

13 Leadership Styles Suitability Analysis for East Asian Churches in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This research rigorously evaluates thirteen leadership styles (laissez-faire, democratic, situational, transactional, trait, skills, adaptive, inclusive, authentic, autocratic, transformational, servant, and relational) for East Asian churches by integrating scriptural validation, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and contemporary challenges faced in each country. The analysis identifies transformational leadership as highly effective for South Korea and Taiwan, relational leadership as particularly suitable for China, Japan, and North Korea, and both transformational and relational leadership as optimal for Mongolia. While these leadership styles are predominantly well-aligned with the general context of each country, it is essential to consider specific local factors to tailor strategies and address the unique needs of individual congregations effectively.

Introduction

Since the early twentieth century, numerous systematic and empirical studies have explored leadership styles, examining the traits and factors influencing leadership effectiveness. These studies have led to the establishment of various leadership models, including laissez-faire, democratic, situational, transactional, trait, skills, adaptive, inclusive, authentic, autocratic, transformational, servant, and relational leadership, among others. While each of these leadership styles offers distinct strengths and challenges, selecting a culturally and contextually appropriate leadership style is crucial for effective organizational leadership. This need is particularly relevant for local churches in East Asia, where cultural nuances significantly impact leadership dynamics. Despite extensive research on leadership styles, there has been limited focus on the suitability of these styles within the context of East Asian churches in the 21st century. This research gap poses significant risks, including the development of ineffective leadership strategies, reduced innovation and adaptation in a rapidly evolving socioeconomic, technological, and cultural environment, and inefficient resource utilization.

Addressing this gap, this research article examines various leadership style possibilities for East Asian churches across different countries. It explores the suitability of 13 leadership styles—laissez-faire, democratic, situational, transactional, trait, skills, adaptive, inclusive, authentic, autocratic, transformational, servant, and relational—considering scriptural validation, cultural dimensions, and contemporary challenges faced by East Asian churches.

While several leadership styles have been proposed as frameworks for East Asian churches, this paper analyzes these 13 models through scriptural validation and Hofstede's six cultural dimensions to determine their applicability. The findings suggest that the following leadership styles are generally appropriate for churches in each of the East Asian countries: 1) transformational leadership for South Korea, 2) relational leadership for China, 3) relational leadership for Japan, 4) transformational leadership for Taiwan, 5) transformational and relational leadership for Mongolia, and 6) relational leadership for North Korea.

Recognizing that unique environmental factors and meso- and micro-contextualization elements can influence the characteristics of individual churches, these leadership style recommendations are intended as flexible guidelines rather than rigid prescriptions. The analysis presented in this article can also be applied to contexts outside of East Asia, provided that appropriate contextualization is considered for each specific country and its local churches, based on a comprehensive assessment of macro-, meso-, and micro-contextualization factors.

Definition of Key-Terms

Archival Research (Secondary Data Analysis)- A research methodology which utilizes exclusively secondary sources of published works and documents.

Cultural Dimensions- A framework developed by a Dutch social psychologist named Geert Hofstede to help understand various cultural differences and their possible impact on values and behaviors on individuals that belong to a specific group or a society.

East Asia- A geographical region bounded by Russia in its north, the Pacific Ocean, and Southeast Asia in its south which is constituted by Japan, South Korea, North Korea, China, Mongolia, and Taiwan by countries.

East Asian Churches- Churches located in the region of East Asia.

Leadership Style- a pattern of behavior, attitudes, and various characteristics that a leader exhibits in leading and directing an organization with its individual constituent(s) of the organization.

Methodology

This research employed an archival methodology, involving secondary data analysis, to evaluate leadership styles for East Asian churches. The study followed a structured, three-step process. First, 13 leadership styles were surveyed and assessed for scriptural validity. Second, those validated by scripture were subjected to cultural analysis using Geert Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, tailored to the context of six East Asian countries.¹ Finally, the research considered contemporary challenges specific to churches in these countries, enabling the profiling of the most suitable leadership styles for each national context.

¹ Indulgent and Restraint cultural dimensional analysis for Mongolia was not included in this research due to the lack of available data.

Scriptural Validation of 13 Leadership Styles (Models)

Thirteen leadership styles were evaluated against scriptural principles, focusing on their operational characteristics, working mechanisms, and strengths. The following table provides a summary of each leadership style:

Leadership Style	Descriptions (Operational Principles/Working Mechanisms/ Strengths/ Weaknesses)
Laissez-Faire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More likely to listen than to give advice - Trusts followers to figure things out independently - Grants self-autonomy - Holds fewer meetings and is less likely to probe or check in - Encourages followers to discern, identify, and execute their work on their own²
Democratic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Takes a collaborative approach with followers - Listens to a wide range of opinions - Exhibits low power distance - Solicits feedback and input to make decisions - Makes efforts to connect horizontally - Lacks primary vertical dependency³
Situational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adapts leadership style based on the situation and followers' readiness - Uses directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating flexibly - Depends primarily on the ability and motivation of followers - Discourages communication and deeper horizontal relationships for high-ability and highly motivated followers⁴
Transactional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Controls behaviors and outcomes through a feedback loop - Provides positive feedback for good performance - Provides negative feedback for poor performance - Satisfies only the bottom three layers of Maslow's hierarchy of needs⁵
Trait	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership is determined by innate traits such as intelligence, extraverted personality, and self-confidence. - Assumes effective leaders are born with these traits rather than acquiring them⁶
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership effectiveness is based on learned and acquired skills - Anyone can become a leader by developing these skills through education and practice - Emphasizes skill acquisition over innate characteristics⁷

² Carl Lindberg, *Leadership Styles: the Classics: Autocratic, Democratic, and Laissez-Faire Leadership* (n.p.: Carl Lindberg, 2022), 60-67; K. Lewin, R. Lippitt, and R.K. White, "Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created social climates," *Journal of Social Psychology* 10, no. 2 (1938): 271–301, doi:10.1080/00224545.1939.9713366

³ Carl Lindberg, *Leadership Styles: the Classics: Autocratic, Democratic, and Laissez-Faire Leadership* (n.p.: Carl Lindberg, 2022),40-59; K. Lewin, R. Lippitt, and R.K. White, "Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created social climates," *Journal of Social Psychology* 10, no. 2 (1938): 271–301, doi:10.1080/00224545.1939.9713366; Horizontal relationship refers to human to human relationship while vertical relationship refers to an individual's relationship with Triune God.

⁴ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2021), Chapter 5; Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behaviour: Utilizing Human Resources* (Hoboken N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996).

⁵ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations* (New York: Free Press, 1947), 336-340.

⁶ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2021), Chapter 2; Bennett C. Spector, "Freud, and the great man theory more fully considered," *Leadership* 12, no. 2 (2016): doi:10.1177/1742715015571392.

⁷ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2021), Chapter 3; Robert L. Katz, *Skills of an Effective Administrator* (Brighton, MA: Harvard Business Review Publishing, 2009).

Adaptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages people to deal with change - Sensitive to the environment and situation of the followers - Encourages conflicts as part of the adaptation process⁸
Inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enacted and socially constructed through interactions between the leader and followers - Includes all followers without eliminating individual differences - Lacks a well-defined research base and a clearly organized framework⁹
Authentic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focuses on the genuineness of leadership - Emphasizes transparency and ethical behavior - Centered on leaders being true to their values and principles¹⁰
Autocratic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited to no input from followers - The leader directs all processes, procedures, and methods - Characterized by centralized decision-making and authoritative control¹¹
Transformational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creative and visionary in leadership - Empathetic and empowering - Engages and connects with followers to elevate their morality and motivation - Assesses followers' motives and aids their growth to reach their full potential¹²
Servant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follower-centered approach - Emphasizes good treatment and collaboration - Empathetic and attentive to followers' needs - Prioritizes putting followers first¹³
Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influences primarily through vertical relationships and secondarily through horizontal interactions - Seeks to influence holistically and cause transformational change. - Relationship-oriented, focusing on the well-being and scriptural grounding of individuals rather than tasks¹⁴

Figure 1. Descriptions of the 13 Leadership Styles (Operating Principles/Operating Mechanisms/Strengths/Weaknesses)

⁸ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2021), Chapter 11; Ronald A. Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

⁹ Amy E. Randel et al., "Inclusive leadership: Realizing positive outcomes through belongingness and being valued for uniqueness," *Human Resource Management Review* 28, no. 2 (June 2018): 190-203; Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2021), Chapter 12.

¹⁰ Bill George, *Authentic Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2003)-although George describes leadership as authenticity and not in terms of style, this paper uses the word "style," "model," and "theory" pertaining to leadership interchangeably; Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2021), Chapter 9.

¹¹ Carl Lindberg, *Leadership Styles: the Classics: Autocratic, Democratic, and Laissez-Faire Leadership* (n.p.: Carl Lindberg, 2022), 16-38; K. Lewin, R. Lippitt, and R.K. White, "Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created social climates," *Journal of Social Psychology* 10, no. 2 (1938): 271-301, doi:10.1080/00224545.1939.9713366.

¹² James M. Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), Part III.

¹³ Robert Greenleaf, *The Servant As Leader* (Westfield IN: The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2012); Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2021), Chapter 10.

¹⁴ One of the earliest scholars to adopt relational focus on leadership comes from Elliot Hollander: Elliot Hollander, "Legitimacy, Power, and Influence: A Perspective on Relational Features of Leadership," in *Leadership Theory and Research: Perspectives and Directions*, ed. Michael M. Chemers and Robert Ayman (New York: Academic Press, 1993), 29-47; Also refer to Enoch Wan's *Transformational Change in Christian Ministry* for discussions and more explanations on relational frameworks and paradigms: Enoch Wan and Jon Raibley, *Transformational Change in Christian Ministry*, 2d ed. (Portland, OR: Western Academic, 2022), 3-12; Although relational leadership can often be discussed primarily through a horizontal lens, this article examines the framework within the broader missiological and theological contexts provided by Wan's relational paradigms.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

The laissez-faire leadership style's characteristic of being more likely to listen than to give advice aligns with James 1:19-20. Moreover, giving a certain amount of trust to the followers to a certain extent is also scriptural because love trusts in Christ (1 Cor. 13:7). Nevertheless, some other characteristics of the laissez-faire leadership style make it unscriptural and unsuitable for church leadership overall.

Although laissez-faire leadership's encouragement for followers to figure things out on their own can discourage unhealthy horizontal dependency, such encouragement is not scripturally sound. Scripture likens members of a church to parts of the Body of Christ and encourages them to bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2) and depend on one another for edification (1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Cor. 12:7). Furthermore, human beings are created to be dependent on God, as Christ mentioned in John 15:5, because apart from Him, followers cannot do anything that bears fruit.

The laissez-faire leadership style's emphasis on self-autonomy is also refuted by Scripture. Along with John 15:5, James 4:6-8, 2 Chronicles 32:8, Psalm 39:5, Psalm 121:1-8, Matthew 6:25-26, Luke 11:9-11, Philippians 4:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, and Hebrews 4:16 clearly portray human weakness and the need for human dependency on God rather than self-autonomy. Psalm 39:5 illustrates this truth by pointing out human frailty, human dependency on God, and human accountability before God: "Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah."

Furthermore, laissez-faire leadership's tendency to encourage fewer meetings is not strictly scriptural. This can be found in Hebrews 10:24-25, which states, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Although laissez-faire leadership can bring some positive values to a church, such as discouragement of unhealthy horizontal dependency and emphasis on attentive and intentional listening to others in horizontal relationships, it should not be employed as the suitable leadership style for a church due to its various elements that are scripturally disapproved.

Democratic Leadership

The democratic leadership style, although it aligns well with overall scriptural teachings in a horizontal relational level, fails scripturally because it fails to consider the vertical relationship, which is the most essential and primal in leadership execution and implementation within a church. There are several descriptive features of the democratic leadership style that align quite well with the scripture, and these include a collaborative approach with the followers (Gal. 6:2), listening to a wide range of opinions (Prov. 11:14; Prov. 15:22), low power distance (Matt. 20:26-28; John 13:4-6), soliciting feedback and input to make decisions (1 Pet. 5:2-3), and making efforts to connect horizontally (1 Thess. 5:11). Nevertheless, democratic leadership, with the lack of a vertical dimensional component, is at its best yet anthropocentric and contrary to scripture. The following verses show the invalidity of democratic leadership: 2 Timothy 4:3-4 ("For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."), Psalm 118:8-9 ("It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes."), Jeremiah 17:5-8 ("Thus says the Lord: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.'"), and Isaiah 31:1 ("Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord!").

Situational Leadership

Although the situational leadership style's flexibility in leading is scripturally aligned (1 Cor. 9:23), the framework of the situational model itself is unscriptural because the style's outworking operational principle mechanism is functional in its approach and not relational. Situational leadership assigns the followers into four categories according to a preassigned readiness level defined by its undergirding framework—low ability and low willingness, low ability and high willingness, high ability and low willingness, and high ability and high willingness—and the leader's inputs into the followers are determined according to these categories. Among the inputs that get categorically determined is communication in relationships.

More specifically, according to this leadership style, the input of communication from a leader to a particular follower is job-oriented rather than being out of care for the followers with true concern for an individual with love. In this leadership style, sincere concern, love, and encouragement are unnecessary "tasks" when a follower has a certain degree of skills and motivation. With such a functionalistic operational approach, the leadership style treats the relationship between a leader and the followers simply as a means to achieve a task to be done. Such operational principle is clearly refuted by the scripture as the scripture says to "do everything in love" (1 Cor. 16:14) with selflessness (1 Cor. 13:5), and because the scripture says to not look to your own interests but the interests of others in humility (Phil. 2:3-4).

Transactional Leadership

Although transactional leadership aligns with the overall scriptural teaching of the law of retribution, it should be excluded as a suitable leadership style for the church because it does not go beyond the retributive principle to encompass the core elements of the gospel message—grace, forgiveness, love, mercy, the incarnation, propitiation, and the atonement. While the retributive principle is clearly at work in everyday affairs, disciples' lives and the church cannot be explained apart from mercy, grace, forgiveness, love, and mercy, and Christ's propitiatory atonement. To operate with the transactional mechanism at the level of church leadership would equate to looking at the law but failing to see Christ, who shed His innocent blood in His substitutionary death. Such leadership would only facilitate legalism and dilute the grace of God, which is freely given as a gift through faith (Eph. 2:8), and Christ's teaching of mercy, grace, love, and forgiveness that the Church is called to show and live (Matt. 6:14; Luke 6:27-30, 6:36, 10:33-37, etc.).

Trait Leadership

The trait leadership style fails because the scripture shows Divine appointments of leadership which this leadership framework fails to consider. Although the trait leadership model lacks a comprehensive list of traits that make a leader, the scripture shows evidence of leaders that are Divinely appointed who lacked some of the core traits that this leadership style describes. Examples of such include Moses, Gideon, and Peter, who lacked oral communication proficiency skills (Ex. 4:10), lacked confidence (Judges 6:15-16), and lacked high education competency, respectively (Acts 4:13).

Skills Leadership

While it is discovered in the field of leadership studies that many leadership skills can be studied, learned, and acquired, and even though the scripture encourages learning for leadership effectiveness (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 2 Timothy 3:16-17), the skills leadership model (style) is repudiated because the appointing of the leaders is Divinely appointed and not man-initiated. The following verse from Romans 13:1 shows this conspicuously: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God." Moreover, Romans 12:8 plainly teaches that leadership is a gift (χάρισμα), God-given, and describes the gifts as particulars and not universals (Rom. 12:4-6). Because the skills leadership style operates on the wrong premise regarding who can indeed be a leader due to its failure to recognize Divine leadership appointments and their enactments within a church, it is anthropocentric rather than theocentric, and is invalidated by the scripture.

Adaptive Leadership

Although adaptive leadership has certain values in encouraging resolution when faced with conflicts and in asserting change geared toward adapting to a new environment, the framework itself is invalidated at least on two layers. Firstly, in its premise, conflicts are not only sought out for conflict resolution but also encouraged. While conflict resolution is highly encouraged among churches, the end goal of leadership shouldn't be more conflicts or the conflict itself. When the motivation and chief end of leadership are not the glory of God, it is repudiated on scriptural grounds and cannot propagate in the church (1 Cor. 10:31). Secondly, adaptive leadership encourages change without delineating and defining the nature of the change needed for the organization's good. Not any sort of change should be supported just for the sake of a change justified under the name of adaptation. The change must be transformational on the individual level (micro-level) as well as on the organizational level (meso-level), and the change must not be transgressional. The scripture clearly teaches "to hold fast to what is good" and warns against transgressional change (1 Thess. 5:21; Rom. 12:2).

Because adaptive leadership has a wrong premise of inviting conflicts and is ambiguous and not thoroughly defined in its out-workings regarding the nature of change it supports for the good of the organization, it is invalidated by numerous scriptural accounts (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Thess. 5:21; Rom. 12:2).

Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership is scripturally validated because it includes all the followers without annihilating individual differences between them while it is carried out through social interactions between the leader and followers. Although the model itself needs more research and refinement, such leadership descriptions align themselves well with scripture. For instance, Christ made Himself available to whoever wants to come to Him; this is clearly attested in John 6:37, where Christ said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out." Because the church is a door to Christ, a church should have open doors to whoever wants to come to Christ and be ready to accept, count in, and include the person. Such a statement presupposes inclusiveness of individuals with unique cultural and individualistic differences while inviting personal connections and personal interactions with Christ Himself.

Authentic Leadership

Although the leadership model is under development for its more thorough theoretical formulation and hasn't reached a consensus among scholars regarding its overall framework, authentic leadership can be said to align with scriptural teachings. According to Bill George's authentic leadership approach, the following are five characteristics of authentic leadership: 1) Leaders have a strong sense of purpose, 2) Leaders have strong values about the right thing to do, 3) Leaders establish trusting relationships with others, 4) Leaders demonstrate self-discipline and act on their values, and 5) Leaders are sensitive and empathetic to the plight of others.¹⁵ These five characteristics' scriptural alignments are shown by the following scriptural teachings in the respective order: 1) "Where there is no vision, the people perish[...]" (Prov. 29:18), 2) "An overseer must not give people a reason to criticize him, and he must have only one wife. He must be self-controlled, wise, respected by others, ready to welcome guests, and able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2), 3) "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!" (Ecc. 4:9-10), 4) "For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain but [...] a lover of good, disciplined[...]" (Titus 1:7-9a), and 5) "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). Therefore, authentic leadership aligns with scriptural teachings and offers a model that can be effectively applied to church leadership contexts.

Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership is also invalidated scripturally because it does not follow the scriptural principle of "listening over speaking (or commanding)," does not value the scriptural principle of collaboration and bi-directional edification, and does not follow Christ's command to serve as leaders. James 1:19 teaches clearly the principle of hearing over speaking as it says, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak[...]" As the verse states "πᾶς ἄνθρωπος" (literally "every person") as the subject of the action "to be quick to hear" (ταχὺς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι), this principle is not restricted to any specific group but is inclusive of all individuals, including those who serve as leaders. Moreover, as 1 Corinthians 12:14 emphasizes the diverse parts in the Body of Christ while emphasizing collaboration and unity as one in Christ, autocratic leadership, which emphasizes mono-directional input, communication, and contribution, is scripturally invalidated. Similarly, Matthew 20:26-28 teaches that "whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave," thereby establishing servanthood as a requisite for leadership. Consequently, the autocratic leadership style, which is inconsistent with this scriptural teaching, is scripturally repudiated.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is scriptural in its operating mechanism, and Genesis 1:27, Proverbs 29:18, Micah 6:8, Matthew 28:19a, 1 Thessalonians 2:8, and Ephesians 4:11-13 validate this leadership style. As Genesis 1:27 declares, "God created man in his own image," a leader is endowed with creativity as one of his communicable attributes.

¹⁵ Bill George, *Authentic Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2003), Chapter 1.

Moreover, as Proverbs 29:18 declares, “Where there is no vision, the people perish[...],” leaders are scripturally mandated to lead by vision. Additionally, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded the disciples “to make” disciples, which implies empowering. Furthermore, 1 Thessalonians 2:8 declares, “Being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves because you had become very dear to us.” This is implicative for non-apostles as well who are in leading roles since the “we” in the verse doesn’t singularly refer to Paul but also to Silas and Timothy, as the opening of the epistle in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 makes clear. More specifically, 1 Thessalonians 2:8 is a scriptural reminder and implicative teaching of how other leading figures of the church (as Silas and Timothy are along Paul) are to engage and connect with the congregants. Even more, Ephesians 4:11-13 approves the scriptural teaching and the importance of a leader's task to empower the followers to arrive at their full potential, as the scripture declares, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints [...] to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13).

Servant Leadership

Although criticized by some as abstract and unclearly defined, servant leadership offers scripturally validated leadership. Its follower-centered approach to leadership is justified by Mark 10:45, which says, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Its characteristic of good treatment of the followers is also scripturally validated, as Colossians 4:1 says, “Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.” Colossians 4:1’s treatment of the bondservants by the masters is likened to God’s treatment of His servants, and this treatment is not restricted to masters and slaves relations but applies where power dynamics are involved between positions of various authorities. Moreover, the value of seeking collaboration is supported by Scripture. Proverbs 11:14 states, “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors, there is safety,” and Proverbs 15:22 affirms, “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers, they succeed.” These verses underscore the importance of collaborative decision-making in leadership. The empathetic nature of the leadership style is also scripturally endorsed. Titus 1:7-9a specifies, “For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain but [...] a lover of good, disciplined[...].” Furthermore, the principle of attending to followers’ needs is validated by Ezekiel 34:4, which rebukes Israel’s leaders for neglecting their duties: “The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.” Thus, servant leadership, with its emphasis on service, empathy, and collaboration, is highly appropriate for church leadership.

Relational Leadership

Relational leadership is scripturally approved because it is grounded in scriptural principles of 1) sowing and reaping (Gal 6:7-8, 9-10), 2) relational causality (Prov. 13:20, 1 Cor. 12:26), 3) relational growth (Prov. 27:17), and 4) the universal call to all believers to bear one another (Col. 3:12-14). The principle of sowing and reaping is explicitly articulated in Galatians 6:7, which states that one reaps “whatever (ö)” he sows without imposing any contextual categorical restrictions on the sowing. This principle encompasses a broad range of elements that one might sow, including thoughts, words, beliefs, presuppositions, actions, attitudes, goals, service, visions, values, commitments, communication, love, character, initiatives, or examples. Thus, Galatians 6:7 effectively supports the sowing and reaping principle foundational to relational leadership and its paradigmatic assertions. Moreover, Proverbs 13:20 shows the principle of relational cause as it states, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” Although this verse only mentions specifically two-dimensional characteristics of people, namely, wise and being a fool, it sufficiently establishes the fact that no human being is free from the causal influence that goes on in the relational matrix of interactions. Such relational influence within the authentic church (the Body of Christ) is also evident from 1 Corinthians 12:26, which states that “if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” Furthermore, Proverbs 27:17 states, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another,” indicating that personal growth is fostered through horizontal relationships.

While Scripture primarily teaches that individuals should depend on God for their spiritual development (e.g., Matt. 22:37-38; Psalm 62:5-8; 118:8-9; Jer. 17:7-8; John 15:5), it also emphasizes the role of believers in encouraging, loving, and building one another up as part of God's ordained process for shaping His people (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Romans 12:10, etc.).¹⁶

Cultural Analysis of the Available Leadership Styles

The five scripturally approved leadership styles were examined and analyzed culturally according to Hofstede's six cultural indexes to find culturally suitable leadership styles for each of the six East Asian countries. Each of the six dimensions was characterized by two tendencies, and four letters were assigned to each cultural characteristic for profiling and easy access (PDIH-power distance index high, PDIL-power distance index low, INDH-individualistic, INDL- collectivistic, MASM-masculine, MASF- feminine, UAIH- high uncertainty avoidance, UAIL- low uncertainty avoidance, LTOH- long term orientation, LTOL- short term orientation, IVRI-indulgent, and IVRR-restraint). Furthermore, when a leadership style was ambiguous or applicable in more than one tendency within a dimension, "---" was given to denote its bi-cultural applicability. The following table summarizes each of the five scripturally approved leadership styles according to their cultural compatibilities based on their operational approach or characteristics.

Leadership Style	PD IH	PD IL	IN D H	IN DL	M AS M	M AS F	UA IH	UA IL	LT O H	LT OL	IV RI	IV RR	Culturally Constricting Conditions (CCC)
Inclusive	---	☐	---	☐	---	☐	☐	---	☐	---	---	---	PDIL, <u>INDL</u> , MASF, UAIH, LTOH
Authentic	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	Flexible (None)
Transformational	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	Flexible (None)
Servant	---	---	☐	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	INDH
Relational	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	Flexible (None)

Table 2. Analysis of the Five Scripturally Approved Leadership Styles according to Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensional Framework

The analysis of the five leadership styles shows that authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and relational leadership are flexible and therefore applicable in all cultural contexts. Additionally, the analysis shows that inclusive leadership is suited for high power distance (PDIH), individualistic (IDVL), feminine (MASF), high uncertainty avoidance (UAIH), and long-term oriented cultures (LTOH) while servant leadership is suited for collectivistic cultures (INDL). This conclusion was reached by analyzing the inherent characteristics or operating approaches of each leadership style. For example, inclusive leadership is low in power distance because it attempts to minimize gaps between a leader and followers; it is collectivistic because it emphasizes togetherness and acceptance of diversity rather than individuality and conformity to norms; it is applicable in both masculine and feminine cultures because it doesn't favor assertiveness and material success versus nurturing and quality of life, etc.¹⁷

¹⁶ This primal dependence on vertical relationship and influencing horizontally in thought, belief, values, behaviors, capacity, culture, development of gifts, and utilization of their resources is consistent with Enoch Wan's relational paradigm. Refer to the following for further discussions on Wan's relational paradigm: Enoch Wan and Jon Raibley, *Transformational Change in Christian Ministry*, 2d ed. (Portland, OR: Western Academic, 2022), 3-12.

¹⁷ While each leadership style is not expounded in this section in words according to each 12 Hofstede's characteristics (6 indexes time 2), the cultural characteristic definitions imposed on the leadership were the same, and they were qualitative rather than quantitative. These 12 characteristic definitions used in this research are from Hofstede's book "Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind" and are as follows: PDIH-"considerable dependence of subordinates on bosses," PDIL-

Analysis and Evaluation of the Five Scripturally Validated and Culturally Appropriate Leadership Styles According to Modern Challenges

1. South Korea

Although authentic, transformational, and relational leadership are all applicable leadership styles in South Korean churches according to Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, the most suitable leadership style for South Korean churches is transformational due to its creativity and ability to handle complex problems, its ability to establish and engender a clear vision among the congregants, and its ability to inspire and engender collaborative work toward interdenominational unity (South Korea has PDI of 60, IDV of 58, MAS of 39, UAI of 85, and IVR of 29).¹⁸ In the face of stagnation and many financial debts, authentic leadership, which emphasizes honesty and transparency, may not be highly effective in providing the best, optimal, and fitting solution. Similarly, although relational leadership would be effective in fostering interdenominational unity, it may be ineffective in recovering the reputation of the churches in Korea because a few individuals with negative actions can hinder the positive work attitudes and behaviors of others in many contexts of Korean society. Nevertheless, transformational leadership can be innovative in addressing the problem of stagnation and financial debts that many churches in Korea are facing. Moreover, transformational leadership is a suitable leadership style for churches in Korea because through its clear and strong vision casting, it can inspire believers to collaborate and work toward interdenominational unity. While various other environmental factors and logistics with different approaches and methods with each of these leaderships may affect the effectiveness of the leadership styles in the context of churches in Korea, given the cultural characteristics of Korea and the current challenges imposed on all churches in Korea, transformational leadership seems to be the most auspicious of them all.

2. China

Though authentic, transformational, and relational leadership styles are all applicable in China given its cultural characteristics (PDI of 80, IND of 43, MAS of 66, UAI of 30, LTO of 77, and IVR of 24), faced with security concerns, many uncertainties, extensive censorship, and the demand for creativity, the most suitable leadership style for churches in China is relational.¹⁹ Although authentic leadership has important leadership values that can be effective in various contexts, its emphasis on personal values, honesty, and transparency will be insufficient to address the communication barrier imposed by extensive censorship in China. Similarly, even though transformational leadership can be effective in building strong relationships, because the security concerns imposed on churches in China are a priority before high effectiveness in inspiring and motivating at large, relational leadership is a better-suited leadership style than transformational leadership.

"limited dependence of subordinates on bosses, and there is a preference for consultation," INDH- "interest of the individual prevail over the interests of the group," INDL-"interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual," MASM-"emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life," MASF- "when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life," UAIH- large "extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations," UAIL- "extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations," LTOH- "long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future reward- in particular, perseverance and thrift," LTOL-"the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face,' and fulfilling social obligations," IVRI(indulgence)-tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun" IVRR(restraint)-conviction that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict-social norms." Refer to the following reference for more details for each of the definitions used: Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* 3rd ed. (N.Y.: McGraw Hill, 2010), 62, 90, 91, 143, 194, 238-239, 285, 359.

¹⁸ "Country Comparison Tool," *The Culture Factor*, accessed September 3, 2024,

<https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=china%2Cjapan%2Csouth+korea%2Ctaiwan>.

¹⁹ David Ro, "Mainland China (House Churches)" in *Christianity in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross et al. (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 90-100; "Country Comparison Tool," *The Culture Factor*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=china%2Cjapan%2Csouth+korea%2Ctaiwan>.

Although the transformational leadership style can excel in creativity to support mission work, since mission work is dependent on the security of the sending church, and though ministries in the sending church and the mission work are both equally important in essence, the sending church's security and its well-being take logical precedence. This, in turn, places relational leadership before transformational leadership in the order of suitability in the context of churches in China.

3. Japan

While authentic, transformational, and relational leadership can all be effective, the current challenges of contrasting demographics and multiethnic congregation challenges render relational leadership the most suitable leadership style in the churches of Japan (PDI of 54, IND of 62, MAS of 95, UAI of 92, LTO of 100, and IVR of 42).²⁰ Faced with various cultures and life backgrounds, authentic and transformational leadership will both struggle to cross intercultural barriers that exist in the churches of Japan due to the gaps in age and diverse ethnicities. Such struggles will stunt effective communication, mutual respect and edification, shared values and visions, and eventually the unity of the churches and their growth as a whole. Relational leadership, with its emphasis on building relationships across various barriers, will be the most suitable leadership style in the context of churches in Japan.²¹

4. Taiwan

The leadership style best suited for churches in Taiwan is transformational. This style offers vision for the future while inspiring and motivating followers towards that vision. Leaders practicing transformational leadership are also inclined to take risks and pursue innovation. Taiwan's cultural dimensions—PDI of 58, IND of 40, MAS of 45, UAI of 69, LTO of 87, and IVR of 49 (indulgence)—align with authentic, transformational, and relational leadership styles.²² However, given the stagnation of churches in Taiwan since 1965 and the persistent political instability, the transparency and honesty emphasized by authentic leadership, though crucial, may not be the most effective elements for achieving a breakthrough or ensuring stability amidst the uncertain political relationships between Taiwan and China.²³ Similarly, while relational leadership can enhance unity and fellowship among believers and foster transformational change and growth, it may be less effective in addressing stagnation and instability for quick adaptation and change.

5. Mongolia

The best-suited leadership styles for churches in Mongolia are transformational and relational leadership because these styles meet the cultural context of Mongolia and are suited to facing the major challenges of lack of pastoral and leader training in biblical knowledge, personal character maturity, and ministerial training, and because these leadership styles can appropriately encourage interdenominational unity. Although all five leadership styles from the cultural analysis section are applicable to the churches in Mongolia (PDI of 93, IND of 37, MAS of 29, UAI of 39, and LTO of 50), transformational and relational leadership are the best-suited leadership styles because both encourage transformational change and transformative growth among followers in areas such as biblical knowledge, personal character maturity, and ministerial training.²⁴ Furthermore, both styles can foster interdenominational unity even though they approach it differently.²⁵

²⁰ Akemi Kugimiya, "Japan" in *Christianity in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross et al. (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 159-171; "Country Comparison Tool," *The Culture Factor*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=china%2Cjapan%2Csouth+korea%2Ctaiwan>.

²¹ Since 1990s, immigration has greatly increased, and multicultural coexistence with people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds has become a major issue; Akemi Kugimiya, "Japan" in *Christianity in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross et al. (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 170.

²² "Country Comparison Tool," *The Culture Factor*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=china%2Cjapan%2Csouth+korea%2Ctaiwan>.

²³ Yang-en Cheng, "Taiwan" in *Christianity in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross et al. (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 126-138.

²⁴ "Country Comparison Tool," *The Culture Factor*, accessed September 3, 2024, <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=mongolia>.

²⁵ Charles Rarick, Gregory Winter, Casimir Barczyk, Mark Pruett, Inge Nickerson, and Arifin Angriawan, "Global Journal of Management and Business Research: Administration and Management," *Global Journal of Management and Business Research: Administration and Management* 14, no. 9 (2014): 1.0, accessed April 6, 2023, https://globaljournals.org/GJMBR_Volume14/2-Global-Journal-of-Management-and-Business-Research-Administration-22

Although the inclusive leadership style can engender interdenominational unity, its effectiveness in fostering growth in biblical knowledge and ministerial proficiency will be severely limited.

6. North Korea

Although authentic, transformational, and relational leadership styles are all implementable in North Korean churches based on Hofstede's cultural dimensional framework, given the current challenges of extreme persecution, limited communication, limited resources inside and outside the church, and the high degree of trustworthiness required of leaders by followers, the most suitable leadership style in North Korea is relational. While available data regarding North Korean societies and their culture are limited, it can be inferred that North Korean societies are extremely high in power distance and strongly collectivistic given the nature of the communist regime. Even though North Korean churches may differ from the cultural norms of the country to a certain extent, these tendencies would likely be visible and embedded in church practices and congregants' lives due to various customizations.²⁶

Furthermore, due to the extreme persecution of Christians when discovered by the government, the lack of resources inside and outside the church, limited communication among church members, and the high degree of trustworthiness required from leaders by followers due to security reasons, relational leadership becomes the most suitable leadership style in North Korean churches among authentic, transformational, and relational leadership.²⁷ Relational leadership prioritizes building personal relationships and trust with followers, making it effective even with limited resources. Additionally, due to the limited communication available in the North Korean church context, relational leadership can maximize the time spent together for congregants' cohesion. Such effectiveness might be difficult for transformational leadership, as leaders are limited in resources to meet congregants' needs, and communication channels are severely hampered for thorough assessments of followers' needs and motives. Moreover, the level of transparency, a hallmark of authentic leadership, may not be available at its required minimal level in the North Korean church context to effectively motivate and engage followers. Thus, relational leadership, with its focus on fostering trust and personal connections, is the most suitable leadership style for the unique and challenging context of North Korea.

Conclusion

This paper undertook the analysis of the suitability of 13 different leadership styles—laissez-faire, democratic, situational, transactional, trait, skills, adaptive, inclusive, authentic, autocratic, transformational, servant, and relational—for East Asian churches. By integrating scriptural validation with Hofstede's cultural dimensions and considering the modern challenges distinct to each country, the analysis identified the most suitable leadership styles as follows: transformational leadership for South Korea, relational leadership for China, relational leadership for Japan, transformational leadership for Taiwan, both transformational and relational leadership for Mongolia, and relational leadership for North Korea.

Although these prescriptions provide a general framework that is applicable at the national level, their effectiveness may vary depending on the unique context and characteristics that distinguish individual congregations from the generalized depiction of churches in these countries. Therefore, while these leadership styles are recommended, it is essential to apply them with flexibility, allowing for contextual adjustments that consider macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors. This approach ensures that leadership strategies are not only culturally relevant and scripturally grounded but also responsive to the specific needs and circumstances of each church community. By doing so, church leaders can foster effective and sustainable growth, helping their congregations navigate the complex challenges of the 21st century while remaining faithful to the *Missio Dei*.

and-Management.pdf; Bayarjargal Garamtseren, "Mongolia" in Christianity in East and Southeast Asia, ed. Kenneth R. Ross et al. (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 119-125.

²⁶ Philo Kim, "North Korea" in Christianity in East and Southeast Asia, ed. Kenneth R. Ross et al. (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 143-144.

²⁷ Philo Kim, "North Korea" in Christianity in East and Southeast Asia, ed. Kenneth R. Ross et al. (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 144.

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