Differential Effects of Renqing and System on Employee Work Quality

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how Renqing and the system affect employees’ work quality in Chinese culture. The leader-employee matching questionnaires were gathered using data from businesses in China’s Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Yunnan provinces. The article then uses an empirical analytic method to analyze the data. It uses SPSS25.0 software to process data. The results indicate that the three dimensions of emotion relationship, resource relationship, and norm relationship have an equal impact on the quality of work enjoyment; the system has no substantial effect on employees’ work quality, but it regulates the impact of Renqing on work quality. If a Chinese company wants employees that produce high-quality work, the article’s conclusions suggest that Renqing should be considered. In the meantime, the company should increase its efforts to improve the efficiency of its system.

KEYWORDS

Renqing, System Effectiveness, Work Quality

INTRODUCTION

In Chinese management research, organizational context has become increasingly significant. In their fascinating paper “Location, location, location: Contextualizing organizational research,” Rousseau and Fried (2001) proposed that a particular management approach is ineffective in other circumstances. Of the 302 empirical articles on the Chinese context that Jia et al. (2012) examined and found to be published in six journals between 1981 and 2010, only 14 of these articles thoroughly considered the role of context in concepts’ definition and measurement, construction of inter-concept relationships, and interpretation of internal logic. This demonstrates that significant research in this area of knowledge falls short of offering fresh perspectives and ideas for management practice in the Chinese environment (Tsui, 2006).

Societal networks are inseparable from the realm of economic activity (Granovetter, 2018). Moreover, cultural aspects are always incorporated into economic exchanges. Hence, emotions
and feelings need to be addressed in organization management. Renqing refers to a set of social norms that require people to conduct proper social actions in various interpersonal situations, and to express sensitive regard for others (Hwang, 1987). Rooted in Chinese culture, Renqing governs all social interactions and regulates all kinds of Guanxi among individuals, even the formal interpersonal relationships between people in modern organizations (Shi et al., 2011). Further, informal rules can be regarded as being of greater help in achieving efficiency and fairness in enterprises, particularly those operating in China’s transitional economy (Nee & Opper, 2012). Within a company, people always interact with one another—as an example, the relationships between employees and their peers or superiors, which are similar to a network. Hence, a harmonious culture and enterprise coherence depend absolutely on Renqing. That intangible influence will likewise impact specific management operations. Employees will go above and beyond the requirements of their formal job description to uphold their reciprocal relationship with their immediate supervisors (Hwang et al., 2021).

The enterprise system is a crucial component of management that plays a deciding role in resource allocation. Good HR practices positively impact employees’ perspectives on using technology, thus encouraging their innovative behavior (Ahmed et al., 2022). Low-efficiency systems would bring about supply and demand disruption, severe lag, utility failure, and other undesirable outcomes. The Lisbon Strategy in Europe in the early 20th century called for better jobs, and rethought our work and work quality from a social, cultural, and political perspective to broaden our understanding. In practice, enterprises then improve their workplace norms and offer various forms of humanized support to further improve the work quality of employees. Huawei, for instance, has established the role of chief employee health and safety officer to look after the physical and emotional health of employees. The system may not always function efficiently due to cost control, finite rationality, and environmental uncertainty. The embeddedness of Guanxi cannot be overlooked, even though the system plays the role of the Hot Stove Rule in Management (defined as an analogy between breaching company discipline and touching a hot stove—similarly, an employee should be made to realize immediately if he or she is going against norms or rules). Empirical studies have revealed that organizational institutions also influence the Guanxi behavior of employees (Chen, 2020). In fact, Chinese people, who are rooted in Confucian thinking, always work to strike a balance between Renqing and work norms (Zhu, 2009). Accordingly, we argue, Renqing and organizational norms within one’s job environment are two crucial factors that are key to understanding the attitudes and behaviors of Chinese employees.

In the workplace setting, executives and employees face the same dilemma of how to balance informal Guanxi and the workplace’s formal system. By investigating how Renqing interacts with the formal system in the area of work quality, our study hopes to narrow this practical gap. Research scholars have been paying attention to Leader-Member Interchange in terms of interpersonal relationships in organizational behavior. Moreover, it is investigated as a relationship dimension (Yen et al., 2017). In contrast, this study uses Renqing, which has three dimensions (emotion, resource, and norm) as a pre-variable to examine its value and impact on enterprises and employees. Thus, our research enriches the study of Guanxi theory. Additionally, both human emotions and an organizational system will impact an individual’s behavior and attitude within a given organization. Prior research has solely focused on the positive and negative effects, balance, and complementarity of Renqing and formal organizational norms and practices or has been limited to theoretical study. The relationship between Guanxi and organizational practices is supplemented and expanded in our study. Using SPSS software to process the data of leader-employee pairing questionnaires from Chinese employees, this study will examine: the effects of Renqing on work quality; the effects of formal organizational systems on work quality; and lastly, how these systems’ effectiveness moderates the relationship between Renqing and work quality.
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Social Exchange Theory provides a research framework that encompasses employee perspective, organizational perspective, and mutual relationship perspective (Shore et al., 2004). Accordingly, we propose it presents a broad mechanism to explain Guanxi based on reciprocity norms (Wu et al., 2006). Employees hope to obtain two main elements from the companies they join: one is economic income; the other is spiritual satisfaction, which includes employees’ strong needs in social communication, social recognition, and belonging to a certain group. Based on mutual influence, social exchange between employees will have an impact on their work value and interest. Thus, we propose a potential linking path in which Renqing among colleagues as an antecedent stimulates their work quality, then system effectiveness that employees perceive as a moderator strengthens this effect.

RENQING AMONG COLLEAGUES AND WORK QUALITY

Some scholars have noted that the Renqing norm is shared by all members of Chinese societies (Shi et al., 2011). Previous research on Renqing has primarily concentrated on how it manifests in and affects Chinese people’s personalities, interpersonal relationships, and social behavior. Additionally, the Renqing norm, which requires people to treat others generously and charitably by helping, caring, exchanging favors, and showing sympathy, is prevalent in Chinese organizations, according to empirical analyses of organization and management researchers. Renqing, a complex and widespread social phenomenon within the Differential Pattern culture, has been interpreted differently. In particular, it is regarded as a fundamental emotional reaction (for example, “joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, and bad desire” in The Book of Rites) in a particular scenario or as a set of social norms (for example, “treat people as you would like to be treated”), or as a resource (favor, gift, etc.) utilized in social exchange. Continuous Renqing acts as a “glue” to strengthen cohesion as a composite of “emotional bond” and “exchange” behavior (Gong et al., 2013). Renqing emphasizing on memorable resource exchange and reciprocal obligation can improve emotion’s worth (Zhai, 2014). Fei and Liu (2018) confirmed the three aspects of Renqing—“emotional response,” “resources for exchange,” and “norms for controlling inter-individual behavior”—proposed by Zhai (1996) and made it clear that Renqing consists of these three elements. Based on the previous research on Renqing, and considering that colleague relationship belongs to the relationship between acquaintances with the characteristics of strong ties (Xie & Li, 2021). This study adopts this typical perspective and maintains that Renqing among coworkers is primarily an interactive and informal relationship that adheres to traditional Chinese ethical norms. Moreover, many scholars have further subdivided and classified the components of Renqing based on its definition, specifically the emotion, resources, and norm relationships.

Prior to becoming a complex issue, work quality initially attracts attention to the physical and mental stress that employees go through (De Bustillo et al., 2011). There are two categories: one reflects the desires and sentiments of the workforce, focuses on the welfare of workers while they are at work (Findlay et al., 2013), and emphasizes “decent work”; the other reflects the completion of their work, i.e., assurance of the quality of the delivered goods and services. In other words, for enterprise management to be harmonious, it must take into account both spirit and effectiveness (Huang & Xi, 2001). Factor input and output optimization under certain circumstances are our concerns, in addition to the sense of community and self-worth that enterprises bring to their employees. The results of this study support that the feelings of employees and job needs should both be taken into account when measuring work quality. Employees’ subjective assessments of their work experiences are crucial for determining their level of work enjoyment. The main metrics used in this study to assess level of work enjoyment are job satisfaction and work-life balance. Further, with regard to the quality of work output, the behavior of employees at work is considered, emphasizing the value of recognizing the quality of employees’ work output. In this study, the quality of work output is measured by work
performance, which includes task performance and contextual performance. Job performance can reflect an employee’s work output quality inside and outside their role.

**Emotional Relationships and Work Quality**

“Emotional relationship” refers to a relationship developed over a long period between people who work for the same enterprise, as a result of emotional communication. Increased connection, deeper communication, and wider communication can lead to colleagues becoming “acquaintances” or even “family” (Zhou & Chen, 2021). Employees will be more willing to collaborate when they have good interpersonal relationships at work. This positive and supportive working connection may play a big role in their decision to stay with an organization (Choi et al., 2011). Another advantage of this interpersonal setting is the improvement of psychological capital, which improves workers’ capacity to balance work and family duties (Wardani & Anwar, 2019). Through cordial teamwork and the encouragement of individual work performance, a synergy is generated. Coworkers who get along well are more likely to experience feelings of happiness at work and hence have a positive work attitude and effective behavior (Li, 2016). Hence, we argue that strong emotional relationships between colleagues may increase their opportunities to achieve high-quality work. Thus:

- **H1a:** Emotional relationships will be positively related to quality of work enjoyment.
- **H1b:** Emotional relationships will be positively related to quality of work output.

**Resource Relationships and Work Quality**

Renqing is seen as a resource by colleagues in their communication, whether it takes the shape of tangible resources like financial aid and birthday gifts from coworkers or intangible resources like knowledge and experience sharing. Resource relationships are based on the requirements of various individuals. Wu et al. (2021) found a link between two members of a team in an online community, indicating that the two were sharing resources with one another. By picking up knowledge from team members with greater degrees of expertise, team members will take the initiative to advance their understanding. This learning among members and between the leader and members can boost the organizational knowledge of an online work community (OWCOKP). The theory of resource conservation states that a person’s satisfaction in the workplace and sense of security under the law will depend on how many resources he or she has (Hobfoll, 1989). The utilization rate of resources is raised through interpersonal contacts and exchanges, which helps meet employees’ different requirements and discover solutions to challenges in both professional and personal life. Hence, we argue that high resource relationships between colleagues may increase their opportunities to achieve high-quality work. Thus:

- **H2a:** Resource relationships will be positively related to quality of work enjoyment.
- **H2b:** Resource relationships will be positively related to quality of work output.

**Norm Relationships and Work Quality**

Norm relationships, also referred to as “giving-rewarding norm relationships,” describe how coworkers communicate using the reciprocity tenet. According to the dictum “Courtesy demands reciprocity,” wherein people reciprocate by “doing favors” and “returning favors,” a cordial relationship with other people is built. People in the same network who receive assistance from others “do favors” and repay those who aided them in the future in order to avoid feeling “imbalanced” and indebted to others. Giving and receiving favors reduces the distance between people and helps create a healthy workplace environment. A “tacit” norm of secrecy and tardiness characterizes the giving and receiving of favors. Those that adhere to this standard will be seen as trustworthy and reasonable. Personal awareness is
necessary for this process. Giving partners favors strengthens emotional connection. This affection, a willingness to help partners with both professional and personal difficulties, can inspire people to do favors for one another. The exchange of favors and their repayment fosters trust (Chen & Bedford, 2021; Xian et al., 2019; Xie & Li, 2021). According to the findings of Sherony and Green’s (2002) study, the relationships between colleagues have a positive impact on the performance of employees in their work duties. Hence, we argue that high norm relationships between colleagues may increase their opportunities to achieve high-quality work. Thus:

H3a: Norm relationships will be positively related to quality of work enjoyment.
H3b: Norm relationships will be positively related to quality of work output.

Renqing Among Colleagues, System Effectiveness, and Work Quality

A system is described as a code of conduct that has been intentionally created to constrain and motivate people to engage in intentional behavior. A successful institutional environment is inextricably linked to an organization’s ability to survive and thrive (Yu Han et al., 2017). People affiliated with the institution can act in accordance with these norms and receive fair and regular incentives, thus giving them the internal drive to put in constant effort and creativity. A further measurement for institutionalized corporate management is the system’s effectiveness. Clear and reasonable responsibilities and rights can serve as a direction for an employee’s conduct at work while also ensuring that the employee’s rights and interests are fair and reasonable. According to Kuai (2012), results and value should be taken into account when evaluating system effectiveness. An organization must assess the scientific rigor and rationality of an institutional system’s development as well as the extent to which the system can perform its intended role. Studies in the past have examined a system’s effectiveness from three angles: whether it is legitimate, which affects acceptance of the system and willingness to follow it; whether it actually influences employees’ behavior; and whether it can achieve its goals, or how successfully those goals are accomplished (Ren, 2014). Prior studies have shown that when assessing a system’s effectiveness, we use rationality, functional effectiveness, and fairness. Employees must perceive the system’s acceptability and the impact of its implementation when facing it.

There is little doubt that the workplace environment affects how employees behave. Employee requirements and objectives can be met when they think a highly effective system is rational and scientific. When there is a highly fair system in place, employees will likewise feel that doing more and receiving more is fair. Employees will become emotionally invested in the company if it is fair and reliable, and they will be more likely to put forth their full effort and enthusiasm in their work. They will also be more satisfied with the organization as a whole (Eisenberger et al., 2010). When a system’s effectiveness is improved, employees’ sense of identity and support for the company are also improved (Meyer et al., 2010), which not only increases employees’ trust in the company but also fosters interpersonal trust, teamwork, spontaneous extra-role behaviors, resource sharing, and knowledge sharing. Consequently, employees’ knowledge, expertise, and work efficiency can all be increased (Nonaka et al., 2000). This present study argues that high system effectiveness will strengthen the relationship between Renqing and work quality. Therefore:

H4a: The positive relationship between emotional relationships and quality of work enjoyment is moderated by employees’ perceptions of system effectiveness.
H4b: The positive relationship between emotional relationships and quality of work output is moderated by employees’ perceptions of system effectiveness.
H5a: The positive relationship between resource relationships and quality of work enjoyment is moderated by employees’ perceptions of system effectiveness.
H5b: The positive relationship between resource relationships and quality of work output is moderated by employees’ perceptions of system effectiveness.
**H6a:** The positive relationship between norm relationships and quality of work enjoyment is moderated by employees’ perceptions of system effectiveness.

**H6b:** The positive relationship between norm relationships and quality of work output is moderated by employees’ perceptions of system effectiveness.

The research model is shown in Figure 1.

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**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Data Collection**

In order to gather data for this study, questionnaires were delivered to a sample of businesses in computer services, property management, transportation, and other industries in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Jiangxi, and other locations between May 4 and August 1, 2019. A paired questionnaire was completed by executives and workers to effectively reduce the influence of standard procedure deviation on study outcomes. Specifically, superiors rated the quality of work output in task performance, whereas subordinates graded the other components. In the process of distribution, we first numbered the employees, matched each number to a questionnaire, and then distributed the questionnaires to the subjects to fill in; then, we marked the questionnaires with the names of the employees to be evaluated, submitted them to the supervisors, and invited the supervisors to evaluate their employees.

We distributed 280 paired questionnaires in all, and 236 valid paired questionnaires were gathered. The response rate was 84.28%. Male respondents made up 51.7% of the sample, while female respondents made up 48.3%; 23.7% of respondents were aged 40 and over, 23.7% were aged 30 to 39, and 61% were aged 30 and under. Of the respondents, 89.4% had at least a bachelor’s degree, and 88.1% worked for organizations with more than 50 employees.

**Measures**

**Renqing Among Colleagues**

There are ten items in the resource scale of Renqing among colleagues referring to the research of Wang et al. (2008), Li et al. (2018), and Guo et al. (2018), of which four items (R1 to R4) are used to measure emotional relationships, three items (R5 to R7) are used to measure norm relationships,
and three items (R8 to R10) are used to measure resource relationships. A five-point Likert scale (1 = extremely inconsistent, 5 = extremely consistent) was employed for the questionnaire. In this study, the Cronbach’s α coefficient of Renqing among colleagues scale was 0.810.

System Effectiveness

We used the eight-item scale developed by Ming and Xiong (2016) (Z1 to Z8). A five-point Likert scale (1 = highly inconsistent, 5 = very consistent) was employed for the questionnaire. The Cronbach’s α coefficient of the scale in this study was 0.914.

Work Quality

For measuring the quality of work enjoyment, job satisfaction refers to the scale studied by Brayfield and Rothe (1951) (G1-1 to G1-6), and work-life balance refers to the scale studied by Wong and Ko (2009). (G1-7 to G1-9). In this study, the Cronbach’s coefficient of the quality of work enjoyment scale was 0.871; for measuring the quality of work output, task performance refers to the scale (G2-1 to G2-6) studied by Tsui et al. (1997). Contextual performance refers to the scale (G2-7 to G2-10) produced by Sun and Jiao (2006). In this study, the overall Cronbach’s α coefficient of the quality of work output scale was 0.837.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Reliability and Validity Analysis of Renqing Among Colleagues

The Cronbach’s α coefficients of emotional relationships, resource relationships, and norm relationships were 0.836, 0.765 and 0.846, respectively, which were all greater than 0.8. Bartlett χ²= 94.825, p<0.001, KMO=0.786>0.7. Using principal component analysis, three components that collectively explained 70.980% of the total variation (>60%) were extracted. A factor loading value greater than 0.71 was also present. Furthermore, the combined reliability (CR) of each dimension of Renqing among colleagues (0.879, 0.852, 0.886) was greater than 0.7, and the average extraction variance (AVE) value of each dimension (0.646, 0.657, 0.721) was greater than 0.5.

Reliability and Validity Analysis of System Effectiveness

The reliability of each item of system effectiveness and the scale as a whole (0.914) was greater than 0.9, Bartlett χ²=1161.406, P<0.001, KMO=0.914 >0.7. Principal component analysis retrieved one factor, which explained 62.873% of the total variation (>0.60%) collectively. A factor loading value greater than 0.71 was also present. The composite reliability (CR) value of the system effectiveness variable (0.931) was greater than 0.7, and the average extraction variance (AVE) value was 0.629 (> 0.5).

Reliability and Validity Analysis of Work Enjoyment Quality

In the quality of work enjoyment, Cronbach’s α coefficients of job satisfaction (0.899) and work-life balance (0.861) were greater than 0.8. Bartlett χ²=1187.522, P<0.001, KMO=0.868(>0.7). The principal component analysis identified two components that collectively explained 71.107% (>60%) of the total variation. A factor loading value greater than 0.71 was also present. As well, the average extraction variance (AVE) value of each dimension (0.649, 0.763) was more significant than 0.5, and the combined reliability (CR) value of each dimension of work enjoyment quality (0.917, 0.906) was more significant than 0.7.

Reliability and Validity Analysis of Work Output Quality

In the quality of work output, Cronbach’s α coefficient of task performance (0.905) and contextual performance (0.818) were greater than 0.8. Bartlett χ²=1244.790, p<0.001, KMO=0.851(>0.7). The
principal component analysis yielded two components that explained 67.432% of the total variation (>60%). A factor loading value greater than 0.71 was also present. The combined reliability (CR) value of each dimension of work output quality (0.926, 0.882) was greater than 0.7, and the average extraction variance (AVE) value of each dimension (0.676, 0.651) was greater than 0.5.

**Hypothesis Tests**

**Regression Analysis of the Quality of Work Enjoyment**

From Table 1, in Model 1, the explanatory rate of emotional relationships, resource relationships, and norm relationships to work enjoyment quality is 30.8%, and there was a significant linear relationship ($F=11.465$, $P<0.001$). Among the relationships, the emotional relationship was positively related to the quality of work enjoyment ($\beta=0.231$, $P<0.001$). The resource relationship was positively related to the quality of work enjoyment ($\beta=0.204$, $P<0.01$); the norm relationship also had a positive impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>$t$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$t$</td>
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<td>3.342**</td>
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<td>0.092</td>
<td>1.838</td>
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<td>Emotional Relationship*System Effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norm Relationship*System Effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$
on the quality of work enjoyment (β=0.195, P<0.01). Hence, these results support the hypotheses H1a, H2a, and H3a.

The value of R² (△R²=0.162, P<0.001) increased after putting emotional relationship*system effectiveness, resource relationship*system effectiveness, and norm relationship*system effectiveness into this model. In addition, β=0.134, p<0.05, indicating that emotional relationship*system effectiveness has a significant relationship with the quality of work enjoyment. β=0.244, p<0.001, indicating that resource relationship*system effectiveness has a significant relationship with work enjoyment quality. β=0.219, p<0.001, indicating that norm relationship*system effectiveness has a positive impact on the quality of work enjoyment. This indicates that system effectiveness positively moderates the effects of emotions, resources, and norms on the quality of work enjoyment. Hence, these results support the hypotheses H4a, H5a, and H6a. When system effectiveness is increased, the positive impacts of emotion, resource, and norm on the quality of work enjoyment are more likely to be enhanced (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).

The results of the standardized regression coefficients (0.220, 0.197, 0.197) of the three dimensions of Renqing indicated that the effects of emotional relationships, resource relationships, and norm relationships on work enjoyment are relatively balanced. Specifically, all three play a very equal role in the level of work enjoyment. In addition, the influence of system effectiveness on the

Figure 2. Moderating effect of system effectiveness on emotion relationship and work enjoyment quality

![Figure 2. Moderating effect of system effectiveness on emotion relationship and work enjoyment quality](image)

Figure 3. Moderating effect of system effectiveness on resource relationship and work enjoyment quality

![Figure 3. Moderating effect of system effectiveness on resource relationship and work enjoyment quality](image)
quality of work enjoyment is not significant, whereas, it can interact with Renqing as a moderating variable and influence the quality of work enjoyment.

**Regression Analysis of the Quality of Work Output**

As displayed in Table 2, the emotional relationships, resource relationships, and norm relationships in Model 2 explained 28.8% of the predicted variable (work output quality), and there was a significant linear relationship ($F=10.503, P<0.001$). Among these relationships, the emotional relationship was positively related to the quality of work output ($\beta=0.236, P<0.001$); the resource relationship was positively related to the quality of work output ($\beta=0.280, P<0.001$); the norm relationship also had a positive impact on the quality of work output ($\beta=0.142, P<0.001$). Thus, hypotheses H1b, H2b, and H3b are supported.

The results of $R^2$ were significantly increased ($\Delta R^2=0.131, P<0.001$) after putting emotional relationship*system effectiveness, resource relationship*system effectiveness, and norm relationship*system effectiveness into this model. The emotional relationship*system effectiveness was positively related to the quality of work output ($\beta=0.116, p<0.05$). The resource relationship*system effectiveness was positively related to work output quality ($\beta=0.233, p<0.001$). The norm relationship*system effectiveness was also positively related to the quality of work output ($\beta=0.186, p<0.01$). The results support hypotheses H4b, H5b, and H6b, i.e., system effectiveness positively moderated the relationships between emotion, resource, and norm and the quality of work output. When the level of system effectiveness is increased, the positive impact of the emotional relationships, resource relationships, and norm relationships on the quality of work output will be enhanced (see Figures 5, 6, and 7).

Similarly, it can be seen from the standardized regression coefficient (0.218, 0.269, 0.146) of the three dimensions of Renqing among colleagues, the resource relationships, followed by the emotional relationships and norm relationships, had a positive impact on the quality of work output. This suggests that resource relationships are more crucial to the quality of employees’ work output. As a moderating variable, their interaction with Renqing impacts the quality of work output, even though the effect of system effectiveness on the quality of work output is not significant.

**DISCUSSION**

Chinese people, who are rooted in Confucian thinking, always work to strike a balance between Renqing and organizational norms (Zhu, 2009). Many academics (Zhang, 2006) have
Table 2. Hierarchical regression results of work output quality (N=236)

<table>
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<td>0.269</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norm Relationship</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>2.306*</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>2.364*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Effectiveness</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>1.353</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>2.209*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Relationship*System Effectiveness</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>2.010*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Relationship*System Effectiveness</td>
<td>0.233</td>
<td>4.117***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norm Relationship*System Effectiveness</td>
<td>0.186</td>
<td>3.063**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.318</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>0.455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta R^2 )</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.209***</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.131***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \text{adj} R^2 )</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>0.291</td>
<td>0.420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3.974***</td>
<td>10.503***</td>
<td>9.750***</td>
<td>13.179***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

acknowledged that rules and Renqing are the two most significant social institutions for guiding Chinese people’s social behavior. Yet, relatively little research has addressed how both these factors influence employees’ behavior. Based on the definition of Renqing among colleagues, system effectiveness, and employee work quality, this study has sought to investigate the impact of Renqing among colleagues on their work quality. Empirical research builds and validates a research model about Renqing among colleagues, system effectiveness, and work quality. As hypothesized, the present study finds that Renqing among colleagues is positively related to the quality of work output and quality of work enjoyment. In other words, individuals who have
strong emotional, resource, and norm relationships with their colleagues are more likely to achieve high quality of work output and work enjoyment. Contrary to previous studies stating that the importance of Guanxi has declined in China with the development of a rational legal system, our study shows that in the workplace Renqing or Guanxi is still important for employees. Even the opportunity for returning favors grows (Bian, 2002). Besides, high-quality relationships provide benefits for employees’ work experience and performance. We find that among the effects on the quality of work enjoyment, the importance of the three dimensions (emotional relationships, resource relationships, and norm relationships) is generally balanced. This finding indicates that the three relationships provide employees with positive feelings from their work, such as
job satisfaction. As is widely recognized, China has a typically relational, collectivist culture, in which harmonious interpersonal relationships are highly valued (Chen et al., 2013). Further, resource relationships play a more significant role on the quality of work output. A possible explanation is that resource relationships are more relevant to informal work, and instrumental exchange among colleagues undoubtedly affects their job performance.

This current study shows that Renqing among colleagues has a strong impact on employees’ enjoyment of work and work output. In contrast, the effect of the system on work quality is insignificant. This finding is consistent with several earlier research studies indicating Chinese people value Guanxi more highly than institutions (Hwang, 2004; Han Ren et al., 2020). Moreover, we also find that system effectiveness positively moderates the relationship between Renqing among colleagues and work quality, which means that high system effectiveness strengthens the relationship. A possible explanation is that, with employees’ perceptions of system effectiveness and firms’ fairness being low, Renqing interactions are likely to be valued by employees. Compared to the system, people believe that Guanxi can offer employees genuine benefits and psychological security (Shi et al., 2011; Yina Ma et al., 2012). The working state of employees will only be affected when people balance rules and relations or take into account the system and Guanxi at the same time. In Chinese culture, people take both rational and affective aspects into consideration in interpreting, guiding, and evaluating people’s social actions (Jia et al., 2012), which is distinctively different from Western culture, where emphasis is placed on following formal rules and excluding personal emotions from social actions in the workplace.

Additionally, in the context of an effective system, the effect of Renqing on good work experience will be strengthened. This shows that the reasonable, effective, and fair rules and regulations will also affect the effectiveness of such informal rules. One possible explanation is that trust and justice serve as the foundation for an organizational system’s fairness and efficacy. Employees are more motivated to create and sustain positive interpersonal interactions when they believe that the organizational system is effective. In Guanxi, a fair system gets rid of things that are unjust, lessens internal rivalry and mistrust, and improves employee communication and trust. Employees are more likely to collaborate rather than compete and build helpful and supportive relationships with coworkers. And then this positive interaction encourages people to work harder and produce better results.
CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Theoretical Implications

In order to deepen our understanding of Renqing, this paper first treats it as a pre-variable rather than a subdimension of interpersonal relationships. It then further splits Renqing into three dimensions: emotional dimension, resource dimension, and norm dimension. Combined with existing research, our findings confirm that traditional Chinese culture and the psychological balance of giving-rewarding impact employees’ work experience and output. This study expands our understanding of the positive impact of colleague relationships on employees’ performance and behaviors in a company by giving such evidence, which adds depth to the existing literature.

Second, while formalized systems undoubtedly improve the productivity of enterprises, they also challenge current assumptions. Management must rely on more than just formal rules in the context of Chinese culture. A formalized system affects employees’ work performance, as do informal rules like Renqing. By adding a new context to the discussions on how a company’s formal system of practices affects employees’ performance, this study contributes to the body of existing literature.

Finally, this study also suggests that reviewing the results of studies on work quality is necessary. It is essential to assess both performance with regard to organizational goals and feelings concerning the workforce’s needs. In the meantime, considering the role of colleague relationships and formal system effectiveness in connection to work quality expands the research on work quality and its antecedents.

Practical Implications

This study has notable implications for managerial practices. Our findings suggest that the role of Renqing must be approached dialectically, and its positive aspects must be brought to the fore. It adheres to conventional Chinese psychology. On the other hand, one must be aware that building a harmonious atmosphere promotes employees’ improved performance and feelings for their enterprises. Blindly deleting Renqing seems an act devoid of ordinary human compassion and cannot fulfill the expectations of Chinese enterprises for the “family atmosphere” of their workplaces. When a company shows concern and support for its employees at work or outside of work, this action subtly impacts other employees. Enhancing internal communication informally can help boost Guanxi among colleagues, thus cultivating and reaping the benefits of trust.

Our findings also emphasize the significance of the effectiveness of formal systems of norms and practices and employees’ experiences and feelings about these systems. It is advisable that the development and implementation of such formal systems be carried out with Chinese employees since its quality, as perceived by an organization’s staff, impacts work quality and the relationships between colleagues. In order to promote an impression that a formal system is precise and reasonable, employees can participate in the process of developing the new system; for example, through discussions with employee representatives from all departments and levels. Organizations should also ensure fairness and effectiveness in implementation. An efficient system will improve employees’ Renqing interactions, which amplifies the beneficial effects of interpersonal connections.

In terms of pursuing continuous good work quality, it is essential to wisely use both informal and formal rules in an organization. Benefits exchange is relevant to work and directly impacts an individual’s work performance. However, instrumental interest exchange offers limited incentives. Hence, organizational goals and personal pursuits should be combined in the corporate culture of “prospective family.” To enhance the work experience for employees and consistently stimulate their vitality, it is crucial to focus on their psychological traits, cater to their emotional needs, and cultivate a robust, holistic relationship between the organization and the employees that spans both their professional and personal lives.
Limitations and Future Research

Similar to other research, this study has several limitations. The data were gathered from managers and employees of 236 companies located in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Yunnan. Future pertinent data should be acquired by broadening the range and volume of sample combinations using self-assessment and other evaluation techniques. In addition, phased tracking research on Renqing, the effectiveness of formal systems of norms and practices, and work quality was not conducted for this study; instead, cross-sectional data were gathered. Further investigation may consider rigorous tracking research to gather more precise and high-quality data. Moreover, just because certain indicators of work output quality and enjoyment were chosen for this paper, does not necessarily mean these are the best indicators. Future research can conduct more rigorous enterprise output interviews, establish a classification system, and investigate the relationship between work output quality and enjoyment. Finally, numerous variables influence the work quality of employees. We did not go into additional detail about the role of control variables; we just looked at how colleagues’ relationships and the effectiveness of formalized systems affected work quality. The control variables should be discussed in greater detail in future research.
REFERENCES


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ENDNOTE

1 Some scholars use Fei’s (1948) differentiated treatment framework on Guanxi to explain phenomena or people’s behavior in Chinese culture. He explained “differentiated treatment relationships” by vividly using an analogy of throwing a stone into the water. The center/stone is the focal person and the ripples from near to far represent different levels of interpersonal relationships. The closeness of Guanxi depends on the distance from the ripple to the center. Fei’s (1948) framework has been a foundation of much Guanxi research, which puts strong emphasis on sorting relationships into a particular order and treating different people accordingly.