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When can culturally diverse teams be more creative? The role of leaders' benevolent paternalism

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Summary

The current research examines the conditions under which cross-cultural teams can realize their creative potential—a consequence of their cultural diversity. We propose that in more culturally diverse teams, team members are less open when communicating with each other, which impairs the team's ability to elaborate on the information contributed by different members, ultimately limiting team creativity. We further theorize that leaders' benevolent paternalism, a leadership style that is particularly prevalent in East Asian contexts, can reduce the negative consequence of intercultural diversity on intercultural communication openness. On the basis of multiwave, multisource data from 48 culturally diverse teams in China, we found that perceived intercultural diversity is negatively related to intercultural communication openness, which, in turn, is positively related to information elaboration, and ultimately, team creativity. Leader benevolent paternalism attenuates the negative relationship between intercultural diversity and intercultural communication openness. These findings enrich the literature on intercultural diversity by calling attention to communication-related obstacles.

KEYWORDS

intercultural communication, intercultural diversity, leader benevolent paternalism, team creativity

1 | INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, organizations increasingly feature culturally diverse teams. In this context, a pressing question is whether and when cultural differences in norms, customs, beliefs, habits, and values in teams, defined as *intercultural diversity*, promote team creativity (e.g., Gibson & Gibbs, 2006; Paletz, Peng, Erez, & Maslach, 2004; Rodriguez, 1998). Although the benefits of functional and educational diversity are well documented (e.g., Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Briggs, & Belau, 2011), and people with diverse cultural backgrounds do bring different perspectives on a problem (Salas & Gelfand, 2013), some recent studies have reported a negative relationship between intercultural diversity and team creativity (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006; Nouri et al., 2013). In fact, evidence about the relationship between intercultural diversity and team creativity remains inconclusive. For example, a meta-analysis revealed that intercultural diversity has an overall positive impact on team creativity, but the effect size is small (.16) and the range of variation is very wide (−.14 to .48; Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen,

2010). This suggests that the effect may depend on the situation; it may be moderated by factors that have not yet been identified, and the mechanisms underlying this effect need to be carefully investigated.

Theories of diversity have moved beyond testing the direct effects of diversity on creativity to investigating factors moderating this relationship as well as processes mediating this relationship. Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homan (2004) proposed the categorization-elaboration model (CEM) to capture the complex effects of diversity. This model states that diversity (whether as a function of gender, generation, race, etc.) can give rise to categorization dynamics within the team (members perceiving each other in terms of social categories, as well as related stereotypes and biases), which interferes with the team's information elaboration process (in-depth processing of task-related information and perspectives), and thereby suppress team performance, including team creativity.

Whereas the social categories form the basis of trust in Western cultures (e.g., Giambatista & Bhappu, 2010; Greer, Homan, de Hoogh, & den Hartog, 2012; Kearney & Gebert, 2009; O'Reilly, Williams, & Barsade, 1998; Shin & Zhou, 2007; van Dick, Van Knippenberg, Hägele, Guillaume, & Brodbeck, 2008), they may be somewhat less

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salient in East Asian contexts. Theorists have argued that East Asians have less category-based and more relationship-based representations of their social environment (Yuki, 2003; Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, & Takemura, 2005). For example, Yuki et al. (2005) found that Americans trusted people primarily on the basis of whether they shared category memberships, whereas Japanese trusted people on the basis of the likelihood of sharing interpersonal relationships. Hence, in East Asian contexts, it may be important to investigate social interaction processes other than categorization to understand the multiple pathways through which intercultural diversity can influence team creativity (Leung & Wang, 2015; Somech, 2006).

Although some effects of intercultural diversity are similar to those of other types of diversity (e.g., gender, generational, and racial), intercultural diversity may also have some unique effects. In particular, intercultural diversity poses challenges of communication that are not associated with many other types of diversities. Beyond the issue of linguistic fluency (Fujio, 2004), misunderstandings arise from differing tacit cultural assumptions (Pelled, 1996; Stahl et al., 2010). Direct and indirect communication styles (e.g., Gibson, 1997; Pelled, 1996), conceptions of teamwork (e.g., Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001), and norms about information sharing (e.g., Goodman, Ravlin, & Schminke, 1990) guide communication behaviors in ways that can produce miscommunication, misunderstanding, and mistrust on cross-national teams (e.g., Gertsen & Søderberg, 2011; Maznevski, 1994; von Glinow, Shapiro, & Brett, 2004). Intercultural diversity can therefore make it harder and more frustrating to exchange nuanced, complex ideas and can induce team members to be more restrained in what they try to communicate to each other.

To capture this dynamic of communication and social interaction relationships, we introduce the construct *intercultural communication openness*, the ease with which team members communicate with each other across cultural lines (Ayoko, 2007). Communication barriers have received relatively little attention in the diversity and creativity literature (Leung & Wang, 2015). As open communication is a prerequisite for sharing and integrating task-relevant knowledge, experience, and skills (Liyanage, Elhag, Ballal, & Li, 2009), reduced openness likely hinders a diverse team's ability to generate innovative solutions (Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012). Therefore, we focus on intercultural communication openness as a novel mediating process that links intercultural diversity to information elaboration (which refers to "group members' exchange, discussion, and integration of ideas, knowledge and insights relevant to the group's task," Van Knippenberg et al., 2004, p. 1010), and subsequently, creativity.

Although some past studies have identified communication dynamics as a challenge for diverse teams (e.g., Nouri et al., 2013), almost none have identified conditions that amplify or dampen these dynamics (for exceptions, see Earley & Mosakowski, 2000; Schachaf, 2008). Rooted in social psychology, CEM and related research have mainly focused on psychological factors that serve as boundary conditions for social categorization and information elaboration (Guillaume, Dawson, Otaye-Ebede, Woods, & West, 2017). Beyond psychological factors, some research has examined team and task characteristics, such as team tenure, team size, and task complexity (Stahl et al., 2010; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Further, leadership styles can moderate effects on team dynamics and outcomes (Mumford, Scott,

Gaddis, & Strange, 2002; Shin & Zhou, 2007). Research in Western cultural contexts points to the relevance of transformational leadership, which increases identification with the overall team rather than divisive subcategories (Kearney & Gebert, 2009). Similarly, diverse teams benefit from high participative leadership/low directive leadership, which can help members from diverse teams reflect more on the teams' objectives, strategies, and processes (Somech, 2006). We propose a moderator focusing on a different aspect of leadership that is more commonly practiced and discussed in East Asian contexts: *leader benevolent paternalism*. As one of the three facets of paternalistic leadership, leader benevolent paternalism involves the leaders' benevolent behaviors such as expressing familial concern for subordinates, caring for subordinates' holistic well-being, and protecting subordinates from negative career outcomes (Farh & Cheng, 2000). This familial style of leadership plays a positive role in cultivating employees' creativity (Wang & Cheng, 2010), and may help a team interact in a more open and trusting way, thereby unlocking the potential for open communication, information elaboration, and creativity in culturally diverse teams.

In sum, this study seeks to extend CEM and advance knowledge about the linkages between intercultural diversity and team creativity by examining a novel mechanism that has not been investigated previously in the context of diversity—intercultural communication openness—which complements the social categorization mechanism proposed by CEM. We test whether reduced intercultural communication openness in more culturally diverse teams impairs team members' information elaboration, and ultimately, team creativity. Moreover, we test whether leader benevolent paternalism moderates the relationship between intercultural diversity and intercultural communication openness as well as the indirect effect of intercultural diversity on information elaboration through intercultural communication openness. Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized relationships and the study model.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 | Diversity, elaboration, and the role of communication

Intercultural diversity has long been conceptualized as a double-edged sword that simultaneously hampers and benefits team functioning and outcomes. Research in organizational behavior, especially on CEM, posits that team members categorize each other into subgroups, setting off negative social dynamics and activating intergroup biases (e.g., Van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). These negative social dynamics include low identification with the team, reduced cohesion, low team commitment, and high relationship conflict, all of which may stifle the benefits of cultural diversity for information elaboration and subsequent team creativity (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Following this line of theorizing, considerable research has identified contingencies or moderating conditions that weaken social categorization processes or mitigate their negative effects, including status differences among group
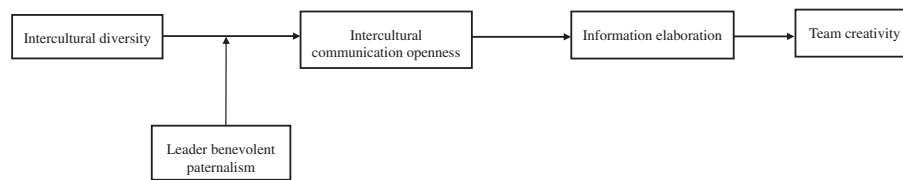
FIGURE 1 Hypothesized relationships and study model

members (O'Reilly et al., 1998), employee's diversity beliefs (van Dick et al., 2008), the leader's categorization tendencies (Greer et al., 2012), transformational leadership (Kearney & Gebert, 2009; Shin & Zhou, 2007), and computer-mediated communication and nominal group techniques (Giambatista & Bhappu, 2010).

Aside from the team literature, past studies on intercultural interactions suggest an additional obstacle in multicultural teams—lack of intercultural communication openness. Cultural heterogeneity often results in reduced communication, errors in communication, and misunderstanding (e.g., Barnlund & Harland, 1963). These problems are likely to occur among team members who speak different languages and hold different values, beliefs, and social conventions (e.g., Earley & Gibson, 2002; Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). For instance, a case study conducted in a U.S. company operating in Japan revealed that Japanese employees' silence, ambiguous replies, and norms of politeness led expatriate managers and locals to misunderstand each other (Fujio, 2004). More infrequent but longer messages were sent in culturally diverse than nondiverse dyads, leading to less effective communication and more misunderstanding and frustration (Nouri et al., 2013). In general, free-flowing open discussion is less likely to occur in culturally diverse teams (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). As such, team members are likely to collectively perceive a barrier to open communication with other members from diverse cultural backgrounds. Hence, we theorize that members of more culturally diverse teams would feel less comfortable communicating with each other and would have a more difficult time understanding each other. We therefore expect a negative impact of intercultural diversity on intercultural communication openness.

In culturally diverse teams, low intercultural communication openness likely prevents team members from engaging in in-depth processing of all the information and perspectives shared by different members (Kooij-de Bode, Van Knippenberg, & van Ginkel, 2008). According to Van Knippenberg et al. (2004), the differing ideas and perspectives that diversity brings promote information elaboration. We theorize that this potential benefit of diversity on information elaboration cannot be realized in multicultural teams because intercultural diversity reduces the tendency to openly communicate with other members from different cultural backgrounds. Research in intercultural negotiations provides support for this idea: Lower intercultural communication openness in multicultural negotiation dyads, characterized by lower comfort, more unease, and more unpleasantness, led to suboptimal negotiation outcomes compared to monocultural negotiation dyads (Liu, Chua, & Stahl, 2010). Thus, we predict that intercultural diversity would reduce intercultural communication openness, thereby hindering the sharing, elaboration, and integration of ideas (Pearsall, Ellis, & Evans, 2008). Specifically, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. *Intercultural diversity has a negative indirect effect on information elaboration through intercultural communication openness.*

2.2 | Moderating effect of leader benevolent paternalism

If closed communication indeed impedes culturally diverse teams from unleashing their creative potential, a question arises: Under what conditions do members of culturally diverse teams communicate more openly with each other? We propose that some help may come from benevolent paternalistic leaders, who exhibit a leadership style prevalent in Chinese contexts (Aycan, 2006; Chen, Eberly, Chiang, Farh, & Cheng, 2014). Benevolent leaders are more personally concerned for their subordinates' overall job-related and personal well-being (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Farh & Cheng, 2000), more likely to tolerate subordinates' mistakes, encourage subordinates to correct and improve their work, protect subordinates from getting hurt, provide mentoring and training, and care about subordinates' career development (Farh, Liang, Chou, & Cheng, 2008). Outside the workplace, benevolent leaders play a parent-like role, treating their subordinates as family members, and helping them solve problems in their personal lives (Farh et al., 2008). For example, benevolent leaders might spontaneously offer personal loans or gifts to subordinates facing financial difficulties. This leadership style contrasts with norms of leadership in Western cultures that highlight bureaucratic professionalism as opposed to familial closeness, and demarcate a clear boundary between work identity and personal identity (Chen et al., 2014; Sanchez-Burks, Bartel, & Blount, 2009).

The benevolent paternalistic leadership style is derived from Chinese Confucian heritage, whereas most leadership constructs in organizational behavior (e.g., transformational leadership, empowering leadership) are derived from Western cultural and philosophical traditions (Chen et al., 2014; Farh & Cheng, 2000). There are at least three key differences between leadership styles arising from these different cultural contexts. First, the fundamental motive behind benevolent paternalistic leadership is to build positive interpersonal relationships between the leader and the subordinate, rather than to help the team achieve its near-term goals. Second, benevolent leaders tend to arouse emotions such as respect, liking, and gratitude among followers, whereas transformational leaders tend to arouse followers' emotions such as excitement, enthusiasm, and elation (Liang & Chi, 2013). Third, benevolent leaders care about their followers' work and personal lives, creating a team climate like a family, whereas transformational leaders and empowering leaders primarily focus on subordinates' work-related issues. Therefore, we argue that the benevolent

paternalistic leadership style is distinct from the leadership styles studied in past research on team diversity.

Past research on individual rather than team outcomes has found positive effects of leader benevolent paternalism. For example, subordinates with benevolent paternalistic leaders are more satisfied with their job, are more committed to the organization, have higher affective trust in the leader, and have higher job performance. Moreover, benevolent paternalistic leadership induces employees to go beyond what is strictly called for by their roles and engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (Chen et al., 2014; for a review, see Farh et al., 2008). Thus, benevolent paternalistic leadership influences not just the manner in which employees act toward the leader but also the manner in which employees act more generally in the workplace. Subordinates with more benevolent paternalistic leaders were also more likely to generate creative ideas (Wang & Cheng, 2010), indicating that benevolent leaders might provide a more psychologically safe environment in which subordinates have room to explore potentially risky but creative ideas.

We expect that benevolent paternalistic leadership would affect how members of the team interact with each other, thereby reducing the negative effect of intercultural diversity on communication openness. A leader's benevolent paternalistic behaviors create a familial frame around coworker interactions (Morris, Podolny, & Sullivan, 2008), allowing the habits of family relationships to play out in team interactions. Teams that see themselves as a family "freely, frequently, and spontaneously interact with each other without many limitations in regard to time spent in interaction or topics discussed" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 85). In short, more open and frequent communication occurs in a more familial climate. Further, benevolent paternalistic leaders create a feeling of psychological safety among employees, and thus encourage employees to take more interpersonal risks (Edmondson, 1999). As communicating openly despite the cultural barriers risks misunderstanding and frustration, a familial frame for team interactions would likely help people to better endure this risk. Thus, benevolent paternalistic leaders are likely to mitigate the intercultural communication problems that are hypothesized to be particularly prevalent in more culturally diverse teams. Specifically, we hypothesize:

> **Hypothesis 2.** *Leader benevolent paternalism moderates the negative relationship between intercultural diversity and intercultural communication openness, such that the negative relationship is present under low but not high leader benevolent paternalism.*

2.3 | Conditional indirect effects

We argue that the indirect relationship between intercultural diversity and information elaboration via intercultural communication openness is conditional on the level of benevolent paternalism displayed by the team leader. Employees in teams with benevolent paternalistic leaders are likely to have a more familial orientation toward fellow team members. Thus, they are more likely to care for and connect with each other, thereby helping team members communicate more openly with each other. Doing so would further enable team members to utilize diverse ideas, perspectives, and knowledge contributed by each other and enhance information elaboration as a result. In contrast, when

the team leader is low on benevolent paternalism, the leader's lack of care for team members and lack of interest in building a relationship with them set up a nonfamilial team environment. In this case, a culturally diverse team is more likely to experience communication misunderstandings and frustrations. These negative effects of intercultural diversity on open communication would likely reduce the extent to which team members elaborate on the ideas generated by each other. Thus, we hypothesize:

> **Hypothesis 3.** *Leader benevolent paternalism moderates the strength of the negative indirect relationship between intercultural diversity and information elaboration through intercultural communication openness, such that the negative indirect effect is present under low but not high leader benevolent paternalism.*

2.4 | From communication openness to creativity

We expect that the effect of low intercultural communication openness on team creativity is transmitted by reduced information elaboration. To develop new products, services, and processes, teams need to capture, integrate, and deploy knowledge-related resources (e.g., Verona, 1999; Zahra & George, 2002). Prior research has established that exchanging, reconciling, and integrating disparate ideas and perspectives are critical to team creativity (e.g., Gong, Kim, Lee, & Zhu, 2013; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Integration of diverse knowledge facilitates individuals to connect previously unrelated ideas and to reorganize connected ideas, helping them create new knowledge. Considerable empirical evidence supports the importance of information elaboration for team creativity. Teams that engage in information elaboration, which refers to constructive exchange and integration of ideas, are more creative (Hoever, van Knippenberg, van Ginkel, & Barkema, 2012). Research and development teams that are more likely to engage in knowledge communication, sharing, and integration are also more innovative (Jin & Sun, 2010). As argued earlier, high intercultural communication openness likely encourages team members to exchange their diverse knowledge, perspectives, and ideas and facilitates in-depth discussion and integration of these ideas. This higher information elaboration is likely to help teams be more creative. Putting together the above arguments, we hypothesize:

> **Hypothesis 4.** *Intercultural communication openness has a positive indirect effect on team creativity through information elaboration.*

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Research setting and participants

We collected data from multicultural teams in 30 different organizations based in China. The industries included manufacturing, financial services, trading, retailing, education/training, and information technology. The first author contacted top-level expatriate managers working in multinational companies through the MBA alumni association of a university in Shanghai, China, soliciting their help to request team members and team leaders in their networks to participate in

the study. As incomplete team data (i.e., some members fail to respond to a questionnaire) can somewhat distort true diversity–outcome relationships (Allen, Stanley, Williams, & Ross, 2007), we adopted multiple approaches to collect complete team datasets. Specifically, in the cover letter, we denoted clearly and highlighted that "It should be noted that we expect **ALL** the members in the team to take part in the survey." To encourage participation, a monetary reward of 100 RMB (approximately US$16) was provided to respondents who completed both rounds of surveys. One research assistant made regular telephone calls and sent email reminders to respondents who did not respond after 1 week.

We conducted a two-wave multisource online survey. To reduce common method bias, we followed Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff's (2012) recommendation to use a two-wave design that temporally separates the independent variables and mediators, both of which were self-reported. Further, in addition to self-reported variables, we invited team leaders as a second source to provide ratings on the criterion variable, team creativity. Specifically, at Time 1, a questionnaire was distributed to all team members, with measures of demographic variables, intercultural diversity, and leader benevolent paternalism. After approximately 2 weeks, team members provided ratings on intercultural communication openness and information elaboration, whereas team leaders provided assessment of their team's creativity.

We developed English and Chinese versions of all questionnaires using a back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). Chinese participants responded to the Chinese version; non-Chinese participants, all of whom were proficient in English, responded to the English version.

Of the 65 teams contacted, 48 teams (73.8%) agreed to participate. We recruited all of the team members from these teams to obtain complete sets of team member responses. The final sample included 48 teams with 330 team members and 48 team leaders. Teams were composed of three to nine members (M = 6.88, excluding the team leader). Among the team members, 60.9% were men, 87% were between 20 and 39 years old, and 87.6% had university or postgraduate education. Regarding tenure in the firm, 11.5% had worked in the company for 1 year or below, 41.5% between 1 and 3 years, 28.8% between 4 and 6 years, and 18.2% for 7 years or above. For tenure in their teams, 19.7% had worked in the team for 1 year or below, 48.8% between 1 and 3 years, 24.5% between 4 and 6 years, and 7% for 7 years or above. The team members and leaders came from 24 different countries, with 73 non-Chinese citizens, 16 of whom were team leaders; 24.7% came from North America (United States and Canada), 35.6% from Europe, 37% from Asia excluding Chinese societies, and 2.7% from Africa. In the 48 teams, 64.6% had one member or leader from a non-Chinese culture, 20.8% had two, and 14.6% had three or more.[1]

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[1]In our dataset, eight teams had zero members from non-Chinese culture, 27 teams had one member from non-Chinese culture, 11 teams had two members from non-Chinese culture, and two teams had three members or more from non-Chinese culture. We also replicated our analysis excluding eight teams lacking intercultural diversity among team members, and the results based on 40 teams were highly consistent with the findings reported based on 48 teams, and all the hypotheses were supported.

3.2 | Measures

The full scales used are presented in the Appendix.

3.2.1 | Perceived intercultural diversity (Time 1)

In the cross-cultural literature, Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, and Tangirala (2010) developed a six-item scale to measure the cultural distance between expatriates' home country and their host country/foreign subsidiary on six cultural attributes (religions and rituals, values, beliefs, norms, customs, and ways of conducting business). We adapted these items to measure participants' perceptions of the cultural distance between their own positions on these attributes and the positions of other team members. We did so by replacing "cultural attributes in their host country/foreign subsidiary" in the original items with "cultural attributes of other team members," and "those in their home country" in the original items with "their cultural attributes." Thus, team members rated the extent to which other team members' religions and rituals, values, beliefs, norms, customs, and ways of conducting business were similar to or different from their own (α = .89). This measure falls in the category of relational demography approach, which is not a measure of the actual diversity of separation, variety, and disparity (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Note that compared to measures based on demographic categories, such as Blau's index, this perceptual measure likely captures many dimensions and degrees of difference (Shemla, Meyer, Greer, & Jehn, 2014). Especially in the era of globalization, the relevant diversity in a team is not just a function of the passports that people carry—there are Chinese employees who are Westernized from working or studying abroad, and foreign nationals who are Sinicized from staying in China for a long period. Participants responded on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all similar*) to 7 (*highly similar*). The items were reversely scored so that higher ratings represent higher perceived intercultural diversity.

3.2.2 | Leader benevolent paternalism (Time 1)

Team members rated the leader benevolent paternalism of their leader on a four-item scale on the basis of Cheng et al. (2004; α = .83). Sample items included are "Beyond work relations, my team leader expresses concern about my daily life" and "My team leader meets my needs according to my personal requests."

3.2.3 | Intercultural communication openness (Time 2)

To measure communication openness during intercultural interactions, we followed the referent-shift approach (Chan, 1998) to adapt O'Reilly and Roberts' (1976, 1977) original five-item scale to create our scale of intercultural communication openness. We modified the referents from "any/other/all member(s) of this group" and "each other in this group" in the four items of O'Reilly and Roberts' scale to "foreign team members." Sample items included are "It is easy to talk openly to foreign team members," "When people talk to their foreign team members, there is a great deal of understanding," and "Communication with foreign team members is very open" (α = .94).

3.2.4 | Information elaboration (Time 2)

Two items were adapted from Kearney and Gebert's (2009) "elaboration of task-relevant information" scale to capture the elaboration of

different ideas and perspectives (α = .86). The two items are "The members of this team utilize diverse perspectives to generate optimal solutions" and "As a team, we generate ideas and solutions that are much more diverse than those we could develop as individuals."

3.2.5 | Team creativity (Time 2)

Leaders rated the team's creativity with a three-item scale from Farh, Lee, and Farh (2010; α = .86). A sample item is "The team output is 'creative'."

3.2.6 | Control variables

We considered team size to be a potentially relevant control variable as a meta-analysis (Hülsheger, Anderson, & Salgado, 2009) found that larger teams are more creative. Teams with more members are likely to have more collective resources, skills, and knowledge, which would enable them to generate more creative ideas (Hülsheger et al., 2009; Schippers, West, & Dawson, 2015). The pattern of the results remained unchanged irrespective of whether all the hypotheses are tested with or without this control variable.

3.3 | Analysis

3.3.1 | Data aggregation

For team members' scores on the scales of intercultural diversity, intercultural communication openness, information elaboration, and leader benevolent paternalism, we examined whether there would be a shared experience among team members (e.g., Huang, Hsieh, & He, 2014). We assessed within-group agreement (r_{wg}) and intraclass correlations (ICCs) to justify the aggregation as appropriate. We followed the recommendation of LeBreton and Senter (2008) to compute r_{wg} values on the basis of both uniform null and slightly skewed distributions. When the uniform null distribution (the slightly skewed distribution) was assumed, we obtained median r_{wg} values of .91 (.86) for intercultural diversity, .95 (.92) for intercultural communication openness, .93 (.90) for information elaboration, and .90 (.87) for leader benevolent paternalism. All of the median r_{wg} values exceeded the recommended cutoff value of .70 (Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006), indicating high average agreement. In addition, the values of ICC(1) and ICC(2) were respectively 0.28 and 0.72 for intercultural diversity, 0.24 and 0.68 for intercultural communication openness, 0.24 and 0.69 for information elaboration, and 0.28 and 0.72 for leader benevolent paternalism. Our ICC(1) values were above the recommended cutoff value of 0.20 (Bliese, 2000), and all of the ICC(2) values were higher than the cutoff value of 0.60 (Ostroff & Schmitt, 1993). Taken together, high within-group consensus and the values of ICC(1) and ICC(2) justified the aggregation to the team level (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000).

3.3.2 | Analysis strategies

We used PROCESS for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) to test our hypotheses using standard two-tailed tests. Specifically, we employed PROCESS Model 4 to estimate regression coefficients and test the indirect effects models described by Hypotheses 1 and 4. The follow-up bootstrap analyses were based on 10,000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals. We interpreted indirect effects with confidence intervals that did not contain zero as empirical evidence. To test the moderating effect (Hypothesis 2), we adopted PROCESS Model 1 and mean centered the interactive terms in the analyses. PROCESS Model 7 was used to test the conditional indirect effects (Hypothesis 3).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Confirmatory factor analysis

To comprehensively test our multilevel data structure, we followed Dyer, Hanges, and Hall's (2005) procedures using Mplus 7.0 to conduct multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the four constructs reported by team members: intercultural diversity, intercultural communication openness, information elaboration, and leader benevolent paternalism. Multilevel CFA is used to "assess the factor structure of constructs intended to reflect group-level phenomena even though the data was collected from lower level units" (Dyer et al., 2005, p. 152) and generates unbiased estimates of the group-level factor structure by statistically accounting for the within-group factor structure (Hanges & Dickson, 2006; Muthén, 1994). As we expected that the four-factor structure can be observed simultaneously at both the individual level and the team level, we constructed within- and between-group CFA models comprising the five factors. We then ran a two-level CFA using a robust weighted least squares mean- and variance-adjusted estimator in Mplus. By default, the factor loading of the first indicator of a latent variable was set to 1 in order to fix the scale of the latent variable, and the error terms at both within and between levels were set as independent. Cross-loadings were not estimated. All the unstandardized parameter estimates for the factor loading from the four latent variables to their respective observed indicators were significant at both levels. Dyer et al. (2005) recommended multiple indices to determine model fit, including the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) at both the within (SRMR$_{within}$) and between (SRMR$_{between}$) levels. As expected, the four-factor model fit the data well, χ^2 = 317.09, df = 243; CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.030, SRMR$_{between}$ = 0.122, SRMR$_{within}$ = 0.063, better than more parsimonious models such as (a) a three-factor model (collapsing intercultural communication openness and information elaboration), χ^2 = 399.77, df = 249; CFI = 0.85, TLI = 0.83; RMSEA = 0.043, SRMR$_{between}$ = 0.155, SRMR$_{within}$ = 0.075, $\Delta\chi^2$ = 82.68, Δdf = 6, p < .01; (b) a two-factor model (collapsing intercultural communication openness and information elaboration as well as intercultural diversity and leader benevolent paternalism), χ^2 = 689.84, df = 253; CFI = 0.56, TLI = 0.50; RMSEA = 0.072, SRMR$_{between}$ = 0.202, SRMR$_{within}$ = 0.130, $\Delta\chi^2$ = 372.75, Δdf = 10, p < .01; and (c) a one-factor model that did not converge.

We also conducted a multilevel CFA focusing just on intercultural communication openness and information elaboration. The two-factor model had a satisfactory fit, χ^2 = 44.80, df = 33, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.033, SRMR$_{between}$ = 0.026, SRMR$_{within}$ = 0.040, better than that of a one-factor model, χ^2 = 143.48, df = 35, CFI = 0.82, TLI = 0.75;

RMSEA = 0.097, SRMR$_{between}$ = 0.122, SRMR$_{within}$ = 0.088, $\Delta\chi^2$ = 98.68, Δdf = 2, p < .01.

Finally, we followed Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro, and Farh's (2011) approach to conduct a set of analyses to evaluate the psychometric equivalence of measures for our focal variables collected in Chinese (from 260 team members) and in English (from 70 team members). The hypothesized four-factor model of intercultural diversity, intercultural communication openness, information elaboration, and leader benevolent paternalism generally fit well in the Chinese subsample, χ^2(113, N = 260) = 318.25, CFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.084, and in the English subsample, χ^2(113, N = 70) = 158.92, CFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.076. In addition, the hypothesized four-factor model fit the data better than did the alternative one-factor model in both the Chinese subsample, $\Delta\chi^2$(6) = 1277.91, p < .01, CFI = 0.52, RMSEA = 0.219, and the English subsample, $\Delta\chi^2$(6) = 300.32, p < .01, CFI = 0.34, RMSEA = 0.202. Finally, a multigroup CFA using Mplus with the English and Chinese subsamples revealed that the four-factor model in which the factor correlations and factor loadings were set to be equal fit the data well, χ^2(239, N = 260, 70) = 493.24, CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.080. These findings provide support for the psychometric equivalence of the focal measures across the two languages (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000).

For means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and zero-order correlations, see Table 1.

4.2 | Tests of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 predicts that intercultural diversity has a negative indirect effect on information elaboration through intercultural communication openness. Model 1 of Table 2 showed that intercultural diversity was significantly and negatively related to intercultural communication openness, b = −.35, p = .009. Model 2 of Table 2 revealed that intercultural communication openness was significantly and positively related to information elaboration, b = .51, p = .001. The bootstrapping analyses revealed that the indirect effect of intercultural diversity on information elaboration through intercultural communication openness was significant and negative (indirect effect = −0.18, Boot SE = 0.09), with zero outside the bootstrapped 95%

bias-corrected confidence interval (BC CI = [−0.391, −0.046]). Hence, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that leader benevolent paternalism moderates the negative relationship between intercultural diversity and intercultural communication openness. Model 2 of Table 3 showed that the product term between intercultural diversity and leader benevolent paternalism was significantly positive (b = .60, p = .007). Figure 2 presents the interaction pattern at high and low levels of leader benevolent paternalism, defined as 1 SD above and below the mean value, respectively (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991). In support of Hypothesis 2, the relationship between intercultural diversity and intercultural communication openness was negative and significant at low levels of leader benevolent paternalism (−1 SD; slope = −0.67, SE = 0.17, p < .001, 95% CI = [−1.010, −0.330]) but was nonsignificant at high levels of leader benevolent paternalism (+1 SD; slope = 0.12, SE = 0.20, p = .550, 95% CI = [−0.285, 0.528]).

We proceeded to test whether the negative indirect effect of intercultural diversity on information elaboration via intercultural communication openness varies as a function of leader benevolent paternalism (Hypothesis 3). The bootstrapping analyses revealed that when leader benevolent paternalism was low (−1 SD), the indirect effect of intercultural diversity on information elaboration through intercultural communication openness was significant and negative (indirect effect = −0.34, Boot SE = 0.16, 95% BC CI = [−0.723, −0.079]). In contrast, when leader benevolent paternalism was high (+1 SD), the indirect effect was not significant (indirect effect = 0.06, Boot SE = 0.09, 95% BC CI = [−0.093, 0.288]). Figure 3 illustrates the indirect effect of intercultural diversity on information elaboration (through intercultural communication openness) at low and high levels of leader benevolent paternalism. As indicated, the indirect effect was significant and negative only under low leader benevolent paternalism; under high leader benevolent paternalism, there was no indirect effect of intercultural diversity on information elaboration (via intercultural communication openness). Taken together, leader benevolent paternalism buffered the negative effect of intercultural diversity on information elaboration through intercultural communication openness, providing support for Hypothesis 3.

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Individual level (n = 330)								
1. Intercultural diversity	3.03	1.12	(.89)					
2. Intercultural communication openness	5.35	1.01	−.25**	(.94)				
3. Information elaboration	5.65	1.02	−.14*	.49**	(.86)			
4. Leader benevolent paternalism	4.84	1.10	−.16**	.19**	.30**	(.83)		
Team level (n = 48)								
1. Team size	6.88	2.26	—					
2. Intercultural diversity	3.10	0.66	−.35*	—				
3. Intercultural communication openness	5.29	0.60	.29*	−.44**	—			
4. Information elaboration	5.63	0.60	.11	−.30*	.53**	—		
5. Leader benevolent paternalism	4.84	0.66	.02	−.15	.16	.43**	—	
6. Team creativity	5.20	0.87	.04	.08	.20	.37**	.25	(.86)

Note. Reliabilities are in parentheses.

*p < .05. **p < .01; two-tailed tests.

TABLE 2 Regression results of indirect effects

Variables	Intercultural communication openness			Information elaboration			Team creativity		
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Coeff.	p	95% CI	Coeff.	p	95% CI	Coeff.	p	95% CI
Team size	.04	.290	−0.035, 0.115	−.02	.630	−0.092, 0.056	−.00	.964	−0.117, 0.112
Intercultural diversity	−.35**	.009	−0.610, −0.094	−.09	.495	−0.364, 0.178			
Intercultural communication openness				.51**	.001	0.218, 0.801	.02	.951	−0.491, 0.522
Information elaboration							.54*	.031	0.053, 1.019
	R^2 = .21			R^2 = .29			R^2 = .14		
	F = 6.12, p = .005			F = 5.99, p = .002			F = 2.38, p = .082		

Note. Results for Models 1–3 are based on PROCESS Model 4. CI = confidence interval.

*p < .05. **p < .01; two-tailed tests.

TABLE 3 Regression results of moderation effects

Variables	Intercultural communication openness						Information elaboration			Team creativity		
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Coeff.	p	95% CI	Coeff.	p	95% CI	Coeff.	p	95% CI	Coeff.	p	95% CI
Team size	.04	.281	−0.035, 0.117	.04	.262	−0.031, 0.110	−.01	.740	−0.081, 0.058	.02	.460	−0.094, 0.128
Intercultural diversity	−.34*	.013	−0.599, −0.074	−.27*	.031	−0.522, −0.026	−.05	.679	−0.307, 0.202	.35	.093	−0.060, 0.755
Leader benevolent paternalism	.09	.459	−0.155, 0.337	.076	.505	−0.153, 0.305	.32**	.006	0.096, 0.543	.16	.426	−0.235, 0.546
Intercultural Diversity × Leader Benevolent Paternalism				.60**	.007	0.175, 1.030	.12	.609	−0.337, 0.568	−.88*	.019	−1.603, −0.152
Intercultural communication openness							.44**	.005	0.137, 0.734	.36	.168	−0.160, 0.888
Information elaboration										.54*	.036	0.038, 1.034
	R^2 = .22			R^2 = .35			R^2 = .41			R^2 = .30		
	F = 4.22, p = .010			F = 5.69, p = .001			F = 5.85, p < .001			F = 2.99, p = .016		

Note. Results for both Models 3 and 4 are based on PROCESS Model 5. CI = confidence interval.

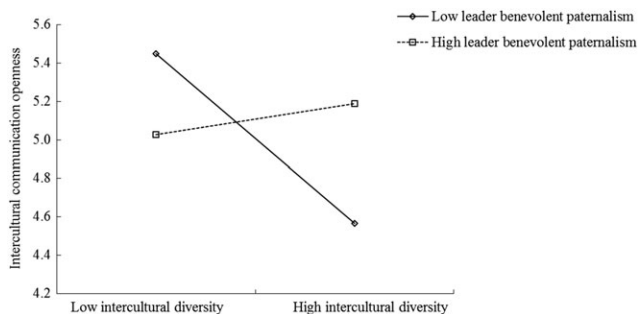*p < .05. **p < .01; two-tailed tests.

FIGURE 2 Simple slope for the interaction effect of intercultural diversity and leader benevolent paternalism on intercultural communication openness
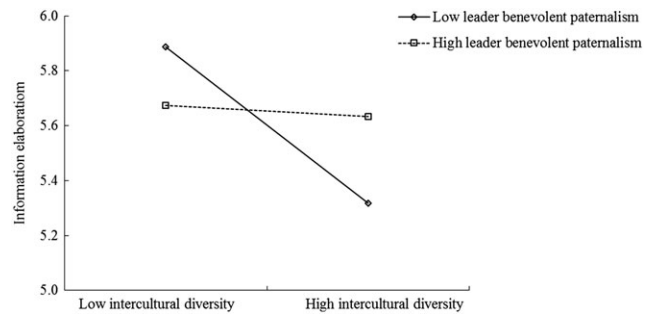

FIGURE 3 Conditional indirect effect of intercultural diversity on information elaboration (via intercultural communication openness) at low and high levels of leader benevolent paternalism

The next indirect effect model tested whether intercultural communication openness had a positive indirect effect on team creativity through information elaboration (Hypothesis 4). As shown in Model 3 of Table 2, information elaboration was positively related to team creativity, b = .54, p = .031. The bootstrapping analyses showed that the indirect effect of intercultural communication

openness on team creativity was positive and significant through information elaboration (indirect effect = 0.29, Boot SE = 0.16, 95% BC CI = [0.020, 0.663]). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported. As shown in Table 3, variance explained in intercultural communication openness, information elaboration, and team creativity was .35, .41, and .30, respectively.

Taking Hypotheses 1 and 4 together, we conducted a serial mediation analysis to create a causal chain linking the mediators in a serial causal sequence (Hayes, 2013). In other words, intercultural communication openness and information elaboration were the two serial mediators in the causal order in the link from intercultural diversity to team creativity. We employed PROCESS Model 6 to estimate the serial-mediated relationship. To predict the serial mediation, we calculated specific and total direct effects of intercultural diversity on team creativity through at least one mediator and through the two serial mediators, respectively. The Indirect Model 1 tested whether only intercultural communication openness mediated the relationship between intercultural diversity and team creativity. The Indirect Model 2 tested whether only information elaboration mediated the relationship between intercultural diversity and team creativity, and the Indirect Model 3 tested the expected serial-mediated model. The indirect effect of intercultural diversity on team creativity serially via intercultural communication openness and information elaboration was statistically significant (indirect effect = −0.10, *Boot SE* = 0.08, 95% BC CI = [−0.339, −0.010]). However, the indirect effect via either intercultural communication openness or information elaboration was not significant (indirect effect = −0.05, *Boot SE* = 0.11, and indirect effect = −0.05, *Boot SE* = 0.09, respectively, and 95% BC CIs = [−0.312, 0.141] and [−0.339, 0.010], respectively). Thus, the analysis supported that intercultural communication openness and information elaboration serially mediated the effect of intercultural diversity on team creativity.

5 | DISCUSSION

We explored a new proposed obstacle in the link between intercultural diversity and team creativity—low intercultural communication openness. We found that in more culturally diverse teams, team members are less open when communicating with each other, which in turn is associated with less information elaboration, and ultimately, lower creativity. We further found that leader benevolent paternalism serves as a moderating condition that buffers the negative effect of intercultural diversity on communication openness. Finally, we found a conditional indirect relationship between intercultural diversity and information elaboration through intercultural communication openness.

5.1 | Theoretical implications

The findings from this study broaden our understanding about *how* and *when* intercultural diversity influences team creativity. Our research is among the first to study multicultural teams in East Asian contexts, and this examination led to novel theoretical insights. Our research was conducted in the Chinese context, and by doing so, we extend the theorizing from most multicultural team studies conducted in a Western context to include constructs rooted in an East Asian culture.

First, we pinpoint the critical role of low intercultural communication openness in blocking culturally diverse teams from transmitting their diverse knowledge and perspectives into team creativity. Our findings suggest that social categorization and intragroup biases are not the only obstacles preventing culturally diverse teams from generating creative outputs. We conclude that in culturally diverse teams, low intercultural communication openness is another obstacle beyond the social categorization dynamics elucidated by CEM. Further, our results demonstrate the indirect effect of intercultural diversity on team creativity serially via intercultural communication openness and information elaboration. This finding enables us to broaden understanding about the process by which the creative potential of culturally diverse teams is impeded. In parallel, we also recognize that it is possible that communication barriers are particularly prevalent in culturally diverse teams but not as prevalent in teams that are diverse on other dimensions, such as gender, age, and ethnicity, an issue worthy of further empirical research.

Second, considering team intercultural diversity from an East Asian perspective led us to explore the important role of leader benevolent paternalism, a leadership style prevalent in Chinese cultural contexts (Farh & Cheng, 2000). We found that leader benevolent paternalism buffered the negative consequences of intercultural diversity. Despite the growing trend of globalized business operations all over the world, few studies have examined the relationship between diversity and team effectiveness outside Western contexts (Kirkman, Shapiro, Lu, & McGurrin, 2016; Salas & Gelfand, 2013). Our findings expand theories of diversity and creativity by bringing in constructs and ideas derived from an analysis of Eastern cultures.

A key idea in past research on teams is that forging a hybrid culture that offers a shared understanding of role expectations and appropriate communication behaviors can help team members from different cultural backgrounds more freely communicate and interact with each other (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). Extending this line of research, our study shows that a benevolent paternalistic style of leadership can be beneficial for open communication in culturally diverse teams as it can shape intrateam interactions among members from different cultures. Although originally discovered from an analysis of leadership styles prevalent in Chinese cultures, leader benevolent paternalism has been recognized by employees across six countries: China, Turkey, Pakistan, the United States, Germany, and the Netherlands (Aycan, Schyns, Sun, Felfe, & Saher, 2013). The benefits of this leadership style have been confirmed in other collectivist cultures, such as Turkey (e.g., Erben & Güneser, 2008; Karakas & Sarigollu, 2012; Wang & Cheng, 2010; Wang, Chiang, Tsai, Lin, & Cheng, 2013) and India (Pellegrini, Scandura, & Jayaraman, 2010), and even in individualistic cultures, such as the United States (Pellegrini et al., 2010). Thus, the moderating effect of leader benevolent paternalism in multicultural teams may hold across cultures, a possibility that future research can test explicitly.

Leadership constructs from the West that are conceptually analogous to leader benevolent paternalism may have similar effects in nurturing intercultural communication openness. Examples include the individual consideration dimension of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), leader openness (Tröster & Van Knippenberg, 2012), supervisor support (George & Zhou, 2007), and leaders' cultural intelligence (Lisak & Erez, 2015). These Western leadership constructs involve leader behaviors that attend to the well-being of subordinates and likely cultivate a comfortable, trustful, and psychologically safe environment. Our theorizing suggests that these leadership styles may also mitigate the negative effect of intercultural diversity on intercultural interaction dynamics in multicultural teams.

Third, by examining leader benevolent paternalism in multicultural teams, this research contributes to the paternalistic leadership literature by investigating the moderating role of benevolent leadership at the team level. Although past research has shown that leaders of multicultural teams play a role in facilitating intercultural communication and bridging cultural and linguistic boundaries among team members (Zander, Mockaitis, & Butler, 2012), researchers have not yet examined the role of benevolent leaders as bridge builders in resolving communication barriers engendered by intercultural diversity. In this study, we predicted and found that as benevolent leaders tend to help nurture a familial climate for team interactions and create a feeling of psychological safety among team members, less open and frequent communication occurred at low rather than high levels of leaders' benevolent paternalism. The current research therefore suggests that team-level research on the role of leader benevolent paternalism would be beneficial, extending diversity research into the global management arena and enriching the study of the benevolent leadership style prevalent in China. The moderating effect of leader benevolent paternalism in this study suggests that certain leadership styles can shape cross-cultural team interactions and processes. Therefore, we suggest future research to work in this direction and explore how other types of leadership, such as empowering leadership, may also moderate the effect of intercultural diversity on team outcomes. Moreover, future research can continue to explore the role of other relationship-based contextual factors in shaping the effect of diversity. For example, leader–member exchange, trust climate at the team level, and organizational support may work similarly in offsetting communication problems in culturally diverse teams.

Although we examined the positive effects of leader benevolent paternalism on teams, past research has identified some negative effects of leader benevolent paternalism on individual employees. Benevolent paternalistic leaders can make subordinates feel obliged to them and increase subordinates' tendency to be more loyal and obedient (Farh & Cheng, 2000), which may discourage team members from thinking creatively (Wang & Cheng, 2010). From the current study, it appears that the positive association of leader benevolent paternalism with increased intercultural communication openness might have trumped any negative association between leader benevolent paternalism and reduced individual-level creativity. Future research can examine how leader benevolent paternalism is associated with the creativity of both individual employees and teams.

5.2 | Practical implications

This study has important implications for managers in multinational operations. Organizations with multicultural teams need to be aware of the possibility of low intercultural communication openness, and its possible negative effects on a team's information elaboration and, in turn, creativity. Our findings suggest that to achieve creative outcomes from culturally diverse teams, leaders of multicultural team should actively promote open communication and sharing of ideas.

Our findings point to the benevolence dimension of paternalistic leadership as particularly relevant to influencing the openness of communication within a culturally diverse team. Leader benevolent paternalism involves showing holistic concern for employees, just like how parents express concern for their children's holistic well-being. Many Western managers may regard it as inappropriate or unprofessional to interfere with their subordinates' lives outside of work domain (Uhlmann, Heaphy, Ashford, Zhu, & Sanchez-Burks, 2013). However, training programs can be developed to help managers, especially those from the Western culture, become aware of this leadership style and learn how to express holistic care and concern for their subordinates to create a familial tone in the work environment (Sanchez-Burks, Lee, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2007).

Although China used to be a fairly culturally homogenous nation, the rapid growth of foreign enterprises and the swelling foreign population mean that the workplace in China frequently involves culturally diverse teams (Pieke, 2012). Our study provides insight into how the creativity of multicultural teams in China can be increased. The finding of leader benevolent paternalism as an effective way to mitigate the negative effect of intercultural diversity on intercultural communication signals the importance of learning from the local culture for multicultural companies.

5.3 | Limitations

This study has some limitations that need to be addressed in future research. Although we separately measured the independent variable and the moderator, the two serial mediators, and the dependent variable, some of the measures were self-reports collected at the same time. Thus, we cannot completely rule out common method bias. Specifically, intercultural communication openness and information elaboration were rated by team members simultaneously, which may inflate their correlationship on the serial mediational effect of intercultural diversity on team creativity. Future research needs to address this limitation to ascertain the causal order of intercultural communication openness and information elaboration. Experimental designs are encouraged to provide causal evidence for each of the hypothesized links. In addition, some of the measures used in this study may have glossed over the different types of complexities prevalent in the globalized workforce. For example, the use of phrases such as "foreign team members" included in the items measuring intercultural communication openness may not have fully measured lack of intercultural communication openness between team members of the same national background but with different cultural experiences.

In addition, despite the strength of conducting this study in an Eastern Asian context, the issue of the generalizability of our results may be a concern. For instance, China is high in collectivism (Hofstede, 2001), and the relationship-oriented interpersonal interaction style may make the effect of benevolent leadership more salient in China than in individualistic cultures (Chan, Huang, Snape, & Lam, 2013). Thus, a cross-cultural comparative study may be interesting for future research.

Finally, we acknowledge that our sample size is not large, which may limit conclusions that can be drawn from this study. Although many studies with a similar sample size have provided meaningful and impactful findings (e.g., Aime, Humphrey, DeRue, & Paul, 2014; Crossley, Cooper, & Wernsing, 2013), future research can seek to replicate our findings with larger samples.

6 | CONCLUSION

Our study identifies lack of intercultural communication openness as a novel explanation for why the benefits of intercultural diversity for team creativity might not be realized. We illustrate that leader benevolent paternalism is an important contextual factor that moderates the effect of intercultural diversity on intercultural communication openness, which is associated with information elaboration and creative potential. Thus, the present research paints a more nuanced picture of the complex relationship between intercultural diversity and team creativity.

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APPENDIX
STUDY SCALES

Perceived intercultural diversity

Please rate the following six items pertaining to the extent to which various cultural attributes of other team members were similar to or different from yours (1 = *not at all similar*, 7 = *highly similar*):

1. Religions and rituals.
2. Values.
3. Beliefs.
4. Norms.
5. Customs.
6. Ways of conducting business.

Intercultural communication openness

1. It is easy to talk openly to foreign team members.
2. It is easy to ask advice from foreign team members.
3. When people talk to their foreign team members, there is a great deal of understanding.
4. I find it enjoyable to talk to foreign team members.
5. Communication with foreign team members is very open.

Information elaboration

1. The members of this team utilize diverse perspectives to generate optimal solutions.
2. As a team, we generate ideas and solutions that are much more diverse than those we could develop as individuals.

Leader benevolent paternalism

1. My supervisor is like a family member when he/she gets along with us.
2. Beyond work relations, my supervisor expresses concern about my daily life.
3. My supervisor meets my needs according to my personal requests.
4. My supervisor tries to understand what the cause is when I don't perform well.

Team creativity

1. The team output is "creative."
2. The team output is "original and practical."
3. The team output demonstrates that the team is capable of using existing information or resources creatively in executing the teamwork.