

# Testing a Moderated Mediation Model of Turnover Intentions With Chinese Employees

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## Abstract

This study explores the role of organizational career growth on employees' organizational identification and turnover intentions in the contemporary career era. We compare the impact of organizational career growth and perceived external prestige of organization on employees' organizational identification and turnover intentions and probe whether perceived alternative job opportunities moderate the relations between perceived external prestige—organizational identification and organizational career growth—organizational identification. Using a sample of 644 Chinese employees, findings indicated perceived external prestige and organizational career growth negatively influenced turnover intentions via organizational identification. Perceived alternative job opportunities buffered the relation between perceived external prestige and organizational identification but not the relation between organizational career growth and organizational identification. Finally, organizational career growth contributed more to organizational identification and turnover intentions than perceived external prestige. Our results suggest future research should consider the role of individual career states in improving employees' organizational identification and retaining them within an organization.

## Keywords

organizational career growth, perceived external prestige, organizational identification, turnover intentions, perceived alternative job opportunities

Employee turnover comes at a considerable cost as organizations invest time and money in recruiting and training employees (De Moura et al., 2009). As such, organizations are interested in reducing employees' turnover intentions to increase employee engagement and job satisfaction and lower the likelihood of leaving (Halbesleben, 2010). To reduce turnover intentions, organizations seek various approaches to improve organizational identification (i.e., the extent to which one integrates organizational identities with self-concept; Ashforth, 2016), such as organizational support (Shen et al., 2014)

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and organizational justice (Blader & Tyler, 2009). Because people are attaching more importance to careers (Karavardar, 2014), the impact of career-related factors (e.g., career satisfaction, career management) has garnered research attention (Foong-Ming, 2008; Guan et al., 2015). Thus, this study focuses on employees' career development needs that are believed to increase organizational identification (Baruch, 2004) and lower employee turnover.

In the unstructured career environment, individuals tend to rely on themselves, instead of the organization, for their career development needs (Hall & Moss, 1998). Careers in today's market are less predictable, which raises challenges for organizations to manage employees' career (Clark, 2013). Some question whether organizations' investment in their employees' career development can pay off (De Vos & Cambré, 2017; De Vos & Dries, 2013), that is, by enhancing employees' organizational identification and reducing turnover intentions. In response to this, we draw on the social identity theory (SIT; Reid & Hogg, 2005) and aim to explore the extent to which employees value organizational career growth (i.e., the degree to which employees' career-based needs are satisfied by the organization; Weng & McElroy, 2012). We focus on the concept because it involves a joint effort of employees and organizations (Weng & McElroy, 2012) and emphasizes one's career development within the context of an organization. Given that career is the practice of the self (Super, 1963), organizational career growth can be viewed as self-enhancement within the organization. As SIT indicates self-enhancement can foster identification (Reid & Hogg, 2005), we argue that organizational career growth can reduce turnover intentions via organizational identification.

Furthermore, we focus on a Chinese sample and compare the impact of perceived external prestige (i.e., employees' beliefs about how outsiders judge the image of their organization; Smidts, Pruyn & Van Riel, 2001) on organizational identification and turnover intentions. Chinese highly value others' judgments and they are dedicated to gaining and protecting the self-image *mianzi* that is constructed by others' evaluations of them (Lin, 2011). People gain positive reputations when others' evaluations show appreciation to their values. For Chinese employees, perceived external prestige that reflects the respect, pride, and dignity associated with an organization is a representative form of *mianzi* and constitutes a significant part of personal image. We conceptualize perceived external prestige as an inter-organizational identity and organizational career growth as an intraorganizational state. According to the SIT literature, both intraorganization and interorganization factors influence organizational identification (Tyler & Blader, 2002). When referring to identification, some people think of themselves in terms of groups, while others think of themselves in terms of others (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). They attach different significance to these two perspectives. Therefore, to explore the importance Chinese employees attach to organizational career growth, the impact of perceived external prestige is an important criterion for comparison.

We also consider the moderating effect of perceived alternative job opportunities (i.e., the probability of finding acceptable job alternatives; Mobley, Homer & Hollingsworth, 1978) on the relations between the individual-level variables and organizational variables. According to SIT (Islam, 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), identification starts with distinguishing cognitively between in-group identities and out-group identities. We argue that employees who perceive more external job opportunities are less clear about the in-group/out-group relation. For them, the differences between the employer and the external organizations are smaller even when the employer has high prestige and can promote career growth.

This study contributes to the extant literature in three ways. First, we respond to questions about the effectiveness of organizational investment on career development and take both interorganizational and intraorganizational perspectives to test the argument that traditional social identity perspectives focusing on intergroup dynamics have been extended to include intragroup dynamics (Tyler & Blader, 2002) in China. Second, research on the predictors of organizational identification is underdeveloped (Ashforth, 2016) and limited studies have considered both perspectives in analyzing its antecedents (e.g., Fuller et al., 2006; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Our study compensates for this and highlights

career-related factors in accordance with contemporary career era trends. Third, previous studies have tested some relations in our study (e.g., perceived external prestige and turnover intentions, organizational identification and turnover intentions), mostly with samples from Western countries with very distinct cultures from China. Noting that national culture can moderate relations between organizational identification and work outcomes (Lee, Park & Koo, 2015), we examine the cross-cultural validity of these hypotheses with a Chinese sample.

### ***Organizational Identification as a Mediator Between Perceived External Prestige and Turnover Intentions***

According to SIT (Reid & Hogg, 2005), self-enhancement is a fundamental motive of social identification that reflects people's need to maintain and improve self-concepts with the belonging group's features. The protection and enhancement of self-concepts foster social identity (Islam, 2014). When perceiving affiliation with a group maintains or improves self-concepts, one is more likely to identify with the group. Hence, organizational identification as a form of identification within an organizational context is also affected by self-enhancement.

Organizational identification, as a connection between self and the organization (De Moura et al., 2009), reflects the extent of perceived overlap between an employee's self-concept and the organization's norms (Van Dick et al., 2004). SIT suggests people identifying with a group integrate more group features with their self-concepts (Turner et al., 1987), and identification determines members' inclination to behave in terms of the group membership (Ellemers, Kortekaas & Ouwerkerk, 1999). Applying identification to the organizational context, employees with high organizational identification tend to be close to the employer and are less likely to leave the employer (De Moura et al., 2009; Van Dick et al., 2004) because of the psychological attachment and the expense of losing an important self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

We argue that perceived external prestige, an interorganization form of self-enhancement, reduces turnover intentions via organizational identification. According to SIT, "people use groups as sources of information about themselves" (Tyler, DeGoey & Simith, 1996, p. 914). A prestigious social group can satisfy one's need to improve identification (Mignonac, Herrbach & Guerrero, 2006; Reid & Hogg, 2005). Therefore, high organizational prestige can meet employees' self-enhancement needs (Tyler & Blader, 2002) to foster organizational identification. For Chinese employees, an organization's status is an important standard for self-worth assessment (Tyler & Blader, 2002) and it influences the construction of one's self-concepts (Hogg & Terry, 2000). High prestige enables employees to "bask in the reflected glory" from the organization (Cialdini et al., 1976) and evaluate themselves positively (Mignonac et al., 2006). These employees tend to believe the organization can enhance personal development and thus may be more willing to integrate organizational features within their self-concepts. The increased overlap between one's self-concept and an organization's identity leads to stronger organizational identification through which employees gain a sense of connection and meaningfulness (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002). We believe that Chinese employees will be proud that outsiders use the organization's identity to evaluate them; this will strengthen the psychological connection between the organization and the employees, which in turn, reduces turnover intentions. The rebuilt self-concepts developed by the integration means that employees rely on the organization for self-enhancement, and leaving the organization may lead to the loss of positive self-concepts (Van Dick et al., 2004).

On the other hand, employees may be reluctant to incorporate organizational features into their self-concepts when they perceive low organizational prestige. A negative organizational image can damage one's self-concept (Mishra et al., 2012), which is against their self-enhancement motive to protect the self-concept. Consequently, employees will seek opportunities to detach from it, gradually becoming

uninvolved both physically and emotionally (Kahn, 1990); such employees are more likely to have strong turnover intentions.

**Hypothesis 1:** Perceived external prestige negatively relates to turnover intentions via organizational identification.

### *Organizational Identification as a Mediator Between Organizational Career Growth and Turnover Intentions*

People attach an increasing importance to career growth within an organization (Karavardar, 2014), and failure to get one's needs met may lead them to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. Organizational career growth is important to retain employees (Weng & McElroy, 2012), and empirical findings have supported its negative relation with turnover intentions (e.g., Karavardar, 2014; Kim et al., 2016).

We propose that organizational career growth, an intraorganization form of self-enhancement, can lower turnover intentions via organizational identification. The concept has four dimensions (i.e., career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed, and remuneration speed; Weng & McElroy, 2012) that cover most experiences one has in an organization. While no research tested the relation of career growth and organizational identification, previous findings support the positive relations between career growth dimensions (e.g., promotion and professional achievement opportunities) and organizational identification (Lange, Boivie & Westphal, 2015; Pratt, 1998). In general, organizational career growth can be viewed as one's positive personal construction or improvement of self-concept with the assistance of the organization; this is closely linked to employees' identity, as career is a reflection of the self and a way to construct one's identity (Super, 1963). Perceiving organizational career growth satisfies employees' career-related demands, which narrows the gap between employees and the organization and increases the integration of employees' self-concepts and the organization and enhancing employees' identification with the employer.

In this regard, leaving the organization is less likely to happen for employees with high organizational career growth considering the potential sacrifice in career growth (Weng & McElroy, 2012). As such, employees will stay in the organization to maintain the already achieved career growth (Nawaz & Pangil, 2016). Organizational career growth is a construction of the psychological contract between the organization and its employees (Karavardar, 2014; Weng & McElroy, 2012). The identification raised from the growth makes employees feel that they share the same destiny with the organization, and they are more likely to think and act in favor of it (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The psychological attachment to the organization can lower employees' turnover intentions (Price, 2001).

**Hypothesis 2:** Organizational career growth negatively relates to turnover intentions via organizational identification.

### *Moderating Effect of Perceived Alternative Job Opportunities*

According to SIT (Islam, 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), identification is based on "the categorization of one's 'in-group' with regard to an 'out-group' and the tendency to view one's own group with a positive bias vis-à-vis the out-group." One's cognitions tend to exaggerate the difference between in-group and out-group identities and create a positive in-group bias for group members. Therefore, in this study, organizational identification occurs because employees realize the uniqueness of an organization to their self-enhancement needs from perceived external prestige/organizational career

growth. People can differentiate the employer from other organizations and consider the employer irreplaceable.

Nevertheless, perceived alternative job opportunities can obscure employees' perceptions to the difference. People perceiving more job opportunities are more able to analyze and compare the costs and benefits between current and alternative jobs (Price, 2001). They are more aware of desirable choices outside the employer through evaluating the perceived external prestige and career growth opportunities of other organizations, which weakens their attention to the value brought by the prestige or career growth in the current organization. High perceptions of alternative jobs lead employees to view themselves as highly marketable and employable elsewhere (Ng & Feldman, 2012), causing a stronger tendency to view the employer as replaceable.

**Hypothesis 3:** Perceived alternative job opportunities moderate (a) the perceived external prestige–organizational identification relation and (b) the organizational career growth–organizational identification relation, such that the positive relation is weaker when employees perceive more alternative job opportunities.

Finally, we argue that employees value organizational career growth more than perceived external prestige. Despite the independence of individuals in careers, the organization is still an important platform to develop careers (Khan, Salleh & Hemdi, 2016). Organizational career states are essential for identification (Baruch, 2004) and retention, especially with the adjustment of organizational career management from being linear and rigid to supportive and flexible (Baruch, 2006). Although organizational prestige is important for Chinese employees to gain *mianzi*, personal career development is a growing concern. Organizational career growth can provide employees with sustainable resources for development, while organizational prestige is more of a temporary status symbol that brings additive rather than primary benefits.

**Hypothesis 4:** Compared with perceived external prestige, organizational career growth contributes more to employees' organizational identification and turnover intentions.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedures*

We considered the diversity of participants and collected data in three waves to reduce common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Participants held various occupations (e.g., management, technology, operation, and professor) and were drawn from seven coastal provinces and five inland provinces because economic and social environments can influence the labor market and people's attitudes to organization and career. We sent the questionnaires through a social media platform commonly used in China, WeChat. At Time 1 (T1), 856 participants responded to a survey to assess perceived external prestige, organizational career growth, perceived alternative job opportunities, and control variables. A total of 723 of the participants completed a measure of organizational identification 1 month later (T2) and turnover intentions 1 month after that (T3). Participants created an identification code to match responses. We received valid responses from 644 participants (a response rate of 75.2%). Most (56.4%) were under 30 years old, 21.9% were between 31 and 50, and 21.9% were above 50 ( $M = 32.1$ , standard deviation [ $SD$ ] = 8.9). Men comprised 53.5% of the sample; 48.6% had more than 3 years of working experience in the current organization and most (60.6%) held a bachelor's degree. Slightly more than half (51.2%) worked in organizations located in the coastal provinces.

## Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all items used a Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (*disagree strongly*) and 5 (*agree strongly*).

**Perceived external prestige (T1).** We used an 8-item scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and excluded the item “it is considered prestigious in the religious community to be an alumnus of (name of school)” considering a small number of religious believers in China. Sample items included “People in my community think highly of my organization” and “My organization is considered one of the best.” All items used the organization in which respondents worked as the referent. Validity evidence was provided when organizational prestige scores were significantly related in the expected directions with measures of interorganizational competition, intraorganizational competition, and tenure (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Coefficient  $\alpha$  ranged from .76 to .87 in prior studies (Mignonac et al., 2006; Mishra et al., 2012; Smidts et al., 2001) and was .89 in this study.

**Organizational career growth (T1).** Organizational career growth was assessed with a 15-item scale (Weng & McElroy, 2012). Sample items included, “My present job moves me closer to my career goals,” “My present job encourages me to continuously gain new job-related skills,” “My promotion speed in my present organization is fast,” and “My salary is growing quickly in my present organization.” Dimensions of organizational career growth related positively to occupational commitment and negatively to turnover intentions and not related to gender or age (Weng & McElroy, 2012). Prior studies found coefficient  $\alpha$  from .85 to .95 (Kim et al., 2016; Weng & McElroy, 2012). In this study, the coefficient  $\alpha$  was .95.

**Perceived alternative job opportunities (T1).** We used a 14-item employment opportunity index (Griffeth et al., 2005). A series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported a five-dimensional measure of perceived alternative job opportunities (i.e., ease of movement, desirability of movement, networking, crystallization of alternatives, and mobility) and provided support for construct and criterion-related validity (Griffeth et al., 2005). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ s for the five dimensions ranged from .70 to .85 (Griffeth et al., 2005). Sample items were “I have contacts in other companies who might help me line up a new job” and “My spouse’s career makes it very difficult for me to leave.” The coefficient  $\alpha$  was .97 for this sample.

**Organizational identification (T2).** We used a 6-item scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) to assess organizational identification. Sample items included “I am very interested in what others think about my current organization” and “This organization’s successes are my successes.” Previous research has reported good validity (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Scale scores related positively to organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). The coefficient  $\alpha$  ranged from .73 to .91 (Chen, Chen & Sheldon, 2016; Fuller et al., 2006; Mishra et al., 2012) in prior studies, and it was .91 for this study.

**Turnover intentions (T3).** We used a 2-item scale (Hom & Griffeth, 1991) to measure turnover intentions. Items were “I intend to quit my present job” and “I intend to leave this organization during the next 12 months.” Scale scores related negatively to job satisfaction and retention, and positively to job search, search intentions, and comparison of alternatives, providing validity evidence (Hom & Griffeth, 1991). Coefficient  $\alpha$  was .95 in a prior study (Ferguson et al., 2016) and .77 for this sample.

**Control variables (T1).** We considered sociodemographic variables (i.e., gender, age, education, tenure, and employment region; Wan-Huggins, Riordan & Griffeth, 1998) and used dummy variables to control for gender (*male* = 1, *female* = 0) and region (1 = *coastal provinces*, 0 = *inland provinces*). We

also controlled for the effects of perceived organizational support considering its connection to organizational identification and turnover intention (Kraimer, Seibert & Wayne, 2011; Shen et al., 2014). Organizational support was assessed with a 6-item scale (Kraimer et al., 2011). Sample items were “My organization provides opportunities for employees to develop their specialized functional skills” and “My organization has career development programs that help employees develop their managerial skills.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was .89 in a prior study (Kraimer et al., 2011) and .93 for the current sample.

## Results

### *Descriptive Analysis and Correlations*

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among the study’s variables. Organizational identification relates positively to perceived external prestige ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ) and organizational career growth ( $r = .61, p < .01$ ) and negatively to perceived alternative job opportunities ( $r = -.87, p < .01$ ) and turnover intentions ( $r = -.46, p < .01$ ). Turnover intentions relate negatively to perceived external prestige ( $r = -.24, p < .01$ ) and organizational career growth ( $r = -.32, p < .01$ ), and positively to perceived alternative job opportunities ( $r = .43, p < .01$ ).

### *Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*

To examine the distinctiveness of the study’s variables, we conducted a CFA to compare the fit of hypothesized model and assessed the fit with the indexes: comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Good fit normally has CFI and TLI values higher than .95 and RMSEA values lower than .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The fit indexes (see Table 2) indicate the proposed five-factor model (i.e., perceived external prestige, organizational career growth, perceived alternative job opportunities, organizational identification, and turnover intentions) was a better fit ( $\chi^2 = 1,642.65, df = 885, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .04$ ) than any of the nested models.

### *Hypothesis Testing*

We tested the model with SPSS Version 23.0 and Mplus Version 7.0 (see Table 3 and Figure 1). Perceived external prestige ( $\beta = .07, p < .05$ ), organizational career growth ( $\beta = .42, p < .001$ ), and perceived alternative job opportunities ( $\beta = -.57, p < .001$ ) had significant direct effects on organizational identification. However, only one interaction term was significant (Perceived External Prestige  $\times$  Perceived Alternative Job Opportunities:  $\beta = -.31, p < .001$ ; Organizational Career Growth  $\times$  Perceived Alternative Job Opportunities:  $\beta = .004, p > .05$ ), which supported Hypothesis 3a. We plotted the interaction effect using Aiken and West’s (1991) procedure. The simple slope analysis suggested the positive perceived external prestige–organizational identification relation is stronger when perceived alternative job opportunities is low and weaker when the perception is high (see Figure 2).

We then examined the impact of perceived external prestige/organizational career growth on turnover intentions via organizational identification. Perceived external prestige ( $\beta = -.09, p < .05$ ), organizational career growth ( $\beta = -.17, p < .001$ ), and organizational identification ( $\beta = -.23, p < .001$ ) related negatively to turnover intentions. We used bootstrapping ( $N = 2,000$ ) to further examine Hypotheses 1 and 2, and they were supported with significant indirect effects between perceived external prestige ( $\beta = -.02, p < .05$ ; confidence interval 98% CI  $[-.03, -.01]$ ), organizational career growth ( $\beta = -.10, p < .001$ ; 98% CI  $[-.14, -.06]$ ), and turnover intentions. We also examined the moderated mediation model (i.e. perceived alternative job opportunities moderate the mediation model where perceived external prestige influences turnover intentions via organizational identification).



**Table 2.** Fit Indexes of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Models	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Five factors <sup>a</sup>	1,642.65	885	.97	.96	.04
Four factors <sup>b</sup>	3,935.87	896	.86	.85	.07
Three factors <sup>c</sup>	5,631.97	899	.78	.77	.09
Two factors <sup>d</sup>	6,069.93	901	.76	.75	.09
One factor	6,310.74	902	.75	.74	.10

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

<sup>a</sup>Five-factor model: perceived external prestige, organizational career growth, perceived alternative job opportunities, organizational identification, and turnover intentions. <sup>b</sup>Four-factor model: perceived external prestige and organizational career growth combined, perceived alternative job opportunities, organizational identification, and turnover intentions not combined. <sup>c</sup>Three-factor model: perceived external prestige, organizational career growth and perceived alternative job opportunities combined, and organizational identification and turnover intentions not combined. <sup>d</sup>Two-factor model: perceived external prestige, organizational career growth, and perceived alternative job opportunities combined and organizational identification combined.

Linking the latent interaction term to both the mediator and outcome variables, perceived external prestige exhibited an indirect effect on turnover intentions via organizational identification in conditions of both low ( $\beta = -.18, p < .01$ ; 98% CI  $[-.27, -.10]$ ) and high perceived alternative job opportunities ( $\beta = -.13, p < .01$ ; 98% CI  $[-.20, -.05]$ ), supporting the moderated mediation model.

### Dominance Analysis

To assess Hypothesis 4, we examined the relative importance of perceived external prestige and organizational career growth. Relative importance is the contribution a variable makes to the prediction of a criterion variable by itself and in combination with other predictor variables (Johnson & LeBreton, 2004). The weights are the proportionate contribution of each variable to *R* that considers its direct, partial, and total effects. Following the analytical approach (Johnson & LeBreton, 2004), we found organizational career growth was more important in explaining variance to both organizational identification (84.17%) and turnover intentions (68.25%) than perceived external prestige (see Table 4).

### Discussion

Taking both interorganization and intraorganization perspectives, this study responds to the questions about the necessity of organizational investment in employees' careers, and findings suggest that organizational career growth is highly valued by Chinese employees. Consistent with prior findings (e.g., Mishra, 2013), we found that perceived external prestige influenced turnover intention via organizational identification with a sample of Chinese employees. These findings indicate that high prestige enhances the link between Chinese employees and organizations, reflecting the significance of *mianzi* in building and enhancing personal relationships (Buckley, Clegg & Tan, 2006). In addition, organizational identification mediated the negative relation between career growth and turnover intention, which was partially supported in prior studies (e.g., Karavardar, 2014; Kim et al., 2016; Weng & McElroy, 2012). The positive relation between career growth and organizational identification partially reflects that career growth can raise psychological attachment, which is emphasized by prior studies (e.g., the mediating role of occupational affective commitment; Weng & McElroy, 2012). More importantly, this finding shows that career growth encourages employees to integrate organizational identities into personal identities, demonstrating the effectiveness of organizational career management.

**Table 3.** Moderated Mediation Statistics.

Predictor Variable	$\beta$	B	SE	F	R <sup>2</sup>	98% Boot CI
Outcome: Organizational identification						
Step 1				76.301	.418	
Gender	.018	.197	.330			
Age	.157***	.860***	.172			
Education	.071*	.574*	.254			
Tenure	.111**	.572**	.177			
Region	.064*	.692*	.325			
POS	.053***	.463***	.032			
Step 2				108.849	.578	
Gender	-.017	-.183	.282			
Age	.113***	.620***	.160			
Education	.097***	.776**	.225			
Tenure	.082**	.423**	.150			
Region	.036	.393	.282			
POS	.376***	.327***	.032			
PEP	.071*	.066*	.027			
OCG	.419***	.185***	.014			
Step 3				251.110	.814	
Gender	-.019	-.210	.188			
Age	.056**	.306**	.109			
Education	.061**	.488**	.143			
Tenure	.053*	.274*	.113			
Region	.010	.106	.182			
POS	.175***	.152***	.024			
PEP	.248***	.229***	.040			
OCG	-.131*	-.058*	.022			
PAJO	-.571***	-.196***	.031			
PEP × PAJO	-.307***	-.007***	.002			
OCG × PAJO	.004	.001	.001			
Outcome: Turnover intentions						
Step 1				30.107	.221	
Gender	.048	.197	.145			
Age	-.161***	-.333***	.086			
Education	-.075*	-.226*	.103			
Tenure	-.048	-.093	.080			
Region	.042	.173	.144			
POS	-.372***	-.122***	.013			
Step 2				27.278	.256	
Gender	.061	.250	.142			
Age	-.139**	-.287**	.084			
Education	-.088**	-.267*	.104			
Tenure	-.036	-.070	.078			
Region	.055	.223	.141			
POS	-.293***	-.096***	.013			
PEP	-.087*	-.030*	.014			
OCG	-.168***	-.028***	.007			
Step 3				27.408	.277	
Gender	.057	.234	.140			
Age	-.114**	-.234**	.084			
Education	-.066*	-.201*	.101			

(continued)

**Table 3.** (continued)

Predictor Variable	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	98% Boot CI
Tenure	-.018	-.034	.079			
Region	.063	.257	.139			
POS	-.208***	-.068***	.015			
PEP	-.070	-.025	.014			
OCG	-.073	-.012	.007			
Organizational identification	-.227***	-.085***	.021			
Indirect effect of PEP	-.016**	-.006***	.003			[-.031, -.005]
Indirect effect of OCG	-.095*	-.016***	.004			[-.137, -.055]
Conditional indirect effect analysis						
For PEP						
High PAJO	-.126**		.041			[-.202, -.046]
Low PAJO	-.183**		.053			[-.270, -.095]
Difference	.057**		.047			[.031, .094]
For OCG						
High PAJO	-.055		.054			[-.149, .031]
Low PAJO	-.054		.057			[-.150, .038]
Difference	-.001		.009			[-.016, .014]

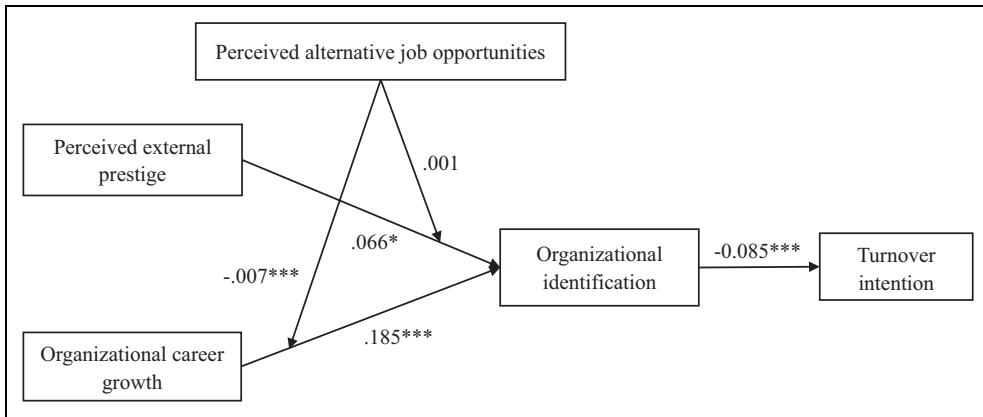
Note. *N* = 644. POS = perceived organizational support; PEP = perceived external prestige; OCG = organizational career growth; PAJO = perceived alternative job opportunities; bootstrap sample size = 2,000;  $\beta$  = standardized estimate; *B* = unstandardized estimate; *SE* = standardized error; CI = confidence interval.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

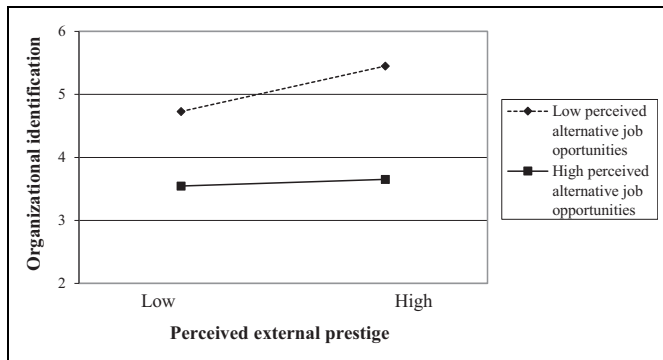
Similar to previous findings (Ing-San & Jyh-Huei, 2006; Thatcher, Stepnia & Boyle, 2003), we found that perceived alternative job opportunities were related positively to turnover intentions and negatively to organizational identification with our sample of Chinese employees. We found partial support for Hypothesis 3, as perceived job opportunities weakened the relation between perceived external prestige and organizational identification, but it did not moderate the relation between career growth and organizational identification. This may be because career growth requires an accumulation process and relies more on personal efforts. It is difficult for outsiders to judge which organizations provide desirable resources for personal development. The results also indicated career growth contributes more to the variance of organizational identification and turnover intention than perceived external prestige, providing support for Hypothesis 4. With our sample of Chinese employees, career growth has a more profound impact on organizational identification and turnover intentions than perceived external prestige.

### *Practical Implications*

This study has practical implications for career counseling and organizations. Career growth and organizational prestige are difficult to come by at the same. For example, Chinese employees working in state-owned enterprises can gain respect from outsiders but may face limited development within a company. Chinese employees may have to face these trade-offs in the job search and career decision-making. Career counselors can guide people to know themselves and organizations better and to balance the relative importance between organizational prestige and career growth opportunities. Counselors can provide career assessments for individuals to understand what they value more and help them investigate how alternative jobs can meet personal expectations. If individuals are vague about personal expectations, career counselors can focus on personal career needs. In this



**Figure 1.** Model with unstandardized parameter estimates of path coefficients.  $N = 644$ .  $*p < .05$ .  $**p < .01$ .  $***p < .001$ .



**Figure 2.** Moderating effect of perceived alternative job opportunities on the perceived external prestige–organizational identification relation.

**Table 4.** Relative Importance of Perceived External Prestige and Organizational Career Growth to Organizational Identification and Turnover Intentions Separately.

Predictors	Organizational Identification			Turnover Intentions		
	$R^2$	Additional Contribution of		$R^2$	Additional Contribution of	
		PEP	OCG		PEP	OCG
None		0.101	0.373		0.056	0.102
PEP	.101		0.297	.056		0.070
OCG	.373	0.025		.102	0.024	
PEP, OCG	.398			.126		
General dominance weights		0.063	0.335		0.040	0.086
Rescaled weights		15.829	84.171		31.746	68.254

Note. PEP = perceived external prestige; OCG = organizational career growth.

way, individuals are more likely to gain continuous personal development without frequent transitions between jobs.

For organizations, high prestige is not enough to retain employees, and career growth plays an important role in employee retention. Organizations should pay more attention to employees' personal career needs while managing their careers. They should have a thorough and timely assessment of employees' expectations and provide targeted support and opportunities to meet employees' needs (Sluss, Klimchak & Holmes, 2008). In this way, employees may be more willing to remain in an organization if they obtain personal growth within the company.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Some limitation of the study should be noted. First, we measured the relations among variables at three time points but did not measure the effects of the same variables across time. This prevents us from understanding causal relation among variables in the model. Given that organizational identification waxes and wanes in the long-term (Zhu, Tatachari & Chattopadhyay, 2017), a longitudinal, dynamic perspective should be taken in the future. Second, we considered Chinese characteristics while analyzing the impact of career growth, but we only emphasize perceived external prestige that is closely connected with *mianzi*. To further explore the psychology of Chinese employees' turnover intentions, the impact of other Chinese cultural characteristics (e.g., *guanxi*, *renqing*, and *Zhong Yong*; Bond, 1996; Lin, 2011) can be explored in the future studies. Third, we focus on the mechanisms through which identification operates, in relation to perceived external prestige, organizational career growth, and turnover intentions. We only view organizational identification as a mediator, but it may also act as a moderator. For example, our study found identification strengthened the negative perceived external prestige–turnover intentions relation. Identification may happen with other dimensions (e.g., supervisor, work, and department) in the organization (Johnson et al., 2006), which also explains significant variance in work outcomes (Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2000). Therefore, future research should pay attentions to other dimensions of identification mechanism.

To conclude, organizations need to invest in the career development of their workforce to retain employees in the contemporary career era. Even for Chinese employees who highly value organizational prestige, organizational career growth is still effective in raising organizational identification and reducing turnover intentions. Although both career growth and perceived external prestige are related positively to organizational identification and negatively to turnover intentions, the former contributes more to organizational identification and turnover intentions than the latter, and perceived alternative job opportunities only buffer the perceived external prestige–organizational identification relation.

### **Authors' Note**

Linna Zhu plans to be out of town to study in the National University of Singapore from January 2020 to July 2020.

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