

# Protestant Work Ethic, Confucian Values, and Work-Related Attitudes in Singapore

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## Abstract

The current article examined the extent to which Western Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) and Eastern Confucian values would influence employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment in an East Asian culture. Based on survey data from 151 employees in Singapore, the study showed that these two values have distinct relationships with job-related attitudes. The PWE had significant relationships with affective, continuance, and normative organizational commitment, whereas the Confucian value dimensions of diligence and harmony were significantly related to job satisfaction and affective/normative commitment, respectively. Additional dominance analysis revealed that Confucian harmony was more useful in predicting affective commitment, whereas PWE was more useful in predicting normative commitment. The cultural validity of the PWE and the cultural specificity of the Confucian values are discussed along with practical implications of the research findings.

## Keywords

values, work ethic, Confucian values, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job attitudes, Singapore

## Introduction

Values are enduring beliefs or conceptions of preferred end state of existence or modes of behavior that guide selection of behavior and evaluation of events (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Originating from the Western culture, the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) was first proposed by Weber (1905) as a cultural value that contributed to the development of capitalism. The PWE has garnered considerable attention for its influence on employee's attitudes and behavior (see Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005 for a meta-analytic review), with decades of research in the West demonstrating

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the PWE's influence on important work outcomes such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction (e.g., Blood, 1969; Kidron, 1978). Yet a paucity of cross-cultural studies exists on the matter, particularly in East Asia. It remains unclear whether findings on the PWE are generalizable to an East Asian cultural context.

Parallel to Protestantism in the West, Confucianism has been hypothesized to provide the ideological foundation that promotes economic development in Asia (Tai, 1989). Although the influence of Confucianism has been studied at the national and societal level, the manner in which Confucian values relate to individual job attitudes is yet to be adequately addressed. In this study, we juxtapose the PWE and Confucianism within an East Asian cultural context—Singapore—to examine the extent to which they influence organizational commitment and job satisfaction, two important variables in management and organizational behavior (Tett & Meyer, 1993). In particular, we follow Leong and Brown's (1995) recommendation to integrate the cultural validity and cultural specificity approaches by (a) examining the cultural validity of the PWE on job satisfaction and organizational commitment in a Confucian Asian culture; (b) investigating the cultural specificity of Confucian values on job satisfaction and organizational commitment; and (c) exploring the relative importance of Confucian values and the PWE in predicting job satisfaction and organizational commitment. We believe this etic-emic approach to be profitable in three respects. First, a cross-cultural examination of the PWE is particularly important in determining the extent to which PWE is a universal value, rather than a solely Western one, as it relates to human motivation to work. Second, we examine the influence of Confucian values on work outcomes at the individual level of analysis, which, to date, has been relatively unexplored. Third, by combining these two approaches, we can develop a fine-grained picture of both the universal and the culture-specific aspects of values that influence work outcomes in Confucian Asian cultures.

We will first review the literature on both PWE and Confucian value dimensions and set forth hypotheses as they relate to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. A survey study was conducted in Singapore to test the hypothesized relationships at the individual level of analysis. The implications of using both PWE and Confucian values in management practice and organizational behavior research are discussed.

### *Protestant Work Ethic*

*Values and the Nature of PWE.* Protestant Work Ethic was first proposed by Weber (1905) to explain the fact that people pursue wealth and material gain for its own sake rather than out of necessity. Weber considered PWE as a factor that contributed to the rise of capitalism, because it provided a moral justification for the accumulation of wealth. The PWE construct, however, is not associated with religious affiliation (Furnham & Reilly, 1991); rather, it reflects individuals' work values and represents the degree to which individuals hold the belief that work is intrinsically rewarding and not just a means to attaining external rewards (Furnham, 1984).

Based on a review of studies, Morrow (1983) concluded that PWE is a function of primarily personality and secondarily culture and socialization. Other scholars generally agree on the stable nature of PWE, conceptualizing it as an individual difference variable (e.g., Furnham, 1989; Mirels & Garrett, 1971). PWE is related to, but distinct from, several stable traits, such as internal locus of control, postponement of gratifications, and need for achievement (Furnham, 1987, 1989).

*PWE, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment.* Job satisfaction is the level of positive affect an employee has toward his or her job or job situation (Spector, 1997). Since individuals who endorse PWE obtain intrinsic pleasure from work, researchers have theorized that they derive satisfaction from all jobs (Gorgievski-Duijvesteijn, Steensma, & te Brake, 1998). Indeed, in a study of fish-processing companies in the Netherlands, Gorgievski-Duijvesteijn et al. (1998) found that PWE is positively

related to job satisfaction even when controlling for job characteristics, nationality, and age. Similarly, Blood (1969) found positive relationships between PWE and both overall job satisfaction and satisfaction with work among a sample of U.S. airmen. These results support the notion that individuals' perceptions of work as intrinsically satisfying are related to their evaluation of their particular jobs.

Organizational commitment is conceptualized as consisting of three components: *affective commitment* reflects the extent to which the individual feels loyal to the organization and identifies with it; *continuance commitment* denotes the attachment based on perceived costs associated with leaving; and *normative commitment* represents a feeling of moral obligation to remain in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). To examine Werkmeister's (1967) proposition that commitment to the organization is a manifestation of an individual's value orientation, Kidron (1978) surveyed three samples of employees in the United States and found that PWE was positively associated with affective commitment across the samples. Randall and Cote (1991) also found that PWE correlated positively with a general measure of organizational commitment based on a survey of university employees.

The associations between the PWE and the job attitudes of organizational commitment and job satisfaction have been supported by meta-analytic findings. In a recent meta-analytic study of commitment constructs, Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran (2005) reported that the relationships between PWE and all three components of organizational commitment were all significantly positive. They also found a positive correlation between PWE and job satisfaction. The studies that served as input for the meta-analytic relationships, however, were not conducted in Asia, and thus the extent to which these meta-analytic findings can generalize to Eastern cultures remains unclear.

Cross-cultural studies on PWE have generally shown support to the applicability of PWE in non-Western countries, including those in Eastern Asia. For example, Ma (1986) surveyed 700 college students in Taiwan and concluded that PWE represents a general work orientation that is applicable to various groups. Tang (1993) explored the factor structure of responses to PWE measure by 115 medical school students in Taiwan and identified factors similar to those found in Furnham (1990) based on native English speakers. The most direct evidence linking PWE to job satisfaction and organizational commitment in an East Asian context was reported by Williams and Sandler (1995). Based on a combined sample of the U.S. and Singaporean managers ( $N_s = 20$  and 31, respectively), the authors found that PWE was related to organizational commitment ( $r = .31$ ) and, to a lesser extent, job satisfaction ( $r = .23$ , not significant, *ns*). The lack of significant finding for job satisfaction could be due to unreliability of the PWE measure in the study (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .48). In addition, the authors found that Confucian values were related to job satisfaction ( $r = .43$ ) but not to organizational commitment ( $r = .20$ , *ns*).

There are several major methodological problems with the Williams and Sandler (1995) study which the current study sought to correct in examining the relative contribution of PWE and Confucian values to work outcomes. First, from a statistical point of view, the combined analysis across two cultures can be problematic, as it ignored the potential nonindependence of observations within culture: Individual observations were nested within two different cultures, so the combined analysis across two cultures risked confounding between-culture and within-culture effects (see Bliese & Hanges, 2004). Second, the sample size for the study was extremely small (20 U.S. participants and 31 Singaporean participants), which restricts statistical power and generalizability. Third, the low Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of their PWE measure calls into question the reliability of their measure. Given these problems, the findings by Williams and Sandler (1995), although informative, did not adequately illuminate the cultural validity of PWE in the East Asian context.

Both the conceptualization of PWE as stable individual difference and the evidence regarding the cross-cultural findings on PWE suggest that the relationships between PWE and the job attitudes of satisfaction and organizational commitment will be expected in the East Asian context. Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 pertain to the examination of the cultural validity of PWE on job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

*Hypothesis 1:* Endorsement of PWE will be positively related to job satisfaction in an East Asian cultural context.

*Hypothesis 2:* Endorsement of PWE will be positively related to (a) affective commitment; (b) continuance commitment; and (c) normative commitment in an East Asian cultural context.

## Confucian Values

Originating in China, Confucian philosophy provides a set of practical ethics intended to guide daily life (Tang, 1991) and has exerted great influence on East Asian cultures such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore (Yum, 1988). Indeed, Confucian values and tradition have been observed as one of the strongest cultural influence in the region (Oh, 1991) and have been posited to have an influence on Asian management systems (Chen, 2004). Although various value clusters have been proposed to capture Confucian values (e.g., Matthews, 2000; Zhang & Harwood, 2002), specific Confucian value dimensions have not been linked to job satisfaction and organizational commitment in a Confucian Asian culture (c.f., Williams & Sandler, 1995). We highlight two central principles of Confucian teaching: (a) personal achievement through hard work, skill acquisition and education, and perseverance and (b) the submission of individuality to maintain harmonious relationships in all social organizations (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). In the following sections, we discuss how values associated with the first principle, labeled hereafter as *diligence*, are expected to relate to job satisfaction, and how the values associated with the second principle, labeled as *harmony*, can relate to different dimensions of organizational commitment.

*Diligence and Job Satisfaction.* A number of writers have noted the emphasis placed on hard work in Chinese culture (e.g., Smith, 1894; Ward, 1972). Harrell (1985) observed that hard work, or diligence, has almost always been praised as an important virtue in Chinese cultures. He suggested that individuals in the same Chinese society have differential levels of diligence due to different socialization experiences and perceived material incentives. Also contributing to differential diligence, according to Harrell (1985), is an entrepreneurial ethic that calls for investment of one's resources for long-term material well-being or security. Additional support comes from Coates (1987) and Kim and Park (2003) who observed that Confucian work ethic influenced the values of hard work and drive to accumulate wealth in Japan and South Korea. Although diligence could be argued as a work value variable, we note that the Confucian diligence is a more encompassing construct that goes beyond the work domain and permeates other life domains such as learning, interpersonal relationships, and societal obligations. The emphasis on diligence can be traced back to Confucius's teaching on learning, where students are expected to exert the best effort to learn, and diligent practice is deemed instrumental to obtaining success (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Socialization about the importance of diligence can begin years before an individual starts his or her first job. Therefore, Confucian diligence may be more general with broader implications than the more specific work values.

Instilled with a general inclination to better one's standing through continued hard work and persistent effort, individuals who endorse Confucian diligent values are more likely to accept taxing and demanding work, even when the work is not objectively enjoyable. Because determination and perseverance is a central value of their Confucian cultural identity, such willingness to accept hard work can lead to higher satisfaction from the perspective of value congruence.

*Hypothesis 3:* Endorsement of Confucian diligent values will be positively related to job satisfaction in a Confucian Asian cultural context.

*Harmony and Organizational Commitment.* An integral component of Confucius's teaching is concerned with proper human interrelations as the basis of society that emphasizes courtesy, magnanimity, good faith, and kindness (De Bary, Chan, & Watson, 1960; Yum, 1988). Confucianism underlines interpersonal obligation and relationship and aims to maintain social order and harmony through its value system (Chen, 1991). One is expected to subjugate one's impulses to social propriety and to achieve harmonious relationships with others, especially family members (Ho, Peng, Cheng, & Chan, 2001). The values of interpersonal harmony extend from family to the social group, prescribing avoidance of antagonism and confrontation within the group and maintenance of compromises (Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991). The emphasis on harmony may even lead to more congenial, relaxed, and friendly relationship among fellow employees (Wah, 2001). Likewise, due to their concerns about interpersonal relationships, Chinese managers tend to focus more on people or relationships than on performance (Lockett, 1988).

The relationships between Confucian harmony and the three components of organizational commitment can be discussed on three aspects. First, an individual who values harmony may be more likely to create and maintain positive relationships with others at work and may subsequently view the organization as an important social group he or she belongs to. Second, the organization may even be seen as a source of support and resources besides income and belonging; it may be more favorable to stay in an organization than to leave because leaving requires the forfeiture of existing relationships and the need to create new ones. Powell and Meyer (2004) showed how social costs can be associated with leaving an organization and thus serves as an antecedent to continuance commitment. In a Confucian society, this effect is likely to be magnified due to the emphasis on interpersonal relationships. Finally, the belief in harmony in social life requires individuals to defer to authority and adhere to rules. For example, subordinates in Confucian societies tend to accommodate to the superior's wishes to avoid confrontation (Kirkbride et al., 1991). This emphasis on knowing one's place in the social hierarchy can further translate into a perceived moral obligation to stay in the organization. Thus:

*Hypothesis 4:* Endorsement of Confucian harmony values will be positively related to (a) affective commitment; (b) continuance commitment; and (c) normative commitment in a Confucian Asian cultural context.

The four hypotheses set forth previously represent the two dimensions in cross-cultural research. Specifically, *Hypotheses 1–2* and *3–4* pertain to, respectively, the cultural validity of PWE and cultural specificity of Confucian values in Singapore. Taken together, one may wonder whether the broader, local Confucian values or the more specific, universal work values of PWE will be more closely associated with job attitudes. On the one hand, PWE may be expected to be more closely associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment because PWE has a narrower focus on work, whereas Confucian values are more general and broader in scope (c.f., Ashton, 1998). On the other hand, according to *cultural relativism*, individual beliefs and needs are shaped and bounded by particular cultural contexts and values (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992), and thus Confucian values may exert a stronger influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment than PWE in the particular context. Therefore, rather than proposing specific hypotheses, we explore the relative importance of PWE and Confucian values in predicting job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

## Method

### *Cultural Context: Singapore*

Singapore is in juxtaposition between the East and the West, being exposed to both Eastern and Western cultural influences. It is a multiethnic society, with 75% Chinese, 14% Malays, and 9%

Indians (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2009). Confucian values are socialized as part of the moral and social ethos in Singapore due to the large number of Chinese people in the society, traditional communal activities, and the government's promotion (Kuah, 1990). Researchers have observed strong presence of traditional Chinese values in the present day Singapore society (Cheung, Cheung, Howard, & Lim, 2006). Therefore, the study of Confucian values in Singapore is meaningful and relevant.

### Participants

The surveys were distributed to 200 employees from an insurance company in Singapore. After being informed that the survey was used for research purposes only and being insured of confidentiality, the employees filled out the self-report questionnaire on a voluntary basis. A total of 151 useable surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 76%. Of the respondents, 91% identified themselves as Chinese, followed by 5% Malays. Of the respondents, 75% were female. Of the respondents, 64% were between the age of 22 and 31, and 28% were between the age of 32 and 41. The respondents' positions varied from administrative and assistant (65%) and professional (19%) to clerical (8%) and sales (5%).

### Measures

The following measures were included in the questionnaire. All measures were in English. At the end of the survey, the participants also reported demographic information, including gender, age, race, job position, organizational tenure, and income level.

*Protestant work ethic* was assessed using Mirels and Garrett's (1971) 19-item scale, with each item rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The composite scale is the most frequently used PWE scale in the literature (Miller, Woehr, & Hudspeth, 2002) and continues to be employed in research studies (e.g., Li et al., 2012; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010; Rode, Judge, & Sun, 2012) to assess the PWE construct to date. A sample item is, "People who fail at a job have usually not tried hard enough (*reverse coded*)." Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the scale was .74.

*Confucian diligence and harmony* were operationalized using the Industry scale (5 items) and Civic-Harmony scale (9 items) from the Singaporean Chinese Value survey (Chang, Wong, & Koh, 2003), which was slightly modified from the Chinese Value Survey (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). Rather than using the factors obtained from ecological analysis at the cultural level (see Chinese Culture Connection, 1987), Chang, Wong, and Koh (2003) analyzed the factor structure of values at the individual level in Singapore and derived six factors, including the two scales we adopted in the current study.

Participants reported how important each value was to themselves on a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Of no importance at all" to "Of supreme importance." Sample items for Diligence include "Industry" and "Persistence" and for Harmony include "Courtesy" and "Harmony with others." Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s were .71 for Diligence and .88 for Harmony.

*Job satisfaction* was measured with the Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969) that contained 5 separate subscales, covering satisfaction with work (18 items), pay (9 items), promotion opportunities (9 items), supervision (18 items), and coworkers (18 items). As one of the most rigorously developed scales of job satisfaction, the JDI's construct validity has been well documented in a recent meta-analysis (Kinicki, McKee-Ryan, Schriesheim, & Carson, 2002), and its measurement equivalence across Western/Eastern cultures has been established (Wang & Russell, 2005). In line with the hypotheses of the present study, we used the Satisfaction with Work scale and the average of five scales to indicate overall job satisfaction (see Bateman & Organ, 1983). Participants were asked to indicate whether each item described their jobs, using a response scale of *Yes*,

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, Alphas, and Correlations for Study Variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Protestant work ethic	4.01	0.59	(.74)							
2. Diligence	6.47	1.18	.16	(.71)						
3. Harmony	6.58	1.21	.12	.73	(.88)					
4. Satisfaction with work	1.58	0.63	-.05	.28	.21	(.81)				
5. Overall job satisfaction	1.67	0.50	.07	.23	.19	.41	(.92)			
6. Affective commitment	4.32	1.27	.15	.13	.20	.49	.36	(.88)		
7. Continuance commitment	3.99	1.19	.27	.08	.11	-.06	-.04	.22	(.79)	
8. Normative commitment	3.95	1.12	.24	.12	.20	.32	.30	.65	.29	(.81)

Note.  $N = 151$ .  $|r| .16$  is significant at  $p < .05$ , two-tailed;  $|r| .21$  is significant at  $p < .01$ , two-tailed. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s are in parentheses on the diagonal. PWE = Protestant Work Ethic; JDI-Work = satisfaction with work; JDI-Avg = overall job satisfaction; affective = affective commitment; continuance = continuance commitment; normative = normative commitment; SD = standard deviation.

*Uncertain*, and *No*, scored as 3, 1, and 0, respectively. For example, "Pleasant" measured Satisfaction with Work. We dropped two items ("Hot" and "On your feet") from Satisfaction with Work because they had near-zero correlation with the rest of items on the scale. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .81 for Satisfaction with Work and .92 for the overall scale.

*Affective*, *continuance*, and *normative organizational commitment* were measured using Allen and Meyer's (1990) scales, with 6 items in each scale. Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). Sample items include "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me (*affective commitment*)"; "I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization (*continuance commitment*)"; and "I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization (*normative commitment*)."  
Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s were .88 for affective commitment, .79 for continuance commitment, and .81 for normative commitment.

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, coefficient  $\alpha$ , and intercorrelations of the study variables. There was a significant but weak correlation between Diligence and PWE ( $r = .16, p < .05$ ), suggesting a low degree of overlap between the constructs. As would be expected, the relation between Harmony and PWE was not significant ( $r = .12$ ). Taken together, the correlations provided discriminant validity evidence for the three constructs.

*Hypothesis 1* predicted a positive relationship between PWE and job satisfaction. The results did not support the hypothesis, as PWE did not significantly correlate with either satisfaction with work or overall job satisfaction. Thus, endorsement of PWE did not influence employees' job satisfaction.

*Hypotheses 2(a) through 2(c)* stated that PWE would have positive relationships with three components of organizational commitment. These hypotheses were supported by PWE's positive correlations with affective commitment ( $r = .15, p < .07$ ), continuance commitment ( $r = .27, p < .01$ ), and normative commitment ( $r = .24, p < .01$ ). Therefore, individuals who endorsed PWE were in general more likely to be committed to the organization.

*Hypothesis 3* predicted a positive relationship between Diligence and job satisfaction. As expected, Diligence significantly correlated with both satisfaction with work and overall job satisfaction. Overall, employees who adhered to Confucian Diligence values tended to be satisfied with most aspects of their jobs.

*Hypotheses 4(a) through 4(c)* stated that Confucian Harmony would predict the three components of organizational commitment. The results supported *Hypotheses 4(a)* and *4(c)*, with Harmony

**Table 2.** Results From Multiple Regression Analysis and Dominance Analysis.

Predictor variables	$\beta$	$p$	$C_x$	$C_x$ -RS
Predicting affective commitment				
PWE	.13	.11	.019	34.21%
Harmony	.19	.02	.037	65.79%
Predicting normative commitment				
PWE	.22	.01	.053	59.34%
Harmony	.18	.03	.036	40.66%

Note.  $N = 151$ .  $C_x$  = general dominance weight;  $C_x$ -RS = rescaled general dominance weight.

positively correlated with affective commitment ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ) and normative commitment ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ). *Hypothesis 4(b)*, however, was not supported, as the relationship between Confucian harmony and continuance commitment did not reach significance level ( $r = .11, p > .10$ ). Therefore, employees who endorsed Confucian Harmony values tended to also desire to stay in the organization and feel the obligation to stay as well.<sup>1</sup>

Because both PWE and Confucian Harmony predicted affective and normative commitment, we next addressed the research question regarding the relative importance of PWE and Confucian values in predicting these two commitment constructs. We adopted two approaches to examine the research question on relative importance: traditional multiple regression analysis and dominance analysis. Although standardized regression weights from a multiple regression have traditionally been used to indicate the predictors' relative importance, such approach does not adequately partition the variance in the criterion jointly predicted by the multiple predictors (LeBreton, Binning, Adorno, & Melcher, 2004). Thus, we also employed general dominance weights analysis (Budescu, 1993). The general dominance weight is calculated as the mean of each predictor's squared semi-partial correlation in all possible subsets of predictors, and the general dominance weight sum to the model  $R^2$  (LeBreton, Hargis, Griepentrog, Oswald, & Ployhart, 2007). The general dominance weight indicates the relative importance, or average "usefulness," of predictors in all possible subset of regression models (Azen & Budescu, 2003). Finally, we rescaled the dominance weight to represent the percentage of model  $R^2$ .

Table 2 presents the multiple regression analyses predicting affective/normative commitment using both PWE and Harmony. The results for affective commitment revealed that, when entered in the analysis simultaneously, Harmony still significantly predicted affective commitment, while PWE failed to reach significance. The rescaled dominance analysis showed that the general dominance of PWE and Harmony were 34% and 66%, respectively.

In contrast, the analysis for normative commitment indicated a different pattern of results. Although both PWE and Confucian Harmony significantly predicted normative commitment, both the standardized regression coefficient and the general dominance identified PWE as the more important predictor of normative commitment. The rescaled dominance weight was 59% for PWE and 41% for Harmony.

Taken together, the results indicated that PWE was more useful to predict the sense of obligation to stay in the organization, whereas Harmony would be more effective in predicting the desire to stay in the organization.

## Discussion

The current study examined the cultural validity of PWE and the cultural specificity of Confucian values in predicting job satisfaction and organizational commitment within a Confucian Asian cultural context. Regarding the cultural validity of PWE, although PWE was found to relate to



organizational commitment, the relationship between PWE and job satisfaction was not supported. More importantly, the cultural specificity of indigenous Confucian values received general support: perceptions on Confucian Diligence and Harmony showed discriminant validity against PWE; individuals who endorsed Confucian Diligence were more likely to feel satisfied with most aspects of their jobs; individuals who endorsed Confucian Harmony tended to be committed to the organization. Finally, the relative importance analysis indicated that PWE was more useful in predicting normative commitment, whereas Confucian Harmony was more useful in predicting affective commitment, thus supporting the position that integrating cultural validity and cultural specificity approaches has merit (Leong & Brown, 1995).

### *The Effects of PWE in Confucian Asia*

This study provides partial support to the notion that PWE has universal applicability as it relates to human motivation to work in terms of its effects on organizational commitment, but the relationship between PWE and job satisfaction found in meta-analysis (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005) was not found in the current study. At least two explanations could be proffered. It is possible that unmeasured variables such as job characteristics, leadership styles, and organizational climate interacted with PWE in influencing job satisfaction and thus obscured the relationship. Another potential explanation has to do with the cultural context of the study. The individualistic striving embodied in PWE (Lim & Lay, 2004) may be incompatible with the collectivistic, harmony-oriented culture. Thus, rather than deriving satisfaction from work and achievement, individuals in a Confucian Asian culture may tend to focus on building and maintaining harmonious relationships with other people at work, which in turn enhance their satisfaction with work.

### *Confucian Values at Work*

The results of the study highlight the alternative in studying organizational behavior using constructs relevant to the local culture. The identification of Confucian Diligence and Harmony as antecedents to job attitudes has created several venues for future research. First, researchers may begin to explore psychological or organizational processes vis-à-vis a particular value dimension. For example, researchers can examine how Confucian values function in Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition cycle and how organizational newcomers are socialized with organization-relevant Confucian values. Second, in addition to using values as predictors of important outcomes, researchers may start investigating the role of values in moderating psychological processes. For example, Xie, Schaubroeck, and Lam (2008) found that endorsement of traditional Chinese values moderated the positive relationship between distributive justice and health, such that the relationship was stronger for more traditional workers. It can further elucidate the psychological process if particular Confucian value dimensions can be shown to moderate the effect. Third, if Confucian values such as Diligence and Harmony are deemed beneficial to the organization, researchers can investigate potential ways to influence these values in the organization, such as designing relevant training programs and providing feedback. Finally, future research can address whether certain personality factors render individuals more likely to endorse particular Confucian values.

### *Practical Implications*

The results from this study have several counseling implications. Career counseling theory, research, and practices are primarily Eurocentric (Leong & Tang, 2002); career counselors and researchers may therefore have a lack of appreciation for the culture-specific values and concerns of specific racial/ethnic groups. Counselors need to consider values relevant to the local culture, in addition to values that

are applicable across cultures, in order to understand how and to what extent culture-specific variables predict important job attitudes. This study found that the source of job satisfaction and organizational commitment for individuals with Confucian Asian cultural backgrounds may be different in people from other cultures. In addition to an internal motivation toward work, these individuals may be more committed to the organization if they tend to value harmonious relationships with others. These results suggest that cultural value dimensions of Confucianism and PWE offer important variables to attend to when providing career assessment and counseling services for this population; initial assessment of these variables is therefore important to fully meet their clients' needs and ensure good job or organization fit. For example, counselors could predict possible levels of satisfaction in different career paths, depending on the client's level of Diligence or PWE. Similarly, job satisfaction could be forecasted based on the congruence between an organization's culture for hard work and an individual's level of Diligence or PWE. Additionally, counselors should focus on building interpersonal relationships in the workplace for Confucian Asian individuals who are constrained to a poorly fitting job or organization; in doing so, these individuals may develop more positive perceptions of work and the organization through stronger and more harmonious relationships in the workplace.

Our findings also have organizational implications. Organizations are encouraged to initiate organizational practices around the Confucian value dimensions such as Diligence and Harmony in order to create an organizational culture for hard work and interpersonal harmony. The present study suggests that this will have meaningful impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment for individuals from Confucian Asian cultural backgrounds. Therefore, individuals who are in a position to enact organizational practices to influence employees' perceptions and behaviors are likely to benefit from the results of this study.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

The interpretation of the conclusions of the present study needs to be tempered by the recognition of several limitations. First, the results could be bounded by the Singaporean cultural context. As noted above, Singapore has been under the confluence of Western and Eastern cultures. Second, the generally low magnitude of the relationships that were significant calls for caution against overinterpreting the results. Additional research to confirm the findings and with different and larger samples will be needed. At the same time, our unique approach of simultaneously researching both PWE and Confucian values may at the same time limit generalizability, since constructs and measures developed in one culture may not easily or readily transfer to another culture. This is an inherent challenge in research examining etic and emic constructs (see Cheung, van de Vijver, & Leong, 2011). Future studies are needed to examine the functions of PWE and Confucian values in other Confucian Asian cultures, such as China and Japan. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits predictions of changes in job perceptions over time and also places constraints on conclusions about causality. However, as values are relatively stable across time (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987) while perceptions on the job are more susceptible to influence (e.g., Hackman & Oldham, 1980), we can presume that Confucian values and PWE exert influence on job satisfaction and organizational commitment rather than the other way around. Finally, future research should test the cultural validity and cultural specificity dimensions of the PWE and the Confucian values in the United States. Such a design will enable us to determine whether indeed the PWE and the Confucian values would work better in its own cultural context with the other culture-specific variable (PWE in Singapore and Confucian values in the United States) predicting additional variance.

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## Note

1. The same pattern of results emerged for Hypotheses 1–4 after controlling participants' age, gender, tenure, and income level.

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