

# The Mediating Role of Leader-Member Exchange in the Relationship Between Paternalistic Leadership and Turnover Intention: A Study on Millennial Employees in China

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## Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between three-dimensional paternalistic leadership and turnover intentions among millennial employees in China, with a focus on the mediating role of leader-member exchange (LMX). A sample of 241 millennial employees from private enterprises was analyzed using SPSS and PLS techniques. The findings indicate that LMX effectively mediates the influence of three-dimensional paternalistic leadership on turnover intentions. The study's use of single respondent and cross-sectional data may limit the robustness and generalizability of its conclusions. Nevertheless, the results offer valuable insights for management practices and decision-making processes in organizations. This research contributes to the literature by highlighting LMX as a crucial mediator in the relationship between three-dimensional paternalistic leadership and turnover intentions among millennial employees. It underscores the importance of further exploring LMX's mediating role in similar contexts, thereby advancing theoretical understanding and practical applications in leadership and employee retention strategies.

**Keywords:** LMX, Paternalistic Leadership, Millennial, Turnover Intention, China

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

LMX is proposed based on the theories of role identity and social exchange (Graen et al., 1972). LMX is considered an important indicator for measuring and describing the quality of work relationships between leaders and subordinates within an organization (Martin et al., 2018; Aggarwal et al., 2020; Terpstra-Tong et al., 2020). The LMX theory suggests that due to significant differences in the quantity and quality of resources invested by leaders and subordinates in the communication process, there are also significant differences in the quality of exchange between the two parties (Karanika-Murray et al., 2015; Omilion-Hodges et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2019).

With social progress and economic and cultural development, the millennial generation has entered the workplace and become the main force of labor (Siegfried Jr., 2008; Ware, 2014; Gallup, 2016). The millennial generation is known as the largest and most diverse generation, with a high turnover rate (Sharon, 2015; Gallup, 2019). The high turnover rate of the millennial generation has become a hot topic, valued and discussed by companies and managers (Kilber et al., 2014; McGrady, 2016; Sun, 2019; Pang, 2019; Sha, 2021). In China, there are currently approximately 350 millennials, accounting for 25% of the total population of China (Daxue Consulting, 2023). The average turnover rate of the new generation of employees is 2-3 years, and the volatile turnover rate within five years is about 20% in China (CIIC Consulting, 2021). According to the survey conducted by CIIC Consulting (2021), leadership management style and the relationship between leaders and employees have become the main reasons for the turnover of millennial employees (Harlianto, 2021; Moreno et al., 2022).

Compared to Western societies, Chinese society places more emphasis on "relationships" and respects "authority". The relationship between employees and leaders receives more attention and has a stronger impact on organizational employees (Guo, 2011; Ma et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2022); Secondly, the power distance in China is relatively high, and there is a strong sense of inequality between employees and leaders. Leaders have a greater influence on employees (Chen et al., 2002; Lin et al., 2018). The paternalistic leadership is rooted in traditional Chinese social culture, including authorship, Benevolence, and moral dimensions (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Cheng et al., 2004; Zhang et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2022).

From a leadership perspective, existing research has shown that leadership style and leadership traits are the main antecedent variables affecting LMX, and the more inclined a "bottom-up", "mild", and "positive" leadership style is, the easier it is to construct a healthy and high-quality LMX (Sun et al., 2017; Saragih et al., 2021; Sarmah et al., 2022). Different types and degrees of LMX will have different impacts on employees, teams, or organizations. Since the connotation of LMX theory is more derived from social exchange theory, LMX can play a "bridge" role between antecedent variables and outcome variables (Martin et al., 2018; Omobude & Umemezia, 2019; Shkoler et al., 2019; Wang, 2023). In other words, some antecedents tend to have an impact on behavior and other outcome variables through the

mediating role of LMX. LMX, as a mediator variable, is commonly studied from the perspectives of leadership style, leadership characteristics, and leadership relationship management, which is inseparable from the connotation of the LMX concept. Another research perspective is to explore the mediating role of LMX between the antecedent and outcome variables, starting from the psychological factors and individual traits of employees (Keskes et al., 2018; Assefa et al., 2024).

### *1.2 Introduce the Problem*

There are some studies on LMX as a mediating factor in regulating leadership member relationships. Despite the prevalence of millennial employees in today's global workforce, which constitutes the largest segment of the workforce (Negoro & Wibowo, 2021; Lee & Cho, 2016), limited studies on the LMX mediate the impact of paternalistic leadership on turnover intention of millennial employees. While extensive research has been conducted on the impact of leadership styles on employee turnover intention, the LMX mediates relationships between leadership styles and turnover intention among millennials are notably under-explored (Putriastuti & Stasi, 2019; Anderson, 2019). The knowledge and understanding of the mediation role of LMX in the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees and leadership style preferences and their unique work dynamics remain inadequately explored in the existing literature (Keskes et al., 2018; Anderson, 2019; Assefa et al., 2024). Specifically, the LMX as a mediating factor between paternalistic leadership and the turnover intentions of the millennial generation has not been thoroughly explored (Chen et al., 2016; Akdol, 2017; Chen et al., 2022).

Therefore, this study elucidates LMX as a mediator that mediates the impact of three-dimensional paternalist leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees. In addition, the existing empirical background used to study the LMX mediates the impact of leadership on employee turnover intention is mainly dominated by developed economies. This study has the opportunity to investigate organizational development phenomena in developing economies such as China. The main contribution of this study is to explore the LMX mediates the impact of the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership on the likelihood of turnover intention of millennial employees, enriching the understanding of the comprehensive structure of the role of LMX as a mediator and advancing studies on LMX.

The insight drawn from the study findings suggests that LMX can effectively mediate the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees. In addition, this study contributes to the conceptualization of aspects of LMX as a mediator. Understanding the how the LMX mediates the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees can provide significant insights for organizational and institutional decision-makers, providing them with relevant support to enhance high-quality interaction between leaders and members, and reduce millennial employee's turnover intentions.

The remaining of the paper is structured as follows. The following section reviews the literature behind this study and proposes hypotheses. The third section explains the data and methods used, and the fourth section reports and discusses the research results. Finally, this article introduces the conclusions, significance, and limitations of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Paternalistic Leadership

Zheng (1995) conducted a series of studies on leadership behaviors in various local organizations and found that paternalistic leadership is prevalent. Building on this, Farh and Cheng (2000) developed a three-dimensional model of paternalistic leadership, which includes authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, and moral leadership. Authoritarian leadership involves superiors exerting absolute control over subordinates and demanding unconditional obedience. Benevolent leadership is characterized by leaders showing comprehensive care for their subordinates and their families. Moral leadership is defined by leaders' selfless and exemplary behavior, reflecting their noble character. Authoritarian leaders require absolute obedience from their subordinates, implementing strict rules with clear rewards and punishments to ensure organizational precision (Shaw et al., 2020; Meng et al., 2022). However, this approach carries the risk of power abuse and can lead to favoritism if not balanced with benevolence (Shaw et al., 2020). Thus, noble virtues such as fairness, selflessness, and leading by example are crucial in leadership (Grego-Planer, 2022; Moore et al., 2023). In essence, authoritarian, benevolent, and moral support and constrain each other. A leadership style that integrates benevolence with moral can achieve a more comprehensive and effective outcome (Shaw et al., 2020; Meng et al., 2022; Grego-Planer, 2022).

Paternal leadership is not exclusive to Chinese organizations. This leadership style is prevalent in many organizations across Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Scholars from countries such as Türkiye, India, and China have extensively studied its effectiveness (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006; Farh et al., 2008; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). In this study, paternalistic leadership specifically refers to the three-dimensional of paternalistic leadership including authoritarianism leadership, benevolence leadership, and moral leadership.

### 2.2 Millennials

The millennial generation refers to people born between 1980 and 2000 (Stein, 2013). The millennial generation, also known as the "Y generation," or "generation network," is typically described as the generation born in the last 20 years of the 20th century (Howe & Strauss 2007; Edge, 2014; Dalton, 2014; Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014; Morrell & Abston, 2018). Millennials, the largest and most diverse generation, make up 1.8 billion people worldwide, accounting for 23% of the global population (Visual Capitalist, 2021). With millennials currently comprise 38% of the workforce (Kilber et al., 2014; McGrady, 2016). By 2025, millennials are expected to account for 75% of the global workforce (Timmes, 2022). In recent years, a significant influx of millennial knowledge workers has entered the workforce (Siegfried Jr., 2008; Ware, 2014; Xie, 2019). Organizations have found that millennial employees, who form the largest group in the workplace, are particularly challenging to retain (Greenwood, 2016). Known as the "job hopping generation", millennials tend to change jobs more frequently than older generations (Gallup, 2016). They are often characterized as "job hoppers" due to their tendency to change jobs every two years on average, with around 20 job transitions throughout their careers (Edge et al., 2011; Kaifi et al., 2012; Kassab, 2016). In

this study, millennials specifically refer to the generation born between 1980 and 2000.

### 2.3 LMX

LMX originated from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; He et al., 2021; Dirican & Erdil, 2020). Since Graen et al. (1972) proposed the concept of LMX, The LMX theory has become an important theory in organizational behavior research. Leader Member Exchange (LMX) refers to the dynamic relationship between supervisors and their subordinates (Graen & Uhl Bien, 1995; Eisenberger et al., 2014). Based on the perspective of role-playing, Dansereau et al. (1975) argued that there are differences in the relationship between leaders and different employees. According to LMX theory, leaders do not adopt a unified approach towards all subordinates; On the contrary, they establish different relationships or communication with each subordinate (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). When the quality of the relationship between leaders and subordinates is high, leaders will view them as "team employees", and the two often maintain a high degree of mutual trust, support, respect, and sense of obligation. On the contrary, when the quality of the relationship is low, subordinates are considered "out of group employees" who can only obtain authorization within their normal work scope and maintain a low level of interaction, trust, and support with their leaders (Hayes, 2013). In organizational environments, the communication relationship between supervisors and subordinates is considered the foundation for understanding employee attitudes and behaviors (Jablin, 1979; Napier & Ferris, 1993). Relationships are considered one of the most important relationships between leaders and employees (Manzoni & Barsoux, 2002). Most scholars believe that LMX is an important indicator for describing and measuring the quality of work relationships between leaders and employees in organizations (Aggarwal et al., 2020; Wagner & Koob, 2022; Ji et al., 2023). The social exchange theory links the quality of authorization and LMX relationships, indicating that resource exchange between subordinates and supervisors can predict positive and negative outcomes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

### 2.4 Turnover Intention

Turnover intention refers to an employee's deliberate and conscious decision to leave their current job or organization (Mobley et al., 1979; Sousa-Poza & Henneberger, 2004; Tanova & Holtom, 2008; Bennett, 2009). It is a psychological state that precedes actual turnover behavior and can be influenced by various factors, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work environment, career opportunities, personal circumstances, and so on (Saeed et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2019; Scanlan & Still, 2019; Rahman, 2020). It serves as a crucial predictor of actual turnover behavior, showing a strong correlation between these variables, thus making it a valuable indicator of employee turnover (Bothma & Roodt, 2013; George & Wallio, 2017; Kim et al., 2018; Qu & Chen, 2018; AK, 2018). Turnover intentions often arise from negative emotions or experiences, such as dissatisfaction with the current job. In this study, turnover intention specifically refers to the desire of millennial employees to leave their current job and work environment.

### 2.5 LMX Mediates the Impact of Paternalistic Leadership on the Turnover Intention of Millennials

Due to cultural differences, the impact of paternalistic leadership on LMX and employee behavior may vary (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006; Maqsoom et al., 2022). Parental leadership can influence LMX, and LMX can also influence employee behavior (i.e. turnover intention) (Tang & Naumann, 2015; Nazir et al., 2020). Therefore, LMX may mediate the impact of paternalistic leadership on turnover intention (Fang et al., 2019; Bedi, 2020; Jun et al., 2023).

LMX is considered one of the most suitable theories for handling the dual relationship between leaders and members (Erdogan et al., 2006; Ye et al., 2021). In organizations, the level of LMX varies between leaders and each employee (Ye et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2023). A high-level and high-quality LMX is the reason for high-level interaction between leaders and members (Terpstra-Tong et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2021). High quality LMX supports organizational culture by establishing trust, sharing information, cultivating higher job satisfaction, and lower willingness to quit (Erdogan et al., 2006; Andersen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2023). Low levels of LMX may be the reason for low-level interaction between leaders and members, which further leads to lower levels of employee willingness and distance them from the leaders (Aggarwal et al., 2020).

#### 2.5.1 Authoritarianism Leadership

There is no direct research on the impact of LMX mediates authoritarianism leadership on the turnover intention of millennials. However, in family businesses, the LMX mediates the relationship between leader mindfulness and non-family employee turnover intention (Razzak et al., 2024). Authoritarianism leaders have a negative impact on the task performance of subordinates through low-quality LMX (Wang et al., 2019; Siddique et al., 2020). The higher the quality of LMX, the stronger the indirect relationship between authoritarianism leadership and unethical employee behavior (Rui & Qi, 2021). The impact of LMX on turnover intention has always been the main focus of understanding employee retention dynamics, especially in the context of the millennial generation. A high-quality LMX relationship characterized by mutual trust, respect, and obligation will reduce the turnover intention of millennial employees (Niu et al., 2022). Thus, LMX acts as a mediating mechanism, shaping the dynamics between authoritarian leaders and millennials, ultimately impacting turnover intentions (Bedi, 2020; Fang et al., 2019; Jun et al., 2023). Building on this nuanced understanding, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H1: LMX mediates the relationship between authoritarianism leadership and turnover intention.*

#### 2.5.2 Benevolence Leadership

There is no direct research on the impact of LMX mediates benevolence leadership on the turnover intention of millennials. Benevolence leadership has a negative impact on employee turnover intention (Bakr Shaalan et al., 2018; Algarni & Kasib, 2023). This indicates that the higher the level of benevolence leadership demonstrated in an organization, the lower the turnover intention of employees. Benevolent leadership characterized by kindness and caring for subordinates lays the foundation for establishing positive leadership subordinate relationships. LMX, as the quality of these relationships, plays a crucial role in shaping

employee perception and experience (Chan & Mak, 2012; Grego-Planer, 2022). High-quality LMX means trust, mutual respect, and enhanced communication between leaders and millennials, creating a positive work environment. When LMX mediates this relationship, it will affect how millennials understand and respond to benevolence leadership. A strong LMX can alleviate turnover intention by creating a sense of belonging, job satisfaction, and commitment. On the contrary, a weak LMX may amplify the perceived gap between benevolence leadership and millennials. may increase turnover intention (Wang et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2023). Recognizing that LMX is a mediating factor can provide valuable insights into the mechanisms by which compassionate leadership influences millennial turnover intentions, providing valuable insights into organizational strategies aimed at retaining employees and employee well-being (Chan & Mak, 2012; Malik et al., 2015). Building on this nuanced understanding, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H2: LMX mediates the relationship between benevolence leadership and turnover intention.*

### 2.5.3 Moral Leadership

Moral leadership is characterized by ethical behavior, integrity, and caring for others, laying the foundation for positive leader-follower relationships (Zhang et al., 2018; Bao & Li, 2019). LMX is an important factor in moral leadership that influences the turnover intention of millennial employees. High-quality LMX promotes trust, open communication, and mutual benefit between leaders and followers (Zhang et al., 2018; Bao & Li, 2019). On the contrary, this positive exchange relationship alleviates the turnover intention of millennials, as they value meaningful connections and moral considerations in organizational interactions (Guo et al., 2021; Mostafa et al., 2021). Therefore, by promoting favorable workplace interactions, LMX has played a crucial role in transforming moral leadership into enhancing employee commitment and reducing turnover intention among millennial employees (Qian et al., 2017; Guo et al., 2021). Building on this nuanced understanding, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H3: LMX mediates the relationship between moral leadership and turnover intention.*

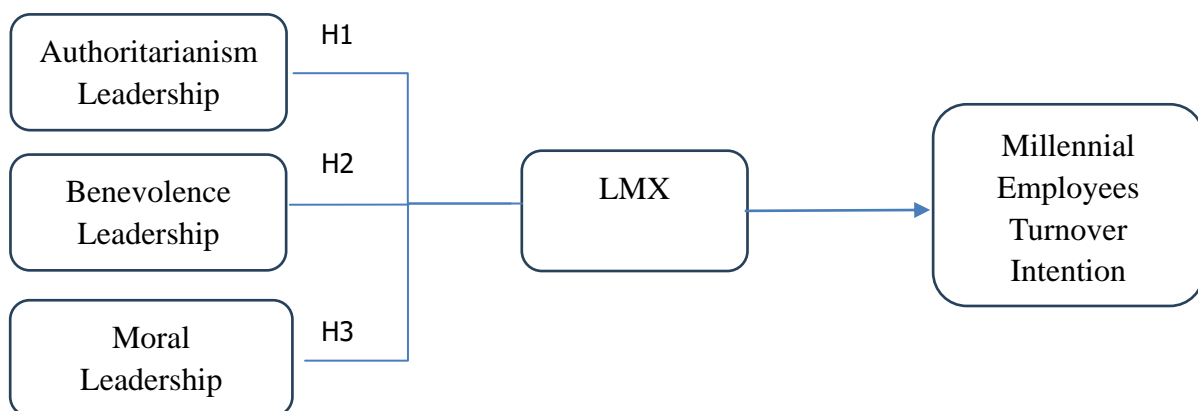


Figure 1. Research Framework

Table 1. Hypotheses of the Study

No.	Hypothesis
H1	LMX mediates the relationship between authoritarianism leadership and turnover intention.
H2	LMX mediates the relationship between benevolence leadership and turnover intention.
H3	LMX mediates the relationship between moral leadership and turnover intention.

### 3. Data and Methodology

This study utilizes quantitative research methods, specifically employing sampling surveys as the research strategy for data collection. This approach is well-suited for the study's objectives, particularly in identifying association patterns and measuring the effects between various variables (Bryman, 2012; Pallant, 2013). The rationale for selecting quantitative research is to rigorously test hypotheses and investigate the interactions between variables.

#### 3.1 Population and Data Collection Procedure

This study centers on a distinct group with shared characteristics pertinent to the research: millennial employees in China, particularly those working in private enterprises in the major cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. These cities, as highlighted in previous research are known for their robust economies, plentiful employment opportunities, and significant populations of millennial workers (Dian, 2014; Wan, 2018; Shen, 2019). This study employed purposeful sampling due to its effectiveness in examining populations with shared characteristics (Li, 2017). Data collection was conducted through online surveys distributed via email and social applications such as WeChat and Weibo. Utilizing online surveys allows for reaching a broader geographical audience, thereby saving both time and costs (Li, 2017).

#### 3.2 Research Instrument and Method for Data Analysis

This study utilized an electronic questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section gathered demographic information and history, while the second section focused on specific structures, with responses given on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"; 1 = "strongly dissatisfied" to 5 = "strongly satisfied"). The 5-point Likert scale is recommended for displaying the intention level of the target population (Li, 2017). To accommodate domestic Chinese respondents, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese. The reverse translation method, the most commonly used technique for ensuring translation accuracy in research (Douglas & Craig, 2007), was employed. To protect personal privacy, respondents remained anonymous and received an explanation form detailing the study's purpose to encourage participation. This study utilized Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) and Partial Least Squares (PLS) for data analysis. PLS was selected to



assess the hypothetical relationships in the study, as it effectively evaluates the relationships between factors (Hair et al., 2021).

### 3.3 Measurement of Variables

Table 2 shows the questions pertaining to Demographic Information (gender, age, level of education, monthly income, and so on) and Work History (working years, work reasons, etc.). The questions are adapted from previous studies in the same context, i.e. employee's turnover intention (Jaworski et al., 2018; Riyadi, 2019).

Table 2. Part 1 Demographic Information

Items		No .of items
Demographic		9
1	Work status	
2	Company nature	
3	Age	
4	Gender	
5	Marital status	
6	Level of education	
7	City of work	
8	Monthly income	
9	Job position	
Work History		2
1	How many years do you work in this company?	
2	What are the reasons lead you choose this company?	

Part 2 comprises the measurement items for all the research constructs utilized in this study. Previously established and validated scales were employed to measure these constructs as follows.

#### 3.3.1 Paternalistic Leadership

This study adopts the measurement items for paternalistic leadership developed by Wu and Tsai (2012) through case studies and in-depth interviews. These items cover the three dimensions of paternalistic leadership: authoritarianism leadership, benevolent leadership, and moral leadership, comprising a total of 26 items (refer to Table 3). These measurement items have been used in previous studies, which have demonstrated good validity and reliability (e.g. Sheer, 2013; Özçelik & Cenkci, 2014; Mansur et al., 2017; Yeşiltaş et al., 2022).

#### 3.3.2 LMX

This study utilizes the LMX-7 measurement items developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), consisting of seven items (refer to Table 3). These items have been widely adopted in various studies and have demonstrated strong validity and reliability (e.g. Joseph et al., 2011; Schriesheim et al., 2011; Furunes et al., 2015; Lommi et al., 2023).

### 3.3.3 Turnover Intention

This study employs the turnover intention measurement items developed by Roodt (2004), comprising six items (refer to Table 3). These items have been used in various studies, demonstrating good validity and reliability (e.g. Jacobs & Roodt, 2008; Yücel, 2012; Dwivedi, 2015; Bonds, 2017; Manaloto et al., 2022).

Table 3. Part 2 Measurement Items

Variables and constructs		No. item/ source
<b>Authoritarianism leadership</b>		9
1	My supervisor asks me to obey his/her instructions completely	Wu and Tsai (2012)
2	My supervisor determines all decisions in the organization whether they are important or not.	
3	My supervisor always has the last say in the meeting.	
4	My supervisor always behaves in a commanding fashion in front of employees.	
5	I feel pressured when working with him/her.	
6	My supervisor exercises strict discipline over subordinates.	
7	My supervisor scolds us when we can't accomplish our tasks.	
8	My supervisor emphasizes that our group must have the best performance of all units in the organization.	
9	We have to follow his/her rules to get things done. If not, he/she punishes us severely.	
<b>Benevolence leadership</b>		11
1	My supervisor is like a family member when he/she gets along with us.	Wu and Tsai (2012)
2	My supervisor devotes all his/her energy to taking care of me.	
3	Beyond work relations, my supervisor expresses concern about my daily life.	
4	My supervisor ordinarily shows a kind concern for my comfort.	
5	My supervisor will help me when I'm in an emergency.	
6	My supervisor takes very thoughtful care of subordinates who have spent a long time with him/ her.	
7	My supervisor meets my needs according to my personal requests.	
8	My supervisor encourages me when I encounter arduous problems.	
9	My supervisor takes good care of my family members as well.	
10	My supervisor tries to understand what the cause is when I don't perform well.	
11	My supervisor handles what is difficult to do or manage in everyday life for me.	
<b>Moral leadership</b>		6
1	My supervisor never avenges a personal wrong in the name of public interest when he/she is offended.	Wu and Tsai (2012)
2	My supervisor employs people according to their virtues and does not envy others' abilities and virtues.	
3	My supervisor uses his/her authority to seek special privileges for himself/herself. ( <i>reversed-coded</i> )	
4	My supervisor doesn't take the credit for my achievements and contributions for himself/herself.	
5	My supervisor doesn't take advantage of me for personal gain.	
6	My supervisor doesn't use guanxi (personal relationships) or back-door practices to obtain illicit personal gains.	
<b>LMX</b>		7
1	Do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?	LMX-7, Graen and UM-Bien. (1995)
2	How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?	
3	How well does your leader recognize your potential?	
4	Regardless of how much formal authority your leader has built into his or her position, what are the chances that your leader would use his or her power to help you solve problems in your work?	
5	Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your leader has, what are the chances that he or she would "bail you out" at his or her expense?	
6	I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his or her decision if he or she were not present to do so.	
7	How would you characterize your working relationship with your leader?	
<b>Turnover intention</b>		6
1	How often have you considered leaving your job?	Roodt. (2004)
2	To what extent is your current job satisfying your personal needs? ( <i>reversed-coded</i> )	
3	How often are you frustrated when not given the opportunity at work to achieve your personal work-related goals?	
4	How often do you dream about getting another job that will better suit your personal needs?	
5	How likely are you to accept another job at the same compensation level should it be offered to you?	
6	How often do you look forward to another day at work? ( <i>reversed-coded</i> )	

#### 4. Results and Discussion

A total of 245 questionnaires were distributed to the target survey subjects, yielding 241 valid responses and 4 invalid ones, resulting in an effective rate of 98.37%. Four questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete answers or respondents not meeting the criteria to ensure the data and results remained representative. Ultimately, 241 questionnaires were coded for analysis.

Table 4 summarizes the demographic profiles of the target respondents in this study. Among the 241 respondents, the majority are aged between 20 and 30 years old. Most of the respondents hold bachelor's or master's degrees. Their monthly salaries primarily range from 9,000 to 11,999 RMB, with some earning above 12,000 RMB.

Table 4. Profile of Respondents – Demographic

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	24 - 30 years old	172	71.37
	31 - 35 years old	46	19.09
	36 - 40 years old	16	6.64
	41 - 44 years old	7	2.90
Gender	Male	115	47.72
	Female	126	52.28
Marital Status	Single	156	64.73
	Married	85	35.27
Level of Education	Vocational School/Junior College	26	10.79
	Bachelor's Degree	142	58.92
	Master's Degree	63	26.14
	Doctoral Degree	10	4.15
City	Beijing	66	27.39
	Shanghai	57	23.65
	Guangzhou	62	25.73
	Shenzhen	56	23.24
Monthly income	Below 6,000RMB	10	4.15
	6,000RMB to 8,999RMB	30	12.45
	9,000RMB to 11,999RMB	108	44.81
	More than 12,000RMB	93	38.59
Job position	Financial Officer	27	11.20
	HR (Human Resources)	29	12.03
	Clerk	29	12.03
	Administrative Staff	32	13.28
	Operations Staff	52	21.58
	Marketing Personnel	29	12.03
	Technical Staff	34	14.11
	Others	9	3.74
Length of Service	Less than 1 year	60	24.90
	1-2 years	99	41.08

	3-4 years	50	20.75
	More than 5 years	32	13.28
Reasons for	Salary	160	66.39
Choosing this	Benefits	196	81.33
company	Personal Development	128	53.11
	Company Background	203	84.23
	Company/Team Atmosphere	87	36.10
	Leader	115	47.71
	Others	0	0

n = 241 respondents = 100%

#### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis provided the mean and standard deviation for all structures. The results show that the average value of this variable ranges from 2.809 to 3.862, with a standard deviation between 0.965 and 1.188. This analysis suggests that the data are accurate, valid, and reasonably representative. Detailed data on the mean and standard deviation of all variables are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Analysis

Constructs	Number of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Authoritarianism leadership	9	2.809	1.188
Benevolence leadership	11	3.161	1.109
Moral leadership	6	3.862	0.965
Leader-member exchange	7	3.411	1.036
Turnover intention	6	2.792	1.000

All constructs that being analyzed should be in the range of 0.70 to 0.95, which showed enough convergence or internal consistency (Hair et al., 2017), except for Turnover Intention (TI3=0.581, TI6=0.679) (see Table 6). Considering that Turnover Intention still has 4 items (after subtracting TI3 and TI6), deleting two items is considered acceptable (Cortina, 1993). After deleting 2 items, run the PLS algorithm again. For this study, the minimum and maximum value were 0.779 and 0.981, respectively from Moral leadership and Turnover Intention. The values of all constructs were presented in Table 6 Measurement Model.

#### 4.2 Measurement Model

The measurement model in this study was assessed by examining: i) indicator reliability; ii) average variance extracted (AVE); iii) Cronbach's alpha; iv) composite reliability (CR); and v) discriminant validity, as follows.

#### 4.2.1 Indicator Reliability

Urbach and Ahlemann (2010) explained indicator reliability means the degree to which a variable or a group of variables is consistent with the measured content. According to Hair et al. (2017), the outer loadings of all indicators should be statistically significant, in which should be 0.7 or higher.

In this study, all constructs analyzed should be above 0.70, indicating sufficient convergence or internal consistency (Hair et al., 2017), except for two items under the construct of Turnover Intention: TI3=0.581 and TI6=0.679 (see Table 5.3). Given that Turnover Intention retains four items after removing TI3 and TI6, this deletion is considered acceptable (Cortina, 1993). After removing these two items, the PLS algorithm was rerun. The new results after rerun shows that the all the items now have the indicator reliability above the threshold value of 0.70 (refer Table 6).

#### 4.2.2 Average Extracted Variance (AVE)

To test the convergent validity of the latent structures in this study, the AVE of each latent structure was evaluated. Bagozzi and Yi (1988) proposed that the acceptable threshold for AVE values is 0.50 or higher to reflect a sufficient level of convergence validity. From Table 6, it can be seen that all AVEs are above the acceptable threshold of 0.50 and are considered a reliable set of measurement model for the structure.

#### 4.2.3 Cronbach Alpha (CA)

The study used Cronbach Alpha to measure the internal consistency of data. This method measures reliability estimates based on the interrelationship between indicators. Robinson et al. (1991) stated the value of Cronbach Alpha should be at least 0.7 to show sufficient internal consistency. The results of data analysis show the range of Cronbach Alpha values are above the acceptable threshold of 0.70 (refer Table 6) and are considered a reliable set of measurement model for the structure.

#### 4.2.4 Composite Reliability (CR)

The range of CR value should from 0 to 1, higher values represented higher reliability. Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Hair et al. (2017) proposed that a sufficient composite reliability value should be 0.70 or greater. All constructs that being analyzed were scored value of more that the suggested minimum limit of 0.70 (refer Table 6), which indicated an adequate convergence or internal consistency (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2017).

Table 6. Measurement Model

Constructs	Item	Loading	AVE	CA	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)
Authoritarianism leadership  9 items	AL1	0.952	0.864	0.980	0.981	0.983
	AL2	0.946				
	AL3	0.919				
	AL4	0.955				
	AL5	0.935				
	AL6	0.920				
	AL7	0.933				
	AL8	0.902				
	AL9	0.903				
Benevolence leadership  11 items	BL1	0.935	0.801	0.975	0.976	0.978
	BL2	0.890				
	BL3	0.899				
	BL4	0.930				
	BL5	0.895				
	BL6	0.873				
	BL7	0.912				
	BL8	0.924				
	BL9	0.893				
	BL10	0.867				
	BL11	0.819				
Moral leadership  6 items	ML1	0.899	0.766	0.939	0.948	0.951
	ML2	0.913				
	ML3	0.779				
	ML4	0.891				
	ML5	0.884				
	ML6	0.877				
Leader-member exchange  7 items	LMX1	0.921	0.864	0.974	0.974	0.978
	LMX2	0.938				
	LMX3	0.924				
	LMX4	0.935				
	LMX5	0.923				
	LMX6	0.934				
	LMX7	0.934				
Turnover Intention  4 items	TI1	0.960	0.886	0.957	0.958	0.969
	TI2	0.920				
	TI4	0.938				
	TI5	0.947				

#### 4.3 Path Coefficient

Path coefficients are crucial for evaluating structural model analysis. The t-value assesses the significance and relevance of the relationships between variables. According to Hair et al. (2017), the direct effect analysis should employ the criterion for the 1-tail category. Based on

the analysis, for 2-tail, the t-value of H1 was more than 1.96, and the p-value was less than 0.05; H2 and H3 were more than 2.33, and the p-value was less than 0.01, which showed the significance and relevance between the structures. Table 7 presented the results of the t-value and p-value.

Table 7. Path Coefficient

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values
H1	AL -> LMX -> TI	0.104	0.107	0.052	2.011	0.044
H2	BL -> LMX -> TI	-0.305	-0.294	0.069	4.421	0.000
H3	ML -> LMX -> TI	-0.119	-0.118	0.041	2.942	0.003

#### 4.4 The Category of Mediation

According to Hair et al. (2017), if all relationships show positive coefficients and are significant, this suggests partial (complementary) mediation. Conversely, if the coefficient is negative and significant, it indicates partial (competitive) mediation. In both cases, the mediator role is maintained.

The results of this study show that the original sample value of H1 is a positive coefficient with significance, indicating that LMX plays a partial (complementary) mediation role in the relationship of H1; the original sample values of H2 and H3 are negative coefficients with significance, so LMX has a partial (competitive) mediation effect in the relationship between H2 and H3. All three hypotheses (H1, H2, H3) regarding the mediating effect of LMX have been confirmed to exist, and LMX is the partial mediation (refer Table 8).

#### 4.5 The Results

The statistical results demonstrate that the introduction of LMX as a mediating factor significantly enhances the association between three-dimensional paternalistic leadership and turnover intention among millennial employees. All three hypotheses (H1, H2, H3) regarding this mediating effect have been empirically supported (refer Table 8).

Table 8. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Description	Category of Mediation	Result
H1	LMX mediates the relationship between authoritarianism leadership and turnover intention.	Partial (complementary) mediation	Supported

H2	LMX mediates the relationship between benevolence leadership and turnover intention.	Partial (competitive) mediation	Supported
H3	LMX mediates the relationship between moral leadership and turnover intention.	Partial (competitive) mediation	Supported

#### 4.6 The Discussion

This study delves into the LMX mediates the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees, aiming to comprehensively elucidate its impact by integrating the perspectives of this population. Previous studies have shown that LMX can effectively mediate the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees. The results of this study indicate that the introduction of LMX as a mediating factor significantly enhances the association between three-dimensional paternalistic leadership and turnover intention among millennial employees. Specifically, through the effective regulation of LMX, the positive impact of authoritarianism leadership on employee turnover intention can be reduced, and the negative impact of benevolence and moral leadership on employee turnover can be enhanced.

The role of LMX as a mediator is pivotal, enhances the influence of paternalistic leadership on millennial employees' turnover intentions (Huang et al., 2021; Peng, 2022). This aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of LMX in shaping leader-employee dynamics and influencing organizational outcomes such as employee behavior and turnover intention (Wang et al., 2005; Chandler, 2020). Consistent with earlier studies, LMX has been shown to be a key factor in mediating the relationship between various leadership styles and employee outcomes (Jawahar et al., 2019; Chandler, 2020; TÜMKAYA & SARP KAYA, 2022). It promotes communication and strengthens the relationship between leaders and members, which is crucial for reducing turnover intentions (Jawahar et al., 2019; Aggarwal et al., 2020; Wang, 2023; Assefa et al., 2024).

This study investigates the role of LMX as a mediator factor in elucidating the influence of three-dimensional paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees (Huang et al., 2021; Peng, 2022). LMX holds significant importance as a mediator, as underscored in various scholarly works (Wang et al., 2005; Chandler, 2020). It plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics between leaders and employees, thereby impacting organizational outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention (Jawahar et al., 2019; Chandler, 2020). Existing research underscores LMX's role in mediating relationships between different leadership styles and employee outcomes, such as transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (Jawahar et al., 2019; TÜMKAYA & SARP KAYA, 2022). This study aims to link LMX's mediating effect with the impact of three-dimensional paternalistic leadership on millennial



employees' turnover intention.

Empirical findings in this study show that LMX effectively mediates the relationship between three-dimensional paternalistic leadership and turnover intention among millennial employees. High-quality LMX enhances the understanding of how paternalistic leadership influences turnover intention.

#### *Authoritarianism Leadership:*

Authoritarianism in paternalistic leadership, which involves absolute control and demands for unconditional obedience, increases turnover intention (Jiang et al., 2019; Sukmasari, 2021). Positive LMX can mitigate this by improving communication and reducing perceptions of control, thus lowering turnover intention (Naveed, 2019; Aggarwal et al., 2020).

#### *Benevolence Leadership:*

Benevolent leadership, characterized by compassion and support, decreases turnover intention (Chan, 2017; Luu, 2019; Khairy et al., 2023). High-quality LMX strengthens the care and support provided by benevolent leaders, making employees feel valued and reducing turnover intention (Grego- Planer, 2022; Yudiantmaja et al., 2023).

#### *Moral Leadership:*

Moral leadership, emphasizing integrity and fairness, also reduces turnover intention (Liao et al., 2017; Li & Lu, 2019; Xiong et al., 2023). High-level LMX enhances mutual trust and respect, reinforcing the positive effects of moral leadership and further lowering turnover intention (Gu et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2021).

This empirical survey supports the previous viewpoint and provides detailed insights into the LMX mediates the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees. Consistent with previous research findings and supplementing the previous research results, from the perspective of millennial employees, this study reveals that LMX can effectively mediate the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees. In three-dimensional paternalistic leadership, through the effective regulation of LMX, the positive impact of authoritarianism leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees can be reduced, to reduce the turnover intention of millennial employees; the negative impact of benevolence and moral leadership on the intention of millennial employees can be enhanced, it can also reduce the turnover intention of millennial employees. These findings are consistent with the premise of the study, as a supplement, this study emphasizes the importance of LMX as a mediator for the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees and also emphasizes the importance of considering the perspectives of millennial employees while incorporating three-dimensional parental leadership to understand the determinants of turnover intention. LMX has become a key factor in effectively mediating the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of millennial employees, highlighting the effective mediating effect of LMX.

## 5. Conclusion

### *5.1 Theoretical Implications*

This study emphasizes the importance of LMX as a mediator in leader-member interactions (Jawahar et al., 2019; Chandler, 2020). It investigates the intricate relationship between three-dimensional paternalistic leadership and turnover intentions among millennial employees, proposing that LMX is a crucial mediator in this context. The aim is to provide a detailed understanding of how three-dimensional paternalistic leadership affects millennial turnover intentions through the important mediation of LMX.

By positioning LMX as the mediator, the study seeks to establish a robust theoretical framework that enhances our understanding and predictive capability of the interactions between three-dimensional paternalistic leadership and millennial turnover intentions. This approach aligns with existing literature on leadership and employee relationships, highlighting the critical role of LMX in mediating such associations and addressing the high turnover intentions prevalent among millennials (Ahmed et al., 2013; Peng, 2022). LMX is pivotal in elucidating how three-dimensional paternalistic leadership impacts millennial turnover intentions, underscoring its significance in leader-member interactions (Jawahar et al., 2019; Chandler, 2020).

Moreover, this study used a large sample survey to investigate the LMX mediates the impact of paternalistic leadership on millennial employees' turnover intentions, supplementing previous research gaps that focused on Western developed countries (Peng, 2022; Gutterman, 2023), enriches the understanding of the important of LMX mediates the impact of paternalistic leadership on millennial employees' willingness to leave. The findings provide important contextual implications for China and other countries, especially Asian countries with similar cultural backgrounds to China, such as Singapore, Japan, and South Korea. Given the growing number of millennials in the global workforce, the study also produced some background check results to test and enrich existing knowledge by demonstrating how LMX moderates the relationship between three-dimensional paternalistic leadership and millennial employee turnover intentions. Grounded in LMX theory, it offers a comprehensive analysis of how paternalistic leadership influences millennials' turnover intentions, thereby laying a solid foundation for theoretical advancement and expansion in this field.

### *5.2 Managerial and Practical Implications*

This study provides valuable insights for organizations seeking a deeper understanding of the millennial generation and aiming to reduce the turnover rate of millennial employees. It emphasizes the importance of LMX mediates three-dimensional paternalistic leadership in reducing millennial turnover intentions. By improving the quality and level of LMX, the impact of paternalistic leadership on millennial employees can be improved (i.e. reducing negative impact and strengthening positive impact), and the turnover intention of millennial employees can be reduced (Nazir et al., 2020; Peccianti, 2020; Galdames & Guihen, 2022). Essentially, this study provides actionable insights into organizational management, emphasizing the importance of strengthening LMX as a positive moderating factor and

promoting paternalistic leadership practices as a mechanism for cultivating positive leadership and member relationships. By improving the quality and level of LMX, organizations can integrate the positive aspects of paternalistic leadership to adapt to management styles, cultivate mutual respect, understanding, and trust between leaders and team members; Actively respond to the departure challenges of millennial employees, and cultivate a more satisfied and dedicated workforce. Addressing and reducing the intention of millennial resignations not only contributes to healthy business growth but also contributes to national economic development (Wan & Duffy, 2023; Minzlaff et al., 2024).

### *5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

This study has some limitations. Firstly, examining the impact of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of Chinese millennial employees from the perspective of LMX theory provides valuable insights into the cultural context of China. However, it must be acknowledged that although China shares similarities with other countries with a Chinese cultural background, each background may have unique factors that influence dynamics. This may limit the generalizability of research results. Although theoretical foundations may have universal applicability, extending research models to different contexts or exploring different topics is crucial for comprehensive understanding and theoretical progress. Secondly, this study was conducted in private enterprises in four first-tier cities in China, gaining a deeper understanding of the perspectives and choices of millennial employees in this context. However, it is worth noting that due to geographical and temporal limitations, universality has limitations. Although using electronic questionnaires is practical, it may lack the depth and intuition of face-to-face interviews, which limits the exploration of participants' true emotions.

This study also provides avenues for future research improvements. Firstly, the results of this study indicate that the influence of LMX effectively mediates the influence of paternalistic leadership on the turnover intention of the millennial generation. Future research should adopt a multi-level approach, considering various factors and their direct, indirect, and moderating effects, in order to deepen our understanding of the impact of paternalistic leadership on millennial turnover intentions. Future research can attempt to incorporate mediating factors such as organizational commitment and work environment to test whether the relationship between the two can be strengthened. This helps to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the turnover intention of the millennial generation. In addition, considering personal factors such as risk-taking and control can enrich the understanding of the interactive impact of turnover intention. This method will help to gain a detailed understanding of this phenomenon and help develop more effective organizational management strategies. Secondly, this study only focuses on the background of individual countries and the data collected from individual respondents from private enterprises. Future research can attempt to extend the research model to other countries to improve the universality of research results and provide more insights.

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