

How is Benevolent Leadership Linked to Employee Creativity? The Mediating Role of Leader–Member Exchange and the Moderating Role of Power Distance Orientation

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Abstract Previous research has shown that virtuous leader behavior in the form of benevolent leadership has considerable impact on employee creativity. However, little is known as to how and under what conditions these constructs are linked. In the current research, we proposed and tested a moderated mediation model positing leader–member exchange (LMX) as a mediator, and employee power-distance orientation as a moderator of this relationship. Two studies were conducted to test our hypothesized model. In Study 1, repeated measured data collected from 284 Chinese employees in an information technology company demonstrated that benevolent leadership had a

lagged effect on LMX. In Study 2, analyses of multisource and lagged data from 391 Chinese employees in 42 research and development teams, and their direct supervisors indicated that benevolent leadership was positively related to supervisor-rated employee creativity via LMX. In addition, the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX was stronger for employees high in power-distance orientation. Theoretical implications of benevolent leadership’s research and practical contributions concerning promoting creativity in organizations where benevolent leaders prevail are also discussed.

Keywords Benevolent leadership · Leader–member exchange · Creativity · Power distance

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Introduction

Leadership is one of the most salient aspects of the organizational context because the success of an organization largely depends on the effectiveness of the leadership process (Yukl 2001). As suggested by extant literature, leadership reflects an interpersonal skill that is used to influence followers to strive for the common good in organizations (Barrow 1977; Parris and Peachey 2013; Plsek and Wilson 2001). Moreover, virtuous behavior on the leaders’ part has considerable impact not only toward creating humane workplace environments that offer compassion and sympathy, but also on significant organizational production-related variables (Karakas and Sarigollu 2012, 2013). One such construct that embodies leaders’ virtuous behavior is that of benevolent leadership, which refers to leaders’ individualized, holistic concern for subordinates’ personal or familial well-being (Farh and Cheng 2000; Farh et al. 2008). By demonstrating benevolence to

followers, benevolent leaders tend to create a humane work environment that could be characterized as comfortable, supportive, respectful, and trusting, which in turn creates observable benefits for the common good (Cheng et al. 2000; Karakas and Sarigollu 2012; Wang and Cheng 2010). Specifically, benevolent leaders exemplify wholehearted and genuine actions at work that benefit followers around them. In return for leaders' benevolent behaviors, followers in turn demonstrate positive attitudes and desirable behaviors that provide beneficial outcomes for their work units or organizations due to felt obligations and reciprocity.

Given its significant role in promoting followers' obligation, vitality, and effectiveness, a growing stream of research has begun to examine the impacts of benevolent leadership. Empirical work has demonstrated that benevolent leadership has a beneficial impact on a variety of followers' outcomes, including job satisfaction (Cheng et al. 2002a), organizational commitment (Cheng et al. 2002b; Karakas and Sarigollu 2012), organizational citizenship behavior (Karakas and Sarigollu 2012; Liang et al. 2007), and performance (Chan and Mak 2012; Farh and Cheng 2000; Farh et al. 2006; Karakas and Sarigollu 2012).

Despite this flourishing research, the impact of benevolent leadership on followers' creativity is relatively less studied. In organizational settings, creativity is crucial for the development and profit making of organizations. For example, employee creativity has been commonly viewed as a necessary foundation for organizations to achieve competitive advantage (Shalley 1995). Thus, it is important to examine whether, how and when benevolent leadership is linked to critical organizational outcomes such as creativity. However, although existing research has shown that benevolent leadership is positively correlated with followers' creativity (Hakimian et al. 2014; Wang and Cheng 2010; Wang et al. 2013), the mechanisms and boundary conditions underlying the benevolent leadership—creativity link is left unexplored. Conceptually, benevolent leadership—showing concern for subordinates both in work and non-work domains—is not directly related to improving subordinates' creativity, which makes it pertinent to further investigate this relationship in terms of its mechanisms and boundary conditions, especially in light of the increasingly important role of creativity in the modern age.

Therefore, the first purpose of the current research is to empirically investigate the mechanism through which benevolent leadership links to employee creativity within the Chinese context. Given that benevolent leadership is most commonly discussed through the framework of social exchange (e.g., Chan and Mak 2012; Zhang et al. 2015) and that under this framework, LMX is most often examined as the process by which leader behaviors influence subordinate outcomes (Dulebohn et al. 2012), we

specifically posit that leader–member exchange (LMX) will mediate the relationship between benevolent leadership and employee creativity (see Fig. 1). According to Tierney and her colleagues (Tierney et al. 1999), a critical leadership approach to enhance followers' creativity is to develop high-quality dyadic relationships with followers, which is captured by LMX. Given that benevolent leadership emphasizes leader–follower relationships that would result in reciprocally beneficial exchanges between leader and follower, LMX should act as the mediating mechanism through which benevolent leadership links to employee creativity.

Moreover, due to fact that benevolent leadership is embedded in a set of cultural conditions (Farh and Cheng 2000), it can be expected that the effects of benevolent leadership may vary depending on the cultural values held by subordinates. Since cultural values can shape the characteristics (e.g., trait and behavior) that an individual believes to capture effective leadership (Javidan et al. 2006), individuals' cultural value plays an important role in how subordinates interpret and react to leader's behavior (Kirkman et al. 2009; Lin et al. 2013). However, although previous research provides a broad range of knowledge about the connection between benevolent leadership and significant subordinate outcomes, little is known about how subordinates holding different cultural values react to benevolent leadership. This issue becomes increasingly pertinent since economic globalization and social change have accelerated the differentiation of individuals' cultural values (Ralston et al. 1999). Besides, recent research has shown that even within the same culture, there are considerable variations in individuals' cultural values (e.g., Farh et al. 2007; Kirkman et al. 2009; Lian et al. 2012). Thus, it is imperative to extend our understanding of how to effectively manage diverse human capital that holds different cultural values.

Therefore, the second purpose of this research is to examine how subordinates' cultural values impact their responses to benevolent leadership. Specifically, we posit that subordinates' power-distance orientation moderates the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX. We focused on the cultural value of power distance because prior research (e.g., Cole et al. 2013; Kirkman et al. 2009; Schaubroeck et al. 2007) suggest that power distance is more theoretically relevant to leadership dynamics compared to other cultural values (e.g., individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance). As one of the most important cultural values that can be found in almost every cultural framework (Kirkman et al. 2009), power-distance orientation specifically reflects individuals' fundamental beliefs and values of power, which is pertinent to how followers perceive and interact with their leaders (Cole et al. 2013; Kirkman et al. 2009; Schaubroeck et al.

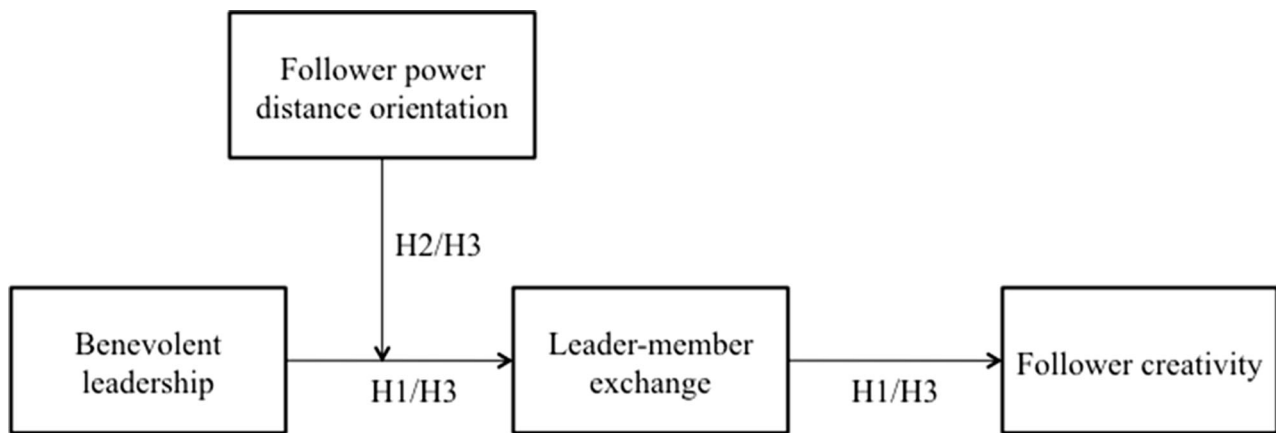


Fig. 1 Hypothesized model. All the hypothesized relationships are positive. *H* Hypothesis. H1 represents indirect effect. H2 represents moderation effect. H3 represents moderated mediation effect

2007). As benevolent leadership is at the heart of the Confucian doctrine that dictates mutual obligation between individuals of different power status (Farh and Cheng 2000), subordinates' values of power, namely their power-distance orientation, would largely influence how they react to benevolent leadership (also see Fig. 1).

Our research provides several contributions to the extant literature. First, although previous research demonstrated a positive link between benevolent leadership and employee creativity, little is known about the mechanism underlying this relationship. By examining the mediating role of LMX, our research provides some of the first evidence of how benevolent leadership is linked to employee creativity. Second, although several previous studies have examined factors that can moderate the relationship between benevolent leadership and employee outcomes, investigations into the role that employees' cultural values play in these relationships have still been largely neglected. By demonstrating the moderating effect of employee power-distance orientation, our research offers some of the first insights of how individual cultural values (e.g., power-distance orientation) would influence the effect of benevolent leadership and the social exchange process as well, contributing to the literature on benevolent leadership and LMX.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Concept of Benevolent Leadership

Benevolent leadership refers to leaders' demonstration of individualized, holistic concern for subordinates' personal or familial well-being (Cheng et al. 2004). Benevolent leaders exhibit individualized care to followers in both work and non-work domains (Farh and Cheng 2000). In the

work domain, benevolent leaders display concern for followers' career development, try to understand the reasons behind followers' poor performance, provide coaching and mentoring, and give chances for correcting mistakes at work (Cheng et al. 2000; Farh et al. 2008; Pellegrini and Scandura 2008). In the non-work domain, benevolent leaders treat followers as family members, help followers during personal emergencies, avoid public embarrassment of followers, and take care of followers' family members (Cheng et al. 2000; Farh et al. 2008).

As a widespread management phenomenon in Chinese organizations (Cheng et al. 2004), benevolent leadership is deeply rooted in the Chinese culture of Confucianism (Cheng et al. 2009). According to the Confucian tradition, there should exist mutual obligations between two individuals with different levels of power (Farh and Cheng 2000). For instance, in ruler-minister dyads, a ruler should be benevolent to his ministers, and in turn, the ministers should be loyal to the ruler. Similarly, a father should provide protection to his children, and the children should show gratitude and obedience to their father in return. Following these Confucian ethics, benevolent leaders exhibit individualized care to followers in both work and non-work domains so as to evoke followers' gratitude and loyalty (Farh and Cheng 2000; Farh et al. 2008; Pellegrini and Scandura 2008). As a reflection of its strong embeddedness in Chinese culture, the construct domain of benevolent leadership has been relatively unchanged despite the rapid social and modernization in China (Farh et al. 2008).

Benevolent Leadership and Leader–Member Exchange

Building on social exchange theory (Blau 1964), leader–member exchange refers to the quality of the exchange

relationship between leader and follower (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995; Liden and Maslyn 1998; Wayne and Green 1993). There are several reasons why benevolent leadership is related to higher quality of leader–member exchange. First, since benevolent leaders demonstrate individualized care to followers such as taking care of followers' family members, those employees who perceive high benevolent leadership tend to experience a strong sense of gratitude toward their leaders (Tsui and Farh 1997). This strong sense of gratitude leads followers to reciprocate more to their leaders to repay the benevolence, which strengthens the dyadic relationship between leader and follower (Cheng et al. 2004) and leads to higher LMX (Zhang et al. 2015).

Second, followers will develop higher levels of trust with leaders because of the leaders' benevolent behaviors (Chen et al. 2014; Wu et al. 2012). Benevolent leaders care about followers both within and outside the work domain, and will help followers when they encounter problems in work or personal life (Cheng et al. 2004; Farh and Cheng 2000). After leaders demonstrate motivation and competency to take good care of followers, followers will return more trust in leaders, which increases LMX since LMX is based on mutual trust (Mahsud et al. 2010; Yukl 2001). Third, followers of benevolent leaders are more likely to identify with the leaders (Cheng et al. 2004), because these leaders provide them with individualized care that targets their personal needs. With this identification, followers will be more loyal to leaders, be more prone to maintain high-quality relationships with the leaders, and exchange more valued resources with them, increasing LMX (Gu et al. 2013; Zhang et al. 2015).

Benevolent Leadership, Leader–Member Exchange, and Creativity

Having a high-quality relationship with one's leader can enhance an employee's creativity in several ways. First, leader–follower dyads with high-quality LMX are more likely to have high-quality interactions in which they exchange valued resources (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995; Wayne and Green 1993). Leaders also tend to share opinions more comprehensively and constructively with followers if they have built high-quality relationships with these followers (Chen et al. 2007). These valued resources and opinion sharing processes will equip followers with important information and knowledge that help them develop higher levels of creativity (Amabile 1983). Second, leaders are more likely to empower followers with whom they have built high-quality relationships, and provide such followers more autonomy with which to approach their work (Gómez and Rosen 2001). With perceived autonomy over job execution, empowered followers

are more likely to establish creativity in the workplace because they are more willing to take risks in trying novel methods and experimenting with new ideas (Pan et al. 2012; Zhang and Bartol 2010). In line with the above reasoning, previous studies have demonstrated that LMX is positively related to employees' innovative behavior (Basu and Green 1997) and creative performance (Liao et al. 2010; Tierney et al. 1999).

Based on the above argument, we propose that LMX will mediate the relationship between benevolent leadership and followers' creativity. According to Tierney et al. (1999), one significant approach for leader to exert influence on followers' creativity is relationship building. Benevolent leadership emphasizes the relationship between leaders and followers (Farh and Cheng 2000), and we propose that LMX captures the psychological process underlying the reciprocal relationship between benevolent leaders and followers. Benevolent leadership strongly promotes followers' gratitude toward, trust in, and identification with the leaders, which all lead to the development of a high-quality LMX. With high-quality LMX, followers feel that they are obliged to engage in more creative work involvement, have more valued information and knowledge from mutual resource exchange and opinion sharing, which leads to better creativity output. To summarize, we hypothesize the following mediation relationship:

Hypothesis 1 LMX mediates the relationship between benevolent leadership and followers' creativity.

The Moderation of Power-Distance Orientation

Power distance, one of the four dimensions of Hofstede's (1980) cultural values, is defined as the extent to which people regard unequal status differences as legitimate (Hofstede 1980). Although power distance was first conceptualized at the cultural level, studies have found that it has large variations between different individuals within the same culture (Clugston et al. 2000; Kirkman and Shapiro 2001; Kirkman et al. 2006; Sue-Chan and Ong 2002). We use the term power-distance orientation to indicate this construct at individual level (see Kirkman et al. 2009, for the same treatment). In the current research, we argue that power-distance orientation will moderate the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX, as well as the indirect effect of benevolent leadership on employee creativity via LMX.

More specifically, we propose that power-distance orientation will strengthen the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX. Employees with high levels of power-distance orientation believe that they are inferior to their leaders, regard the imbalance of power possessed by leaders and subordinates as legitimate (Tyler et al. 2000),

are more likely to endorse the opinions and influence of leaders (Schaubroeck et al. 2007), and show more deference and obedience to authorities (Farh et al. 2007; Li and Sun 2015). Thus, when benevolent leaders demonstrate individualized care to followers, followers with higher power-distance orientation will be more gratuitous to leaders. By contrast, employees with lower power-distance orientation will experience a less sense of gratitude toward their leaders due to their belief that they are equal to their leaders in status. Besides, employees with lower power-distance orientation would not put as much trust in leaders as their colleagues with higher power-distance orientation. This is because when benevolent leaders care about followers' personal lives, these employees would regard it as a violation of privacy, rather than a favor of the leaders (Pellegrini and Scandura 2008).

Also, power-distance orientation congruence between leader and followers has important effects on followers (Cole et al. 2013). It is suggested that benevolent leadership is congruent with the values of high power-distance cultures (Aycan 2006). Benevolent leadership is engrained in Confucian ideologies that dictate mutual obligations between individuals of different power levels (Farh and Cheng 2000), such as rulers and ministers, and father and son (Cheng et al. 2009). Benevolent leaders believe that their displays of benevolence are integral to the fulfillment of their obligations toward their lesser-powered counterparts (i.e., their followers), which will promote reciprocity from followers to fulfill their obligations toward their leaders (Farh and Cheng 2000; Farh et al. 2008). Employees with high power-distance orientation agree that their leaders legitimately have more power than themselves, and thus they are more likely to accept the mutual reciprocity in this hierarchical relationship. Therefore, when there is congruence between leaders' benevolent leadership and followers' power-distance orientation, followers will be more likely to identify with leaders and more easily develop high-quality dyadic relationships with leaders. Consistent with our argument, previous research demonstrated that the value congruence of power distance between team leaders and their team members has beneficial effects on team effectiveness (Cole et al. 2013).

In summary, followers with higher power distance would have stronger gratitude toward, trust in, and identification with their leaders, which all increase the quality of LMX. In contrast, individuals with lower levels of power distance may less embrace benevolent leadership, and thus weaken the benevolent leadership—LMX relationship. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2 Power distance orientation moderates the positive relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX, such that this relationship is stronger for those with higher power-distance orientation.

Based on the above argument, we further propose that followers' power-distance orientation will moderate the indirect effect of benevolent leadership on creativity through LMX. Those with high levels of power-distance orientation will have higher LMX under benevolent leadership, thus they are more likely to engage in creative work involvement to reciprocate and possess more valued resources, which boosts their creativity. In contrast, those with low levels of power-distance orientation will reciprocate less and have fewer resources, since they will not develop high-quality relationships with their benevolent leaders, and will not have a significant increase in creativity. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3 The indirect relationship between benevolent leadership and creativity through LMX is stronger for those with higher power-distance orientation.

Plan of Research

We conducted two studies to test our hypotheses. In Study 1, we focused on the causal relations between benevolent leadership and LMX since previous research on such relations have been mixed. Some researchers have argued that benevolent leadership is an antecedent variable of LMX (e.g., Chan and Mak 2012; Zhang et al. 2015), while others have suggested that benevolent leadership is an outcome, rather than an antecedent, of LMX (Ansari et al. 2004; Pellegrini and Scandura 2006, 2008). Given that it has not been possible to infer causality from previous research as they have used cross-sectional designs, in Study 1 of the current research, we used a repeated measured design to allow for a stronger causal inference between benevolent leadership and LMX. In Study 2, we used multisource and lagged data to examine all of the relationships embedded in our model (see Fig. 1).

Study 1

Study 1 Method

Participants and Procedure

Employees from an information technology (IT) company in China were asked to participate in Study 1. They were responsible for a wide range of IT services and solutions, such as content operation and advertisement operation. We used random sampling method with a 30 percent sampling rate to select participants from this company.

Participants were invited to complete two repeated surveys separated by 1 month. An appropriate interval

length between measurements is important as the inferred relationship may not have come into effect if the interval is too short, while the effect could start fading if the interval is too long (Selig and Preacher 2009). Although there is no available theoretical basis for choosing time lag or interval for benevolent leadership, following previous empirical research on leadership (e.g., Leroy et al. 2012; Tse et al. 2013), we chose 1 month as this interval because it is neither too short nor too long to observe the effects of benevolent leadership. At time 1, participants reported their perceptions of LMX and leaders' benevolent leadership. Demographic information (i.e., gender, age, education, and organizational tenure) was also collected. At Time 2 (1 month after Time 1 survey), participants again reported benevolent leadership and LMX. Voluntary participation was emphasized and confidentiality was ensured.

We used the employee roster to randomly select 212 full-time employees in this company as our participants. Surveys were distributed to these 212 employees with the help of the company's human resources department. Among them, 191 (90.1 %) responded to the first survey and of these 191 participants, 184 (96.3 %) responded to the second survey. Thus, the final sample size was 184, yielding an overall response rate of 86.8 %. Among the participants, 65.2 % were men; the average age was 28.4 years ($SD = 4.7$); on average, participants had completed 14.8 years of education ($SD = 2.4$ years); and the average organizational tenure was 5.0 years ($SD = 3.9$) at Time 1 assessment.

Measures

All ratings were made on a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 7 = "Strongly agree").

Benevolent Leadership Benevolent leadership was measured at Time 1 and Time 2 using Cheng et al. (2003) 5-item scale. Previous research has demonstrated that this 5-item scale has a reasonable reliability and validity (Zhang et al. 2015). A sample item for benevolent leadership was "My supervisor expresses concern about my daily life." The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for benevolent leadership was 0.94 at Time 1 and was 0.91 at Time 2.

LMX LMX was measured at Time 1 and Time 2 using the 7-item scale (LMX-7) adopted from Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). A sample items was "I would characterize my working relationship with my supervisor as extremely effective." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.89 at Time 1 and was 0.91 at Time 2.

Control Variables Participants' demographic variables, including gender, age, education, and organizational tenure measured at Time 1, were used as control variables in the analyses since previous research suggest that they could be related to employees' perceptions of leader behavior (Gu et al. 2013; Li et al. 2010; Liao et al. 2010).

Study 1 Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the focal variables for Study 1 are presented in Table 1. The zero-order correlations between benevolent leadership and LMX were significant and positive at Time 1 ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$), and at Time 2 ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$). The time-lagged zero-order correlations between these two variables while still positive and significant, were somewhat lower: benevolent leadership Time 1 and LMX Time 2: $r = 0.52$ ($p < 0.01$); LMX Time 1 and benevolent leadership Time 2: $r = 0.41$ ($p < 0.01$).

To establish the discriminant validity of these two measures, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using Mplus 7 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2012). We created three parcels of items per construct using random assignment procedure (Little et al. 2002) to improve the sample size to parameter ratio, as this ratio adversely impacts the standard errors and stability of the estimates (see Landis et al. 2000). Specifically, benevolent leadership had 3 parcels and each parcel included 1–2 items. LMX also had 3 parcels and each parcel included 2–3 items. Each parcel was created based on a same set of items across time. All factor loadings were freely estimated and the uniquenesses of the same measurement indicators were correlated over time to account for consistency in indicator-specific variance (Cole and Maxwell 2003).

Results showed that the four-factor model (i.e., benevolent leadership at Time 1, benevolent leadership at Time 2, LMX at Time 1, and LMX at Time 2) fit the data well, $\chi^2(42) = 111.31$, $p < 0.01$, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.97, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.95, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.09. All items loaded significantly on their corresponding factors. This measurement model fit the data better than the one-factor model in which both factors in each period were combined ($\Delta\chi^2[\Delta df = 5] = 425.04$, $p < 0.01$). These results provided support for the hypothesized measurement model.

Controlling for the effects of gender, age, education, and organizational tenure, we tested a cross-lagged model using Mplus 7. As can be seen in Table 2, after controlling for the effect of Time 1 LMX, Time 1

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for Study 1 variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	–	–	0–1								
2. Age	28.43	4.66	20–41	–0.10							
3. Education (years)	14.84	2.36	7–21	0.24**	–0.16*						
4. Organizational tenure (years)	4.95	3.91	0–14.7	–0.09	0.65**	–0.33**					
5. Benevolent leadership Time 1	4.56	1.47	1.00–7.00	0.00	–0.06	0.06	–0.05	(0.94)			
6. Leader–member exchange Time 1	4.90	1.31	1.00–7.00	–0.12	–0.12	0.06	0.00	0.58**	(0.89)		
7. Benevolent leadership Time 2	4.54	1.31	1.00–7.00	0.09	–0.03	0.02	–0.04	0.72**	0.41**	(0.91)	
8. Leader–member exchange Time 2	4.80	1.32	1.00–7.00	–0.03	–0.03	0.14	–0.01	0.52**	0.70**	0.55**	(0.91)

N = 184. Gender was coded “0” for men and “1” for women. Alpha reliabilities are provided in parentheses on the diagonal

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test)

Table 2 Cross-lagged analyses (Study 1)

	LMX Time 2	Benevolent leadership Time 2
Gender	0.07 (0.15)	0.28 (0.15)
Age	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Education	0.06 (0.03)	–0.03 (0.03)
Organizational tenure	–0.00 (0.02)	–0.02 (0.02)
Benevolent leadership Time 1	0.15** (0.06)	0.64** (0.06)
LMX Time 1	0.62** (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)
R^2	0.53** (0.05)	0.53** (0.05)

N = 184. Gender was coded “0” for men and “1” for women. Entries are unstandardized coefficient estimates. Estimations of the standard errors are in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two – tailed test)

benevolent leadership was positively related to Time 2 LMX ($\gamma = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$). Results from the reversed specification embedded in this model indicated that this relationship is *not* reciprocal. More specifically, controlling for the effects of the same control variables and Time 1 benevolent leadership, the reversed cross-lagged effect of Time 1 LMX on Time 2 benevolent leadership was not significant ($\beta = 0.01$, $p > 0.05$). These results support our contention that the benevolent leadership positively influences LMX.

In sum, Study 1 provided support for Hypothesis 1 and offered a stronger causal inference of the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX. By using a repeated-measures design and cross-lagged analysis, we are able to rule out the reversed causal relationship and provide stronger evidence that benevolent leadership is an antecedent, rather than an outcome, of LMX, which helps reconcile previous mixed arguments about the causal ordering between benevolent leadership and LMX. In order to fully test our hypothesized model (i.e., the mediation effect of LMX and the moderation effect of power

distance), we then conducted Study 2 using a multisource and lagged design.

Study 2

Study 2 Method

Participants and Procedure

We collected data from two sources (i.e., subordinate survey and supervisor survey) in a communication company in China. Participants in this sample worked in research and development (R&D) teams and were responsible for different product development projects. Each supervisor works with a group of subordinates to deal with issues such as product design, schedule planning, and product improvement.

Data were collected at two time points separated by one month. At Time 1, subordinates rated their levels of power-distance orientation, LMX, and perceptions of their

supervisors' benevolent leadership. One month later, at Time 2, supervisors were asked to rate their subordinates' creativity. The nature of full confidentiality and voluntary participation was emphasized. We used an identification code for each questionnaire to match subordinates' responses with their supervisors' evaluations.

With the help of the company's human resources department, surveys were distributed to all 412 full-time employees in 42 R&D teams, and 391 completed surveys were returned (with a response rate of 94.9 %). In addition, all supervisors ($n = 42$, with a response rate of 100 %) provided ratings of their employees' creativity. We were able to achieve these high response rates because of company sponsorship and the use of work time to complete the surveys. Among the subordinates, 84.9 % were men; the average age was 28.9 years ($SD = 3.7$), and the average organizational tenure was 1.52 years ($SD = 1.13$) at Time 1 assessment; most of the subordinates (83.9 %) have a bachelor degree or above; most subordinates (80.3 %) have the same gender as their supervisors.

Measures

Unless otherwise stated, all ratings were made on a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 7 = "Strongly agree").

Benevolent Leadership Benevolent leadership was measured at Time 1 using Cheng et al. (2003) 5-item scale as in Study 1. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for benevolent leadership was 0.90.

LMX LMX was measured at Time 1 using the 7-item scale (LMX-7) adopted from Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) as in Study 1. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.91.

Power Distance Orientation We assessed power-distance orientation at Time 1 with a 6-item measure developed by Dorfman and Howell (1988). A sample item was "Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.76.

Creativity Subordinates' creativity was rated by their direct supervisors at Time 2 using a 13-item scale taken from Zhou and George (2001). Supervisors were asked to rate their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = *very uncharacteristic*, 7 = *very characteristic*). Sample items include "comes up with new and practical ideas to improve performance." Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.96.

Control Variables Subordinates' gender, age, education, and job tenure measured at Time 1 were used as control

variables in the analyses since previous research suggest that they could be related to both employees' perceptions of leader behavior (Gu et al. 2013; Li et al. 2010; Liao et al. 2010) and creativity (e.g., Liu et al. 2012; Zhang and Bartol 2010). Moreover, we controlled for the subordinates' working time with the current supervisor because the length of the supervisors' and the subordinates' working relationship influences both LMX (Wayne et al. 2002) and supervisor ratings of subordinates (Duarte et al. 1994). Variance in LMX and supervisor ratings of creativity due to gender similarity was also controlled for. Finally, we controlled for subordinates' agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness because such personality traits were found to correlate with LMX (Bernerth et al. 2008) and creativity (King et al. 1996). These personality traits were measured using Saucier's (1994) Big-Five Mini-Markers. Eight items were used for each personality trait (e.g., "Warm" and "Kind" for agreeableness; "Relaxed" and "Unenvious" for emotional stability; "Creative" and "Imaginative" for openness). Respondents rated each item using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*extremely inaccurate*) to 7 (*extremely accurate*). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness were 0.72, 0.73, and 0.76, respectively. In sum, by controlling for these individual difference variables, we were able to take possible confounds into account and thus rule out some of the alternative explanations that need to be considered when examining benevolent leadership.

Study 2 Results and Discussion

The means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among the focal variables for Study 2 are presented in Table 3. As expected, benevolent leadership was positively correlated with LMX ($r = 0.66$, $p < 0.01$) and creativity ($r = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$). LMX was positively correlated with creativity ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). These findings provided preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships.

Due to the nested nature of the data, we conducted multilevel confirmatory factor analysis using Mplus 7 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2012) to examine the distinctiveness among our measures. Specifically, given that our hypotheses were proposed at the individual level, all seven focal variables (i.e., agreeableness, emotional stability, openness, benevolent leadership, power-distance orientation, leader-member exchange, and creativity) were treated as individual-level factors while their team-level variances were controlled. As in Study 1, we created three parcels of items per construct using random assignment procedure (Little et al. 2002) to improve the sample size to parameter ratio.

Results for the measurement model indicated that the seven-factor model fit the data well ($\chi^2[378] = 812.23$,

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Study 2 Variables

Variable	M	SD	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender	-	-	0-1													
2. Age	28.88	3.69	18-40	-0.02												
3. Education	-	-	0-2	0.01	0.12*											
4. Organizational tenure (year)	1.52	1.13	0.08-6.25	0.08	0.39**	-0.07										
5. Time working with current supervisor (year)	1.37	1.11	0.08-6.25	0.05	0.35**	-0.07	0.81**									
6. Gender similarity	-	-	0-1	-0.80**	-0.01	0.01	-0.09	-0.01								
7. Agreeableness	5.74	0.69	2.75-7.00	0.09	0.00	0.04	-0.06	-0.04	-0.08	(0.72)						
8. Emotional stability	5.32	0.82	2.38-7.00	0.07	0.09	0.09	-0.04	-0.02	-0.04	0.59**	(0.73)					
9. Openness	5.33	0.74	2.88-7.00	-0.13*	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.06	0.09	0.53**	0.40**	(0.76)				
10. Benevolent leadership	3.98	1.35	1.00-7.00	-0.11*	0.00	-0.07	-0.06	0.06	0.12*	0.04	0.07	0.03	(0.90)			
11. Power distance	2.81	1.02	1.00-6.17	0.02	0.10	0.01	0.15**	0.08	-0.01	-0.18**	-0.10	-0.06	-0.30**	(0.76)		
12. Leader-member exchange	5.03	1.14	1.00-7.00	-0.12*	-0.01	0.00	-0.05	0.06	0.11*	0.13*	0.13**	0.08	0.66**	-0.34**	(0.91)	
13. Creativity	5.11	0.91	1.77-7.00	-0.18**	-0.01	0.04	0.00	0.02	0.13*	-0.07	-0.07	0.10	0.17**	-0.17**	0.22**	(0.96)

N = 391. Gender was coded "0" for men and "1" for women. Education was coded "0" for "associate degree," "1" for "bachelor degree," and "2" for "master degree or above." Gender similarity was coded "0" for that the gender between subordinate and supervisor is different and "1" for that the gender between subordinate and supervisor is the same. Alpha reliabilities are provided in parentheses on the diagonal

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test)

$p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.05). This measurement model fit the data better than all 21 constrained models in which any two of the seven factors were combined ($93.16 \leq \Delta\chi^2(\Delta df = 6) \leq 1670.13$, $ps < 0.01$). These results provided support for construct distinction.

With the nested nature of the data, we conducted multilevel modeling analyses (Level 1: individual level; Level 2: team level) to test our hypotheses using Mplus 7. To examine the mediation effect hypothesis (i.e., Hypotheses 1), we first estimated a multilevel model (Model 1) that specified the Level 1 fixed effect of benevolent leadership on LMX and the Level 1 fixed effect of LMX on creativity. The direct effect of benevolent leadership on creativity was also controlled for. Subordinate demographics, time working with current supervisor, gender similarity with current supervisor, agreeableness, emotional stability, openness, and power-distance orientation were controlled on both LMX and creativity. At Level 2, all Level 2 intercepts of Level 1 focal variables (i.e., benevolent leadership, power-distance orientation, LMX and creativity) were set to freely correlate with each other. All the exogenous variables were grand-mean centered.

The unstandardized coefficient estimates for Model 1 are presented in Table 4. Results showed that benevolent leadership was positively related to LMX ($\gamma = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, as expected, LMX was positively related to supervisor-rated creativity ($\gamma = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$).

We tested the proposed mediation effects (Hypothesis 1) on the basis of a Monte Carlo simulation procedure due to its capacity to accurately reflect the asymmetric nature of the sampling distribution of an indirect effect (Preacher et al. 2010). With 20,000 Monte Carlo replications, the indirect effect for benevolent leadership via LMX on supervisor-rated creativity was 0.09, with a 95 % bias-corrected bootstrap confident interval (CI) of (0.02, 0.16). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

To test for the proposed moderating hypothesis (Hypothesis 2), we estimated a moderation model (Model 2) that added the moderation effect of employee power-distance orientation on the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX. Unstandardized coefficient estimates of Model 2 are presented in Table 4. As shown in Table 4, the interaction term between benevolent leadership and employee power-distance orientation was positively related to LMX ($\gamma = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$). Following Cohen et al. (2003) recommendations, we plotted this interaction at conditional values of power-distance orientation (one standard deviation above, below, and equal to the mean). As shown in Fig. 2, the positive relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX was stronger for employees with higher levels of power-distance orientation. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

We also examined the conditional indirect effects of benevolent leadership on creativity through LMX at

Table 4 Hierarchical linear modeling results (Study 2)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	LMX	Creativity	LMX	Creativity
Intercept	5.02** (0.07)	5.10** (0.09)	5.07** (0.07)	5.10** (0.09)
Gender	-0.33 (0.27)	-0.37** (0.11)	-0.35 (0.23)	-0.36** (0.12)
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Education	0.11 (0.09)	0.15 (0.11)	0.14 (0.09)	0.14 (0.12)
Organizational tenure	-0.06 (0.07)	0.08 (0.05)	-0.07 (0.07)	0.08 (0.05)
Time working with current supervisor	0.09 (0.08)	-0.00 (0.06)	0.10 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.06)
Gender similarity	-0.14 (0.26)	-0.12 (0.11)	-0.19 (0.23)	-0.10 (0.11)
Agreeableness	0.07 (0.09)	-0.11 (0.06)	0.06 (0.09)	-0.11 (0.06)
Emotional stability	0.08 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.05)	0.09 (0.07)	-0.09 (0.06)
Openness	0.01 (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	0.01 (0.05)	0.15** (0.06)
Benevolent leadership	0.52** (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.52** (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)
Power distance	-0.17* (0.07)	-0.13** (0.04)	-0.15** (0.06)	-0.13** (0.04)
LMX		0.17* (0.07)		0.18* (0.07)
Benevolent leadership \times power distance			0.12** (0.04)	-0.03 (0.02)

$N = 391$. Gender was coded “0” for men and “1” for women. Education was coded “0” for “associate degree,” “1” for “bachelor degree,” and “2” for “master degree or above.” Gender similarity was coded “0” for that the gender between subordinate and supervisor is different and “1” for that the gender between subordinate and supervisor is the same. Entries are unstandardized estimations of the fixed effects. Estimations of the standard errors are in parentheses. LMX leader–member exchange

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test)

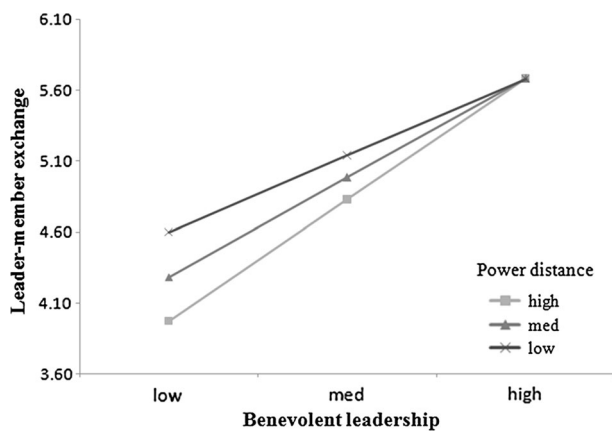


Fig. 2 Interaction between benevolent leadership and followers' power-distance orientation on leader-member exchange

varying values of power-distance orientation (1 SD above the mean, the mean, and 1 SD below the mean) using Bauer et al. (2006) method. As presented in Table 5, results indicated that the conditional indirect effect for benevolent leadership via LMX on supervisor-rated creativity was 0.11 with a 95 % confidence interval (CI) of (0.03, 0.21) for employees with higher levels of power-distance orientation versus 0.07 with a 95 % CI of (0.02, 0.13) for employees with lower levels of power-distance orientation. The difference of the indirect effects between the two conditions was 0.04 with a 95 % CI of (0.01, 0.10). Thus, Hypothesis 3 (proposing the moderation of the indirect effect of benevolent leadership on creativity by power-distance orientation) was supported, indicating that when employee power-distance orientation is higher, benevolent leadership has a stronger relation to creativity via LMX.

General Discussion

We found that benevolent leadership, a virtuous leadership style that prevails in China as well as other paternalistic cultures, was positively related to subordinates' reports of LMX, which in turn was positively related to employees' supervisor-rated creativity. That is, LMX mediated the relationship between benevolent leadership and subordinates'

supervisor-rated creativity. Under the cultural backdrop of high power distance, we also investigated whether individuals' power-distance orientation is able to impact upon the way that they respond to benevolent leadership. We found that subordinates' power-distance orientation strengthened the positive relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX, and strengthened the indirect effect of benevolent leadership on employee creativity through LMX.

Our findings offer important contributions to the understanding of leadership, and insight into how cultural values are able to shape organizational processes. In terms of the literature on leadership, the results presented in Study 1 represent the first attempt to understand the causal nature of the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX. Although prior research has established that benevolent leadership and LMX are distinct, scholars have held different views on the causal ordering between these two constructs. While some researchers have examined benevolent leadership as an antecedent of LMX (e.g., Chan and Mak 2012; Zhang et al. 2015), others have deemed benevolent leadership as an outcome of LMX (Ansari et al. 2004; Pellegrini and Scandura 2006, 2008). Given that these studies tested hypotheses using cross-sectional data, they were unable to provide strong inference of the causal relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX. By using two-wave repeated measures and cross-lagged analyses in Study 1, our results suggest that benevolent leadership serves as an important antecedent of LMX with the latter having no significant reciprocal influence on benevolent leadership. This is important in that our research provides some of the first insight into the causal ordering between benevolent leadership and LMX, which suggests that virtuous leader behavior, such as demonstrating holistic care about followers, can help leaders develop high-quality dyadic exchange relationships with followers.

Our research also extends previous knowledge about the positive link between benevolent leadership and creativity by uncovering the mechanisms under which this phenomenon exists. This is particularly pertinent to paternalistic cultural contexts where benevolent leadership is one of the most highly prevalent leadership styles. Drawing on

Table 5 Moderated mediation results (Study 2)

Outcome variables	Level of power distance	Indirect effects and 95 % CI	Difference of effects and 95 % CI
Follower creativity	Low (-1 SD)	0.07 (0.02– 0.13)	0.04 (0.01– 0.10)
	High (+1 SD)	0.11 (0.03– 0.21)	

N = 391. Indirect effects represent the mediating effect of leader-member exchange through which benevolent leadership linked to followers' creativity at varying levels of followers' power-distance orientation

CI confident intervals

social exchange perspective, we found that benevolent leadership was positively related to employee creativity through the effect of LMX, and to our best knowledge, this is a first in the published literature on how benevolent leadership is linked to employee creativity. This finding suggests that leaders' individualized and holistic caring about followers' personal and familial well-being enhances the development of high-quality leader–follower relationships, which in turn facilitates followers' creativity performance. As such, the result also suggests that LMX is a proximal component through which benevolent leadership influences more distal individual behavioral outcomes (i.e., creativity). In other words, benevolent leadership acts as an important tool that facilitates high-quality LMX, thereby promoting high levels of follower's creativity.

Not only do our findings hold important contributions to the understanding of leadership, we also demonstrate that individual cultural values, in particular, power-distance orientation, is able to impact important leadership outcomes. Although previous research demonstrated that benevolent leadership links to a wide range of significant subordinate outcomes (e.g., Cheng et al. 2002a; Farh and Cheng 2000; Liang et al. 2007), little has been done to investigate the role that cultural values play in these relationships. Since cultural values influence how subordinates react to leader behavior, it is important to take subordinates' cultural values into account when exploring the effects of benevolent leadership so as to have a deeper understanding of leadership effectiveness.

With special consideration of the Chinese cultural context and its high levels of power distance, we examined the way that subordinates' power-distance orientation is able to shift the outcomes of benevolent leadership. We conceptualized power distance as a type of individual difference because previous research has repeatedly demonstrated that power distance has substantive within-country variations, particularly in large countries such as China and the United States (e.g., Clugston et al. 2000; Kirkman et al. 2006; Taras et al. 2011). This suggests that, although China is generally viewed as a country with high power-distance culture, there are both high-power-distance and low-power-distance individuals in this context.

Our descriptive results provide support for this argument. The scores on power-distance orientation in our sample demonstrated a sizable variation (mean = 2.81, SD = 1.02, ranged from 1.00 to 6.17). This distribution is consistent with previous research on individual power distance using Chinese samples (e.g., mean = 2.88, SD = 0.75, see Cole et al. 2013; mean = 2.68, SD = 1.17 in Study 1, and mean = 2.55, SD = 1.11 in Study 2, see Lin et al. 2013). Distribution of individual power distance using American sample also has similar variation (e.g., mean = 2.35, SD = 1.05, see Study 1 in Botero and Van

Dyne 2009). These figures suggest that, in terms of the diversity of individual power distance, the Chinese sample used in our research shares great similarity with previous research conducted in both China and the United States. Thus, it is plausible to examine the moderating effects of power-distance orientation in the Chinese context.

Our research found that employees' power-distance orientation moderated the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX, as well as the indirect effect of benevolent leadership on employee creativity through LMX. Previous studies looking at the boundary conditions of the effect of benevolent leadership on followers' creativity have focused on leader-related factors such as leaders' gender (Wang et al. 2013), as well as follower-related factors such as followers' identity-related variables (e.g., creative role identity, Wang and Cheng 2010). However, while benevolent leadership is embedded in cultural values underlying the Confucian doctrine, this line of research has largely neglected whether and how followers' cultural values could shape the relation between benevolent leadership and followers' creativity, which is the focus in the current paper. Specifically, we found that the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX, as well as the indirect effect of benevolent leadership on employee creativity through LMX, were stronger for employees with high power-distance orientation. These findings were substantial and robust, even when taking into account possible confounding effects of demographics and personality (all these control variables had sizable amounts of variance in our samples). These findings suggest that employee power-distance orientation has an important catalyzing effect that amplifies the benevolent leadership—LMX relationship.

While previous research has viewed power distance as taboo for organizational outcomes (Carl et al. 2004) and found that leadership styles originating from western culture (e.g., transformational leadership) have less beneficial effects on subordinates with high power-distance orientation (e.g., Farh et al. 2007; Kirkman et al. 2009), there has been a lack of insight into the type of leadership behaviors that are compatible with followers high in power-distance orientation. As one of the few studies that emphasizes the beneficial outcomes of individual power-distance orientation, our findings extend previous research as they suggest that under a cultural context that is characterized by paternalism, the benefits of benevolent leadership on LMX is exacerbated by subordinate's power-distance orientation. Such results point toward the importance of the congruence between leadership style and subordinates' cultural values. It suggests that it is the fit between the style of leaders and that of their followers, rather than leadership style or subordinates' cultural values alone, that matters in influencing subordinate outcomes. Subordinates with certain

values, such as those who hold high respect for authority, may desire and be more responsive under benevolent leadership, in turn becoming more productive under such leadership. These findings also contribute to social exchange theory by demonstrating the crucial role of cultural values in the social exchange process.

It is worth noting that although followers with high power-distance orientation reported lower levels of LMX on average (see the negative relationship between power-distance orientation and LMX in Tables 3, 4), their levels of LMX increased dramatically when the levels of benevolent leadership increased. This result suggests that, even though followers with low power-distance orientation generally demonstrate better LMX quality than their high-power-distance counterparts, their LMX quality is less influenced by benevolent leaders. This might be because followers with low power-distance orientation value participation and proactively involve in interaction with leaders (Kirkman et al. 2009), which makes them better able to develop high-quality exchange relationship with leaders no matter how benevolent their leaders are. On the other hand, benevolent leadership is more effective in developing high-quality exchange relationships with followers who have higher levels of power-distance orientation. This might be due to the reason that followers with high power-distance orientation maintain greater social distance with their leaders (Farh et al. 2007), which makes leader benevolence necessary for followers to develop exchange relationship with leaders.

Moreover, the moderating effects of power-distance orientation suggests that benevolent leadership is an effective way to enhance LMX and employee creativity in the Chinese context where its culture is characterized by high power distance (Hofstede 2005), which may explain the prevalence of such leadership style in China. China has a culture that highly values hierarchical social relations, which can be traced back to the Confucian ethic of respect for vertical order, and long history of imperial rule (Farh and Cheng 2000; Hofstede 2005; Redding 1990). These unique features of Chinese context are the reflections of high power-distance values (Hofstede 2001; House et al. 2004). Given that benevolent leadership stems from Confucian ideology, which is founded on social relations, such as “benevolent leader with loyal minister” and “kind father with filial son” (Farh and Cheng 2000), it fits with individuals’ values and expectations in the Chinese context and thus becomes a viable management strategy in such context. This may probably explain why individuals in China are more likely to demonstrate preference to benevolent leadership and why benevolent leadership is so prevalent in high-power-distance societies such as China.

Our research also complements previous literature on LMX and creativity. Previous research have examined the

relationship between LMX and employee creativity, as well as possible moderating effects on this relationship (e.g., Liao et al. 2010; Tierney et al. 1999), which is important in that they provide insights into how and when dyadic relationship between leader and follower is linked to followers’ creativity. However, from the leaders’ perspective, it is crucial for them to not only understand the importance of LMX in boosting followers’ creativity, but more importantly, to know what they should do specifically to enhance the quality of their relationships with followers and thus facilitate followers’ creativity. By showing benevolent leadership as an antecedent of LMX and the moderating role of followers’ power-distance orientation, the current research sheds light on (1) whether leaders can develop high-quality relationships with followers by demonstrating benevolence, (2) how followers’ characteristics shape the benevolent leadership—LMX relationship, and (3) the effectiveness of benevolent leadership in promoting LMX and followers’ creativity. All of these contributions extend the literature on LMX and creativity.

Practical Implications

Our findings also provide some suggestions for practice. First, our findings suggest that benevolent leadership is related to higher levels of LMX and therefore related to higher levels of employee creativity. This points toward the importance of developing leaders’ benevolent behavior. Organizations could provide leadership trainings aimed at cultivating and promoting leader benevolence, encouraging leaders to demonstrate personal care, support, and guidance in both work and non-work domain so as to improve LMX and thus enhance subordinate creativity.

Second, programs aiming at enhancing exchange relationships between leaders and subordinates may also be helpful to improve employee creativity because LMX is a proximal predictor of creativity. In order to develop high-quality LMX, organizations could create social activities for leaders and followers to provide them with more opportunities to engage in deep interaction (Schriesheim et al. 1999; Sparrowe and Liden 1997).

Third, our examination of the moderating effects of employee power-distance orientation revealed that the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX was stronger for employees with high power-distance orientation. This result suggests that leaders should be concerned about their subordinates’ cultural values when attempting to exert influence on them. Rather than treating all subordinates in a similar way, leaders may need to enact differently depending on the cultural values held by individual subordinates. Compared with those holding lower levels of power-distance orientation, for subordinates holding higher levels of power-distance orientation it would be more

worthwhile for leaders to engage in benevolent leader behaviors such as showing concern about their daily life, in order to develop higher-quality relationships with these subordinates and boost their creativity. Therefore, in order to foster creative performance, there lies merit for leaders to notice each subordinate's values of power distance manifested in daily interactions and demonstrate more benevolent behaviors to those who have high levels of power-distance orientation.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations in the current research need to be addressed. First, we tested our hypotheses using samples that had relatively short organizational tenures (i.e., Study 1: mean = 4.95 years, SD = 3.91; Study 2: mean = 1.52 years, SD = 1.13). Although we controlled for the possible confounding effects of organizational tenure in our analyses, it is still questionable whether the effects of benevolent leadership on LMX and creativity can be generalized to other samples, especially to those with longer tenures. As such, we conducted supplementary analyses to see whether organizational tenure would moderate the relationship between benevolent leadership, LMX, and creativity. Results demonstrated no significant moderating effects of organizational tenure, which provides further support of the robustness of our findings. Nevertheless, future research should test the validity of our findings using more heterogeneous samples (e.g., employees from different companies varied in industries, company sizes, or years in business).

Second, we collected data solely in a Chinese context, which may again limit the generalizability of our findings. For example, although the distributions of the scores on benevolent leadership in the current research demonstrated a wide range of variations (i.e., Study 1: mean = 4.56, SD = 1.47, ranged from 1.00 to 7.00 at Time 1, and mean = 4.54, SD = 1.31, ranged from 1.00 to 7.00 at Time 2; Study 2: mean = 3.98, SD = 1.35, ranged from 1.00 to 7.00), which makes it plausible to examine the effects of benevolent leadership, whether the effects of benevolent leadership on LMX and creativity differ in other countries need to be further examined. Besides China, benevolent leadership is also prevalent in other countries that value paternalism, including countries in the Pacific Asia such as Japan (Uhl-Bien et al. 1990), Malaysia (Ansari et al. 2004), and South Korea (Kim 1994), countries in the Middle East such as Turkey (Pellegrini and Scandura 2006), and countries in Latin America such as Mexico (Martinez 2005). Therefore, the research question about how benevolent leadership impacts creativity is best suited in a cross-country context. Across these countries that value benevolent leadership, there are considerable differences in political systems, levels of economic

development, business operations, religion traditions, and other specific aspects of cultural values, all of which may influence benevolent leadership and its effect on followers' creativity (Cheng et al. 2014). Data collected from multiple countries that value benevolent leadership would largely bolster the external validity of our study. Thus, we expect future research to investigate the proposed relations with samples from other paternalistic countries beyond China.

Furthermore, another interesting extension of the current research is to expand its scope to nonpaternalistic, Western contexts and examine whether the hypothesized relationship about benevolent leadership and creativity, its mechanism, and boundary condition would differ in those nonpaternalistic cultures. On one hand, it may be the case that benevolent leadership will backfire in Western contexts since benevolent leadership shows consideration not only on the followers' job but also extends to their personal life, which goes against Western values such as respect for personal privacy and separating work from personal life. On the other hand, benevolent leadership may be welcomed by employees since benevolent leaders pay attention to and care about employees' individual needs, and previous studies have shown that individualized consideration, as one facet of transformational leadership, is positively related with numerous favorable outcomes (Bass 2010). Findings about the effect of benevolent leadership in Western context can answer questions about the generalizability of this leadership construct across paternalistic and nonpaternalistic cultures and make great contributions to the benevolent leadership literature.

Although we tested the moderating role of power-distance orientation due to its theoretical significance in the leadership process (Cole et al. 2013; Kirkman et al. 2009; Schaubroeck et al. 2007), it is possible that other culture-related variables might also moderate the relationship between benevolent leadership and LMX. For instance, humane orientation, a culture dimension identified in the GLOBE project (House et al. 2004) as "the degree to which an organization or society encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others" (House et al. 2004, p. 569), may play a role in the effect of benevolent leadership. It is possible that the benefits of benevolent leadership are only salient in organizations with higher humane orientation; while benevolence from leaders may be deemed inconsistent with organizational norms and thus not associated with desirable outcomes in organizations with lower humane orientation.

While we tested the mediation role of LMX based on the social exchange perspective, the mechanism through which benevolent leaders links to creativity may be more complicated. Future research can test other possible mechanisms, such as followers' psychological safety (Edmondson

1999). Since followers receive personal care from and thus trust in benevolent leaders, they are more likely to feel interpersonally safe and have more courage to express their own ideas and take risks, which in turn may increase their creativity performance. Another possible mediator could be employees' trust in leader (Chen et al. 2014). Benevolent leaders, who demonstrate holistic concern about followers, develop followers' trust in leaders, which would in turn motivate followers' engagement and thus promote their performance such as creativity (Chen et al. 2014; Wang et al. 2013). Together with the current research, these future studies will provide a more sophisticated and comprehensive picture about the influence of benevolent leadership on creativity.

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