# Do people with traditional values suffer more from job insecurity? The moderating effects of traditionality

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# Do people with traditional values suffer more from job insecurity? The moderating effects of traditionality

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This study aimed to explore the consequences of job insecurity in the Chinese context, and focused on the moderating effect of traditionality, an individual-level cultural value. A series of regression analyses of data from 388 subordinate–supervisor dyads in China revealed that job insecurity was negatively related to employees' well-being, and its negative relation with organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB) was nonsignificant. Furthermore, it was found that traditionality significantly exacerbated the negative relationships between job insecurity and employees' well-being, and OCB. Specifically, the employees with high traditional values suffered more health consequences and OCB performances from job insecurity. These results suggested that traditionality played an important role in the dynamics of job insecurity in the transitional society.

*Keywords:* Job insecurity; Traditionality; Well-being; Organizational citizenship behavior.

In the past decades, due to rapid organizational changes, such as outsourcings, mergers and acquisitions, downsizing, and restructuring, employees have been experiencing a great sense of job insecurity in the workplace. The financial crisis that erupted in mid-2008 undoubtedly exacerbated this situation. Recent studies have consistently shown that job insecurity has negative impacts on both individuals and organizations (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002). Nevertheless, the majority of the research on job insecurity has been conducted in Western industrialized societies. Economic globalization and social transition have made the issue of job insecurity increasingly important in developing societies, including China. At the moment, the Chinese economy is in a transition from planned to market-oriented model, which puts an end to the "iron rice-bowl" lifetime employment era (Price & Fang, 2002). During the past two decades, more than 17 million employees have been laid off, which represented more than 20% of the Chinese state-owned enterprises workforce (Zhao, Rust, McKinley,

& Edwards, 2010). Even for employees holding on to their jobs, the threat of being "laid-off" has heightened their feelings of job insecurity (Chen & Lu, 2011; Feng, Lu, & Siu, 2008).

Traditionally, job security has been highly valued in collectivist cultures (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Lu, Siu, Au, and Leung (2009) recently found that job insecurity was the primary source of stress for the contemporary Chinese employees. Thus, the conflict between rapid industrialization and the Chinese tradition of security and stability renders China the most important context for job insecurity research.

According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive view of stress, individual difference variables, including personal values, largely affect individual's stress appraisals and subsequently adopted coping strategies. Yet, except for the constructs of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1991), differences in individual-level cultural values were seldom explored regarding their potential effects on employees' responses to job insecurity (Greenhalgh &

Rosenblatt, 2010; Probst & Lawler, 2006). In the present study, we examined how traditionality, an individual-level construct of cultural values, impacted the relationships between job insecurity and employees' well-being, and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), respectively. Recent empirical evidence unequivocally demonstrated that traditional values are still prevalent among Chinese people despite significant value changes during modernization (Lu & Yang, 2006; Ralston, Egri, Stewart, Terpstra, & Yu, 1999). As Chinese people tend to emphasize safety, harmony, and stability (Schwartz, 1992), the negative effects of job insecurity may be even more serious for people adhering to traditional values.

The purpose of the present study is two-fold. First, we extend the existing literature by examining the effects of job insecurity on employees' OCB, which has received little attention in the past job stress studies (Eatough, Chang, Miloslavic, & Johnson, 2011). As a form of prosocial behaviour in the workplace, employees' OCB contributes to the effective functioning of the organization (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), especially in the current environment of rapid change and uncertainty. Second, we further investigate how traditionality, as an individual difference variable, might influence the effects of job insecurity on Chinese employees' well-being and OCB during social and cultural transitions. As a result, this research will undoubtedly enhance our understanding of how individual-level cultural values impact the relationship between job insecurity and its outcomes.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB INSECURITY AND EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES

Scholars have argued that objective environments, such as uncertain economic conditions and organizational changes, might impact people's beliefs about their job insecurity (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). However, even when facing the same objective conditions, feelings of job insecurity and threat intensity may vary from one person to another (e.g., Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Roskies, Louis-Guerin, & Fournier, 1993). Thus, most definitions share the view that job insecurity is a subjectively experienced stressor, which is based on the individual's perceptions and interpretations of the immediate work environment (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Sverke et al, 2002). Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984, p. 438) defined job insecurity as an individual's "powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation". Nevertheless, experienced job insecurity does not mean that an individual actually loss his/her job. It refers to "the anticipation of this stressful event in such a way that the nature and continued existence of one's job are perceived to be at risk" (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002, p. 27). Furthermore, the central proposition of stress research is that an anticipation of stressful event represents an equally important, or even greater, source of anxiety than the actual event itself (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Previous studies confirmed that perceived job insecurity had as detrimental effects as the job loss itself (e.g., Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; De Witte, 1999).

As one of the prominent job stressors, perceived job insecurity could be harmful to employees' well-being. Most studies consistently found a direct relationship between job insecurity and concurrent or subsequent health problems/illnesses. After controlling for sociodemographics, negative affectivity, and job characteristics, De Witte et al. (2010) demonstrated that job insecurity was negatively related to employees' well-being. Hellgren and Sverke (2003) found that job insecurity had a significant cross-lagged effect on employees' mental health complaints 1 year later. Kinnunen, Mauno, Nätti, and Happonen (1999) discovered that job insecurity could still predict employees' job exhaustion even after 3 years. Although the research exploring the detrimental effects of job insecurity on Chinese workers is still scarce (Chen & Lu, 2011; Feng et al., 2008), numerous studies have confirmed that, similarly to the West, work stressors–strains relations are present among Chinese workers. For example, work stressors were associated positively with physical and behavioural symptoms for workers in Chinese society (Lu et al., 2009; Lu, Kao, Siu, & Lu, 2011; Siu, Lu, & Spector, 2012). Thus, after identifying job insecurity as a salient work stressor for Chinese workers (Chen & Lu, 2011; Feng et al., 2008; Lu et al., 2009), we propose that it negatively impacts the employees' well-being in China.

*Hypothesis 1:* Job insecurity is negatively related to employees' well-being.

Perceived job insecurity has negative impact not only on individuals' well-being, but also on their work-related attitudes and performance. Two recent meta-analysis studies (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002) have shown that job insecurity is negatively related to job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, trust in the organization, and job performance. Recent evidence from two Chinese studies has also shown that job insecurity was associated with lower job satisfaction, weaker organizational commitment, and poorer job performance (Chen & Lu, 2011; Feng et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, there are few studies that explore the influence of job insecurity on employees' likelihood to engage in OCB. This omission is unfortunate because performing OCB contributes to

organizational performance (Podsakoff et al., 2000). OCB refers to employees' extrarole and discretionary behaviours (Organ, 1997), and is considered to be one of the three main components of job performance (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). Furthermore, the few existing studies have not reached a consistent conclusion. Bultena (1998), King (2000), and Reisel, Probst, Chia, Maloles, and König (2010) observed that job insecurity was negatively associated with self-reported or other-reported OCB. Feather and Rauter (2004) found a positive relation between job insecurity and supervisor-rated OCB for only contract teachers, but not for the permanent ones. Staufenbiel and König (2010) noticed that job insecurity was not related to supervisory-rated OCB, although it was negatively related to self-reported OCB. Until now, the results of the only two studies conducted in China are also mixed. One provided evidence of a positive relationship between job insecurity and supervisor-rated OCB in the state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and a negative relationship in the private joint ventures (Wong, Wong, Ngo, & Lui, 2005). Another study demonstrated that job insecurity was not related to supervisor-rated OCB for the employees from SOEs (Loi, Ngo, Zhang, & Lau, 2011).

The previously mentioned literature showed the mixed results about the job insecurity–OCB relation. However, based on the recent challenge–hindrance stressor conceptualization (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007), job insecurity is regarded as one type of hindrance stressor, which reflects stressful demands that thwart individual growth and gain. Therefore, perceived job insecurity leads employees to believe that their extra efforts may not translate into desirable outcomes. Consequently, insecurity may prompt a passive coping strategy, and cause focal employees to withdraw from their extrarole responsibilities (i.e., OCB). A meta-analysis study also provided evidence that hindrance stressors were positively related to withdrawal behaviour (Podsakoff et al., 2007), which can manifest itself in a reduced OCB (Davy, Kinicki, & Scheck, 1997; King, 2000). Thus, we hypothesize that job insecurity is negatively related to employees' engagement in OCB. The OCB could be categorized into two types: (1) OCB directed at the organization itself (OCBO; e.g., attends functions that are not required but that help the organizational image), and (2) OCB directed at individuals in the organization (OCBI), such as helping colleagues who are behind in work (Lee & Allen, 2002; McNeely & Meglino, 1994). We measured both OCBO and OCBI in the present study in order to capture a full range of OCB.

*Hypothesis 2:* Job insecurity is negatively related to employees' OCB.

## MODERATING EFFECTS OF TRADITIONALITY

As a subjectively experienced threat, job insecurity is derived from objective threats by means of individual cognitive processes (Sverke et al., 2002). These cognitive processes are influenced by individual differences as well as social environment elements (e.g., Büssing, 1999; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). Thus, different people would react to the threat of job insecurity differently. It has been found that individual difference variables, such as locus of control (Ashford et al., 1989) and positive and negative effect (Näswall, Sverke, & Hellgren, 2005), could moderate the impacts of job insecurity.

Probst and Lawler (2006) were the first to investigate individual-level cultural values of individualism-collectivism as a moderator of job insecurity, and found that employees with collectivistic values are more impaired by job insecurity than those with individualistic values. Their study indicates that cultural values might play an important role in the employees' reactions to perceived job insecurity. However, except for individualism and collectivism, the effect of individual cultural values on employees' reactions to job insecurity is seldom explored. In the present study we thus conceptualized traditionality, a culture-specific individual construct, as a moderator in the relationships between job insecurity and employees outcomes.

Traditional values were defined by Schwartz (1992) as commitment to, respect for, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion imposed on the individuals. The construct of Chinese traditionality was originally developed by Yang and his colleagues in the 1980s (Yang, Yu, & Yeh, 1989). He defined Chinese individual traditionality as "the typical pattern of more or less related motivational, evaluative, attitudinal and temperamental traits that is most frequently observed in people in traditional Chinese society and can still be found in people in contemporary Chinese societies such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China" (Yang, 2003, p. 265). The essential characteristics of Chinese traditionality include respect for authority, fatalism, and a general sense of powerlessness (Xie, Schaubroeck, & Lam, 2008). Chinese traditionality originated from Confucian ideology, which is conceptually and empirically distinguishable from collectivism (Farh, Earley, & Lin, 1997). Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that traditionality here represents a continuum rather than an "either/or" variable. Traditionality, therefore, refers to the extent to which an individual adheres to the traditional values.

Also, traditionality was found to be a key factor that significantly impact Chinese employees' work-related attitudes and behaviours (e.g., Farh et al., 1997; Hui, Lee, & Rousseau, 2004; Lu & Yang, 2006;

Xie et al., 2008). Measures of traditionality have been well-validated in the individual-level analysis in the aforementioned research. Yet, up to date, no study has specifically explored the role of traditionality among the relationships between job insecurity and its outcomes. Here, we adopted Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive appraisal approach to elaborate how individual differences in cultural orientation affected the appraisal process and reactions to job insecurity.

In the view of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), individuals make two appraisals of the encounter: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal concerns whether an event constitutes the threat of harm or loss to oneself, and secondary appraisal is a judgement concerning what might and could be done to manage the situation. Perceived job insecurity constitutes what Lazarus and Folkman would characterize as a harm or loss. Furthermore, Lazarus and Folkman suggested two psychological factors might weaken or strengthen an individual's primary appraisal. One is the perceived situational relevance (also treated as "commitment in stressful encounter"), which refers to the importance of the encountering situation to the individual. Another is the individual's sensitivity to the stressor. Empirical studies provided evidence that Chinese employees would perceive job insecurity as more stressful due to a stronger desire for secure and stable jobs (Hofstede, 1991; Probst & Lawler, 2006). Moreover, we believe that traditionality might also strengthen an individual's sensitivity to uncertain job environments. Individuals with high traditionality lean towards conserving and pursuing safety, harmony, and stability (Schwartz, 1992); therefore, for a conservative person, having secure employment is a main aspect of life stability. Hence, individuals with high traditionality were expected to be more concerned about job security.

When facing a job-threatening situation, employees considered what could be done to manage the anticipated job loss. This is what Lazarus and Folkman (1984) called the secondary appraisal process, which focuses on the coping strategies available to alter the perceived threat of harm or loss. Coping is expected to be a key determinant of whether anything can be done to change or avoid the stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The coping process involves cognitive and behavioural changes made by the individual. As individuals with high traditionality have high propensity to submit to authority, and feel powerlessness (Yang et al., 1989), they tend to think they have no control of a job threatening situation. Empirical evidence demonstrated that powerlessness was positively related to the threat of job insecurity, and strengthened the job insecurity–health relation (Barling & Kelloway, 1996; Mauno, Leskinen, & Kinnunen, 2001; Reisel, 2003). Moreover, because individuals with high

traditionality believe in fatalism, they may give up any possible efforts to deal with stressful situations (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2002; Scheier & Bridges, 1995). Such coping strategies could not reduce the risk of job uncertainty, which may even exacerbate the negative effects of job insecurity (Armstrong-Stassen, 1994). Hence, they are expected to feel more strain. Maercker et al.'s recent study (2009) showed that holding traditional values was positively related to mental disorder for Chinese crime victims. Cheng and Chan's meta-analysis study (2008) found that the negative impacts of job insecurity on health outcomes were more severe for elder people. A recent study conducted in a Chinese society (Taiwan) also confirmed that job insecurity was more threatening to older people, in the form of depressing their job satisfaction (Chen & Lu, 2011). Moreover, it has been proven that Chinese older people were found to uphold stronger traditional values (Chen & Lu, 2011; Lu & Yang, 2006). Therefore, we hypothesized employees with more traditional values would be more severely affected by job insecurity in terms of their well-being.

*Hypothesis 3:* Traditionality moderates the negative relationship between job insecurity and well-being. The negative relationship is stronger for employees with high traditionality than those with low traditionality.

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) suggested that both external locus of control and powerlessness might exacerbate the detrimental effects of job insecurity not only on individuals' well-being, but also on their work-related outcomes, such as reduced work efforts and organizational effectiveness. Kao and Lu's (2011) recent meta-analysis provided evidence that inability to control could lead to worse well-being for Chinese employees in the Chinese work stress context. Unfortunately, their study did not include work-related behavioural outcomes. As noted, a general sense of powerlessness is one of the essential characteristic of traditional values, and the external locus of control is also proven to be positively correlated with traditional values (Aldag & Jackson, 1984). These individual beliefs were asserted to influence individuals' threat appraisal of stressful events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, when facing job insecurity, individuals with high traditionality, relative to those with low traditionality, would be more likely to experience more serious threat appraisal. The existing research reveals that perceived threats make individuals withdraw from a situation so as to avoid the source of threats (e.g., Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Fugate, Prussia, & Kinicki, 2012). A recent study also confirmed that the harmful effects of job insecurity on employees'

organizational commitment and turnover intention were more serious for those with high security expectation (Bernhard-Oettel, De Cuyper, Schreurs, & De Witte, 2011). Job security expectation is highly valued in collectivist societies, especially for individuals adhering to traditional values (e.g., Oyserman et al., 2002; Probst & Lawler, 2006; Schwartz, 1992). Therefore, in the context of job insecurity, we expected that individuals with high traditionality would be more likely to withdraw their OCB in order to avoid the job threatening situation. In contrast to fatalistic individuals who are high in traditionality, individuals with lower traditionality tend to hold more modern values (Yang et al., 1989), and might try to reduce their risk of being laid off by increasing their OCB. Therefore, we anticipate,

*Hypothesis 4:* Traditionality moderates the relationships between job insecurity and OCB. The negative impact of job insecurity on OCB is more serious for employees with high traditionality than those with low traditionality.

## METHODS

### Sample

We administered a survey to employees of a joint venture enterprise in Guangdong province of China, which suffered heavily during the current economic crisis. Employees were mostly manufacturing workers and office clerks, and they voluntarily completed the survey during regularly scheduled working hours. Before administering the survey, researcher assistants read the cover page of the questionnaire to the respondents and gave employees verbal and written assurances of confidentiality. Participants were asked to write staff numbers in order to pair their responses to supervisors' evaluations of their OCB performances. Of the 571 employees given questionnaires, 514 (90%) returned completed questionnaires with staff numbers. Supervisors were given 560 questionnaires and returned 493 (88%). The final matching sample size was 388, of which 77.6% were males, 30.4% were married, and the average age was 25.58 years ($SD = 4.56$). Employees' organizational tenure averaged 39 months ($SD = 38$).

The scales in our study were in Chinese. The back-to-back translation procedure was employed for the scales without the Chinese versions (Brislin, 1980).

### Measures

*Job insecurity.* We used five items to measure the global sense of job insecurity, which included both the likelihood as well as the threat of losing the job

(Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010). Three of them—"Your job is insecure", "Your job is likely to change in the future", "Your job is not permanent"—are taken from ASSET (Cartwright & Cooper, 2002). The other two items are "You are worried about the possibility of being fired" and "The thought of getting fired really scares you", which are from the scale developed by Mauno et al. (2001). Responses could range from "never" (1) to "quite often" (6), and were scored such that higher number indicated high level of job insecurity. A Chinese version of this scale had shown good psychometric properties (Feng et al., 2008). In this study, the alpha coefficient was .73.

*Traditionality.* Traditionality was measured by the Chinese Individual Traditionality Inventory developed by Yang et al. (1989). This scale has been used in studies of Chinese individuals in Greater China, including Mainland China (Hui et al., 2004; Xie et al., 2008), Hong Kong (Farh, Leong, & Law, 1998), and Taiwan (Farh et al., 1997), and proven to be reliable and valid. We used six items from a shortened version adapted by Xie et al. (2008) (e.g., "Powerful leaders are more important than a well-established legal system"). Responses could range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (6). The alpha coefficient was .70.

*Well-being.* Well-being was measured by the Psychological Well-Being scale of ASSET, an Organizational Stress Screening Tool (Cartwright & Cooper, 2002), which assessed physical symptoms (10 items) and behavioural symptoms (10 items). The items are symptoms of stress-reduced strains, such as panic attack and constant tiredness. Responses could range from "never" (1) to "quite often" (6). Each item was reversely scored on a 6-point scale, with higher scores denoting better well-being. A Chinese version of this scale had shown good psychometric properties (Siu et al., 2012; Siu, Spector, Cooper, & Lu, 2005). The alpha coefficient of the scale was .92.

*Organizational Citizen Behaviour (OCB).* Supervisor-rated OCB was measured by a 16-item scale (eight items for OCBI; eight items for OCBO) by Lee and Allen (2002). A sample item for OCBI and OCBO are "Helps coworkers who have been absent" and "Attends functions that are not required but that help the organizational image", respectively. Responses could range from "never" (1) to "quite often" (6). Since the correlation between OCBI and OCBO was very high, $r = .85$, $p < .01$, we combined both scales into a global OCB-measure. The alpha coefficients of the OCB scale were .96.

*Control variable.* As suggested by Cheng and Chan (2008), age, gender, marital status, and

organizational tenure were controlled to predict the outcomes of job insecurity in all regression analyses.

## Methods of analysis

The interactive effects of job insecurity and traditionality on OCB and well-being were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Demographic characteristics were controlled, and entered in the first step. Job insecurity and traditionality were entered in the second and third step, respectively. The interaction terms of job insecurity and traditionality were then entered in the fourth step to test the hypothesized moderating effects of traditionality. Following the procedures described by Aiken and West (1991), the predictor variables were centred to avoid multicollinearity.

## RESULTS

Table 1 showed the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables in the present study. To examine the validity of our measurement model, the confirmatory factor analysis was conducted via structural equation modelling, utilizing LISREL 8.80

through maximum likelihood estimation. The analysis was performed on variance-covariance matrices. Item parcels were adopted as indicators in our measurement. For the well-being, the OCB variable combined the items by averaging until there were four indicators for each construct. The measurement errors were not allowed to correlate in each measurement model. The result showed that the fit of the hypothesized four-factor model is accepted, $\chi^2 = 592.90$, $df = 224$, $\chi^2/df = 2.65$, CFI = .96, NFI = .93, RMSEA = .069, which supports the validity of our measures.

Table 2 showed that job insecurity was negatively correlated to well-being, $\beta = -.30$, $p < .001$. Job insecurity was not significantly correlated to OCB, $\beta = -.04$, $p > .05$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was fully supported, and Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Table 2 showed the moderating effects of traditionality on relationships between job insecurity, well-being, and OCB. Specifically, Table 2 (see Model 4) shows that the interactive items were significant for well-being, as well as OCB: well-being, $\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$; OCB, $\beta = -.15$, $p < .01$. To further clarify the moderating effects of traditionality, we examined separate simple slopes depicting the relationships

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics and correlations for independent, dependent, and control variables

| Variables | M | Range | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Job insecurity | 2.71 | 1–6 | 0.80 | (.73) | | | | | | | |
| 2. Traditionality | 3.88 | 1–6 | 0.90 | .03 | (.70) | | | | | | |
| 3. OCB | 4.30 | 1–6 | 0.82 | −.03 | −.08 | (.96) | | | | | |
| 4. Well-being | 4.07 | 1–6 | 0.84 | −.34** | .02 | .03 | (.92) | | | | |
| 5. Age | 25.58 | 18–46 | 4.56 | .01 | .05 | .06 | .06 | — | | | |
| 6. Gender | 0.22 | 0–1 | 0.42 | −.07 | .07 | −.12* | .24** | −.10 | — | | |
| 7. Marital status | 0.70 | 0–1 | 0.46 | −.04 | −.11* | −.01 | −.08 | −.61** | −.02 | — | |
| 8. Organization tenure (in months) | 39.26 | 1–360 | 37.51 | .03 | .08 | .08 | −.09 | .60** | −.21** | −.49** | — |

$N = 388$. OCB, organizational citizen behaviour. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are in parentheses on the diagonal. Gender was coded as 0 for male, 1 for female. Marital status was coded as 0 for married, 1 for single. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

TABLE 2
The results of hierarchical regression analyses

| Variables | Well-being | | | | OCB | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
| Step 1: Control variables | | | | | | | | |
| Age | .08 | .07 | .07 | .08 | .09 | .09 | .09 | .11 |
| Gender | .25*** | .22*** | .22*** | .21*** | −.07 | −.07 | −.07 | −.08 |
| Marital status | −.05 | −.07 | −.07 | −.06 | .09 | .09 | .08 | .10 |
| Organization tenure | −.08 | −.08 | −.08 | −.08 | .02 | .02 | .03 | .03 |
| Step 2: Job insecurity | | −.30*** | −.30*** | −.29*** | | −.04 | −.04 | −.02 |
| Step 3: Traditionality | | | −.03 | .01 | | | −.06 | −.08 |
| Step 4: Job insecurity × Traditionality | | | | −.11* | | | | −.15** |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | .066 | .152 | .150 | .158 | .003 | .002 | .002 | .020 |
| $\Delta R^2$ | | .087*** | .001 | .011* | | .002 | .004 | .021** |

$N = 388$. OCB, organizational citizen behaviour. Coefficients presented in the table are standardized beta-coefficients. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

between job insecurity, well-being, and OCB. Separate plots were drawn for individuals whose scores on the moderator (traditionality) were one standard deviation below and above the mean (Aiken & West, 1991). Furthermore, the significant interactive item means the two simple slopes were significantly different from each other. For employees' well-being, the simple slopes for both groups were negative and significant. The simple slope was greater for the high traditionality group, $b = -.32$, $p < .001$, and smaller for the low traditionality group, $b = -.15$, $p < .05$. Figure 1 shows that traditionality strengthened rather than buffered the relationship between job insecurity and employees' well-being. This confirms that the impact of job insecurity is more serious to employees with high traditionality than those with low traditionality. For the high traditionality group, the simple slope of OCB was significantly negative, $b = -.12$, $p < .05$, whereas for the low traditionality group, the simple slope was positive, but statistically nonsignificant, $b = .09$, $ns$. Especially, when dealing with the threat of job insecurity, employees with high traditionality would engage in less OCB than those with low traditionality (see Figure 2). In conclusion, these results, taken together, provided the support for Hypotheses 3 and 4.
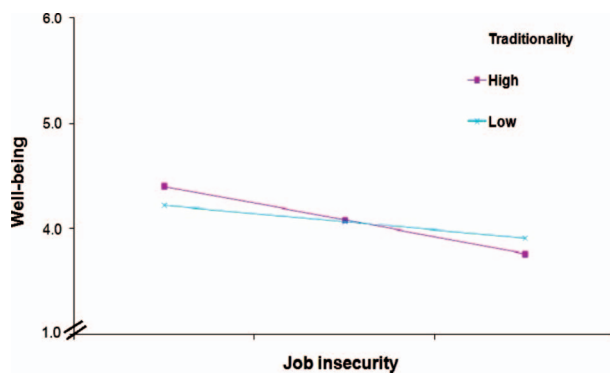


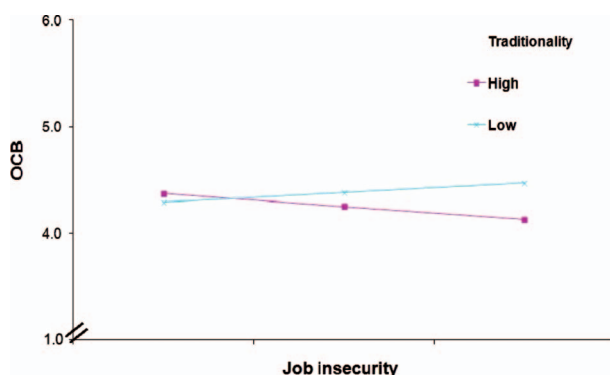**Figure 1.** Interaction of job insecurity and traditionality on well-being.



**Figure 2.** Interaction of job insecurity and traditionality on OCB.

## DISCUSSION

The present study examined job insecurity and its impact on employees' well-being and OCB in the Chinese society undergoing rapid social and cultural changes, and focused on the moderating effects of traditionality. We found that perceived job insecurity is negatively related to employees' well-being, which is consistent with the findings of Sverke et al. (2002). Contrary to our expectations, the negative relationship between job insecurity and employees' OCB is nonsignificant. Recently, other studies found the same results (e.g., Loi et al., 2011; Staufenbiel & König, 2010). Staufenbiel and König (2010) argued that job insecurity might be appraised as a stressor comprising of both hindrance and challenge aspects. Hindrance stressor leads to reduced OCB, whereas challenge stressor leads to improved OCB (Podsakoff et al., 2007; Staufenbiel & König, 2010). As a result, they may cancel each other out, yielding no or only weak effects. Another reason might be that employees do not dare to significantly reduce extrarole behaviours toward their employers or co-workers in order to keep their jobs even under the high pressure of job insecurity due to the current harsh economic environment. This argument was supported in Otto, Hoffmann-Biencourt, and Mohr's study (2011), which found that higher regional unemployment rate could compel employees to get more involved in their jobs, although they were still negatively impacted by job insecurity. Thus, more studies are needed to explore the complex job insecurity–OCB relation in the future.

Consistent with our predictions, we found that traditionality indeed moderated the relationships between job insecurity and employees' well-being, and OCB, which exacerbated rather than buffered the negative impacts of job insecurity on employees. Specifically, our results indicated that job insecurity had a detrimental effect on employees' well-being regardless of the traditionality levels; and the well-being of employees with high traditionality deteriorated even more seriously than their counterparts' (see Table 2, Figure 1). Figure 2 showed that employees with high traditionality tend to withdraw more OCB when facing the high risk of job loss. These results are similar to the studies of Probst and her colleagues (Probst & Lawler, 2006; Probst & Yi, 2003). They found that *guanxi* (relations or harmony, one characteristic of Chinese traditional value), and collectivistic values could strengthen the negative relationship between job insecurity and Chinese employees' well-being, and proactive behaviours, respectively. An anticipation of a reduction or total loss of income usually accompanies perceived job insecurity (Lim & Sng, 2006). Thus, job insecurity might trigger the experiences of injustice among

employees. Employees with high traditionality may tend to treat job insecurity as a breach of distributive justice because loyalty per se is not rewarded.[1] Xie et al.'s (2008) study showed that traditional Chinese were more sensitive to breach of distributive justice, and reacted more negatively.

However, for employees with low traditionality, the impacts of job insecurity on their OCB tend to be positive although the relationship is nonsignificant. It has been proven that individuals with high Chinese traditionality have characteristics similar to those of "power distance" and collectivist tradition (Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007; Spreitzer, Perttula, & Xin, 2005). Individuals with high Chinese traditionality might be willing to accept status difference, and comply with their employers' arrangements (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Similarly, when their expectations about job security are at risk, they tend not to take proactive actions targeted at their organizations and co-workers, or they might behaviourally withdraw from their organizations. However, as we discussed earlier, employees with lower traditional values tend to have more modern values (Yang et al., 1989), and have a higher propensity to seek self-control and personal autonomy (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, they are expected to adopt instrumental means such as performing OCB, in order to keep the job or reduce the risk of job loss. Such helpful and altruistic behaviour could minimize the threat of resource loss in a situation when their jobs are in jeopardy (e.g., Hobfoll, 1989; Kaplan, Bradley, Luchman, & Haynes, 2009). Such an argument might also explain why Wong et al. (2005) got contradictory results in different types of Chinese organizations. They proposed that the contradictory relationship between job insecurity and OCB could be attributed to employees' different motivations. The employees in private joint ventures pay more attention to long-term relational attachments to their organizations, whereas those in SOE would increase their OCB in order to gain employers-offered benefits (i.e., providing secure employment), because they care more about the instrumental/economic exchanges.

In general, individuals with high Chinese traditionality are more conservative, and are more concerned about security and stability. Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) predicted that "conservative individuals were more likely to be averse to loss of desired continuity in a threatened job situation than are their less conservative counterparts" (p. 7). To our knowledge, the present study is the first to provide evidence supporting Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's predictions. The current economic recession might also be one of important factors intensifying

the effects of job insecurity in Chinese society. Also, the lack of social security systems intensifies Chinese people's worry about job insecurity; losing one's job means losing the major source of personal or family income. As Wiesenfeld, Brockner, Petzall, Wolf, and Bailey (2001) suggested that individuals who consider their job to be more important would react more negatively to the threat of job insecurity. In sum, individuals with high traditionality suffer more from both the health and behavioural consequences, which results from the threat of job insecurity compared to their less traditional counterparts.

Our study mainly contributes to the job insecurity literature by exploring the role of traditionality in differentiating employees' reactions to job insecurity during social and cultural transition. The results supported the hypothesis that traditionality, an individual-level cultural value variable, is an important moderator in the relations between job insecurity and employees' outcomes. Therefore, employees with more traditional values were more adversely affected by perceptions of job insecurity, experienced more strains, and performed less OCB than those with low traditional values. Although Chinese traditionality reflects the emphasis on traditional Chinese values, traditionality also captures the extent to which individuals adhere to their traditional cultural values in the world (Schwartz, 1992). Two recent studies from European countries confirmed that traditional values make individuals suffer more from health-related consequences of stressful events, and lead to a deterioration of mental health (Maercker et al., 2009; Müller, Forstmeie, Wagner, & Maercker, 2012). Furthermore, to some extent our results could be applied to the other parts of the world where traditional values are strongly held, and social and cultural changes are simultaneously taking place during the globalization and modernization process, such as other parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. These peoples with more traditional values would suffer more negative effects due to higher degree of alienation (Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991). The results of our study would shed light on how cultural value held by individuals could influence their reactions to the threat of job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010).

With regard to the stress management practices, the current findings suggest that some individuals are more vulnerable to the threat of job insecurity. As traditional values remain deeply rooted in Chinese society, and remain relatively stable during the Chinese industrialization and modernization process (Lu & Yang, 2006; Ralston et al., 1999; Yang, 2003), the individual's level of traditionality is unlikely to change. For this reason, stress management strategies should focus on how to reduce the individual's level of perceived job insecurity, especially for employees

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[1]We thank one of reviewers for the insightful suggestion.

adhering strongly to Chinese traditional values. It is imperative to create a supportive workplace for employees to devote themselves to the job rather than worry about job loss, especially in the current economic recession. Some stress management strategies should be adopted to assist employees to cope with job insecurity, such as employee assistance programmes (EAPs).

## Limitations and future directions

It should be kept in mind that there are several limitations inherent to this study. First, this study was an exploratory study. We admitted that theories generated and tested in one culture could not be simply applied into another culture. Hence, future research needs to examine the cross-cultural generalizability of our findings. Second, the cross-sectional design and measures of self-reported health limited the conclusions of the cause–effect relationships. Although the two-way interaction effects in our study were modest, $\Delta R^2 = .011$, and .021, respectively, they are still meaningful. The median effect size in published articles for moderated regression analyses is .002 (Aguinis, Beaty, Boik, & Pierce, 2005). Furthermore, we measured employees' OCB by their supervisors, which would reduce common method bias to some extent. Longitudinal study design and objective measures of health outcomes, like physiological measures or recorded sick days, could be employed to validate the results in the future. Third, we adopted Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive appraisal theory to develop specific hypotheses, and speculated that individuals with high traditionality are more likely to adopt passive coping. However, measures of coping strategies are not included in our study. Future studies should examine whether individuals with high traditional values suffered more from job insecurity due to choices of different coping strategies. Fourth, studies of mechanisms through which traditional values impact individuals' emotional and behavioural reactions to job insecurity should be advocated, which could lead to the adoption of culture-specific measures, such as emic OCB in China. For example, since individuals with high Chinese traditionality are more concerned about secure and stable relations (Lu et al., 2011; Probst & Lawler, 2006), the detrimental effect of perceived job insecurity might be the threats against the "sense of belonging" to an organization or group, such as "ingroup" status, or organization-based self-esteem. Longitudinal study designs are highly advised to include some of the mediating variables that capture the functions of cultural values (Kitayama, 2002), and explore their functional relations. This would indeed help us better explain phenomena in China, and understand how individual-level cultural values influence individuals' reactions to stressful situations.

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