Knowledge Adoption in China: The Roles of Ganqing and Renqing

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Abstract: This study sought to advance our understanding of what affects knowledge adoption (a key process of knowledge sharing) in China by exploring the impact of two main affective determinants (ganqing and renqing) of Chinese interpersonal relationships on Chinese employees' adoption of explicit and tacit knowledge contributed by their peers. Compared with two other main processes (contribution and seeking) of knowledge sharing and their determinants, knowledge adoption and its contributing factors have received much less attention in the extant literature on knowledge sharing in China. The effects of ganqing and renqing on explicit and tacit knowledge adoption were examined and tested with the data from a survey of 243 MBA students in China. The results from the hierarchical regression analyses showed that ganqing was positively related to explicit knowledge adoption and tacit knowledge adoption. Renqing was also found to be positively related to the adoption of both types of knowledge. While effective knowledge sharing relies on both the 'supply of knowledge' through knowledge contribution and the 'demand of knowledge' via knowledge adoption, prior research on knowledge sharing in China has placed more emphasis on the supply side of knowledge sharing and its determinants. By linking knowledge adoption to two affective factors, the findings from this study help address this imbalance in the knowledge sharing research related to China and increase our knowledge of what might have hindered the diffusion of knowledge management in China and how to better promote it. Other research and practical implications from the study are discussed.

Keywords: Knowledge adoption, Knowledge sharing, Ganqing, Renqing, Interpersonal feelings

1. Introduction

In today's knowledge-based global economy, knowledge is well recognized as a critical resource that enables firms to gain and sustain competitive advantage. As a key activity in knowledge management, knowledge sharing helps a firm create and mobilize its knowledge resources for success in the global market (Block, 2017). Through knowledge transfer, integration, combination and application, the firm can achieve competitive advantage from knowledge sharing (Regner and Zander, 2011). Despite being exposed to knowledge management for over two decades and aspiring to become a knowledge-based economy (Augier, Guo and Rowen, 2016), China lags behind developed nations in embracing and practicing knowledge sharing (Liu et al., 2019; Milton, 2016). While numerous studies have shown that firms operating in China can benefit from increased knowledge sharing in managing innovation, productivity and an aging workforce (Akram et al., 2018; Jasimuddin, Li and Perdikis, 2019; Martinsons, Davison and Huang, 2017; Tang and Martins, 2021; Ye, Liu and Tan, 2021), how to promote and benefit from knowledge sharing remains poorly understood. Much of the previous China-based research has focused on knowledge hoarding and hiding as well as their determinants (Liu et al., 2025; Peng, 2013; Xiao and Cooke, 2018), even though lack of motivation to adopt knowledge from others was once found to be among the top three barriers to knowledge sharing in China (Su, Li and Chow, 2010). More recent research has shown that knowledge adoption in China can be influenced by not only the credibility of the knowledge source (Jin et al., 2021), but also interpersonal factors such as social trust and relationship (Huo, Zhang and Ma, 2018; Martinsons, Davison and Huang, 2017). In their research on knowledge management failures in China, Martinsons, Davison and Huang (2017) found that Chinese employees placed more value on knowledge obtained from informal exchanges than on knowledge from an impersonal knowledge management system. Huo, Zhang and Ma (2018) further showed that interpersonal trust could influence the relationship between knowledge source credibility and knowledge adoption. To the extent that effective knowledge sharing depends on knowledge adoption as well as knowledge contribution (Cleveland and Ellis, 2015; Jin et al., 2021), more knowledge of what determines the former process of knowledge sharing helps increase our understanding of how to promote and benefit from knowledge sharing in China. Toward this end, this study focused on the adoption process in knowledge sharing and explored the roles of two common interpersonal feelings (ganqing and renqing) among Chinese in knowledge adoption at the workplace. Despite their prominence in the Chinese society and influence on business activities in China (Chen and Bedford, 2022; Xie et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2015), ganqing and renqing have received scant attention in previous studies on the determinants of knowledge adoption in China.

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2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 Knowledge Adoption and its Determinants

While receiving much less attention than knowledge contribution and seeking in the knowledge sharing literature, knowledge adoption or acceptance has been recognized as a key process in knowledge sharing. Valuable knowledge contributed by an employee must be adopted and applied by other employees to generate positive results (e.g., learning, innovation and increased productivity) for a firm (Adeyemi, Uzamot and Temim, 2022; Arsanti, Rupidara and Bondarouk, 2024; Srisamran and Ractham, 2020). At the same time, knowledge adoption is not automatic, as the knowledge recipient may not readily accept others' knowledge because of some potential obstacles (Desouza, Awazu and Wan 2006). Failure to accept and use knowledge from others thus hinders knowledge sharing (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) and makes efforts to facilitate knowledge contribution and seeking (e.g., knowledge capture and expert location) useless (Desouza, Awazu and Wan, 2006; Guo and Chelliah, 2024). Research on barriers to knowledge adoption has revealed several reasons for individuals' reluctance to accept or adopt knowledge from others. One of them is the 'not-invented-here' mentality (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Preference for developing one's own ideas and knowledge, coupled with the lack of trust in the knowledge source, can lead to rejection of knowledge coming from an outside source (Husted and Michailova, 2002). Strong group affiliation and even group thinking are additional reasons for resisting knowledge from outside a department or a group, because the adoption of any outside ideas may disturb the stability of the group and undermine its possession of knowledge monopoly (Husted and Michailova, 2002). Adopting peer knowledge can also carry financial, psychological, social, and performance risks (Desouza, Awazu and Wan, 2006). For example, applying another person's ill advice may hurt one's job performance. Using help from others admits incompetence, ignorance, inferiority, and dependence, which may tarnish one's self-esteem and image within an organization (Nadler, Ellis and Bar, 2003).

Another stream of research rooted in the Technology Acceptance Model (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000) has identified additional key determinants of knowledge adoption. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and its extension (TAM2) reveal two key factors underlying user acceptance of a new technology (e.g., a novel information system): user perceptions of the usefulness of the new technology, and the ease of using the technology. Perceived usefulness and ease of use were later applied to the research on information and knowledge adoption. For example, a study on intention to adopt knowledge in virtual communities found the perceived usefulness of knowledge as one of the contributing factors (Liao and Chou, 2012). Perhaps the main contributions from the studies that drew on the TAM framework to identify what influence information and knowledge adoption are the findings about the antecedents of perceived usefulness and their direct or indirect effects on knowledge adoption. One study of health knowledge adoption among social media users in China showed that the users' willingness to adopt health knowledge was influenced by its content and source credibility (Jin et al., 2021). A survey of information exchange in a large virtual travel community also found the quality of information salient in the participants' consumption of the information contributed by others (Zheng, Zhao and Stylianou, 2013).

In addition to the perceived usefulness of knowledge and its antecedents (e.g., content and source credibility), the knowledge recipient's personal relationship or experience with the knowledge contributor may affect the former's knowledge adoption attitudes and intentions (Hertzum, 2014; Liao and Chou, 2012). Extensive relationship or experience between the two parties is conducive to the extra efforts needed to ensure the knowledge recipient's understanding and use of the knowledge (Levin and Cross, 2004). Liao and Chou (2012) found virtual community participants' ties with others in the community network positively influencing their attitudes toward adopting knowledge from the network. Hertzum (2014) further maintained that even weak relationships may affect one's choice of knowledge sources. Experience with a knowledge source has also been found significant or very useful in choosing the source (Hirsh and Dinkelacker, 2004; Woudstra and van den Hooff, 2008).

Closely related to interpersonal relationships, interpersonal trust has received some attention in the knowledge adoption research. A survey of 275 legal professionals in a large Canadian law firm found knowledge recipients' trust in knowledge contributors' competency mediating the relationships between interpersonal ties and knowledge use (Evans, Frissen and Choo, 2019). Another survey on health knowledge adoption through social media in China showed a similar mediating effect of interpersonal trust on the relationship between perceived source credibility and knowledge adoption (Huo, Zhang and Ma 2018). In addition, a study conducted in a U.S. nonprofit organization found that interpersonal trust could be directly linked to the use of one type of knowledge: tacit knowledge (Holste and Fields, 2010). On the other hand, another study conducted in Nigeria

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did not support such a direct relationship (Balogun and Adetula, 2015). While the extant literature indicates the salience of interpersonal relationship, experience and trust in knowledge adoption, there has been scant attention to the potential roles of other important interpersonal factors, such as feelings between two people, in knowledge adoption. The next section discusses two prevalent interpersonal feelings (ganqing and renqing) in Chinese social exchanges and relationships as well as their influence on social and business activities in China.

2.2 Ganqing and Renqing

China is a relation-based society where personal relations (guanxi) play a critical role in the social and economic activities through their profound influence on how Chinese people behave in social exchanges and interactions at work and in spare time (Bedford and Hwang, 2013). In the discourse of Chinese business culture, guanxi has been deemed crucial to different business activities, such as management, marketing, purchasing and innovation (Leung et al., 2014; Ren et al., 2023; Wu, 2021; Zhang, Xu and Wu, 2022; Zhou et al., 2015). Guanxi has also been found salient in knowledge sharing among Chinese employees (Davidson, Ou and Martinsons, 2018; Liu and Zhai, 2024; Liu, Zhu and Yan, 2022; Qian et al., 2019). There is consensus in the literature that guanxi quality is mainly determined by the trust and feelings that two people in a relationship develop and hold for each other (Chen and Bedford, 2022; Chen and Chen, 2004). One main interpersonal feeling is ganqing that represents a persistent affection or emotional attachment and its sharing between the two parties (Berger et al., 2017). This affective connection also entails some obligations and commitments such as loyalty, solidarity and even unconditional sacrifice (i.e., taking care of each other no matter what) (Chen and Chen, 2004). While being inherent and thus more salient in guanxi among family members and relatives, ganqing can be formed between close friends, acquaintances or even strangers. In the workplace, employees and managers may develop deep ganqing for one another through a long history or a wide scope of work-related interactions, afterwork socialization and assistance with personal problems (Chen and Peng, 2008; Yen and Barnes, 2011).

Another main interpersonal feeling in China is renqing that consists of 1) a sense of obligation to provide and return favors to each other, and 2) empathy for each other's emotions, feelings and needs (Hwang, 1987). Chinese favor exchanges and the feeling of indebtedness they create are somewhat different from the Western reciprocal favors in several ways. First, the Chinese norm of reciprocity is dynamic, often involving unequal favor exchanges in which "both sides will practice trying to do more, improving with every new effort, in a system of escalating favors" (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1997, p. 179). Returning greater favors demonstrates one's sincerity in valuing and maintaining the relationship with another person and "induces greater feeling of gratitude and indebtedness in the other party so that the other party will return the favor when needed later on" (Chen and Chen 2004, p. 318). Second, failure to reciprocate can result in more negative consequences in China. One can lose face (mianzi), be considered as immoral, or experience anxiety (worry about being punished) (Chen and Bedford, 2022; Deng et al., 2021). Conversely, returning a favor, especially a larger one, will give face to the recipient, enhancing his or her social status and reputation. Third, whereas Westerners tend to return favors within a short period of time, Chinese people often do not expect quick returns of favors and are willing to wait for a longer time before being paid back (Shi et al., 2011).

While renqing is often equated with instrumental exchanges based on dynamic reciprocity in the literature (Bobrucali, 2020), some Chinese scholars noted the affective aspect of renqing, i.e., an individual's sympathy for other people's emotional responses to various situations of daily life (Hwang, 1987; Zhang, Xu and Wu, 2022). A person having renqing would feel "happy or sad when and as others do" (Hwang 1987, p. 953). The strength of renqing thus also reflects the depth of the emotional commitment between the parties involved (Jacobs, 1979). An individual versed in such a feeling is more likely to sacrifice his or her personal interest in helping the other party (Kipnis, 1997). Hence, empathy for other people works in conjunction with dynamic reciprocity in influencing one's propensity to assist others (Wang, Siu and Barnes, 2008).

In business relationships that are essentially mixed ties involving mostly coworkers and business partners (Hwang, 1987), both renqing and ganqing are pivotal to guanxi development and maintenance in that they influence the affective and instrumental aspects of guanxi and their interplay. As many business activities involve instrumental interactions (e.g., work collaboration, information exchange, and business transactions) where mutual help is often needed (Chen and Chen, 2004), renqing influences the level of cooperation between the parties in a transactional activity and may even strengthen their emotional bonds (Chen and Bedford, 2022). Ganqing is equally influential, since expressive interactions (e.g., working lunches and birthday celebration parties) increasing the emotional connections between business partners during and after work can also reinforce or even increase renqing (Chen and Chen, 2004). Moreover, people who care about each other and treat their partners as friends are more inclined to help in times of difficulty (Zhou et al., 2015). Research on the

business influence of ganqing and renqing supports their importance to interpersonal relationships in various business settings, such as supervisor-subordinate and buyer-supplier relationships (Chen and Bedford, 2022; Xie et al., 2023).

2.3 Explicit vs. Tacit Knowledge

It is well recognized in the knowledge management literature that there are two main types of knowledge: explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge can be easily explained and documented in reports, presentations, and formulas. In contrast, tacit knowledge (e.g., skills, expertise and "gut-feelings") is harder to articulate and capture (Polany, 1967) because it is "deeply rooted in action, commitment and involvement in a specific context" (Nonaka 1994, p.16). The distinction between these types of knowledge has been established as a contextual factor in the knowledge sharing research (e.g., Balogun and Adetula, 2015; Evans, Frissen and Choo, 2019). For example, research on the impact of interpersonal trust on knowledge contribution shows that different types of such trust (e.g., affect-based and cognition-based) affect explicit and tacit knowledge contribution in different manners (Chowdhury, 2020; Holste and Fields, 2010; Zhang and Chen, 2018). Accordingly, the potential effects of ganqing and renqing on adopting these two types of knowledge were examined and tested in this study.

2.4 Effects of Ganqing and Renqing on Explicit Knowledge Adoption

Since explicit knowledge is well-articulated and easy to understand, the ease of using such knowledge is not a major concern for the recipient. Rather, potential adoption considerations would focus on perceived knowledge usefulness determined by interpersonal relationships and their contributing factors. Strong ganqing and renqing can increase perceived knowledge usefulness by reducing any potential doubt or perceived risks regarding the knowledge source and its performance impact as well as any potential embarrassment or loss of face the knowledge recipient may feel. Deep ganqing and renqing can also strengthen and maintain the bond between the knowledge contributor and the knowledge recipient (Wang and Noe, 2010). Such a close tie provides the latter with support and experience for understanding the former and using his/her knowledge (Hertzum, 2014; Levin and Cross, 2004; Woudstra and van den Hooff, 2008), hence increasing the latter's knowledge adoption propensity (Liao and Chou, 2012). In their study of the impact of social ties on knowledge transfer in China, Zhou, Siu and Wang (2010) found that strong instrumental and expressive ties both facilitating knowledge transfer through increasing affect-based trust and cognition-based trust between the knowledge contributor and the knowledge recipient. Instrumental ties are heavily influenced by renqing, while expressive ties often involve ganqing (Chen & Chen, 2004). Moreover, since renqing is developed and maintained via exchanges of favors under the norm of dynamic reciprocity (Chen and Chen, 2004), the knowledge contributor may offer knowledge as a return of a favor or favors received from the knowledge recipient before (Serenko and Bontis, 2016). Hence, the knowledge recipient would likely feel obliged to accept the knowledge as a returned favor to avoid violating the norm of escalating reciprocity (Deng et al., 2021). Ganqing may also increase the chance for knowledge adoption to the extent that individuals with deep affection for others are likely to be loyal to them and accept their help without much hesitation. Based on the above analysis, stronger ganqing and renqing are expected to increase Chinese employees' propensity to adopt explicit knowledge from their peers.

Hypothesis 1: Ganqing is positively related to explicit knowledge adoption in China.

Hypothesis 2: Renqing is positively related to explicit knowledge adoption in China.

2.5 Effects of Ganqing and Renqing on Tacit Knowledge Adoption

As tacit knowledge often entails insights, beliefs and intuitions that are hard to articulate and tightly intertwined with the experience of the knowledge contributor, the process of learning and applying tacit knowledge is much more complex and demanding than that for explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge adoption also depends on a shared experience through intense social collaborations between the knowledge contributor and the knowledge recipient (D'Eredita and Barreto, 2006; Nonaka, 1994). In order for the latter to internalize (fully understand and effectively apply) the tacit knowledge, both parties often need to interact with each other and create shared values, mental models and perceptions (Nonaka, 1994). During the internalization process, the knowledge recipient must not only trust the reputation of the knowledge contributor and the quality of his or her tacit knowledge (Desouza, Awazu and Wan, 2006), but also believe in the latter's willingness and ability to assist the former in absorbing the knowledge before applying it to a task. Both ganqing and renqing can increase the knowledge recipient's trust in the knowledge source. Research on the relationships between affect and trust shows that positive and negative feelings in a personal relationship can increase and diminish one party's belief in the other party's trustworthiness as well as the frequency of interactions between the two parties (Lee et al.,

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2023; Yang and Horak, 2018). Moreover, people emotionally connected in close personal relationships are more likely to be open with shared values, mental models and perceptions (Chowdhury, 2020). Previous research on the effects of instrumental and expressive ties on knowledge transfer in China implied the influence of ganqing and renqing on tacit knowledge adoption, as renqing enhances instrumental ties and ganqing strengthens expressive ties as noted before. From a survey of 212 business students from a Taiwanese university, Lin (2007) found both instrumental and expressive ties conducive to tacit knowledge transfer. In another study using 152 MBA students from China, Zhou, Siu and Wang (2010) reported similar effects of instrumental and expressive ties on tacit knowledge transfer. From the above analysis, it appears that both ganqing and renqing may exert positive effects on tacit knowledge adoption in China.

Hypothesis 3: Ganqing is positively related to tacit knowledge adoption in China.

Hypothesis 4: Renqing is positively related to tacit knowledge adoption in China.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

A survey was conducted in 2022 to collect the data for testing the research hypotheses. The sample frame consisted of 303 part-time MBA students at two universities in China. The students worked full-time in a variety of service and manufacturing industries, such as banking, real estate, transportation, machinery, consumer electronics and retailing. Most of them (78%) had worked full-time for at least three years, and some of them (37%) even had managerial experiences. This ensured the participants had had prior experience in sharing knowledge with others, strengthening the validity of the survey. The sample also reasonably represented different gender and age groups (38% males, 62% females, 48% under the age of 30 and 52% above the age of 30) in the population, thus maintaining the external validity of the study. While providing a convenient sample, the use of MBA students is adequate for the study since they all grew up in the Chinese culture and were likely to have experienced both ganqing and renqing in guanxi (Chen and Peng, 2008). The participants were instructed to take the survey voluntarily and anonymously. Out of 303 questionnaires distributed, 243 usable responses were returned, representing a response rate of 80%. Since the research model did not involve complex relationships, this sample size can be viewed as sufficient for the types of statistical analyses (structural equation modeling and regression analyses) used in the study (Kline, 2005).

3.2 Measurements and Instrument Validation

Based on the conceptualization by Chen and Chen (2004), ganqing was measured with two items that reflect the degree of feelings and emotions, and their sharing between two coworkers. For renqing, three items adapted from Zhou, Siu and Wang (2010) were used to measure the closeness of personal connection and the extent of favor exchanges between two parties at and outside of work. In keeping with Bock et al. (2005) who operationalized explicit knowledge as job-related reports, documents, manuals, models and methods, explicit knowledge adoption was measured with two items that captured the adoption of those materials. Tacit knowledge adoption was measured with three items similar to those developed by Holste and Fields (2010) who viewed spending significant time in learning tacit knowledge from the knowledge contributor as a key process of adopting tacit knowledge. While these authors used only one item to assess tacit knowledge as personal knowhow and expertise learned from experience and formal training, this knowledge was measured with two items in the current study. The ten items used in the survey can be found in the Appendix and were assessed on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In answering each question related to an item, the respondents were instructed in the questionnaire to randomly pick another organizational member with whom they had worked in their companies during the previous three years. This instruction was intended to generate a sample of responses that would capture a wide range of interpersonal feelings developed from personal interactions and exchanges in real work settings. Without knowing the criteria (random selection of a coworker known for some time) for choosing another person in answering the questions, many respondents might be inclined to consider a well-acquainted coworker or a close friend who was not a coworker. As many respondents lacked a strong command of English, the questionnaire was presented in Chinese. To ensure equivalence of meaning, the English items were translated to Chinese first and then back translated into English. The questionnaire was also pretested with 27 employees from a local company in China for face-validity and item clarity.

To check the construct validity of the survey instrument, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) based on structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS 26.0 as the SEM software. In the analysis, the maximum likelihood estimation method was selected, and covariances between some error terms were allowed. To

confirm the measurement model, the hypothesized model (M0) was compared with three alternative nested models. As ganqing is often mixed with renqing in China (Chen and Chen, 2004), they were combined into one factor to form the first alternative model (M1). In the second alternative model (M2), the two types of knowledge adoption formed one factor. The third alternative model combined ganqing and renqing into one factor and the two types of knowledge adoption into another. As shown in Table 1, the default model (M0) fits the data better than the other three alternative models (M1, M2 and M3) with the best key good-fit ratios among the four models. Hence, the CFA provided empirical support for the convergent and discriminant validity of the four main constructs measured in this study. The reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) of the four corresponding scales (ganqing, renqing, explicit knowledge adoption, and tacit knowledge adoption) were 0.82, 0.89, 0.98, and 0.97, respectively. Their bivariate correlations are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Models	X^2	df	ΔX^2	X^2/df	GFI	CIF	TLI	IFI	RMSEA
Model (0)	47.1	28		1.68	.96	.99	.99	.99	.05
Model (1)	114.6	32	67.5	3.58	.91	.97	.96	.97	.10
Model (2)	545.9	32	498.8	17.06	.79	.80	.72	.80	.26
Model (3)	576.5	34	529.4	16.96	.78	.79	.72	.79	.26

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients[a]

Variable	Mean	s. d.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Explicit knowledge adoption	5.77	1.31						
2. Tacit knowledge adoption	5.84	1.21	.70					
3. Ganqing	5.49	1.45	.47	.60				
4. Renqing	5.12	1.41	.44	.53	.72			
5. Gender[b]	.38	.49	.05	-.05	.02 -	.02		
6. Age[c]	2.55	.61	-.16	-.13	.13	-.15	.05	
7. Tenure	6.58	4.50	-.15	-.09	-.15	-.06	-.11	.27

[a] N = 243. Correlations greater than or equal to .13 are significant at the .05 level; $r \geq .21$ are significant at the .01 level; all two-tail tests.

[b] 0 = female and 1 = male

[c] 1 = under 20; 2 = 21-30; 3 = 31-40; 4 = above 40

3.3 Common Method Variance

As the data for the independent and dependent variables came from the same source, they might be subject to the influence of common method bias. Several measures employed to collect the data (protecting respondent anonymity, using multiple items to measure each key variable, and keeping the survey questions simple, specific, and concise) reduced this potential problem to some extent (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To check for potential common method variance in the data, Harman's single factor test was performed, which showed that the first factor in an exploratory factor analysis accounted for approximately 43% of the total explained variance of 90%. Potential common method variance was further assessed using the marker-variable technique (Lindell and Whitney, 2001; Malhotra, Kim and Patil, 2006). A demographic variable, the gender of the respondents, included in the survey questionnaire was chosen as the marker variable because it is theoretically unrelated to at least one research variable in this study (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). Holste and Fields (2010) also empirically found gender unrelated to knowledge use. Because the marker variable is assumed to have no relationship with the research variables, common method variance can be assessed based on the correlations between the marker

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variable and the indicators of a research variable (Lindell and Whitney, 2001). No significant correlations were found between the gender variable and the indicators of either dependent variable. Hence, the assessments from the Harman's test and the marker-variable analysis did not show a strong presence of common method bias in the data.

3.4 Hypothesis Testing and Results

The four research hypotheses were tested using two hierarchical regression analyses. In the first step of each regression analysis, the control variables were entered into a regression model. In keeping with Holste and Fields (2010), age and tenure were used as the control variables. In the second step of the analysis, the two independent variables were added to the equation together. The results from the hierarchical regression analyses are shown in Table 3. Ganqing and renqing together substantially increased the explained variances in both explicit knowledge adoption (ΔR^2 = .21) and tacit knowledge adoption (ΔR^2 = .36). Moreover, renqing was significantly and positively related to both explicit knowledge adoption (b = .20, p < .01) and tacit knowledge adoption (b = .20, p < .01). Ganqing was also significant in predicting explicit knowledge adoption (b = .31, p < .01) and tacit knowledge adoption (b = .45, p < .01) in the expected directions. These results provided support for all the four hypotheses. Despite the high correlation between ganqing and renqing (r = .72), their VIFs (2.12 and 2.14) in the regression models were below the conservative benchmark of 2.5, suggesting a low level of multicollinearity in the data.

Table 3: Regression Results[a]

	EKA[b]		TKA[b]	
Variables	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Age	-.13+	-.07	-.11	-.04
Tenure	-.11+	-.07	-.06	.01
Ganqing		.31**		.45**
Renqing		.20**		.20**
R^2	.04	.25	.02	.38
ΔR^2		.21		.36
Adjusted R^2	.03	.24	.01	.37
F	4.58*	20.21**	2.38+	36.75**
ΔF		34.56**		1 69.75**

[a] N = 243. Standardized regression coefficients are shown. +p<.10, *p < .05, **p < .01

[b] EKA = explicit knowledge adoption; TKA = tacit knowledge adoption

4. Discussion

This study represents one of the few recent investigations of knowledge adoption and its affective determinants in China. While effective knowledge sharing relies on both the 'supply of knowledge' through knowledge contribution and the 'demand of knowledge' via knowledge adoption, prior research on knowledge sharing in China has placed more emphasis on the supply side of knowledge sharing and its determinants. By assessing the current status of knowledge adoption and exploring two of its affective determinants, the present investigation and its findings help address this imbalance in the knowledge sharing research related to China and increase our knowledge of what might have hindered the diffusion of knowledge management in China and how to better promote it. By focusing on knowledge contribution and its barriers, previous studies did not pay sufficient attention to problems and issues related to knowledge adoption, which may affect our thinking about and practice of knowledge sharing in China. Evident in our findings, certain affective factors closely related to guanxi may determine knowledge adoption and therefore effective knowledge sharing in China. Since the current study was based on a small sample, more data are needed to help us further assess the relative importance of knowledge adoption to knowledge sharing in China and obtain a fuller understanding of the motivational factors of knowledge adoption in the Chinese society.

The findings from this study also highlight the need of and benefit from understanding the roles of the key affective drivers of Chinese guanxi in knowledge sharing. Given the critical role of social relationships in a relation-based society like China, linking the affective elements in guanxi to the key processes of knowledge

sharing enriches our knowledge of certain fundamental social forces (e.g., long-term interpersonal feelings) that may influence knowledge sharing in China. Our findings echo the observation by van den Hooff, Schouten and Simonovski (2012) that social relationships between two individuals may affect their knowledge sharing behaviors through the feelings and emotions they hold for each other. Consequently, future research on how relational factors influence knowledge sharing in China needs to recognize and explore the affective states of the parties involved, which has been downplayed in conventional social network and exchange theories largely based on Western cultures (Yang and Horak, 2018). Moreover, it is worthwhile for future studies to investigate the interaction between ganqing and renqing in influencing knowledge adoption and other main processes of knowledge sharing. The strong relationship between ganqing and renqing was evidenced in our sample (r = .72) and a previous study (Zhou et al., 2015). Finding the high correlation between ganqing and renqing in this study was somewhat expected in that these two qualitatively different feelings are often closely intertwined in workplace guanxi (Chua, 2012; Zhang, Xu and Wu, 2022). Reciprocal exchanges of favors between two coworkers at or outside of work can breed affection to each other (Chua, Morris and Ingram, 2009; Hwang, 1987) and such emotional attachment can in turn increase each party's propensity to help the other out in job-related and personal matters (Chen & Peng, 2008; Kipnis, 1997). The interplay between ganqing and renqing may then have a potential bearing on knowledge exchange at the workplace.

Since ganqing and renqing represent personal feelings people hold towards others, their effects on knowledge adoption behaviors found in this study add to a body of research investigating the affective aspects of motivation for knowledge sharing (Casciaro and Lobo, 2008; Liang, Li and Shao, 2025; Ma et al., 2025; Trevinyo-Rodriguez and Bontis, 2010; Van den Hoof, Schouten and Simonovski, 2012). Trevinyo-Rodriguez and Bontis (2010) and Van den Hoof, Schouten and Simonovski (2012) showed emotions such as pride and empathy could facilitate the knowledge transfer process. Casciaro and Lobo (2008) found that an individual with a negative sentiment for a knowledge source was less likely to seek knowledge from that person. While demonstrating the connections between certain affective states (e.g., liking or disliking, pride, and sympathy) and some knowledge sharing activities, this stream of research has focused on emotions and sentiments that tend to be instantaneous or transient. Formed and accumulated through numerous social interactions over time, ganqing and renqing are more durable and stable. Therefore, their impacts on knowledge sharing may be more robust than those of short-lived emotions and sentiments. It then appears that the impact of long-term interpersonal feelings on knowledge sharing is worth more attention in future research.

For Chinese firms interested in better managing their knowledge resources, one practical insight from this study is that knowledge adoption should be viewed as important as knowledge contribution to effective knowledge sharing. Managerial support of knowledge sharing should then include efforts (e.g., policies and rewards) that encourage adopting knowledge from others. Of equal importance, knowing that ganqing and renqing may affect knowledge adoption, Chinese firms can leverage them to reduce potential hesitance of their employees to accept and use useful knowledge from coworkers, hence increasing knowledge sharing. To increase the development and maintenance of ganqing and renqing at the workplace, management should support and even encourage more interactions and exchanges among employees through such activities as cross-functional collaborations or team projects, which involve working with colleagues they do not meet on a daily basis. These measures can also reduce the influence of potential not-invented-here syndrome on employees who lack ganqing and renqing with knowledge contributors. At the same time, firms should be mindful of one downside of strong ganqing and renqing for knowledge adoption. An employee with high emotional attachment or indebtedness to a knowledge contributor may blindly accept his or her knowledge without evaluating its credibility. To prevent irrational acceptance of inferior knowledge due to the emotional influence or the pressure to return favors, clear company policies should be established to forbid knowingly adopting inadequate knowledge and require considering the usefulness of the knowledge before using it. To help employees separate emotions from good ideas, training should be provided on unconscious bias caused by ganqing and renqing in guanxi. In addition, employees can be required to report critical or high impact knowledge obtained from others and provide a rationale for adopting it. Firms from other Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Vietnam can also benefit from the above insights and manage knowledge sharing in similar ways. Most of the populations in those countries are under the influence of the Confucian values of collectivism and may develop and experience interpersonal feelings similar to ganqing and renqing in social interactions and relationships (Yang and Horak, 2018).

This study had some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, conclusions regarding the causal relationships between ganqing or renqing and knowledge adoption could not be drawn due to the cross-sectional nature of the study. On the other hand, the correlations found in the study suggest two important

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interpersonal factors in knowledge adoption and their potential causal links for further testing and study in controlled, experimental settings. Secondly, although several measures were taken to detect and reduce potential common method variance, the influence of common method bias could not be completely ruled out, and more data collected with additional measures and checks can increase our confidence in the relationships found in the study. Thirdly, since the data of the study was drawn from a small sample reflecting a relatively high level of interpersonal feelings, broad generalizations of the findings to different patterns of dyadic interactions should be cautioned. While the subjects of the study were instructed to randomly consider a coworker in the survey, most of them tended to pick one with whom they had developed strong ganqing and renqing. Hence, the impact of these two feelings on knowledge adoption needs to be further validated with additional data capturing lower levels of interpersonal feelings. Finally, since the norm of reciprocity underlining renqing in China can be different from those experienced in other countries under less influence of the Confucian values, caution should be taken before generalizing the current findings to those countries. Notwithstanding these limitations, this research suggests that the influence of interpersonal feelings on knowledge adoption in China warrants further research and managerial attention.

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Appendix: Measurement items

Ganqing

1. I can freely share feelings and emotions with this person.
2. We have fond feelings for each other.

Renqing

3. We often help each other out in work-related matters.
4. We often help each other out in personal matters.
5. I am well acquainted personally with this person.

Explicit knowledge adoption

6. If relevant to my work, I would welcome and use any work reports and official documents this person shares with me.
7. If relevant to my work, I would welcome and use any manuals, methodologies and models this person shares with me.

Tacit knowledge adoption

8. If relevant to my work, I would welcome and adopt any personal practical know-how this person shares with me.
9. If relevant to my work, I would welcome and adopt any expertise from education or training this person shares with me.
10. If relevant to my work, I would welcome an opportunity to spend significant time observing and collaborating with this person in order for me to better understand and learn from his/her know-how.

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