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# Moral intensity and the use of socially undesirable influence tactics with superiors in greater China: exploring the role of Chinese sub-culture in the hospitality industry of Hong Kong and Taiwan

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The purpose of this article is to integrate and extend previous research by examining the relative influence of the components of employees' moral intensity (MI) on their use of two socially undesirable tactics: assertiveness and exchange of benefits, when attempting to influence their supervisors. It also looks at the moderating role of sub-culture in two greater Chinese regions. The responses of 268 Hong Kong and Taiwanese employees indicate that of all the dimensions of MI, probability of effect has the most strongly negative effect on the use of both influence tactics. Furthermore, Taiwanese culture with a relatively low power distance appears to reduce the impact on assertiveness of probability of effect, proximity, and temporal immediacy. Taiwanese culture also has relatively high uncertainty avoidance, which appears to weaken the relationship between probability of effect and exchange of benefits. Our findings provide insights into the ethicality of upward influence tactics.

**Key words:** Cultural values, greater China, moral intensity, socially undesirable influence tactics.

## INTRODUCTION

Moral intensity (MI) is defined as the characteristics of a particular moral issue itself, or the extent of the issue-related moral imperative in a situation. MI has an impact on every stage of the ethical decision-making process (Jones, 1991). This relationship has been discussed widely in empirical research (Weber, 1996; Marshall and Dewe, 1997; Singer and Singer, 1997; Davis et al., 1998; Frey, 2000; Carlson et al., 2002; Granitz, 2003). Most of these studies, with a few exceptions (Su and Wang, 2006; Dukerich et al., 2000; Alas, 2006), have focused on the ethicality of outcomes from the researchers' perspective. Such findings are not likely to explain the impact of MI on actual managerial behavior where the ethical content is implicit (Singer et al., 1998). Ethical criteria (Cavanagh et al., 1981; Niehoff and Moorman, 1993) or moral principles

(Hodgson, 1992; Vogel, 1992) have been proposed to assess the ethicality of managerial behaviors. Accordingly, extending the scope of research outcomes to examine the role of MI in explaining the use of specific managerial behaviors, such as interpersonal influence attempts, will not only provide insight into how people engage in workplace ethical behavior (which has been considered as the final stage of the ethical decision-making process: Jones, 1991), but also practical guidance for improving on-the-job ethics within organizations (Stead et al., 1990; Su and Wang, 2006).

Previous research has asserted that there is an overall association between the components of MI and upward influence tactics (Su and Wang, 2006), supporting the proposition that the use of upward influence is a political phenomenon (Allen et al., 1979; Ferris and Judge, 1991; Chen and Fang, 2008; Su, 2010) and hence can be discussed from an ethical perspective (Cavanagh et al., 1981). Of all the influence tactics studied, however, less

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attention has been paid to less popular approaches such as assertiveness and benefit-exchange, which are generally considered socially unacceptable (Frazier and Summers, 1984; Venkatesh et al., 1995; Kelman, 1958; Yukl and Falbe, 1990) or counter-normative (Bolino and Turnley, 2003). This is particularly true for subordinates who are attempting to influence their supervisors (Rao et al., 1995; Yukl and Tracey, 1992; Wayne et al., 1997; Kipnis et al., 1984; Kipnis et al., 1980; Su, 2010). Their ethicality and relationship with MI are worth advanced exploration. Furthermore, emerging research confirms that cultural values can serve as a predictor of ethical decision making (Lu et al., 1999; Frey, 2000; Ralston et al., 2009), the ethical standards desired in a society (Alas, 2006), ethical reasoning (Tsui and Windsor, 2001) or managerial practices (Alas, 2006; Paik et al., 1996). Recently, more exploratory research has found that there are certain links between the components of MI and the selection of upward influence tactics, and that these links may vary by national cultures in Asia (Su and Wang, 2006). These initial findings have stimulated our interest and provided us with a basis for developing and empirically testing detailed hypotheses.

The present study extends Su and Wang's (2006) research in three ways. Firstly, their research design confirms the existence of associations between the components of MI and upward influence tactics; we propose and test a set of hypotheses which speculate on the directional effects of each MI component on the use of two less-popular upward influence tactics which are considered socially undesirable, namely: assertiveness and exchange of benefits. Secondly, Su and Wang's findings on the effects of national culture are based on statistical analysis, whereas in our study the interactive effects of culture on the relationship between MI and influence tactics are hypothesized based on well-accepted cultural dimensions rather than using nationality as a proxy for culture. Finally, we discuss these phenomena in two similar but different Chinese culture-based regions, namely: Hong Kong and Taiwan. Accordingly, the effects of evolving Chinese culture on business ethics will be explored.

## **Literature review and hypotheses**

### ***In search of more managerial implications of MI***

Typically, empirical studies on the role of MI in the decision-making process have been conducted on the basis of Jones' (1991) issue: contingent model of ethical decision making. This defines the characteristics of a moral issue (that is, MI) as having six components (Jones, 1991; Singer et al., 1998; Frey, 2000): (1) magnitude, or the seriousness of potential consequences; (2) social consensus, or the degree to which other people are perceived to agree that an action is ethically

questionable; (3) probability of effect, or the likelihood or probability of a decision actually resulting in the negative outcome; (4) temporal immediacy, or the period of time between the decision and the effect; (5) proximity, or the physical, psychological, or social distance between the decision maker and the people who are likely to be affected by the decision; and (6) concentration of effect, or the number of affected people for an effect of constant size. It has been speculated that these components affect the decision maker's moral recognition, judgment, intent, and behavior.

Generally, existing findings confirm the predictive role of MI at the various stages of the ethical decision-making models. However, they focus their mediating or terminal variables on outcomes at the earlier stages of the ethical decision-making process, like ethical judgment (Singer, 1996; Singer and Singer, 1997; Singer et al., 1998; Carlson et al., 2002; Frey, 2000; Ralston et al., 2009), recognition of moral issue (Carlson et al., 2002), ethical reasoning (Granitz, 2003), perception of ethical problems (Singhapakdi et al., 1999), and behavioral intentions (Singhapakdi et al., 1999; Granitz, 2003; Ng et al., 2009) toward the moral issues proposed. Few have discussed the connection between MI and applied behavior in fields or workplaces (Dukerich et al., 2000; Su and Wang, 2006) although this would demonstrate how MI, as an individual characteristic, predicts actual behavior. Hence, our research is needed to explore the managerial and practical implications of MI on employees' decision dilemmas, such as changing others' behavior to fit with their own wishes or obeying their social norms, in the context of considering whether or not to use socially undesirable influence tactics (SUITs) with superiors.

### ***The upward usage of SUITs in ethical decision-making***

Based on research discussing the ethicality of managerial behavior in the workplace (Dukerich et al., 2000), Su and Wang (2006) explore the association among the components of MI and the upward use of influence tactics in India, Korea, and Taiwan. Their results respond to the literature by arguing that the use of political tactics demands explicit consideration of ethical restraints (Cavanagh et al., 1981) since the use of impression management has been held synonymous with political tactics (Allen et al., 1979; Ferris and Judge, 1991). Although various factors may lead to competition among ethical decision criteria for the use of political tactics, Cavanagh and colleagues' (1981) criteria can help managers to determine whether or not an upward influence attempt meets the rules or principles that define right and wrong conduct. These criteria are (1) Utilitarianism theory, or maximizing the good for the greatest number of people; (2) Theory of rights, or respecting basic human rights; and (3) Theory of justice,

or administering rules and rewards fairly (Cavanagh et al., 1981). Similarly, Hodgson (1992) identifies seven general moral principles which extend these criteria to a more detailed framework, namely: (1) Dignity of human life, or respecting people's lives; (2) Autonomy, or respecting all persons' rights to self-determination; (3) Honesty, or telling the truth to those who have a right to know it; (4) Loyalty, or honoring promises, contracts, and commitments; (5) Fairness, or treating people justly; (6) Humaneness, or doing good, not evil; and (7) The common good, or seeking the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Overall, these ethical decision criteria pertain to individual or social moral standards that make up the concept of ethics (Velasquez, 2002).

However, exploring the roles of moral principles or ethical criteria in determining managerial behavior in the workplace may not lead to a set of constant findings, because these principles or criteria will come into conflict due to the various value systems and perceptions people hold. It is managers, not researchers, who define a problem as moral or non-moral (Dukerich et al., 2000). There are no absolute ethical answers for moral agents in real cases (Hodgson, 1992). In addition, MI may be affected by organizational factors (Kelley and Elm, 2003; Granitz, 2003). The assumed rationality applied by moral agents in typically ethical behavior has various dimensions and can be viewed as a socially constructed reality (Singer and Singer, 1997). Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of any system of ethical guidelines should be to ensure that the resulting decisions are principled, appropriate, and defensible (Hodgson, 1992). Employees' need for approval, which motivates individuals to comply with ideas of social desirability (Marlowe and Crowne, 1960) that serve as collective norms, will reinforce their self-awareness in response to cues from the environment (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). In other words, upward influence attempts which are considered relatively socially desirable or acceptable (Yukl and Falbe, 1990; Yukl and Tracey, 1992) should be more likely than others to lead to favorable decision-making outcomes. Specifically, a society's culture provides members with commonly accepted ethical criteria, since it reflects the beliefs and desirable behaviors of their corporate values. Socialized employees who have learned the shared values of the organization will be skilful in utilizing this culture as a sense-making mechanism that guides and shapes its members' behavior (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996) to influence their superiors. Furthermore, socialized subordinates have more experience and may expect a higher probability of success in advance of their influence attempts. In other words, we may distinguish socially desirable and undesirable influence tactics by observing employees' actual choice of these tactics with their superiors.

Interestingly, the limitations of data collections in previous research support our reasoning. It is widely recognized that research using self-report measures with

a single reporter, usually the agent, may represent one-sided views and hence account for bias in findings (Kipnis et al., 1980; Kipnis et al., 1984; Wayne et al., 1997; Rao et al., 1995; Tsai et al., 2005; Su and Wang, 2006). Generally, agents may exaggerate how often they apply socially desirable tactics and understate how often they use less acceptable ones (Yukl and Falbe, 1990). This weakness in the research method reflects the social desirability of interpersonal influence tactics. Since ethicality is the standard by which to accept or reject something in terms of personal and social welfare (Alas, 2006), using socially desirable influence tactics with supervisors should be more likely to meet ethical standards, and to be considered as more ethical than other approaches. Therefore, we may speculate that employees' MI component(s) will tend to relate negatively to the use of SUITs with their supervisors.

The process of interpersonal influence attempts derives mainly from Gardner and Martinko's (1988) conceptual framework of impression management, in which employees attempt to control or manipulate the reactions of their superiors to images of themselves or their ideas. This has been empirically shown to be effective; in the case of upward influence, the success comes about mainly in bringing about favorable performance appraisals (Wayne and Ferris, 1990; Wayne and Liden, 1995; Wayne et al., 1997; Su, 2010) and positive interviewer evaluation (Ferris and Judge, 1991; Tsai et al., 2005). Previous research also shows that overall, influencing targets by offering the exchange of favors (that is, exchange of benefits) or applying a direct and forceful manner (assertiveness) is less preferred by the source (Venkatesh et al., 1995; Frazier and Summers, 1984; Yukl and Falbe, 1990), particularly in upward influence attempts (Yukl and Tracey 1992; Kipnis et al., 1984; Kipnis et al., 1980; Rao et al., 1995; Wayne et al., 1997). Studies conducted in Chinese culture-based regions such as Taiwan (Su and Wang, 2006; Su, 2010), Hong Kong (Schermerhorn and Bond, 1991), and mainland China (Sun and Bond, 2000) produce the same outcomes. These findings support the proposition that SUITs, namely, assertiveness and exchange of benefits, typically pertain to coercion or manipulation (Kelman, 1958; Sun and Bond, 2000). Moreover, previous research suggests that in greater China, SUITs are far less effective than other influence tactics in inducing the target to develop positive attitudes to and evaluations of the user (Fu et al., 2004; Leong et al., 2007; Su, 2010; Su, 2005). In other words, the fact that SUITs appear to lack practical utility, reinforces the reason why they are generally less popular across cultures (Venkatesh et al., 1995; Steensma, 2007).

These previous findings provide us with the rationale for discussing the ethicality of using SUITs with superiors by proposing a question. Since SUITs are less acceptable and effective across cultures, what motivates subordinates to choose them? If subordinates have no

**Table 1.** Relative ranking of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the US on Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

Nations	Power distance		Individualism		Masculinity		Uncertainty avoidance		Long-term orientation	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Hong Kong	15/16	68H	37	25L	18/19	57M	49/50	29L	2	96H
Taiwan	29/30	58M	44	17L	32/33	45M	26	69M	3	87H
US	38	40L	1	91H	15	62H	43	46L	17	29L

Index values for 50 countries and 3 regions on the first four dimensions; for 23 countries on the fifth dimension. Source: Hofstede (2001). H = top third, M = medium third, L = bottom third.

incentive to use SUITs with their superiors, no ethical dilemma would rise between their personal and social welfare, and thus exploring the ethicality of SUITs would not contribute to our understanding of ethical decision making. The main reason this issue arises may be attributed to the role of individuals' power bases in forming their influence attempts at work (French and Raven, 1959; Venkatesh et al., 1995) and their risk consideration of the costs and benefits of using influence tactics (Steensma, 2007). Subordinates normally do not have as much formal authority (that is, legitimate power) as their superiors. They have limited opportunities to influence superiors via legalistic pleas. For those who lack the expertise or information that superiors need (that is, have no expert or information power) or do not exhibit the working styles that superiors like (that is, do not have referent power), then their options may come down to favor exchanging or exerting pressure. Moreover, employees at lower levels within organizations normally have a smaller stake in an issue than their senior counterparts. The potential cost of upward use of SUITs, especially for low-level employees, may be acceptable. In such cases, balancing users' benefits and social norms would be an ethically controversial judgment.

In addition, traditional values dominated by Confucianism and business ethics codes in Chinese culture-based regions appear to particularly reinforce the ethical controversy of using SUITs with superiors. Chinese organizations can be considered as an extension of the family system (Chan et al., 2000). Confucianism's thoughts on morality emphasize social harmony and the fundamental role of family as a place where cardinal human relationships are defined. Managerial authority is derived from unconditional filial piety in families, which provides senior family members with more resources and respect (Richman, 1969; Chan et al., 2000). Therefore, forceful or coercive influence attempts with superiors are considered highly counter-normative. As for the upward use of favor exchanges as a relationship-based tactic (Fu et al., 2004), superiors in a Chinese cultural society which emphasizes social hierarchy tend to be conscious of their level and that of others at work. They are likely to associate favors rendered by subordinates with unethical exchanges such as bribery, unless the subordinate can convince them that their interaction has been based on

respect rather than manipulation.

### ***The moderating role of the dimensions of Chinese sub-culture on the MI-SUIT relationship***

Su and Wang (2006) show that culture moderates the association between MI components and upward influence attempts. However, their purpose is exploratory and their framework needs more elaboration. Based on our hypotheses articulating the effects of the MI components on each SUIT and the literature on the role of culture in shaping employees' behavior, we propose here a set of hypotheses on the interaction(s) of MI component(s) and each SUIT. Upward influence attempts have been found to vary according to employees' culture (Leong et al., 2007; Su and Wang, 2006). In addition, employees from different cultural backgrounds tend to possess different ethical standards and values (Alas, 2006), as well as to have distinctive ethical decision-making processes (Lu et al., 1999; Jones, 1991; Su and Wang, 2006; Tsui and Windsor, 2001; Frey, 2000). Previous empirical evidence suggests that dimensions of cultural background are related to managerial practices (Paik et al., 1996; Alas, 2006; Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Hofstede, 2001). Hence, we apply Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions and survey results to speculate on, and to examine, the effect of Chinese sub-culture on the upward use of SUITs. To ensure the variation in cultural background stems from a similar basis, we select the dimensions which may affect upward use of SUITs and demonstrate an obvious gap between the findings for Hong Kong and Taiwan. The literature suggests two pertinent cultural dimensions that meet our research purpose, namely: power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Hofstede, 2001). As summarized in Table 1, Hong Kong and Taiwan have similar scores and rankings along the dimensions of individualism, masculinity, and long-term orientation. These are markedly different from American culture. However, Hong Kong has a higher rank for power distance than Taiwan and the converse is true for uncertainty avoidance. Such small cultural differences could cause differences in the dynamics of interpersonal influence (Su and Wang, 2010). Moreover, research on

interpersonal influence conducted in these two Chinese regions will provide evidence to develop our speculations (Sun and Bond, 2000; Fu et al., 2004; Leong et al., 2007; Su, 2010). Based on these cultural and managerial differences and Su and Wang's (2006) study suggesting that upward influence tactics differ across Asian countries that have similar backgrounds, we speculate on the predictive role of each component in utilizing the SUITs in the greater Chinese context.

Assertiveness or pressure tactics (Yukl and Falbe, 1990; Yukl and Tracey, 1992) mean the use of demands, threats, or persistent reminders to influence others (Yukl and Tracey, 1992). Generally, these tactics are unpopular in upward influence attempts since they are challenging to superiors and thus may induce negative responses (Wayne et al., 1997). In other words, they conflict with superiors' expectation about the role subordinates will play. Previous research does not recommend using assertive behavior with superiors because the relationship between it and subordinates' performance ratings is unclear in western cultural contexts (Jones and Pitman, 1982; Yukl and Tracey, 1992; Rao et al., 1995; Wayne and Liden, 1995; Wayne et al., 1997). There are contingent factors that may moderate the effectiveness of upward assertiveness (Bolino and Turnely, 2003). Of these factors, cultural values are considered a major macro-level predictor that explains the inconsistencies in previous results (Wayne et al., 1997). Rare cases in North America demonstrate evidence for the desired outcomes, such as receiving favorable performance appraisals of the upward use of assertiveness (Wayne et al., 1997); these effects are not experienced by staff in Chinese sub-cultures (Leong et al., 2007; Su, 2010). We suggest that the frequency of upward use of direct and forceful approaches within organizations may be explained by respect for ranks of social power in a society, namely: power distance. This is a dimension that distinguishes Eastern and Western cultures (see for example Fu et al., 2004).

Power distance refers to the extent to which members of a society accept the fact that power in organizations is distributed unequally (Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Hofstede, 1985; Lu et al., 1999). Hong Kong has a higher power distance culture than Taiwan and hence its employees tend to accept the inequality of power and perceive differences between superiors and subordinates as natural. In contrast, Taiwanese staffs have a lower power distance score and thus are less likely to tolerate class distinctions, and be less afraid of disagreeing with superiors (Hofstede, 2001; Lu et al., 1999). Assertiveness is intrinsically less likely to be applied in upward influence attempts because of the associated risk of receiving unfavorable performance ratings (Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988). The negative offense to communication norm can be more noticeable to managers in a high power distance society where the ideal leader is a benevolent autocrat (Hofstede and Bond, 1988) and hence to decrease the

value of assertiveness with superiors. In addition, managers in a low power distance culture, which is normally associated with decentralized organizations and democratic leadership (Hofstede and Bond, 1988), rely on subordinates, who expect to be consulted (Hofstede, 2001). They tend to involve subordinates in work-related decisions, and to solicit their feedback (Paik et al., 1996). This implied that managers who depend on consultative leadership should tolerate subordinates' use of coercive tactics. Consequently, assertiveness would be more acceptable in a society with a low than a high power distance culture. Taiwanese subordinates thus tend to consider the upward use of coercion as less counter-normative. In other words, a decision on the use of assertiveness is less likely to be based on ethical considerations.

Moreover, prior research suggests that authoritarian leadership in workplaces appears to be better received in Hong Kong than in Taiwan (Farh and Cheng, 2000). This may derive partly from the different locus of the two regions' modern histories. Compared to Hong Kong, Taiwan's experience of the colonial regime under Japanese rule was shorter and ended much earlier (1895-1945). Taiwan has a longer history of political democracy and its people are more experienced with, and more used to, democratic values. Taiwanese people have been encouraged to engage in social and democratic activities such as campaigns and polls. In contrast, Hong Kong was under colonialism much longer (1841-1997) and so far has not introduced a comprehensive electoral system. Traditionally, Hong Kong society under British rule was characterized by low social and political involvement for the people (Leong et al., 2007). In this study, we speculate that the component(s) of MI would be negatively related to assertiveness, whereas the upward use of assertiveness will be considered less ethically dubious in Taiwan than Hong Kong. Taken as a whole, Taiwanese culture may make the negative relationship between the MI component(s) and the upward use of assertiveness less manifest. We therefore present the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Taiwanese culture (having a relatively low power distance) will weaken the negative effects of the component(s) of MI on the upward use of assertiveness.

Exchange of benefits or bargaining tactics (Kipnis et al., 1984) is the other category of SUIT included in our study. These tactics involve providing the target with a specified reward which is contingent on behavior, or negotiation through the exchange of favors (Kipnis et al., 1984; Sun and Bond, 1999; Yukl and Tracey, 1992; Yukl and Falbe, 1990; Frazier and Summer, 1984). In cases of downward or lateral influence attempts, where it is more likely that balanced reciprocity exists (Wayne et al., 1997), the faithful and persistent implementation of promises may strengthen the target's identification with the source

(Raven and Kruglanski, 1970; Frazier and Summer, 1986). However, superiors normally expect their subordinates to carry out their requests without asking for rewards in return (Wayne et al., 1997). Subordinates will rarely apply promises to persuade their superiors without violating role expectations. Moreover, subordinates' upward exchange attempts will probably be interpreted by their superiors as a signal of poor performance (Raven and Kruglanski, 1970; Frazier and Summer, 1986) leading to an unfavorable performance assessment. A possible nonlinear relationship between exchange and influence (Su, 2005) suggests that the effectiveness of exchange tactics with superiors will be more unpredictable than other influence tactics. Previous research, regardless of cultural context, generally suggests that the upward use of exchange tactics is useless in improving subordinates' performance ratings (Yukl and Tracey, 1992; Rao et al., 1995; Leong et al., 2007; Su, 2010). Still, there are a few cases that suggest dysfunctions, such as the unfavorable performance ratings caused by upward exchanges in the US (Wayne et al., 1997). We reason that a preference for upward use of benefit-exchanging approaches in the workplace may be predicted by the degree of tolerance a society has for uncertain situations; in other words, uncertainty avoidance.

Uncertainty avoidance is defined as the degree to which members of a society feel uncomfortable in unstructured situations (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). Of the Chinese sub-cultures which we are interested in, Taiwanese employees have higher uncertainty avoidance (Paik et al., 1996; Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, they are more concerned with security in their general lives, prefer clear hierarchical structures and written rules, and are intolerant of deviations from standard practices (Hofstede, 2001; Lu et al., 1999). In such working environments, problem-solving relies on expertise and technology (Hofstede, 2001). Control is achieved through a clear and highly structured system of procedures to standardize employee behavior, resulting in predictability of performance (Paik et al., 1996; Hofstede and Bond, 1988). Upward influence attempts that appeal to supervisors' personal interests, such as exchange of benefits, may not lead to the desired outcomes and hence may be less often selected by subordinates. In addition, the preference for routine tasks and formalized work operations which is associated with high uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede and Bond, 1988) restricts opportunities for accomplishing influencers' personal goals (Su, 2005) such as receiving favorable performance appraisals that facilitate the use of exchange tactics (Rao et al., 1995) but are not consistent with the organization (Gardner and Martinko, 1988; Rao et al. 1995). In contrast, Hong Kong employees tend to have lower uncertainty avoidance and are thus less concerned with security and less reliant on written rules or procedures (Lu et al., 1999). Employees have more scope to take personal risks (Hofstede and Bond, 1988) which can often be traded for personal benefits. Moreover, low uncertainty avoidance facilitates

ambiguity and innovation within organizations, and provides opportunities for subordinates to achieve personal benefits. Therefore, the workplace environment may also contribute to the use of the exchange of benefits approach in upward influence attempts. In summary, the popularity of exchange of benefits may be determined less by ethical considerations and more by subordinates' previous successful or failed attempts (Ventatesh et al., 1995; Fu et al., 2004) that have shaped the expected value of exchange tactics (Steensma, 2007).

Again, the different historical contexts of Hong Kong and Taiwan demonstrate the distinctions between their general business models. From the typical westerner's perspective, Hong Kong is an opportunists' paradise. Hong Kong business and societal practices are characterized by self-reliant behavior and a preference for quick profits (Leong et al., 2007). In contrast, Taiwanese business was once under a stable and regulated political and economic environment during the age of serious military confrontations between the mainland China and Taiwan governments (1947-1991). As for Taiwanese management styles, the first generation of private business owners after World War II was deeply influenced by Japanese culture, which has an even higher uncertainty avoidance than Taiwanese (Hofstede, 2001), in terms of education and management philosophies and practices. Therefore, Taiwanese businesspeople, unlike their Hong Kong counterparts, prefer long-term but low-risk transactions to those offering instant returns. In addition, state-owned enterprises, which tended to be large in size and to have a rigid compensation system, also tolerated a delay in profits and thus kept passing their conservative practices to the private sectors until 1987 when the Taiwanese government announced a policy of privatizing these enterprises. Employees in such organizations have weaker incentives to actively change their behavior to protect their rewards (Chen and Fang, 2008). In other words, Taiwanese culture may obscure a negative relationship between the components of MI and the upward use of exchange of benefits that is usually used to realize personal goals (Kipnis et al., 1980; Rao et al., 1995; Su, 2005). Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

**H2:** Taiwanese culture (having a relatively high uncertainty avoidance) will weaken the negative effects of the components of MI on the upward use of exchange of benefits.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants and procedure

A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to alumni of a business and hospitality course in selected Hong Kong and Taiwan universities. To qualify for inclusion in this study, the respondent had to be working in a tourism-related industry (such as the hotel trade) and to be able to name a supervisor with whom they had interacted frequently over the last six months. It has been observed

previously that industries such as hotels provide a good research setting for this type of hypothesis as supervisors and subordinates often work closely together (Su, 2010). Furthermore, by using this setting, our results can be compared directly with previous research on upward influence tactics and MI in similar settings (Su and Wang, 2006). Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality of responses was guaranteed. The final sample constituted 140 and 128 respondents from Hong Kong and Taiwan with 52.2 and 47.8% respectively. The response rate was above 60%. The majority of respondents were male (56.7%), aged 25-34 years (32.5%), had 1 to 5 years' work experience (29.9%) and worked in various positions, including frontline staff (48.5%) and supervisors (21.3%). Most worked in medium-size companies (that is, with less than 500 employees).

### Instruments and scenario

A scenario used previously by Carlson and colleagues (2002) pertaining to an ethical dilemma set in a business context was adopted to assess the perceived MI of respondents. The use of such a scenario to measure MI is commonly accepted in business ethics research (Weber, 1992). Respondents were asked to indicate their perceived MI for an ethical dilemma depicted in an organization-oriented scenario by responding to 15 statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Sample items include the following: "This act will hurt a few people very badly" (to measure concentration of effect); "There is a strong likelihood this act will cause harm" (to measure probability of effect); "I feel for the victim in this situation" (to measure proximity); "This act will not cause any harm in the immediate future" (to measure temporal immediacy); "Most people would agree that the act is wrong" (to measure social consensus); and "The overall harm (if any) done as a result of the act would be very small" (to measure magnitude). Conceptually, these statements represent the six dimensions which underlie MI (Jones, 1991; Singhapakdi et al., 1996; Carlson et al., 2002).

Schriesheim and Hinkin's (1990) refinement of the subscales developed by Kipnis and colleagues (1980) to measure influence tactics demonstrates high validity and reliability. We followed this typology to investigate the ethicality of assertiveness and exchange of benefits (Kipnis et al., 1984; Rao et al., 1995; Su, 2010). The subscales were adopted to assess how often respondents used a particular influence tactic in dealing with their immediate work supervisors. In total, six statements, each measured using a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 = never; 5 = always), were adopted to represent the frequency of assertiveness (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85) and exchange of benefits (coefficient alpha = 0.70), respectively. Sample items included the following: "Express my anger verbally" (to measure assertiveness); and "Reminded him or her of past favors that I did for him/her" (to measure exchange of benefits). Respondents' residence was coded as a dummy variable to represent the possible differences of the Chinese sub-cultures in the two regions (0 = Hong Kong; 1 = Taiwan). We translated and back-translated the English-language instruments to produce Chinese versions of the questionnaires.

### Validation of measures

A six-factor structure for MI ultimately emerged when weak statements were deleted from a factor analysis with Varimax rotation. As suggested by the literature, nine statements with an acceptable composite reliability of 0.84 (Nunnally, 1978) were kept in the MI scale, representing concentration of effect, probability of effect, proximity, temporal immediacy, social consensus, and magnitude. All the standardized factor loadings were positive and high (>0.67) on the intended dimensions and loading on other factors was weak,

thus demonstrating convergent and discriminant validity simultaneously (Venkatesh et al., 1995). The total variance explained by these statements was 90.77%.

## ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all variables in the overall sample, demonstrating the initial results of the analysis, are shown in Table 2. The frequency of assertiveness (mean = 1.82) was lower than that of exchange of benefits (mean = 1.95), suggesting that the former is considered relatively high in terms of coercion compared to the latter, although it is also expected to be socially undesirable (Yukl and Falbe, 1990; Venkatesh et al., 1995) and thus more likely to contravene an ethical stance. For the significant correlations, the dummy variable of culture was negatively related to exchange of benefits ( $r = -0.015$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that Taiwanese respondents tend to use it less with their superiors than their Hong Kong counterparts. Moreover, Taiwanese respondents demonstrated higher MI (that is, concentration of effect, proximity, and social consensus) than Hong Kong respondents. Of the MI components, "proximity of effect" and "social consensus" were negatively related to assertiveness ( $r = -0.25$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $r = -0.13$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and exchange of benefits ( $r = -0.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and  $r = -0.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Overall, the relationships observed in the matrix support our premise that SUITs are low in ethicality and that MI and culture explain employees' use of them with superiors. In particular, some of the subordinates' MI components appear to have a negative relationship to the use of upwardly-directed SUITs in greater China.

### Hypothesis 1 testing

Table 3 summarizes the results of a series of hierarchical regression analysis for the upward use of assertiveness, in order to test if the MI component(s) predict the use of this tactic and interact with the respondents' cultural background as hypothesized. In model 1, respondents' gender, age, work experience, and company size were controlled for in the regression due to their possible effects on the use of influence tactics in the workplace (Kipnis et al., 1980; Kipnis et al., 1984; Rudman, 1998; Leong et al., 2007; Bolino and Turnley, 2003; Furst and Cable, 2008; Ralston et al., 2009).

In Model 2, we added the six independent variables, concentration of effect (CE), probability of effect (PE), proximity (PR), temporal immediacy (TI), social consensus (SC) and magnitude (MA), with culture (CU) as the moderator, to the regression. As shown in Table 3, Model 2 was significant overall ( $F = 2.93$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and the seven variables explained a significant amount of the variance in assertiveness beyond that of the control variables ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Following Furst and Cable

**Table 2.** Means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix of variables.

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender <sup>(1)</sup>	—	—												
2. Age <sup>(2)</sup>	—	—	-0.19 **											
3. Working experience <sup>(3)</sup>	—	—	-0.23 ***	0.88 ***										
4. No. of employees <sup>(4)</sup>	—	—	0.00	0.07	0.06									
5. Concentration of effect	3.78	0.88	0.01	0.21 ***	0.19 **	0.08								
6. Probability of effect	3.68	0.98	-0.00	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.39 ***							
7. Proximity	3.80	0.75	0.03	0.30 ***	0.27 ***	0.03	0.57 ***	0.34 ***						
8. Temporal immediacy	3.26	1.12	-0.08	0.13 *	0.12 *	0.03	0.42 ***	0.37 ***	0.23 ***					
9. Social consensus	4.13	0.74	0.10	0.11	0.13 *	-0.02	0.49 ***	0.29 ***	0.45 ***	0.18 **				
10. Magnitude	3.86	1.01	-0.04	0.15 *	0.09	0.04	0.33 ***	0.48 ***	0.38 ***	0.26 ***	0.27 ***			
11. Culture <sup>(5)</sup>	—	—	0.05	0.38 ***	0.24 ***	-0.03	0.19 **	0.08	0.20 ***	0.03	0.20 ***	0.09		
12. Assertiveness	1.82	0.85	0.00	-0.01	-0.02	-0.06	-0.02	-0.25 ***	-0.14 *	-0.10	-0.13 *	-0.06	0.06	
13. Exchange of benefits	1.95	0.83	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.01	-0.12 *	-0.24 ***	-0.04	-0.09	-0.15 *	-0.09	-0.15 *	0.41 ***

(1) Gender (0 = male, 1 = female), (2) Age (1 = below 25 years old, 2 = 25-34 years old, 3 = 35-44 years old, 4 = 45 years old and above), (3) Working experience (1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1-5 years, 3 = 6-10 years, 4 = 11-15 years, 5 = 16-20 years, 6 = more than 21 years), (4) No. of employees (1 = less than 100, 2 = 100-499, 3 = 500-999, 4 = 1,000 and above), (5) Culture (0 = Hong Kong, 1 = Taiwan).

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed)

(2008), we also conducted separate, moderated regression equations for each of the six MI components when examining their moderating effects. This approach maximizes statistical power and detects weak  $R^2$  (0.25 or below, Mason and Perreault, 1991) with a sample of this size (Hair et al., 2006). Therefore, each of the possible two-way interaction terms describing the effect of culture on assertiveness was added to the moderated models separately, including CE×CU (for Model 3), PE×CU (for Model 4), PR×CU (for Model 5), TI×CU (for Model 6), SC×CU (for Model 7), and MA×CU (for Model 8). All predictors and the moderator were centered to avoid multicollinearity (Dielman, 1991). The findings shown in Table 3 indicates that the addition of further interaction terms increased the

the explained variability significantly for Model 4 ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Model 6 ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) which were significant overall at the 0.001 level. The increase in  $R^2$  for Model 5 was also marginally significant ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ). The

rest of the moderated models were not significant in increasing the explained variability, which suggests that Models 3, 7, and 8 were not supported by the results. In summary, CU appeared to moderate the impact of both PE and TI on the upward use of assertiveness. As Table 3 suggests, there were two significant and positive interaction terms: PE×CU ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and TI×CU ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); and a marginally acceptable interaction term: PR×CU ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ). This supports our proposed direction for this

term in the moderated model predicting assertiveness. Taiwanese culture, with its lower power distance, appears to diminish the negative effect of PE and TI on assertiveness. Therefore, H1 was partially supported. To obtain a clearer picture of these significant interactions, we also mapped the regression outputs from the Taiwanese and Hong Kong data (Aiken and West, 1991). As demonstrated in Figure 1, for Hong Kong employees, PE was negatively related to assertiveness (assertiveness =  $1.749 - .372 \times PE$ ).

In contrast, their Taiwanese counterparts revealed an insignificant (that is, reduced) relationship (assertiveness =  $1.886 - 0.112 \times PE$ ). Similarly, the shape of the interaction term of TI×CU in Figure 2 indicates that Hong Kong employees' TI was negatively related to

**Table 3.** Results of hierarchical regression analyses: Assertiveness.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
<b>Control variables</b>								
Gender	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.01	0.01
Age	0.05	-0.02	-0.02	0.00	-0.01	0.02	-0.03	-0.02
Working experience	-0.06	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.03	0.02
Number of employees	-0.06	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	-0.04	-0.02	-0.06	-0.05
<b>Predictors</b>								
CE		0.22 **	0.22 *	0.22 **	0.22 **	0.19 *	0.22 **	0.22 **
PE		-0.29 ***	-0.29 ***	-0.46 ***	-0.30 ***	-0.26 ***	-0.28 ***	-0.29 ***
PR		-0.16 *	-0.16 *	-0.18 *	-0.26 **	-0.17 *	0.16 *	-0.16 *
TI		-0.06	-0.06	-0.05	-0.07	-0.27 **	-0.05	-0.06
SC		-0.12	-0.12	-0.11	-0.12	-0.12	-0.07	-0.12
MA		0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.16
CU (Moderator)		0.09	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.09
<b>Interactions</b>								
CE × CU (Model 3)			0.00					
PE × CU (Model 4)				0.24 **				
PR × CU (Model 5)					0.14 †			
TI × CU (Model 6)						0.28 **		
SC × CU (Model 7)							-0.07	
MA × CU (Model 8)								-0.06
$\Delta R^2$	0.00	0.11 ***	0.00	0.03 **	0.01 †	0.03 **	0.00	0.00
Overall $R^2$	0.00	0.11	0.11	0.14	0.12	0.14	0.11	0.11
Adjusted $R^2$	-0.01	0.07	0.07	0.10	0.08	0.10	0.07	0.07
F-value	0.26	2.93 ***	2.68 **	3.35 ***	2.94 ***	3.49 ***	2.73 **	2.72 **

Standardized coefficients for final models are reported.

CE = Concentration of Effect, PE = Probability of Effect, PR = Proximity, TI = Temporal Immediacy, SC = Social Consensus, MA = Magnitude, CU = Culture. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) for predictors/interactions in final models are all less than or equal to 2.89, suggesting that collinearity among predictors does not substantially degrade the precision of estimates. †  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$  (two-tailed tests)

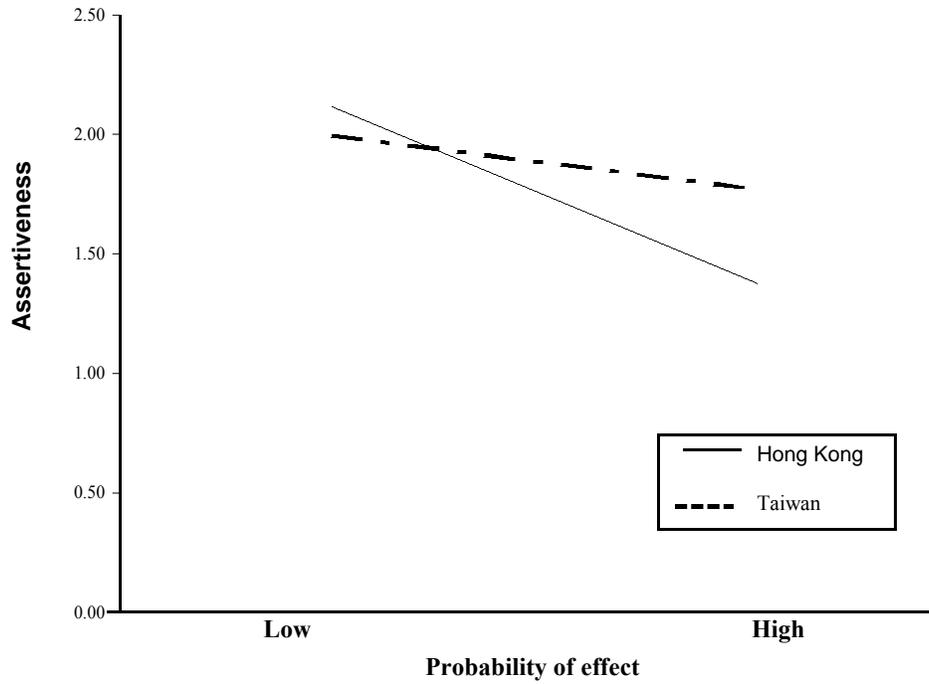
Assertiveness (assertiveness =  $1.770 - 0.256 \times TI$ ), whereas their Taiwanese counterparts revealed an insignificant behavioral model (assertiveness =  $1.876 + 0.041 \times TI$ ). In sum, these figures supported the expected shape of the hypothesized interactions.

### Hypothesis 2 testing

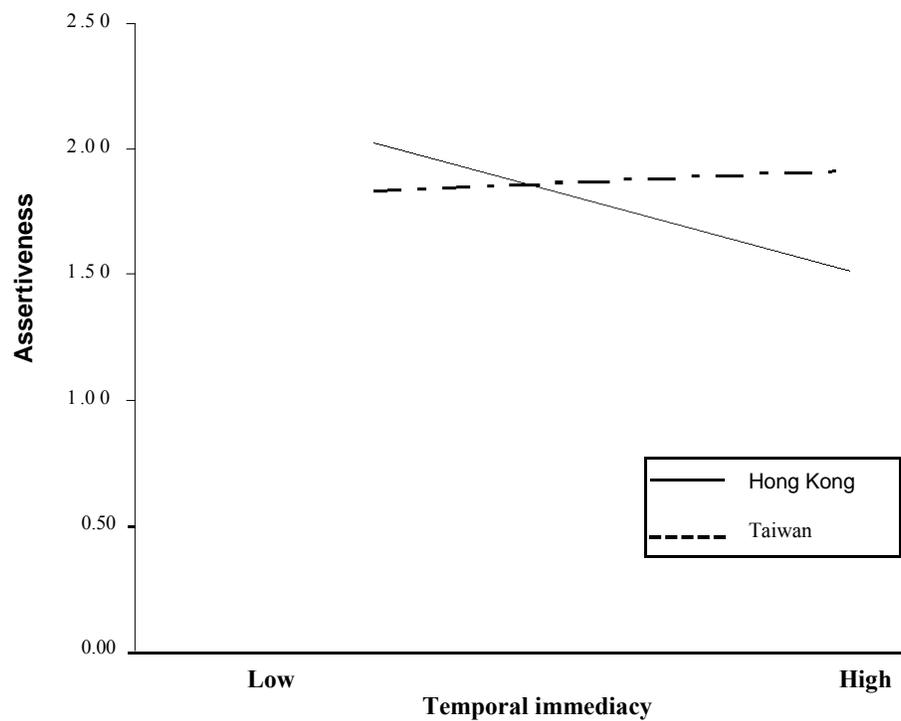
The same hierarchical regression process was then applied to examine whether Taiwanese culture diminishes the negative relationship between the components of MI and the upward use of exchange of benefits. The results are set out in Table 4 and show that Model 2 was significant overall ( $F = 2.63$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The IM components and culture explained a significant amount of the

variability in exchange of benefits beyond that of the control variables ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). As shown in Table 4, among the moderated models, only Model 4 was significant overall ( $F = 3.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with a significant incremental  $R^2$  ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, the standardized regression weight for the interaction term of PE × CU of Model 4 was, as anticipated, significant and positive ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) in predicting exchange of benefits. Taiwanese culture, having a higher uncertainty avoidance than Hong Kong, appears to weaken the negative relationship between PE and exchange of benefits, suggesting that H2 was partially supported.

In addition, Figure 3 illustrates a negative relationship between PE and exchange of benefits in Hong Kong



**Figure 1.** The moderating effect of sub-culture on the relationship between probability of effect and assertiveness.



**Figure 2.** The moderating effect of sub-culture on the relationship between temporal immediacy and assertiveness.

(exchange of benefits =  $2.045 - 0.369 \times PE$ ), but also shows that this relationship in Taiwan is insignificant (exchange

of benefits =  $1.829 - 0.049 \times PE$ ). Figure 3 shows a pattern that is consistent with the prediction of H2.

**Table 4.** Results of hierarchical regression analyses: Exchange of benefits.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8					
<b>Control variables</b>													
Gender	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.06					
Age	0.05	0.20	0.19	0.22	0.19	0.20	0.20	0.20					
Working experience	-0.01	-0.08	-0.08	-0.10	-0.09	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08					
Number of employees	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00					
<b>Predictors</b>													
CE		-0.03	0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03					
PE		-0.23	**	-0.23	**	-0.44	***	-0.22	**	-0.23	**		
PR		0.09		0.08	0.06	0.16	†	0.08	0.09	0.09			
TI		-0.01		0.00	0.01	0.00		-0.03	-0.01	-0.01			
SC		-0.09		-0.09	-0.09	-0.09		-0.10	-0.10	-0.10			
MA		0.02		0.02	0.02	0.03		0.02	0.09	0.09			
CU (Moderator)		-0.19	**	-0.18	**	-0.19	**	-0.18	**	-0.18	**		
<b>Interactions</b>													
CE X CU (Model 3)			-0.09										
PE X CU (Model 4)				0.28	**								
PR X CU (Model 5)						-0.11							
TI X CU (Model 6)							0.03						
SC X CU (Model 7)								0.01					
MA X CU (Model 8)										-0.08			
$\Delta R^2$	0.00	0.10	***	0.00	0.03	**	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00			
Overall $R^2$	0.00	0.10		0.10	0.13		0.11	0.10	0.10	0.10			
Adjusted $R^2$	-0.01	0.06		0.06	0.10		0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06			
F-value	0.16	2.63	**	2.50	**	3.33	***	2.56	**	2.41	**	2.46	**

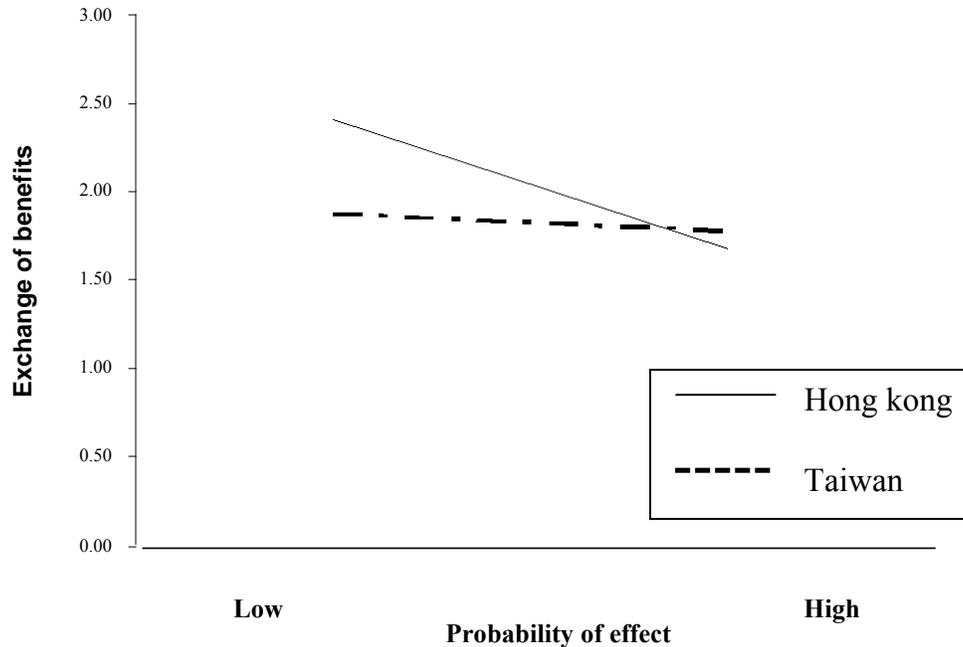
Standardized coefficients for final models are reported.

CE = Concentration of effect, PE = Probability of effect, PR = Proximity, TI = Temporal immediacy, SC = Social consensus, MA = Magnitude, CU = Culture. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) for predictors/interactions in final models are all less than or equal to 5.36, suggesting that collinearity among predictors does not substantially degrade the precision of estimates. †  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$  (two-tailed tests)

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study integrates a micro-level (that is, IM) factor and a macro-level (that is, cultural values) factor into a framework for analyzing employees' actual influence behavior with superiors. Based on 268 responses collected in two regions of greater China, we employed Hofstede's (2001) cultural framework to extend the work of Su and Wang (2006) in regression analyses. Beyond an overall link between the components of MI and the upward use of influence tactics, we have provided empirical evidence for the proposition that SUITs are considered to have low ethicality. Our findings also partially support the assertion that the negative effects of MI components on the application of SUITs with superiors may be moderated by a culture's power distance and uncertainty avoidance.

These results confirm our premise that employees' MI can predict not only their judgment or reasoning about ethicality in the decision-making process, but also their ethically controversial behavior at work. In addition, individuals' MI appears to explain, at least in part, why SUITs which focus on applying pressure or reciprocating favors are less popular than suggested by previous findings (Yukl and Falbe, 1990; Rao et al., 1995; Wayne et al., 1997; Kipnis et al., 1984; Su, 2010; Su and Wang, 2006). Using or not using SUITs appears to be more of an ethical than a social conformity consideration. Employees' MI appears to lead them to consider whether their behavior in persuading others would be consistent with their ethical standards. Moreover, the high correlation between assertiveness and exchange of benefits in Table 2 ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggests that SUITs appear



**Figure 3.** The moderating effect of sub-culture on the relationship between probability of effect and exchange of benefits.

to be categorized by subordinates under the same umbrella of ethical attributes across Chinese sub-cultures, which is consistent with the clustering results of Leong and colleagues (2007) based on managers' expectations of the effectiveness in Hong Kong of using each influence tactic. Therefore, the role of employees' MI and the ethicality of organizational behavior in developing interpersonal relations may be more important in management issues than we expected, at least in greater China.

Our findings on the moderating effect of Chinese sub-culture on the MI-SUIT relationship largely support the application of Hofstede's dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance to this study. The interactions between culture and MI components which we speculated might affect the use of SUIs with superiors are partially confirmed. Compared to those for exchange of benefits, the interactive models for assertiveness received stronger support overall in terms of either overall fit or number of interaction terms. Venkatesh and colleagues (1995) categorize influence tactics on the basis of three dimensions: (1) Coercive intensity, or how a target feels about the unfavorable consequences of not complying with the wishes of the source; (2) Task orientation, or how an influence tactic emphasizes the effect of the target's compliance on the task at hand; and (3) Instrumentality, or how an influence tactic relies on a source's ability to reward or punish the target. Their framework suggests that of all the influence tactics, assertiveness and exchange are characterized as having low task orientation and high instrumentality, rather than coercion. The use of legitimating or legalistic pleas is

considered as a hard coercive approach (Venkatesh et al., 1995), but is not listed in the SUIs. Therefore, it may be task orientation and instrumentality, rather than coercion, which is key in forming the judgment criteria for the ethicality of influencing behavior. Nevertheless, the stronger evidence for the MI-assertiveness than the MI-exchange relationship suggests that if assertiveness is characterized as a hard coercive influence tactic, it appears to be more perceptible and controversial on the prospect of meeting ethical standards, than exchange of benefits - the latter is considered only to be a soft coercion tactic in greater China. Coercion as a means of upward influence still plays a role in reinforcing perceptions of ethically-doubtful behavior. Employees from either Hong Kong or Taiwan may have learned to avoid behavior which disrupts harmony, while dealing with their superiors through the process of socialization to disguise the ethical dubiety of their manipulative (that is, low in task orientation and high in instrumentality) behavior with a superior. Consequently, our findings not only offer an approach to enacting the ethicality of actual management practices at work, but also rationalize the significant contribution of the socialization process to maintaining managerial practices within organizations in these two regions.

The results of this study indicate that, as expected, only some of the components of MI are significant in explaining the use of SUIs with superiors. As Model 2 in Table 3 suggests, PE ( $\beta = -0.29, p < 0.001$ ) and PR ( $\beta = -0.16, p < 0.05$ ) appear to play the expected role in predicting the use of assertiveness with superiors. For exchange of benefits, only PE ( $\beta = -0.23, p < 0.01$ ) meets

our expectation (see Model 2 of Table 4). In other words, not all components have equally significant managerial implications, as concluded in previous research. The existing literature is inconsistent on the relative importance of the dimensions of MI in predicting ethical judgments (Frey, 2000; Singhapakdi et al., 1996; Dukerich et al., 2000; Su and Wang, 2006; Wasieleski and Hayibor, 2008).

The main reason for this may be attributed to disagreement about the composites and measures of MI in the literature. Frey's (2000) findings suggest that a one-dimensional structure is best suited to this, whereas Jones' (1991) model does not indicate that forming a unidimensional measure is required. More recent literature, such as Vitell and Patwardhan (2008), proposes a dimension of "perceived harm" that consists of MA, PE, TI, and CE. These diverse findings and suggestions imply that there is no commonly accepted design for constructing predictors of the models for empirical purposes. In addition, the independent variables examined in the study describe employees' actual behavior in the workplace rather than outcomes of the various phases of a process of ethical decision making, as is assumed in more traditional perspectives (Jones, 1991; Ralston et al., 2009). Informants will experience possible inconsistencies between behavioral judgments and actual behavior (Breckler, 1984). Still, the support here for the role of PE partly echoes previous findings suggesting that the "perceived harm" category of the MI components (such as PE) is more influential than either PR and SC in affecting ethical perceptions (Tsalikis et al., 2008; Vitell and Patwardhan, 2008); furthermore, PR appears to predict only those SUITs involving hard coercion (that is, assertiveness). Once again, the more significant role of the MI components in explaining assertiveness and interacting with cultural values rather than exchange tactics in this study provides evidence reinforcing our inference that once an influence attempt has been judged as manipulative and therefore unethical, use of coercion to further it will increase employees' perception of the attempt as ethically doubtful.

Our findings support the value of incorporating culture as an exogenous variable to explain the ethicality of upward influence attempts. As seen in Table 2, Taiwanese culture correlates negatively with exchange of benefits ( $r = -0.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Model 2 of Table 4 also suggests that Taiwanese culture may negatively influence the use of exchange of benefits ( $\beta = -0.19$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In other words, Hong Kong culture appears less sensitive to an unethical influence tactic with lower coercion. However, the results also show culture does not have a similar effect on, or correlation with, assertiveness, which is more coercive than exchange of benefits. This suggests that employees in either of these Chinese sub-cultures, with their emphasis on social harmony (Yau, 1988) tend to avoid practices which might seriously offend common ethical standards (Alas, 2006).

In summary, Taiwanese employees may have a stronger need to gain approval for adhering to notions of social desirability than their Hong Kong counterparts; or they may simply be subject to more strictly-regulated workplace ethics codes. In addition, Hofstede's cultural dimensions consider the differences in managerial practices between countries in terms of practices such as leadership, motivation, and organizational structure (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). Our results, based on subordinates' descriptions of their upward influence attempts, provide empirical support for Hofstede's typology and present a more comprehensive scope within which to articulate organizational phenomena. Our results not only imply that managerial practices should not be assumed to be culturally identical in greater China, but also support the suggestion that Hofstede's cultural framework has predictive power for employees' upward influence attempts beyond their leadership styles with subordinates.

Moreover, these findings add to Su and Wang's research on the ethicality of upward influencing. In particular, the lower power distance and higher uncertainty avoidance in Taiwanese culture appears to suppress the boundary conditions of the effects of the components of MI on predicting unethical influence behavior, as characterized by manipulation and coercion. In summary, our results are noteworthy insofar as they provide more theoretical and empirical support for the ethical ambiguity of SUITs. They also imply that a culture's distinctive values appear to affect the ethical standards of society (Alas, 2006), since the two regions studied here have given rise to different findings even though they demonstrate considerable cultural similarity (Paik et al., 1996). The study contributes to the need for cross-cultural research conducted in similar cultures within a region rather than focusing on East-West contrasts (Su and Wang, 2010).

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our research design, purposes, and discussion have some limitations which need to be acknowledged. Firstly, we have focused only on the ethicality of SUITs as directed towards superiors. However, the choice of interpersonal influence tactics may differ according to the direction of the influence attempt (Kipnis et al., 1980; Kipnis et al., 1984; Yukl and Falbe, 1990; Yukl and Tracey, 1992; Leong et al., 2007). To expand on the present findings, more research is needed which incorporates lateral and downward use of SUITs to enable us to compare these findings and develop a more general and complete system for interpreting the ethicality of interpersonal influence attempts. Secondly, although we measured respondents' actual behavior in the workplace, which is a more objective approach than probing their responses to moral issues developed by researchers, the

potential for bias caused by using one-sided measures remains. Incorporating the superior's opinions could provide a more balanced report of actual behavior (see for example Rao et al., 1995; Su, 2010).

Nevertheless, a superior's descriptions of the SUIs used by the subordinate may be insensitive to subtler forms of influence that are successful only if the superior is not aware that they are being used (Yukl and Tracey, 1992). Hence, it would be highly rewarding to examine, from a communications perspective, how subordinates encode their message in SUIs and how superiors decode it (compare with Su, 2010). Discussing the barriers to communication, such as selective perception, filtering, information overload, emotions, and language may enable more understanding of the gap between the intended and actual use of SUIs. Moreover, employees' choice of communication format may account for the variation in the effect of transferring and understanding the meaning of attempted SUIs in dyadic interactions, since the information richness of particular media pertains to the potential information-carrying capacity of the data (Daft and Lengel, 1984). Future research should discuss how to measure or reflect effectively the actual behavior which is considered as ethically doubtful in workplaces, and how to select media which are appropriate for improving the application of SUIs from a communication perspective.

Thirdly, our design used national culture as a macro-level variable and MI as a micro-level variable, but did not discuss the role of meso-level variables that may improve insight into SUIs (Ralston et al., 2009). Meso-level factors, such as the ethics codes of businesses, would contribute to reducing the frequency of unethical behavior (Vitell and Patwardhan, 2008) since ethics codes increase employees' perceptions of their organization's ethical values (Valentine and Barnett, 2002). Thus, future research is encouraged to examine how the ethics codes of enterprises interact with the components of MI and national culture on the use of SUIs for upward influencing. Furthermore, well-accepted measurement of MI composites, rather than diversified arguments, should be developed and used so that we may compare and contrast the results of empirical studies.

Finally, our insignificant and unexpected findings may be derived partly from the use of organization-oriented MI as predictor variables, as distinct from the approach taken in some previous research. In other words, the current study did not examine the moderating effect of the different orientations (that is, self, other, and organization) of MI on the use of SUIs although this has been seen in previous research on ethical decision making (Carlson et al., 2002). We would encourage future research to include all scenarios for measuring the components of MI in various orientations, and to contrast the impact of these on the relationships of interest. Moreover, there are various approaches to the number of dimensions for MI, either conceptually or empirically,

although we did partially confirm the MI-SUIT relationship. Therefore, a commonly accepted typology of MI dimensions for empirical research should be developed and refined in the future.

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