

**EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
HRM PRACTICES, ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE,
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP, AND JOB
PERFORMANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF
IN “DOUBLE FIRST CLASS” UNIVERSITIES IN
SICHUAN, CHINA: THE MODERATING ROLE
OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CB-SEM	Covariance-Based SEM
CI	Confidence Interval
CMV	Common Method variance
HRM	Human Resource Management
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

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**MENGENAL HUBUNGAN ANTARA AMALAN PENGURUSAN
SUMBER MANUSIA, KEADILAN ORGANISASI, KEPIMPINAN
TRANSFORMASI DAN PRESTASI KERJA STAF PENTADBIRAN DI
UNIVERSITI “DOUBLE FIRST-CLASS” DI SICHUAN, CHINA: PERANAN
MODERASI IDENTIFIKASI ORGANISASI**

ABSTRAK

Dengan perkembangan pesat sektor pendidikan tinggi di China, kakitangan pentadbiran peringkat operasi menghadapi beban kerja yang semakin meningkat, jangkaan tugas yang berubah-ubah, dan tekanan yang besar. Keberkesanan mereka penting untuk kecekapan institusi, namun kajian tentang prestasi mereka masih terhad. Kajian ini, berasaskan Teori Pertukaran Sosial (SET) dan Teori Identiti Sosial (SIT), meneroka bagaimana amalan Pengurusan Sumber Manusia, keadilan organisasi, dan kepimpinan transformasional mempengaruhi prestasi kerja, dengan identifikasi organisasi sebagai moderator. Data daripada 326 kakitangan pentadbiran peringkat operasi di lapan universiti “Double First-Class” di Sichuan, China, dianalisis menggunakan SPSS dan pemodelan persamaan struktur kaedah kuasa dua terkecil separa (PLS-SEM). Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa pengambilan dan pemilihan, latihan dan pembangunan, keadilan prosedural, keadilan interaksional, dan kepimpinan transformasional merupakan peramal signifikan terhadap prestasi kerja. Selain itu, hubungan antara amalan Pengurusan Sumber Manusia, keadilan prosedural, keadilan interaksional, kepimpinan transformasional dan prestasi kerja dimoderasi oleh identifikasi organisasi, kecuali hubungan antara latihan dan pembangunan dengan prestasi tugas. Kajian ini diakhiri dengan perbincangan mengenai implikasi teori dan praktikal, keterbatasan, serta cadangan kajian masa hadapan.

**EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HRM PRACTICES,
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MODERATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION**

ABSTRACT

As China’s higher education sector expands, operational-level administrative staff face increasing workloads, evolving job expectations, and immense pressure. Ensuring their effectiveness is crucial for institutional efficiency, yet research on their performance remains limited. This study, based on social exchange theory (SET) and social identity theory (SIT), explores how HRM practices, organizational justice, and transformational leadership influence job performance, with organizational identification as a moderator. Data from 326 operational-level administrative staff across eight “Double First-Class” universities in Sichuan, China, were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that recruitment and selection, training and development, procedural justice, interactional justice, and transformational leadership significantly predict job performance. Additionally, the relationships between HRM practices, procedural justice, interactional justice, transformational leadership, and job performance are moderated by organizational identification, except for the training and development-task performance relationship. The study concludes with theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As a result of the advancements made in economic globalization, cultural pluralism, and social informatization, the intensity of international competition has increased, and the development and competition of talented individuals have emerged as the primary focus. China's 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of National Education (2021) emphasises that to tackle complex challenges and achieve sustainable development, education needs to be prioritised. Xi (2016) asserted that the level of advancement in higher education serves as a critical indicator of a country's comprehensive development and prospects. According to the QS World University Rankings 2024 (2023), three of the top five universities are from the United States. It is reported that the US possesses 85% of the best universities in the world and 50% of the American economy is dependent on its higher education system (Zeng, 2018). One key reason for the US's superpower status is its world-class higher education, which attracts top talents from around the globe, as well as its possession of a large number of independent intellectual property rights and a strong knowledge economy with outstanding scholars (Zeng, 2018).

China's higher education has experienced a period of rapid expansion and profound reforms since the 1990s. When it comes to the size of higher education, China is recognised as the world's largest (China Education Daily, 2019). In the year 2000, there were only 1,813 higher education institutions in China with 12.3 million students (Ministry of Education of China, 2001). However, by the end of 2022, there were 3,013 higher education institutions in China, with 46.6 million students of all kinds of higher education such as regular higher education institutions, adult higher

education institutions, and other non-government higher education institutions (Ministry of Education of China, 2023a). It is undeniable that the size of higher education in China has rapidly expanded during the past two decades. The following table and figure show the size and gross enrolment rate of students in China higher education.

Table 1.1 Size and Gross Enrolment Rate in Higher Education in China

Year	2000	2010	2012	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Size (million)	12.3	31.1	33.3	36.5	37	37.8	38.3	40.0	41.8	44.3	46.6
Gross enrolment rate (%)	12.5	26.5	30	40	42.7	45.7	48.1	51.6	54.4	57.8	59.6

Source: Ministry of Education of China (2023a)

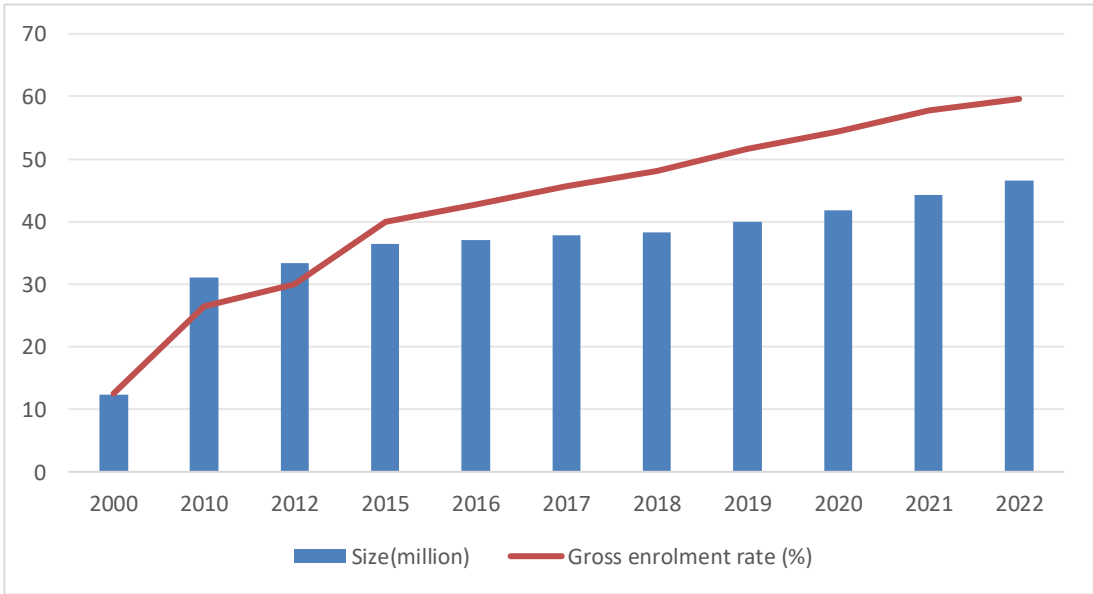


Figure 1.1 Size and Gross Enrolment Rate in Higher Education in China
(Ministry of Education of China, 2023a)

In addition to the size of higher education in China, the government also pays much attention to the quality of higher education. In order to enhance the comprehensive strength and international competitiveness of higher education in

China, the country aims to upgrade some universities and disciplines to world-class standards. Consequently, the Chinese government launched the “Double First-Class” Universities Initiative (Ministry of Education of China et al., 2017a). The Chinese government announced the initial list of first-class universities and first-class disciplines in 2017 (Ministry of Education of China et al., 2017b). This initiative is commonly referred to as “Double First-Class”. In other words, “Double First-Class” universities include two types: 1) universities that have been designed to be first-class universities; 2) universities that have been designed to build their superior disciplines into first-class disciplines. All the universities involved in “Double First-Class” universities are public universities. In this list, 42 universities have been identified as first-class universities, and 95 universities have been identified to build their superior disciplines into first-class disciplines.

The development and construction of “Double First-Class” requires a first-class professional academic team as well as first-class administrative team, as both are equally essential for advancing higher education (Wang, 2020). Administrative staff play a crucial role in ensuring the efficient operation and sustainable development of universities internally while also facilitating external collaboration and knowledge exchange (Song, 2021). Their responsibilities encompass both administration and service, providing vital support that enables faculty members to focus on teaching and research, which in turn drives the academic excellence of universities (Wang, 2023).

The “Double First-Class” initiative places heavy emphasis on academic research and teaching quality (Jiang, 2022). Administrative staff play an essential role in facilitating these areas by providing the necessary support systems (Yang, 2024). For example, they assist in managing research grants, handling the logistics of

academic conferences, ensuring compliance with research standards, and coordinating student services (Cheng et al., 2017; Gao, 2015). Their work ensures that faculty members have the resources and environment they need to focus on academic tasks, which ultimately supports the university's mission to become globally competitive (Lin, 2019). Moreover, the growth and development of "Double First-Class" universities require strong, efficient administrative systems (Wang, 2020). The role of administrative staff in managing budgets, overseeing infrastructure development, and handling HR functions directly contributes to the university's long-term sustainability and capacity for growth. These efforts are crucial as institutions expand their academic and research output in line with "Double First-Class" goals.

Given the strategic importance of administrative staff in university governance, their effectiveness directly impacts the overall institutional performance and the realization of "Double First-Class" goals (Li & Xin, 2023; Xu & Chen, 2023). As China's higher education sector undergoes rapid transformation and restructuring, administrative staff must continuously enhance their capabilities to support institutional development, foster innovation, and contribute to the broader objectives of the "Double First-Class" initiative (Jiang, 2022). However, the rapid expansion of student enrolment in higher education institutions has led to a significant increase in administrative workloads (Li & Jiang, 2020). As the number of students grows, the demands on administrative staff intensify (Liu, 2022). Meanwhile, the Chinese government's "Double First-Class" initiative, designed to elevate the quality of higher education, has added further strain (Jiang, 2022). University administrations may struggle to adapt to both the growing size and the higher expectations for educational quality, resulting in greater workloads and heightened pressure on administrative staff. This, in turn, may impact their ability to meet the required standards of job

performance. Therefore, administrative staff must continuously enhance their performance to keep pace with the increasing demands.

Along with the development of higher education, the Chinese government recognizes the significance of transitioning from a mere large country of education to a globally recognized education powerhouse. According to Xi (2017), building a strong education nation is essential to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. To achieve this objective, the Chinese government implemented a reform named Recommendations For Strengthening the Reform of Streamlining Administration, Delegating Power, and Improving Regulation and Services (Ministry of Education of China et al., 2017). In 2020, the Ministry of Education of China (2020) required all education departments to continue to deepen this reform. The aim of this reform is to stimulate the enthusiasm of academic staff, cultivate all kinds of innovative talents to meet the needs of socialist modernization, and form a new international competitive advantage. This reform requires all administrative departments to simplify and optimise service processes, streamline and standardise procedures, shorten processing time and improve service quality so that faculty members can devote their time and energy to teaching and research. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to develop administrative staff in higher education institutions in order to enhance the overall competitiveness of China's universities and colleges (Wu, 2024).

In China, there are twenty three provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities, and two special administrative regions (China government website, 2005). There are eleven provinces and one municipality located in the western part of China. This area makes up 71.4% of the total land area of China but has a population of only 28.8% of the total population due to the poorer natural conditions and economy

compared to those in the East (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022). According to Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and State Council (2020), the majority of the western region remains undeveloped and requires further development. The Chinese government considers the development of the western region crucial and is committed to narrowing the gap between the West and the East. Moreover, the Chinese government has invested significant efforts into developing higher education institutions in the western region. In Figure 1.2, the orange part is the West of China.



Figure 1.2 Map of the West of China

Table 1.2 Administrative Divisions of The People's Republic of China

No.	Name	Level
1	Hebei	Province
2	Shandong	Province
3	Liaoning	Province
4	Heilongjiang	Province
5	Gansu	Province
6	Jilin	Province
7	Qinghai	Province
8	Henan	Province
9	Jiangsu	Province
10	Hubei	Province
11	Hunan	Province
12	Zhejiang	Province
13	Jiangxi	Province
14	Guangdong	Province
15	Yunnan	Province
16	Fujian	Province
17	Taiwan	Province
18	Hainan	Province
19	Shanxi	Province
20	Sichuan	Province
21	Shaanxi	Province
22	Guizhou	Province
23	Anhui	Province
24	Beijing	Municipality
25	Shanghai	Municipality
26	Tianjin	Municipality
27	Chongqing	Municipality
28	Neimenggu	Autonomous region
29	Guangxi	Autonomous region
30	Xizang	Autonomous region
31	Xinjiang	Autonomous region
32	Ningxia	Autonomous region
33	Hongkong	Special administrative region
34	Macau	Special administrative region

Located in the west, Sichuan is an important province with a significant role in the comprehensive development of the country (Peng & Ding, 2018). Sichuan leads the economy in the western region and serves as the hub of opening, cooperation and

innovation drive (Peng & Ding, 2018). On January 3rd, 2020, the sixth meeting of the Central Financial and Economic Commission decided to promote the construction of the Chengdu (capital of Sichuan)-Chongqing economic circle. The Outline of the Construction Plan for the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle (Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2020) was issued on October 16th, 2020. Based on the plan, the economic circle includes the Sichuan Province and Chongqing Municipality and are deemed as the driving force of the western China development. As such, its progress has attracted the attention and interest of policymakers and academic researchers (Zhang & Xiong, 2020).

The development of one region requires the support of colleges and universities, since colleges and universities have an important mission of social service (State Council of the Communist Party of China, 2017). With the deepening of the relationship between universities and society, the importance of the university's social service function becomes increasingly prominent (Li & Coates, 2020), especially the first-class universities, which should not only have first-class educational quality and academic achievements, but also first-class social contributions (Li, 2020). Hence, colleges and universities in Sichuan, particularly "Double First-Class" universities, are important because they are the top universities that are better at serving local development than the other universities.

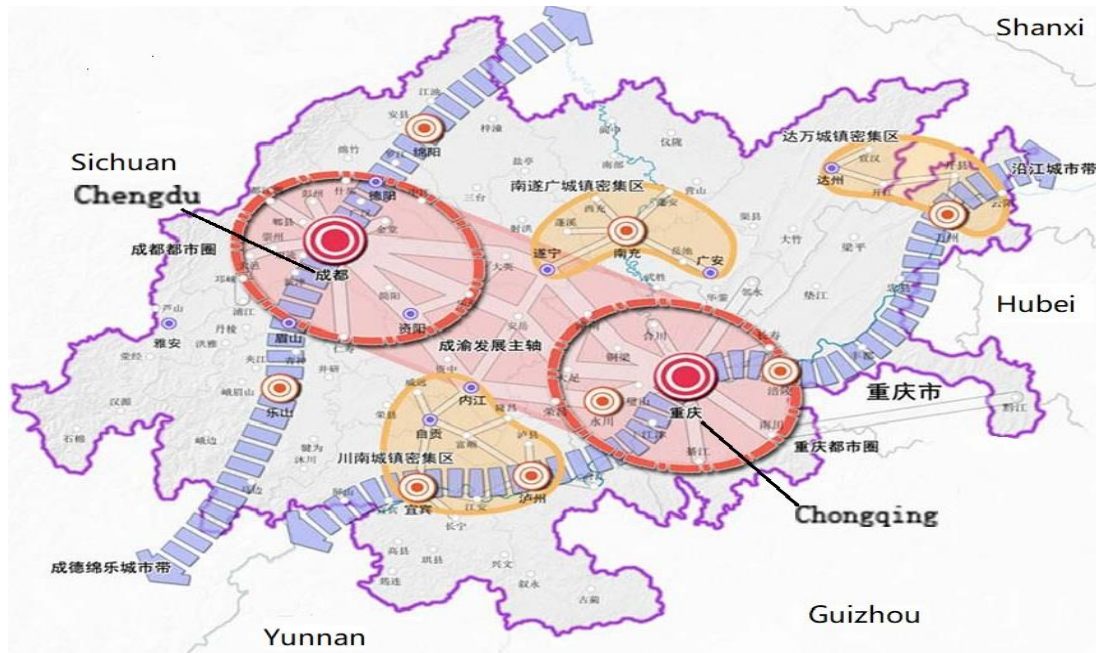


Figure 1.3 Sichuan in the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle (Chen & Tan, 2020)

Besides, Sichuan is the largest education province in the West with 3,045,087 students in colleges and universities by the end of 2022, ranking first in the western area and making up 22.5% of all students in this area (Ministry of Education of China, 2023b). In terms of faculty members, by the end of 2022, there were 105,477 faculty members in Sichuan province, accounting for 20.9% of the total number of faculty members in the west of China, ranking first in the western region (Ministry of Education of China, 2023b). In order to provide support and service to such a large group of students and faculty members, it is critical to improve the job performance of administrative staff in colleges and universities in Sichuan.

Additionally, to deal with poor performance of administrative staff, Sichuan is the first province in China to introduce a policy named Notice of rectification activities on mediocrity, laziness, indiscipline, and procrastination (Sichuan Provincial Education Working Committee & Sichuan Provincial Education Department, 2014).

This signals that in Sichuan Province, poor performance of administrative staff is a problem, and the Sichuan provincial government is concerned about it.

This policy was part of a broader effort to improve the performance of administrative staff in higher education institutions. The key motivation for this initiative was the recognition that widespread issues such as work inefficiency, lack of accountability, and poor attitude among administrative staff were hindering the effective operation and development of universities. This notice is relevant to the current research, which investigates the factors influencing the job performance of administrative staff in Sichuan's universities. The introduction of the notice of rectification activities on mediocrity, laziness, indiscipline, and procrastination reflects the government's recognition of inefficiencies and performance gaps within administrative teams—issues that the current study seeks to explore. Moreover, this policy highlights the need to enhance administrative performance to support broader educational reforms. By examining key organizational factors that influence job performance, the current study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to improve administrative efficiency in Sichuan's higher education institutions, aligning with the broader objectives of this rectification initiative.

In recent research, it has been found that work efficiency, enthusiasm, and abilities of administrative staff are still not satisfactory (Wang, 2023). This indicates that the poor performance of administrative staff in higher education institutions in China is a serious and persistent problem that requires ongoing research in order to improve their job performance.

Mediocrity refers to the lack of excellence, which is manifested in the lack of willingness to reform, enthusiasm for work, broad vision and ability, aimlessness

towards work, and contentment in completing the work tasks arranged by the leaders (Sichuan Provincial Education Working Committee & Sichuan Provincial Education Department, 2014). To address mediocrity, some strategies are considered effective such as training, hiring, performance appraisal and reward system (Hu et al., 2024; Yang, 2024). Hence, some HRM practices including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and reward contribute to solving the issue of mediocrity.

Laziness refers to the unwillingness to put in effort and take on responsibility, manifested as low execution ability, unwillingness to take on work, being picky about tasks, and not completing assigned tasks in a timely manner (Sichuan Provincial Education Working Committee & Sichuan Provincial Education Department, 2014). In order to tackle laziness, transformational leadership is considered an effective strategy because it is negatively associated with laziness (Yao et al., 2014). Additionally, organizational justice may be a factor that reduces laziness (Zheng, 2023).

Indiscipline refers to poor execution of regulations, which is manifested as being late or leaving early for work, playing online entertainment or games during work hours, and lack of motivation for work (Sichuan Provincial Education Working Committee & Sichuan Provincial Education Department, 2014). It has been found that transformational leadership significantly and positively affects the discipline (Wu, 2017). Besides, it has been proved that training and reward has positive effect on employee discipline (Li & Xue, 2021). Additionally, proper performance appraisal has been proved an effective factor to reduce indiscipline at the workplace (Zhang, 2023). Moreover, it has been proved that organizational justice could reduce indiscipline (Wu

et al., 2016). Therefore, transformational leadership, reward, training, performance appraisal and organizational justice are considered as factors that can address the issue of indiscipline.

Procrastination refers to low work efficiency, which is manifested as delaying or postponement of tasks, insufficient progress in work, lack of enthusiasm and initiative in handling tasks (Sichuan Provincial Education Working Committee & Sichuan Provincial Education Department, 2014). Transformational leadership is proven to have a negative correlation with procrastination (Sun, 2024). According to Zhao (2022), procrastination is likely to be addressed by recruitment and selection, training, and reward. Similarly, Zhang (2023) pointed out that training and reward are considered effective to reduce procrastination. Besides, procrastination can be reduced by organizational justice (Zheng, 2023). Hence, recruitment and selection, training, performance appraisal, reward, organizational justice, and transformational leadership are regarded as factors that can solve the issues of procrastination.

The factors described above are related to HRM practices such as training and development, recruitment and selection, reward, and performance appraisal, organizational justice, and transformational leadership. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the effects of HRM practices, organizational justice, and transformational leadership on the job performance of administrative staff in higher education institutions. Table 1.3 shows the effective strategies to solve mediocrity, laziness, indiscipline, and procrastination.

Table 1.3 Strategies to Solve Mediocrity, Laziness, Indiscipline, and Procrastination

Problem	Strategy	Source
Mediocrity	Training	
	Recruitment and Selection	Hu et al. (2024)
	Reward	Yang (2024)
Laziness	Performance Appraisal	
	Transformational Leadership	Yao et al. (2014)
	Organizational Justice	Zheng (2023)
	Training and development	Zhu (2020)
	Performance appraisal	Zhu (2020)
Procrastination	Transformational Leadership	Sun (2024)
	Organizational Justice	Zheng (2023)
	Recruitment and selection	Zhao (2022)
	Training	Zhang (2023)
		Zhao (2022)
Indiscipline	Performance appraisal	Zhang (2023)
	Reward	Zhao (2022)
	Transformational leadership	Wu (2017)
	Organizational Justice	Wu et al. (2016)
	Training	Li & Xue (2021)
	Reward	Li & Xue (2021)
	Performance appraisal	Zhang (2023)

Moreover, recent researchers have called for more research to identify and investigate the boundary conditions that may attenuate or accentuate the link between HRM practices and job performance (Ismail et al., 2021), transformational leadership and job performance (Chen et al., 2018), and organizational justice and job performance (Krishnan et al., 2018). This is due to the inconsistent results of these variables with job performance in prior studies (Ismail et al., 2021; Pattnaik & Tripathy, 2023; Piedade, 2021). “Double First-Class” universities are highly focused on achieving academic excellence and contributing to national development (Wang, 2023), which imbues the organizational culture with a strong sense of collective identity and purpose. Administrative staff working in such an environment are not just employees, they are often deeply invested in the broader mission of the university. In this context, organizational identification becomes a crucial factor that influences how

employees perceive and respond to various organizational practices, including HRM practices, organizational justice, and transformational leadership. Employees who strongly identify with the university may be more likely to internalize the university's values and goals, which can influence their attitudes toward the practices implemented by the organization. For instance, they may prioritize organizational goals over individual rewards or recognition.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the moderator between these variables. Although it is widely acknowledged that HRM practices, organizational justice, and transformational leadership are essential in influencing job performance. However, it is also crucial to recognize the significance of employees' organizational identification in facilitating good job performance (Miao et al., 2019; Peng et al., 2020; Piccoli et al., 2017).

According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), organizational identification refers to "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to the organization". Employees that possess a strong sense of organizational identification regard their organizations' success as their own success, hence fostering positive employee behaviors such as good job performance. When these employees identify themselves as members of their organization, they tend to improve their job performance. Moreover, they are inherently motivated to align their behavior with the goals and norms of the organization, resulting in a reduced need for some other factors such as HRM practices, transformational leadership, and organizational justice.

Therefore, this may indicate that the effects of HRM practices, organizational justice, and transformational leadership on job performance can be attenuated by high-level organizational identification. Nevertheless, few previous studies provided

empirical evidence regarding the moderating effect of organizational identification on the relationships between these variables. Therefore, the moderating role of organizational identification is examined in this study.

In Sichuan, there are eight “Double First-Class” universities: Sichuan University, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, Southwest Jiaotong University, Sichuan Agricultural University, Chengdu University of Technology, Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Southwest Petroleum University (Ministry of Education of China, 2017). These universities are top universities in Sichuan province and play an important role in enhancing the comprehensive strength and competitiveness of higher education in Sichuan. Considering the important role of “Double First-Class” universities in higher education, it is meaningful and necessary to study the job performance of administrative staff in “Double First-Class” universities in Sichuan Province.

In colleges and universities, there are three levels of administrative staff, i.e., operational level, management level, and decision-making level (Ding, 2009; Xu, 2007). According to the Notice of Rectification Activities on Mediocrity, Laziness, Indiscipline, and Procrastination (Sichuan Provincial Education Working Committee & Sichuan Provincial Education Department, 2014), mediocrity, laziness, indiscipline, and procrastination commonly exist in all levels of administrative staff. Among the administrative staff, the largest proportion is the operational-level administrative staff (Peng, 2019). Meanwhile, it is the main group engaged in the administration of colleges and universities and holds a significant position in the administration of colleges and universities (Ding, 2009). The operational-level administrative staff is the

non-academic staff that has been working at the forefront of administrative work, performing administrative and service functions, and playing an important role in information transmission, task implementation, and external exchange (Gao, 2015). Furthermore, the job performance of operational-level administrative staff can influence the efficiency of administration and the development of higher education (Peng, 2016; Yu & Zhang, 2016). Taking the importance of operational-level administrative staff into consideration, this study focuses on operational-level administrative staff.

Based on the reasons mentioned above, it is meaningful to examine if HRM practices, organizational justice, and transformational leadership could enhance performance of operational-level administrative staff in “Double First-Class” universities in Sichuan province with the boundary condition of organizational identification.

1.2 Problem Statement

In recent years, higher education in China has expanded very fast. The number of students in Chinese higher education institutions has grown significantly, rising from 33.3 million in 2012 to 46.6 million in 2022—an increase of approximately 40% during 10 years (Ministry of Education of China, 2023a) . Apart from the size of higher education, the Chinese government introduced the “Double First-Class” universities initiative to enhance the quality of higher education. As a result, both the government and universities have placed higher demands on administrative staff, making their roles increasingly complex and challenging (Liu, 2022; Wu, 2019). The workload has risen substantially (Li & Jiang, 2020), and administrative staff now face immense pressure (Xu, 2018). This burden is particularly heavy for operational-level administrative staff,

who interact directly with students and faculty while bearing the most demanding responsibilities (Gao, 2015; Xu, 2018).

The job performance of administrative staff in universities plays a crucial role in ensuring the smooth operation of academic and administrative processes (Li & Xin, 2023). Administrative staff are essential in supporting teaching, managing resources, and maintaining university operations (Yao et al., 2023). However, poor job performance among administrative staff remains a significant issue in higher education institutions and cannot adapt to the rapid development of higher education of China (Huang, 2016; Lin, 2022; Wang, 2023). Such deficiencies can have profound consequences for universities' ability to function effectively and achieve their institutional goals.

Poor job performance of administrative staff can severely impact institutional efficiency, leading to delays in decision-making (Wu, 2024; Zhang, 2024), resource wastage (Niu & Wu, 2024; Zhang, 2024), and poor service delivery to both students and faculty members (Lin, 2019; Yu et al., 2021). These inefficiencies not only affect the quality of education but also damage the institution's reputation, erode trust in its administrative capacities, and undermine its ability to foster talent and support scientific research (Chen & Hu, 2018).

In the context of universities in Sichuan province, poor job performance is a pressing concern, mirroring the broader trends across China (Peng & Hu, 2019). Issues such as mediocrity, laziness, indiscipline, and procrastination among administrative staff have been documented (Sichuan Provincial Education Working Committee & Sichuan Provincial Education Department, 2014). For example, some administrative staff members exhibit low engagement and responsibility in their roles, as well as an

apparent inefficiency in the execution of their responsibilities. They execute higher-level directives sluggishly, avoid problems rather than solving them, and lack accountability and initiative. It has been noted that some individuals have exhibited disorganized task management and frequent procrastination. Moreover, some administrative staff have exhibited a disregard for the established rules and regulations. Their attendance is often unreliable, with lateness and early departure being commonplace. Moreover, they frequently leave their posts or skip meetings without justification, often engaging in non-work-related activities like using mobile phones and gaming during work hours.

It was reported that faculty members often encounter delays, spending excessive time navigating multiple departments and seeking out various administrative leaders to resolve issues like reimbursement (Lin, 2019). Yu et al., (2021) similarly highlighted the inefficiency of administrative staff in higher education institutions. For example, students have reported needing to make more than ten trips between departments just to obtain the necessary stamps for replacing student cards. Additionally, administrative staff are sometimes unavailable to handle requests in a timely manner. Complaints from both faculty members and students also emphasize the authoritarian behaviour of certain administrative staff, which impedes the efficient management of tasks such as stamping and signing.

Given the important role administrative staff play in maintaining the operational and academic quality of universities, addressing poor job performance is crucial for improving institutional outcomes. However, research on improving job performance of administrative staff in the context of higher education institutions, particularly in China, remains limited (Peng, 2019). Meanwhile, existing research on

improving job performance has often been fragmented, focusing on isolated factors such as human resource management (HRM) practices, transformational leadership, or organizational justice. However, limited studies have investigated these factors within a single framework in the context of administrative staff. Furthermore, there remains a significant gap in understanding how organizational identification might moderate their influence.

In previous studies, various strategies have been shown to be effective. For example, recruitment and selection processes are key in addressing performance issues such as mediocrity and procrastination, as ensuring new hires possess the required skills and educational background can help mitigate inefficiencies and improve job performance (Berman & West, 2003; Sih Darmi & Kusni, 2019). Similarly, training and development programs are a powerful tool for improving job performance by equipping administrative staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to reduce mediocrity, procrastination, and indiscipline (Berman & West, 2003; Li Li & Li, 2020; Tavengwa, 2013; van Eerde & Klingsieck, 2018). Such programs foster greater engagement, accountability, and overall performance. Well-designed performance appraisal systems also play a vital role by providing structured feedback, which helps identify gaps in skills or knowledge, set clear expectations, and motivate staff to improve performance (Ezeodili & Gerald, 2017). Moreover, an effective reward system can incentivize positive behaviors and outcomes, which further enhances job performance by reducing mediocrity and promoting discipline (Ezeodili & Gerald, 2017; Tavengwa, 2013). When rewards are tied to performance, administrative staff feel recognized and valued, leading to increased job satisfaction and motivation.

Beyond these HRM practices, transformational leadership is another critical factor that influences administrative performance. This leadership style, which focuses on inspiring a shared vision and fostering a sense of purpose, has been shown to reduce procrastination, laziness, and indiscipline (Köse & Metin, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2014). Transformational leaders promote creativity, challenge the status quo, and encourage accountability, all of which contribute to improved job performance.

Organizational justice is also a significant determinant of job performance. Research suggests that when employees perceive fairness in reward allocation, decision-making process, and disciplinary actions, they are more likely to take initiative, avoid procrastination, and engage in positive behaviors (Emamverdi et al., 2019; Tavengwa, 2013). Organizational justice not only enhances motivation but also reduces indiscipline, ensuring that administrative staff perform their duties in a professional and responsible manner.

Organizational identification plays a crucial role in shaping job performance (Kazmi & Javaid, 2022; Lee et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2021). However, research also suggests that high organizational identification may reduce sensitivity to HRM practices, leadership interventions, and perceptions of justice (Mostafa et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2017; Yuan et al., 2016), necessitating further investigation. Yuan et al. (2016) suggest that the internalization of organizational values and norms into the self-concept can have complex effects, potentially reducing the impact of other organizational practices on individual job performance. This suggests that the impact of HRM practices, leadership, and justice on job performance may vary depending on the degree of organizational identification among employees.

Given the gap in the literature, this study aims to integrate HRM practices, organizational justice, and transformational leadership to understand job performance of operational-level administrative staff. Additionally, it investigates the moderating role of organizational identification in these relationships, providing a more integrated understanding of how multiple factors contribute to improving job performance of operational-level administrative staff in higher education institutions in China.

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the previous discussion about the problems about operational-level administrative staff, the objectives of present study are as follows:

1. To examine the relationship between HRM practices (recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and reward) and job performance (task performance and contextual performance).
2. To assess the relationship between organizational justice (i.e., distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice) and job performance (task performance and contextual performance).
3. To evaluate the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance (task performance and contextual performance).
4. To test the moderating role of organizational identification on the relationship between HRM practices (recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and reward), organizational justice (distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice), and transformational leadership and job performance (task performance and contextual performance).

1.4 Research Questions

This research attempts to answer the following questions, in the context of “Double First-Class” colleges and universities in Sichuan, China:

1. Are there relationships between HRM practices (recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and reward) and job performance (task performance and contextual performance)?
2. Are there relationships between organizational justice (distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice) and job performance (task performance and contextual performance)?
3. Is there a relationship between transformational leadership and job performance (task performance and contextual performance)?
4. Does organizational identification moderate the relationship between HRM practices (recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, and reward), organizational justice (distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice), and transformational leadership and job performance (task performance and contextual performance)?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study employs a cross-sectional empirical study in which all variables in this study are measured at a single time point. The objectives of the study are to examine the relationships between HRM practices, organizational justice, transformational leadership, and job performance, while considering the moderating role of organizational identification. The study is specifically focused on operational-level administrative staff at eight “Double First-Class” universities located in Sichuan

Province, China. The respondents must meet these two criteria: 1) they must be full-time operational-level administrative staff; 2) they must have 6-month work experience.

1.6 Significance of the Study

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

The present research makes significant contributions to three areas. Firstly, this study contributes to the current literature within the framework of social exchange theory (SET) by offering empirical evidence to support the direct relationship between HRM practices, organizational justice, transformational leadership, and job performance. The current study also enriches the existing body of literature about social identity theory (SIT) by investigating organizational identification as the boundary condition between HRM practices, organizational justice, transformational leadership, and job performance. This has rarely been studied when investigating these relationships between the variables in prior research. To attend the recent call for more research to identify and investigate the boundary conditions that may attenuate or accentuate the link between HRM practices and job performance (Ismail et al., 2021), transformational leadership and job performance (Chen et al., 2018), organizational justice and job performance (Krishnan et al., 2018), this study investigates the moderating effect of organizational identification on these linkages. By doing so, this study contributes to the literature by expanding the understanding of these unexplored relationships. Theoretically, the current research framework presents an idea strongly underpinned by the theme of these theories. As a result, integrating HRM literature, organizational justice literature, transformational leadership literature, and

organizational identification literature into SET, SIT, and job performance literature makes contributions to the theoretical development of this study.

Secondly, this study contributes to the existing literature by integrating HRM practices, organizational justice, and transformational leadership to better understand job performance. Job performance is influenced by multiple factors, including organizational structures such as HRM practices (Groenewald et al., 2024), employee perceptions such as organizational justice (Khan et al., 2022), and leadership style such as transformational leadership (Lee et al., 2023). Examining all three provides a comprehensive perspective by incorporating distinct dimensions that isolated studies might overlook. Therefore, this study integrates these factors within a unified framework to better understand their individual contributions to job performance. Although there has been some empirical research that has explored the relationship between HRM practices and job performance (e.g., Abugre & Nasere, 2020; Ismail et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2019), organizational justice and job performance (e.g., Faeq & Ismael, 2022; Pattnaik & Tripathy, 2023; Sarwary et al., 2023), and transformational leadership and job performance (e.g., Chang, 2021; Chi et al., 2023; Guan, 2020), there is no study that integrates these variables to better understand job performance to the best of the author's knowledge. Therefore, the current study enriches the literature within the realm of human resource management.

Last but not least, it's worth noting that the number of empirical studies focused on the job performance of administrative personnel in higher education institutions is limited (Peng, 2019). Given the importance of higher education to the economy and development of any country, and the importance of operational-level administrative staff in university functions, there is an urgent need to fill this research gap. By