

*Two-way in-/congruence in three components of paternalistic leadership and subordinate justice: The mediating role of perceptions of renqing*

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**Two-way in-/congruence in three components of paternalistic leadership and subordinate justice: The mediating role of perceptions of *renqing***

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**Abstract** This paper examines the effects of two-way congruences and incongruences between three components of paternalistic leadership, namely, benevolence, morality, and authoritarianism, on overall subordinate justice perceptions. We hypothesize that these dyad in-/congruences would differentially predict subordinate overall justice perceptions, with perceptions of *renqing* as a mediator. With data collected from two-wave surveys in the People's Republic of China, the results indicate that dyad congruences and incongruences between benevolence, morality, and authoritarianism have significant impacts on subordinate perceptions of *renqing* and, ultimately, their overall justice perception. Our findings underscore that to fully understand the influencing processes of paternalistic leadership on subordinate outcomes, it is important to take into account the context and the different combinations of its three dimensions.

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**Keywords** Paternalistic leadership • Components in-/congruence • Perceptions of *renqing* • Overall justice • **Mediating mechanism**

## Introduction

Paternalistic leadership, which has its cultural roots in The —Chinese traditional ethics of Confucianism, includes paternalistic leadership, which involves fatherly benevolence, moral integrity, and strong authority (Chen et al. 2014; Cheng et al. 2004; Farh and Cheng 2000; Hiller et al. 2019). It combines three dimensions: benevolence, morality, and authoritarianism (Farh and Cheng 2000). Scholars have examined the consequential effects of paternalistic leadership on subordinate and team outcomes in many societies and concluded that paternalistic leadership is more acceptable and prevalent in those regions whose cultures values hierarchy and collectivism (e.g., China, Latin America, Africa, and Middle East) while it is less prevalent in countries characterized as Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic such as the United States of America (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, 2010; Hiller et al. 2019). Indeed, prior studies have gone so far as to highlight the extensive impacts of culture on the effectiveness of paternalistic leadership in different contexts (Hiller et al. 2019). But few have empirically examined how the different combinations of leader's paternalistic behaviors will trigger subordinates' perceptions of cultural-specific notions (such as *renqing* in China) and then to alter their justice perceptions. We ask: How will the two-way combinations of three dimensions of paternalistic leadership affect subordinates' perceptions of *renqing* and then overall justice?

Most previous work has focused on both the effect of the unitary paternalistic leadership and that of the three components; and found a constantly positive relationship between unitary paternalistic leadership, benevolence and morality effects on subordinate outcomes such as organizational commitment and performance (Chan et al. 2013; Hiller et al. 2019). Recent research (e.g., Cheng et al. 2004; Niu et al. 2009; Tian and Sanchez 2017), however, started to pay attention to the interactive effects of the three components of paternalistic leadership. The evidence indicates that *only* the two-way interactions (i.e., benevolence×morality,

benevolence×authoritarianism, and morality×authoritarianism) exert significant effects on subordinate outcomes: The three-way interaction (benevolence×morality×authoritarianism) does not significantly relate to them (Cheng et al. 2004). Moreover, previous studies also found that the three two-way interactions tend to exert differential impacts on subordinate outcomes, including identification, compliance, gratitude (Cheng et al. 2004), justice perceptions (Zhou & Long 2007), work motivation (Niu et al. 2009), and affective trust, knowledge sharing and innovative behavior (Tian and Sanchez 2017).

To further examine the interactive effects, scholars have recommended polynomial regression models with response surface analyses (Edwards, 2002; 2007; Shanock et al., 2010). This approach provides a more nuanced view that traditional moderating analyses cannot offer, in which the relationships between the combination of two predictor variables and outcome variable are detected in a three-dimensional space (Shanock et al., 2010). So far, few studies have touched upon the topic of the two-way congruences and incongruences between the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership and how these combinations impact subordinate outcomes.

One exception is the pioneering work of Wang et al. (2018; p. 686), who proposed “a new typology of paternalistic leadership styles” by identifying three combinations of benevolence and authoritarianism, namely, classical paternalistic leadership (CPL), benevolence-dominant (BDL), and authoritarianism-dominant (ADL); they found both CPL and BDL have a positive relationship with subordinate performance while ADL does not. Wang et al.’s study demonstrated that in-/congruent combinations of benevolence and authoritarianism exist, and differently affect subordinate performance; however, what remains unknown is that how these two-way combinations, especially those involving morality, affect subordinate overall justice perception and whether the Chinese culture-specific construct, *renqing*, serves as a mediator.

As with any other aspect of HRM, leadership and justice are concepts that need to be understood in specific contexts (Cooke 2018; Yakob 2020). The regional level (Cooke and Kim 2018) and the national level (Brewster Mayrhofer and Farndale 2018) are particularly important. Social representation theory assumes that every society has its own culturally-specific representations. Representation is an individual and collective activity of the simultaneous establishment of ‘common sense’ (Bauer and Gaskell 1999; Moscovici 1981; 1988). To understand any aspect of people management or HRM in China, we have to understand what constitutes ‘common sense’ in the Chinese context. One specific feature of the Chinese culture is *renqing*. There is no direct English-language translation of *renqing*.

*Renqing* has three different meanings: one refers to people’s emotional responses triggered by various social situations; the second refers to the resources that an individual can offer to others as gifts and favors; the third means a set of social norms that requires people to express good emotional feelings for others, and to conduct contextually-proper social actions in different situations (Hwang 1987; Wang 2007; Leung et al. 2014). According to Ren, Chen and Chen (2020), in the work context, perceptions of *renqing* refer to employees’ perceptions of the extent to which people’s actions in their organizations follow the *renqing* norm. It involves two dimensions: affective interaction and discretionary consideration. Although *renqing* is a culturally-specific notion understood and accepted by individuals who are born into such contexts, it does not mean that employees’ perceptions of *renqing* in the workplace are equivalent to or independent of the impacts of contextual factors. It is people’s actions, including leader behaviors and coworker interactions, that exert direct effects on the level of *renqing* perceptions in the workplace. Given that both paternalistic leadership and *renqing* have cultural roots in the Chinese traditional ethics of Confucianism, they may be significantly related to each other (Farh and Cheng 2000; Hwang 1987; Zhang et al. 2019).

*Renqing* manifests in every aspect of Chinese social life (Hwang 1987; Jia et al. 2012;

Yen et al. 2017; Zhang 2006). Many scholars (e.g., Hwang 1987; Leung et al. 2014; Zhang and Yang 1998; 2001) have noted how the *renqing* norm regulates all interpersonal relationships and guides all social actions in Chinese society. More importantly, Zhang and Yang (1998) found that the *renqing* norm, as a widespread social representation, also underlies Chinese employees' judgement of distributive justice in the workplace. Then the experience of distributive justice, in conjunction with other justice-relevant information (e.g., procedural justice and interactive justice), will be processed to create the general justice judgment, as has been depicted in the "judgmental phase" by the fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001). One typical variable which indicates the general justice judgment is overall justice, which refers to the extent to which employees perceive the justice of their organization as a whole (Ambrose and Schminke 2009; Aryee et al. 2015; Kim and Leung 2007; Kim et al. 2017).

Integrating social representation theory and fairness heuristic theory, we contend that perceptions of *renqing*, in the workplace, serves as a 'bridge' (a social representation process) that links paternalistic leadership to subordinate views of overall justice. Specifically, when a leader's behaviors show evidence of paternalistic leadership, that will go a long way towards meeting the implicit leadership expectations of Chinese employees, leading to high-levels of perceptions of *renqing* and, in turn, to significant feelings of overall justice.

We offer the following contributions. First, by integrating social representation theory and fairness heuristic theory, we highlight a consecutive theoretical link from the two-way combinations of benevolence, morality, and authoritarianism, to perceptions of *renqing*, and to overall justice in the context of Chinese organizations. Our findings of the significant mediating role of perceptions of *renqing* advance current understandings of the mechanisms underlying the relationships between culture-specific leadership to subordinate outcomes. Second, by using polynomial regression to precisely model the effects of different two-way

combinations of benevolence, morality, and authoritarianism on subordinate outcomes, we follow the call by Wang et al. (2018) to shed light on the new enhanced typology of paternalistic leadership. Our study highlights the fact that to fully understand the effects of paternalistic leadership on subordinate **overall justice** one should consider it as a multidimensional rather than a unitary construct (Hiller et al. 2019; Wang et al. 2018; Zhang et al. 2015). In particular, this requires an exploration of the in-/congruent **two-way** combinations of its three components.

The theoretical framework of this study is shown in Figure 1.

----- Insert Figure 1 about here -----

## Theory and hypotheses

### Paternalistic leadership and the in-/congruent combinations of its components

In highlighting leadership styles in the Chinese context, Farh and Cheng (2000) developed and defined paternalistic leadership as leaders' behaviors that combines fatherly benevolence, moral integrity and strong authority (Wu et al. 2012, p. 97): **benevolence**, morality and authoritarianism. Benevolence involves leaders' behavior that demonstrates individualized, holistic care, kindness, **and concern for** followers' well-being. Morality depicts leaders' pursuit of a moral character, including self-discipline, unselfishness and personal virtues. Authoritarianism refers to absolute authority, control and strict discipline over followers. **A quick glance at these definitions of benevolence, morality, and authoritarianism triggers the impression that paternalistic leadership has three paradoxical dimensions, however, the yin-yang philosophy, a Chinese traditional ideology, helps to explicate why these three paradoxical dimensions coexist in paternalistic leadership (Chen 2002; Fang 2012; Wu et al. 2012).**

The yin-yang philosophy highlights a dynamic, dialectical, and holistic world view



(Fang 2012), in which paradoxical components such as the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership, actually coexist, interact, and form ‘paternalism’ as a whole, which affects subordinate outcomes (Cheng et al. 2004). Consequently, scholars (e.g., Hiller et al. 2019) have focused ~~on~~ not only on the effects of the unitary paternalistic leadership but also on those of its three components. Their findings have **consistently** confirmed the positive effects of ~~the~~ unitary paternalistic leadership, benevolence, and morality, as well as the negative effects of authoritarianism on subordinate outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organization-based self-esteem and performance (Chan et al. 2013; Hiller et al. 2019). Some scholars examine their interactive effects (Cheng et al. 2004; Niu et al. 2009; Tian and Sanchez 2017) and find that the two-way interactions exert significant effects on subordinate outcomes, but that the three-way interaction **does not**. **In general**, such interaction effects support the idea that different combinations of benevolence, morality and authoritarianism affect subordinates differently. However, the traditional analysis of moderation cannot precisely model the impacts of the in-/congruencies that we need to fully understand paternalistic leadership (Wang et al. 2018).

Wang et al. (2018) use polynomial regression<sub>s</sub> to model the effects of the combinations of two components (benevolence and authoritarianism) of paternalistic leadership on subordinate **task performance**. Using a Taiwanese military sample, they find that subordinates’ task performance is positively related to CPL and BDL, but negatively associated with ADL. These results suggest the need for a closer look at this enhanced typology of paternalistic leadership in order to shed light on the effects of the combinations of its three components.

So, this study offers an enhanced view of paternalistic leadership by bringing its third component—morality—to this new typology. To simplify, we class the BDL and ADL into the incongruence group; and the CPL into the congruence group. Accordingly, we propose and

define six types in terms of each of the two components of paternalistic leadership<sup>1</sup>: B=M (the congruence of benevolence and morality), B=-M (the incongruence of benevolence and morality), B=A (the congruence of benevolence and authoritarianism), B=-A (the incongruence of benevolence and authoritarianism), M=A (the congruence of morality and authoritarianism), M=-A (the incongruence of morality and authoritarianism). The congruent combinations: X=Y (i.e. B=M, B=A, and M=A) manifest in the continuum from both low to both high, while the incongruent ones: X=-Y (i.e. B=-M, B=-A, and M=-A) manifest in the continuum from the combination of low X and high Y to that of high X and low Y.

#### **The in-/congruent combinations of B, M and A, and subordinate perceptions of *renqing***

To develop our understanding of the two dimensions (affective interaction and discretionary consideration) in perceptions of *renqing*, we need to clarify meanings. Affective interaction refers to employees' perceptions of the extent to which the *renqing* norm typically regulates interpersonal interactions within the workplace. The interpersonal interactions of the *renqing* norm include expressing good emotions (such as respect, trust and sympathy), caring for others and providing help. The other dimension, discretionary consideration, refers to employees' perceptions of the extent to which the *renqing* norm typically regulates managerial practices within their organizational settings. The *renqing* norm requires Chinese managers to show flexibility (Zhu et al 2018) by considering specific situations faced by employees and paying attention to both rational criteria (e.g., formal rules) and *renqing* factors when making personnel decisions.

As we explained before, *renqing* serve as a 'common sense' underlying the Chinese

<sup>1</sup> Note that in this paper 'X=Y' does not mean that 'X is equal to Y' or 'the two values share the same meaning', for X and Y are two distinct variables. As in Beus, Lucianetti, & Arthur (2020) and other studies (e.g., Wang et al., 2018; 2020), we measured the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership using the same response scale, and thus scores from these measures allow us to compare whether leader's behaviors of benevolence and morality (or authoritarianism) are equally frequent or if one is more or less frequent than the other. In particular, 'X = Y' shortly represents that leader's behaviors of benevolence and morality (or authoritarianism) are equally frequent; while 'X = -Y' means that one is more or less frequent than the other.

social representation process, in which leader behaviors are evaluated by ~~the~~ employees through comparing them with the *renqing* norm. Although *renqing* is a culturally-specific notion which is naturally recognized by the individuals who are born in such context, perceptions of *renqing* highlight ~~s~~ how employees perceive people's actions, especially leader behaviors, in line with the *renqing* norm. Consequently, subordinates' perceptions of *renqing* vary with the leader's display of benevolence, morality and authoritarianism. Given that both paternalistic leadership and *renqing* are rooted in the traditional ethics of Confucianism (Farh and Cheng 2000; Wu et al. 2012), ~~which highlights the~~ benevolence most, it is reasonable to expect leader benevolence, which contains leaders' care and concern for subordinate well-being (Farh and Cheng 2000), ~~is to be~~ the component of paternalistic leadership that best meets the *renqing* norm as conveying good feelings (e.g. care and kindness) for others (Hwang 1987; Leung et al. 2014; Zhang and Yang 2006) and the one that should have a positive effect ~~of benevolence~~ on subordinates' perceptions of *renqing*.

The other dimension, morality, refers to leaders' pursuit of moral character. "This moral character ... contains a broad set of Confucian values such as sense of responsibility to subordinates, propriety, tolerance, reasonableness, filial piety, and human-heartedness" (Farh and Cheng 2000, p. 94). Given that leaders' virtues as a moral character are shaped by the social norms in particular regions (Farh and Cheng 2000), we contend that morality also meets the requests of the *renqing* norm and has positive effects on subordinates' perceptions of *renqing*. Hence:

**Hypothesis 1a** Congruence between leader's benevolence and morality (B=M) will be positively related to subordinate perceptions of *renqing*, that is, subordinate perceptions of *renqing* will be higher when they perceive benevolence and morality are both high than when both are low.

Given the most essential requirement of the *renqing* norm is to express good emotional feelings for others, including showing sympathy, caring for, and helping others (Zhang and Yang 2006), we argue that benevolence will show stronger positive effects on subordinate perceptions of *renqing* than morality. Therefore, we propose that perceptions of *renqing* will be higher when subordinates perceive a combined display of high benevolence and low morality than when they perceive an incongruity of low benevolence and high morality:

**Hypothesis 1b** Incongruence between leader's benevolence and morality (B≠M) will be positively related to subordinate perceptions of *renqing*, that is, subordinate perceptions of *renqing* will be higher when they perceive a combination of high benevolence and low morality than that of low benevolence and high morality.

Authoritarianism, which emphasizes control, power and obedience, has been repeatedly confirmed to have negative effects on subordinate outcomes (Hiller et al. 2019). Nonetheless, the interaction/combination of benevolence and authoritarianism has been proven to be positively associated with subordinate outcomes. Specifically, scholars found that the two-way interaction has positive effects on subordinates' gratitude, compliance, identification (Cheng et al. 2004) and affective trust (Tian and Sanchez 2017). Using polynomial regression, Wang et al (2018) found positive effects of the congruence of benevolence and authoritarianism on subordinate performance. Such results, with the findings that subordinates tend to attribute authoritarianism to good intentions when it is combined with a high-level of benevolence (Chan et al. 2013), suggest it is reasonable to propose that:

**Hypothesis 2a** Congruence between leader's benevolence and authoritarianism (B=A) will be positively related to subordinate perceptions of *renqing*, that is, subordinate perceptions of *renqing* will be higher when benevolence and authoritarianism are both high than when both are low.

Indeed, authoritarianism has its cultural roots in Chinese patriarchal tradition, wherein the father-son bond is treated as the prototype for leader-subordinate relationships. Chinese society inculcates the obligations of ‘followership’ into subordinates to legitimate fatherly authority (Farh and Cheng 2000). Nowadays, however, Chinese people, especially younger ones, are becoming more individualistic (concerned with e.g. power, hedonism and self-direction) and less collective (e.g. tradition and conformity), though not altogether forsaking their Confucian values of societal harmony, virtuous interpersonal behavior, and interpersonal harmony (Ralston et al. 1999). Given that “the power and legitimacy of authority depends on the subordinates’ internalization of their roles” (Farh and Cheng 2000, p.103), we propose that employees at the current workplace identify themselves less as traditional ‘subordinates’ who are required to exhibit conformity to leaders’ control and power; and are more likely to assess authoritarianism as a hindrance for interpersonal harmony, leading to low levels of perception of *renqing*. So:

**Hypothesis 2b** Incongruence between leader’s benevolence and authoritarianism

( $B=-A$ ) will be positively related to subordinates’ perceptions of *renqing*, that is, subordinates’ perceptions of *renqing* will be higher when they perceive a combination of high benevolence and low authoritarianism than that of low benevolence and high authoritarianism.

Cheng et al. (2004) indicated the negative effects of the two-way interaction of morality and authoritarianism on subordinates’ identification, compliance and gratitude. This, according to the authors, is because in traditional China, when righteous managers carried out policies with an authoritarian approach, they tended to execute severe punishments on the subordinates, no matter what the situation, resulting in people having a cruel and negative impression of them (Pye 1985), leading to a reduction in perceptions of *renqing*. Hence:

**Hypothesis 3a** Congruence between leader's morality and authoritarianism ( $M=A$ ) will be negatively related to subordinate perceptions of *renqing*, that is, subordinate perceptions of *renqing* will be higher when morality and authoritarianism are both low than when both are high.

In contrast, when leaders display high morality combined with low authority, their subordinates tend to form a positive impression of them. Cheng et al. (2004) found that the positive correlation between morality and subordinates' responses will be stronger when authoritarianism is low than when it is high. As defined, the incongruence between morality and authoritarianism ( $M=-A$ ) manifests in a continuum from the combination of low morality and high authoritarianism to that of high morality and low authoritarianism. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 3b** Incongruence between leader's morality and authoritarianism ( $M=-A$ ) will be positively related to subordinate perceptions of *renqing*, that is, subordinates' perceptions of *renqing* will be higher when they perceive a combination of high morality and low authoritarianism than that of low morality and high authoritarianism.

### The mediating role of perceptions of *renqing*

There have been very few studies of the effects of paternalistic leadership on subordinates' overall justice, although some studies (e.g., Zhou and Long, 2007) have examined the impacts of the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership on subordinates' views of specific types of organizational justice (e.g., interactional justice). In particular, according to the multi-language meta-analyses of Hiller et al. (2019), both benevolence and morality exert positive effects on distributive and interactional justice; while authoritarianism only shows a significant negative effects on interactional justice, but is non-significant in relation to other justice perceptions. Moreover, as has been identified by Zhou and Long (2007), the two-way

interaction of morality and authoritarianism exerts significant negative effects on procedural and distributive justice; and that of benevolence and authoritarianism also has a negative relationship with interactional and informational justice.

Integrating social representation theory and fairness heuristic theory, we contend that perceptions of *renqing*, in the workplace, are ‘common sense’ which has been simultaneously established as a social representation process in evaluating leader behaviors and judging justice. In particular, we propose that perceptions of *renqing* serve as a ‘bridge’ that links paternalistic leadership to subordinates’ views of overall justice. We expect that subordinates’ perceptions of *renqing* vary with the leader’s interactive displays of benevolence, morality and authoritarianism, in particular, the two-way in-/congruences of benevolence, morality and authoritarianism. Now we focus on the effects of perceptions of *renqing* on overall justice.

Many scholars have postulated that Chinese societies employ a different conception of justice (Chiu 1991; Li 1999; Zhang and Yang 2006). This difference has been related to Confucianism’s highlighting of *ren* (benevolence) and *yi* (righteousness). The former requires people to express affect (*qing*) to others (Hwang 1987); and the latter requires fulfilling one’s moral obligations in any given context (Chiu 1991). The *renqing* norm, as the most prevalent social norm in Chinese society, is actually a combination of the requirements of Confucian’s *ren* and *yi* (Hwang 1987). In keeping with this notion, we expect perceptions of *renqing*, in turn, to directly influence subordinates’ views of overall justice.

Additionally, justice-relevant information such as leader behaviors will first influence subordinates’ judgment of their own position or status in their team, and then be used to form a judgment of overall justice (Lind 2001; Lind et al. 1998). A critical indicator of position and status in a team can be the quality of interpersonal relationships with others. To some extent, we believe that perceptions of *renqing* not only underlie Chinese social representation process

in evaluating leader behaviors and judging justice, but also imply the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace, which suggests position and status. These considerations provide the theoretical rationale for proposing that perceptions of *renqing* serve as a mediator in the relationship between the in-/congruence of leaders' benevolence, morality and authoritarianism and subordinates' overall justice perceptions:

**Hypothesis 4** The a) congruence of benevolence and morality ( $B=M$ ); and b) incongruence of benevolence and morality ( $B=-M$ ), has a positive indirect effect on subordinates' overall justice perception through their perceptions of *renqing*.

**Hypothesis 5** The a) congruence of benevolence and authoritarianism ( $B=A$ ); and b) incongruence of benevolence and authoritarianism ( $B=-A$ ), has a positive indirect effect on subordinates' overall justice perception through their perceptions of *renqing*.

**Hypothesis 6** The a) congruence of morality and authoritarianism ( $M=A$ ); and b) incongruence of morality and authoritarianism ( $M=-A$ ), has a) negative and b) positive indirect effects on subordinates' overall justice perception through their perceptions of *renqing*.

## Method

### Sample and procedures

We conducted two successive surveys to collect data from seven enterprises located in China. A time-lagged design was employed to reduce the potential risk of common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Questionnaires were administered to employees via human resources managers in each enterprise. To assure confidentiality, and to reduce participants' potential concerns about being evaluated, each questionnaire was enclosed within an envelope, and participants were informed that immediately after completing the questionnaire, they should put it back in the envelope, seal it, and then give it to their human resources manager to pass



on to us.

In the first wave of surveys, a total of 530 employees reported their perceptions of the leaders' paternalistic leadership and their own demographic information, with a response rate of 88.3%. Two weeks later, questionnaires for measuring employee perceptions of *renqing* and their overall justice perception were administered to the employees who completed the first survey via the same human resources managers in the same seven enterprises; 464 were returned (77.3%), of which 361 responses were matched with the first survey. Excluding the incomplete ones, the final sample pool contained 325 valid [paired](#) responses. Of the 325 employees, 66% were male. Their average age was 33.8, and the average organizational tenure was 9.6 years. 54.7% of them had a university degree or above. 44.5% of the participants occupied managerial positions. 65.5% worked in state-owned enterprises, with the rest working in private-owned or foreign owned companies.

## Measures

We use six-point Likert-type scales (one: strongly disagree; to six: strongly agree) to avoid the central tendency bias found among Chinese respondents (Yang and Chiu 1987; see Chen et al. 2014, p. 806). We employed translation and back-translation procedures as suggested by Brislin (1986) to translate all English items into Chinese.

*Paternalistic leadership.* The 15-item version scale developed by Cheng et al. (2014) was used to evaluate [subordinates' views of their senior's](#) paternalistic leadership. It has three subscales: benevolence, morality, and authoritarianism; and each consists of five items. Sample items are: "My leader often shows his/ her concern about me" (for benevolence); "My leader takes responsibility on the job and never shirks his/ her duty" (for morality); "My leader appears to be intimidating in front of his/ her subordinates" (for authoritarianism). The CFA results show that the three-factor model fits the data ( $\chi^2/df = 3.565$ , RMSEA = 0.089,

NFI = .923, IFI = .943, NNFI = .931, CFI = .943) better than alternative models, indicating good discriminant validity of this three-dimensional scale. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of three dimensions of paternalistic leadership scale was .923, .959, and .797, respectively.

*Perceptions of renqing.* The measure of perceptions of *renqing* was taken from Ren et al. (2020). The scale consists of two dimensions: *Affective interaction* (9 items) and discretionary consideration (5 items). One sample item of affective interaction is "If an employee or an employee's family is sick, the supervisor and coworkers will visit the patient and express their concerns." One sample item of discretionary consideration is "In managerial practices, my organization will consider the special situations faced by the employees rather than impose uniformity in all cases." The Cronbach's alphas of perceptions of *renqing* and its two dimensions are .923, .914 and .841, respectively.

*Overall justice.* The three-item overall justice scale developed by Kim and Leung (2007) was used. One sample item was "Overall, I believe I receive fair treatments from this organization." The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of this scale is .929.

*Control variables.* This study included as control variables individual's demographic variables, such as gender, age, organizational tenure, education level and position in the organization, as well as the organization's ownership. We measure the education level by five categories: middle school or below, high school, college, university, and postgraduate; organizational tenure as the number of years worked in the current enterprise; position in the organization as four categories: employees, junior manager, middle manager and senior manager. The organization's ownership was measured using four categories: state-owned, private-owned, foreign-owned and 'others.'

### **Analysis strategies**

*Tests of congruence and incongruence effects.* We used polynomial regression and response

surface analysis (Edwards 2007; Jia et al. 2018)<sup>2</sup>. In testing the hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, we estimated the following equation:

$$M = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Y + b_3X^2 + b_4XY + b_5Y^2 + e, \quad (1)$$

Where M represents perceptions of *renqing*; X and Y respectively represent two of benevolence, morality and authoritarianism. We then graph the response surfaces in which perceptions of *renqing* is plotted on the vertical axis, meanwhile X and Y are plotted on the perpendicular horizontal axes (Edwards and Parry 1993).

To test the congruence effects of B=M, B=A, and M=A (i.e., hypotheses 1a, 2a, and 3a), as specified by Edwards (2007), the key features of the X=Y line on the response surface were examined. To claim support for hypotheses of positive (or negative) congruence effect, the slope of this line (i.e., computed as  $b_1+b_2$ ) needs to be positive (or negative) and significantly differ from zero; meanwhile the curvature (i.e., computed as  $b_3+b_4+b_5$ ) should be nonsignificant. To test incongruence effect of B=-M, B=-A, and M=-A (i.e., hypotheses 1b, 2b, and 3b), the key features of the X=-Y line on the response surface were examined. To claim support for hypotheses of positive incongruence effect, the slope of this X=-Y line (i.e., computed as  $b_1-b_2$ ) should be positive and significantly differ from zero and the curvature (i.e., computed as  $b_3-b_4+b_5$ ) needs to be nonsignificant.

*Tests of the mediating role of perceptions of renqing.* Turning to hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 (i.e., the mediating role of perceptions of *renqing* in the congruence and incongruence effects

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<sup>2</sup> Polynomial regression models with response surface analyses, as an alternative to difference scores, are advised for commensurate variables that examine in-/congruence between the same variable rated by different subjects (e.g., leaders and followers) or between desired and actual levels of the same variable (e.g., those in person-environment fit studies) (Edwards, 2002; 2007). The main purpose of this study, however, is not to examine the in-/congruence of two commensurate variables but to use the approach to get nuanced information that traditional moderating analysis cannot offer (Shanock et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2018). Moreover, as in Beus et al. (2020), we measured the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership using the same response scale, and thus scores from these measures allow us to compare whether leader's behaviors of benevolence and morality (or authoritarianism) are equally frequent or if one is more or less frequent than the other. Thus, using commensurate variables is not a major concern.

on subordinates' perceptions of overall justice), we adopted the block variable (Edwards and Cable 2009; Cole et al. 2013). The estimated coefficients in Equation 1 were combined to obtain the block variable. Then perceptions of *renqing* were regressed on the block variable to obtain the 'a' path regression coefficient. Next, subordinates' views of overall justice were regressed on both perceptions of *renqing* and the block variable to get the 'b' path (represented by the coefficient for perceptions of *renqing* on overall justice). Finally, the indirect effect (i.e.,  $a \times b$ ) is calculated and examined by bootstrapping bias-corrected CIs from 10,000 samples (Efron and Tibshirani 1993).

## Results

### Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) and common method variance caution

A series of CFAs were employed to examine the distinctiveness of five main variables: benevolence, morality, authoritarianism, perceptions of *renqing*, and views of overall justice (i.e. Model 1). Table 1 shows the results and demonstrates that the baseline five-factor model fits the data well ( $\chi^2 = 1107.595$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.440$ , SRMR = 0.054, RMSEA = 0.067, CFI = .915, IFI = .915, NNFI = .907). We compared the goodness of baseline five-factor model fit to several alternative models: A four-factor model with the combination of perceptions of *renqing* and overall justice (Model 2), a three-factor model with the combination of three components of paternalistic leadership (Model 3), and a one-factor model with all five factors combined (Model 4). The findings shown in Table 1 indicate that the fit indices of the five-factor model are better than all alternative models ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 502.629, 848.256, 2547.914$ , respectively,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting reliable distinctiveness of these variables. As recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003), we use the marker variable method to detect any common method variance (CMV) in our study. In particular, we constructed a latent variable called "CMV" by loading all indicators of the five theoretical variables based on the baseline model, and the

six-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 921.756$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.184$ , SRMR = 0.042, RMSEA = 0.060, CFI = .935, IFI = .935, NNFI = .923) fits the data better than the baseline five-factor model, but the improvement of the goodness of fit was slight ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 179.839$ ,  $\Delta df = 32$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, we calculated the average variance extracted (AVE) by the “CMV”, and it is 0.43, which was below the cutoff (0.50) to identify the presence of a latent construct (Dulac et al., 2008; Hair et al., 2009). In conclusion, though CMV may exist, we believe it does not undermine the research validity of the present study.

----- Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here -----

### Hypotheses testing

In Table 2, we present the means, standard deviations, correlations and alphas among all variables. We find that both benevolence and morality are positively associated ~~to~~ with subordinates’ perceptions of *renqing* ( $r = .557$  and  $.568$ , respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ) and their views of overall justice ( $r = .433$  and  $.492$ , respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ) while authoritarianism is not ( $r = -.118$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , and  $r = -.082$ , n.s., respectively). Consistent with the findings of prior studies (Cheng et al. 2004; Farh and Cheng 2000; Hiller et al. 2019), leader authoritarianism is negatively related to benevolence and morality ( $r = -.160$  and  $-.214$ , respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ). We then conducted polynomial regression and bootstrapping to test our hypotheses.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b predicted positive effects of in-/congruence of benevolence and morality on subordinate perceptions of *renqing*. As shown in Table 3, we find a significant  $\Delta R^2$  between the two models (0.298,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that benevolence and morality significantly affect perceptions of *renqing* after controlling for the demographic variables and ownership dummies. Thus, it is appropriate to conduct the response surface (Cole et al. 2013) as shown in Fig. 2a. We estimated the slopes and curvatures along the  $B=M$  and  $B=-M$  lines for the congruent and incongruent effects of benevolence and morality on perceptions of

*renqing*. As seen in Table 3, we find a significant positive slope of 0.318 ( $p < 0.01$ ) and a positive curvature of 0.053 (n.s.) for the  $B=M$  line; these suggest the positive effect of  $B=M$  on perceptions of *renqing*. We graph this relationship in Fig. 2b. As shown, perceptions of *renqing* improved as the levels of  $B=M$  increased, suggesting support for H1a. Also as shown in Table 3, we obtain a negative slope (-0.183, n.s.) and a negative curvature (-0.092, n.s.) for the  $B=-M$  line; these indicate a negative but not significant relationship between  $B=-M$  and perceptions of *renqing*. Fig. 2c shows the relationship between  $B=-M$  and perceptions of *renqing*. H1b is not supported.

----- Insert Table 3 and Figure 2a, 2b, and 2c about here -----

Turning to Hypotheses 2a and 2b, which examine the congruence and incongruence effects of benevolence and authoritarianism on subordinate perceptions of *renqing*, we report the results (M1 and M3) in Table 3. Similarly, we obtain a significant  $\Delta R^2$  between the two models (0.212,  $p < .01$ ) and graph the response surface as shown in Fig. 3a. The slopes and curvatures along the  $B=A$  and  $B=-A$  lines were estimated. Table 3 shows we obtain a significant positive slope (0.300,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a positive curvature of 0.085 (n.s.) for the  $B=A$  line and also a positive slope (0.334,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a positive curvature (0.025, n.s.) for the  $B=-A$  line. These indicate positive relationships between  $B=A$  and perceptions of *renqing* and between  $B=-A$  and perceptions of *renqing*. We plot these two relationships in Fig. 3b and 3c. As shown, both the two relationships are significantly positive, supporting H2a and H2b.

----- Insert Figure 3a, 3b, and 3c about here -----

Similarly, we tested the effects of the in-/congruence of morality and authoritarianism on subordinate perceptions of *renqing*, posited in H3a and H3b. As shown in Table 3 (M1 and M4), we obtain a significant  $\Delta R^2$  between the two steps (0.256,  $p < .01$ ) and graph the response surface in Fig. 4a. We estimate the slopes and curvatures along the  $M=A$  and  $M=-A$

lines. The results indicate a significant positive slope (0.302,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a positive curvature of 0.105 (n.s.) for the  $M=A$  line, so H3a ~~was~~ not supported. We also obtain a positive slope (0.350,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a positive curvature (0.073, n.s.) for the  $M=-A$  line. These indicate a positive relationship between  $M=-A$  and perceptions of *renqing*, supporting H3b. We plot these two relationships in Fig. 4b and 4c. As shown, both are significantly positive, so H3b is supported but H3a is not.

----- Insert Figure 4a, 4b, and 4c about here -----

Hypotheses 4, 5 and 6 suggested the congruence (a) and incongruence (b) effect of three components of paternalistic leadership on subordinates' views of overall justice is mediated by perceptions of *renqing*. As shown in Table 4, the block variable for  $B=M$  and  $B=-M$  is positively related to perceptions of *renqing* (path a = 0.548 and -0.500, respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, perceptions of *renqing* are positively related to overall justice (path b = 0.293 and 0.354, respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ), and the block variable is significantly associated with overall justice for  $B=M$  (path c' = 0.323,  $p < 0.01$ ) and for  $B=-M$  (path c' = -0.231,  $p < 0.01$ ) when perceptions of *renqing* entered the regression model. Finally, bias-corrected CIs with 10000 bootstrapped samples of the indirect effect (ab) of  $B=M$  (ab = 0.243, 99% CI [0.086, 0.450]) and that of  $B=-M$  (ab = -0.350, 99% CI [-0.611, -0.153]) on views of overall justice exclude zero, thereby providing support for H4a and H4b.

Similarly, as shown in Table 4, we obtain significant positive coefficients of path a (0.528 and 0.542, respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ) between the block variable and perceptions of *renqing* for  $B=A$  and  $B=-A$ . We also obtain significant positive coefficients of path b (0.344 and 0.311, respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ) between perceptions of *renqing* and overall justice after the block variables of  $B=A$  and  $B=-A$  were controlled for. Moreover, the effect of the block variables of  $B=A$  and  $B=-A$  on overall justice (path c') are 0.272 and 0.325 (both  $p < 0.01$ )

respectively when perceptions of *renqing* entered. Finally, bias-corrected CIs with 10000 bootstrapped samples of the indirect effect (ab) of B=A (ab = 0.279, 99% CI [0.122, 0.486]) and that of B=−A (ab = 0.309, 99% CI [0.122, 0.565]) on views of overall justice exclude zero, thereby providing support for H5a and H5b.

Turning to Hypotheses 6a and 6b, as seen in Table 4, the results indicate that the block variables of M=A and M=−A are positively related to perceptions of *renqing* (path a = 0.511 and 0.536, respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, perceptions of *renqing* are positively associated with views of overall justice (path b = 0.367 and 0.338,  $p < 0.01$ ) when the block variables of M=A and M=−A are controlled for. As for path c', the coefficients between the block variables of M=A and M=−A and overall justice became 0.239 and 0.284 (both  $p < 0.01$ ) respectively when perceptions of *renqing* are considered. Finally, bias-corrected CIs with 10000 bootstrapped samples of the indirect effect (ab) of M=A (ab = 0.272, 99% CI [0.124, 0.466]) and that of M=−A (ab = 0.280, 99% CI [0.115, 0.496]) on views of overall justice exclude zero, thereby providing support for H6a and H6b.

----- Insert Table 4 about here -----

## Discussion

Our paper explores the influencing process through which the dyad congruence and incongruence of three components of paternalistic leadership (i.e., benevolence, morality and authoritarianism) affect Chinese subordinates' views of overall justice (via the transmission of perceptions of *renqing*). The results supported the prediction that these in-/congruencies significantly affect subordinate perceptions of *renqing* such that B=M and B=A positively relate to perceptions of *renqing*, and so does B=−A and M=−A. Against our expectations, B=−M is negatively, albeit non-significantly, associated with perceptions of *renqing* (H1b)



and the congruence of  $B=M$  is significantly positively related to perceptions of *renqing* (H3a). More importantly, our study reveals a mediating mechanism such that the effects of the congruence and incongruence of the three components of paternalistic leadership on subordinates' views of overall justice are significantly transmitted by perceptions of *renqing*, mainly in terms of the partial mediation patterns. The bootstrapping results indicate that perceptions of *renqing* exert significant indirect effects in the relationships between each dyad in-/congruence of benevolence, morality, authoritarianism and subordinates' views of overall justice.

A plausible explanation regarding the non-significant negative effect of  $B=-M$  on perceptions of *renqing* may be that morality and benevolence are not equally strong: **Morality** has a stronger effect on perceptions of *renqing* than benevolence has. As seen in Table 3 (M2), the relationship between morality and perceptions of *renqing* was significantly positive (0.367,  $p < 0.01$ ) while that between benevolence and perceptions of *renqing* was positive but nonsignificant (0.097, n.s.). These findings indicate that subordinates who perceive high-levels of benevolence are likely to perceive higher *renqing* only when they perceive their leader as having high morality. Our finding of the positive effects of  $M=A$  on perceptions of *renqing* are inconsistent with some previous research (e.g., Cheng et al. 2004).

In sum, our study suggests that leaders cannot improve subordinate perceptions of *renqing* and ultimately their views of overall justice by simply showing their individualized, holistic care, kindness, and concern towards the subordinates unless subordinates also perceive their leaders' pursuit of personal virtues and moral character. They can achieve this goal by employing both high levels of morality and authoritarianism.

### **Theoretical implications**

Our findings contribute to current understandings of paternalistic leadership in the

Chinese context in three ways. First, by integrating social representation theory and fairness heuristic theory, we proposed and confirmed a consecutive theoretical link from the two-way combinations of benevolence, morality, and authoritarianism, to perceptions of *renqing*, and ~~to~~ overall justice in the context of Chinese organizations. Interestingly, our findings indicate that when a leader conducts benevolence without morality, subordinates do not perceive much *renqing* and overall justice. In other words, it seems that leaders need to conform to paternalistic leadership, as identified by Cheng et al. (2004). Someone who is caring, magnanimous (i.e., benevolent) should in addition be setting a moral example, in order to improve subordinates' perceptions of *renqing*, and in turn their overall justice. Additionally, inconsistent with prior findings (e.g., Cheng et al., 2004), our results suggest that when a leader behaves morally as well as authoritatively subordinates might not form an inhumane and cruel impression of that leader but instead may perceive high-levels of *renqing* and overall justice. More importantly, our findings of the significant mediating role of perceptions of *renqing*, a Chinese-specific culture-related construct, advance current understandings of the mechanism underlying the relationships between culture-specific leadership and subordinate outcomes.

Second, by using the polynomial regression to precisely model the effects of the different combinations of benevolence, morality and authoritarianism on subordinate outcomes, we followed the call by Wang et al. (2018) to shed light on a new enhanced typology of paternalistic leadership. Our study highlights that to fully understand the effects of paternalistic leadership it should be considered as a multidimensional, rather than unitary, construct (Hiller et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2015). Accordingly, we recommend that scholars not only explore the interactive effects of the three components, but also examine their in-/congruent combinations. Our study illustrates that in-/congruent combinations of the three components of paternalistic leadership significantly but

differentially affect subordinates' perceptions of *renqing* and ultimately their views of overall justice. In particular, all three congruences (i.e.,  $B=M$ ,  $B=A$ , and  $M=A$ ) and two incongruences (i.e.,  $B=-A$  and  $M=-A$ ) exert significant positive effects on perceptions of *renqing*; while  $B=-M$  shows negative, albeit nonsignificant, impacts. Moreover, our study also advances the current understanding of the mixed findings regarding authoritarianism effects (negative or null effects) in previous studies (e.g. Chan et al. 2013; Tian & Sanchez 2017) by highlighting its congruence and incongruence with the two other components of paternalistic leadership.

### **Practical implications**

Paternalistic leadership prevails in many societies that have cultural contexts that value collectivism and hierarchy (Farh and Cheng 2000; Hiller et al. 2009). Our theory on the influencing processes of the in-/congruent effects of paternalistic leadership's three components, subordinate perceptions of *renqing* and overall justice, has significant implications for Chinese managers and possibly those in other collectivist countries in East Asia, Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Outside the Chinese context subordinate perceptions of *renqing* may not have such an impact but we speculate that, nonetheless managers in paternalistic contexts should enact the combinations of the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership, i.e. benevolence, morality and authoritarianism, to enhance subordinate perceptions of overall justice. Meanwhile, organizations should design their leadership training programs accordingly.

Specifically, leaders who need to conform to paternalistic leadership should in addition be setting a moral example in order to improve subordinates' views of overall justice. Moreover, leaders should implement those managerial practices which help to trigger social interactions and decision-making in accordance with the Chinese social representation of

adhering to the *renqing* norm.

### Limitations and future directions

It is essential to consider our findings in light of the following limitations. First, our study is dependent on context (Cooke 2018); in a non-Chinese society the construct of *renqing* will not exist and any equivalent will almost certainly include a different set of cultural assumptions. We encourage similar research in other contexts to test the generalisability of our conclusions.

Second, despite this study's use of two-wave surveys in collecting data, its correlational design does not permit conclusive statements about causality from the relationships between and among key variables. Therefore, we suggest researchers employ experimental or qualitative methods to shed light on the causal effects.

Third, employees were the only data source for the variables in this study and the mediator (perceptions of *renqing*) and the dependent variable (views of overall justice) were assessed at the same time. We acknowledge the possibility that CMV may have biased some of our results. Thus, we recommend that future studies employ multiple data sources with a three-time lagged design to collect antecedents, mediators and outcomes at separate times.

Our data suggest that the congruent and incongruent combinations of paternalistic leadership elements differentially affect subordinate perceptions of *renqing* and, ultimately, overall justice. It therefore highlights the significance, at least in Chinese communities, of perceptions of *renqing* as a potential transmission mechanism in the relationships between other external antecedents (such as paradoxical leadership) and subordinate outcomes.

Besides, the examinations of other moderating and/ or mediating mechanisms drawing on the theories of implicit leadership (Den et al. 1999; Epitropaki and Martin 2004), [or](#) social categorization (Turner and Reynolds 2010) might prove helpful. Moreover, since the potential

impact of the in-/congruent combinations effects of benevolence, morality and authoritarianism on employees' outcomes may also vary over time, we recommend future research examines them longitudinally.

## Conclusion

We contribute to the literature on paternalistic leadership, workplace *renqing* and overall justice. We have advanced current understandings of the linking mechanism between the in-/congruent combinations of three components of paternalistic leadership and subordinates' overall justice by bringing in the mediating role of perceptions of *renqing* (see the calls for such research: Wang et al. 2018; Wu et al., 2012). Our findings demonstrate the significant but differential effects of the congruences (i.e., B=M, B=A, and M=A) and incongruences (i.e., B=−M, B=−A, and M=−A) on subordinate perceptions of *renqing*. In detail, all three congruencies and two incongruences (B=−A and M=−A) exert positive effects while B=−M shows negative impact. The relationships between each in-/congruence and subordinates' overall justice [perceptions](#) are significantly transmitted by perceptions of *renqing*. We take a step to explore the influencing mechanism of paternalistic leadership, especially that of dyad congruences and incongruences of its three components. Future studies need to be conducted in other cultural contexts to obtain a fuller understanding of the moderators and mediators in the link between paternalistic leadership and subordinates' outcomes.

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**Table 1** Comparison of alternative measurement models

Models	Factors	$\chi^2(df)$	$\chi^2/df$	$\Delta\chi^2$	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	NNFI
1	<i>Five factors:</i> B, M, A, perceptions of <i>renqing</i> , overall justice	1107.595(454)	2.440**		.054	.067	.915	.915	.907
2	<i>Four factors:</i> perceptions of <i>renqing</i> and overall justice combined into one factor	1610.224(458)	3.516**	502.629**	.064	.088	.850	.850	.837
3	<i>Three factors:</i> B, M, and A combined into one factor	1955.851(461)	4.243**	848.256**	.082	.100	.805	.806	.790
4	<i>One factor:</i> five factors combined into one factor	3655.509(464)	7.878**	2547.914**	.117	.146	.584	.585	.555

**Notes:** \*\* $p < .01$ . B=Benevolence, M=Morality, A=Authoritarianism.

**Table 2** Means, standard deviations, correlations, and scale reliabilities of all variables involved in the study

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Gender	1.34	0.47											
2 Age	33.77	8.26	-.171**										
3 Tenure	9.61	8.99	-.143*	.853**									
4 Education level	3.35	1.03	.177**	-.409**	-.337**								
5 Position	1.55	0.67	-.122*	.251**	.187**	.238**							
6 Ownership	1.60	1.15	.242**	-.237**	-.352**	.067	-.130*						
7 Benevolence	4.02	1.29	-.203**	.203**	.143*	-.055	.138*	.013	(.923)				
8 Morality	4.54	1.29	-.058	.105	.057	-.020	.019	.011	.740**	(.959)			
9 Authoritarianism	3.46	1.09	-.082	.081	.112*	-.112*	.007	.065	-.160**	-.214**	(.797)		
10 Perceptions of <i>renqing</i>	4.37	0.84	-.163**	.121*	.130*	-.049	.103	.021	.557**	.568**	-.118*	(.923)	
11 Overall Justice	4.18	1.13	-.097	.112*	.140*	-.116*	.036	.019	.433**	.492**	-.082	.587**	(.929)

**Notes:**  $N = 325$ . Cronbach's alphas are in parentheses on the diagonal. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; two-tailed tests.

**Table 3** Polynomial regression results for perceptions of *renqing*

Variables	Perceptions of <i>renqing</i>			
	M1	M2	M3	M4
Intercepts	2.21**	2.24*	2.43*	2.23
Gender	-.181**	-.121*	-.088	-.148*
Age	-.106	-.211	-.247	-.198
Tenure	.069	.048	.073	.104
Education	-.132*	-.067	-.114	-.143*
Position	.103	.115	.080	.093
Ownership_1	-.032	-.053	-.004	-.022
Benevolence (B)		.097	.451**	
Morality (M)		.367**		.463**
Authoritarianism (A)			-.022	-.031
Benevolence squared		-.077	.020	
Morality squared		.044		.046
Authoritarianism squared			.078	.130*
Cross-product of B $\times$ M		.165		
Cross-product of B $\times$ A			.061	
Cross-product of M $\times$ A				.035
$R^2$	.105**	.403**	.317**	.361**
$\Delta R^2$		.298**	.212**	.256**

Congruence ( $X=Y$ ) line				
Slope ( $b_1 + b_2$ )		.318**	.300**	.302**
Curvature ( $b_3 + b_4 + b_5$ )		.053	.085	.105
Incongruence ( $X=-Y$ ) line				
Slope ( $b_1 - b_2$ )		-.183	.334**	.350**
Curvature ( $b_3 - b_4 + b_5$ )		-.092	.025	.073

**Notes:** \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ; two-tailed tests. Standardized coefficients are reported. **X and Y respectively represent the two of benevolence, morality and authoritarianism in each model. For example, in M2, X represents Benevolence and Y represents Morality.** Regressions include controls for ownership (3 dummies). For simplicity, we only reported Ownership\_1. Specifically, Ownership\_1 = State-owned enterprises.

Table 4 Results of indirect effects tests

Variable	Congruence of benevolence and morality (B=M)		Congruence of benevolence and authoritarianism (B=A)		Congruence of morality and authoritarianism (M=A)	
	Mediator: perceptions of <i>renqing</i>	Overall justice	Mediator: perceptions of <i>renqing</i>	Overall justice	Mediator: perceptions of <i>renqing</i>	Overall justice
Coefficient of the block variable (a path)	.548**		.528**		.511**	
Coefficient of perceptions of <i>renqing</i> , controlling for the block variable (b path)		.293**		.344**		.367**
Coefficient of the block variable, controlling for perceptions of <i>renqing</i> (c' path)		.323**		.272**		.239**
Indirect effect of congruence via perceptions of <i>renqing</i> (a×b)		.243**		.279**		.272**
99% bootstrapped CIs for indirect effect (a×b)		[.086, .450]		[.122, .486]		[.124, .466]
Variable	Incongruence of benevolence and morality (B=−M)		Incongruence of benevolence and authoritarianism (B=−A)		Incongruence of morality and authoritarianism (M=−A)	
	Mediator: perceptions of <i>renqing</i>	Overall justice	Mediator: perceptions of <i>renqing</i>	Overall justice	Mediator: perceptions of <i>renqing</i>	Overall justice
Coefficient of the block variable (a path)	−.500**		.542**		.536**	
Coefficient of perceptions of <i>renqing</i> , controlling for the block variable (b path)		.354**		.311**		.338**
Coefficient of the block variable, controlling for perceptions of <i>renqing</i> (c' path)		−.231**		.325**		.284**
Indirect effect of congruence via perceptions of <i>renqing</i> (a×b)		−.350**		.309**		.280**



99% bootstrapped CIs for indirect effect (a×b)		[-.611, -.153]		[.122, .565]		[.115, .496]
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**Notes:** CI, Confidence interval. CIs not containing zero are interpreted as significant. Results are based on 10,000 bootstrap samples

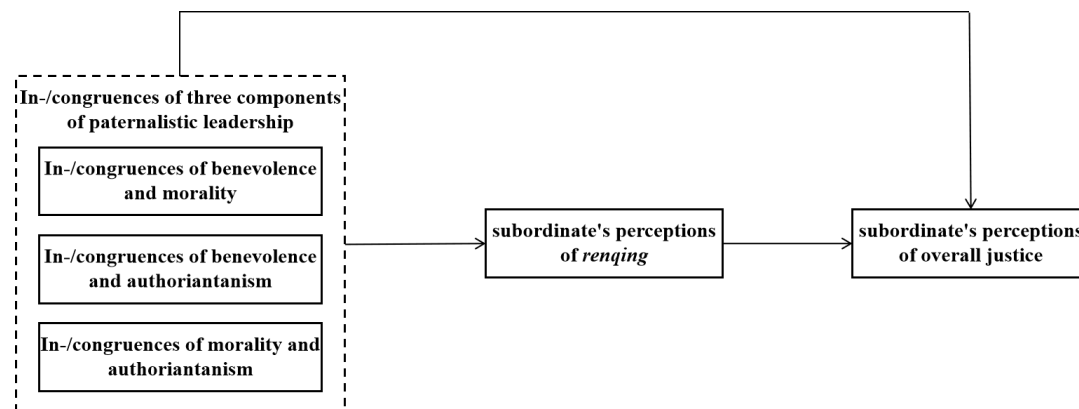
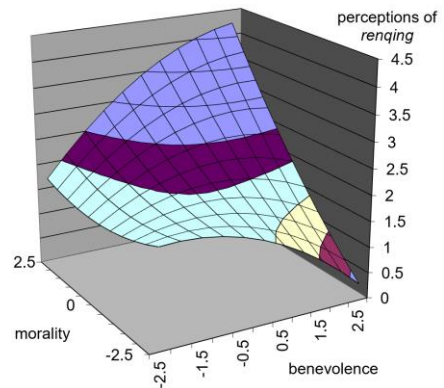
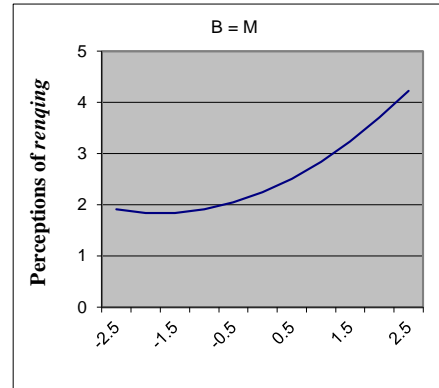


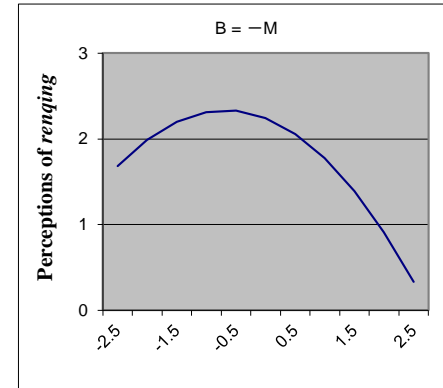
Figure 1 Theoretical framework of this study



(2a)

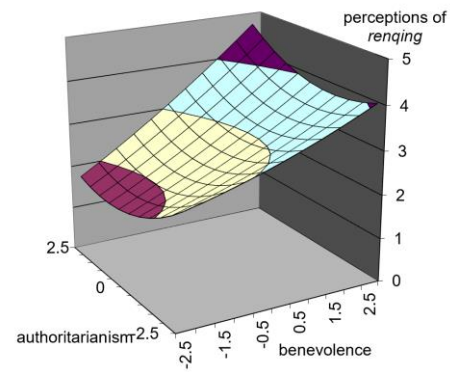


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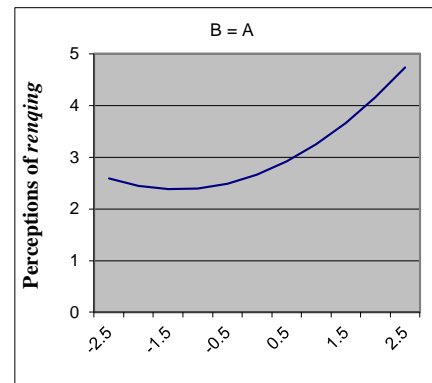


(2c)

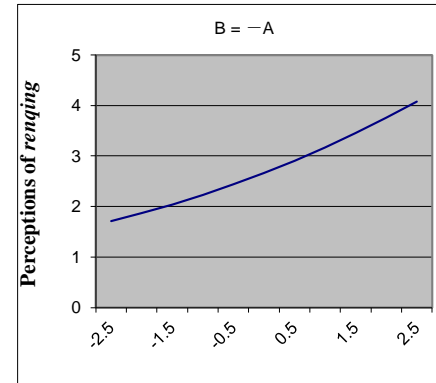
Figure 2 The response surface of  $B=M$  and  $B=-M$  on subordinates' perceptions of *renqing*



(3a)

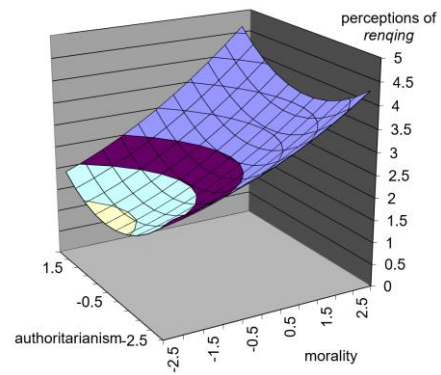


(3b)

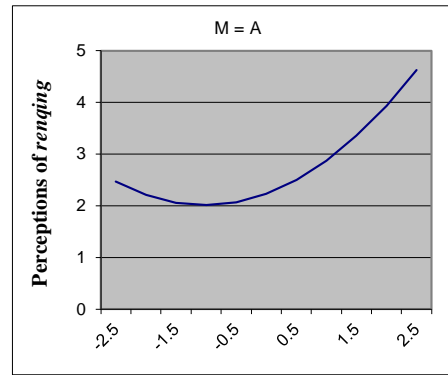


(3c)

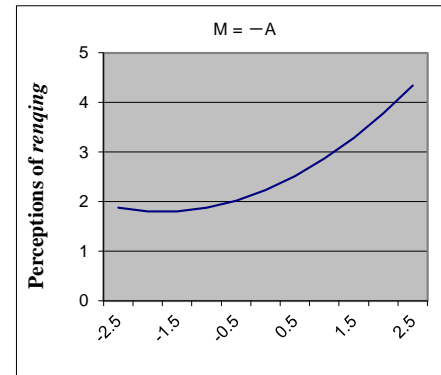
Figure 3 The response surface of  $B=A$  and  $B=-A$  on subordinates' perceptions of *renqing*



(4a)



(4b)



(4c)

Figure 4 The response surface of  $B=A$  and  $B=-A$  on subordinates perceptions of *renqing*