



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating the Complex Interplay between Paternalistic Leadership and Self-Supporting Personality: Implications for Employee Well-being in China

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Oct 18, 2024 Accepted: Dec 7, 2024	Paternalistic leadership is prevalent in Chinese societies and is known to predict various employee and organizational outcomes. However, the factors influencing its effect on employee well-being remain under-explored. Notably, few leadership studies have integrated the concept of self-supporting personality. This research explores the moderating role of the self-supporting personality, a unique construct rooted in Chinese culture, on the connection between paternalistic leadership and employee well-being, specifically assessed through levels of emotional exhaustion, within the context of China. The findings reveal that the interpersonal self-supporting personality plays a critical moderating role in the link between paternalistic leadership and employee well-being. Moreover, benevolent leadership is identified as the strongest predictor of employees' well-being. This study offers valuable empirical insights to the existing body of knowledge and highlights practical, context-relevant implications for local professionals.
Keywords	
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INTRODUCTION

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the work landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation, pushing organizations and their employees towards virtual modes of organization control and supervision. The shift to work-from-home arrangements has intensified concerns about employee well-being, bringing it into focus alongside emerging trends such as telecommuting, the "great resignation," and "quiet quitting" (Formica & Sfodera, 2022; Liu-Lastres et al., 2024; Tessema et al., 2022; Zenger, 2021). Employee well-being is often studied through constructs such as job satisfaction, work engagement, and burnout (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). Low employee well-being, lack of motivation, poor communication, and feelings of undervaluation are often reactions to managerial behavior (Zenger & Folkman, 2021).

Leadership behavior significantly impacts employee behavior and well-being (Inceoglu et al., 2018) and is crucial for organizations to achieve their mission and vision (YuSheng & Ibrahim, 2019) and adapt to changes in the external environment (Harris et al., 2007). Previous research has identified leadership as a complex construct, encompassing various styles such as authentic, democratic, transactional, transformational, charismatic, servant, and bureaucratic leadership (Al Khajeh, 2018; Fries et al., 2021; Elkhwesky et al., 2022). Paternalistic leadership, defined as a strong authority with fatherly care (paradoxically combining "control" and "care"), is a widespread, positive, and generally effective leadership style rooted in Confucianism and legalism, Chinese traditional culture (Farh &

Cheng, 2000). In recent years, paternalistic leadership has been associated with various aspects of employee well-being, such as work motivation (Ishaq & Ikran, 2022), employee voice (Dedahanov et al., 2022), work engagement (Koçak & Küçük, 2021), burnout (Huang et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2022), organizational innovative performance (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün, 2020), job satisfaction (Shi et al., 2020), and avoiding cross-cultural conflict (Chen et al., 2018). However, little is known about how paternalistic leadership affects employee well-being in China (Mittal & Bienstock, 2019). Moreover, the influence of the Chinese indigenous personal trait known as self-supporting personality on the link between paternalistic leadership and employee well-being remains unexplored.

Invoking deep Chinese philosophy and wide Chinese leadership practices, including rules, systems of rewards, punishment, and preservation of power, Cheng et al. (2004) suggest a positive correlation between leadership (with benevolence, authoritarianism style) and subordinates' attitudes. Research conducted on Chinese data has proven the effectiveness of paternalistic leadership, such as subordinates' trust (Lau et al., 2019), employee commitment (Zheng et al., 2020), innovation (Hou et al., 2019), role/extra-role performance (Wu et al., 2012), and employee voice (Zhang et al., 2014). Thus, very few studies have comparatively analyzed paternalistic leadership and well-being in China. Notably, there is a lack of research examining how a self-supporting personality functions as a moderating factor. Personality is indeed reliably related to emotional exhaustion (Aларcon et al., 2009). The personal personality boundary conditions in the context of China's psychological mechanisms that affect well-being have not been fully explored.

Our study attempts to contribute to a Chinese indigenous moderator - the self-supporting personality, interpersonal self-reliance refers to the portmanteau interpersonal personality that helps individuals settle their fundamental interpersonal problems and social development, it is a personality rooted in Chinese culture (Xia & Huang, 2008). Evidence of the impact of cognitive and emotional mechanisms (negative emotions, relationship schemas, etc.), personality functions (career maturity, career decision-making difficulties, etc.), and other related variables. At present, most research on the self-supporting personality focuses on teenagers and college students, with no research related to employee well-being. Traits of the self-supporting personality were negatively correlated with anxiety and show the negative prediction of emotional information by themselves (Xia et al., 2012c; Xia et al., 2014b). Our study responds to the research on the self-supporting personality in work scenarios.

Integrating leadership and personality literature, our study aims to explore how personality influences the connection between paternalistic leadership and employees' well-being. This paper makes three key contributions to the literature. First, it introduces an indigenous personality construct as a moderator, offering a novel perspective on the relationship between paternalistic leadership and employee well-being. This approach addresses the call for greater contextualization in management research (Bondarouk & Brewster, 2016) and enriches leadership studies by emphasizing a context-specific lens. Furthermore, it provides empirical evidence from a Chinese employee sample, specifically highlighting the association between paternalistic leadership and emotional exhaustion as a negative indicator of well-being. Second, the study uncovers a significant finding regarding the self-supporting personality, which serves as a moderator in this relationship. This discovery extends theoretical insights into cross-cultural management and informs strategic human resource practices for global enterprises, particularly those operating in the Chinese market.

The Cultural Context of Paternalistic Leadership in China

Paternalistic leadership is a prevalent concept in Eastern cultures, particularly within Chinese and Japanese organizations. Japanese employees. For instance, highly value paternalism, viewing it as essential for effective company operations in Japanese (Uhl-Bien et al., 2023). Similarly, in Malaysia, this leadership style aligns well with the values and expectations of subordinates, as hierarchical relationships are maintained through affective reciprocity and mutual emotional exchange (Lee et al., 2023). The benevolence of entrepreneurs is crucial for effective management, and a higher power distance correlates with employees' preference for paternalistic leadership.

Early studies in China, such as Silin (1976), explored the leadership styles and behavior patterns of large private enterprises in Taiwan, finding significant differences from Western practices. Zheng (2000) expanded the theory by highlighting two fundamental elements: Shi En, which refers to granting favors, and Li Wei, which involves instilling awe or fear. Paternalistic leadership remains widespread in mainland China and Taiwanese business organizations, especially within family-owned businesses (Sposato, 2021). The foundation of paternalistic leadership in China can be linked to Confucian principles, which highlight the importance of parental authority, benevolence akin to a father's care, and moral integrity. These elements are viewed as critical for ensuring effective control over employees and safeguarding company prosperity (Farh & Cheng, 2000).

Confucianism, a philosophical system that has profoundly influenced Chinese society for over two millennia, lies at the heart of Chinese culture. Confucius emphasized hierarchical relationships, moral integrity, and benevolence—principles that are foundational to paternalistic leadership (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Confucianism advocates for a structured society where each individual has a defined role, evident in the Five Relationships outlined by Confucius: ruler-subject, father-son, husband-wife, older brother-younger brother, and friend-friend (Higgins, 2013). The ruler-subject and father-son relationships are particularly relevant to organizational settings, where leaders (rulers) are expected to guide and care for their employees (subjects).

Confucius placed significant importance on the moral development of individuals, particularly leaders. Leaders are expected to lead by example, demonstrating virtues such as honesty, righteousness, and self-discipline (Farh & Cheng, 2000). This moral dimension enhances the trust and respect employees have for their leaders, creating a moral obligation to follow and support them. Benevolence, or "ren" in Confucian terms, is the compassionate and humane treatment of subordinates. Leaders are seen as paternal figures responsible for the well-being of their employees, akin to a father's role in a family. This benevolence fosters loyalty and dedication among employees, who feel genuinely valued and cared for (Wu & Xu, 2012).

In addition to Confucian philosophy, the concept of familial collectivism profoundly influences Chinese organizational culture (Sison et al., 2020). The family is the primary social unit in Chinese society, and its values extend into the workplace. Organizations in China often operate like extended families, with leaders perceived as parental figures and employees seen as family members (Wu et al., 2016). This dynamic creates a strong sense of belonging and mutual obligation, prompting employees to go above and beyond their job descriptions to support the organization, similar to how they would support their family members.

Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism over individualism, prioritizing group harmony and collective well-being over personal achievements (Dong et al., 2023). This collectivist orientation aligns with the goals of paternalistic leadership, which seeks to maintain harmony and cohesion within the organization through a balanced approach of authority and benevolence.

Paternalistic leadership is highly relevant in the Chinese cultural context due to its alignment with Confucian values and customs. This leadership style establishes a direct link between leadership practices and the cultural customs that shape human relationships and expected behaviours (Chen et al., 2014). Loyalty is a paramount attribute valued by leaders in Chinese organizations, often overshadowing skills, ability, or competence. This sense of loyalty is primarily directed towards the leader, rather than the organization, and it plays a significant role in shaping decisions regarding promotions and job responsibilities (Ip P, 2009).

Authoritarianism in China is deeply rooted in Confucian and Legalistic traditions, which emphasize the importance of hierarchical relationships between managers and employees (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Chinese managers often adopt a parental role within their organizations, exercising authoritarian control while ensuring the well-being of their subordinates (He et al., 2019). The historical context of imperial China, marked by control and political manipulation, has fostered a culture that supports authoritarian leadership styles.

In a high-power distance culture like China, centralized decision-making structures are the norm (Yuan & Zhou, 2015). Subordinates are expected to follow directives without questioning their supervisors, reflecting the existential inequality between different levels of employees (Wei et al., 2017). The cultural expectation of a vertical relationship between leaders and subordinates reinforces the acceptance of authoritarianism.

Paternalistic leadership in China reflects traditional Confucian culture and family values (Fu & Xie, 2023; Abiddin et al., 2024). In Confucian philosophy, the family, particularly the patrilineal family, is considered the cornerstone of society. The relationship between father and son holds immense significance, ranking just below the monarch-subject bond, with the father exercising unquestionable authority within the family structure. This familial dynamic is often mirrored in organizational contexts, where leaders take on paternal roles, and employees are expected to show loyalty and obedience akin to that of sons towards their fathers (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Jam et al., 2017).

Confucian culture stresses the importance of personal morality, assigning greater moral expectations to those with higher social status (Chou & Cheng, 2020; Farooq et al., 2010). Leaders are expected to exhibit high moral standards; otherwise, they risk losing the genuine respect of their subordinates. Moreover, Confucian culture emphasizes the leader's responsibility to protect and care for subordinates, akin to a father's benevolence within a family (Shi et al., 2020).

Paternalistic leadership reflects the concept of traditional Chinese "fatherly leadership," in which leaders enforce strict rules and discipline while simultaneously demonstrating compassion and concern for their subordinates (He et al., 2019; Shi et al., 2020). Leaders serve as moral role models and foster a familial atmosphere within the workplace. They build strong, personalized connections with their employees, engage in areas beyond work, insist on loyalty, and uphold their authority and status. In exchange, employees are expected to respect authority, participate in non-professional matters, show loyalty, and view the organization as a family (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Fu & Xie, 2023; Aycan, 2006).

Paternalistic leadership

Paternalistic leadership is a leadership approach that draws on the family governance principles of traditional Chinese Confucianism and Legalism to manage employees in China (Farh & Cheng, 2000). This leadership style is characterized by a fatherly approach, blending authority and discipline with kindness and a morally guided, personal atmosphere. It encompasses three key dimensions: authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, and moral leadership (Zheng et al., 2000; Chen et al., 2019).

Authoritarian leadership emphasizes legalism, with leaders desiring unquestionable obedience and yielding from subordinates, absolute authority, and control (Humphreys et al., 2015; Li & Sun, 2015; Hamrin, 2016). Authoritative leaders exert complete control and demand unquestioning obedience from their employees (Hamrin, 2016). In such environments, employees have limited freedom and little to no opportunity to challenge their leaders' authority. These leaders generally show little interest in differing opinions or advice. Additionally, authoritarian leaders maintain high expectations, imposing penalties for subpar performance (Huang & Liu, 2023). This leadership style is characterized by a rigid hierarchical structure, where leaders retain absolute authority and make most decisions within the organization, often without consulting others. In many cases, they even make routine, day-to-day decisions independently.

Authoritarian leadership, rooted in legalism, involves leaders who demand absolute authority, control, and unquestioning obedience from their subordinates (Li & Sun, 2015; Hamrin, 2016). Such leaders maintain strict control, allowing minimal freedom and almost no opportunity for employees to challenge their authority (Humphreys et al., 2015). They rarely welcome differing opinions and often set high standards, punishing poor performance to enforce compliance. Authoritarian leaders make key decisions without much consultation and frequently handle minor, routine decisions as well (Gyamerah et al., 2022). This leadership style emphasizes rigid control and centralized decision-making, leaving little room for subordinate input or autonomy.

Benevolent leadership and moral leadership are derived from Confucianism (Yuan et al., 2023). Benevolent leadership involves leaders caring for subordinate development, well-being, work, and personal life (Aycan, 2015; Chen & Weng, 2023). Subordinates are able to build a close relationship with their leader (Shaw & Liao, 2021) and feel comfortable sharing innovative ideas or opinions (Chen & Weng, 2023). Benevolent leadership, characterized by a family-like concern for employees, allows them to rectify mistakes without fear of judgment, protects them from workplace embarrassments, and supports their career growth (Aycan, 2015). Under this leadership style, employees feel a sense of safety and closeness with their leader, who encourages them to share new ideas and provides guidance to help prevent uncomfortable situations at work (Chen et al., 2019). This leadership approach involves demonstrating a personalized, holistic care for the professional and personal well-being of subordinates.

Moral leadership is characterized by leaders who exhibit strong personal virtues, self-discipline, and selflessness. Employees are likely to perceive their leaders as fair and just, believing that even if they make mistakes, their leader will not punish them unfairly (Cheng & Wang, 2015). As a result, subordinates may feel more inclined to share their thoughts and suggestions, aligning them with the organization's needs (Xia et al., 2020). Studies on moral leadership suggest that leaders who model personal virtues inspire greater respect and identification from their followers. Even when mistakes are made during the suggestion process, followers tend to trust that their leaders will treat them fairly and avoid immoral punishment (Wang & Cheng, 2015). This trust encourages more frequent expression of ideas when the organization requires input. It is generally expected that leaders display strong moral values and act as role models within the organization. While this expectation may not always be fulfilled, leaders typically make a visible effort to be perceived as individuals of high moral standing.

The relationship between paternalistic leadership and emotional exhaustion

Scholars emphasize the burnout defined as energy turns into exhaustion, involvement into cynicism, and efficacy into ineffectiveness (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). In the workplace, burnout is characterized by employees experiencing a general sense of detachment and indifference, leading to reduced trust, interest, and motivation (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). Additionally, burnout encompasses feelings of exhaustion, being emotionally drained, irritability, frustration, and a sense of being worn out (Gaines & Jermier, 1983). Emotion exhaustion as the core component of burnout (Seidler et al., 2014), negatively influence employee's well-being, and such work performance, emotions, absenteeism, and work-related mental health (Maslach et al., 2001; Langelaan et al., 2006; Rupert et al., 2015; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), a slow process of progressive loss of energy and enthusiasm (Shahkarami et al., 2016).

The Job Demands-Resources (JDR) model (Schaufeli et al., 2004) provides a theoretical view of the effects of paternalistic leadership on emotional exhaustion. Studies have established a link between job demands and burnout (Huyghebaert et al., 2016), with similar patterns observed in Asian populations, notably among Chinese employees where specific demands exacerbate work-related burnout (Lee et al., 2023). The authoritarian aspect of paternalistic leadership is marked by stringent rules and high expectations, particularly in collectivistic settings where mistakes are not readily accepted (Lim, 2016; Chan et al., 2013). This environment demands unyielding obedience (Cheng et al., 2004), leading to emotional distress as employees struggle with the significant effort required to meet these demands (Laila & Hanif, 2017). The considerable mental effort to meet leadership expectations often results in negative emotions like stress and anxiety (Laila & Hanif, 2017).

Authoritarian leadership intensifies job demands by enforcing strict routines and high expectations, thereby contributing to emotional exhaustion (Cheng, 2004; Jiang et al., 2019). The authoritarian style imposes heavy demands on employees, requiring high levels of compliance and effort, often leading to cognitive and emotional strain due to limited autonomy and pervasive oversight (Chan et al., 2013). These demands can trigger negative emotional states and increased stress, contributing to emotional exhaustion.

Conversely, benevolent and moral leadership provide resources that promote a supportive and ethical work environment, reducing emotional exhaustion (Chen et al., 2019; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Moreover, benevolent and moral leadership enhance employee well-being by fostering a culture of care and ethical conduct, which mitigates emotional exhaustion (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2023; Wang & Cheng, 2015).

According to the JD-R theory, the health erosion pathway posits that job demands lead to burnout. Benevolent and moral leadership align with the motivational pathway, providing resources that stimulate personal growth and job satisfaction. Conversely, authoritarian leadership corresponds with the health erosion pathway, increasing job demands that can result in physiological and psychological costs, such as emotional exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Therefore, this paper proposes the:

- H1:** The benevolent aspect of paternalistic leadership has a negative effect on emotional exhaustion.
- H2:** The moral dimension of paternalistic leadership is inversely related to emotional exhaustion.
- H3:** The authoritarian component of paternalistic leadership contributes positively to emotional exhaustion.

The moderating role of Interpersonal Self-supporting personality

Personality plays an important role in employee well-being (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Xia and Huang (2008) have developed an indigenous Chinese personality termed interpersonal self-support (ISS).

There are two main theoretical categories: personal self-support and interpersonal self-support (Xia & Huang, 2008). Interpersonal self-support (ISS) is a comprehensive personality trait that encompasses five distinct characteristics, which help individuals navigate social challenges in everyday life. These five traits of interpersonal self-support include: interpersonal independence (the inclination and ability to handle interpersonal activities or challenges independently), interpersonal initiative (the tendency to proactively form connections with others), interpersonal openness (the willingness to accept others in a positive manner), interpersonal flexibility (the ability to respond to social situations in a flexible and adaptive way), and interpersonal responsibility (the inclination to remain trustworthy and loyal to others) (Xia et al., 2012a; Xia et al., 2012b).

ISS traits can influence emotional experiences through five distinct pathways. First, interpersonal self-support traits indirectly affect emotional experiences by shaping the life environment that contributes to affective feelings (Xia, 2011; Xia et al., 2013). Second, these traits influence emotional arousal levels or provocation (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991). Third, they play a role in regulating emotional processes, which in turn impacts the generation and modification of feelings (Xia et al., 2014). Fourth, individuals with high interpersonal self-support are more likely to focus on positive interpersonal information, while those with low interpersonal self-support tend to be more sensitive to negative interpersonal cues (Xia et al., 2013). Fifth, emotional traits such as neuroticism and extraversion are associated with expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal (Gresham & Gullone, 2012; Hasking et al., 2010). As a result, lower interpersonal independence is linked to a more negative emotional disposition, whereas higher interpersonal initiative is associated with a more positive emotional orientation (Xia, 2010; Xia et al., 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013). These findings suggest that cognitive reappraisal can serve as a predictor of interpersonal flexibility and openness (Xia et al., 2014).

Thus, this paper proposes:

- H4:** The interpersonal self-supporting personality plays a moderating role in the connection between the Benevolence aspect of Paternalistic Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion.
- H5:** The relationship between the Morality component of Paternalistic Leadership and Emotional Exhaustion is moderated by the interpersonal self-supporting personality.
- H6:** The interpersonal self-supporting personality moderates the impact of the Authoritarian dimension of Paternalistic Leadership on Emotional Exhaustion.

Finally, the research model is shown in Figure 1.

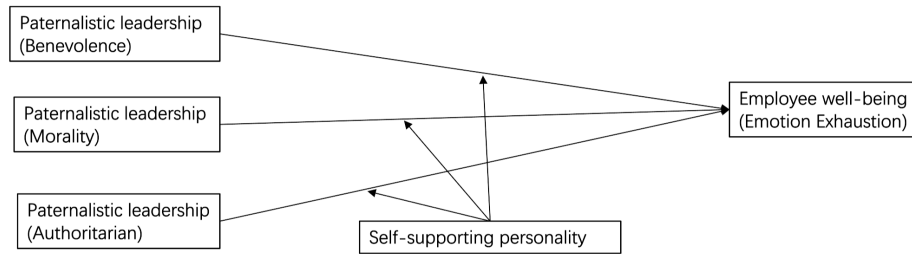


Figure 1. The effect mechanism model of paternalistic leadership styles on employee emotional exhaustion.

METHODS

This study collected data from Chinese mainland employees. The utilized scales including the Mandarin version of paternalistic leadership and self-supporting personality, as well as translated scales for work engagement and emotional exhaustion from English to Mandarin. In this study, the scales for 'work engagement' and 'emotional exhaustion' were originally in English. I first translated these scales from English to Mandarin. Then, to test the accuracy, I invited two HRM experts—one a Ph.D. candidate and the other a senior researcher—to translate the scales back from Mandarin to English. To ensure the internal consistency of the table, this study tested all 331 data to pass Cronbach's alpha analysis before conducting exploratory factor analysis. The scale exhibits high internal consistency, and the internal consistency of all the scales is high, with Cronbach alpha reliability values greater than 0.7.

Measures

Paternalistic Leadership. Paternalistic Leadership was assessed using a 15-item scale on the Chinese paternalistic leadership scale with a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The scale includes three dimensions: authoritarian ($\alpha = 0.773$), benevolent ($\alpha = 0.853$), and moral ($\alpha = 0.762$). In the Probability Proportionate to Size Sampling (PPS) (Chen et al., 2014), sample items were "My leader asks me to obey their instructions completely" (Authoritarian leadership); "My leader is like a family member when they get along with us" (Benevolent leadership); "My leaders employ people according to their virtue" (Moral leadership).

Emotion Exhaustion. Emotion Exhaustion was assessed using a 5-item scale from the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS) (Maslach et al., 1996; Potipiroon & Faerman, 2020). Participants rated their burnout using a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The sample item was "I feel burned out from work." ($\alpha = 0.912$)

Interpersonal Self-supporting Personality. Interpersonal Self-supporting Personality was assessed using a 20-item scale (Xia & Huang, 2008; 2009) from the Development of the Self-supporting Personality Scale for Adolescent Students survey of self-supporting personality, which should be classified into two theoretical categories: personal self-supporting and interpersonal self-supporting (Xia & Huang, 2008; 2009). The scale includes five dimensions: interpersonal independence, interpersonal initiative, interpersonal responsibility, interpersonal flexibility, and interpersonal openness. It uses a Likert 5 scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Moreover, there are 20 questions on this scale, of which 6 are scored in reverse and 14 in forward. The higher the score, the more obvious the level of self-supporting personality ($\alpha = 0.756$).

Analyses

Data analysis involved two software tools: SPSS 24 and AMOS 26, utilizing data collected from 331 Chinese employees. The analysis assessed the descriptive statistics, structural equation modeling (SEM), bootstrap analysis, and conducted significance tests for the research hypotheses.

RESULTS

This study recruited a total of 331 participants online via social networks (i.e., WeChat, Email, etc.) in China. The study focuses on an individual level, with data collected from multi-industry employees. First, age, gender, educational background, and work experience were used as demographic variables in this study. Most responders were in the range of 18-60 years old, but only one responder was above 60 years old. Age was measured with six options: 18–25 years (37.8%), 26 to 30 years (45.6%), 31 to 40 years (13.9%), 41 to 50 years (1.2%), 51 to 60 years old (1.2%), and above 60 years (0.3%). The gender distribution includes males (47.7%) and females (52.3%). Moreover, 54.1% of respondents had undergraduate educational backgrounds, 23.6% had Diplomas, and 19.3% had master's degrees. Work experience was measured with three options: less than one year (24.5%), one to three years (21.5%), and over three years (54.1%).

Measurement test

Pairwise and multiple-variable collinearity was inspected by collinearity diagnostics in SPSS prior to the analysis. The correlation coefficients between the four key variables, including paternalistic leadership (benevolence, morality, and authoritarianism) and self-supporting personality, are below moderate in magnitude. These results provide preconditions for the subsequent structural equation modeling. Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Variables

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Gender	1.523	0.500										
2	Age	2.834	0.835	-.176**									
3	Work Experience	2.296	0.837	.219**	.578**								
4	Education	2.036	0.801	0.066	.163**	.116*							
5	Marital Status	1.492	0.799	0.085	.305**	.262**	0.062						
6	Paternalistic Leadership-Benevolence	3.824	1.023	0.006	0.037	0.023	0.025	0.078					
7	Paternalistic Leadership-Morality	4.079	0.924	0.067	0.048	0.051	0.061	0.077	.526**				
8	Paternalistic Leadership-Authoritarianism	3.814	0.903	-0.051	-0.046	-0.062	0.079	0.011	0.088	0.037			
9	Emotional Exhaustion	3.609	1.169	-0.083	-0.089	-0.116*	0.011	0.022	.156**	.286**	.390**		
10	Interpersonal self-supporting personality	1.290	0.548	-0.083	.262**	.339**	0.062	.131*	0.049	0.064	.150**	.350**	

Notes: $n = 331$. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

According to Table 2, the model showed an acceptable fit to the data. The CMIN/DF ratio, which adjusts for sample size, was 2.888, indicating an acceptable fit (values close to 1 or below 3 are generally considered good). The RMSEA was 0.082, below the recommended threshold of 0.08, suggesting an acceptable fit. The IFI, TLI, and CFI were 0.833, 0.812, and 0.831, respectively. These indices are close to 1, further supporting an acceptable fit of the model.

Moreover, all the loadings were significant, demonstrating validity, and the model fitted the data well. The indices used for the structural model goodness-of-fit (Load Factor > 0.6, SMC > 0.36) are the same used for the measurement model in Figure 2 (Hair et al., 2012). Thus, the model is accepted and considered for measuring the research hypothesis in this study.

Table 2. Overall fitting coefficients

CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	IFI	TLI	CFI
1120.647	388	2.888	0.082	0.833	0.812	0.831

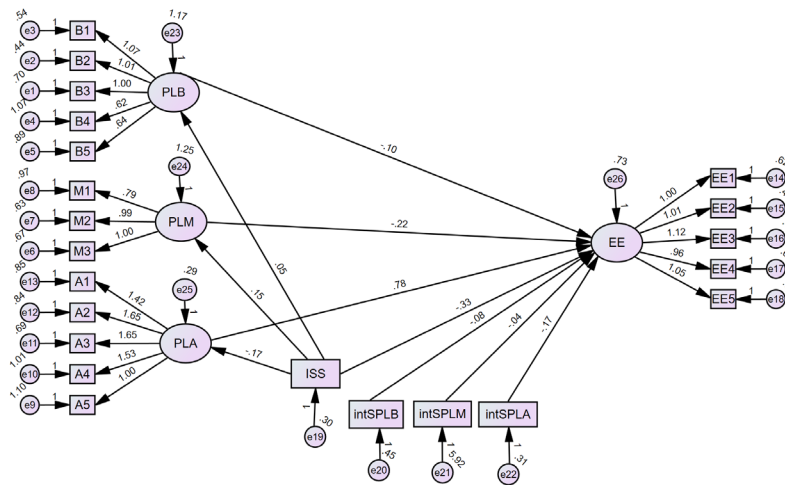


Figure 2. Research structural model

Abbreviations: PLB, benevolence leadership; PLM, morality leadership; PLA, authoritarianism leadership; ISS, interpersonal self-supporting personality.

The results of the reliability and validity test are shown in Table 3. In Table 3, the loading factors of the measurement model should be above 0.5, except for PLM3 (loadings = 0.32), indicating that each observed variable had a strong relationship with its respective latent construct. Reliabilities, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, were also found to be satisfactory, with all scales having values above 0.7, indicating good internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). In addition, the CR values were all above 0.8, indicating strong internal consistency (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Table 3. Loading factors and reliabilities for the measurement model

Variable	Items	α	Loadings	P	CR	AVE
Paternalistic Leadership- Benevolence (PLB)	PLB1		1.70	***		
	PLB2		1.60	***		
	PLB3	0.853	1.57	***	0.851	0.542
	PLB4		0.98	***		
	PLB5		1.00			
Paternalistic Leadership- Morality (PLM)	PLM1		0.73	***		
	PLM2	0.806	0.91	***	0.805	0.582
	PLM3		1.00			
PLA1			1.33	***		

Paternalistic Leadership-	PLA2		1.55	***		
Authoritarianism	PLA3	0.773	1.64	***	0.778	0.418
(PLA)	PLA4		1.49	***		
	PLA5		1.00			
	EE1		1.00			
	EE2		1.00	***		
Emotion Exhaustion	EE3	0.912	1.12	***	0.908	0.665
(EE)	EE4		0.96	***		
	EE5		1.06	***		
	IO1		1.00		0.836	0.562
	IO2		1.11	***		
	IO3	0.835	0.99	***		
	IO4		0.97	***		
	IF1		1.00		0.797	0.497
	IF2		1.00	***		
Interpersonal	IF3	0.794	0.94	***		
self-supporting	IF4		1.02	***		
personality	IR1		1.00		0.631	0.421
(ISS)	IR2		0.83	***		
	IR3	0.678	-0.26	***		
	IR4		0.78	***		
	IIT1		1.00		0.862	0.379
	IIT2		-1.49	***		
	IIT3	0.705	1.03	***		
	IIT4		-1.23	***		
	IID1		1.00		0.912	0.723
	IID2		1.02	***		
	IID3	0.912	1.10	***		
	IID4		1.01	***		

Hypotheses testing

These statistical findings are presented within the results section for each of the three stages of hierarchical regression analysis: (1) Control Variables; (2) Direct Relationships; and (3) Moderation. As depicted in Table 4, subsequent to accounting for gender, age, work experience, and education as control variables, it is observed that Benevolence leadership (model 2, $\beta = -0.141^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and Morality leadership (model 4, $\beta = -0.263^{***}$, $p < 0.001$) exhibit a negative association with employees' emotional exhaustion. This lends support to Hypotheses 1 and 2. Conversely, Authoritarianism leadership demonstrates a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion (model 6, $\beta = 0.344^{***}$, $p < 0.001$), thereby confirming Hypothesis 3.

Subsequently, this study employed the SPSS PROCESS method (Hayes, 2009) to investigate the moderating influence of interpersonal self-supporting personality on the connection between paternalistic leadership and emotional exhaustion. This analysis was prompted by the observed significant moderating role of interpersonal self-supporting personality in the relationship between benevolence leadership and emotional exhaustion, as evidenced in Model 3 ($\beta = -0.109^{**}$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, Model 5 revealed that the interaction between morality leadership and interpersonal self-supporting personality was significantly associated with emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.319^{+}$, $p < .1$). These findings provided support for Hypotheses 4 and 5. Conversely, Hypothesis 6 was not supported, as the analysis indicated an insignificant moderating role of interpersonal self-supporting personality in the relationship between authoritarian leadership and emotional exhaustion, as demonstrated in Model 7 ($\beta = -0.055$).

Table 4. Regression analysis results

	Emotional Exhaustion						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Gender	-0.115	-0.113*	-0.103*	-0.091+	-0.089+	-0.089+	-0.082
Age	-0.040	0.002	0.008	0.009	0.011	0.011	0.008
Work Experience	-0.122	-0.034	-0.043	-0.029	-0.035	-0.030	-0.025
Education	-0.012	-0.036	-0.041	-0.050	-0.052	-0.058	-0.061
Marital Status	0.014	0.036	0.040	0.044	0.056	0.023	0.026
PLB		-0.141**	-0.123**				
PLM				-0.263***	-0.249***		
PLA						0.344***	0.347***
ISS		-0.348***	-0.323***	-0.342***	-0.037	-0.305***	-0.296***
PLB * ISS			-0.109**				
PLM * ISS					-0.319+		
PLA * ISS							-0.055
R²	0.027	0.156	0.167	0.204	0.212	0.251	0.254
ΔR²	0.012	0.138	0.146	0.187	0.193	0.234	0.235
F change	1.806	8.547***	8.073***	11.848***	10.841***	15.440***	13.677***
Durbin-Watson	1.943	1.947	1.933	2.018	2.029	2.051	2.057

Note(s): $N = 331$; $+p < 0.1$, $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$. Abbreviations: PLB, benevolence leadership; PLM, morality leadership; PLA, authoritarianism leadership; ISS, interpersonal self-supporting personality.

Considering the noteworthy moderating role played by interpersonal self-supporting personality in the relationship between benevolence leadership/morality leadership and employees' emotional exhaustion, this study sought to visualize this moderation effect. To do so, this study created interaction plots at three confidence interval levels: low, mean, and high, as outlined in Table 5.

The results indicate that the indirect moderation effect of benevolence leadership on emotional exhaustion, within the context of interpersonal self-supporting personality, was significantly negative (effect = -0.125, boot SE = 0.060, 95% bootstrap CI mean = [-0.262, -0.049]). Similarly, the indirect moderation effect of morality leadership on emotional exhaustion, considering interpersonal self-supporting personality, was also significantly negative (effect = -0.245, boot SE = 0.051, 95% bootstrap CI mean = [-0.347, -0.142]) (refer to Figure 3 and 4 for graphical representations).

Table 5. Moderation results				
Moderator variable	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
PLB low (-1 SD)	-0.026	0.084	-0.193	-0.023
PLB mean	-0.125	0.060	-0.262	-0.049
PLB high (+1 SD)	-0.243	0.070	-0.381	-0.105
PLM low (-1 SD)	-0.173	0.074	-0.320	-0.025
PLM Mean	-0.245	0.051	-0.347	-0.142
PLM high (+1 SD)	-0.331	0.062	-0.454	-0.208

Abbreviations: PLB, benevolence leadership; PLM, morality leadership.

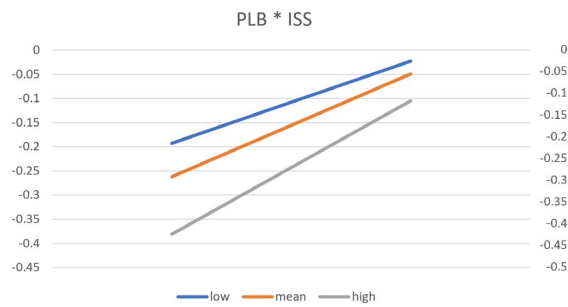


Figure 3. The moderating role of ISS in the relationship between PLB and EE.

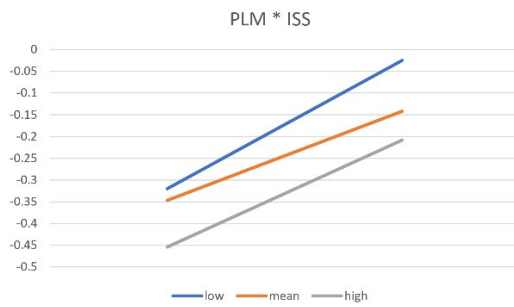


Figure 4. The moderating role of ISS in the relationship between PLM and EE.

Abbreviations:
leadership;

PLB, benevolence

PLM, morality leadership; ISS, interpersonal self-supporting personality; EE, Emotional Exhaustion.

DISCUSSION

In this study, this study investigates the variation in the association between paternalistic leadership and worker well-being, concentrating on the moderating role of interpersonal self-supporting personality. This study offer three new theoretical insights.

First, the study focuses on work scenarios in the Chinese workplace and suggests that interpersonal self-supporting personality (IID), an indigenous Chinese construct of personality, moderates the relationship between paternalistic leadership (Benevolent, Morality, and Authoritarian), and employee well-being measured as work engagement and emotional exhaustion. It supports favorable individual results at many levels within the international organization and aids in the investigation of the efficacy of paternalistic leadership in Chinese Confucian culture. Following Jackson (2016), it was found that there was a lack of research on paternalism in leadership in Chinese firms. It was also determined that cross-cultural management studies should emphasize the significance of identifying the relevant cultural contexts. Most research on strategic human resource management uses Western-developed theories, with little understanding of local practices. Research on indigenous personality can help better understand the relationship between leaders and employees in countries with different ideological, economic, and institutional contexts (McDonald, 2012). The concept of localization is crucial for global management theory, and many scholars have attempted to adopt an indigenous situational perspective to study leadership and employees in unexpected places in the West. Therefore, this study contributes to enriching leadership theories of non-Western contexts.

Second, this study find that interpersonal self-supporting personality moderates the effect on paternalistic leadership and employee well-being. More specifically, an interpersonal self-supporting personality moderates the relationship between PLB-IID and PLM-IID. It is worth noting that our research findings do not support the moderating PLA-IID relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee work engagement. This explains that the personality of employees who attempt to build relationships with others in an authoritarian leadership environment is not effective. These studies enrich the institutional literature by examining the moderating role of individual personality and extend the evidence for indigenous personality relationships. In addition, these findings support the need to adapt strategic human resource management practices to specific cultural contexts, particularly research on employees, when interpreters' social-cultural, and political environments of the interpreters are different (Panaccio et al., 2015).

Third, our results support the paternalistic leadership style's impact on employee well-being. It provides evidence from studies of paternalistic leadership across all three dimensions (He et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2023; Tu et al., 2023), these basic findings are consistent with research showing

that BL and ML had a positive effect, and AL was negatively related to employee behavior. In addition, previous studies focus on employee behavior, such as work-family conflict (Wang et al., 2022; Tokat & Göncü-Köse, 2023), employee retention (Gyamerah et al., 2022), personal psychological safety (Tu et al., 2023), employee voice (Peng & Chen, 2022), and so on. Moreover, most studies on leadership and employee well-being tend to focus on positive leadership styles, such as ethical (Chughtai et al., 2015), virtuous (Hendriks, M 2020), inclusive (Choi et al., 2017), etc. Our study is the first to bridge the contribution to how PL affects employee well-being through positive and negative aspects by measuring employees' behavior and psychological mechanisms.

Employees have become an important and sustainable talent resource for the organization when faced with internal and external environmental risks. Thus, the findings of this study provide several important implications for cross-cultural and post-pandemic era management and interpretation, especially in areas influenced by Confucian culture or in the Chinese market. The study shows that leadership style is indeed a factor that affects employee well-being, providing a verifiable basis for managing the behavioral mechanisms of employees in the company. For example, companies based in China or entering the Chinese market should provide training on management skills at the strategic human resource management level, encourage managers to use ML and BL as the main leadership style, and recognize the negative impact of AL on employees. The goal is to improve employee work efficiency, loyalty to the company, and retention rate by increasing employee engagement at work.

Furthermore, this study suggests that personality has a significantly moderate impact on BL, ML, and employee well-being. HRM practitioners not only need to have a comprehensive understanding of employee personality but also how to foster their work engagement to align with organization culture and development. This shows the importance of more and more Chinese interpreters conducting some kind of self-assessment questionnaire for applicants as part of the hiring process. Personality could also be considered as part of potential skills, which would not only help the manager to better recognize employees and promote their career opportunities but also help recruiters to identify suitable employees for the hiring process – this may bring moral and discriminatory risks.

Limitations and future research

Although this study provides important insights, there are also limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional survey in this study may bias the results, as all variables were measured without manipulation. It is recommended that future research use longitudinal studies to better understand the causal relationships between variables. Second, this study recruited participants voluntarily, and not all participants come from the same industry. It is recommended to focus on specific industries or organizations as research subjects in the future and to extend the value of the research through specific industry studies.

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