

A Study on the Mechanism of Cultural Differences among New Employees Influencing Implicit Followership

Wei Zhang*

School of Management, Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan, Guangdong, China

**Corresponding Author*

Abstract: Leadership is a collaborative process with followership, in which leaders and followers define, develop, and manage their mutual relationship. This study focuses on implicit followership at the individual level, using new employees as subjects. It introduces two distinct follower role cognitive structures-positive and negative implicit followership examining how traditional and modern individual orientations influence followers' implicit followership. It derives and substantiates the constituent elements and structural patterns of follower role perceptions formed by new employees entering the workplace, expanding prior research on the antecedents of implicit following at the individual level and offering theoretical contributions to this field.

Keywords: Traditionality; Modernity; Positive Implicit Followership; Negative Implicit Followership

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, the advancement of globalization, shifts in the U.S.-led economic landscape, technological revolutions, and intensified competition have significantly driven transformations in corporate behavior. Organizational structures have flattened, and rapid response to customer needs, enhanced dynamic management capabilities, and promotion of organizational change and innovation have become key sources of competitive advantage. The evolving environment has reshaped perceptions of the follower role: Followers must become more proactive and play a more significant part in building corporate competitive advantage[1]. However, within organizations, it is insufficient for only leaders and managers to shift their perceptions of the follower role. More critically,

it is essential to understand how followers themselves perceive their role and whether their traditional understanding of the follower role has evolved.

Research on antecedents of implicit following has gradually yielded a wealth of findings within academia. Preliminary studies suggest that extraversion may serve as one of the antecedent variables for implicit following [2, 3]. From a gender and social role perspective, research has found that women are perceived as ideal candidates for follower roles, while men are more likely to be propelled from follower positions into leadership roles[4]. Other research indicates that groups with which individuals strongly identify represent effective follower archetypes[5]; the formation of positive implicit following may be linked to the type of transformational parenting experienced by individuals[6]. However, no studies have yet explored the antecedent factors influencing implicit following within the Chinese context.

Sy and colleagues[7] identified cultural differences among distinct groups within the same ethnic culture, further demonstrating that individual cultural variations influence the formation of distinct implicit leadership perceptions. Numerous cultural priming studies also indicate that when primed with different cultures, individuals exhibit differing attribution tendencies and varying levels of interpersonal connectedness[8]. However, direct data on whether Chinese cultural variations affect people's thoughts, emotions, intentions, and behaviors remain scarce. Therefore, this study attempts to incorporate traditional and modern concepts representative of Chinese cultural values into research on antecedents influencing implicit following. From an employee perspective, it explores how individual cultural differences impact implicit following.

2. Theoretical Hypothesis

2.1 Traditionality and Implicit Followership

Yang et al. [9] defined traditionality as an individual's degree of adherence to traditional Chinese values. Farh et al. [10] first introduced this concept into organizational behavior by focusing on the dimension of obedience to authority. They selected five core items from the Obedience to Authority Scale to measure individuals' hierarchical role relationships as defined by the five fundamental relationships in Confucian thought. These five fundamental relationships possess five core characteristics: male dominance; veneration of ancestors; submission to authority; tolerance and conservatism; and self-justification and fatalism [9]. Subsequently, Farh et al. [11] defined traditionality as the degree to which individuals endorse the traditional hierarchical role relationships prescribed by Confucian social ethics.

Among the numerous concepts examining culture from a values perspective, traditionalism stands as one that best represents the uniqueness of Chinese culture and the characteristics of the Chinese people. It is also one of the concepts most capable of describing an individual's value beliefs [10]. Although traditional concepts within the Chinese personality structure are gradually diminishing or evolving alongside societal transformation and shifts in thought, this does not signify that such traditional values have been replaced or discarded. Rather, they coexist and integrate with certain modern values.

Traditionality possesses a relatively core connotation. For instance, it encompasses other-directedness and collectivism orientation (Yang, [9]. Compared to those with higher traditionalism, individuals with lower traditionalism exhibit a stronger desire to pursue self-development [12]. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that individuals with stronger traditionality are more prone to developing negative implicit conformity. Specifically, employees with higher traditionality are more compliant with authority. Those with traditional value orientations place greater emphasis on maintaining hierarchical order. In organizational contexts, they are more willing to comply with organizational arrangements and exhibit a stronger behavioral tendency to follow others. Chinese traditional culture, widely recognized in society,

emphasizes interpersonal obligations and specific role responsibilities [13]. Conversely, employees with lower traditionality perceive interpersonal interactions as primarily based on reciprocal exchange principles. Under this value framework, they are more motivated to actively communicate with others and build positive relationships. Their personalities tend toward extroversion and cooperative awareness, making them more likely to develop positive implicit following cognitions. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1a: Traditionality has a significant negative effect on positive implicit followership.

H1b: Traditionality has a significant positive effect on negative implicit followership.

2.2 Modernity and Implicit Followership

With the advent of reform and opening up, Chinese society has undergone profound transformations. Individual values, influenced by Western societies, have acquired characteristics of modernity. Existing literature indicates that research on traditionalism is relatively abundant, while studies on modernity remain scarce. Research suggests that modernity embodies egalitarianism, open-mindedness, optimism and initiative, emotional well-being, self-reliance, gender equality, and other traits [9]. Traditionalism and modernity are not two opposing extremes on a single dimension. Many societies exhibit both high traditionalism and high modernity, simultaneously respecting familial authority while emphasizing individual development [14, 15].

This study posits that an individual's modern cultural values correlate positively with proactive implicit followership. This stems from modernity's core tenets of egalitarianism, optimism, and proactivity. Egalitarianism reflects a firm belief in universal equality, aligning closely with description of followers viewing themselves as co-collaborators with leaders [16]. Optimism, meanwhile, represents positive expectations for the future, indicating that individuals typically approach their work with optimism and passion. Proactivity reflects an individual's tendency to express their emotions and ideas while asserting their rights. It manifests as a positive mindset and proactive behavior, making individuals more likely to strive upward and pursue excellence. These manifestations align more closely with the

cognitive schema of positive implicit following. Therefore, this study hypothesizes:

H2a: Modernity has a significant positive effect on positive implicit followership.

H2b: Modernity has a significant negative effect on negative implicit followership.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Questionnaire Pre-Test

To enhance the reliability and validity of the research and improve the quality of the survey questionnaire, a small-scale pretest was conducted prior to the large-scale questionnaire distribution and data collection. Using an electronic questionnaire and snowball sampling, initial questionnaires were distributed to investigators meeting the survey criteria within the immediate circle. A total of 60 questionnaires were returned, with 7 invalid ones excluded, resulting in 53 pretest questionnaires. Preliminary confirmatory factor analysis revealed that certain items failed to meet the intended research objectives. Specifically: - The factor loading for TRA (Traditionalism, Item 1) was 0.24, below the threshold of 0.6. - The factor loading for TRA (Traditionalism, Item 5) was 0.23, below the threshold of 0.6. - The factor loading for MOD (Modernism, Item 4) was 0.42, below the threshold of 0.6. - The factor loading for MOD (Modernism, Item 5) was 0.23, below the threshold of 0.6. MOD (Modernity, Item 5) had a factor loading of 0.2, below 0.6; NIFT (Negative Implicit Following, Dimension 1, Item 3) had a factor loading of -0.17, below 0.6; and NIFT (Negative Implicit Following, Dimension 2, Item 2) had a factor loading of -0.41, below 0.6. Consequently, these six items were removed.

Through small-sample testing, certain measurement items that did not meet requirements were removed from the study. After item deletion, all factor loadings exceeded 0.6, meeting the criteria for confirmatory factor analysis. For the traditionalism construct, the CR value increased from 0.671 before deletion to 0.759 afterward, while the AVE value rose from 0.332 to 0.516. For modernism, the CR value increased from 0.723 to 0.789, and the AVE value rose from 0.377 to 0.556. Following item deletion in the Negative Implicit Construct, the CR value increased from 0.841 before deletion to 0.917, while the AVE value rose

from 0.505 before deletion to 0.620 after deletion. Reliability and validity were improved, and a large-sample survey was subsequently conducted based on this foundation.

3.2 Research Sample

The questionnaire survey for this study drew its sample from graduates of the School of Management at a bachelor's degree-granting institution in Guangdong Province. To mitigate homogeneity bias, questionnaires were collected from this cohort at two distinct time points, with a one-month interval between the first and second surveys. Graduates completed items regarding personal background, traditionality, modernity, and other relevant dimensions during the initial survey. The second questionnaire, administered one month later, included items measuring positive implicit followership and negative implicit followership. Prior to the formal survey, the author contacted the Associate Dean of Teaching at the School of Management to explain the purpose and nature of this research. Subsequently, at the request of the school leadership, and under the condition that the survey would not involve the privacy of newly employed students or disclose confidential information about their employers, permission was granted to conduct a questionnaire survey targeting recent graduates. The questionnaire distribution process was as follows: First, the academic advisors for each major within the school were contacted. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to employed students via Qwixxan. Students were instructed to enter their student ID numbers in the questionnaire for subsequent matching purposes. The first questionnaire survey yielded 658 completed responses. One month later, using the same methodology, 611 questionnaires were collected. After excluding duplicate entries and matching responses, 452 valid samples were obtained. Descriptive statistics for the sample are presented in Table 1.

In terms of gender, the male sample size was 199, accounting for 44%, while the female sample size was 253, accounting for 56%. The proportion of females exceeded that of males. Regarding age, 345 individuals were aged 18-22, representing 76.3%; 106 individuals were aged 22-26, representing 23.5%; and 1 individual was aged 26-30, representing 0.2%. By age group, all participants were post-90s graduates. In terms of majors, 164 were

Marketing majors (36.3%), 58 were Logistics Management majors (12.8%), 229 were International Trade majors (50.7%), and 1 was a Business Administration major (0.2%). Regarding work experience, all 452 participants had prior work experience, representing 100%.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Survey Content	Category	Frequency	Effective Percentage
Gender	Male	199	44
	Female	253	56
Age	18-22	345	76.3
	22-26	106	23.5
	26-30	1	0.2
Major	Marketing	164	36.3
	Logistics Management	58	12.8
	International Trade	229	50.7
	Business Administration	1	0.2
Work Experience	Yes	452	100

Note: As this college's undergraduate program accepts military personnel transitioning to civilian careers, some students are relatively older.

3.3 Research Tools

All scales in this study were designed using established questionnaires. Measurement of Traditionality and Modernity: This scale employs the questionnaire developed by Farh[11], comprising 10 items. Measurement of Implicit Followership: Existing literature indicates that extensive empirical research primarily employs the questionnaire developed by Sy [1]. Given its widespread adoption across diverse fields, this study adopts Sy's scale, which encompasses two dimensions: positive implicit following and negative implicit following. Based on Sy's research, the proposed measurement scale for implicit following comprises 18 items. Specifically, it includes 9 items for positive implicit followership and 9 items for negative implicit followership.

3.4 Reliability and Validity Testing of the Scale

3.4.1 Content validity

To assess the appropriateness of the measurement scope for the sample content, this study conducted a literature review and

summarized empirical questionnaires with identical or similar dimensions based on relevant prior theories. This process established the measurement questionnaire for each dimension. Following the completion of the initial draft, the questionnaire underwent evaluation and revision by relevant experts and scholars. Consequently, the questionnaire developed in this study possesses a high degree of content validity.

3.4.2 Reliability and convergent validity

Table 2 summarizes standardized factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). Fornell and Larcker [16] recommended three measures to assess the convergent validity of measurement items. The first is the measurement of item reliability, the second is the calculation of composite reliability (CR) for the construct, and the final step is the analysis of the average variance extracted (AVE). Within a structure, composite reliability implies the internal reliability of each indicator, with items not meeting threshold levels being removed. Table 2 shows standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.612 to 0.926, indicating all items fall within a reasonable range and possess convergent validity. The CR values for all structures range from 0.762 to 0.965, thus exceeding the 0.6 threshold recommended by Fornell and Larcker [16], demonstrating internal consistency for all constructs. Finally, all AVEs ranged from 0.517 to 0.754, exceeding the 0.5 threshold suggested by Fornell and Larcker [16] and Hair et al. [17]. All structures thus possess sufficient convergent validity.

Table 2. Model Measurement Results

Construct	Item	Factor loading	CR	AVE
TRA	TRA01	0.705	0.762	0.517
	TRA02	0.612		
	TRA03	0.820		
MOD	MOD01	0.753	0.763	0.521
	MOD02	0.794		
	MOD03	0.607		
PIF	PIF 01	0.769	0.965	0.754
	PIF 02	0.915		
	PIF 03	0.857		
	PIF 04	0.702		
	PIF 05	0.911		
	PIF 06	0.882		
	PIF 07	0.917		
	PIF 08	0.911		
	PIF 09	0.926		
NIF	NIF 01	0.746	0.936	0.676
	NIF 02	0.850		

	NIF 03	0.779		
	NIF 04	0.877		
	NIF 05	0.767		
	NIF 06	0.873		
	NIF 07	0.853		

Note: TRA = Traditionality; MOD = Modernity; PIF = Positive Implicit Followership; NIF = Negative Implicit Followership;

3.4.3 Distinctive validity

Comparing the square root of the AVE for a given construct with its correlations to other constructs constitutes discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). If the square root of an AVE for a structure is higher than the corresponding non-diagonal elements in the row and column, these indicators correlate more strongly with the structure than others. As shown in Table 3, bold numbers along the diagonal represent the square root of AVEs. Since all diagonal numbers exceed their non-diagonal counterparts, the discriminant validity of all structures meets the requirement.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Results

Construct	AVE	MOD	TRA	NIF	PIF
MOD	0.521	0.722			
TRA	0.517	-0.016	0.719		
NIF	0.676	0.026	0.186	0.822	
PIF	0.754	0.152	0.068	-0.577	0.868

Note: Bold diagonal text represents the square root of the AVE for each dimension, while the lower triangles denote the squared Pearson correlation coefficients between dimensions.

3.4.4 Model fitting analysis

The structural model analysis in this study was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation. The fit indices employed were derived from the work of Jackson, Gillasp, and Purc-Stephenson [18], which examined 194 international academic journal (SSCI) articles to establish a framework for model fit analysis. Findings are reported using the eight most widely adopted fit indices (As shown in Table 4).

3.5 Hypothesis Testing

The results presented path coefficient analyses to verify causal relationships among variables. Traditionality (TRA) did not significantly influence Positive Implicit Followership (PIF) ($\beta = 0.043$), thus failing to support Hypothesis 1a. However, TRA significantly influenced Negative Implicit Followership (NIF) ($\beta = 0.200$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis 1b. Modernity (MOD) significantly influenced

Positive Implicit Followership (PIF) ($\beta=0.118$, $p<0.01$), thus supporting Hypothesis 2a. Modernity (MOD) did not significantly influence Negative Implicit Following (NIF) ($\beta=0.006$), thus failing to support Hypothesis 2b. In summary, the findings indicate that traditionalism exerts a significant positive influence on negative implicit conformity, while modernism exerts a significant positive influence on positive implicit conformity.

Table 4. Structural Model Fit

Index	Criteria	Model fit	Result
Chi-square	The smaller, the better	480.992	
degree of freedom	The bigger, the better	198	
Chi-square/Degrees of freedom	<3	2.429	Compliant with standards
GFI	>0.9	0.914	Compliant with standards
AGFI	>0.9	0.890	Acceptable
CFI	>0.9	0.949	Compliant with standards
TLI(NNFI)	>0.9	0.941	Compliant with standards
RMSEA	<0.08	0.056	Compliant with standards

4. Research Findings and Outlook

4.1 Research Findings

This study investigates the influence of individuals' traditional and modern cultural values on implicit conformity. Findings indicate that stronger traditional values correlate with a greater tendency toward negative implicit conformity, while stronger modern values correlate with a greater tendency toward positive implicit conformity. However, since traditionalism and modernism are not polar opposites on a single dimension, individuals may integrate diverse value concepts from both orientations. Thus, this study represents an exploratory investigation into how differences in cultural values influence implicit conformity perceptions. Furthermore, since both positive

and negative implicit following encompass three distinct dimensions, each corresponding to three different behaviors or traits, further analysis revealed that traditionalism significantly influences the incompetence and insubordination sub-dimensions of negative implicit following but does not significantly affect the conformity sub-dimension. Conversely, modernism significantly influences all three sub-dimensions of positive implicit following. This phenomenon may arise because, although traditionalism and modernism are both culturally rooted value concepts, the boundaries between them have become increasingly blurred with the advancement of globalization. Cultural interpenetration and the extension of cultural concepts are also undergoing subtle transformations. Attempting to explore the connections and influences between a single construct dimension and different dimensions of implicit following may prove insufficient. Further research should incorporate additional factors to investigate how cultural differences impact implicit following.

4.2 Research Outlook

Although this study has yielded certain research conclusions and achieved its intended objectives, it was conducted through limited field investigations and online questionnaires. Consequently, potential shortcomings may exist within the research, which also provides valuable insights and references for future studies. The relatively small sample size necessitated the use of questionnaire surveys to enhance external validity. However, geographical and temporal constraints inevitably excluded certain groups, while respondents' answers were influenced by subjective factors (social expectations, personal perceptions, attitudes, emotions, etc.), resulting in incomplete survey outcomes. Future research could consider collaborating with diverse industries and enterprises to broaden the demographic coverage and increase the sample size of the questionnaire, thereby enhancing the breadth of this study.

This study focuses solely on new employees who are recent graduates entering their first job. In reality, different types of new hires exhibit significant variations in their perceptions of the organization and their understanding of the follower role. Therefore, subsequent research could be narrowed to exclusively examine

recent graduate hires, or further refined to target new employees within a specific age group. Such focused investigations would deepen our understanding of the work characteristics of these new employee segments, providing theoretical support and practical insights for organizations.

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