chinese firms being thriving in a particular sector worldwide, by indigenously promoting an Eastern-Western integrative model that carries Chinese philosophy as the root and the best western management practice as the expression. This construction-derived application can be argued sourcing from the application of eco-system and stakeholder-view, and fundamentally benefiting from the tradition of Chinese philosophy where the sphere of living and the doctrine of the mean are taken into account.

To close, the definition of success is various, and the reasons for success are random. Judging Huawei as an entity of success or not needs to take on an extra condition which I stress as the setting of time-being and space-boundary. Success is only a status within time-being in a specific space. It can be a cause and same time can be a consequence. We shouldn't take success as the reason to investigate a target while shouldn't for a non-success. Success is a way, and additionally is on the way rather than on the destination. What is seen or heard differs from what is understood and believed. My experience working with Huawei people and years of collaborating with them formally and informally assure me that a less error-added methodology to understand others is an in-person emersion approach, meaning that allowing yourself to be part of the study target's spheres of living, with a strong self-control towards no subjective judgment, being humble with study subjects, feeling what they feel, thinking what they think, speaking what they speak, painning what they pain, and most importantly believing in what they believe in the universe of Huawei's "collective effort towards collective prosperity".

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ying Zhang is an Associate Dean for China Business and a Professor on Entrepreneurship and Innovation, as well as the Founder of Erasmus-Huawei Collaboration Program, at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, the Netherlands. [y.zhang@rsm.nl](mailto:y.zhang@rsm.nl)

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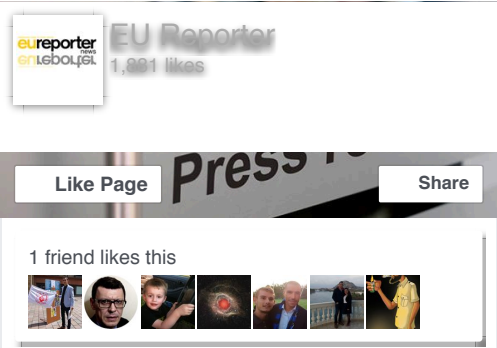
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