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AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG FEMALE AND MALE  
MIGRANT WORKERS IN CHINA**

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# **Cultural Values of Traditionality / Modernity: Their Differential Impacts on Marital Conflict and Marital Satisfaction among Female and Male Migrant Workers in China**

Xiao Yu ZHUANG<sup>1</sup>, Daniel Fu Keung WONG<sup>2</sup>, Ting Kin NG<sup>3</sup>

## **Abstract**

There are 260 million migrant workers in China in 2012, most of whom left their spouses and/or children in the village. Due to long-term separation, there is an obvious concern over the marital relationships among these couples. In this study, the impacts of modernized or traditional attitudes in life among individual spouses and spousal separation on marital conflicts and marital satisfaction were examined. Three hundred and twenty-eight migrant workers were recruited through convenience sampling. SEM was used to investigate the interrelationship among different variables under study. Results indicated that spousal separation induced a higher level of marital conflicts among migrant couples. While the adoption of modernized attitudes protected marital satisfaction by decreasing marital conflicts only among female migrant workers, the adoption of traditional attitudes did not impact on marital conflicts, but surprisingly protected couples' marital satisfaction. Theoretical implications of the differential roles of adopting modernized or traditional attitudes on life in marital relationship among marital couples were discussed. Moreover, practical recommendations were raised.

*Keywords:* traditional and modern values; marital relationship; marital conflict; Chinese migrant workers.

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## Introduction

In the past two decades, there were around 260 million rural-to-urban migrant workers in the cities in China, and most of them left their spouses and/or children behind in their villages (National, 2013). According to XinhuaNet (2010), about 44% of these marriages ended up in divorce. Different reasons have been put forward to explain this unfortunate phenomenon, which includes, adaptation problems encountered by migrant workers, resulting in a lowering of marital quality (Williams, 2003); long separation from spouses and children (Hiew, 1992); changes in values and attitudes of the spouses (Lee, 2005) changes in power structure within family (Lee, 2005); and changes of efficient conflictual resolution patterns (Ben-David & Lavee, 1994), leading to greater marital conflicts and less marital satisfaction. However, there is a lack of a systematic investigation exploring the major social and cultural factors influencing marital conflicts and marital quality this very large group of migrant workers in China. Such an endeavor would provide valuable information that would be useful for policy and programmatic measures that would address the needs of these migrant families. Henceforth, it is important to collect information regarding the risk and protective factors influencing the marital quality of migrant workers in China.

## Literature review

### *A family resilience perspective*

The impact of migration on individual psychosocial and cultural adaptation has been documented. However, how migration affects marital relationships and the processes by which a couple adapt to their new living environment have been under-researched (Hyman, Guruge, & Mason, 2008). Even though families in the context of migration have been widely reported to undergo distress and experience poor functioning in terms of marital relationships, other evidence revealed a positive image (Guruge *et al.*, 2010). A more recent construct that describes how families adapt to stress and bounce back from adversity is termed “family resilience,” which indicates a movement from deficit-based models toward strength models in the family research field (Hawley, 1996). Family resilience is defined as a process wherein a family under adversity follows a path to become adaptive or even thrive (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996; Patterson, 2002). Patterson (2002) proposed three conditions in defining family resilience: (1) a family-level outcome to indicate the family competency despite adversity; (2) risk conditions which threaten the functioning of a family; and (3) protective mechanisms which counteract the poor functioning in a family. It has been well documented that families under stressors and transitions adapt to these extreme difficulties and achieve

remarkable resilience in many circumstances (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). In this study, modernity and traditionality as a protective factor and marital separation as a risk factor were explored. Specifically, this study intended to examine the roles played by these two factors in influencing marital conflicts and marital satisfaction among Chinese migrant couples in China.

### ***Modernity/traditionality and migration***

Research concerning the changing psychological responses to modernization in Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China or other developed countries in Asia can be traced back to studies conducted by Yang and his associates in 1972 (Yang, 2003). According to Yang (1996), modernization in Chinese societies have resulted in a decrease in the familistic, interdependent and authoritarian orientations among Chinese people, while an increase in self, independent, competitive and egalitarian orientations is noted. Based on this conceptual understanding, Yang and his associates proposed two multidimensional psychological constructs – Chinese traditionality and modernity (Yang, Yu, & Yeh, 1991) to describe the phenomenon. Studies have found that students in urban areas in mainland China are more modernized than their counterparts in rural areas (Zhang, Zheng, & Wang, 2003). Rural areas are more backward in terms of education and economic opportunities and people generally espouse collectivism, whereas urbanized cities have better education opportunities and are full of current information from around the world (Zhang, *et al.*, 2003). Thus urban residents tend to embrace values such as gender equality, independence and affective hedonism. It is likely that migrant workers who used to live in the countryside have to go through a process of acquiring modern values upon migrating to the cities. Since their partners in the couple relationships are still living in the rural areas, the unequal exposure to modern values and behaviors may result in marital problems (Cheung, 2008). In one study, Kao and Lu (2006) investigated how different levels of individual modernity and traditionality held by husbands and wives influenced marital adjustment among Taiwan residents. Results indicated that when the husbands were more traditional than their wives (i.e. the more different their scores on *traditionality*), the poorer were their marital adjustments (Kao & Lu, 2006). In terms of modernity, when wives held more modern values than their husbands (i.e. the more different their scores on *modernity*), the poorer were their marital adjustments (Kao & Lu, 2006). In the migration literature, it has been reported that a higher level of identification with the modern values among Mexican American wives was associated with conflicts between married couples and less marital satisfaction (Flores, Tschann, VanOss Marin, & Pantoja, 2004; Negy & Snyder, 1997). In contrast, a higher level of acquisition of the host language as well as modern values from mainstream society for husbands was associated with a healthy marital relationship (Park, Harrison, & Bailey, 2000; Spasojevic, Heffer,

& Snyder, 2000). In this study, it was hypothesized that acquiring modern values from urban cultures protects marital functioning for male migrant workers.

### ***Spousal separation and marital functioning***

Migration induces transient or prolonged separation of family members. A study on Canadian military families and Japanese families revealed that husbands' absence decreased the perceived social support of their wives (Hiew, 1992). Moreover, husbands' absence induced loneliness, feelings of depression, social isolation, tension, and worries about discipline and behavioral problems in the children (Black, 1993; Hiew, 1992). However, Abbott and Meredith (1994) found that Chinese couples who experienced prolonged separations caused by factors other than an intentional desire to live apart (e.g. higher education and job opportunities, including those located abroad) did not report lowered marital satisfaction, presumably because the partners viewed the activities that necessitated the separation as benefiting the couples and families in the longer run (Epstein, Chen, & Beyder-Kamjou, 2005). In this study, it was hypothesized that spousal separation is the risk factor that would sabotage marital relationships.

### ***Marital conflicts and marital satisfaction as outcomes***

Previous studies have advocated a negative impact of couples' conflictual interactional patterns on relationship satisfaction (Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005). The pattern that is characterized by women showing pressure and criticisms and men showing defensiveness and passive inaction was harmful to marital quality (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2006). Moreover, other research contended that the tendency to explain a partner's negative behaviors (e.g. coming home late from work) in a way that promotes conflicts was related to steeper declines in marital satisfaction (Faulkner, *et al.*, 2005; Fincham, 2003). However, the influence of marital conflict on marital satisfaction might be different between males and females. According to Wanic and Kulik (2011), females are more negatively influenced by marital conflict than are males. It is suggested that men's satisfaction with their relationships is not affected by the hostile characteristics of their partners, whereas women are highly influenced by a male partner's hostility (Loving, Heffner, KiecoltGlaser, Glaser, & Malarkey, 2004). This is because women's greater focus on positive interpersonal functioning and traditional subordinate status in comparison to men results in an increase in the experience of negative emotions and situational threat that provides the potential to increase the impact of conflict (see Wanic and Kulik, 2011, for a review).

### ***Research gap***

Drawn from the above literature review, two major research gaps can be highlighted. Firstly, most of the previous studies in migration literature have assumed that the extent to which a migrant population identifies with the values, behaviors and social norms of a modernized host society would result in more marital conflicts and dissatisfaction, but have overlooked the strength of cultural dispositions in maintaining familial harmony and marital satisfaction. Flores and his associates (2004) identified that adherence to traditional Mexican values among migrants had not intensified their marital conflicts. In Chinese culture, Chinese people underscores social stability and family harmony, and believe that social needs take precedence over individual needs (Xu, Xie, Liu, Xia, & Liu, 2007). Traditional Chinese values were reported to benefit marital stability and continuity (Zuo, 2008). Indeed, with respect to these Chinese values of traditionality and modernity, Yang (2003) suggested that researchers should examine these values in specific Chinese societal contexts because different Chinese societies have different levels of modernity and traditionality. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous research has studied Chinese traditionality and modernity in the context of internal migration in mainland China. The present study aimed to address these two major research gaps.

### ***Objectives and hypotheses***

The present study explored how individual modernity and traditionality, and spousal separation influenced marital conflicts and satisfaction among migrant workers in Shanghai. Based on the above literature review, hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Spousal separation would induce marital conflict for both male and female migrant workers, which in turn would negatively influence marital satisfaction;

Hypothesis 2:

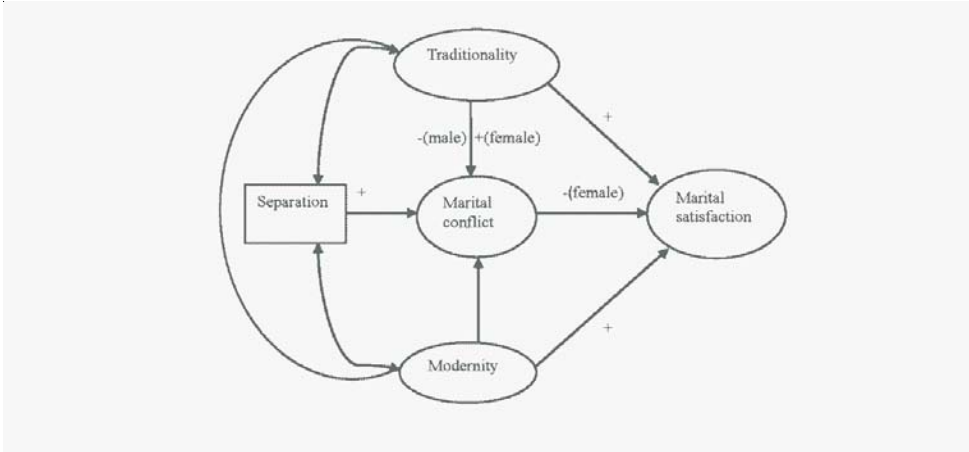
- a. Modernity would protect male migrant workers from encountering a high level of conflict with their spouses;
- b. Modernity would lead to a high level of marital conflict for female migrant workers with their spouses;

Hypothesis 3: Modernity would be positively associated with marital satisfaction;

Hypothesis 4: Traditionality would not induce marital conflict for either male or female migrant workers; otherwise traditionalism would benefit marital satisfaction;

Hypothesis 5: Marital conflict would be negatively related to marital satisfaction for females but not for males.

The proposed latent variable structural model is presented in *Figure 1*.



*Figure 1: Posited path structure of separation, individual modernity and traditionality influencing marital conflict and marital satisfaction (observed indicator variables for latent constructs, factor loadings and error variances are omitted for clarity).*

## Method

### Measurement

*Marital satisfaction.* The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm *et al.*, 1986) was adopted in the present study to measure participants' satisfaction with their marital relationships. Three items in total are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1="Very dissatisfied" to 5="Very satisfied." Item scores are summed as a total score with a higher score indicating a better or more satisfying marital relationship. The scale asks participants to rate how satisfied they are with "their spouse", "their relationship with their spouse" and "their overall marriage life." The KMSS has undergone rigorous testing for reliability and validity (Crane, Middleton, & Bean, 2000). With a higher internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha =.92) and a good concurrent validity reported, the Chinese version of the KMSS (C-KMSS) was used in this study (Shek & Tsang, 1993). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.89.

*Individual modernity and traditionality.* The short version of the Multidimensional Scale of Individual Traditionality (MS-CIT) and Modernity (MS-CIM) was employed to measure individual traditionality and modernity (Yang *et al.*,



1991; Kao & Lu, 2006). Five subscales are contained in MS-CIT: submission to authority (STA), filial piety and ancestral worship (FPAAW), conservatism and endurance (CAE), fatalism and defensiveness (FAD) and male dominance (MD). Correspondingly, there are five subscales within MS-CIM: egalitarianism and open-mindedness (EAO), social isolation and self-reliance (SIASR), optimism and assertiveness (OAA), affective hedonism (AH) and sex equality (SE). A six-point Likert scale ranging from 1="strongly disagree" to 6="strongly agree" is used for rating the items. Kao and Lu (2006) found that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the short version of MS-CIM and MS-CIT were 0.71 and 0.81 respectively. Initially three components in MS-CIM (EAO, AH and SE) and three components in MS-CIT (STA, MD and FPAAW) were planned to be retained for analyzing the proposed model due to their relevancy to marriage relationships (Kao & Lu, 2006). A higher order confirmatory factor analysis showed that the factor loading of MD on traditionality was less than 0.3. Goodness-of-fit indexes for the model without MD were very good ( $\chi^2=13.775$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p>.05$ ,  $CFI=.989$ ,  $RMSEA=.047$  [90% CI=.000-.088],  $SRMR=.029$ ). For the subscale of Chinese modernity, a confirmatory factor analysis indicated an acceptable model fit for including the three components which were mentioned above ( $\chi^2=91.871$ ,  $df=24$ ,  $p<.000$ ,  $CFI=.903$ ,  $RMSEA=.093$  [90% CI=.073-.114],  $SRMR=.056$ ). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha for the two subscales were 0.78 for MS-CIT and 0.79 for MS-CIM.

*Marital conflict.* The Marital Conflict Scale (MCS) was developed in this study from relevant literature (Locke & Wallace, 1959). The 14-item MCS measures marital conflict between couples in various aspects, such as financial issues, parenting, housework, sex life, loyalty, entertainment and religious belief. Participants were asked to rate the severity of their conflict in all items on a six-point Likert scale (1="not at all severe," 6="extremely severe"). The mean of all the item scores was calculated as the scale score, with a higher score indicating a higher level of marital conflict. A principal component analysis was performed in SPSS 20.0 on this scale based on the 328 participants in this study by varimax rotation. All the items had factor loadings that were greater than 0.3. Based on the scree test, a one-factor solution was found that accounted for 52% of the total variance. A reliability test showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha =0.92).

*Demographic information.* Demographic information was also collected, including age, gender, educational level, length of marriage, employment status of the respondent and his/her spouse, family income, and number of children.

### ***Participants***

A total of 328 Chinese rural-to-urban migrants were recruited in Shanghai. About 54% (n=178) were male and about 46% (n=150) were female, with a mean



age of 34 (SD=7.7). The majority (83.5%) of them lived with their spouse in the same city, and a few (16.5%) lived with their spouse in two different cities.

### ***Data collection***

Convenience sampling strategy was adopted in this study. Two residents' committees were approached for recruiting participants since there was a name list of migrants in each committee. Then the committee members helped researchers invite married migrants to join the research; 500 migrants agreed initially. Two research assistants were trained and employed to call each migrant to seek formal consent. Three hundred and twenty-eight migrants finally completed the questionnaire. The interview was conducted in migrants' homes. They filled out the questionnaire either by themselves or with the help of research assistants. The process took 30-60 minutes. Ethics approval was sought from and endorsed by the East China University of Science and Technology.

### ***Data analysis***

Based on the proposed model in the above section, we intended to investigate the moderating and mediating effects through which individual modernity, traditionality and spousal separation influenced the marital relationships of migrant workers in Shanghai. Since the goal of this study was to explore the structural relations among latent variables, and the sample size is limited, item-parcels were adopted as indicators of latent variables (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). A multi-group latent variable moderation test was run in LISREL 8.7. Data screening procedures in PRELIS found that the data did not follow multivariate normal distribution, thus robust maximum likelihood was used to estimate model fit and the Satorra-Bentler Scaled chi-square test was adopted in this study. Firstly, a configural model, in which all the estimated parameters were not constrained to be equal across the two groups, was evaluated. Secondly, a factorial invariance model with the entire factor loadings of each latent variable constrained to be equal between the two groups was analyzed. In the third model, four of the six paths (the paths from separation, modernity and traditionality to marital conflict, and the path from traditionality to marital satisfaction) in the structural models as well as the variances and covariances of the exogenous variables were constrained to be equal between the two groups. The two paths that were not constrained were the path from modernity to marital conflict and the path from marital conflict to marital satisfaction. The fourth model constrained one more path wherein modernity related to marital conflict. The last model was the full constrained model where all the paths were assigned to be equal.

The goodness-of-fit of the models was tested with root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), Non-Normed Fit Index

(NNFI), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). When the RMSEA value  $\leq .08$ , the CFI  $\geq .90$ , the NNFI  $\geq .90$  and the SRMR  $\leq .08$ , the model is indicated to fit well to the data (Kline, 2005). Furthermore, the program written by Crawford and Henry (2003) was used to compare the Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  value for each of the nested models and determine the final superior model (Crawford & Henry, 2003). A significant  $\Delta\chi^2$  indicates that the less restrictive model is better than the more restrictive model. Additionally, the Sobel test was adopted to test the indirect effects of modernity and separation on marital satisfaction via marital conflict.

## Results

### *Preliminary analysis*

Details of the demographic information of the participants are presented in Table 1. Most of the participants were middle-aged and between 20 and 40 years old. The majority of the migrant workers had finished either junior or senior high school. Around 21% had the tertiary education attainment. About 83.5% of the participants lived with their spouses in Shanghai, while the rest were separated from their spouses. Nearly 60% of the migrant workers in this study had a yearly income of over 20,000 Chinese yuan; 9.5% had a yearly income that was less than 5,000 Chinese yuan. Most of the participants had only one child and lived in a rented flat. This was basically the same as the general conditions of migrant workers in Shanghai reported by Wong and his associates, but the education attainment of the participants in this study was higher. The majority of participants in this study had finished senior secondary school, while in Wong's study (2007) they had mostly only finished junior secondary school.

Table 1. *Demographic information of participants*

|           |                            | N   | %    |
|-----------|----------------------------|-----|------|
| Gender    | Male                       | 178 | 54.3 |
|           | Female                     | 150 | 45.7 |
| Age       | 20-30                      | 136 | 43.0 |
|           | 31-40                      | 117 | 35.7 |
|           | 41-50                      | 64  | 19.5 |
|           | 51-60                      | 4   | 0.9  |
|           | Missing                    | 2   | 0.6  |
| Education | Elementary school or below | 30  | 9.1  |
|           | Junior high school         | 104 | 31.7 |
|           | Senior high school         | 122 | 37.2 |
|           | Tertiary                   | 68  | 20.7 |
|           | Missing                    | 4   | 1.2  |

*REALITIES IN A KALEIDOSCOPE*

|                       |                       | N   | %    |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----|------|
| Living with spouse    | Yes                   | 274 | 83.5 |
|                       | No                    | 54  | 16.5 |
| Employment            | Full-time             | 239 | 72.9 |
|                       | Part-time             | 31  | 9.5  |
|                       | Unemployed            | 11  | 3.4  |
|                       | Other                 | 28  | 8.5  |
| Job type              | Factory               | 41  | 12.5 |
|                       | Construction          | 46  | 14.0 |
|                       | Sales                 | 48  | 14.6 |
|                       | Catering              | 42  | 12.8 |
|                       | Other service         | 68  | 20.7 |
|                       | Self-employed         | 12  | 3.7  |
|                       | Other                 | 67  | 20.4 |
|                       | Missing               | 3   | 0.9  |
| Employment of partner | Full-time             | 210 | 63.2 |
|                       | Part-time             | 44  | 14.0 |
|                       | Unemployed            | 26  | 8.0  |
|                       | Housewife/husband     | 46  | 14.0 |
|                       | Missing               | 2   | 0.6  |
| Job type of partner   | Factory               | 58  | 15.9 |
|                       | Construction          | 28  | 8.5  |
|                       | Sales                 | 47  | 14.3 |
|                       | Catering              | 41  | 12.5 |
|                       | Self-employed         | 22  | 6.7  |
|                       | Housewife/husband     | 51  | 15.5 |
|                       | Other                 | 84  | 25.6 |
|                       | Missing               | 3   | 0.9  |
| Yearly family income  | 5,000 or below        | 31  | 9.5  |
|                       | 5,001-10,000          | 33  | 10.1 |
|                       | 10,001-15,000         | 43  | 13.1 |
|                       | 15,001-20,000         | 26  | 7.9  |
|                       | 20,000 or above       | 195 | 59.5 |
| No. of children       | 0                     | 61  | 18.6 |
|                       | 1                     | 174 | 53.0 |
|                       | 2                     | 79  | 24.1 |
|                       | 3                     | 12  | 3.7  |
|                       | 4                     | 2   | 0.6  |
| Type of housing       | Company dormitory     | 31  | 9.5  |
|                       | Rented flat           | 206 | 62.8 |
|                       | Bought flat           | 77  | 23.5 |
|                       | Living with relatives | 1   | 0.3  |
|                       | Other                 | 10  | 3.0  |
|                       | Missing               | 3   | 0.9  |
| Total                 |                       | 328 | 100  |

A summary of descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and correlation matrices for the study variables are presented in *Table 2*. We can conclude from *Table 2* that marital conflict was negatively associated with marital satisfaction and traditionality was positively associated with marital satisfaction.

Table 2. Bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics among study variables (N=328)

| Variable                | M     | SD   | Range  | 1 | 2       | 3       | 4       |
|-------------------------|-------|------|--------|---|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. traditionality       | 25.23 | 4.53 | 6-36   | – | .294*** | .230*** | -.036   |
| 2. modernity            | 35.48 | 5.53 | 9-54   |   | –       | .082    | -.086   |
| 3. marital satisfaction | 10.76 | 2.55 | 3-15   |   |         | –       | -.172** |
| 4. marital conflict     | 2.68  | 0.82 | 1-5.36 |   |         |         | –       |

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

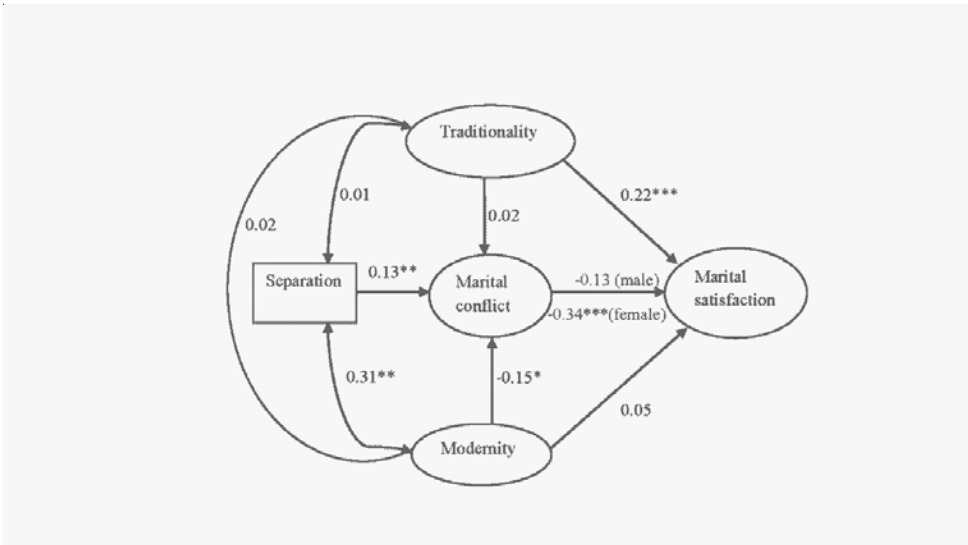
### **Multiple-group latent variable moderation analysis**

A multi-group latent variable moderation analysis was run in LISREL 8.7. The proposed model was fitted in male and female migrant workers. Because the goal of our study was to examine the relationships among the constructs of the proposed model and our sample size was limited, we used item parcels and latent variables in analyzing data (Pössel & Knopf, 2011; Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006). It is suggested that three indicators of a construct lead to an optimal, just-identified construct. As the traditionality and modernity scales contained multiple dimensions, domain-representative approach was utilized to create parcels (Little, *et al.*, 2002). One item from each of the subscales of CIM and CIT was selected to be parceled to one indicator. Therefore, three indicators were parceled for traditionality and modernity respectively. Additionally, as the Marital Conflict Scale was unidimensional, parcels were constructed based on factor loadings (Little, *et al.*, 2002). A one-factor solution was fitted to the items, and then the items with the strongest and weakest loadings were assigned to the first parcel. Subsequently, item with the next strongest and weakest loadings were assigned to the second parcel. The same procedures were repeated until all items were assigned to the three parcels.

The Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  test indicated that the configural model ( $\chi^2 = 234.73$ ,  $df = 118$ ,  $RMSEA = .070$  [90% CI = .055-.085],  $NNFI = .95$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $SRMR = .056$ ) fitted the data well, suggesting that the hypothesized model were applicable to both men and women. The factorial invariance model was not significantly worse than the configural model ( $p > .05$ ). Therefore, the factorial constructs of the latent variables are the same between male and female groups. Further constraining four paths and variances and covariances of the exogenous latent constructs did not significantly worsen the model fit ( $p > .05$ ). Then, the model with the path from individual modernity to marital conflict constrained to be invariant did not show a significant deterioration of the model fit ( $p > .05$ ), indicating that gender did not moderate this relationship. However, when all of the paths in the proposed model were constrained, the model fit became significantly worse than

the model with five paths constrained ( $p = .022$ ). The model with five paths constrained was retained as the final model. Fit indexes of the final model showed a good fit ( $\chi^2 = 222.63$ ,  $df = 135$ ,  $RMSEA = .064$  [90% CI = .049-.079],  $NNFI = .95$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $SRMR = .076$ ). The coefficients for the structural latent variable model are presented in *Figure 2*.

Only the path from marital conflict toward marital satisfaction was different across the two groups. Marital satisfaction was strongly predicted by marital conflict in a negative manner for females but not for males. Modernity was negatively associated with marital conflict but did not contribute to marital satisfaction directly, while traditionality was not directly related to marital conflict but protected couples' marital satisfaction. Incidentally, spousal separation did induce a higher level of marital conflict.



*Figure 2. A moderation model of modernity as well as traditionality influencing marital conflict and marital satisfaction (standardized regression coefficients from SEM were provided. Observed indicator variables for latent constructs, factor loadings and error variances are omitted for clarity, \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ).*

### Mediation analysis

Given that we had discovered the moderating role of gender, we separately analyzed the indirect effect of modernity, traditionality and spousal separation for females and males. The results of Sobel tests indicated that spousal separation ( $\beta = -0.020$ ,  $z = -2.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and individual modernity ( $\beta = 0.017$ ,  $z = 1.67$ ,  $p < .05$ ) significantly influenced marital satisfaction through marital conflict for females. Such indirect effects could not be found among male migrants. The indirect effect of traditionality on marital satisfaction was not supported.

## Discussion

Most parts of our model resonate with the existing literature. Surprisingly, there are interesting findings that may shed new light on gender differences in the role of modernity and traditionality in marital functioning in the context of internal migration in China.

### *Modernity as a protective factor to decrease marital conflict*

The results support hypothesis 2a but dispute hypothesis 2b. No gender difference in the relationship between modernity and marital conflict was found. Our results echo previous findings that a higher level of individual modernity or a higher level of identifications with modern values contributes to marital functioning for males (Kao & Lu, 2006; Park, *et al.*, 2000). Contrary to the existing literature, this study indicated that the above-mentioned association also applicable to females. Husbands having modern values would reduce conflict between spouses because they will accept the changes that their wives become more assertive and independent after migration, thus it would not be a problem for modern husbands to take equal responsibility for doing household chores and taking care of children, which in turn contributes to marital stability and relationship satisfaction (Amato & Booth, 1995).

However, females were depicted as having opportunities to increase their powers Fupon moving to cities because modern values advocate gender equality. During the process of female migrants struggling for equality in employment, household chores and taking care of children, conflict between husbands and wives is induced (Lee, 2005). Our findings did not concur with such a view. This may be explained by the fact that women in China have adopted dual roles as both breadwinners and caregivers (Anderson & Johnson, 2003). According to Anderson and Johnson (2003), while Asian American women are even more egalitarian than men in the workplace, they can remain conservative and accept playing the traditional roles at home. It can be suggested that Chinese women embrace both collectivistic and individualistic values. The individualistic-oriented values such as self-assertiveness and gender equality are mainly reflected in the career domain (Quek, Knudson-Martin, Rue, & Alabiso, 2010). Chinese American couples can flexibly switch between two sets of value orientations in order to tackle problems concerning both career and family (Anderson & Johnson, 2003). Therefore, the adoption of modern values by Chinese female migrant workers might not cause intense marital conflict.

### ***Modernity as an indirect protective factor of marital satisfaction for females***

Unexpectedly, modernity was not directly related to marital satisfaction. But it did affect marital satisfaction indirectly through decreasing marital conflicts. This protective mechanism was only demonstrated among female migrants. Women are affected more by marital conflict than are men because females tend to be relationally and interpersonally oriented (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Women tend to include their husbands in forming conceptions of self and yielding feelings about marriage that are derived from both their husbands' and their own behaviors (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). The more they invest in and expect from their marriage, the more susceptible they are to disappointment in conflictual marital interactions. Wanic and Kulik (2011) maintained that the subordinate role or status of wives increases their chances of experiencing negative emotions and situational threats, which provides the potential for women to suffer more emotional strains from marital conflict. To sum up, modernity serves as an important protective factor for marital quality through diminishing marital conflict for female migrants but not for males.

### ***Traditionality as a significant protective factor for marital satisfaction***

Consistent with our hypothesis 4, traditionality is a protective factor for marital satisfaction among Chinese migrant workers. Studies concerning male-out-migrant couples in Chinese village as well as Chinese American families provided strong evidence that traditional values contributed to marital stability and cohesiveness (Zuo, 2008). Based on Jacka's study (1997), migration and exposure to modernity may "cement the bonds of kinship and reinforce tradition" (p. 139). As a result, such forces tend to strengthen the mutual dependence between spouses and facilitate marital divisions of labor, and hence increase the utilization of collective strategies within the family (Zuo, 2008). Zuo (2008) further pointed out that Chinese collective family orientation stresses the collective responsibilities of members to provide employment, food security, support for the dependents, and personal safety so that individual survival as well as family continuity can be ensured. Thus, when facing hostility, discrimination and adverse life circumstances in the cities, marital couples would maintain their marriage and meet their individual needs through collective efforts (Zuo, 2008).

### ***Spousal separation as a risk factor for marital conflict***

Rural-urban migration in China is characterized by a husband or an unmarried adult child leaving home for work while other family members stay in the countryside (Fan, Sun, & Zheng, 2011). These migrants may visit their spouses, children



and family members once a year or even less. Such separation has been reported to bring about dissolutions in marriages among migrant workers (China Daily, 2011). Our study confirms this assertion. Separation between husband and wife led to a higher level of marital conflict, which in turn decreases marital satisfaction, especially for women. The tensions from the interpersonal relationship between husband and wife were also reported to be related to poor mental health among migrant workers in China (Wong, He, Leung, Lau, & Chang, 2008). It was reported that the left-behind women faced loneliness and hardship as well as marital difficulties (Fan, *et al.*, 2011; Hiew, 1992). No matter whether it is the wives or the husbands who are left behind in the countryside, they have to handle their children and household chores all by themselves. Coupled with other difficulties such as possible conflict with the extended family members (e.g., parents-in-law), spouse conflicts might be escalated. Our present study confirms this observation or claim.

### ***Implications***

This research has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study is one of the few studies that have adopted a family resilience perspective, rather than a pathological view, to examine the couple relationships among migrants in the cities. This family resilience perspective emphasizes the potential of every family to bounce back and prosper in response to adversity (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996). This research also focuses on examining the Chinese psychological constructs of traditionality and modernity in influencing Chinese family functioning. To the best of our knowledge, no research has ever investigated such psychological constructs among migrant workers in mainland China. Indeed, these constructs have only been sparsely used to examine marital functioning among Taiwan residents (e.g. Kao and Lu, 2006). We believe cultural values influence human behaviors. Attempts to examine cultural values in influencing the human behaviors of a specific cultural group, such as the one conducted by our team, should be encouraged. Indeed, much more investigation can be done to examine these constructs because, as Kao and Lu (2006) suggested, Chinese traditionality and modernity may influence a wider spectrum of Chinese people's life, such as marriage and conjugal relationships, parent-child relationships, family dynamics, social interactions, sexual behaviors and so on.

This research also brings practical implications concerning providing mental health services for migrant couples. Firstly, more specific and practical migrant-family-related policies need to be established. Policies concerning family reunification, housing and education for migrant children should be initiated. Reunification criteria and protection have been implemented in many countries (e.g. Australia, South Korea) (Kim, 2010; Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011). In South Korea, married immigrant women and their families are provided with mentoring programs

within neighborhoods to absorb Korean culture (Kim, 2010). Social welfare, health care and education for their children are also guaranteed (Kim, 2010). Even though the central government of China has initiated a series of guidelines for local government to resolve the settlement-related problems of rural-to-urban migrant workers and families, more detailed regulations are still needed (www.QSTHEORY.CN, 2011). For example, regulations guiding the equality of accessing education in the public systems for migrant children and subsidies for buying apartments should be initiated. Secondly, public education programs need to be established to educate migrant couples about the possible consequences of spousal separation and what kinds of services might help them deal with problems. Spousal separation is found to induce marital conflict among migrant couples. Therefore, intervention focusing on training of skills or strategies in managing marital disagreement among migrant couples should be developed and implemented. Both the communities and companies hiring migrant workers should take responsibility for providing such education programs. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) has been established among a few big enterprises in China, and all other companies should also be obliged to establish the EAP to offer personal as well as familial counseling for migrant workers. Thirdly, intervention should center on encouraging migrant couples to examine how their differential values (i.e. modernity and traditionality) may affect their gender role attitudes as well as power differences among husbands and wives. Meanwhile, counselors need to bear in mind the different values concerning modernity and traditionality when serving migrant families (Wang, McCart, & Turnbull, 2007). In Australia, intervention programs aimed at reducing interpersonal distance which stemmed from differential acculturation paces between parents and children were reported to successfully enhance parent-child relationships among immigrant families (Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011). Similar family interventions can be established in order to resolve marital conflict from differential value acquisition paces and to maximize the protective functions of traditional values.

### ***Limitations***

This study has several limitations. First, this study adopted a cross-sectional design. Therefore, the causal relationship between individual modernity, traditionality and marital conflict as well as marital satisfaction cannot be fully determined. Second, the participants of this study were migrant workers in Shanghai, China. Moreover, the samples were conveniently recruited. The generalization of the findings to other groups of internal migrants should be carefully scrutinized. Last but not least, one of the scales was self-constructed. Although initial validation using factor analysis was conducted, more rigorous validation methods are needed in the future.

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