The Role of Job Embeddedness in “New Generation of Rural Migrant Workers” Turnover Intention in China

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ABSTRACT
The high voluntary turnover rates of “new generation of rural migrant workers” have been widely concerned in China. One important reason is their rural identity. The distinctive social identity has caused new generation of rural migrant workers face social identity discrimination, which further hinder the integration of values and goals between the individuals and the organizations. The values and goals gap between individuals and organizations further impact on new generation of rural migrant workers’ organizational identification, which reduce their organization embeddedness and increase turnover intention. Thus, this study seeks to explore the linkage between organization identification and turnover intention, which is mediated by organizational embeddedness. Additionally, this study also proposes the moderating effect of community embeddedness on the correlation between organization embeddedness and turnover intention. A quantitative with a survey method is proposed for this study. Data will be collected in manufacturing setting in Guizhou province of China. Multi-level sampling technique will be applied to determine the sample size.

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1. Introduction
In China, there are a special group of workers, who come from rural area but engage in non-agricultural sectors in cities. These workers who are well known as an important part of China’s labor supply (Han, 2015), are called as “rural migrant workers” (State Council, 2006) and highlighted as industrial workers (Ma & Han, 2015). However, the voluntary turnover rates of “rural migrant workers” are several times higher than other developed market economy countries (Knight & Yueh, 2004). This situation is more serious when compared between different “generation of rural migrant workers”. On average, the voluntary turnover rate of “new generation of rural migrant workers” (who are born after 1980s’) per year is 6 times higher than these “rural migrant workers” who born before 1950s’ (China Federation of Trade Union, 2010). Furthermore, the high turnover behaviors of “new generation of rural migrant workers” have evolved into short-term employment trend since the year of 2012. In terms of “new generation of
rural migrant workers”, who are born after 1980’s and 1990’s, their job duration are only 1.5 and 0.9 years respectively (Zhang, 2016).

The high voluntary turnover behaviors of “New generation of rural migrant workers” have not only cause great pressure on the employment of Chinese industries but also become a stumbling block to Chinese economy steady growth (Wang & Deng, 2017). Thus, it is of great importance to understanding the issue of “new generation of rural migrant workers” voluntary turnover behavior in China (Gan et al., 2015; Li et al., 2015).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 TURNOVER INTENTION

Followed March and Simon’s (1958) voluntary turnover model, most of voluntary turnover studies primarily focus on the desirability of leaving one’s job (i.e., job satisfaction and organization commitment) along with the ease of movement (i.e., job alternatives) as the key mechanisms to explain why people voluntary leave their jobs (Eberly, Hall, & Lee, 2017). However, prior studies have revealed that job attitudes variables (i.e. job satisfaction and organizational commitment) play a relatively limited role in explaining only 4% to 5% of variance in voluntary turnover behavior, as well as the weaker prediction of job alternative or job search on voluntary turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000). It is obviously that other important elements may not be considered yet.

On the other hand, considering the difficult of measuring actual voluntary turnover behavior, most of turnover scholars have explicitly indicated that turnover intention is the most proximal and accurate precursor of actual turnover (Hom & Griffeth, 1991; Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). The assumption of intentions are the most immediate and accurate predictor of behavior has been demonstrated in Fishbein & Ajzen’s (1975) theory of reasoned action (TRA) and Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPA). Hence, this study assumes that turnover intention is the most proximal forecaster of voluntary turnover and define turnover intention as employees’ desire to leave their organization after he/she evaluates the overall factors that influence his/her turnover decision making, but the actual turnover behavior not yet happen.

2.2 ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Based on the theory of motivation, Foote (1951) has stated that individuals classifies themselves as members of the organization, and this self-categorization continues to inspire themselves to perform represent the organization. As said by Kelman (1958) and Brown (1969), organizational identification is indeed a form of the correlation between the individual and the organization. It reveals individual’s self-concept and influence individual’s belief. Furthermore, according to Hall et al. (1970) and Schneider et al. (1971), organizational identification refers to the process of the gradually integrated and congruent of organizational and individual’s values and goals. On the other hand, Tajfel (1978) indicated that individual’s social identity is the “knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. Thus, by combining self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), researchers indicated that people’s social identification drive from their self-categorization, their uniqueness or status of the group, their salience of out-groups, and the aspects that traditionally are associated with group formation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Hence, as a potentially significant social category, people develop their identification in the group of organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

2.3 JOB EMBEDDEDNESS

Job embeddedness was originally conceptualized specifically as reflecting the overall factors (e.g. psychological, social, and financial influences) that make individuals stay at their current jobs. These factors exist on organization and outside the individuals’ workplace, such as community. It is well-defined as “the combined forces that keep an employee from leaving his or her job” (Yao et al.,2004, p.159). This new construct captures both organization and community forces that constrain employees from leaving their present position. It provides theoretical richness and contributions since it explicitly
includes six dimensions of organization embeddedness and community embeddedness, which reflect in fit, links and sacrifice respectively. It is the first effort to represent a comprehensive assembling of non-attitudinal and non-work related elements on employee retention (Mitchell et al., 2001).

After years of development, researchers have found that job embeddedness is indeed provided sufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate its significant effect on predicting employee turnover intention (Burton, Holtom, Sablinski, Mitchell, & Lee, 2010; Lee et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001; Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014; Zhang, Fried, & Griffeth, 2012; Kiazad, Holtom, Hom, & Newman, 2015). However, these outcomes are inspiring, the concept of job embeddedness still need to be addressed (Kiazad et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2014).

Firstly, almost all the prior job embeddedness studies focused on the organization component, while only limited studies investigated the community component (Lee et al., 2014). Although documented literatures have revealed the impact of both organization and community embeddedness on employee’s turnover intention, the results are inconsistent. For example, one study has stated that both organization and community embeddedness nearly identical strength of correlation with voluntary turnover (Tanova & Holtom, 2008). Other studies indicated that only organization embeddedness significantly related to both on turnover intention and turnover, while community embeddedness did not associate with both turnover intention or turnover (Tanova & Holtom, 2008; Mallol et al., 2007; Wheeler et al., 2010; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010). Conversely, researchers indicated that community embeddedness significantly related to voluntary turnover, whereas organization embeddedness was not (Lee et al., 2004). Thus, it is necessary to further investigate the association among organization embeddedness, community embeddedness and turnover behavior (Kiazad et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2014; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010; Crossley, Bennet, Jex, & Burnfield, 2007; Zhang et al., 2012).

Secondly, previous empirical studies have provided sufficient evidence to confirmed the validity of organization embeddedness in predicting various of behavioral outcomes, such as turnover behaviors, in-role and extra-role performance, counterproductive work behaviors and absenteeism (Lee et al., 2014; Ng & Feldman, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2001; Pharmacy, Padjadjaran, & Java, 2015; Lee et al., 2004; Tanova & Holtom, 2008), yet limited empirical studies are conducted to explore the antecedents of organization embeddedness (Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012; Ng & Feldman, 2011; Holtom, Burton, & Crossley, 2012), and its mediating mechanism in turnover behavior (Wheeler et al., 2010; Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2011). Hence, to investigate the antecedents of organization embeddedness and its mediating effects between these antecedents and turnover behavior has gradually become the forefront of the development of job embeddedness theory (Jiang et al., 2012).

Finally, To date, in China, the study of job embeddedness is still new and most of them are conducted among the skilled employees (Li & Jun, 2009; Liu, 2011; Mai, Zou, & Mei, 2009; Xiaowei, Liao, & Zeng, 2005; Yang & Lin, 2013; Zhang, 2011). Limited studies have been carried out to investigate the association among job embeddedness and turnover intention (Liu, Ding, & Zhao, 2016; Qin & Zhao, 2014; Wang & Deng, 2017), the studies of job embeddedness are still new especially in the context of “new generation of rural migrant workers” (Yang & Lin, 2013). Additionally, the measure of job embeddedness conducted in previous studies primarily adopted from Crosley's (2007) global scale. The global measure of job embeddedness primarily focuses on organization embeddedness items, which is widely regarded as ignoring the concern of community embeddedness items. Thus, it is of great importance to explore the mechanism of both organization embeddedness and community embeddedness in the context of “new generation of rural migrant workers” turnover intention (Yang & Lin, 2013).
3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Research Framework

3.2 PREPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

3.2.1 Organizational Identification and Turnover Intention

Organizational identification is defined as the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). It is a specific form of people’s social identity in the context of organization, where people define him/herself regarding his/her organizational membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In general, an individual defines his/her organizational identification through the distinctiveness of the group’s values and practices, prestige of the group and salience of the out-group. The more an employee identify with his/her organization, the more organization’s values, norms, and interests are incorporated in his/her self-concept (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Knippenberg, 2000). Thus, employee with high identification in the organization shows psychologically intertwined with the organization, as well as value and emotional significance attached to his/her organization. Thus, organizational identification has showed its potential capacity to reduce employee turnover intention (He & Brown, 2013; Riketta, 2005; Van Dick et al., 2004). Previous individual empirical studies have widely confirmed the significant relationship between organizational identification and turnover intention in different context (Akgunduz & Bardakoglu, 2015; Cho et al., 2014; Cole & Bruch, 2006; De Moura et al., 2009; Fallatah et al., 2017; Kumar Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2010; Van Dick, Christ, et al., 2004).

“Rural migrant workers” are identified by the household registration system and land contract system, they work in non-agricultural sectors, but still hold rural resident identification (Li & Li, 2007). The rural resident household registration policy leads “new generation of rural migrant workers” to a great social gap with urban workers. One of the prominent social gap between “new generation of rural migrant workers” and urban workers is the identity discrimination (difference between farmers and urban citizens) as well as the subsequent integration and congruence of values and goals among individual and the organization. This seriously affects “new generation of rural migrant workers” organizational membership identify by which influence their work enthusiasm and their organizational commitment and later lead to frequently job change (Gan et al., 2015).

Hence, this study proposes that:

**Preposition (1): Organizational identification is significant related to turnover intention**

3.2.2 Job Embeddedness and Turnover Intention

3.2.1 Organization Embeddedness and Turnover Intention

Western documented literatures have provided sufficiently empirical evidence demonstrating the exact
significant effect of organization embeddedness on turnover behaviors (Mallol et al., 2007; Wheeler et al., 2010; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010; Tanova & Holtom, 2008). Empirical studies of organization embeddedness in China have showed its significant effects on voluntary turnover (Liu, 2011; Xiao, 2015; Yang & Lin, 2013; Zhang, 2011), but there are quite limited studies of organization embeddedness about “rural migrant workers” (Yang & Lin, 2013). Hence, this study proposes:

**Preposition (2):** Organization embeddedness is significantly related to turnover intention.

### 3.2.2 Community Embeddedness and Turnover Intention

Previous studies have showed the exact significant influence of community embeddedness on turnover intention and voluntary turnover (Lee et al., 2004; Tanova & Holtom, 2008). However, only a handful of studies have investigated the association among community embeddedness and turnover intention in the context of Chinese “new generation of rural migrant workers” (Cheng, 2014; Yang & Lin, 2013). Additionally, there are a body of literatures have revealed that non-work related factors significantly predicted “new generation of rural migrant workers” turnover intention as important as work related factors, such as perceived job alternatives and social and cultural elements (e.g. family, responsibility and friends) (Wu & Yang, 2014), government labor security and household registration policy (Li et al., 2011), geography distance (Wang, 2012) and relatives responsibility (Linghu, 2013). However, each of these individual study is relatively limited to reflect the comprehensive understanding of “new generation of rural migrant workers” turnover intention, but the construct of community embeddedness is more extensive. Thus, this study proposes that community embeddedness will provide a more comprehensive and rich perspective of non-work related factors to understand “new generation of rural migrant workers” turnover intention (Feldman, Ng, & Vogel, 2012). Thus, this study proposes:

**Preposition (3):** Community embeddedness will significantly related to turnover intention.

### 3.2.3 Organizational Identification and Organization Embeddedness

Organizational identification arises when employee perceived oneness with or belongingness to the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Organizational identification is an extension of interactions and cohesion of members to psychological cognitive (e.g. distinctiveness and prestige of the in group). It is a consensus that interactional and interpersonal factors enhance employee organizational identification (He & Brown, 2013). Identification in the organization induces employee to engage in, to arise satisfaction, to view him/herself as a paradigm of the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), and to develop cooperation and interaction among the employees (Dukerich et al., 2002). And finally it boosts individual to cultivate “links” within the organization.

In addition, identification in the organization reinforces the correlation of “socialization” and “internalization”, develops the cognitive of individuals’ organizational loyalty and commitment, and enables their internalization of values and beliefs in the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). A meta-analysis from Riketta (2005) also pointed out that individuals’ identification is highly related to their fitness with organizational values, norms, beliefs, practices and emotional attachment (Riketta, 2005). Hence, we can conclude that the higher levels of organization identification, the better fit between individual and the organization.

Finally, previous study conducted in an India executives sample has showed the strong correlation of organizational identification and organization embeddedness (Ghosh, 2015). However, there are quit a handful of empirical studies are conducted to investigate this relationship. Therefore, this study proposes that:

**Preposition (4):** Organizational identification is significantly related to organization embeddedness.

### 3.2.4 Mediating Effect of Organization Embeddedness on the Relationship between Organizational Identification and Turnover Intention

Prior empirical studies have indicated that organization embeddedness is significantly related to turnover behaviors (Mallol et al., 2007; Wheeler et al., 2010; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010; Tanova & Holtom, 2008). Scholars also noted that organization embeddedness is conceived as a key mediating construct between
specific job factors and employee attitudes and behaviors and have provided sufficient empirical studies confirming its mediating effect on the linkage between kinds of job/organizational variables and turnover behaviors (Ferreira et al., 2017; Gantor & Cordery, 2012; Harris et al., 2011).

Furthermore, researchers have revealed the correlation of organizational identification and organizational embeddedness. The stronger organizational identification occurs, the higher level of organization embeddedness will promote (Ghosh, 2015). Thus, employees prefer to stay at the organization when they preserve their fit, links, and sacrifices with the organization (Kiazad et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, regardless of the evidence linking organizational identification to job embeddedness (Ghosh, 2015), and the later influence of job embeddedness on turnover intention or turnover, scholars have yet to propose that organization embeddedness is one of the mediating mechanisms whereby organizational identification is able to decrease turnover intention. Thus, this study proposes that:

**Preposition (5):** Organization embeddedness will play as a mediating role among organizational identification and turnover intention.

### 3.2.5 Moderating Effect of community Embeddedness on the Link among Organization Embeddedness and Turnover Intention

Previous empirical studies have demonstrated the exact significant effect of organization embeddedness on turnover behaviors (Wheeler et al., 2010; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010). Conversely, other scholars revealed that organization embeddedness was not significantly related to turnover behaviors (Lee et al, 2004). These inconsistent results of the effect of organization embeddedness on turnover behaviors indicate that potential moderators might be needed to explicate the relationship of organization embeddedness and turnover behaviors (Zhang et al., 2012; Jiang et al., 2012; Purba, 2015; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010). Additionally, researchers have confirmed the significant effects of community embeddedness on turnover behaviors (Mallol et al, 2007). Hence, this study proposes that:

**Preposition (6):** Community embeddedness will play as a moderating role among organization embeddedness and turnover intention.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study can be categorized as a predictive or hypothesis testing study since this study primarily focuses on the predictors that significantly account for variance of “new generation of rural migrant workers” turnover intention. The unit of this study is individual. A quantitative and a survey method is proposed for this study. Data will be collected in manufacturing setting in China since more than 30 percent of “rural migrant workers” in China worked in manufactories setting (China’s National Statistics Bureau, 2016). Multi-level sampling technique including judgement sampling and quota sampling will be applied to determine the sample size.

### 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMANDATION

The review of prior literatures indicated that organizational identification will significantly influence on turnover intention, with which relationship is mediated by organization embeddedness. The proposed research framework further posits that community embeddedness will moderates the correlation between organization embeddedness and turnover intention. This conceptual paper employs the Conservation of Resource Theory to support this framework. In future, an empirical study should be conducted to test what extend and how organizational identification, organization embeddedness, and community embeddednessare impact on turnover intention. If the framework empirically validated, the finding will offer an important insight to academics, policy makers and practitioners.

### Reference


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