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When Will the Trickle-Down Effect of Abusive Supervision be Alleviated? The Moderating Roles of Power Distance and Traditional Cultures

Abstract

The trickle-down model of abusive supervision points out that the negative effect of abusive supervisory behaviors will be imitated by the subordinates and transmits along the organizational hierarchy. An important question arises herein as when and how this negative effect will be stopped or alleviated. In this study we examine the positive relationship between abusive supervisory behavior and abusive subordinate behavior, and the negative relationship between subordinates' abusive behavior and service performance in teams from hospitality industry. Moreover, we posit that two team-level cultural values (power distance and traditional values) moderate the trickle-down effect of abusive supervision. Data were obtained from 266 supervisor-subordinate dyads in the hotel industry in China. The hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) results revealed that (1) abusive supervision positively predicts abusive subordinate behavior; (2) abusive subordinate behavior negatively predicts service performance; and (3) both traditional and power distance values mitigate the negative effects of abusive supervision in the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

Key Words: Abusive supervision, service performance, abusive behavior, cultural values, hotel, China

The stream of studies on abusive supervision, the dark side of leadership, which refers to "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178), have found a wide range of its negative effects on employee outcomes, ranging from low morale, perceptions of injustice, negative work attitudes, psychological distress, to work-to-family conflict, turnover intentions, and workplace deviance (Aryee, Chen, Sun, and Debrah, 2007; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Liu, Kwan, Wu, and Wu, 2010; Tepper, 2007; Wu, Kwan, Liu, and Resick, 2012). Most past studies attribute the effect of abusive supervision to the social exchange mechanism by arguing that employees react negatively to the abusive treatment received from their supervisors for revenge (e.g., Jian, Kwan, Qiu, Liu, and Yim, 2012; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Liu et al., 2010). A couple of studies, on the other hand, pinpointed the social learning process (Bandura, 1973) between the supervisors and the subordinates and proposed a trickle-down effect of abusive supervision (Aryee et al., 2007; Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, and Marinova, 2012). According to Masterson (2001) and subsequent studies, (Griffin and Mathieu, 1997; Shanock and Eisenberger, 2006; Tepper and Taylor, 2003) behaviors and perceptions can be passed down along the organizational hierarchy from supervisors to subordinates.

The trickle-down effect of abusive supervision found in these studies is significant as it reveals the cognitive process, independent of the emotional reactive explanation, that the subordinates experience when receiving abusive treatment from their supervisors, and it explains how they transfer it into their workplace behaviors and attitudes. However, two important issues were neglected in this cognitive approach. One of them is the specific workplace consequence of this trickle-down effect, i.e., how it is related to the employees' performing outcomes. The other

one, even more critical, is how and when can we stop or even reverse this chain of negative effects. To tackle the first problem, we investigate how abusive supervision influences employees' attitudes and behavioral outcomes. Accordingly, we argue in this study that the trickle-down effect of abusive supervision is especially meaningful in service and hospitality industry where it is an in-role requirement for the frontline employees to treat customers with friendliness and courtesy to create organizational profitability and customer loyalty (Diefendorff et al., 2006; Wu & Hu, 2013). To tackle the second problem, we examine the role of cultural context in mitigating the trickle-down effect from abusive supervisor to subordinates. Our potential contribution to the literature is elaborated as below.

First, given the importance of service quality, the detrimental effect of abusive supervision is salient in service-oriented hospitality industry (Jian et al., 2012). Abusive behaviors trickled down from supervisors will obviously prevent frontline employees from delivering quality service and hampering an organization's image. Surprisingly past studies have provided little evidence to the relationship between abusive supervision and service performance. Specifically, subordinates are likely to demonstrate the learned abusive behaviors to others through the trickle-down effect, which hampers their service performance. Examination of this relayed effect helps clarify the working mechanism of abusive supervision, which is independent from the psychological reaction explanation in prior study (Jian et al., 2012). Therefore, the first objective of this study is to investigate the trickle-down process of abusive supervision from supervisors to subordinates, which negatively influences service performance.

Second, in order to capture the specific trickle-down effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' behaviors, we refer to Tepper's (2000) definition of abusive supervision and define subordinate abusive behaviors as the extent to which they display hostile verbal and non-verbal

behaviors to internal and external members (i.e., coworkers and customers), excluding physical contact. These behaviors include displaying loud and angry reactions, having negative facial expressions, and expressing anger in the workplace. Although the behavior pattern may shares some common characteristics, such as rudeness and hostility, with interactive deviance (Bennett and Robinson, 2003; Jelinek and Ahearne, 2006), unlike deviance behaviors, the motivation behind these abusive behaviors is different. Workplace deviance refers to the intentionally conducted counterproductive behaviors frequently aiming at harming the organization or members within it (Bennett and Robinson, 2003; Bryant and Higgins, 2010). To make a distinct with workplace deviance, subordinate abusive behaviors in this study specifically describe the hostile language and behaviors the subordinates present in their work, which mirrors the abusive treatment they receive from their supervisor.

Last but not least, prior research has argued that abusive supervision is a global organizational phenomenon (Tepper, 2007). Although existing research on abusive supervision suggests that it is extremely detrimental to both individual and organizational outcomes, this may not be the case in traditional Chinese, which has high power distance and strong traditional values (Bandura, 1973; Farh, Earley, and Lin, 1997; O'Leary-Kelly et al., 1996). Social learning, as modified by culture, is an interpreter of managerial practices in light of cultural values (Erez and Earley, 1993). One limitation of the existing literature is that it has ignored the interference of cultural values that might contribute to our understanding of the contingent effect of abusive supervisory behaviors. This limitation is unfortunate as it leaves unexamined an important boundary condition for the effect of abusive supervision. Moreover, the marketplace is increasingly globalized, which has created significant demand for understanding how culture values may impact employee behaviors and firm effectiveness to a large extent (Lian, Ferris, and

Brown, 2012). This is particularly significant in China because research has shown that Chinese culture has high power distance and traditional values (Hofstede, 1980). In this context, the concern for others' expectations is high and role expectations from leaders and members are key sources of an individual's cognitive social learning and behaviors. We therefore consider China an appropriate setting for examining the abusive supervision and trickle-down effect (Bass, 1990; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, another major objective of this study is to examine whether cultural values of power distance and traditionality strengthen or weaken the consequences of abusive supervision.

This study provides a cross-level test of two cultural factors on the supervisor-subordinate relationship which extends our knowledge of how abusive supervisory behaviors interact with team-level cultural factors, testing whether cultural values mitigate or exacerbate the effect of abusive supervisory behavior on employee service performance. Below, we review the literature on the trickle-down approach of abusive supervision. Then we present the study design and hypotheses.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

The Trickle-Down Effect of Abusive Supervision

The trickle-down model developed by Materson (2001) provides a theoretical basis for the idea that individual perceptions and behaviors at one hierarchical level are likely to be reflected in the perceptions and behaviors at the next lower level. Organizational justice research has frequently examined this sort of trickle-down dynamics. For example, Tepper and Taylor (2003) found that supervisors who perceived that senior-level managers treated them justly would have their perception trickle down to lower levels by treating subordinates favorably. In

contrast, when supervisors are abusive, they are conveying a message of hostility towards subordinates (Lian et al., 2012). Supervisors' inappropriate work behavior can serve as a model for lower level subordinates through a trickle-down effect. In fact Mawritz et al. (2012) found that managers' abusive behaviors would be relayed to their direct reports—the supervisor level incumbents who would then engage in aggressive behaviors towards their own subordinates.

In line with the above reasoning, we propose that abusive supervisory behavior is likely to be associated with abusive subordinate behavior. Two major theories support that association: cognitive social learning theory (James et al., 1978, 1990) and the trickle-down model (Masterson, 2001). Cognitive social learning theory (James et al., 1978, 1990) suggests that meanings or perceptions in higher levels (e.g., supervisors) are sources of meaning or perceptions for lower levels (e.g., subordinates). Supervisors' abusive behaviors are important sources of social information that assign unique meanings or perceptions to subordinates' work attitudes and behavior. Subordinates will then formulate their work reactions based on the social information from the upper level and adjust their work behaviors in terms of their personal or acquired meanings (Wong, Hui, and Law, 1998). In the workplace, employees generally regard their supervisors as foci and an important source of social learning. Employees tend to mimic supervisors' patterns of behaviors to perform tasks. Hence, abusive supervision from supervisors is considered a major source of cognitive social information for subordinates in the formulation of attitudes and behaviors (James, Joyce, and Slocum, 1988; Murphy et al., 2003). For example, abusive supervisors often treat their subordinates with silent treatment or aggressive eye contact; subordinates are more likely to use these inappropriate behaviors to treat their customers or coworkers. Thus, supervisors generally teach employees at the lower level of the hierarchy these

abusive behaviors, and employees in turn treat others in the same way. In this way, abusive supervision is transferred along the organizational hierarchy.

Similar to cognitive social learning theory, the trickle-down approach argues that subordinates tend to imitate the perceptions and behaviors of their supervisors (Bass et al., 1987; Masterson et al., 2000). As noted above, extensive research has related abusive supervision to antisocial subordinate behaviors (Thau and Mitchell, 2010). Ouchi and Maguire (1975) found that subordinates used the same control methods as their upper-level managers to deal with their subordinates. Bass and colleagues (1987) argued that transformational leadership of higher-level managers is reflected at the lower level like falling dominoes. In this trickle-down logic, when subordinates perceive that their superiors mistreat them, they tend to use a similar pattern of actions to treat others in the workplace. In this line of reasoning, subordinates' abusive behaviors come from the focal supervisor. Thus, we have the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Abusive supervision is positively related to subordinates' abusive behavior.

The hospitality industry is a people-oriented sector, involving high contact between employees and customers. In this industry, service performance is regarded as the most important factor for maintaining high customer satisfaction and loyalty. Subordinate perceptions of supervisor's misbehavior can cause low-level perceived organizational justice and increased withdrawal behaviors (Tepper, 2000). When subordinates perceive that their supervisors mistreat them, they will mirror those behaviors. Such negative behaviors as loud and angry reactions, negative facial expressions, and negative emotion shown in the workplace, no matter directed at the customers or their coworkers, will impact service quality in a negative way. Such inappropriate treatment can affect subordinates' service performance, foster depersonalization,

and reduce personal accomplishment, which further affect organizational effectiveness (O'Neil and Davis, 2010; Xie and Johns, 1995). Depersonalization refers to an unconcerned and cynical attitude to the recipients of one's service. Reduced personal accomplishment is people's self-evaluation that they are no longer effective at working with others and unable to achieve their job responsibilities (Demerouti et al., 2001). Therefore, in line with this discussion, we argue that abusive supervision is more likely to increase subordinates' abusive behaviors, which in turn are negatively related to subordinates' service performance. Building on the trickle-down effect of abusive supervision, we further posit that subordinates' abusive behavior is negatively related to their service performance. Thus we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Subordinates' abusive behavior is negatively related to service performance.

The Moderating Role of Cultural Factors

Research has suggested that cultural factors can help explain the consequences of abusive supervision because different cultures may affect employees' perceptions of different leadership behaviors (Liu et al., 2010; Tsui, Nifadkar, and Ou, 2007). Cultural factors may exacerbate or mitigate the impact of abusive supervision because cultural factors can have a large influence on how individuals perceive themselves and their organizations—and how their supervisors should treat them (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). International studies have suggested that China has relatively high power distance (Hofestede, 1980) and respect for traditional values. Hence, to examine a Western-rooted theory in China—such as the trickle-down effect and the cognitive social learning perspective—it is especially interesting and necessary to take cultural factors into account.

Given that cultures represent peoples' collective beliefs and actions, cultures have significant group-wide implications. These collective cultures are best represented as group/team constructs. Consistent with this reasoning, we consider two cultural values in the Chinese context (power distance and traditional values). These two values may be good candidates for factors that can influence the consequences of abusive supervision on subordinates' abusive behaviors and service performance.

Power distance. Cross-cultural management and organizational research has frequently studied power distance. Power distance refers to the extent to which an individual views the hierarchical difference between authorities and subordinates as substantial but also legitimate and acceptable in organizations (Hofstede, 1980). In Chinese culture, people high on power distance are more likely to respect and trust their supervisors (Hofstede, 1980). It is typical for people high on power distance to accept status differences and follow the instructions of authority figures (e.g., immediate supervisors or managers). Their behavior tends to be guided by their role as subordinates.

Although cognitive social learning and the trickle-down approach suggest that subordinates will take supervisors' behaviors as social learning and mirror their abusive actions, the fact is that the abusive treatment may seem more normative to subordinates in high power distance cultures (Lian et al., 2012). We suggest that the trickle-down effect of abusive supervision may be less influential for people working in a context with high power distance value. People with high power distance are sensitive to power, and supervisors represent power and high status in organizations. People with high power distance tend to find supervisors' abusive behaviors acceptable because they believe that they should not go against their superiors (Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, and Hourse, 2006). Thus, in high power distance countries, it may be reasonable for

supervisors to display hostility, be less considerate, and behave more autocratically toward subordinates (Hofstede, 1980).

Based on the idea that people with high power distance may consider supervisors' abusive behaviors to be normal and acceptable, it seems reasonable to expect that abusive supervision directed toward them is less likely to be harmful (Tepper, 2007). Therefore, subordinates working in high power distance teams are probably more likely to accept abusive treatment at work and hence be less affected by their supervisors' abusive behaviors. Prior research in China has also supported the argument that people with high power distance are less likely to be critical of a high-status individual who insults lower-status individuals (Leung et al., 1996). Hence, we have the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 3:** The positive relation between abusive supervision and subordinates' abusive behavior is moderated by team-level power distance value such that the relation is weaker for people working in high power distance teams than for people in low power distance teams.

Traditionality. The value placed on traditional culture has ancient roots in China and was the dominant cultural expression for many centuries. Placing value on traditional culture refers to the degree to which cultures are committed to, respect, and accept the customs and norms of traditional values, such as fatalism, *guanxi* (interpersonal reciprocity), filial piety, ancestor worship, male domination, and a general sense of powerlessness (Schwartz, 1992; Yang, Yu, and Yeh, 1991). These traditional values emphasize respect for tradition, subordinating oneself to those higher in authority, following rules, and navigating relationships governed by strict, prescribed codes of conduct regulated by Confucian ideology—the five cardinal relationships (called *wu lun*). These traditional values emphasize a system of deference to authority, harmony,

formalistic interpersonal relationships, and maintaining a close hierarchical relationship between elders and the young, between seniors and their juniors (Farh et al., 1997; Yang, 1996; Yang, et al., 1991). Maintaining interpersonal harmony and acting with personal modesty are cherished values in traditionalist cultures, and there are strong social sanctions to protect against social discord (Fahr et al., 1997; Zhang, Zheng, and Wang, 2003). There are also strong cultural injunctions against challenging the status quo or criticizing entrenched patterns of behavior, which leads to strong social mores of conservatism, defensiveness against novel ways of doing things, and protecting traditions (Fahr et al., 1997; Leong and Chang, 2003).

Traditional culture may therefore mitigate the detrimental effect of abusive supervision because it emphasizes subordinating oneself to those higher in authority and following rules. In addition, traditional culture highly encourages social harmony, endurance, tolerance, and forgiveness by not blaming the source of mistreatment (e.g., abusive supervision), particularly if it comes from an authority figure (Gouldner, 1960). Because high traditionalists cherish the values of maintaining interpersonal harmony and acting with personal modesty (Farh et al., 1997; Leong and Chang, 2003), having abusive or negative reactions towards supervisors or others goes against traditional values.

Furthermore, high traditionalists generally believe that the path to success in the workplace is to maintain close and good *guanxi* (interpersonal relationships) with others in the organization. Hence, they tend to respect and submit to authority, and they are more likely to maintain their allegiance to authority figures (Hui, Lee, and Rousseau, 2004). Even though abusive supervisory behavior exists, it is a social obligation to tolerate mistreatment by not giving offence or trouble to others. Thus, even if subordinates perceive abusive supervision, subordinates working in a team with high traditional values are less likely to abuse others. In contrast, low traditionalists

are less likely to be regulated by traditional obligations of maintaining peace and harmony, and they are less likely to accept supervisors' abusive behaviors. As a result, when the subordinates in low traditionality teams perceive abusive supervision, they are more likely to be influenced by the trickle-down effect of abusive supervision and behave abusively at work. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

> **Hypothesis 4.** The positive relation between abusive supervision and subordinates' abusive behavior is moderated by traditional cultural values, such that the relation is weaker for subordinates working in high traditionality teams than those in low traditionality teams.

Methods

Sample and Procedures

To test the hypothesized relationships in this study, we targeted at hospitality companies in Beijing, China. The research team approached participants in a full-time Master program specially developed for hospitality personnel at a university in Beijing. These participants provided us the contact information of their HR managers, we then contacted the HR managers by emails and follow-up phone calls. Finally 50 HR managers from different hotels agreed to help. We asked them to recommend one functional team or department in their hotels to participate in our survey. We assured the participants that the questionnaires would be anonymous and the survey information would be kept confidential and at no time would any individual results be relayed to the hotel management or anyone other than the research team. With help from these HR managers, 36 out of 50 teams participated in the survey.

With the help of HR managers, separate questionnaires were administered to team managers and subordinates. Employees were asked to answer questions about their perceptions of abusive supervision, their abusive behaviors toward others, and power distance and traditional

values. Team managers were asked to rate their subordinates' service performance. Following the commonly used back-translation procedure, the scales were translated from English into Chinese and then back into English by two independent bilingual translators to ensure equivalency of meaning (Brislin, 1986).

The HR managers distributed 36 survey packets to the team managers and 300 survey packets to subordinates, and the subordinates were allowed to decide whether or not they would participate in the study. Each survey packet was put in a sealed envelope which included a cover letter explaining the general purpose of the study and stating that participation was voluntary. In order to assure confidentiality and anonymity, each participant was given a unique identification code so that data collected from the subordinates and supervisors could be matched and grouped for later analysis. Respondents placed their completed surveys in a sealed envelope and returned them to a box located in the HR department of each company. We then visited each company to collect the questionnaires. The final sample consisted of 266 employees (an 88% response rate) who were supervised by 36 team managers (a 72% response rate). The sample size at each organization ranged from 5 to 11, with a mean of 7. The team leaders held positions ranging from upper-level manager to team supervisors. All of the employee respondents were low or mid-level employees, and all of them were supervised and reported directly to their team managers during working hours. The demographic details are shown in Exhibit 1 below.

Insert Exhibit 1 about here

Measures

All survey measures used a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Abusive supervision. We assessed 15-item scale of abusive supervision developed by Tepper (2000). Participants reported how often their immediate supervisors performed different types of abusive behaviors. Sample items include "My supervisor reminds me of my past mistakes and failures," and "My supervisor expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason." we ran the CFA of the fit indexes of this construct. A single second-order factor fell within an acceptable range (χ^2 = 121.72, p<.01; *CFI* = .95; *TLI* = .94, *RMSEA* = .07), suggesting that the dimensions reflected the overall construct. We average the 15 items to yield a single composite measure, with a high score indicating a high abusive supervision. Coefficient alpha for this scale was .92.

Employee abusive behaviors. Based on Tepper's (2000) literature of abusive supervisory behaviors and the information from HR managers in each organization, we developed a five-item scale to assess employees' abusive behaviors at work. Participants reported how often they displayed different types of abusive behavior towards others. The five items were: (1) "I tend to blame others to save myself embarrassment"; (2) "I express anger at others when I am mad for another reason"; (3) "I make negative comments about me to others"; (4) "I am rude to others when performing tasks"; and (5) "I tell others they are incompetent." The coefficient alpha of this scale was .81.

Service performance. We used the seven-item scale developed by Borucki and Burke (1999) to assess employee service performance. Team managers were asked to rate the service performance of their subordinates. Sample items included "This employee is friendly and helpful to customers"; "This employee is able to help customers when needed"; and "This employee approaches customers quickly." The coefficient alpha for this scale was .90.

We constructed two team-level cultural factors by aggregating the individual employee scores to the team level and testing the between-group variance and within-firm agreement. We also computed the internal consistency reliability estimates for these variables at the firm level (Sirotnik, 1980). It is also necessary to assess team-level cultures by examining their inter-rater agreement (r_{wg}; James, Demaree, and Wolf, 1993), between-group agreement, within-group agreement (Bliese, 2000, Hofmann et al., 2000), intraclass correlations (ICC1), and the reliability of the mean (ICC2).

Power distance. We assessed power distance with Dorfman and Howell's (1988) six-item scale. Sample items included "Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates" and "It is frequently necessary for a manager to use authority and power when dealing with subordinates." A one-way ANOVA showed high between-group variation and within-group agreement for this team-level cultural value ($F = 3.21$, $p < 0.01$; $Rwg = .95$; ICC1 = .23; ICC2 = .70). The alpha coefficient of this six-item scale was .83.

Traditionality. Traditional culture was assessed with a five-item scale originally developed by Yang and colleagues (1991) and later used by Farh, Earley, and Lin (1997) in a Chinese sample in Taiwan. Sample items include "The top management is just like the head of a household; the citizens should obey his decisions on all state matters" and "When people are in dispute, they should ask the senior person to decide who is right." A one-way ANOVA showed high between-group variation and within-group agreement for this team-level value ($F = 2.98$, $p < 0.01$; $Rwg = 0.91$; ICC1 = .26; ICC2 = .72). The coefficient alpha of this five-item scale was .90.

Control variables. We controlled several key variables that were likely to be associated with abusive supervision and outcomes (Tepper et al., 2008). We controlled for gender (0 = male,

1 = female), age (in years), and organization tenure (in years). Team size and company size were also controlled because these can affect individual performance (Hofmann and Stetzer, 1998).

Analyses. We used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) version 6.02 (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, and Congdon, 2004) to test all of the hypotheses. Multilevel researchers (Hofmann and Stetzer, 1998) have demonstrated that multilevel analysis is a more appropriate method for analyzing cross-level data because such data have a nested structure (i.e., employees are nested with the organization). In other words, the work-related attitudes and behaviors of the employees may be similar because they are all working in the same organization. Therefore, we used the HLM computer package to analyze the cross-level hypotheses.

Results

Exhibit 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables. As expected, abusive supervision was positively correlated with subordinates' abusive behavior ($r = .41$, $p < .01$) and negatively related to employee service performance ($r = -.19$, $p < .05$). As expected, subordinates' abusive behavior was negatively associated with employee service performance ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$).

Insert Exhibit 2 about here

A measurement model was estimated by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the convergent and discriminant validity of each variable. We first examined a four-factor model that included abusive supervision, power distance, traditional culture, and subordinates' abusive behavior. The discriminant validity of the four constructs was tested by contrasting a four-factor

model against a three-factor and a one-factor model. The one-factor model loaded all items onto a "grand" latent factor. The three-factor model combined abusive supervision and subordinates' abusive behavior into one factor because they had the highest correlation among the four factors. The three-factor model left the other two cultural factors separate. The one-factor (χ^2 = 1,981.32, *df* = 252, $p < .01$; *GFI* = .55; *CFI* = .54; *RMSEA* = .12) and three-factor (χ^2 = 539.84, *df* = 183, $p < .01$; *GFI* = .71; *CFI* = .70; *RMSEA* = .09) models yielded poor fits of the data compared to the four-factor model (χ^2 = 287.65, *df* = 156, $p < .01$; *GFI* = .91; *CFI* = .90, *RMSEA* = .07). In addition, various fit indices supported the fit of the four-factor model, thus supporting the discriminant validity of the each construct.

Next, HLM was used to test the direct and cross-level hypotheses. Before any of the cross-level effects were examined, we needed to establish that there was a significant amount of between-group variance in abusive subordinate behavior. First, to estimate and test the significance of the level-2 residual variance, we examined a null model in which there were no level-1 or level-2 predictors of subordinates' abusive behavior ($\tau = .05$, $p < .01$; χ^2 =152.88, $p < .01$). The ICC1 values indicated that 21% of the variance in subordinates' abusive behaviors occurred between groups, warranting an examination of the firm-level moderators.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that abusive supervision is positively related to subordinates' abusive behavior, and Hypothesis 2 predicts that subordinates' abusive behavior is negatively related to service performance. Using an "intercept-as-outcomes" model (Exhibit 3), we first estimated a level-1 model for subordinates' abusive behavior with no predictor specified for level 2. In this model, subordinates' abusive behavior was positively predicted by abusive supervisory behavior (Model 2: $\gamma = .48$, $p < .01$) and subordinates' abusive behavior was negatively related to service performance (Model 9: $\gamma = -.51$, $p < .01$). Abusive supervision accounted for 26% of the

between-group variance in subordinates' abusive behavior, and subordinates' abusive behavior accounted for 17% of the between-group variance in service performance. Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported.

We then tested the main effects of the team-level predictors of abusive subordinate behavior. Abusive supervision was treated as a level-1 predictor of abusive subordinate behavior, and the intercept coefficients obtained from level 1 were regressed onto the two cultural values. The HLM results in Exhibit 3 indicate that power distance (Model 3: γ = -.28, p < .01) and traditional culture (Model 3: γ = -.35, p < .01) were significantly related to subordinates' abusive behavior. Power distance accounted for 25% of the between-group variance in subordinates' abusive behavior and traditional culture accounted for 18%.

Insert Exhibit 3 about here

Finally, a set of "slopes-as-outcomes" model was examined to evaluate the hypothesized cross-level interactions. Hypothesis 3 predicts that power distance value would moderate the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' abusive behavior, such that the relationship will be weaker when power distance is strong. In Exhibit 3, the cross-level interaction results show that power distance culture as a level-2 predictor of the slope of the abusive supervision had a significant effect on subordinates' abusive behavior (Model 4: γ = -.19, p < .01). Power distance explained 22% of the between-group variance in the slope of the subordinates' abusive behavior. Exhibit 4 graphically represents this moderating effect with high and low power distance (or traditionalism) depicted as one standard deviation above and below the mean. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, abusive supervisory behaviors were positively related to

subordinates' abusive behavior (see Exhibit 4), and this positive relationship was weaker for teams with a strong power distance values.

Insert Exhibit 4 about here

Hypothesis 4 predicts that traditional value moderates the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' abusive behavior, such that the positive relationship will be weaker when traditional value is strong. When traditional value was treated as a level-2 predictor, the slope of abusive supervision had a significant effect on subordinates' abusive behavior (Model 4: $\gamma = -.21$, $p < .01$). Traditional value explained 15% of the between-group variance in the slope of subordinates' abusive behavior. Exhibit 5 graphically represents this moderating effect. Consistent with Hypothesis 4, abusive supervisory behaviors were positively related to subordinates' abusive behavior (see Exhibit 5), and this positive relationship was weaker for teams with a strong traditional value.

Insert Exhibit 5 about here

Discussion

The findings of this study supported our hypotheses about the cognitive social learning process linking supervisory abusive supervision to employee service performance. And by examining the moderating effects of power distance and traditionality, this study shows that the trickle-down effect of abusive supervision is contingent on the team's cultural climate. Specifically, based on the trickle-down effect, we found that abusive supervisory behavior was positively associated with abusive subordinate behavior. Second, abusive subordinate behavior

was negatively associated with service performance. Third, the two team-level cultural values (tradition and power distance) moderated the relationships of abusive supervision with abusive subordinate behavior and service performance, such that the relationships were weaker for subordinates working in strong traditional and high power distance team culture. Fourth, in line with cognitive social learning theory, this study found that abusive subordinate behavior mediated the link between abusive supervision with subordinate service performance.

Theoretically, this study offers further insight into the relationship between abusive supervision and abusive subordinate behavior by investigating this trickle-down effect in the hospitality industry. Despite the large number of prior studies that showed that abusive supervision would predict employees' negative attitudes, behaviors, and psychological health (Tepper, 2000), there has been very limited evidence that related abusive supervision to employees' job performance. By focusing on the hospitality industry, our study revealed the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' job outcomes. We introduced the construct of subordinates' abusive behaviors to interpret how supervisor's mistreatment to the subordinates will be transferred to the subordinate's level and turn into poor service quality. This approach deviates from the revenge interpretation (Jian et al., 2012; Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Liu et al., 2010) for the effect of abusive supervision by proposing a social learning mechanism.

Moreover, the moderating effects of the two cultural factors found in this study extend the abusive supervision literature by answering the questions *when* and *how* the trickle-down effect of abusive supervision will be mitigated. These findings suggest a complex but rich picture of the ways in which power distance and traditionality affect the supervisor-subordinate relationship in Chinese context. As discussed, high traditionalists tend to be submissive to and respectful of authority, and they are more likely to endure and tolerate abusive supervision so as

to maintain workplace harmony and good *guanxi* (interpersonal relationships) with their leaders and coworkers (Hui, Wong, and Tjosvold, 2007). Hence, when their supervisors mistreat them, they are less likely to pass down the abusive behaviors to their peer group or customers. Similarly, the study results highlight the important role of the authority-follower relationship. To employees with high power distance, supervisors represent a higher authority in the organization. This is particularly important in Chinese society, which emphasizes group harmony and high power-distance—cultural values that differ from those typical of the West (Hofstede, 1980). Therefore, subordinates with such collective value are more willing to adhere to supervisors' instructions, and they are less likely mirror their supervisors' negative behavior. In contrast, teams with lower traditional or power distance values are highly responsive to the abusive behavior of their supervisors, more likely to mirror their supervisors' improper behaviors, and more likely to demonstrate counterproductive behaviors toward customers (Liu et al., 2012). Thus, this study explains unique international management phenomena and contributes to country-specific management research in China.

Although there have been a number of studies on abusive supervision conducted in China and some of the studies included Chinese cultural factors, such as authoritarian leadership (e.g., Aryee et al., 2007; Jian et al., 2012; Wei and Si, 2013; Wu and Hu, 2013; Wu et al., 2012), into consideration, we don't think the practice and effect of abusive supervision is limited to Chinese, or eastern cultural context. We encourage future studies to re-examine the relationships found in this study in the other cultural settings.

Managerial Implications

Our findings from this study provide suggestions to the managers in service and hospitality industries. Employee service quality has been regarded as a prerequisite for success and survival in today's competitive environment (Barber et al., 2011; Liao and Chuang, 2004). For service organizations to maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty, employee service performance is crucial (Jian et al., 2012). This study suggests several practical ways by which hospitality managers and organizations can decrease the effect of abusive supervision on service performance. The first is to take steps to decrease abusive subordinate behavior. Our study argues that one way of achieving this is to discourage abusive supervisory behaviors. Managers need to treat their subordinates justly and politely, provide care and concern about their well-being, and decrease their job-related stress and negative perceptions. These behaviors will reduce abusive managerial behavior. In addition, organizations need to create a zero-tolerance culture toward abusive behavior and provide abuse-prevention training for managers. Research has supported the idea that a sense of injustice and psychological contract violation among supervisors can cause subordinates to become abusive and display hostile behaviors (Aryee et al., 2007). Therefore, organizations should provide a fair and non-abusive work environment and implement transparent HR management procedures for employees.

The second way to reduce abusive behavior in the workplace is to promote traditional values. Organizations trying to minimize abusive subordinate behavior may promote traditional values at work through HR management practices, such as recruiting employees with strong traditional values, training, and development. HR can also encourage senior workers to coach and mentor their subordinates so that they transfer traditional values to junior workers. The traditional concept of transforming individual values to fit the group can also apply to the socialization and orientation of newcomers, through training seminars or orientation workshops.

However, the traditional values of forgiveness and tolerance of mistreatment and injustice may hurt organizations' efforts to encourage open, creative actions and forward-thinking mindsets. Thus, traditional values may hurt progressive goals. Creative and forward-thinking mindsets are important for employee creativity (Amabile et al., 1996). Therefore, promoting traditional Chinese cultures may be a double-edged sword: On the one hand, it can buffer the negative effect of abusive supervision and minimize abusive subordinate behavior; on the other hand, it may inhibit creativity and service innovation. Although these arguments are speculative and outside the scope of this study, we suggest that future research examine factors such as tolerance, *guanxi*, forgiveness, creativity, and organizational effectiveness to delineate the role of traditionality in employee work outcomes.

Lastly, although organizations should implement management policies and practices that discourage abusive supervision, employees' perceptions are generally shaped by their interpersonal interactions with their immediate supervisors or authority figures. Basically, supervisors' management practices trickle down in hierarchical organizations. Thus, top-down influence and quality interpersonal relationships are critical. Our results suggest it is important to take cultural differences into account when training leaders and managing supervisor-subordinate relationships. In particular, subordinates are more inclined to follow the behavior of their supervisors in cultures with low power distance and low traditional values. Employees are concerned about how managers treat them because leaders' actions provide information on whether or not the individual is a respected member of the organization (Hoogervorst et al., 2004). For this reason, managers should note that their influence through abusive behaviors can be magnified when organizations have cultures with low traditional values or power distance. While promoting a corporate culture of fairness or zero-tolerance management practices,

organizations may invest in training and developing managers' interpersonal relationship and communication skills. This could make them aware that their treatment of subordinates shapes employees' actions toward customers.

Limitation and Future Directions

Several limitations of this study should be addressed in future work. One potential limitation is the possibility that common-method variance (CMV) may be affecting our results (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This is because our data on abusive supervision, cultural values, and abusive subordinate behavior came from a single source. However, our interactions terms (particularly cross-level interactions) offer persuasive evidence against the presence of CMV effects (Evans, 1985). This is because it is not readily apparent how CMV would be operating differentially for individuals with high and low power distance (or traditionality). CMV cannot parsimoniously explain our results, suggesting that our results are less likely influenced by CMV. In addition, we collected data from multiple sources—both subordinates and their immediate supervisors—along with a complex analytical framework to analyze cross-level moderation effects. Therefore, concerns of response biases are at least lessened in this study. However, for future studies, an experimental or longitudinal design would be preferable it allows us to trace patterns of development, change, causal direction, and reciprocal relationships in the same group of participants (Williams and Podsakoff, 1989).

A second limitation is that even though we pinpointed the trickle-down effect of abusive supervision as a result of social learning. We did not directly examine the working mechanism of social learning process. A possible way to differentiate this learning effect from alternative explanations, such as emotional revenge as was depicted in previous studies (Jian et al., 2012;

Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Liu et al., 2010), is that the learning effect may be subject to the length of interaction between the supervisor and the subordinates. Our data analysis did show that organizational tenure positively moderates the relationship between supervisor abusive behavior and that of the subordinates. In other words, the positive relationship between abusive supervisor and the subordinates is stronger for those dyads who have been working together for a long time. . Despite this, we expect future studies to further unveil the working mechanism of abusive supervision on subordinates' abusive behaviors.

Moreover, the two cultural values—traditionality and power distance, were examined in a single country, China, suggesting some caution about the cross-cultural generalizability of our findings. Meanwhile, it is notable that, in the past three decades, continuous economic reforming and open-up in China has brought about prominent changes in people's value system and challenged the traditional culture. Indeed, power distance and traditionality reported by our sample in China showed reasonable variance (*s.d.* = 0.96 for power distance; *s.d.* = 0.85 for traditionality), comparable with the past cross-cultural sample (Carson, Baker, and Lanier, 2014). Although the single-culture limitation cannot be ignored, it is especially interesting and challenging to look into the cultural effects in such a changing context (e.g., Farh et al., 1997; Farh et al., 2007; Liu et al., 2012). Further cross-cultural study is needed to examine the measurement equivalence of power distance and traditionality, as well as their relationship with abusive supervisory behavior and service performance. Finally, another constraint on the generalizability of our findings is this study's use of the hospitality industry only. Readers should take caution before applying our findings to other work settings. Thus, future research should compare findings based on samples drawn from hospitality and service sectors to manufacturing, electronics, research and development, and other industries.

Despite these limitations, this study provides theoretical insight by integrating a cultural perspective into the cognitive social learning explanation for the relationships among abusive supervision, abusive subordinate behavior, and service performance. In this way, we intended to unveil the complexity of the trickle-down model. Two cultural factors (power distance and traditionality) are found as important moderators for the relationship between abusive supervision and service performance. We conclude that these cultural factors seem to be able to mitigate the relationship between abusive supervision and abusive subordinate behaviors in the Chinese hotel industry. These findings tend to lead us to rethink the application and possible adaptation of western-based theories in the non-western culture; and they also suggest the value of examining these relationships in specific organizational/industrial settings.

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Exhibit 1

Demographic profile of the sample

Gender (subordinates)	Male	58%	Gender (team managers)	Male	75%
	Female	42%		Female	25%
Education (subordinates)	College	43%	Education (team managers)	College	90%
	Secondary-level or below	57%		Secondary-level or below	10%
Age (subordinates)	20-29	42%	Age (team managers)	20-29	21%
	30-39	31%		30-39	67%
	>49	27%		>49	12%
Company size (number of employees)	<100	9%	Time spent with the team manager	<1 year	30%
	101-500	33%		1-5 years	54%
	501-1000	40%		>10 years	16%
	>1000	18%			

Exhibit 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5
1. Abusive supervision	2.83	0.95	-				
2. Subordinate abusive behavior	2.48	0.74	.41**	-			
3. Service performance	4.10	0.67	-.19*	-.37**	-		
4. Power distance	4.55	0.96	-.26**	.15*	-.16*	-	
5. Traditionality	5.17	0.85	-.30**	.14*	-.10	.28**	-

$N = 266$.

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .01$.

Exhibit 3
HLM Results for the Moderating Effects of Power Distance and Traditional Cultures

Variable	Subordinate abusive behavior				Employee service performance				
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**	**Model 7**	**Model 8**	**Model 9**
Intercept	6.25***	7.56***	7.79***	7.88***	6.41***	6.28***	6.17***	6.30***	6.25***
Independent variable									
Abusive supervision		.48**	.46**	.45**	-.19**	-.26**	-.26**	-.24**	.08
Moderator									
Power distance (power)			-.28**	-.25**		-.12*	-.12*	-.08	-.04
Traditionality (tradition)			-.35**	-.30**			-.15*	-.10	-.07
Cross-level Interactions									
Abusive supervision × power distance				-.19**				-.05	-.03
Abusive supervision × traditionality				-.21**				-.10	-.06
Abusive supervision × organization tenure				.30**				.11	.08
Mediator									
Subordinate abusive behavior (Sub-abusive)									-.51**
Cross-level Interactions									
Sub-abusive x power									.08
Sub-abusive x tradition									.10
R^2	.11	.22	.19	.27	.10	.15	.12	.14	.25
ΔR^2	.10	.09	.06	.08	.07	.03	.03	.02	.16
F	6.54**	33.26**	12.15**	10.82**	8.05**	6.28**	5.35**	5.22**	9.33**

Note. N(individuals) = 266. N(firms) = 36. The first value in a cell is the parameter estimate, and the value in parentheses is the standard error.
*p <.05; **p <.01; ***p <.001.

Exhibit 4
Moderating effect of power distance between abusive supervision and subordinate abusive behavior

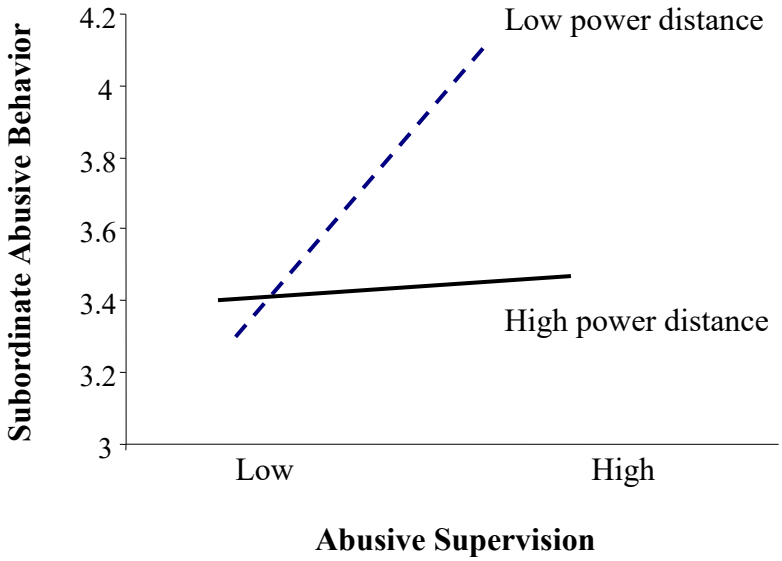

Exhibit 5

Moderating effect of traditional value between abusive supervision and subordinate abusive behavior