Servant Leadership: A Cross-Cultural Biographic Look at Leaders as Martyrs

William Hunsaker*

Abstract

The theory of servant leadership is becoming an increasingly accepted theory of leadership, supported by theories related to organizational learning, motivation, and spirituality, yet it is an age-old theory referenced through becoming a saint or martyr while fighting for a specific cause. Such a view of servant leadership is the extreme, yet offers the opportunity to observe the innate traits of a servant leader as well as the emergence of such attributes. This paper examines the lives of two such leaders, Joseph Smith, Jr. and Kim Koo, through the interpretive biographical method of qualitative research, with a purpose of understanding how defining moments in the lives of individuals can lead to the development of servant leader characteristics. The results of the study reveal that while culture (in this case, Asian Confucian culture) can play a role in shaping leadership behavior, servant leadership traits emerged similarly within participants, indicating the universality of the theory. Future research on the relationship of culture and religiosity to servant leadership emergence are suggested.

Keywords: Theory, Organizational, Joseph Smith, Jr. and Kim Koo, Biographical Method

I. Introduction

Servant leadership is not only one of the most talked about contemporary leadership philosophies, it is also becoming an increasingly accepted theory in the leadership field (Barbuto and Wheeler, 2002; Laub, 2003). Greenleaf (1977) first coined the term in a 1970 essay dealing with servants as leaders. The concept slowly took form and gained acceptance, supported by leadership experts such as Senge (1990), Covey (1991), Fairholm (2001), and Fry (2003), who suggest the need for a better way to lead and manage organizations that puts serving others as the number one priority (Spears, 2004). Meanwhile, followers are also exercising their influence, demanding the workplace pro-

* Adjunct scholar, Graduate School of International Studies, Korea University, Anam-dong, Sungbuk-Ku, Seoul, Korea, and investment research specialist, Daishin Securities, Seoul, Korea; e-mail: hunsaker@korea.ac.kr.
provide greater meaning to their lives by more effectively acknowledging individual efforts and allowing pursuit of individual callings and ambitions (Fairholm, 1996; Fry, 2003).

In answer to the question of who is a servant leader, Greenleaf (1977) responded that a servant leader is servant first and then a leader, motivated to prioritize the needs of others before personal needs. However, a servant leader should not be construed to be some kind of saint or personal martyr. Rather, an individual is best characterized as a servant leader by examining his or her followers and observing whether the followers are growing as individuals. In other words, while being served, are followers becoming “healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants?” (Greenleaf, 1977: 27). Such leadership is grounded in deep self-reflection, personal development and education, an acute awareness of the world, and the personal ability to rise above deeply engrained social and organizational preconception of “command and control”, power-based leadership (Wheatley, 1999).

While the contemporary exemplification of servant leadership is best not construed through the idealism of personal self-sacrifice or martyrdom, examining servant leadership through such an extreme provides the opportunity to more completely understand the ideals underlying the servant leadership construct. Within this scope, the purpose of this manuscript is to purposely sample and examine two historical martyrs from diverse cultural backgrounds that exemplified servant leadership through an interpretive biographical study of their lives, framed within the characteristics of servant leadership. The key question underlying the study is to better comprehend how these leaders emerged and developed as servant leaders. To a lesser extent, the study also seeks to understand servant leadership within an Asian cultural context, as opposed to the predominance of research on servant leadership set within a western context. The two leaders chosen for the study are Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (more commonly known as the Mormon Church), and Kim Koo, a patriot of South Korea who devoted his life to the independence of Korea from the clutches of Japanese rule during the early 20th century. The paper will proceed by first introducing the characteristics of servant leadership, followed by a qualitative description of the emergence of servant leadership characteristics of the sample participants, and concluding with a discussion of research conclusions and implications.

II. Characteristics of Servant Leadership

Based on the writing of Greenleaf (1977), ten characteristics of servant leadership can be extracted including listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2004). Within this framework, and in pursuit of an operationalization of the servant leadership construct, the organizational leadership assessment (OLA; Laub, 1999) emerged, a survey instrument designed to measure servant leadership. The instrument, which exhibits a significant ($p < .01$) positive correlation of .65 between the OLA score and job satisfaction, has been used in multiple research projects, and has been translated into Spanish, Dutch, and Japanese (Laub, 2003). The OLA model defines servant leadership as “an understanding and practice of leadership that
places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader” (Laub, 2003: 160), and characterizes a servant leader across six dimensions: values people, develops people, builds community, displays authenticity, provides leadership, and shares leadership. It is within this framework of servant leadership characteristics that this manuscript compares and contrasts the portrayal of servant leadership through the lives of Joseph Smith, Jr. and Kim Koo. An explanation and operationalization of each of the six dimensions of Laub’s servant leadership model is as follows:

- **Values people**: The leader values people by trusting and respecting others, believing in the unlimited potential of people, serving others’ needs before his or her own needs by showing love and compassion, and by practicing receptive, non-judgmental listening.

- **Develops people**: The leader provides opportunities for learning and growth by using personal power and authority for the benefit of others, accepts conflict as an opportunity to grow, models appropriate behavior and keeps a balance in life, and builds up others through encouragement and affirmation.

- **Builds community**: The leader builds strong personal relationships, relates well with others, works collaboratively with others, and values the differences of others by allowing individuality.

- **Displays authenticity**: The leader is willing to be open and accountable to others, admits mistakes and limitations, expresses a willingness to learn from others, practices self-awareness, and maintains his or her integrity, trust, and ethics.

- **Provides leadership**: The leader envisions the future, utilizes personal intuition and foresight, takes initiative to achieve the vision, exhibits courage, conviction, and competence, clarifies goals to ensure the vision’s success, and turns threats into opportunities.

- **Shares leadership**: The leader facilitates a shared vision, shares his or her power and control, persuades rather than coerces others, utilizes personal influence rather than positional power, promotes and empowers others, and does not seek status or leadership perks.

**III. Research Methodology**

To achieve the purpose of this study, a purposeful and contrasting sample of participants was selected. The selection process began by identifying historical leaders martyred in the name of individual causes and then screening these leaders for servant leadership characteristics. Due to the researcher’s understanding of and ties to the United States and South Korea, the screening process was narrowed to these two countries. The selection process firstly identified Joseph Smith, Jr., as a religious leader who readily and naturally exhibited servant leadership traits and who died in 1844 at the hands of an angry mob while fighting to secure the religious freedom of his followers. Secondly, the process identified Kim Koo as an independence fighter who exhibited certain characteristics of servant leadership and who was assassinated in 1949 at the hands of a political dissident while relentlessly fighting to secure the independence and
freedom of the Korean people.

The research method underlying the study was an interpretive qualitative research approach, which seeks meaning in context to better understand how a situation emerges (Klein and Myers, 1999). Specifically, an interpretive biographical approach was pursued that examines a person’s life, hoping to gain an increased understanding of how personal experiences have developed meaning for the person (Denzin, 1989). In proper form, the method relies on thick description, including the researcher’s reaction to material uncovered, found from diverse sources such as autobiographies, biographies, letters, newspaper articles, interviews, and social interpretations (Smith, 1994). Denzin suggests the method is specifically concerned with cultural and religious influences, defining moments, and family and educational experiences that helped shape a person. Within this context, Bennis and Thomas (2002) suggest that the “crucibles” of life, which they describe as life’s defining moments and experiences, are a significant source of leadership development and learning. Thus, the study focused on the defining moments of the sample participants, Joseph Smith, Jr. and Kim Koo, as the underlying backdrop to better comprehend the emergence of servant leadership traits and behaviors.

IV. Life of Joseph Smith, Jr.

• Brief history: Joseph Smith, Jr. was born on December 23, 1805, the fourth of nine children, in Sharon, Vermont into a humble family setting. At the age of 14, he recorded experiencing a vision in which God and Jesus appeared to him in answer to his prayers, and instructed him to join none of the churches that were seeking his membership but with time, he would be instructed in establishing a new church, which he achieved in 1830. Through subsequent visitations by angels, he states he was guided to the recovery and translation of an ancient record hidden in the earth that became the Book of Mormon, a second book of scripture similar to the Bible. Due to religious persecution arising from both the angelic visitations and the Book of Mormon, he was forced to flee his persecutors and move westward, eventually settling the city of Nauvoo, Illinois. However, the persecution persisted, compelling him to announce his candidacy for the president of the United States in 1844, as a means of voicing his concerns over religious persecution and freedom. Later that year, he and his older brother, Hyrum, and several other senior church leaders were mockingly incarcerated by a mob of his persecutors, who later stormed the small jail on June 27, 1844, and shot and killed him and his brother (Smith, 1958).

• Personal characteristics: Joseph exhibited personal traits such as courage, compassion, honesty, a desire for learning, and a charitable nature from a young age. As he grew in age and maturity, he began to exhibit characteristics such as perseverance, patience, vision, and conviction to these beliefs and principles. Moreover, his religious opponents came to know him as sensible, intelligent, gentlemanly, confident, patriotic, a leader of men, a talented orator and writer, and a man of understanding and accepting of the differences of others (Cannon, 1986; Smith, 1979).

In a journalistic sketch about the life of Joseph in a London newspaper in 1851,
the journalist records the following:

In consequence of his pretensions to be a seer and prophet of God, Joseph lived a life of continual misery and persecution. He endured every kind of hardship, contumely, and suffering. He was derided, assaulted and imprisoned. … But whether a knave or lunatic … it can not be denied that he was one of the most extraordinary persons of his time, a man of rude genius, who accomplished a much greater work than he knew; and whose name, whatever he may have been whilst living, will take its place among the notabilities of the world (Cannon, 1986: 356-357).

1. Defining moments

- **Moment A**: From an early age, Joseph exhibited great courage, integrity, and compassion for others. His mother reveals that at the tender age of seven, Joseph faced the terrifying experience of an inflammation in the marrow of his shin bone following a bout with typhus fever. After three weeks of suffering, including several attempts to relieve the pain by lancing the skin around the inflammation clear to the bone, it was decided that his leg must be amputated. His mother insisted they attempt one more time to remove the diseased part of the bone by cutting the bone away. After binding him to the bed, he was offered a drink of brandy for the pain but Joseph refused all forms of liquor, stating:

  I will not touch a particle of liquor, neither will I be tied down; but I will tell you what I will do-I will have my father sit on the bed and hold me in his arms, and then I will do whatever is necessary in order to have the bone taken out. … Mother, I want you to leave the room, for I know you cannot bear to see me suffer so. Now, mother, promise me that you will not stay, will you? The Lord will help me, and I shall get through with it (Smith, 1958: 57).

  Amidst the screams of a young child and excruciating pain, the doctors then proceeded to break and remove the inflamed pieces of bone, whereupon Joseph experienced a full recovery. From this experience, it is evident that from a young age, he was courageous, empathetic, true to his convictions, and had deep trust in God.

- **Moment B**: Joseph’s formative years were set amidst an intense religious excitement within the community that eventually led to severe persecution of him and his family due to their conflicting religious convictions. At the age of 14, the persecution began. Owing to the example and encouragement of his parents, Smith became a faithful reader and follower of the bible from a young age. Literally applying the guidance found in James 1:6, which states that if any man lack wisdom, he should ask God for assistance, Smith prayed to God and he claims that in answer to his prayer, a vision unfolded in which God and Jesus appeared to him. However, the excitement of the
vision was countered by the rebuking response he received from local ministers whom he trusted, who vehemently told him the vision was from the devil. He writes in his journal,

It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and it was often the cause of great sorrow to myself. However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision (Smith, 1979: 4).

This defining moment in Smith’s life exemplifies (a) his conviction to personal beliefs, despite persecution and ridicule, (b) an understanding of the personal and social price he must pay in following such convictions, and (c) an acute awareness of the unfair and irrational world in which he lived.

- **Moment C**: Several years after witnessing this vision, Smith officially organized and established his small group of followers into a church that has grown to a current world membership exceeding 13 million members, a testament to his vision and leadership. Yet, Smith never esteemed himself with great status or power; rather to more effectively manage the church’s affairs, he delegated responsibilities and empowered others to lead. He selected twelve apostles that “were all equal in authority” (Cannon, 1986, p. 193) to him, and through their joint leadership efforts, the church not only survived his death but also expanded exponentially to its current size. Summarizing this process, Cannon writes,

  Joseph himself had a wonderful personality; and it was the custom to give him credit for the early growth of the church numerically; and to ascribe its spread and the devotion of its adherents to his individual power of attraction. But he did not so esteem himself; and the work which the apostles [and other senior church leaders] have performed is proof (p. 193).

- **Moment D**: The persecution that Smith faced did not slow his vision, his optimism, or his ability to place the needs of others before his own. For example, as recorded in his mother’s journal, Joseph was seized from his home during the night of March 25, 1833, at the hands of an angry mob. After beating and threatening to kill him, the mob stripped his clothes from his body, poured a bucket of hot tar on him, and left him for dead. After finding his way home, he records,

  My friends spent the night scraping and removing the tar, and washing and cleansing my body, so that by morning I was ready to be clothed
again. This being the Sabbath morning, the people assembled for the meeting at the usual hour, and among those came also the mobbers. ⋯ With my flesh all scarified and defaced, I preached to the congregation, as usual, and in the afternoon of the same day baptized three individuals (Smith, 1958: 221).

Such an experience reveals the dedication and responsibility he felt for his followers, as well as the ability to rise above personal afflictions in exemplifying his vision. Moreover, it reveals Smith’s ability to build community in the face of opposition. On a separate occasion, a Methodist minister sarcastically remarked to Smith that he supposed only Mormon preachers were allowed to speak in the Mormon community. In response, Smith replied,

On the contrary, I shall be very happy to have you address my people ⋯ and I will insure you a most attentive congregation. ⋯ You may say anything you please; but I reserve the right of adding a word or two. ⋯ I promise to speak of you in the most respectful manner (Cannon, 1986: 348).

- **Moment E**: The most telling period of persecution against Smith and his followers occurred during the fall of 1838 in Missouri. To protect his followers from the constant plundering by mobs in the area, Joseph organized his followers into a protective militia, which eventually influenced the state (Missouri) governor to issue an extermination order that allowed the state’s military and local militia to kill all Mormons and confiscate their properties. Not surprisingly, fighting between local mobs and Smith’s protective militia ensued, which resulted in the capture and imprisonment of Smith and other key church leaders. Though charged with treason and ordered to be executed, the general of the military refused to carry out the order, and after a period of six months in various local jails, Smith and other jailed leaders miraculously escaped. The experience reinforced his belief in God, his friends, and the need to find a place to protect his people and worship freely according to established laws in accomplishing the vision he embraced. The following journal notation reveals the depth and breadth of his empathy, his acute awareness of the suffering and tribulation of his people, and all-encompassing trust he placed in God. He writes,

Although I felt great anxiety respecting my family and friends, who were so inhumanely treated and abused, and who had to mourn the loss of their husbands and children what had been slain, and, after having been robbed of nearly all that they possessed, were driven from their homes, and forced to wander as strangers in a strange country, in order that they might save themselves and their little ones from the destruction they were threatened with in Missouri, yet as far as I was concerned, I felt perfectly calm, and resigned to the will of my Heavenly Father. I knew my innocence as well as that of the Saints (Smith, 1979: 161).
• Moment F: Following the forced expulsion from Missouri, Smith and his followers (which now amounted to several thousand members) settled in a barren part of Illinois and built the city of Nauvoo. However, persecution followed their mass departure, forcing them to abandon their properties and possessions in their eventual exodus to the Salt Lake City, Utah area from the late 1940s, following the martyrdom of Smith in 1844. However, prior to this expulsion, Smith formally sought nomination as the president of the United States in 1844 as a means of fighting for the rights of his followers and informing the public of the many atrocities heaped upon them maliciously. The following journal excerpt reveals not only his patriotism and belief in law but also his awareness of how his fight for freedom will benefit the overall good of others. He claims,

I feel it to be my right and privilege to obtain what influence and power I can, lawfully, in the United States, for the protection of injured innocence; and if I lose my life in a good cause, I am willing to be sacrificed on the altar of virtue, righteousness, and truth, in maintaining the laws and constitution of the United States, and if it need be, for the general good of mankind (Cannon, 1986: 470).

• Moment G: Finally, despite the many persecutions heaped upon himself and his religious followers, Smith always sought peace over violence in seeking an amicable solution to lead his people out of harms way. But he also firmly believed in defending the right to religious freedom as guaranteed within the law; thus the motivation to establish a protective militia to defend his people. Such personal convictions resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of Smith in 1844 and a chance meeting with the governor of Illinois to resolve the religious tension. During the meeting with the governor that occurred two days before his martyrdom, Smith defended his decision to take up arms to protect his people. The following journal excerpt reveals his keen awareness of the rights and privileges guaranteed by the US Constitution and personal responsibility to defend such rights for the greater good of the others.

If there is trouble in the country, neither I nor my people made it, and all that we have ever done, after much endurance on our part, is to maintain and uphold the Constitution and the institutions of our country, and to protect an injured, innocent, and persecuted people against misrule and mob violence (Cannon, 1986: 535).

V. Life of Kim Koo

• Brief history: Kim Koo was born on August 29, 1876 in humble peasant circumstances. At a young age, he was made aware of his family’s lower social standing within the community, compelling him to request his father for outside education. Fortunately, his father found the means to secure an education for him at a traditional community school, where he was able to study Chinese classics. In his late teens, he
became interested in fighting for the rights of the peasants and against the increasing aggression shown by the Japanese by joining various underground social groups. During this time, the queen of Korea was murdered by Japanese assassins, and by chance, Kim avenged her death by killing one of the assassins who had went into hiding. Upon his capture in 1896, he was sentenced to death but the king later commuted his sentence to a prison term. After roughly two years in prison, he escaped, roamed the country, and took up a life as a teacher using a fake name. However, his drive to seek independence from Japanese oppression eventually led him to join emerging underground political movements, which resulted in his arrest, torture, and imprisonment in 1911, this time for a period of three years. Upon his release in 1914, he returned again to teaching, and following the nationwide movement for independence in 1919, he escaped to Shanghai, where he eventually became the prime minister and president of the Korean Provisional Government. As president, he continuously pursued the independence of his country from the Japanese through numerous covert operations and formation of various political movements. Following Korea’s independence at the conclusion of the Second World War, he was allowed to return to his homeland in 1945. However, due to his political aspirations seeking a unified Korea, he was disliked by both the US military government and other politically driven individuals. Following continuous attempts to unite North and South Korea, he was assassinated on August 26, 1949, to quiet the political storm surrounding the unification of North and South Korea (Doh, 1997).

- **Personal characteristics**: During his younger years, Kim was known as being a curious, intemperate, clever boy. He exhibited a desire to better himself through learning and gaining a formal education, pursuing various opportunities to learn in whatever circumstance he found himself. As he matured, he became passionately patriotic, seeking to regain the independence of his country, by participating in whatever underground independence movement he could find. He exhibited a great ability to self-reflect, learn from his mistakes, keep his body and mind healthy, remain true to his vision of freedom, and sacrifice for and serve his cause for the betterment of others, despite great personal sacrifice. He exhibited compassion and love to those he served and associated with, learning how to provide hope as a means to further the cause of freedom and relieve the personal pain many experienced at the hands of the Japanese. Finally, he was a leader among his peers, based on his confidence, charisma, vision, and competence (Doh, 1997; Kim, 2006).

As evidence of his passion and vision, he writes in his most famous manuscript, titled My Wish,

> If God asked me what was my wish, I would reply unhesitatingly, ‘Korean independence.’ If He asked me what was my next wish, I would again answer, ‘Our nation’s independence.’ If He asked me the same question for the third time, I would reply in an even louder voice, ‘My wish is our Great Korean Nation’s Complete Independence.’ I, Kim Koo, have but this one wish. I lived the past 70 years of my life because of this one wish, and even now I am living my present life for this one wish. In
the future, I will also live in order to fulfill this one wish (Doh, 1997: 423).

1. Defining moments

- **Moment 1**: In his autobiography, Kim reveals learning the value of honesty at the tender age of five wherein he stole some candy and was caught by his father, who only warned him with a look of disappointment to never steal again. However, he was slow to learn, and one day took some money from his father to buy a rice cake. He was caught by his father, and as punishment, his father whipped him with a laundry cord. The act of disappointing his father haunted him during his formative years as he began to reflect on the course his life should take. Another experience that revealed the seeds of the self-reflective process that would later play a central role in his life occurred at the age of ten when he suffered the pain and shock of learning that he was a member of the peasant social class of Korea. He states that one day he and his grandfather were ridiculed by the yangban class (e.g., elite social class), whereupon he asked his grandfather, “How does one person become a yangban, and another become a peasant?” His grandfather replied, “Education is the difference” (Doh, 1997: 30). Thereafter, he committed himself to finding the means to gain an education and free himself from the chains of peasant hood.

- **Moment 2**: Kim’s commitment to education and self-development led him to a greater understanding of politics, including the oppression of the peasant class and the rising presence of Japanese forces in Korea during the early 1890s. Given his patriotic tendencies, he was easily influenced to join the underground movements of the time to fight against this domination. He was introduced at age 18 to the Donghak Movement in 1894 that provided military training according to five books of theory. Upon learning about this opportunity, he writes, “I was thrilled by the prospects, committing myself to apply all the principles found within the five books” (Doh, 1997: 50). Although the Donghak movement proved unsuccessful, it reinforced his commitment to freedom and learning, as well as the value of learning from mistakes.

Continuing this learning process, the following year, Kim began studying under the tutelage of a Buddhist monk known as Teacher Goh, who told Kim that his life would not amount to much if he continued to bide his time at a neighboring home; rather if Kim would like, he could teach him about life, politics, and education. Shortly after agreeing to study with Teacher Goh, Kim states in his journal,

My mental state was extremely pressing. Years earlier, my studies had helped me switch my pessimistic views on life to more hopeful prospects, but when I took a close look at myself, I still felt sadness at who I had become, compelling me to commit to become a person with values. The problem was that I had expected my experience with various movements would help me become such a person but my expectations had all proved fruitless (Doh, 1997: 61).
With this frame of mind, he pleaded with Teacher Goh to teach him how to become a person of values. Teacher Goh agreed, whereupon Kim states, “From that day forward, even when I didn’t eat, I didn’t feel hunger, and if Teacher Goh had told me to die, I would have died without complaining” (Doh, 1997: 63). Teacher Goh was instrumental in helping Kim refine his political views about freedom and the increasing power Japan was exerting within Korea, indirectly impressing him about the potential need to give his life if necessary to secure its freedom. The experience also reveals Kim’s ability to reflect deeply on his life, make commitments, openly experiment with new concepts, and follow his convictions in the refining pursuit of his life’s mission.

- **Moment 3**: By accident in 1896, Kim recognized what appeared to be one of the Japanese assassins of Korea’s queen, disguised in Korean traditional clothing. He was seized by the revengeful opportunity to show his patriotism by killing the assassin. However, he records in his journal that the decision was difficult due to his commitment in becoming a person of values. He rationalized away such guilt by claiming that what he had always sought was not to become a person of values, but rather “to become a person who treated his body with respect while making a name for himself” (Doh, 1997, p. 94). With this understanding, he quickly formulated and executed a plan by which he killed the Japanese assassin. Following the savage act, he announced his name and reasons for carrying out the attack to the local village people, knowing full well that the police would find him, torture him, and in the end, execute him. As anticipated, three months later, the police found and imprisoned him, the first of three extended periods of imprisonment. In his journal, Kim never denounces this act of murder; instead he justifies his action as a necessary action in the fight for independence and to avenge the brutal killing of Korea’s queen (Doh). From this experience, Kim’s passion to be part of a cause is illustrated, the seeds of which eventually engulfed his life in fighting for Korea’s independence. The experience also reveals his weakness to rationalize his behavior for personal benefit. However, later humiliating experiences and active self-reflection reveals that he largely overcame this weakness in rising above his insecurities.

- **Moment 4**: During his imprisonment, Kim was tortured extensively, which led him to attempt suicide. He failed in this attempt, which led him to record that whether he died naturally or at the hands of his torturers, suicide was not the right way to die. Miraculously, the king stayed his execution, but still required an extended stay in prison. During his stay in prison, he records that he gained an understanding of the value of four skills: reading, learning, writing, and singing. Through the help of his father, and supported by the notoriety afforded him for killing the Queen’s assassin, he was able to pursue development of these skills, despite his imprisonment, through helping his inmates lacking such skills. This proved fortuitous in his able to gain the support of his inmates in eventually escaping from the prison in 1898 (Doh, 1997). In sum, Kim exhibited his ability to self-reflect and turn a bad situation into something good while also planting the seeds of community among his inmates.

- **Moment 5**: Upon his escape, Kim became a teacher to the commoners, helping them...
learn to read and write while also covertly stimulating interest in the independence movement. In 1911, he was again arrested, imprisoned and tortured, receiving a 17 year sentence, for his visible role as a leading member of an underground independence organization. He was released from prison in 1915, following the death of his daughter. However, during his four years of imprisonment, he continued to perceive and learn from both his own difficult circumstances and the dire situation of his inmates, who were mostly imprisoned for their involvement in fighting for the independence of Korea, rather than for crimes against the people, and who were tortured continuously through physical beatings, starvation, and dire prison conditions. Amidst these circumstances, Kim’s burning desire for independence and freedom grew more powerful, as well as his desire to alleviate the grim living conditions of his fellowmen (Doh, 1997; Kim, 2006).

On one occasion during his imprisonment, he writes about how he was allowed to eat outside of his cell, but in order to help alleviate the starvation of his inmates, he would stuff his mouth with food before returning and then subsequently remove the food and give it to his cellmates, similar to a bird feeding her young chicks. On another occasion, he writes that he would regularly sacrifice a bowl of his rice to feed his starving inmates, which in normal circumstances would have caused fighting amongst the inmates to secure more food. However, his inmates treated him with respect due both to his notoriety as well as his ability to interpret Japanese on their behalf. However, he claims his acts of kindness were not to satisfy his ego, rather to keep hope alive amongst the inmates for a day of future freedom (Doh, 1997). These are the first recorded experiences in which Kim begins to exhibit his ability to serve others for the betterment of others, a process of refinement that appears to have been the result of humbling circumstances that helped return him to his original desire of becoming a person of values.

• **Moment 6**: A final defining moment in Kim’s life occurred during his exile to Shanghai, China in 1919. Upon his arrival, his fellow patriots persuaded him to become the prime minister and eventual president of the provisional government established to fight for the freedom of Korea. Despite his lack of formal political training, he accepted the mantle of leadership out of love for his country and as a means of fighting for the betterment of his fellowmen. Thus, Kim entered the second half of his life, shaped by hardship and troubling experiences, but fortified in his knowledge that the experiences had instilled in him the burning desire to fight for the freedom of his country (Doh, 1997). He remained true to this desire up to his unfortunate death, achieving both of his original desires as a youth in not only making a name for himself but also becoming a person of values.

**VI. Discussion**

The question driving this research has been to better understand the emergence of servant leadership, especially from the extreme perspective of the servant leader “martyr.” Based on an interpretive analysis of servant leadership, as seen through the
lives of Joseph Smith, Jr., and Kim Koo, and analyzed within the framework of Laub’s (1999) servant leadership inventory, the study revealed that while servant leadership emerged in both individuals across all dimensions of Laub’s inventory, the emergence process came more naturally for Smith than Kim. For Kim, the emergence required active, soul-searching reflection and efforts often at odds with his normal disposition while for Smith, the process, while still requiring intense self-reflection, seemed to unfold quite naturally based on his gentle yet passionate disposition. Thus, a key implication of this research is that while personality may play a role in the ability to emerge as a servant leader (Piedmont, 2005), a more critical role is the ability to deeply self-reflect on personal experiences and abilities.

Table 1: Summary of Servant Leadership Traits and Participants’ Defining Moments

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<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Defining Moments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Founding Values</td>
<td>Self-reflection, personal development, awareness of world, rising above social</td>
<td>B, E, F 1, 2, 4</td>
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<td>preconceptions</td>
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<td>Values People</td>
<td>Trust, respect, belief in others, serving others, love, compassion, listening</td>
<td>A, D, E 4, 5</td>
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<td>to others</td>
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<td>Develops People</td>
<td>Helps others learn and grow, models desired behavior, encourages others, uses</td>
<td>D, F, G 5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>power for benefit of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Builds Community</td>
<td>Builds relationships, values differences, works with others</td>
<td>C, D 4, 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Displays Authenticity</td>
<td>Accountable, admits mistakes, willing to learn, maintains integrity and trust</td>
<td>D, G 4, 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides Leadership</td>
<td>Vision, foresight, initiative, courage, conviction, goal-oriented, turns threats</td>
<td>A, B, D 1, 2, 3,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares Leadership</td>
<td>Shared vision, persuasion not coercion, status aversive, personal influence</td>
<td>C, D, G 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rather than positional power, empowering</td>
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</table>

In describing the servant leader, Greenleaf (1977) emphasized that a key precursor of servant leadership is the ability to pursue self-development through deep self-reflection, a point echoed by Bennis and Thomas (2002) in describing how effective leaders are able to deeply reflect on the defining moments of their lives to achieve greater effectiveness. Both Smith and Kim exhibited such an ability and passion, demonstrating a personal drive to constantly improve their lives, better understand their strengths and weaknesses, and comprehend their mission and purpose in life. Particularly, through this learning process, both Smith and Kim developed an acute awareness of big-picture developments within society and the impact of such developments on their followers.

As the proclaimed leader of his church from a young age, Smith was able to
form strong relational bonds with his followers, which in turn provoked a more intimate relationship between the impact of social developments and his followers, especially in terms of helping them achieve religious freedom and individual spiritual growth. This awareness encompassed more than just the intricacies and differences of the Mormon religion with predominant religions of the time; it also required an awareness of politics and law, which Smith became an expert as a means of achieving his leadership vision. Meanwhile, Kim more deliberately embarked on this journey of awareness by intentionally seeking to become a person of values as a means of better comprehending how to firstly come to terms with the social structure of his time and later the political upheaval that was overtaking his country. Armed with his desired values, he then pursued his vision, keeping his eyes open to social developments and personal experiences that arose in shaping, refining, and changing these values as necessary.

A final aspect of self-reflection that facilitates the emergence of servant leadership as revealed through this research is the ability to recognize opportunities for personal development through unforeseen experiences, especially in terms of the opportunity to lead others. Neither Smith nor Kim necessarily sought or pursued the leadership mantle they eventually embraced; however, as opportunities to lead arose, they embraced the opportunities and then passionately fulfilled their expected responsibilities. By doing so, they exemplified the process of “modeling the way”, a transformational process of leadership closely resembling servant leadership, as described by Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) leadership challenge. Moreover, both Smith and Kim allowed such leadership opportunities to shape and fulfill their visionary purposes, particularly as pertained to the development and inspiration of their followers through building community and sharing leadership.

Turning to the defining moments of both Joseph Smith, Jr., and Kim Koo, this study revealed multiple common characteristics. Both were born into difficult financial and social circumstances, compelling them to seek formal education and learning to increase their social positions. For instance, both individuals eventually became fluent in multiple languages to meet their desire to not only learn but be more instrumental in their causes. In addition, the desire to educate and develop their followers motivated them to construct educational institutions and participate directly in the education and training of their followers and citizens. In this respect, both individuals were instrumental in establishing educational institutions to meet the learning needs of followers. Meanwhile, even though the development of their convictions differed, both learned to value their people, trusting and respecting their opinions, showing compassion, and serving the needs of others before their own needs. Indeed, the desire to seek education for oneself and others is fundamental to becoming a servant leader.

Additionally, despite the differing motivations of their individual causes (e.g., the fight for religious freedom and the fight for political independence), both suffered persecution and atrocities at the hands of their enemies during their lifetimes, stimulating burning inward desires to protect the lives of their followers and make the world a better place. Such experiences allowed them to build consensus and community among their followers through strong relationships while valuing individual differences. Moreover, such struggles provoked them to act on their passion for freedom while also fueling a refinement of their values related to the development of self and others through subor-
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...dinating and sacrificing individual desires for the greater good of others. Noteworthy is that such a subordination process is a key dimension of Korean Confucianism (Kim and Park, 2003). Not only did these experiences illustrate how they valued others, the experiences also revealed their authenticity. Indeed, they both remained true to their causes, learned from their experiences through self-reflection, and were renowned for their integrity. Such an emergence process reveals the refining process required of servant leadership, especially in terms of appreciating the effectiveness of interdependence with others (Wheatley, 1999).

From an additional perspective, both Smith and Kim spent extended periods of time in prison to silence their voice of freedom. Such humble circumstances provoked them to reflect on their lives, their interdependence with others, and their need to serve and empower others to sustain the fight for religious or political freedom. In particular, due to his incarceration while serving as the head of his church, Smith relied on the leadership of other senior leaders to meet the needs of his followers. To meet this objective, he empowered others and provided the doctrine for a smooth succession of leadership when he died, as evident in the continued existence today of the church he established. In contrast, Kim refined his values while imprisoned that he later utilized by sharing his leadership responsibilities while serving as the president of the provisional government of Korea during his later life. In short, the study confirmed that the process of sharing leadership is critical in emerging as a servant leader (Greenleaf, 1977; Laub, 1999).

However, the emergence of servant leadership traits differed on a key dimension. Whereas Smith exhibited traits of a servant leader, such as valuing people, displaying authenticity, and providing leadership, from a young age with seemingly little internal struggle to know his purpose and fate in life, Kim developed these characteristics through a process of trial and error, wherein he fought within himself concerning his life’s purpose, and learned through his difficult experiences in prison the value of human life and freedom that later kindled his life’s vision. Such a difference reveals the impact that one’s cultural or philosophical upbringing may play in the emergence and effectiveness of servant leadership. Wherein Smith had experienced strong Christian influences from an early age through the example of family and community members that dictated service, sacrifice, and loving one’s neighbor, Kim learned to value these characteristics later in life during his pursuit of various philosophical paradigms. Instead, from an early age, he was influenced by Confucian values that dictated group harmony through respect for family, authority, one’s social status, and one’s country (Paik and Sohn, 1998). Despite such differences, both leaders illustrated servant leadership attributes later in life, but future research should address the relationship of religiosity on the emergence of servant leadership, especially within the context of Confucianism.

A secondary purpose of this study was to approach the emergence of servant leadership within an Asian cultural context. Research by House et al. (2004) has reliably found key differences in leadership behaviors between cultures, across multiple dimensions such as performance orientation, assertiveness, collectivism, power distance, and gender egalitarianism. Despite these cultural differences, the study surprisingly found that servant leadership emerged across all dimensions of Laub’s (1999) servant leadership dimensions, an indication that servant leadership may have universal applicability.
Additionally, the study revealed that certain aspects of Confucianism (a key attribute of Korea’s identity), such as the mutually dependent obligations between superiors and juniors (Paik and Sohn, 1998), are witnessed within the emergence of servant leadership in Korea. Thus, future research should more deeply examine the relationship of an individual’s culture to the emergence of servant leadership. In particular, a specific area of future research valuable to Asian cultures would be to examine the role of Confucianism in the emergence of servant leadership within Confucian-centric cultures such as Korea.

VII. Conclusion

The purpose of this manuscript set out to evaluate the development process and possible cross-cultural differences in the development of servant leaders through a biographical study of two servant leader martyrs, Joseph Smith, Jr., and Kim Koo. Through an examination of defining moments in the lives of the two leaders it was determined servant leadership emerges across all dimensions of servant leadership despite cultural differences; however, future research should more specifically address the role of Confucianism and religiosity on the development of servant leadership characteristics.

In summary, by the time both leaders reached a level of maturity that allowed them to properly function as instrumental leaders in their specific causes, both exhibited servant leader characteristics to varying degrees such as valuing and developing people, building community, displaying authenticity, and providing and sharing leadership. While the study is limited in its generalizability due to its narrow focus, it does present a starting point for more in-depth analysis of the impact of culture and religiosity on the development process of servant leaders.

References

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