

# Conceptualizing the Relationship Between HRM Practices and Job Satisfaction Among Millennials in China

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## Abstract

This aim of this study is to conceptualize the influence of HRM practices (such as job promotion, salary and benefit, training and development) towards job satisfaction among millennial employees in China. Millennial employees are important workforce undertaking major work initiatives in different posts of diverse industries. A framework of inspecting job satisfaction among millennial employees from some practices of HRM has been formulated to conceptualize the correlation between the related variables. Four propositions are constructed. Firstly, HRM practices have a positive effect on employees' job satisfaction. Secondly, there is a significantly positive relationship between job promotion and employees' job satisfaction when employees who produce results can get promoted opportunities. Thirdly, there is a significantly positive relationship between salary and benefit and employees' job satisfaction where a good and reasonable system of wage and compensation is implemented. Finally, there is a significantly positive relationship between training and development and employees' job satisfaction in those kinds of organizations where employees are filled with

ambition and motivation to pursuit self-improvement. This research will benefit HRM practitioners with acquiring some aspiration as well as implications. Meanwhile, it is helpful for organizations or enterprises to keep rapid development by accessing some knowledge of HRM to make some pertinent strategies.

**Keywords:** HRM practices, job satisfaction, millennial employees, China

## 1. Introduction

The distinctive generation of millennial employees has emerged to become the dominant working force in today's workplace (Huang, 2020; Liu, Zhang & Huang, 2023). On account of the unique superiority granted by the special upbringing environment incorporated with social transformation and internet advancement, a stack of millennial employees have been nominated as general managers or principle officers in some pivotal posts in large-scale incorporates which are world-renowned or locally famous (Gu et al., 2015; Zhang, Pang & Chen, 2019). As shinning in various posts of diverse occupations and industries, this type of people also brings grievous issues which probably immensely inhabit the growth and expansion of many business enterprises or corporations. The issues of 'job-hopping' is the most prominent and typical problem which can be seen in curriculum vitae of majority job applicants. Liu et al (2013) indicated that the proportion for the post-80s who got job-hopping was about 80%, which was revealed by an authentic job searching website named Zhaopin with extensive users in China in 2010. According to the news from Beijing Morning Post of China Central Broadcasting Network, the average time for job-hopping investigated among the population of post-90s was about 2.5 years in 2018(Beijing Morning Post, 2018). The latest data from the Report of White-collar Job-hopping Index Survey in Spring of 2022 identified that the figure pertaining to the white-collar colony who coincided to engender willingness or behaviors for job alternatives was over 90% released by Zhaopin (China Internet Data Information, 2022). All the aforementioned figures and examples clearly transmit an undeniable fact that employment separation of millennial employees has been the thorny issue for many years in business ventures, and the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic makes this condition much more aggravating than before.

The decision issue of massive labor turnover among Chinese millennial employees is heavily influenced by the factor of low job satisfaction which is generally perceived by the comprehensive assessment of compensation, benefit package, working hours, working environment, evaluation system for job performance, personnel relationship, professional training and career guidance and so forth (Zhang, 2023).

This research intends to conceptualize the issues of job satisfaction of white-collar millennials to be explored and conceptualized. The domestic job-hunting website in China known as Zhaopin launches an investigation on job satisfaction among white-collar population every year. The graph on employees' job satisfaction index can be drew as following after the data got disposed (Figure 1). As can be seen form the figure, the fluctuation of job satisfaction index among Chinese white-collar is large, but it shows a

downward trend on the whole, especially in the year of 2019 and 2020 which exhibited a sharp decline due to the negative influence of the outbreak of COVID-19.

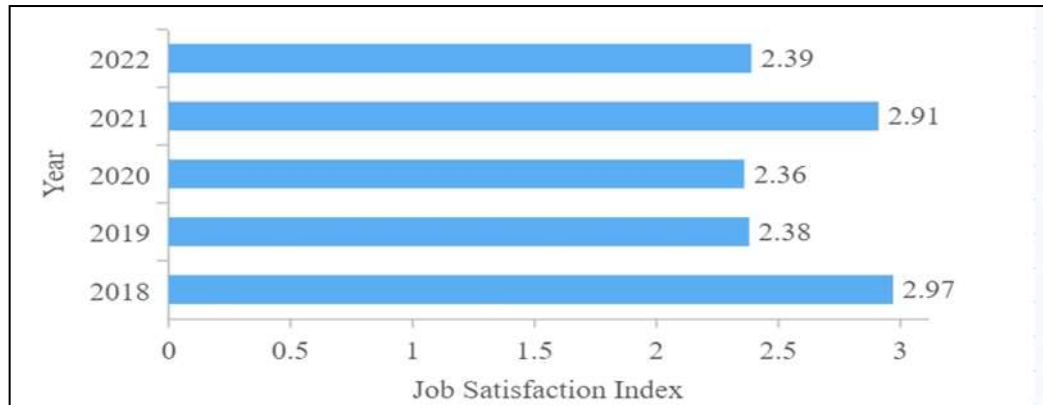


Figure 1. Job Satisfaction Index of Chinese White-collar (2018-2022), Source: Zhaopin, 2022

Extant research provides restricted exploration and reference on the discussion of job satisfaction among millennial workers, primarily focusing on the aspects of some dimensions like reason analysis on low job satisfaction, targeted strategies or countermeasures on job satisfaction enhancement, influencing factors on job satisfaction, impacts of job satisfaction under the mediating role of some variable. Specifically, dominant influencing factors on job satisfaction are interpreted from four facets, which covers employees, colleagues, jobs and organizations on basis of Grounded Theory (Li et al., 2021b). Incentive factors can exert an influence on employees' job satisfaction as well, since this kind of practices usually can generate positive impact on transformation and formation of work motivation substantially, such as corporate management factor, work value factor, organizational environment factor as well as work-life balance factor (Zhao, 2020). As the growing millennial workforce entering the workplace, some proposal which has never been mentioned before on a new perspective come out due to the unique characters of the times that they possess. The most attractive one is that emotional labor can make some changes on employees' job satisfaction, in particular, surface acting of emotional labor is negatively correlated with job satisfaction, while the deep performance and real performance are positively correlated with job satisfaction (Shen, 2020). Although millennial commuters have been endowed with diverse categories of strong personality traits, such as strong perception of self-awareness, high level of education, outstanding learning capability, being imbued with creativity and innovation meanwhile combined with low organization loyalty and weak psychological elasticity. The endeavors on research of job satisfaction not only assist in uncovering the true impacting factors about staff disengagement from disparate angles of view, but also provides some useful implication for practitioners in management levels both on job satisfaction enhancement and reduction of inclination to leave in actual practice (Liu, 2019).

Hence, this paper is designed to explore the literature to conceptualize job satisfaction as a predictor or carrier to deduce the management deficiencies and problems existing in an organization as well as the current status of employment separation among millennial

workers. This leads to the following four pertaining and specific research objectives: (i) to examine factors influencing millennial job satisfaction, (ii) to conceptualize how job promotion as a type of HRM practices influences job satisfaction among millennial workforce in China, (iii) to conceptualize how salary and benefit as a type of HRM practices influences job satisfaction among millennial workforce in China, and (iv) to conceptualize how training and development as a type of HRM practices influences job satisfaction among millennial workforce in China. This novel paper is the first to conduct the research with the setting of Chinese millennial generation employed in Henan province in a comprehensive approach by presenting the content from three dimensions of HRM practices, namely job promotion, salary and benefit, training and development. The study starts from reviewing relevant literature on job satisfaction and HRM practices before elucidating the context of the study, millennial laborers in China. Next, the discussion appraises the literature on job satisfaction and HRM practices for millennial employees, followed by a review of the relationship of aforementioned three dimensions and job satisfaction. This exposition is the theoretical basis for a framework which examines millennials' perception of job satisfaction to conceptualize the hypothesized relationships for this study. The discussion section underlines the potential contribution of this study. Finally, we display practical implications, provide an overview of the limitations of this study and present opportunities for future work which aims at advancing the proposed conceptual framework.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Context of the Study: Millennials in China*

The generation of millennials, seen from the general perspective, refers to a special colony of people who were raised up under the background of internet popularization and computer rising with unique and typical characters (Dimock, 2019; Howe & Strauss, 2000). They are entitled with various names in China defined by different category criteria. There are two types of classification criteria which are the most common to see as well as relatively acceptable among the public, namely literary development and professional academia (Wang, 2022). According to the grading standard of literary development proposed by Chinese literary writers, modern population in China now can be classified into Cultural Revolution generation (1966-1979) and the new generation (1980-2000) based on Chinese developmental history and its impact on literary creation. Reasoning based on time, the new generation in China is the cohort of people named millennials in other countries. However, due to objective limitations of research condition and the accuracy requirement of academic research, scholars in various professional fields will make some specific restrictions on the new generation to make it suitable for their research content, which may result in a relatively large span in time when defining the new generation in the Chinese academic community. For an example, Wang (2022) stated that the new generation could not be defined solely by age but should also consider their cultural attributes and social background comprehensively. Therefore, their study subscribed to the view that young people who grew up after the policy of reform and opening up could be called the new generation. In the study of the leaders' influence on their employees, He and Li (2023) attributed the new generation employees to those who were born after 1990 in the workplace. Liu (2022) provided a clear definition of

the new generation by specifying the birth period of the employee group as those who were born between 1980 and 1999. Based on the industry context of China's new business format, Zhao (2023) defined the new generation as those who had higher education levels, were greatly influenced by globalization and the internet, meanwhile possessed open and diverse mindsets.

The characters of millennials is of primary importance among the public, which ever aroused great discussion and concern of all walk of life. Based on the discourse of the definition on the generation of millennials, pertinent characteristics of their personality can be available to talk about. There are some perspectives of their characters that Chinese academic community tends to converge on which can be elaborated as followings points. Valuing self-realization comes first place. According to Zhou, Pan and Zhang (2016) and Dong and Wang (2022), a significant characteristic of the new generation of graduate employees in their professional careers is their emphasis on self-value realization. Having been born in an era of material abundance and being the first generation of one-child policy, they grew up with plentiful material resources and therefore place less emphasis on salary and benefits offered by companies. Instead, they are more concerned with spiritual factors and value the opportunity to realize their own worth in the workplace. Next, prioritizing learning and self-improvement come after. Li, Zhang and Zhao (2022) proposed that during the growth process of the generation, there have been constant voices of doubt and criticism in society labeling them as the "lost generation" and portraying them as selfish and self-centered individuals. However, upon entering the workplace, they have demonstrated their commitment not only to hard work but also to continuous learning and self-improvement. Then, seeking recognition and support. Despite being criticized by society as children and perceived as having many faults and being unsociable, the new generation is eager to gain recognition from their colleagues and seek guidance, support, and affirmation from their leaders upon entering the workforce. References to relevant online materials and academic literature show that they have indeed gained recognition from their coworkers and leaders in the workplace, becoming a new generation with a sense of responsibility and accountability. And again, pursuing work-life balance is their occupational goal. They are more concerned with their quality of life and physical and mental health. Despite facing strong work pressure in the workplace and maintaining a hectic daily pace of life, they recognize the impact of work-life balance on work efficiency and life satisfaction. Therefore, they hope to achieve a balance between work and life. Finally, equipped with a high level of technical skills as well as strong sense of information awareness are their marks imprinted by technology. They were born and grew up in the era of the Internet, surrounded by various types of online information from an early age. This has given them a natural advantage in learning computer information technology. And they have been influenced by the digital age, which makes them skilled in various new digital tools and information technology applications. So, they also have a stronger sense of information awareness compared to the previous generations (Dong & Wang, 2022).

Another subject as salient as the characteristics is the issues that millennial workforce brings to organizations or enterprises. In detail, these head-scratching issues can be stated as the following four points. Firstly, they are universally assessed as lacking the sense of

responsibility by their coworkers or supervisors in workplace. In the study by Hu (2013), they stated that some millennial employees would choose to resign when they felt discontent with the behaviors or practice of their managers without consideration of the consequences to their corporation or to be worth or not. Furthermore, Pu (2022) explained that some millennial employees wouldn't deal with work items after getting off work compared with the senior workers who would make full use of every minute to complete their tasks even they had punched out. Secondly, they are considered as valuing their own realistic needs too much in working. Hu (2013) asserted that millennial employees possessed the thirst for accessing to abundant material life through quick success, instant benefits and deficit spending influenced by the transformation of idealistic value to practical value after browsing a variety of information online, such as purchasing a house or car on mortgage. Li (2021) also mentioned that some millennial employees especially who had been borne in 1990s tended to be more pragmatic and utilitarian when facing the choice of selecting a major or getting a job in order to cater to the real demands of the society. Thirdly, they are widely alleged as having poor psychological resilience in frustrating or gloomy scenarios at work. Li (2021) summarized the reason for weak adaptability to environment and frustration setbacks of the millennial staff born in 1990s as dependent or paranoid personality which was caused by mental confusion and emotional anxious under the dual pressure of parents and schools. Zhao (2018) represented that millennial employees born in 1980s and 1990s were quite susceptible to external stimuli especially those which were related with economic pressure and society stress from both of work and life, which was one of the main sources contributing to weak psychological resilience. Finally, they are usually known as forming comparatively lower loyalty to the organizations where they are working. Some studies reported that it tend to be easier for the young people to shift their jobs, which also suggests that millennials' loyalty to their organizations or companies is becoming lower and lower.

## *2.2 Job Satisfaction Among Millennials*

Job satisfaction as an affective component which is caused by the functions of diverse factors in the workplace including objective working surroundings, subtle interpersonal relationship, managerial approach, corporate culture, salary and welfare benefits, it plays an essential role for the staff in formulating the decision of keeping retaining in an organization or getting to leave as well as controlling the labor behaviors in the workplace (Bourne, 2020). Generally, employers expect their employees to be satisfied with their job since employees' dissatisfaction was strongly related with their labour market behavior such as low productivity, turnover intention and absenteeism (Gazioglu & Tansel, 2006). Previous studies have indicated that job satisfaction is as a good predictor of quit as wages (Clark, Georgellis & Sanfey, 1998; Freeman, 1977; Clark, 2001). So, no matter what type of industry a company or organization engages in, it is quite necessary and urgent to keep track of the condition of its own employees' job satisfaction so that it can take on a rapid growth and stable development with an excellent talent team.

Initially, many scholars claimed satisfaction incorporates life satisfaction, individuals' life satisfaction and overall satisfaction. And job satisfaction refers in particular to the individuals' fulfilment as a professional, which is the satisfaction evaluation obtained after

comparing the combination of expectation and reality of employees in terms of salary, promotion, job content and working environment (Quan & Zhou, 2010). Job satisfaction also refers to an overall view of an individual's current job and an attitude or feeling shaped by the individual's internal factors and external environment in the context of the banking industry (Ye, 2010). Further, Ye (2010) suggested that employees' satisfaction was equaled to the ratio of actual feelings and expectations. Then job satisfaction of various specific industries gradually became the research focus of vast scholars in different fields. For example, seen from the occupations of teachers, job satisfaction was considered as a general feeling or view that an individual acquired from his working condition and working status, remuneration and expectation, and so forth (Qian et al., 2006; He, Li & Mu, 2018); analyzed from the profession of nurses, job satisfaction was conceptualized as a subjective feeling of nurses' generated with all aspects of nursing work, which could be serviced as a directly predictor for the quality of clinical nursing service, work efficiency and turnover intention (Shen et al., 2018 ; Li et al., 2021).

Factors influencing job satisfaction as the foundation of forming the intention to stay in an organization or loyalty, must be clearly presented in order to achieve a good performance in management even to acquire a good job satisfaction. The earliest research on factors influencing job satisfaction may need to be derived from the explanation by Wernimont (1966) whom categorizes job satisfaction into two types, intrinsic factors and extrinsic factors. Then Gazioglu and Tansel (2006) analyzed job satisfactions from individual and job-related factors with four different measures which had not been taken into consideration before, that were respectively influence over job, amount of pay, sense of achievement, and the respect from supervisors. The striking discovery of this research was that those who got job training opportunities and unmarried groups usually possessed a higher satisfaction level than their counterparts. For the factor of achievement, the people engaged in education and health sectors generated a higher level of satisfaction because of the sense of achievement but less satisfaction with their pay. Recently, a study presented the outlook from the perspective of registered nurses in diverse hospitals located in various countries that two general categories with regard to the factors influencing job satisfaction could be conceptualized, namely personal characteristics of nurses and biographical factors, job-related and organizational factors by organizing and comparing numerous literatures. The former factors covered age, gender, level of education and experience, type of unit and so on; the later included working environment, job promotion, employment training etc., all of which would bring different levels of influence on job satisfaction due to the desperate culture and social context. But seen as a whole, all the identified factors usually made functions together simultaneously. Wen et al (2018) proposed the view that employee development, employee reward, and employee life-work balance were the determinant factors which could produce great influence on the employees' job satisfaction at the moderating role of the organizational culture based on the investigation of millennial employees who were working in the multinational companies in Malaysia.

### *2.3 Conceptualizing the Relationship between HRM Practices and Millennials' Job Satisfaction*

Extents of outcomes achieved in the realm of relationship between HRM practices and job satisfaction have been taken on these years successively, which really has a rich and extensive influence on the future study. The interpretation for the relationship between HRM Practices and job satisfaction can be conceptualized as the following.

The most relevant HRM practices are respectively training and development, performance appraisal, career planning system, employee participation, and compensation system (Hassan, 2016). Mudor (2011) structured a conceptual framework to investigate the relationship between HRM practices and job satisfaction, by focusing on some specific variables, such as job training, pay practices etc., and then found the foregoing variables perceived by employees can significantly influence their job satisfaction positively for the reason that dissatisfaction can be mitigated substantively by this kind of variables or so called hygiene factors interpreted from the perspective of motivation theory. Next, Jeet et. al. (2014) went over the relationship between HRM practices and job satisfaction through empirical study and analysis. Concretely, the researchers set their sights on employees engaged in the bank of HDFC in private sectors and identified the point that HRM practices have displayed significant impact on job satisfaction, notably the practices like training, compensation and so forth (Jeet & Sayeeduzzafar, 2014). Furthermore, Shi (2022) has formulated a completed questionnaire with a sequence of concrete and pertinent questions to inspect the specific elements which can make clear difference on job satisfaction of bank staff. After a range of sound analysis of collected data and hypothesis model, the conclusion drew is that the adjustments on HRM practices such as job promotion system suitable for staff, diverse training with rich content and updated mode, compensation and welfare system with enduring optimization are reasonable countermeasures which can be applied to perfect and promote employees' job satisfaction substantially (Shi, 2022).

Based on the discussion above, one point can be clearly found that HRM practices have a strong relationship with job satisfaction, while types of job promotion, salary and benefits, training and development demonstrate positive influence on employees' job satisfaction among various forms of HRM practices. Since job satisfaction felt by employees endured a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations and conglomerates might need to seek operative approaches or measures to lift job satisfaction of labor force which contributes to the talent acquisition and procedure optimization of HRM. ÇAVUŞ et al (2014) contended that there was a positive relationship between HRM practices and job satisfaction (ÇAVUŞ et al, 2014). Therefore, we conceptualize the proposition below:

Proposition 1: HRM practices such as job promotion, salary and benefits, training and development could positively influence millennials' job satisfaction.

Figure 2 below demonstrates the proposed conceptual framework of this study.



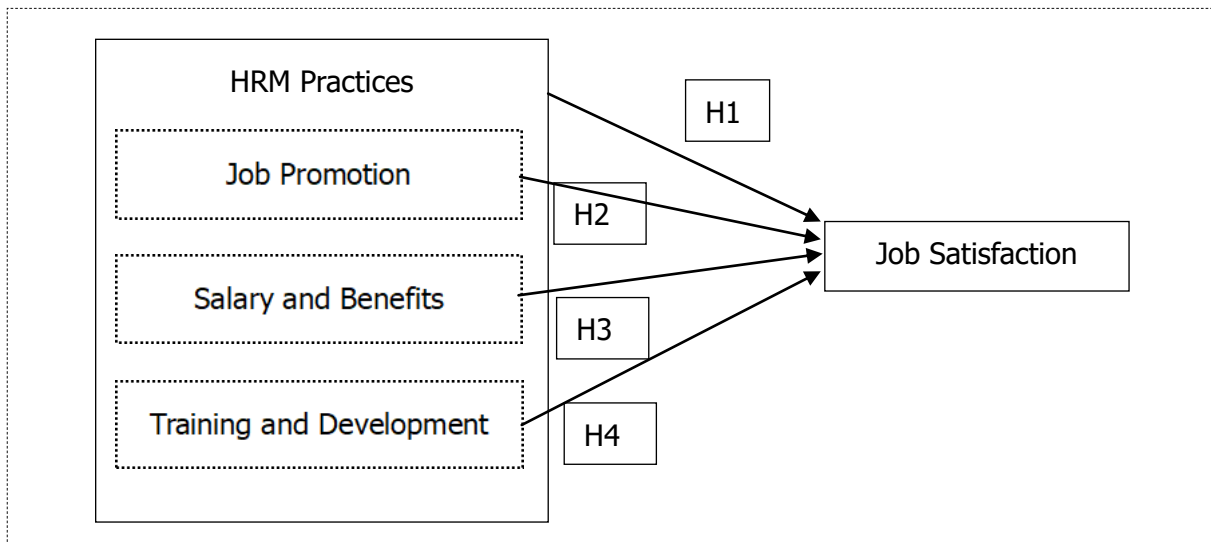


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

### 3. Discussion

The global COVID-19 pandemic has detrimentally impacted the operation of many ventures and various aspects of jobholders in distinctive occupations, job satisfaction is one of the relatively salient examples. In consequence, the model of HRM practices and job satisfaction offers insight into the pivotal factors which may render assistance for people to fathom out how specific practices in HRM shape the perceived feelings of job satisfaction in routine duties among millennial workers, especially may provide valuable reference for some establishments. Nowadays, clusters of millennial commuters have been deployed in different key positions across professions and industries. Due to the great number of disemployed people and job-hoppers because of the low job satisfaction, the development and growth of many holdings or groups encounter some hindrances. So, looking into the dominant types of HRM practices which may sway job satisfaction will become a necessary and imperative task for a number of organizations. By examining and conceptualizing the essential mechanism of the HRM practices on job satisfaction with an expectation of presenting some realistic details both for employers and employees so that they can get some inspirations.

#### 3.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study holds certain points of theoretical and practical implications. From the viewpoint of theory, the interpretation of HRM practices and job satisfaction is instrumental in flourishing relevant theories in the realm of human resources management since it expands the conceptualization of HRM practices and job satisfaction, which not merely participates in a further understanding of these two concepts, but also joins in on making advances of HRM because there is a lack of studies which review the types of HRM practices can become antecedents of job satisfaction.

From the viewpoint of practice, the elaboration on the conceptualized relationship between HRM practices and job satisfaction can play a part in crafting HRM policies which are not only conducive to the growth of organizations or associations, but also benefit the well-being of salary earners by enhancing job satisfaction. Findings of this study can supply a comprehensive understanding for the enterprise management, employees working in China on how these two parts shape their views, feelings and actions towards job satisfaction to achieve a better workplace well-being. Job promotion, salary and benefit, training and development, each dimension contributes to the success of applicable outcomes for different practitioners. For example, job promotion not only can support employees generate more motivation and stronger willingness to persistently work hard, but also spur them to find ways and means to upgrade their professional skills as well as knowledge. Salary and benefit facilitate HR department to take some resultful steps which are helpful to attract and retain talents, meanwhile offer diverse forms of welfare to meet various demands of different employees. As for training and development, it can help organizations greatly boost productivity via cutting-edge training programs, assist in forming a sticker tie between employees and enterprises through employee loyalty, and promote the science advancement and technology update.

### *3.2 Limitations and Future Research*

Few studies have been conducted to explore the relationship between HRM practices and job satisfaction with an empirical approach, which specifically is survey questionnaire with the targeted respondents of millennial employees. Besides, the survey instruments are rare in prior academic articles. To date, most previous research only centers on the influence of some dimensions of HRM practices on job satisfaction, such as reward (Rodjam et al., 2020), recruitment and selection (Mira et al., 2019), employee relationship and empowerment (Mira et al., 2019), training (Rodjam et al., 2020), compensation (Alsafadi & Alhatat, 2021), employee participation (Zamanan et al., 2020). There is no research which covers the terms of job promotion, salary and benefits, training and development together in one study. Future work are needed to develop a quantitative method research to support and confirm the relationship proposed under this conceptualization to leverage a better understanding of HRM practices and job satisfaction on the premise of focusing on the cohort of millennial generation employees in Henan province. Moreover, the conclusion reached in this paper is merely applicable in private sectors and organizations. For public institutions, it is not sure whether this conclusion can get support but that may be a direction where future efforts will go.

## **4. Conclusion**

This study proposed a conceptual framework with situating HRM practices namely job promotion, salary and benefit, training and development as the antecedents to the influence on the opinions and feelings of millennial employees' job satisfaction in the location of Henan province of China. There are four research objectives formed after a critical review of some dominating literature. The first objective was to reveal the detail interpretation of the concept of millennials in China. The literature clarifies that millennials in China with a more

popular name New Generation are a colony of population who grew up and accepted higher education in China, meanwhile had been strongly influenced by internet and possess some typical characteristics because of the transforming development of Chinese economy. This part is a prerequisite for carrying the study. The second objective was to explain the definition and affecting factors of job satisfaction. Literature deliberated on the attribute that job satisfaction plays out as a predictor of employees' intention to leave and discussed its major influencing factors from different occupations and angles. This is the deep foundation to proceed the future research. The third objective was to examine the how job promotion, salary and benefit, training and development influence employees' job satisfaction. Here, related literature manifested that HRM practices, to be particular, job promotion, salary and benefit, training and development have significant relationships with job satisfaction. The fourth objective was to clear and definite the limitations of this research so that pertinent scholars can achieve a better comprehension of where their efforts go in the future.

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