Benevolence and Authority, Active Execution, and Job Performance: Exploring the Effectiveness of Dual Leadership in the Chinese Context (Post-print)

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Abstract

Today' s complex and volatile environment calls for leaders to adopt ambidextrous leadership strategies to balance divergent demands within organizations. The combination of benevolence and authority, shaped by China' s traditional culture, represents a typical ambidextrous leadership behavior that numerous scholars have regarded as an effective approach to enhancing subordinate outcomes. However, previous research has overlooked the differential impacts of various combinations of "showing benevolence" (benevolent leadership behavior) and "establishing authority" (authoritarian leadership behavior) on subordinate work outcomes and their underlying mechanisms. To address these gaps, this article introduces followership theory to examine how combinations of benevolence and authority shape subordinate execution and subsequently influence job performance. Using polynomial regression and response surface analysis on 130 two-time-point supervisor-subordinate paired data, the findings reveal that: (1) when benevolence and authority are at equivalent levels, subordinates exhibit higher proactive execution when both are high compared to when both are low; (2) when benevolence and authority are at inconsistent levels, subordinates demonstrate higher proactive execution when benevolence exceeds authority than when authority exceeds benevolence; (3) the influence of benevolence-authority combinations on subordinate proactive execution extends to subordinate job performance, with the indirect effect of high benevolence-high authority on job performance through proactive execution being the strongest. These results refine scholarly understanding of the effects of combined benevolence and authority, offering valuable insights for research domains including ambidextrous leadership, followership, and job performance.

Full Text

Preamble

Authoritarian-Benevolent Leadership, Active Implementation, and Job Performance: An Investigation into the Effectiveness of Ambidextrous Leadership in the Chinese Context

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Abstract
In today' s complex and volatile environment, leaders must adopt ambidextrous leadership strategies to balance competing demands within organizations. Authoritarian-benevolent leadership, shaped by traditional Chinese culture, represents a typical form of ambidextrous leadership with dual characteristics, widely regarded by scholars as an effective approach to enhancing subordinate outcomes. However, previous research has overlooked the differential impacts of various combinations of "benevolence" (benevolent leadership behavior) and "authority" (authoritarian leadership behavior) on subordinate work outcomes and their underlying mechanisms. To address these gaps, this study draws on followership theory to examine how different combinations of benevolence and authority shape subordinate active implementation and subsequently influence job performance. Using polynomial regression and response surface analysis on 130 two-wave, supervisor-subordinate paired data points, we found that: (1) when benevolence and authority levels are equivalent, subordinate active implementation is higher under high-high conditions than under low-low conditions; (2) when benevolence and authority levels are inconsistent, active implementation is higher under high benevolence-low authority than under high authority-low benevolence; and (3) the influence of benevolence-authority combinations on active implementation extends to job performance, with the indirect effect through active implementation being strongest under high-high conditions. These findings refine scholarly understanding of authoritarian-benevolent leadership effects and offer insights for research on ambidextrous leadership, followership, and job performance.

Keywords: ambidextrous leadership; benevolent leadership; authoritarian leadership; benevolent authority; followership

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, leaders inevitably face numerous "competing" demands, such as focusing on tasks versus caring for subordinates, or being self-centered versus subordinate-centered. Recent research indicates that single leadership behaviors can no longer meet the diverse needs of organizations and their members, necessitating instead an integrative "both/and" mindset—ambidextrous

leadership (Rosing, Frese, & Bausch, 2011). Ambidextrous leadership comprises two differentially complementary leadership behaviors and is considered a key driver of work outcomes. Current research primarily focuses on Western contexts, examining integrations such as exploration and exploitation (Keller & Weibler, 2015) and transformational and transactional leadership (Schreuders & Legesse, 2012), while indigenous explorations rooted in the Chinese context remain scarce. This study therefore aims to develop indigenous ambidextrous leadership research grounded in the Chinese context.

In China, influenced by familism (Yang, 2004), superior-subordinate relationships often resemble parent-child dynamics. Leaders act like fathers, establishing authority to monitor subordinates while simultaneously demonstrating care and benevolence, thereby exhibiting "authoritarian-benevolent" leadership. While many studies report positive correlations between this leadership style and subordinate performance (Tsai, Spain, & Wang, 2013; Wang, Wang, Tang, Tang, & Al, 2016), others find that benevolent and authoritarian leadership do not interactively influence outcomes (Li, Ding, & Li, 2014) or even negatively affect perceived fairness (Zhou & Long, 2007). These discrepancies likely stem from two factors. First, complex mediating pathways may exist between authoritarian-benevolent leadership and work outcomes, with different paths yielding different effects. Second, during the enactment of authoritarian-benevolent leadership, different combinations of "benevolent giving"and "authoritative establishing"create varied subordinate experiences, potentially producing differential effects on work outcomes.

To address these issues, this study draws on followership theory (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014) to uncover the black box linking authoritarian-benevolent leadership to subordinate job performance. Followership, defined as behaviors that support and endorse leaders, includes active implementation as a key and widely agreed-upon dimension—behaviors demonstrating perseverance and excellence in executing leader directives (Zhou, Song, & Li, 2015). We argue that authoritarian-benevolent leadership directly determines subordinate task execution enthusiasm, ultimately affecting execution quality and efficiency. Specifically, benevolent leaders evoke gratitude and reciprocity, prompting subordinate loyalty, while authoritarian leaders exhibit high performance standards, image management, and didactic behaviors (Farh & Cheng, 2000), compelling public compliance and obedience. When leaders employ both approaches, subordinates in this "strict yet supportive" climate may interpret authoritarian behaviors charitably (Shi & Li, 2014), viewing authority as strict work requirements rather than personal attacks. This interpretation influences subordinate attitudes during task execution—specifically, their level of active implementation —which ultimately affects execution quality and efficiency (Wei & Shi, 2010).

Authoritarian-benevolent leadership represents a combination of two leadership behaviors whose effects mutually influence each other. When leaders simultaneously enact both benevolent and authoritarian behaviors, degree differences create four distinct combinations shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]:

high-high, low-low, high-low, and low-high, labeled as high benevolence-high authority, low benevolence-low authority, high benevolence-low authority, and low benevolence-high authority, respectively. Based on this classification, this study examines: (1) When benevolence and authority levels are equivalent, does subordinate active implementation increase as both benevolent and authoritarian leadership behaviors increase? (2) When levels are inconsistent, does active implementation under high benevolence-low authority exceed that under high authority-low benevolence? (3) Does active implementation transmit the effects of benevolence-authority combinations to job performance?

1.1 Authoritarian-Benevolent Leadership and Active Implementation

Authoritarian-benevolent leadership is a distinctly indigenous Chinese ambidextrous leadership behavior. Benevolent leaders show consideration for subordinates' work needs and personal welfare, while authoritarian leaders tightly control performance and demand obedience. We therefore define authoritarian-benevolent leadership from an ambidextrous perspective as: leaders possessing both benevolent and authoritarian behaviors and coordinating their use according to situational demands. Benevolent leadership involves long-term concern for subordinates' work and personal welfare (Cheng, Zhou, & Fan, 2000), including work-related tolerance and individualized care. While such comprehensive care enhances subordinate loyalty and effort (Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012), excessive benevolence may also trigger prosocial rule breaking (Li, Tian, & Liu, 2015) or foster overdependence. To counter these dark sides, leaders' task monitoring and norm maintenance through authoritarian behavior become crucial. Authoritarian leadership emphasizes unchallengeable authority, tight control, and complete subordinate obedience (Cheng et al., 2000), exhibiting both autocratic style and strict performance monitoring. In this context, subordinates must demonstrate compliance and public deference (Farh & Cheng, 2000). We therefore contend that the interaction between benevolent and authoritarian leadership may leverage strengths while mitigating weaknesses, producing synergistic effects greater than the sum of their parts.

According to followership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), subordinates exhibit corresponding behavioral responses when following leaders. In the Chinese context, both benevolent and authoritarian leaders play important roles in shaping subordinate followership behaviors. Subordinates following benevolent leaders work harder (Shin et al., 2012), while those facing authoritarian leaders typically show obedience and dependence (De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005). From an integrative perspective, we argue that coordinated use of benevolent and authoritarian leadership also triggers followership, encompassing both the positive attitudes evoked by benevolent leaders and the compliance generated by authoritarian leaders, ultimately manifesting as active implementation.

Degree differences in benevolent and authoritarian behaviors may alter subordinate active implementation during followership. When benevolence and author-

ity levels are equivalent, leaders may exhibit either high-high or low-low patterns. Under high-high conditions, leaders' autocratic style compels subordinates to execute directives faithfully (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004), while simultaneously providing care and support that evokes gratitude and charitable interpretation of autocratic style. Subordinates consequently demonstrate more positive attitudes during task execution to repay leaders' benevolence (Zhou, Zhou, Cheng, & Ren, 2010). Under low-low conditions, low authoritarianism causes subordinates to relax vigilance and become negligent (Ren, Farh, Cheng, & Zhou, 2003), while minimal care and mentoring allows inertia to grow, failing to stimulate genuine proactivity. In this environment lacking both supervision and warmth, subordinates may adopt a "punch the clock" mentality, exhibiting passive work states detrimental to active implementation.

H1: When benevolence (benevolent leadership behavior) and authority (authoritarian leadership behavior) levels are consistent, active implementation will be higher under high-high conditions than under low-low conditions.

When levels are inconsistent, leaders create two patterns: high benevolence-low authority and high authority-low benevolence. Under high benevolence-low authority, subordinates develop reciprocity motives under caring leadership. Low authoritarianism simultaneously increases subordinate autonomy and sense of control (Deci & Ryan, 1985), providing an activating environment for converting reciprocity motives into action. In short, high benevolence-low authority prompts subordinates to demonstrate active implementation in a relaxed, pleasant state to repay leaders' care. Conversely, under high authority-low benevolence, active implementation is relatively weaker. Specifically, high-authoritarian leaders sometimes interfere with work and ignore subordinate suggestions to maintain power distance advantages (Zhou et al., 2010). When combined with minimal care, subordinates perceive leaders as unconcerned with personal needs and development (Farh & Cheng, 2000), fostering a sense of being "poorly treated" that fails to effectively stimulate proactivity.

H2: When benevolence (benevolent leadership behavior) and authority (authoritarian leadership behavior) levels are inconsistent, active implementation will be higher under high benevolence-low authority than under high authority-low benevolence.

1.2 The Mediating Role of Active Implementation

Followership theory proposes a framework encompassing leader characteristics, subordinate characteristics, and followership outcomes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). This framework not only summarizes how leader factors influence subordinate followership but also includes the agentic outcomes of followership. Active implementation, as a proactive followership behavior, involves investing substantial energy and resources into role and task execution, ensuring timeliness and accuracy that enhance job performance (Peng, Wang, Ran, & Han, 2016). Integrating these arguments with Hypotheses 1 and 2, we argue that benevolence-

authority combinations affect job performance through active implementation. First, when benevolence and authority levels are consistent, high-high conditions promote positive work completion, yielding optimal performance, whereas low-low conditions inhibit positivity and reduce timeliness, necessarily impairing performance. Second, when levels are inconsistent, subordinates under high benevolence-low authority repay leaders' care through active implementation, facilitating basic performance goals. Under high authority-low benevolence, subordinates merely obey mechanically, lacking work enthusiasm, which affects both task execution and performance.

H3: Authoritarian-benevolent leadership influences job performance through subordinate active implementation, with the indirect effect being strongest under high-high conditions.

2.1 Participants and Procedure

This study employed a questionnaire survey method, contacting three enterprises in Chongqing, Shanghai, and Xinjiang across power and architectural design industries. First, "liaisons" were recruited within each organization to identify employees (with tenure exceeding six months) willing to participate and assist with questionnaire distribution and collection. Prior to administration, liaisons created participant rosters with matching codes for questionnaires. Data collection occurred at two time points: Time 1 invited 204 subordinates to provide basic information and rate their immediate leaders' benevolent and authoritarian leadership. After eliminating careless and incomplete responses, 183 valid questionnaires were recovered (89.71% response rate). One month later, the 183 Time 1 participants were invited to complete Time 2 surveys, where subordinates self-rated active implementation and leaders rated subordinate job performance. This wave yielded 130 valid matched pairs (71.04% response rate). Among subordinates, 52.31% were male, average age was 21 years, 94.62% held bachelor' s degrees or higher, average tenure was 17 months, and average time working with their leader was 17 months. Among leaders, 59.09% were male, average age was 25 years, 98.46% held bachelor' s degrees or higher, and average time in leadership positions was 40 months.

2.2 Measures

All English scales were translated into Chinese using back-translation procedures. All measures used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Authoritarian-Benevolent Leadership: This construct comprised benevolent and authoritarian leadership dimensions. Benevolent leadership was measured using the benevolent subscale from Cheng, Zhou, and Fan' s (2000) paternalistic leadership scale, while authoritarian leadership used Zhou et al.' s (2010) authoritarian leadership scale. Benevolent leadership included two dimensions: individualized care (6 items) and tolerance/understanding (5 items), with

sample items such as "He/she satisfies my requests according to my personal needs" and "When I encounter difficulties, he/she encourages me promptly" (= 0.91 and 0.93, respectively). Authoritarian leadership included two dimensions: autocratic leadership (8 items) and strict leadership (10 items), with sample items such as "He/she demands complete obedience" and "He/she monitors my work progress, requiring me to achieve goals with full effort" (= 0.96 and 0.93, respectively).

Active Implementation: Measured using the active implementation dimension (2 items) from Zhou, Song, and Li' s (2015) Chinese followership scale: "I strive for excellence in work assigned by him/her, seeking the best performance" and "I try my best to overcome difficulties to complete tasks assigned by him/her" (= 0.91).

Job Performance: Measured using Chen, Tsui, and Farh' s (2002) 4-item scale, including "I can complete assigned tasks on time" and "My performance always meets leader expectations" (= 0.70).

Control Variables: Following prior research (Peng & Wang, 2016), we controlled for demographic characteristic differences between leaders and subordinates. Additionally, we controlled for Western ambidextrous leadership using Rosing et al.' s (2011) opening leadership scale (7 items, = 0.85) and closing leadership scale (7 items, = 0.90). Following Zacher and Rosing (2015), we measured "opening-closing" ambidextrous leadership as the product of the mean values of opening and closing leadership to control for Western ambidextrous leadership effects.

2.3 Statistical Analysis

We conducted descriptive statistics and correlation analysis using SPSS 20.0 and confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 18.0 to test construct validity and discriminant validity. To test Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, we employed polynomial regression and response surface analysis (Edwards & Parry, 1993), which provides more precise results than traditional moderated regression or difference score analysis. The model formula is:

$$Z_{ij} = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Y + b_3X^2 + b_4XY + b_5Y^2 + \text{control variables}$$

Where Z_{ij} represents subordinate active implementation, X represents benevolent leadership behavior, and Y represents authoritarian leadership behavior. When testing the effect of authoritarian-benevolent leadership on active implementation, the slope along the congruence line ($X = Y$), calculated as ($b_1 + b_2$), tests Hypothesis 1. The slope along the incongruence line ($X = -Y$), calculated as ($b_1 - b_2$), tests Hypothesis 2.

To test Hypothesis 3, since authoritarian-benevolent leadership comprises five polynomial terms, the path coefficient in the first stage of mediation represents

the combined effect of all five polynomials on active implementation. Following Edwards and Cable (2009), we created a block variable by multiplying the raw values of the five polynomial terms by their respective regression coefficients and summing them. This block variable was then used in subsequent mediation analysis. We employed the bootstrap method to estimate bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for effect values.

3.1 Common Method Bias Test

To control for common method variance, we used multi-source, multi-timepoint data collection. Following Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) and Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro, Henderson, and Wayne (2008), we employed Harman' s single-factor test and the single-common-method-factor approach. Harman' s single-factor test revealed that the first unrotated factor explained 27.84% of variance, less than half of total explained variance. The single-common-method-factor approach showed an average variance extracted of 0.37, below the 0.50 threshold for identifying common method variance (Dulac et al., 2008). Thus, common method variance did not seriously affect our results.

3.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Discriminant Validity

We conducted confirmatory factor analysis on benevolent leadership, authoritarian leadership, active implementation, and job performance to test construct and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 1 , the four-factor model demonstrated superior fit indices (RMSEA < 0.08, NFI/CFI/TLI > 0.90) compared to three alternative models, indicating good discriminant validity among the four variables.

Table 1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Model	χ^2/df	RMSEA
Four-factor: AL; BL; JJZX; JP		
Three-factor: AL + BL; JJZX; JP		
Two-factor: AL + BL + JJZX; JP		
Single-factor: AL + BL + JJZX + JP		

Note: $n = 130$. AL = authoritarian leadership behavior, BL = benevolent leadership behavior, JJZX = active implementation, JP = job performance. "+" indicates variable combination.

3.3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 2 shows that benevolent leadership behavior was significantly positively correlated with active implementation ($r = 0.66, p < 0.01$) and subordinate

job performance ($r = 0.33, p < 0.05$). Subordinate active implementation was significantly positively correlated with job performance ($r = 0.33, p < 0.01$).

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Main Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Benevolent leadership						
2. Authoritarian leadership						
3. Active implementation						
4. Job performance						

Note: $n = 130$. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

3.4 Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 3 presents polynomial regression results. Model 3 showed significant improvement in explanatory power after adding squared and interaction terms ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04, p < 0.05$). Based on Model 3, we conducted response surface analysis (Table 4). To test Hypothesis 1 (high-high superiority over low-low), we examined whether the slope along the congruence line ($X = Y$), ($b_1 + b_2$), was significant and positive. Results showed a significant positive slope (slope = 0.47, $p < 0.01$), indicating higher active implementation under high-high than low-low conditions, supporting H1.

To test Hypothesis 2 (high benevolence-low authority superiority over high authority-low benevolence), we examined whether the slope along the incongruence line ($X = -Y$), ($b_1 - b_2$), was significant and positive. Results showed a significant positive slope (slope = 0.51, $p < 0.01$) with a lateral shift quantity of -1.96 (95% CI = [-2.34, -0.67]), indicating higher active implementation under high benevolence-low authority than under high authority-low benevolence, supporting H2.

The response surface (Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]) shows a convex shape, with active implementation highest at the rear blue position (high-high) and lower at the left corner (high authority-low benevolence) than at the right corner (high benevolence-low authority). The incongruence line projected onto the response surface approximates a straight line, indicating that as leader benevolence increases and exceeds authoritarianism, subordinate active implementation gradually improves.

Table 3 Polynomial Regression Results

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Tenure difference	4.33**	0.02**	-0.43*
Opening × Closing	4.39**	-0.40*	0.52**

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Benevolent leadership (X) b_1		0.33**	4.27**
Authoritarian leadership (Y) b_2		-0.52**	0.49**
Benevolent^2 (X^2) b_3			0.12*
Benevolent × Authoritarian (X×Y) b_4			0.09*
Authoritarian^2 (Y^2) b_5			0.04*

Note: $n = 130$. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Table 4 Response Surface Coefficient Tests

Line	Slope	Curvature
Congruence line $X = Y$	0.47**	
Incongruence line $X = -Y$	0.51**	

Note: $n = 130$. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

3.5 Mediation Effect Test Results

To test mediation, we created a block variable from benevolent and authoritarian leadership behaviors following Edwards and Cable (2009). This approach better assesses direct and indirect effects of congruent and incongruent benevolence-authority combinations without changing coefficients or total variance explained (Zhang, Tsui, & Wang, 2011). We then used the widely accepted bootstrap method (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010) to test mediation effects. Results (Table 5) show a significant indirect effect of the authoritarian-benevolent block variable on job performance through active implementation (effect = 0.16, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.37]), supporting H3.

Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper] illustrates the mediation effect. Job performance is higher at the rear dark blue position (high-high) than the front, and higher at the right corner than the left, consistent with statistical results showing that authoritarian-benevolent leadership influences job performance through subordinate active implementation.

To further explain the mediation, we analyzed how specific combinations affect job performance via active implementation by setting X (benevolent) and Y (authoritarian) values to 1 (low) or 5 (high) following Matta, Scott, Koopman, and Conlon (2015). Results (Table 5) show the strongest mediation effect under high-high conditions (effect = 2.69, 95% CI = [0.30, 5.56]), followed by high benevolence-low authority (effect = 1.66, 95% CI = [0.17, 3.40]), high authority-low benevolence (effect = 0.88, 95% CI = [0.09, 2.02]), and low-low conditions (effect = 0.21, 95% CI = [0.05, 0.42]), supporting H3.

Table 5 Mediation Effect Test Results

Path	First-stage coefficient	Second-stage coefficient	Indirect effect	95% CI
Block variable → Active implementation → Job performance	0.66**	0.24*	0.16	[0.04, 0.37]
High-high → Active implementation → Job performance	9.60*	0.28*	2.69	[0.30, 5.56]

Path	First-stage coefficient	Second-stage coefficient	Indirect effect	95% CI
Low-low → Active implementation → Job performance	0.76***	0.28*	0.21	[0.05, 0.42]
High benevolence-low authority → Active implementation → Job performance	5.92*	0.28*	1.66	[0.17, 3.40]

Path	First-stage coefficient	Second-stage coefficient	Indirect effect	95% CI
High authority-low benev-o-lence → Ac-tive im-ple-men-ta-tion → Job per-for-mance	3.16*	0.28*	0.88	[0.09, 2.02]

Note: $n = 130$. $p < 0.001$, $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.10$.

4.1 Results Analysis

Although previous research suggests authoritarian-benevolent leadership positively influences subordinate behaviors and outcomes in Chinese organizations, questions remain about whether different combinations of benevolent and authoritarian leadership produce differential effects and what mechanisms explain these differences. Addressing these gaps, our survey revealed that: (1) when benevolence and authority levels are equivalent, high-high conditions produce greater active implementation than low-low conditions; (2) when levels are inconsistent, high benevolence-low authority produces greater active implementation than high authority-low benevolence; and (3) these combination effects on active implementation extend to job performance, with the high-high combination showing the strongest indirect effect.

First, this indigenous ambidextrous leadership style triggers subordinate active implementation, echoing traditional Chinese military philosophy that effective commanders must combine strict discipline with benevolent care to maximize combat effectiveness. Specifically, when benevolence and authority levels are equivalent, high-high conditions better promote active implementation because they simultaneously evoke loyalty and gratitude while compelling faithful execution (Cheng et al., 2004), fostering positive and effective task performance.

Conversely, low-low conditions create low-quality exchange relationships, cause subordinate negligence (Ren et al., 2003), and fail to stimulate genuine proactivity, resulting in passive work attitudes. When levels are inconsistent, high benevolence-low authority better promotes active implementation by fostering reciprocity motives and providing autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985), creating an activating environment for converting motives into action. In contrast, high authority-low benevolence involves tight control without care, leading subordinates to perceive poor treatment (Farh & Cheng, 2000) and resulting in passive compliance rather than proactive execution.

Second, authoritarian-benevolent leadership influences job performance through active implementation, with the high-high combination producing the strongest effect. The ranking of indirect effects through active implementation from strongest to weakest is: high-high > high benevolence-low authority > high authority-low benevolence > low-low. This demonstrates that not all ambidextrous leadership combinations yield positive performance outcomes—only high-high conditions prove most effective (Zhou et al., 2010), maximizing active implementation and high performance (Özçelik & Cenkci, 2014). Low-low conditions produce the poorest active implementation and performance. High-high conditions allow subordinates to interpret high authority as promoting organizational development rather than undermining contributions (Aycan, 2006), fostering positive psychological cognitions and emotions (Cheng et al., 2004) that enhance performance through active implementation (Luthans, 2002). Low-low conditions create an environment lacking both supervision and care, discouraging active implementation and hindering performance improvement.

Notably, theoretically, authoritarian-benevolent leadership affects job performance through active implementation; without this mediating mechanism, the relationship would be difficult to establish. Indeed, supplementary analyses showed non-significant direct effects, confirming that the relationship depends on active implementation mediation.

4.2 Theoretical Implications

First, this study reveals why previous authoritarian-benevolent leadership research yielded inconsistent findings by examining differential effects of various benevolence-authority combinations. While prior studies explored simple interactions between benevolent and authoritarian leadership (Cheng et al., 2004; Chan, Huang, Snape, & Lan, 2013), they overlooked how different combinations affect subordinates. Our findings show that "high-high" versus "low-low" congruence and "high-low" versus "low-high" incongruence produce differential effects on active implementation and subsequent performance. This not only deepens understanding of inconsistent findings but also challenges the traditional assumption that "any ambidextrous leadership is optimal," providing direction for future research.

Second, this study uncovers the mechanism linking authoritarian-benevolent

leadership to job performance, opening the black box between this leadership style and subordinate outcomes. Although Chan et al. (2013) explored effects of authoritarian-benevolent leadership, they did not clarify the internal process. Drawing on followership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), we identified active implementation as a crucial mediating mechanism through which different benevolence-authority combinations differentially affect job performance, offering a new theoretical perspective to explain performance enhancement.

Third, this study responds to calls by Luo, Zhao, Han, Zhong, and Guan (2016) and Zhao and Guo (2017) to situate ambidextrous leadership research in the Chinese context, helping scholars understand indigenous leadership effectiveness. Since ambidextrous leadership originated in Western contexts, prior research focused on Western integrations like opening-closing (Rosing et al., 2011) and transformational-transactional leadership (Schreuders & Legesse, 2012). However, cultural differences mean directly applying Western findings to other contexts creates mismatches (Smith & Wang, 1996). Our study, rooted in Chinese "familial culture," explores how father-like leaders combining benevolence and authority affect subordinate outcomes, responding to calls for indigenous research (Luo et al., 2016; Cheng, 1995). Importantly, controlling for Western opening-closing ambidextrous leadership, our indigenous measure demonstrated incremental validity, highlighting stronger context-specific predictive power and encouraging future indigenous ambidextrous leadership research.

Fourth, this study extends followership theory into ambidextrous leadership research, expanding its explanatory power. While scholars recognize connections between leadership and followership behaviors (Bjugstad, Thach, Thompson, & Morris, 2006; Li, Song, & Zhou, 2015), most research examines single leadership behaviors, ignoring complexity. Our study applies the "leader characteristics-subordinate followership characteristics-subordinate outcomes" framework (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014) to complex leadership patterns, extending followership theory's applicability from single to ambidextrous leadership contexts.

4.3 Practical Implications

Enhancing subordinate job performance remains a critical management concern. Our findings offer new insights for practice. First, facing complex environments, leaders should develop integrative thinking. Training programs using organizational paradox examples can help leaders analyze and discuss issues dialectically, enabling effective ambidextrous leadership to balance organizational tensions. Second, leaders should not implement benevolent or authoritarian leadership alone but emphasize their coordination, cultivating authoritarian-benevolent leadership. Specifically, leaders should exercise appropriate centralization and monitoring while showing genuine care for subordinates' work and life, providing encouragement and support to enhance performance and organizational effectiveness. Third, organizations should emphasize developing subordinate active implementation, which directly and effectively promotes job performance. Coordinating authoritarian and benevolent leadership to create a "strict yet

supportive" climate ensures subordinates execute tasks proactively, ultimately improving performance.

4.4 Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations. First, we used self-reports for active implementation, which may differ from other-rated behaviors and be subject to subjective biases. Future research should combine self- and other-ratings. Additionally, our sample was relatively small and young. Future studies should expand sample size and diversify across ages and industries for more robust conclusions.

Second, we did not examine contextual factors affecting leadership effectiveness, such as environmental dynamism. Today' s leaders face uncertain, ambiguous environments requiring constant adaptation. Whether authoritarian-benevolent leadership effectively coordinates internal and external environments under such conditions warrants future investigation.

Third, the direct effect of authoritarian-benevolent leadership on job performance was non-significant. MacKinnon, Krull, and Lockwood (2000) note that non-significant total effects may result from opposing mediation paths canceling each other out. Therefore, beyond our explored positive effects, future research could examine dark sides based on cognitive dissonance theory, such as impacts on psychological safety (Zou & Yin, 2017) or ego depletion that may negatively affect performance, or whether performance gains come at the cost of well-being (Peng & Wang, 2018).

Finally, unlike Western ambidextrous leadership research, we focused on indigenous authoritarian-benevolent leadership. Future research should compare the relative effectiveness of indigenous versus Western ambidextrous leadership on subordinate behaviors and outcomes.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.