

Navigating the Dilemma of Righteousness and Profit: The Value Integration of Eastern-Asia Missionary Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Missionary entrepreneurs play a crucial role in driving social innovation and industry transformation. However, they frequently encounter a fundamental paradox between pursuing their social ideals (righteousness/Yi) and ensuring organizational survival (profit/Li). While mainstream literature often views this tension as competing institutional logics that lead to severe trade-offs or operational dilemmas, limited attention has been paid to how culturally embedded values help founders reconcile these conflicts. Based on the philosophical lens of Confucianism, this study explores the dynamic process of how Chinese missionary entrepreneurs navigate the debate between righteousness and profit ("Yi-Li Zhi Bian"). Through an in-depth qualitative case study, this research reveals that rather than adopting a zero-sum compromise, successful missionary entrepreneurs embrace a "Righteousness First, Profit Second" (先義後利) paradigm. In the face of moral crises and short-term financial pressures, ethical leaders utilize an "Inside-Out" value externalization mechanism. The process begins with the founder's moral modeling, which trickles down to cultivate humanistic values among employees and raise need awareness among customers. Ultimately, this collective social identity drives ecological changes within the industry, transforming long-term social investments into sustainable organizational profitability. This study contributes to the entrepreneurship literature by providing a culturally nuanced model of value integration, demonstrating how ethical leadership resolves the righteousness-profit dilemma and sustains a missionary enterprise in a competitive market.

Keywords

Missionary Entrepreneur, Value Integration, Ethical Leadership, Confucianism, Social Identity.