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Organizational rewards and employee commitment: a Chinese study

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this study is to assess how the cultural value orientations of individual employees moderate their attitudinal responses to different categories of organizational rewards. Specifically, it seeks to examine how one dimension of traditionality, respect for authority, moderates the relationship between affective organizational commitment and three variables: pay satisfaction, autonomy and satisfaction with supervision.

Design/methodology/approach - Hierarchical regression analysis was utilized to analyse survey data obtained from a sample of 290 employees of a major Chinese airline company.

Findings - Employees high in traditionality were found to exhibit higher levels of affective commitment when autonomy and satisfaction with supervision was low. When autonomy and satisfaction with supervision was high employees low in traditionality exhibited higher levels of emotional attachment to the organization.

Research limitations/implications - The cross-sectional design is an obvious limitation of the study. Another limitation relates to the generalizability of the study findings outside the context in which the research was undertaken.

Social implications - Organizations should consider taking the cultural orientations of their workforce into account when developing appropriate human resource policies aimed at heightening employee commitment. This should enhance employee well-being, which is especially important in a global economy characterized by uncertainty and rapid change.

Originality/value - This is the first study to examine how employees with different cultural value orientations respond to different categories of organizational rewards, in a predominantly traditional society.

Keywords China, Organizational commitment. Organizational rewards, Traditionality, Employees behaviour, National cultures

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Despite a wealth of empirical work on organizational commitment, there are still huge gaps in our knowledge as to its antecedents. One topic yet to be fully addressed in the literature is the role-played by culture in shaping employee commitment. Culture has traditionally been conceptualised as a group-level construct and can be defined as a shared system of values, attitudes, beliefs and meanings between the members of a social group (Thomas et al., 2003). Since Hofstede's (1980) ground breaking study, which introduced the notion that national cultures vary across four main dimensions, research on how cultural differences
moderate the relationship between culture and organizational commitment has increased in volume (Gelade et al, 2008; Palich et al, 1995; Randall, 1993). There is a growing consensus in the literature that the conceptualisation and measurement of culture purely at a national level ignores significant within-country variability along cultural dimensions (Clugston et al, 2000; Williamson et al, 2009). Scholars have begun to argue that culture is something which can be psychologically experienced at an individual level, manifesting itself in individuals in terms of their assumptions, beliefs, values, attitudes, norms and behaviour (Aycan, 2000; Chao, 2000; Earley and Randel, 1997). Over the last decade, empirical work has begun to examine the role played by cultural values in shaping organizational commitment (Clugston et al, 2000; Wang et al, 2002; Williamson et al, 2009). However, the results of this work are inconsistent. Wang et al. (2002) report a positive relationship between the collectivist orientation of Chinese employees and their affective commitment. In contrast, Clugston et al (2000) finds no relationship between cultural values and the organizational commitment of American employees. Recent work by Williamson et al. (2009) sheds further light on the subject through the use of an interactionist approach to examine how cultural values moderate the relationship between organizational rewards and affective commitment in the US context. They find that collectivism moderates the relationship between both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and affective commitment.

In this study, we examine how cultural values at an individual level moderate the relationship between organizational rewards and affective organizational commitment in the Chinese organizational context. Affective organizational commitment refers to the extent to which an employee identifies with, or is emotionally attached to, his/her organization (Meyer et al, 1993). Although previous work has examined how collectivism moderates this relationship (Williamson et al, 2009), we contribute to the literature by examining whether the attitudinal responses of employees to the provision of organizational rewards might differ according to their traditionality orientation, defined as the extent to which individuals endorse traditional social values (Hui et al, 2004). In this study we focus on the one dimension of traditionality that is most likely to moderate the attitudinal response of individuals in the workplace, respect for authority. The findings of this research have important managerial implications. They should be useful for Chinese organizations looking to foster high levels of employee commitment through the design of appropriate reward systems according to the cultural make-up of their workforce. In the following section we start by reviewing the theoretical and empirical literature, before developing our research hypotheses.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Organizational rewards
Organizational rewards refer to all the benefits, financial and non-financial, that an employee obtains through his/her employment relationship with an organization (Malhotra et al, 2007). The literature distinguishes between three main types of rewards that an individual seeks from his/her organization: extrinsic, intrinsic and social (Williamson et al, 2009). Extrinsic rewards are those provided by the organization, which do not come from the content of the job itself. They include tangible, material benefits such as pay, fringe benefits and promotional opportunities.

On the other hand, intrinsic rewards refer to the intangible benefits that arise from the content of the job itself and have consequences for the psychological development of the
employee (Williamson et al., 2009). They may include motivational characteristics of the job such as autonomy, feedback and participation in decision-making (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). Social rewards derive from interaction with other people on the job. They refer to the extent to which positive interpersonal relationships, such as those with a supervisor or a co-worker, are available to the individual in the work environment.

**Affective commitment**

Affective commitment, defined as "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 226), is one of the most frequently investigated constructs in the study of workplace attitudes. This results from the fact that it is positively linked to a whole host of work-related outcomes of benefit to organizations. Recent meta-analytical reviews of the literature find it to be negatively related to employee turnover and positively linked to job performance (Meyer et al., 2002; Riketta, 2002). Employees with high levels of affective commitment want to stay with the organization as a consequence of the positive feelings that arise from the employment relationship. Compared to other commitment mindsets it has consistently been found to be the most accurate predictor of positive organizational behavior (Chen and Francesco, 2003). According to the social exchange theory, employees will exhibit greater affective commitment to the organization when it meets their expectations regarding the fulfillment of their individual needs (Haar and Spell, 2004). This social exchange is based on what has been labelled in the literature a "psychological contract" between employer and employee (Rousseau, 1995). Psychological contracts, based on the concept of reciprocity, have been shown to play an important role in determining organizational behavior (Garrow, 2004). The provision of rewards by an organization has been shown to be a major factor that strengthens the psychological contract between the employee and employer (Malhotra et al., 2007). According to the tenets of social exchange theory, on being rewarded for their work by the organization, employees will reciprocate by developing affective commitment to the organization. Previous empirical work indicates that extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards all play an important role in enhancing employee commitment towards the organization (Angle and Perry, 1983; Eby et al., 1999; Loscocco, 1990; Malhotra et al., 2007; Mottaz, 1988; Williamson et al., 2009; Young et al., 1998). There are contrasting views in the literature as to the relative strength of the relationships between the different types of rewards and organizational commitment. Some authors argue that the relationship between extrinsic rewards and organizational commitment is stronger than that between intrinsic or social rewards and organizational commitment as organizations have direct control over their provision (Angle and Perry, 1983). Others argue that intrinsic and social rewards are stronger antecedents of organizational commitment than extrinsic rewards (Eby et al., 1999).

**Tradinality**

The problems faced in applying constructs developed in the west, to explain organizational behaviour in non-western settings, have been highlighted by researchers, who believe appropriate measures should be developed to explain phenomena indigenous to Asia (Barney and Zhang, 2009; Meyer, 2006). Over the last three decades, a construct labelled traditionality has been developed by researchers, investigating organizational behaviour, in Confucian-based societies (Farh et al., 1997). Traditionality refers to the extent to which individuals endorse traditional Chinese values, consistent with Confucian ideology (Hui et al., 2004). A key underlying dimension of traditionality in Chinese societies is respect for
authority, arising from the five cardinal relationships (wu lun) principle of Confucianism (Yang et al, 1989). Under this principle, the relationships between individuals are ordered according to one’s place in the hierarchy of society. As a result, those individuals who endorse traditional Chinese values are more likely to be susceptible to their relational ties with others in the workplace. In this study we will focus on how this dimension of traditionality, respect for authority, moderates the attitudinal responses of employees to the provision of organizational rewards. We have chosen to focus on respect for authority, as it is the dimension most likely to moderate the attitudes and behaviour of individuals in the workplace. It is also the dimension of traditionality that is most likely to present itself in non-Confucian settings and, thus, is of interest to researchers doing cross-cultural work. Respect for authority largely corresponds with Hofstede’s (1980) power distance dimension, given that it captures the extent to which employees accept status differences (Farh et al, 2007; Hui et al, 2004; Zhang and Zheng, 2009). Other dimensions of Chinese traditionality that we do not focus on in this study include filial piety and ancestral worship, which tend to carry moral overtones that are prescribed by Confucian culture and are, therefore, not as relevant to western researchers (Spreitzer et al, 2005; Yang et al, 1989). Indeed, Farh et al (2007) have encouraged efforts to develop a refined scale of traditionality, which measures submission to authority and is more relevant in cross-cultural settings. They argue that many items in the Chinese Traditionality Scale, developed by Yang and his associates in the 1980s (Yang et al, 1989), are couched in the context of Taiwan in the 1970s, and are therefore irrelevant today.

Over the last decade a growing number of studies have examined how traditionality moderates the response of employees to different aspects of their working environment. Farh et al (2007) found that the relationship between perceived organizational support and work outcomes were stronger for those low in traditionality. Xie et al (2008) found that the relationship between job control and health was stronger for less traditional workers, whereas the relationship between distributive justice and health was stronger for more traditional workers. Zhang and Zheng (2009) found that employees high in traditionality tended to transfer job satisfaction into stronger commitment than people low in traditionality. Wu et al. (2009) found that traditional employees respond less negatively to abusive supervision, in terms of employee performance, than non-traditional ones.

In this study we investigate how the traditionality orientation of individual employees moderates the relationship between organizational rewards and their affective organizational commitment, by developing a series of hypotheses based on the existing literature (Williamson et al, 2009; Yu et al, 2003). We focus on three organizational rewards in this study; pay satisfaction, autonomy and satisfaction with supervision, included to represent the categories of extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards, respectively. These rewards were chosen due to the fact that their relationship with organizational commitment has been widely investigated in previous studies and that scales for these constructs demonstrate high reliability and validity (Malhotra et al, 2007).

**Pay satisfaction**

Pay satisfaction is defined as the perceived satisfaction with pay for the work done, as well as the relative satisfaction with pay compared to that provided in other organizations (Malhotra et al, 2007). Previous work establishes a positive link between pay satisfaction and the affective commitment of employees (Loscocco, 1990; Mottaz, 1988). However, other studies produce conflicting results, indicating it may have no relationship (Malhotra et
al, 2007) or even a negative relationship (Eby et al, 1999) with affective commitment. Although no work has examined the direct relationship between pay satisfaction and organizational commitment in the Chinese context, previous research suggests that Chinese employees rank pay highly in comparison to other organizational rewards and are, thus, likely to be sensitive to pay inequity (Chiu et al, 2002; Yu et al, 2003).

Individuals high in traditionality tend to respond to their employers according to perceived role obligations rather than according to their perceptions of an inducement/contribution balance (Farh et al, 2007). Consequently, it is likely that individuals high in traditionality, as opposed to low, will show greater commitment to the organization when they perceive their pay to be low in comparison to other individuals doing similar kinds of work in their organization or other organizations. Indeed, recent research by Pillutla et al. (2007) demonstrates that individuals high in traditionality are more likely to accept unequal distribution of benefits than those low in traditionality, who exhibit greater sensitivity towards perceptions of inequity. Based on the previous literature we develop the following hypotheses:

H1. Pay satisfaction is positively related to affective commitment.
H2. Traditionality moderates the relationship between pay satisfaction and affective commitment in such a way that relationships will be stronger for people lower, rather than higher, in traditionality.

Autonomy
Autonomy refers to the ability of the employee to determine the way and manner in which they carry out their job (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). It is an important intrinsic motivator and should be positively related to affective commitment as it helps to satisfy the internal psychological needs of the individual employee (Williamson et al., 2009). Empirical studies in western contexts find evidence of a positive relationship between autonomy and affective commitment (Eby et al, 1999; Malhotra et al, 2007).

Chen and Aryee (2007) argue that individuals high in traditionality, similar to those high in power-distance, may be less reluctant to take responsibility for work-related activities than those low in traditionality due to a sense of powerlessness or lack of agency. They quote Kirkman and Shapiro (1997) to suggest that individuals low in traditionality typically seek greater autonomy over the manner in which they carry out their job and are more willing to accept responsibility than those high in traditionality. For this reason we might expect that the provision of greater autonomy will not enhance the commitment of high traditionality individuals to the same extent as it would of those low in traditionality. This leads us to theorize that when autonomy is low individuals high in traditionality should exhibit greater affective commitment to the organization than those low in traditionality. Emanating from the previous discussion we develop the following hypotheses:

H3. Autonomy is positively related to affective commitment.
H4. Traditionality moderates the relationship between autonomy and affective commitment in such a way that relationships will be stronger for people lower, rather than higher, in traditionality.
Satisfaction with supervision

Satisfaction with supervision refers to the extent to which employees perceive their supervisors to be considerate, and are satisfied with their supervisors' conduct towards them (Malhotra et al, 2007). Previous studies demonstrate a positive relationship between satisfaction with supervision and organizational commitment in western settings (De Cotiis and Summers, 1987; Mottaz, 1988). However, recent work by Malhotra et al. (2007) finds no evidence to support such a relationship. On the basis of previous empirical work which highlights the relative strength of the subordinate/supervisor relationship in the Chinese context (Chen et al, 2002; Cheng et al, 2003), we would expect there to be a positive link between satisfaction with supervision and affective commitment within a Chinese organizational setting.

As regards how traditionality moderates the relationship between organizational rewards and affective commitment, previous research indicates that individuals high in traditionality tend to be more willing to comply with the directives of their supervisors and typically exhibit greater acceptance of status differences than those low in traditionality (Chen and Aryee, 2007). Success in their working life depends on having a good relationship with their supervisor (Redding, 1990). In contrast, those low in traditionality are more reluctant to obey their supervisor, especially when trust is low. Recent work indicates that individual differences in traditionality moderate the behavioural response of individuals to social realities. Hui et al. (2004) find that Chinese employees high in traditionality exhibit organizational citizenship behaviour that is relatively high, regardless of the quality of the relationship with their supervisor. In contrast, less traditional Chinese were found to be more sensitive to their relationship with their supervisor and exhibit greater organizational citizenship behaviour when they have a good relationship with their supervisor. This leads us to theorize that, when employee satisfaction with supervision is low, those individuals low in traditionality will exhibit lower affective commitment than those high in traditionality. Likewise, when satisfaction with supervisors is high, we expect employees low in traditionality to exhibit greater affective commitment than those high in traditionality.

Based on the previous literature we develop the following hypotheses:

\[
H_5. \text{Satisfaction with supervision is positively related to affective commitment.}
\]

\[
H_6. \text{Traditionality moderates the relationship between satisfaction with supervision and affective commitment in such a way that relationships will be stronger for people lower, rather than higher, in traditionality.}
\]

Method

Sample and procedure

This research study was conducted over a three-month time period from May-July 2009. Participants in the study were employees of a major Chinese airline company located in the capital city of Henan Province, China. The airline company selected for the study is one of the top three airline companies in China. Its shares are listed on both domestic and overseas stock exchanges, and it has 13 branches across China.

The research team distributed paper questionnaires to the same group of 500 full-time employees selected randomly from the records of the human resource department at two different time periods, first in May and second in July. The first questionnaire measured demographic variables and traditionality orientation. The second questionnaire measured organizational rewards and affective commitment.
All individuals were full-time employees working in a managerial or administrative capacity in the organization. Respondents were informed that the research study will be used to inform management of their views towards rewards in their organization and were promised confidentiality. Completed surveys were returned to a box placed inside the human resource department of the organization. Valid responses to both questionnaires were obtained from 290 employees, a response rate of 58 per cent. All other responses were discarded from analysis. The response rate to the first survey was 74 per cent and to the second survey 62 per cent. Of the respondents to both surveys 43.1 per cent were male and 56.9 per cent female. The average age of respondents was 31.2 years, and average tenure was 6.87 years; 62.4 percent of employees had a university education, and 35.2 per cent of them were in a managerial position.

Measures
Pay satisfaction. We used two items from Malhotra et al (2007). A typical item used is "I feel I am paid fairly considering the work I do". The Cronbach's alpha estimate for this scale was 0.769.

Autonomy. This was measured using a three-item scale taken from the job diagnostic survey developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976). This scale has been validated in previous research (Malhotra et at, 2007; Singh, 1993; Teas, 1981). A typical item is "The job allows me to use personal initiative in carrying out the work". The Cronbach's alpha estimate for this scale was 0.780.

Satisfaction with supervision. We used four items taken from House and Dessler (1974). Items included "My supervisor helps make my job more pleasant" and "I am satisfied with my supervisor's ability to lead me". The Cronbach's alpha estimate for this scale was 0.873.

Traditionality. This was measured with two items taken from the Chinese Individual Traditionality Scale (Yang et al, 1989) that focus on respect for seniority in the workplace. The two items are "The best way to avoid mistakes is to follow the instructions of senior persons" and "When people are in dispute, they should ask the most senior person to decide who is right". The Cronbach's alpha estimate for this scale was 0.739.

Affective commitment. This was measured using five items developed by Meyer et al. (1993). Typical items include "I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization" and "I do not feel like part of the family at this organization". One item from the original six-item scale was discarded after exploratory factor analysis due to poor factor loading. The Cronbach's alpha estimate for this scale was 0.928.

For all the previous items responses were made on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scales used were translated into Chinese using a back translation procedure (Brislin, 1980) by researchers fluent in both English and Chinese. Age, organizational tenure, gender, education level and position were included as control variables in line with previous research (Chen and Aryee, 2007). Age and organizational tenure were measured as continuous variables. Gender (female ¼ 0, male ¼ 1), education (non-university educated ¼ 0, university educated ¼ 1) and position (non-manager ¼ 0, manager ¼ 1) were coded as dummy variables.

The final question items used in the analysis and their cross loadings and Cronbach's alpha estimates can be seen in Table 1.

The descriptive statistics and correlations of all the control, independent and moderating variables included in our study are presented in Table 11.
Results

Two sets of analysis were conducted on the data. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test for common method bias by comparing the fitness of the five-factor measurement model with that of a one-factor model one (Joreskog and Sorbom, 2001; Peng et al., 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003). The results of CFA indicated that the five-factor model fitted the data reasonably well (GFI = 0.92, NFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.062). Although the RMSEA for the five-factor model was lower than 0.05, the generally accepted criteria for a good fit, the other fit indices were excellent in comparison, suggesting satisfactory fit to the data. All items from the five factors were then combined into a single factor and Harman's one-factor test was performed (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). The results of the one-factor model were not acceptable (GFI = 0.58, NFI = 0.71, CFI = 0.73, IFI = 0.73, RMSEA = 0.20). A sequential chi-squared difference test showed that it was significantly poorer than that of the five-factor model (ΔX² = 875.97, df = 10, p < 0.01), which increases our confidence that common method bias is not a problem in this study (James et al., 1982). To further test the goodness-of-fit of the five-factor model to the data, it was also compared to a series of two, three and four-factor nested models. In all instances it fit the data better.

Second, we tested our hypotheses using hierarchical regression analysis. The results can be seen in Table III. In the first step, age, gender, tenure, education and position were entered as control variables (model 1). Only one demographic variable, age, was found to be significantly associated with affective commitment.
Table III. Hierarchical regression analysis (n = 290)

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<tr>
<th>Step 1: Control variables</th>
<th>Step 2: Independent variables</th>
<th>Step 3: Interaction variables</th>
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<td><strong>Model 1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Dependent variable: affective commitment</strong></td>
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In the second step, independent and moderating variables were added (model 2). All variables were mean-centered to deal with potential multicollinearity issues resulting from subsequent moderation analysis (Aiken and West, 1991). All three independent variables were significantly related to affective commitment when demographic variables were controlled for: pay satisfaction ($b = 0.187; p < 0.01$), autonomy ($b = 0.185; p < 0.01$) and satisfaction with supervision ($b = 0.124; p < 0.05$). These findings support hypotheses H1, H3 and H5.

In the third step of the regression the interactive terms were added. Three hierarchical regressions (models 3, 4 and 5) were carried out to examine how traditionality moderates the relationship between pay satisfaction, autonomy and satisfaction with supervision, and affective commitment. As predicted by H4 and H6 traditionality negatively moderated the relationships between autonomy and affective commitment ($b = -0.127; p < 0.05$) and satisfaction with supervision and affective commitment ($b = -0.294; p < 0.01$). In contrast, traditionality did not moderate the relationship between pay satisfaction and affective commitment to any degree of significance. As a result, no support was provided for hypothesis 2. To interpret how traditionality moderates the relationship between autonomy and satisfaction with supervision on affective commitment, regression equations were calculated for each relationship at high and low levels of traditionality. The results of these equations are plotted graphically in Figures 1 and 2. As illustrated in Figure 1, when autonomy was low, individuals with a high traditionality orientation reported higher levels of affective commitment. When autonomy was high, individuals low in traditionality had similar levels of organizational commitment. As illustrated in Figure 2, when satisfaction with supervisor was low, individuals with a high traditionality orientation reported higher levels of affective commitment. When satisfaction with supervisor was high, the opposite was the case: individuals low in traditionality exhibited greater affective commitment.

In model 6 all interactive variables were entered into the regression at the same time. Traditionality negatively moderated the relationship between satisfaction with supervision and...
and affective commitment to a higher degree of significance than in model 5. However, it was no longer found to moderate the relationship between autonomy and affective commitment to any degree of significance. The interaction terms included in the study accounted for 9.4 per cent more of the variance in affective commitment than when the terms were not included.

**Figure 1. Traditionality as moderator of the relationship between autonomy and affective commitment**

![Graph showing Traditionality as moderator of the relationship between autonomy and affective commitment](image1)

**Figure 2. Traditionality as moderator of the relationship between satisfaction with supervision and affective commitment**

![Graph showing Traditionality as moderator of the relationship between satisfaction with supervision and affective commitment](image2)

**Discussion**

Our study revealed that pay satisfaction, autonomy and satisfaction with supervision were all positively related to the affective commitment of Chinese employees. This is in line with the findings of previous studies conducted in western settings, which support a positive relationship between extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards, and employee commitment (Malhotra et al, 2007; Mottaz, 1988). Such findings indicate that the antecedents of
employee commitment in the Chinese organizational setting may emanate from similar factors to those for employees in the western countries. This study makes a contribution to the literature by examining the relationship of individual level cultural values in employee commitment to the organization. Traditionality, specifically respect for authority, is found to moderate the relationship between affective commitment and two variables: autonomy and satisfaction with supervision. In particular, it was established that individuals high in traditionality exhibited greater levels of affective commitment, even when they perceived low levels of autonomy and satisfaction with supervision. However, when autonomy and satisfaction with supervision were high, individuals low in traditionality exhibited greater levels of affective commitment. This suggests that employees with different cultural value orientations might respond differently to the provision of organizational rewards.

In regard to our findings as to how traditionality moderates the relationship between autonomy and organizational commitment, we find them consistent with Chen and Aryee (2007), who argue that those high in traditionality are less willing to take responsibility for work-related activities than those low in traditionality. This may result from a sense of powerless or lack of agency arising from traditional beliefs. Our results suggest that individuals within relatively traditional societies exhibit varying levels of commitment to their organizations, depending on their individual value systems, and the endorsement of prevalent social values within that society.

In regard to our findings as to how traditionality moderates the relationship between satisfaction with supervision and organizational commitment, we find them consistent with previous research (Hui et al, 2004). Hui et al. (2004) demonstrate that Chinese employees high in traditionality exhibit higher organizational citizenship behavior regardless of the quality of their relationship with their superiors, while less traditional employees only exhibit higher organizational citizenship behavior when they are on good terms with their superiors.

Traditionality was not found to moderate the relationship between pay satisfaction and affective commitment. This might be explained by the fact that pay levels are relatively low in the Chinese airline industry, resulting in general employee dissatisfaction with pay, regardless of their traditionality orientation.

Managerial and societal implications
This study provides a number of implications for managers of Chinese organizations, especially for those in the service sector in which this study was conducted. First, as well as improving extrinsic benefits, managers need to realize the importance of providing autonomy and good supervision to their employees. This should lead to increased organizational commitment, which relates negatively to turnover intentions (Chen and Francesco, 2003; Wong et al, 2001).

Second, managers need to understand that the strength of the relationship between employee' perceptions of organizational rewards and their commitment can depend on an individual's cultural values. When designing human resource policies to enhance the commitment level of their employees, managers should be sensitive to cultural factors rather than adopt general across-the-board strategies. In Chinese organizations that employ a high percentage of traditionalist people, who are typically deferent to authority, the provision of autonomy and good supervision might not yield as many benefits as for organizations employing a less traditional workforce. Organizations with a predominantly
traditional workforce, such as state-owned enterprises and those located in inland regions of the country, should consider other strategies for enhancing employee commitment, such as stressing the importance of group loyalty and the duty of employees to meet their work responsibilities (Farh et al, 2007). In contrast, organizations in more dynamic industries, particularly in the coastal areas of the country, should look to hire less traditional workers with overseas experience who are more responsive to workplace policies that stress autonomy, participation and good supervision. The use of these practices should heighten organizational commitment, which may be related to improved employee retention and performance.

The findings of this study also carry implications for society given that China is home to a large percentage of the world’s population and the participation of China in the global economy has expanded during the last two decades. As people in other countries are interacting with the Chinese more directly on a personal and business basis, it is important to understand the role played by cultural values in shaping individual attitudes. Through increasing their cultural understanding, foreign organizations operating in China or employing Chinese can better tailor their human resource strategies to enhance the commitment and resultant wellbeing of their employees. This is especially important in a global economy characterized by uncertainty and rapid change that has resulted from the recent financial crisis (Stone, 2010).

Limitations and suggestions for future research
As is the case for all research the results of this study are subject to methodological limitations. One limitation concerns the use of self-reporting to measure all the variables in the study, which may have resulted in common method bias. Although incorporating objective measures into our study might strengthen its findings, we believe common method bias is not a significant problem. First, we measured traditionality at a different time from the other variables in our study. Second, previous research indicates that common method bias is not a serious problem when moderation analysis is undertaken (Brockner et al, 1997; Pillutla et al, 2007). Third, we followed Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) advice to reduce common method bias by protecting the anonymity of respondents and making the questionnaire short and clear to reduce their response fatigue. Fourth, we tested for common method bias statistically by comparing our five-factor model with that of a one-factor model using Harman's one-factor test. Future studies might extend our research by examining the relationship between organizational rewards and more objective, non self-rated measures, such as employee turnover and performance, which would further reduce the problem of common method bias.

The cross-sectional design of our study means we are unable to infer causal relationships from our findings. It is arguable that those individuals who exhibit greater commitment to the organization might view the rewards provided by the organization more favorably than those individuals with lower levels of commitment.

Our findings are, however, consistent with the social exchange theory that underpins the relationship between organizational rewards and affective commitment and in line with previous empirical findings in a whole host of organizational settings. Moreover, as the main focus of our research was not the study of causal relationships, but the investigation of how cultural variables moderate such a relationship, it is not compromised by the use of a cross-sectional design.
Another limitation arises from the use of a sample of employees from a single organization, in a single country. The use of such a sample of employees, assimilated into a single organizational culture, means we should be careful about generalizing our findings to the whole population. In addition, our sample might not represent the full cultural spectrum of individuals across China and the rest of the world. Future research may address these concerns by replicating this research in different organizational, industrial and geographical settings, especially outside of China. This will enable us to investigate whether traditionality moderates employee responses to the provision of organizational rewards in similar ways across national boundaries.

Conclusion

China’s long history of insularity created a society in which traditional values were valued. Yet during the last couple of decades China has opened its doors to globalization and, consequently, the social landscape is changing. This may lead us to think that endorsement of traditional beliefs may not have a significant bearing on the relationship between organizational rewards and employee commitment to the organization. Our findings suggest this is not the case. Traditional values, in particular respect for authority, still have a role to play in shaping the attitudes of Chinese employees towards their work and their attachment to their organization. One prominent contribution of this study is the revelation that individuals high in traditionality still appear to exhibit higher levels of affective commitment to the organization, even when their perceived levels of autonomy and satisfaction with supervision are low. This finding has important implications for managers looking to enhance the organizational commitment of their employees in traditional societies through the provision of appropriate organizational rewards.

References


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