# SPEAKING UP WHEN SILENCE IS GOLDEN:

# A STUDY OF ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF VOICE BEHAVIOR IN CHINESE CULTURAL CONTEXTS

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[1] Thanks Inge De Clippeleer for lending me this phrase and mantra.

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction and Research Objectives

# CHAPTER I - Introduction and Research Objectives


## Abstract

In this introductory chapter, we introduce the general motivation and research question underlying this dissertation. First, we discuss why employee voice behavior, defined as the voluntary expression of change-oriented ideas to improve organizational functioning, is important for scholars and managers alike. We highlight that current insights on voice behavior have mostly been developed and tested in Western cultural contexts and we argue that it is theoretically and practically important to incorporate culturally diverse perspectives to build a more global understanding of voice enactment and evaluation. Next, we discuss how taking a Chinese cultural perspective causes us to formulate three key research objectives by which we aim to contribute to the voice domain. We conclude this chapter with a brief overview of the structure of this dissertation.



*Keywords*: voice behavior, cross-cultural research, Chinese cultural contexts, theoretical contribution

## Overarching Research Question

Constructive voice (hereafter simply "voice") is the voluntary expression of ideas, information, or opinions that aim to benefit the organization (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995). Scholars have long devoted attention to voice because it is a primary means by which employees can help their organization remain effective, vigorous, and competitive (for recent reviews, see Morrison, 2011, 2014). For example, employees' change-oriented suggestions can help public sector institutions to better address the demands of its increasingly diverse citizen base and may even facilitate shifts from bureaucratic toward more flexible, citizen-centered ways of working (Ryan & Abed, 2013). As another example, employee voice counts as a key resource in many high-risk industries (e.g., aviation, healthcare), where employees' failure to speak up can have far-reaching consequences (Bienefeld & Grote, 2014). Finally, given that organizations increasingly operate across national boundaries, local employees' suggestions may be crucial for expatriate managers to avoid the pitfalls, and leverage the opportunities of these cross-border activities (Toh & Denisi, 2005). Unfortunately, employees are often reluctant to speak up (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Perlow & Williams, 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001), causing scholars and practitioners to explore ways to promote employee voice.

In the past two decades research on voice has surged, culminating in important insights regarding the antecedents and consequences of voice behavior (Morrison, 2011, 2014). Scholars have predominantly focused on identifying and examining key organizational and dispositional factors (e.g., supervisor openness, employee duty orientation, employee role cognitions) that predict the amount of voice an employee is willing to engage in (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007; Tangirala, Kamdar, Venkataramani, & Parke, 2013; Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008). One important rationale for the effect of some of these antecedents on voice

enactment is that they affect employees' beliefs about whether speaking up is effective and safe (Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, apart from this work on voice enactment, scholars have begun to examine the outcomes of voice. This body of research addresses the question of when and why voice helps versus hinders individual, collective, and organizational outcomes (e.g., Frazier & Bowler, 2015; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). Some of the key factors determining whether voice results in more versus less positive consequences are message characteristics (e.g., challenging versus supportive voice; Burris, 2012) and voicer characteristics (e.g., trustworthiness; Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012). Taken together, this body of research offers rich and valuable insights into a vast array of key factors that affect voice enactment and evaluation.

Regrettably, however, our current insights have largely been developed and tested in Western-oriented cultural contexts and therefore reflect only one of many culturally diverse perspectives on voice enactment and evaluation. We know less than we should about when and why employees in other cultural contexts speak up with change-oriented ideas, in what manner they typically speak up, and how they evaluate and make sense of the suggestions they receive. Put simply, the question "What determines voice enactment and evaluation in non-Western cultural contexts?" deserves more attention.

Our purpose in this dissertation is to expand our understanding of voice enactment and evaluation by exploring these topics in a Chinese cultural context—a distinctive cultural context where voice behavior may generally be discouraged and perceived in a somewhat more negative light (Zhang, Huai, & Xie, 2015). This is important because taking a culturally diverse perspective should allow us to shed new light on existing knowledge, engender theoretical innovation, and build a more global understanding of employee voice (Chen, Leung, & Chen,

2009; Tsui, 2004, 2006, 2012). In addition, such an investigation is also practically important to offer employees, managers, and organizations a more diverse and more globally effective set of strategies to elicit employee voice and reap its benefits.

## Benefiting from (Cross-)Cultural Perspectives

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the state of the cross-cultural research domain. Furthermore, we elaborate on the ways in which management research and theory can benefit from taking into account divergent cultural perspectives. This section is essential to this dissertation because it specifies how we aim to contribute to the voice literature by taking a Chinese cultural perspective.

Research on the impact of national culture has achieved a front-and-center role in management research (for reviews, see Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005; Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007) and practice (Meyer, 2014; Molinsky, 2013). This is further evidenced by the great number of special issue calls for cross-cultural research efforts (e.g., Arvey, Dhanaraj, Javidan, & Zhang, 2015; Barkema, Chen, Luo, & Tsui, 2015; Morris, Hong, Chiu, & Liu, 2015) and editorial efforts to engage global scholars (Eden & Rynes, 2003; Chen, 2014). Throughout the past decade, numerous reviews of the cross-cultural management domain have applauded the surge in cross-cultural research as well as pinpointed the many remaining conceptual and methodological challenges (see, Gelfand et al., 2007; Schaffer & Riordan, 2003; Tsui et al., 2007). These conceptual and methodological reviews encourage scholars to make progress in a number of key domains, such as strengthening our confidence in the causal role of culture (Leung & van de Vijver, 2008), expanding and combining available cultural frameworks (Gelfand et al., 2007), and accounting for the impact of contextual factors beyond culture (Tsui et al., 2007).

Notwithstanding this progress in the cross-cultural management domain, several cross-cultural research scholars have urged us to reflect on a critical question: what exactly makes cross-cultural research valuable, and how can we better leverage this value? (Chen et al., 2009; Tsui, 2012) Like any research endeavor, cross-cultural research is first and foremost expected to add new and fundamentally important theoretical insights to existing knowledge. In the light of this requirement, Chen and colleagues (2009) argue that it is not sufficient for scholars to pursue cultural differences "an sich" (e.g., by testing existing models in novel cultural contexts). Rather, the key value of cross-cultural research lies in the frame-breaking, creative value of diverse cultural perspectives to substantially add to—and even challenge—existing theory and realize knowledge growth. This resonates with the consensus on what constitutes a theoretical contribution in general management research (Corley & Gioia, 2011) and what is considered "interesting" (Davis, 1971). As Corley and Gioia (2011) argue: "contribution arises when theory reveals what we otherwise had not seen, known, or conceived."

Because of cross-cultural research's inherent capacity to uncover divergent perspectives on phenomena, it provides a natural segue for making a theoretical contribution (Chen et al., 2009). Leveraging this potential requires researchers to have a thorough understanding of indigenous characteristics and the way these may shed new light on the state of current research. It does not, however, require them to conduct explicit cross-cultural comparisons because it is the novel cultural perspective, not cultural differences "per se", that help us to reveal interesting, and previously unknown, facets to phenomena. In that sense, several scholars have posited that indigenous research—examining non-Western concepts and perspectives—has a strong potential to make a theoretical contribution, and thereby also helps us to better understand our own culture. As Pruitt (2004, p. xii) put it: "characteristics that are dominant in one culture tend to be recessive in another, and vice-versa. By studying other

societies where these features are dominant, they can develop concepts and theories that will eventually be useful for understanding their own."

Given this discussion and guidelines on how management research can best benefit from (cross-)cultural perspectives, it is the aim of this dissertation to contribute to the voice domain by taking an indigenous Chinese cultural perspective. For each of the papers in this dissertation the objective was to uncover novel perspectives to voice enactment and evaluation which we may not have readily uncovered had we not crossed over to the "middle kingdom"[2], and let our perspectives be altered.

## Voice Behavior – Joining the Conversation

In order to contribute to the voice domain, it is key to "relate the novelty of the new context to the literature familiar to the Western readers", an approach labelled "making the novel appear familiar" (Tsui, 2004, p. 3). In other words, to be able to "join the conversation" on voice and shift it with a novel cultural perspective, we need to start from the current state of the voice literature. In what follows, we derive three key research objectives for this dissertation, by focusing on areas in voice enactment and evaluation regarding which Chinese culture may provide a substantial shift in perspective, and hence may contribute to theoretically.

### Voice Enactment – Supervisor–Subordinate Relationships

When employees speak up with suggestions for change, they do so within the context of their relationship with their supervisor. Therefore, the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships has important implications for upward constructive voice. Empirical studies demonstrate that leader–member exchange (LMX), defined as the reciprocal exchange of

[2] Chinese for "China", 中国.

efforts (e.g., employee performance contributions) and rewards (e.g., supervisor treatment and decisions such as pay raises and promotions), is positively related to voice behavior (e.g., Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008; Van Dyne et al., 2008). The rationale for the positive relationship between LMX and voice is that the fruitful and reciprocal exchange of valuable resources reduces employee fears about potential negative consequences of voice and increases employee confidence that their supervisor will be responsive to their change-oriented opinions, ideas, and suggestions.

We propose that taking a Chinese cultural perspective may shed new light on the linkage between supervisor–subordinate relationships and employee voice. This is because in Chinese cultural contexts, relationships or "guanxi" (关系) are the cornerstone of society (Hwang, 1999, 2000) and therefore the concept and operationalization of supervisor–subordinate relationships may be richer and more complex in Chinese cultural contexts, compared to how it has been conceived in the West (i.e., LMX) (Gelfand et al., 2007). More specifically, rather than being characterized by the equal and reciprocal exchange of valued resources (cf. LMX), guanxi are typically differentiated according to 1) the degree of closeness between dyadic partners; and 2) the hierarchical ordering of the dyadic partners (Chen, Chen, & Huang, 2013). Furthermore, Confucius stipulated that "social interaction should begin with an assessment of the role relationships between oneself and others" across these logics (closeness and hierarchy). In other words, the distinct nature of guanxi should have implications for how Chinese supervisors and employees interact, and thus for employee voice as a part of supervisor–subordinate interaction. In all, we propose that our current knowledge, based on a prototypically Western model of supervisor–subordinate relationships (LMX), should benefit from the distinctive take on supervisor–subordinate relationships that Chinese cultural contexts have to offer (guanxi).

***RO1:*** *The first research objective of this dissertation is to examine the impact of supervisor–subordinate guanxi (i.e., supervisor–subordinate relationships in Chinese cultural contexts) on upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts.*

**Voice Enactment – Drivers of Voice Behavior**

Voice researchers have identified many different antecedents of employee voice, such as employee personality (e.g., LePine & Van Dyne, 2001), leader behaviors (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007), and employee perceptions of social support (e.g., Chiaburu, Lorinkova, & Van Dyne, 2013). In thinking about and identifying antecedents, one key question that voice scholars have asked is: what considerations need to be addressed for employees to be willing to engage in voice behavior? Recent reviews of the voice domain emphasized two key perceptions that may strengthen the motivation to engage in upward constructive voice: perceived efficacy of voice and perceived safety of voice (Morrison, 2011, 2014). Perceived efficacy refers to "individual's judgment about whether speaking up is likely to be effective" (Morrison, 2011, p. 382). Perceived safety refers to "individual's judgment about the risks or potential negative outcomes associated with speaking up" (Morrison, 2011, p. 382). In the light of these key perceptions, part of the research on antecedents of voice centered around factors nurturing perceptions of control (e.g., job autonomy) and perceptions of openness (e.g., supervisor openness). As in the broader proactivity literature, the assumption is that proactive behavior, such as voice, is self-started, planned for, with a self-chosen goal or vision in mind. Thus, if employees can feel efficacious and safe, they can personally initiate action and speak up with change-oriented ideas, opinions, and suggestions, on their own volition.

Taking a Chinese cultural perspective however, brings into scope another important—yet largely unaddressed—issue which employees may consider before they speak up: am I

expected (by others) to speak up with change-oriented ideas, suggestions, and opinions? Indeed, in Chinese cultural contexts, face (i.e., one's self-worth or respectability in the eyes of others) is paramount (Leung & Cohen, 2011). Therefore, honoring and acting upon *others*' expectations—rather than initiating one's own actions—should be most important to maintain mutual face. Entertaining the possibility that voice behavior is most likely to be driven by others' expectations in Chinese cultural contexts, questions the self-starting nature of voice, and surfaces some important questions for voice scholars: What if contexts do not consistently support and legitimize the individual as separate from others, as self-directed and in control? What if agency results from being responsive to others, coordinating with others, and affirming one's place in a particular social order? We think these are important questions and that addressing them may not only shed light on when and why employees in Chinese cultural contexts are likely to speak up, but also helps build more global knowledge on the drivers of voice.

> ***RO2:*** *The second research objective of this dissertation is to develop a conceptual model of when and why individuals in Chinese cultural contexts (where face is important) are likely to engage in upward constructive voice.*

**Voice Evaluation – Voice Tactics and Perceptions**

Scholarly and practitioner interest in voice behavior is largely spurred by the central premise that voice entails a range of benefits for organizations, work groups, and individuals (Morrison, 2011). Despite initial insights in the consequences of voice (e.g., Burris, 2012; Detert, Burris, Harrison, & Martin, 2013), scholars have called for a broader and more in-depth understanding of voice effectiveness (Morrison, 2011). For example, current research has centered on performance- and career-related individual outcomes of voice (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Whiting et al., 2012), with less consideration of consequences in other domains. In

addition, we still have a limited understanding of the manner in which employees can speak up to be more effective and the target characteristics that can facilitate versus hinder voice effectiveness (Morrison, 2011).

We propose that taking a Chinese cultural perspective can uncover implicit Western-oriented assumptions on voice consequences, tactics, and targets, thereby addressing some of these avenues for future research from a relatively more novel angle. For example, given the importance of relationships in Chinese cultural contexts, it may be natural to expect task-related as well as relational consequences of voice (e.g., liking, social exclusion, future interaction). As another example, given the importance of deciding and acting interdependently (vs. independently), it may be more effective to provide change-oriented suggestions in a humble manner—and not in a self-assertive manner. Furthermore, considering a general deference to hierarchy, could it be that Chinese employees are more likely to check their ideas with their peers or speak out to them first with change-oriented ideas and suggestions? Taken together, these questions contrast (implicit) Western and Chinese perspectives and addressing these questions should contribute to a novel, broader, and more in-depth understanding of voice consequences.

> ***RO3:*** *The third research objective of this dissertation is to develop and test a model of when and why voice is more or less effective, thereby contrasting (implicit) Western and Chinese perspectives on voice consequences, voice tactics, and voice targets.*

## Overview of this Dissertation

We developed a conceptual paper and conducted two empirical studies to address the research objectives of this dissertation. Our theorizing and findings are comprised in Chapters 2 to 4, with our final chapter serving as the epilogue of this dissertation. Table 1.1 provides an

overview of the core research question, the cultural perspective, and the theoretical framework for each of the papers.

In Chapter II, we address the first research objective of this dissertation: to examine the implications of the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships for employee voice in Chinese cultural contexts. In this paper entitled "*Too Attached to Speak up? It depends: How Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi and Perceived Job Control Influence Upward Constructive Voice"*, we draw on Relational Models Theory (Fiske, 1992) to develop and test a model of when and why supervisor–subordinate relationships (i.e., supervisor–subordinate guanxi) affect upward constructive voice, over and above the prototypical, Western-oriented conceptualization of supervisor–subordinate relationships (LMX).

In Chapter III, we address our second research objective: developing a conceptual model of when and why individuals in Chinese cultural contexts are likely to engage in upward constructive voice. In the paper entitled *"Obliged To Speak: An Accountability Model of Upward Constructive Voice in Chinese Cultural Contexts"* we take an accountability lens (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) to explicate why employees in Chinese cultural contexts generally feel accountable to *not* speak up with change-oriented ideas and we identify antecedents and boundary conditions that foster voice accountability, and thereby promote employee's obligation to speak.

In Chapter IV, we address our third research objective: developing and testing a model of when and why voice is more or less effective, by contrasting (implicit) Western and Chinese perspectives on voice consequences, voice tactics, and voice targets. In this paper entitled *"Hitting the Right Notes: Peer's Reactions to Constructive Voice as a Function of Voice Style*

*and Cultural Agency Beliefs"*, we draw on Self-Presentation Theory (Jones & Pittman, 1982) to examine when and why individuals react more or less positively toward change-oriented suggestions delivered in different self-presentational voice styles by their peers.

In Chapter V, we conclude this dissertation with an epilogue in which we discuss how the Chinese cultural perspective taken in each of our papers contributes to theory on voice behavior, and on organizational behavior in general. In addition, we elaborate on methodological contributions and limitations, formulate managerial implications, and highlight a number of fruitful avenues for future research.

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Table 1.1
*Overview of the Papers by Cultural Perspective and Theoretical Framework*

| | Research Question | Cultural Perspective | Theoretical Framework |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Paper 1 – Guanxi-Voice** | What are the implications of the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships for employee voice in Chinese cultural contexts? | Supervisor–subordinate Guanxi | Relational Models Theory (Fiske, 1992) |
| **Paper 2 – Obliged to Speak** | When and why are employees in Chinese cultural contexts likely to speak up with change-oriented suggestions, ideas, and opinions? | Face | Accountability Theory (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) |
| **Paper 3 – Hitting the Right Notes** | When and why is peer-to-peer voice more or less effective? | Agency Beliefs | Self-Presentation Theory (Jones & Pittman, 1982) |

# CHAPTER II

## Too Attached to Speak Up? It Depends: How Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi and Perceived Job Control Influence Upward Constructive Voice

# CHAPTER II - Too Attached to Speak Up? It Depends:

# How Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi and Perceived Job Control Influence Upward Constructive Voice


## Abstract

In general, reciprocal supervisor–subordinate relationships (high leader–member exchange relationships) provide a supportive context for employees to speak up. In Chinese cultural contexts however, supervisor–subordinate relationships or *guanxi* are characterized by affective characteristics and hierarchical characteristics which may respectively facilitate and inhibit employee voice. We draw on Fiske's Relational Models Theory to develop a model of the effects of two dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi (affective attachment to the supervisor and deference to the supervisor) on voice. Results of a multi-source, lagged field study demonstrated that affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi facilitated and deference to supervisor guanxi inhibited voice, when employees experienced low job control. In addition, two aspects of relational self-concept (concern for others self-concept and relational identity self-concept) differentially predicted the two dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi. We discuss how these findings extend our understanding of the nature of supervisor–subordinate relationships and their impact on voice.



*Keywords:* supervisor–subordinate guanxi, voice behavior, relational self-concept

## Introduction

Upward constructive voice is the voluntary expression of ideas, information, or opinions that aim to benefit the organization (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995). Upward constructive voice is important because suggestions for change can contribute to organizational effectiveness and build competitive advantage by facilitating innovation (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Nemeth & Staw, 1989), learning (Edmondson, 1999, 2003), and decision making (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Unfortunately, employees are often reluctant to speak up (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Perlow & Williams, 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001), and so scholars have examined different ways to promote upward constructive voice (hence referred to as "voice").

Research demonstrates that the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships is a key predictor of voice (for a review, see Morrison, 2011). Specifically, research consistently demonstrates that leader-member exchange (LMX), which reflects a reciprocal and mutually beneficial supervisor–subordinate relationship, facilitates speaking up (e.g., Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008; Detert & Burris, 2007; Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008). These positive effects occur because LMX reduces employee fears about the negative consequences of voice and strengthens employee expectations that supervisors will be responsive to voice and their suggestions will make a difference.

Regrettably, our current understanding of the effects of supervisor–subordinate relationships on voice is based primarily on social exchange arguments about equal contributions and reciprocity from a prototypically Western perspective (Chen, Friedman, Fang, & Lu, 2009; Hui & Graen, 1997). This is problematic because different cultures tend to develop different types of supervisor–subordinate relationships (Khatri, 2011). Specifically, theory argues and

empirical work demonstrates that supervisor–subordinate relationships in Chinese cultural contexts are based on *guanxi*, defined as a "dyadic, particular and sentimental tie that has potential of facilitating favor exchange between the parties connected by the tie" (Bian, 2006, p. 312). Guanxi relationships are guided by two principles that are particularly salient in Chinese cultural contexts and different from LMX (Chen, Chen, & Huang, 2013; Y. Chen et al., 2009). First, supervisor–subordinate guanxi involves particularistic, affective ties (i.e., affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi). Second, supervisor–subordinate guanxi involves hierarchical obligations to show deference, obedience, and loyalty (i.e., deference to the supervisor guanxi) (Y. Chen, et al., 2009). Focusing on these particularistic and hierarchical dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi is important because they are influential in Chinese cultural contexts (for initial evidence, see Y. Chen et al., 2009), they are different from typical conceptualizations of the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships (LMX) (Khatri, 2011), and these particularistic and hierarchical dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi may have paradoxical implications for employee voice.

Our purpose in this article is to address the question of when and why employee's relative emphasis on these dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi facilitates or impedes speaking up in Chinese cultural contexts. In addition, we consider individual attributes (self-concept) that cause employees to differentially emphasize the two dimensions of guanxi when interacting with their supervisor. We draw on Relational Models Theory (RMT; Fiske, 1992) as the theoretical framework for our model. RMT defines four fundamental ways in which individuals relate to others. Two of these four fundamental relational models have special relevance to supervisor–subordinate relationships in Chinese cultural contexts because they encompass the particularistic and hierarchical dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi. Specifically, the communal sharing relational model encompasses the affective, particularistic

character of affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and the authority ranking relational model encompasses the hierarchical character of deference to the supervisor guanxi (Y. Chen et al., 2009). Because RMT discusses predictors of these relational models and the implications of these relational models for people's social cognitions and behavior, this theoretical framework allows us to develop predictions about the dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi and voice, as well as predictions about antecedents and boundary conditions for these guanxi–voice relationships.

Overall, we aim to contribute to the voice literature by providing a deeper scholarly understanding of when, how, and why supervisor–subordinate relationships in Chinese cultural contexts influence upward constructive voice. This is theoretically important because contrasting indigenous perspectives (e.g., guanxi) with prototypical perspectives taken in Western cultural contexts (e.g., LMX) can build a more well-rounded and nuanced understanding of phenomena (e.g., voice) (Y.-R. Chen, Leung, & Chen, 2009; Tsui, 2006). In what follows, we first introduce Relational Models Theory (RMT; Fiske, 1992) and show how this theoretical framework allows for a deeper understanding of the nature of two dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi, their antecedents, and implications for voice. Drawing on RMT, we then develop our conceptual model.

## Relational Models Theory

Relational Models Theory (RMT; Fiske, 1992) posits that individuals use four fundamental relational models to think about their relationships with others: communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing. In *communal sharing* relationships, people consider their relationship partner as an equal and share resources freely based on the other's needs. In *authority ranking* relationships, hierarchical roles cause subordinates to show respect

and obedience and superiors to show care. In *equality matching* relationships, a sense of egalitarian balance causes tit-for-tat, in-kind reciprocal exchanges and turn-taking. In *market pricing* relationships, people seek suitable returns on their investment of time, effort, or money in the relationship. RMT also posits that cultural and individual factors determine a person's tendency to use each of the four relational models, and that these relational models have implications for individual-level social cognition and behavior (Haslam, 2004a; 2004b).

Over the past two decades, empirical research has provided compelling support for the main premises of RMT. Early empirical work demonstrated that Fiske's (1992) four relational models are distinct and capture the fundamental differences in ways people conceptualize their relationships with others (for a review, see Haslam, 2004a). Research also demonstrates that individual and cultural differences (e.g., personality, cultural values) predict the salience and use of different relational models (Biber, Hupfeld, & Meier, 2008; Haslam, Reichert, & Fiske, 2002). For example, Caralis and Haslam (2004) showed that agreeable individuals were more likely to use and prefer close relationships (communal sharing), but were less likely to use and prefer hierarchical relationships (authority ranking).

Finally, relational models explain individual-level cognitions and behavior (McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; Rai & Fiske, 2011). For example, Simpson and Laham (2015) showed that those describing issues along communal sharing and equality matching relational models adopted a more liberal stance on the issue, whereas those describing issues along authority ranking and market pricing relational models adopted a more conservative stance. As another example, McGraw and colleagues (2003) demonstrated that the source of money such as from a parent (communal sharing) versus from a business (market pricing) influenced the value placed by the recipient on the money and whether they decided to spend or save the money. Taken

together, RMT is an integrated theoretical framework about fundamental relational models, their antecedents, and consequences. To date, researchers have applied RMT in many domains, including consumer behavior (McGraw, Tetlock, & Kristel, 2003), morality (Rai & Fiske, 2011), and organizational behavior (Christie & Barling, 2014).

RMT is relevant to our research question about predictors of voice in Chinese cultural contexts because it increases our understanding of the communal sharing and authority ranking relational models, which are at the basis of supervisor–subordinate guanxi in Chinese cultural contexts. In addition, RMT provides cues about individual differences that should cause employees to construe their relationship with their supervisor according to guanxi-based relational models (communal sharing and authority ranking), and whether and when the guiding principles of these relational models facilitate or inhibit employee voice.

In what follows, we draw on RMT to develop our conceptual model (Figure 1). First, we elaborate on the nature of supervisor–subordinate guanxi, and how it contrasts with LMX. Then, we further draw on RMT to develop the argument that different aspects of employee relational self-concept (i.e., how employees think about themselves in relation to others) serve as predictors of the different dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi. Furthermore, we identify employee's perceived job control (i.e., the extent to which employees think they can control issues and events that influence their work) as a boundary condition that qualifies the relationship between their guanxi and voice. This is because RMT conceptualizes relational models as coordination devices (Fiske, 1992) and so relational models, such as guanxi, are more influential when employees need to coordinate with others, such as in the case of low job control. Finally, we draw on RMT to argue that affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi

and deference to the supervisor guanxi convey distinct relational norms that respectively facilitate and inhibit employees to speak up, when they need to coordinate with their supervisor.

## Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi Dimensions as Prototypical Relational Models in Chinese Cultural Contexts

Fiske (1992) described the four relational models as universally shared templates for social relations and argued that they can be employed in any culture. Recent theorizing and empirical evidence, however, suggest that the prototypical relational models for supervisor–subordinate exchanges differ across cultures (Y. Chen et al., 2009; Khatri, 2011). Nevertheless, most research on the quality of supervisor–subordinate exchanges has focused on leader-member exchange (LMX; Liden, Wayne, & Stillwell, 1993), which is rooted in prototypically Western cultural values. LMX parallels Fiske's (1992) relational model of equality matching (Y. Chen et al., 2009) because both conceptualizations emphasize even, or balanced, exchanges of effort.

Y. Chen and colleagues' (2009) recent examination of the nature of supervisor–subordinate relationships (or guanxi) in China demonstrated that supervisor–subordinate guanxi is multidimensional and includes two different and under-researched relational models: communal sharing and authority ranking. Supervisor–subordinate guanxi is modelled according to family relationships (Y. Chen et al., 2009) and reflects the five cardinal relationships (*wu lun:* emperor-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger, and friend-friend) central to Confucianist thought (Chen & Chen, 2004). The role expectations for these relationships involve differentiation along particularistic and hierarchical dimensions, paralleling communal sharing and authority ranking relational models respectively (Chuang, 1998; Hwang, 2000).

These relational models are especially relevant in Chinese cultural contexts (Y. Chen et al., 2009) and are fundamentally different from prior research on LMX (equality matching). Therefore, our model focuses on the two guanxi dimensions that reflect communal sharing (affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi) and authority ranking (deference to the supervisor guanxi) relational models (Hwang, 2000)[3]. Affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi is defined as the degree of emotional connection, understanding, and willingness to care for the supervisor across varied circumstances (Y. Chen et al., 2009, p. 378). Affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi parallels communal sharing because it reflects the degree to which the supervisor–subordinate tie is personal and involves emotional expressiveness and concern. Indeed, Hwang (2000) noted that the benevolence inherent in such particularistic, and affective ties is the core of communal sharing. In contrast, deference to the supervisor guanxi is defined as the degree of obedience and devotion toward the supervisor (Y. Chen et al., 2009, p. 379). This dimension of supervsior–subordinate guanxi emphasizes appropriate and righteous behavior based on hierarchical position. Its focus on hierarchical obligations is similar to Fiske's relational model of authority ranking (Hwang, 2000).

## Theory and Hypotheses

### Relational Self-Concept and Supervisor-Subordinate Guanxi

RMT posits that individuals "differ in a systematic, trait-like manner in their tendencies to employ the [relational] models in making sense of their interpersonal worlds" (Haslam, 2004a,

[3] We acknowledge the third dimension of guanxi identified by Y. Chen and colleagues (2009) who defined personal life inclusion as the degree to which subordinates and supervisors include each other in their private or family life (p. 378). Personal-life inclusion involves sharing meals, paying regular visits, and exchanging gifts. Given that our research focuses on the implications of relational models for voice behavior at work, the personal life inclusion dimension of guanxi has less relevance to our research because it focuses primarily on relationships outside of work (Smith et al., 2014). Our approach also differs from Leader-Member Guanxi (LMG; Law, Wong, Wang, & Wang, 2000) which also emphasizes non-work social exchanges based on gift giving and dinner invitations (Chen et al., 2013; Law et al., 2000).

p. 44). This is because individuals utilize and express key aspects of themselves (e.g., personality, beliefs, identity, values) when they think about and approach their relationships with others (Biber et al., 2008; Roccas & McCauley, 2004). Specifically, Fiske (1992) described a close connection between individuals' sense of self and their use of particular relational models to relate to close others. He characterized people oriented toward communal sharing as having a sense of self that is united with close others, affectively connected, and concerned about the needs of others. In contrast, those with a sense of self derived from knowing one's place in relation to others in the hierarchy are more likely to use the authority ranking relational model.

Applying this idea to the work context, we argue that an employee's self-concept can influence an employee's emphasis on the different dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi. We focus on relational self-concept, which is derived from connections and role relationships with significant others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996), because it is more relevant to relational models (Fiske, 1992) than more asocial or individual domains of self-concept. Additionally, the Confucian assumption that individuals fundamentally exist in relation to others and are never an isolated or separate entity (King, 1991; Liang, 1988) makes the relational self-concept especially salient in Chinese work contexts.

Research demonstrates that the relational self-concept has multiple aspects (Hardin, 2006; Hardin, Leong, Bhagwat, 2004). Given our interest in predicting employee's emphasis on the different dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi, we consider two contrasting aspects of relational self-concept. The first is concern for others self-concept, which is more communal and emphasizes care for others. An individual's strong concern for others self-concept indicates that high-quality affective relationships are central to this person's sense of self (Johnson,

Selenta, & Lord, 2006). The second is relational identity self-concept and is more about one's standing relative to specific others and what this means for one's role responsibilities. For individuals with a strong relational identity self-concept, specific relationship contexts (e.g., self-with-parent, self-with-supervisor, self-with-friend) are self-defining and they adapt their sense of self and role responsibilities accordingly (Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003).

Both aspects of relational self-concept highlight the importance of relationships to a person's sense of self. However, they also differ in ways that are important for the use of guanxi (affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi, deference to the supervisor guanxi). Employees with a strong concern for others self-concept have a general tendency to promote the well-being of close others (Brebels, De Cremer, & Van Dijke, 2014; Fehr & Gelfand, 2009) and this benevolent approach and communal orientation is not central to employees with a strong relational identity self-concept (Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006; Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2003; Cross, Hardin, Gercek-Swing, 2011). In contrast, employees with a strong relational identity self-concept emphasize role behavior as appropriate within a particular relationship context (e.g., show obedience to the supervisor based on the difference in their hierarchical roles) and this adaptive, relation-specific orientation is not present in employees with a strong concern for others self-concept (Cross et al., 2011)[4]. Below, we argue that Chinese employees' emphasis on each aspect of the relational self-concept determines the extent to which they emphasize the more affective or the more hierarchical dimension of supervisor-subordinate guanxi. Table 1 summarizes these key constructs and the links between relational self-concept and guanxi.

[4] Given the conceptual differences in the more communal and self-defining aspects of the relational self-concept, it is not surprising that they are only moderately related ($r$ = .41, Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; $r$ = .42, Selenta & Lord, 2005) and not mutually exclusive (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Selenta & Lord, 2005). Individuals can be high on both, low on both, or high on one and low on the other.

For our first hypothesis, we focus on concern for others self-concept and affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi. An employee's strong concern for others self-concept indicates that high-quality affective relationships are central to this employee's identity (Johnson et al., 2006). Therefore, this employee should emphasize the self as committed to benevolent helping and mutually caring relationships with close others. As noted in Table 1, strong concern for others self-concept causes employees to emphasize benevolent relationships with close others (Chang & Johnson, 2010; Johnson et al., 2006) and this parallels the primary focus of the communal sharing relational model (Fiske, 1992). As a result, we expect that the caring, helping, nurturing and sharing that are characteristic of those employees with strong concern for others self-concept will cause them to attend to the personal needs and welfare of the supervisor. This will result in an affectively close relationship with the supervisor (i.e., affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi) in which the employee shows the benevolence that is characteristic of communal sharing relational models (Fiske, 1992) and the supervisor and subordinate emphasize mutual care and concern for one another (i.e., favoring the intimate, Hwang, 2000).

Indirect empirical evidence confirms the link between concern for others self-concept and the tendency to approach relationships from a communal sharing perspective. For example, research demonstrates that those high on concern for other self-concept were more likely to go out of their way to help close others (Johnson et al., 2006, study 1) and were more responsive to apologies reflecting communal concerns (e.g., apologies involving empathy, concern, care, and tenderness; Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). Thus, we predict that Chinese employees with a strong concern for others self-concept are more likely to have guanxi with their supervisor that is high on affective attachment.

**Hypothesis 1:** *Concern for others self-concept positively predicts affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi.*

For our second hypothesis, we focus on relational identity self-concept and deference to the supervisor guanxi. An employee's strong relational identity self-concept indicates that close relationships with specific others are central to this employee's identity (Cross et al., 2000). Specific relationship contexts (e.g., self-with-friend, self-with-supervisor) are self-defining and employees adapt their sense of self and role responsibilities accordingly. In the context of Chinese employees' relationship with their supervisor, employees' strong relational identity self-concept makes their hierarchical role obligations and subordinate role salient (e.g., self in relation to supervisor) (Chen et al., 2006; Cross et al., 2003), and this parallels the primary focus of the authority ranking relational model (Fiske, 1992) (see Table 1). Therefore, we expect that Chinese employees with a strong relational identity derive self-worth from appropriate deference within the context of hierarchical work relationships (Brewer & Chen, 2007) and are more likely to show deference, obedience, and loyalty characteristic of authority ranking relational models (Fiske, 1992).

Indirect empirical evidence suggests that the authority ranking concepts of dominance, subordination, and obedience are salient to individuals with a strong relational identity self-concept in Chinese cultural contexts. For example, Huang and Bi (2012) demonstrated that Chinese individuals with a strong relational identity self-concept also thought of themselves in hierarchical terms (submissive-dominant) and described themselves as dutiful and rule-conscious. Thus, we predict that Chinese employees with a strong relational identity self-concept will emphasize deference and hierarchical obligations in their guanxi with their supervisor.

**Hypothesis 2:** *Relational identity self-concept positively predicts deference to the supervisor guanxi.*

**Supervisor–Subordinate Guanxi, Job Control, and Upward Constructive Voice**

Upward constructive voice is the voluntary expression of ideas, information, or opinions directed at the supervisor and aimed at effecting organizationally functional change (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Van Dyne et al., 1995). In Chinese cultural contexts, affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi should be especially important to voice behavior when employees coordinate with their supervisor because "Confucius advised that social interaction should begin with an assessment of the role relationship between oneself and others" (Hwang, 2000, p. 168). Accordingly, the nature of supervisor–subordinate guanxi has implications for employee beliefs about the appropriateness of speaking up with change-oriented suggestions. This is because relational models, such as those reflected in supervisor–subordinate guanxi, involve norms and rules for appropriate interaction (Giessner & Van Quaquebeke, 2010; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; Rai & Fiske, 2011).

RMT, however, posits that "people do not always coordinate" and do not always orient their actions according to their role relationship with others (Fiske & Haslam, 2005, p. 269). Instead, relational models apply only when there is a need for coordination to get things done. In other words, the use of relational models is contingent on the perceived need to coordinate with others. For example, Vodosek (2000) theorized that task interdependence moderates the effect of relational models on group outcomes, such that relational models are more influential when task interdependense is high because task interdependence implies a strong need for coordination and makes relational models salient. Similarly, people regulate their behavior according to sociocultural norms when coordination is necessary and the context makes norms

salient (Gelfand, Lun, Lyons, Shteynberg, 2011; Gelfand & Realo, 1999; Liu, Friedman, & Hong, 2012; Shteynberg, Gelfand, & Kim, 2009). Building on this rationale, we posit that supervisor–subordinate guanxi has implications for upward constructive voice only when employees need to coordinate with their supervisor to get the job done.

We focus on employee perceptions of job control as an indication of the need to coordinate and posit that job control moderates the guanxi–voice relationship. This is because the general sense of low job control makes coordination with the supervisor especially important (Wang, Leung, & Zhou, 2014; Wei, Zhang, & Chen, 2015) and should strengthen the relationship between guanxi and employee voice. Job control is defined as the perceived level of decision-making authority and the extent to which employees think they can control issues and events that influence their work (Karasek, 1979; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). When job control is high, employees typically can work more independently. In contrast, when job control is low, they need to coordinate with others—specifically the supervisor—to get the job done. Prior research suggests that perceptions of low job control make relationships with others more important (Väänänen et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2014; Wei et al., 2015). For example, Schaubroeck and Fink (1998) demonstrated that supervisor consideration predicted extra-role behaviors (altruism and conscientiousness) only when employees experienced low job control. They reasoned that perceptions of low personal control cause employees to look to others for assistance in ensuring effective job performance. Similarly, we expect that the nature of the supervisor–subordinate guanxi relationship predicts upward constructive voice only when employees experience low job control and not when they perceive high job control.

We focus first on affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi. When job control is low and supervisor–subordinate guanxi is salient for getting things done, employees who emphasize

affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi should be more likely to coordinate with the supervisor by speaking up with change-oriented suggestions. This is because affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi reflects a communal sharing relational model where individuals treat their relationship partner as an equal (Giessner & Van Quaqebeke, 2010) and focus on mutual interests (Rai & Fiske, 2011). According to Fiske (1992), partners in a communal sharing relational model address one another's issues as they arise and count on each other by virtue of the relationship tie. When employees characterize the relationship with their supervisors as based on communal sharing, they expect the supervisors to care about them and their needs (Giessner & Van Quaqebeke, 2010). Thus, we expect that the equivalence, genuine care, and interdependence reflected by affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi cause employees to speak up with change-oriented ideas when they experience low job control. Given that the relational norm of affective guanxi in Chinese cultural contexts emphasizes "favoring the intimate" (Hwang, 1999), employees should expect that their supervisor will respond positively.

Consistent with the above theoretical arguments, research demonstrates that relational closeness, genuine care, and cooperative interdependence—the defining attributes of affective attachment to the supervisor—facilitate constructive confrontation and controversy in Chinese cultural contexts (Leung, Brew, Zhang, & Zhang, 2011; Tjosvold, Hui, & Sun, 2004; Wang et al., 2014). For example, Tjosvold and Su (2007) demonstrated that Chinese employees discuss issues openly when their goals and needs are compatible (i.e., cooperative interdependence). In addition, affect-based trust—a key component of Chinese affective ties (Chen & Chen, 2004) and communal relationships (McAllister, 1995, Clark & Mills, 1979)—causes employees to share their ideas because affect-based trust buffers interpersonal anxiety and opens up communication (Chua, Morris, & Ingram, 2010; Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012).

Furthermore, Wang and colleagues (2014) demonstrated that Chinese employees with a tendency to promote mutually beneficial relationships were more likely to believe that communicating their concerns was safe and they were more likely to engage in creative performance, especially when job autonomy was low. Again, the authors reasoned that low autonomy makes employees dependent and highlights the need to coordinate with others. In sum, we predict a positive relationship between guanxi based on affective attachment to the supervisor and voice, when job control is low.

> **Hypothesis 3:** *Perceptions of job control moderate the relationship between affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and upward constructive voice, such that the relationship is positive when job control is low and absent when job control is high.*

In contrast, when employees experience low job control, deference to the supervisor guanxi should cause them to be less likely to speak up with change-oriented ideas and suggestions. This is because deference to the supervisor guanxi reflects an authority ranking relational model where social influence is asymmetric and lower-ranking individuals are expected to emulate, defer to, and obey their superiors in return for support and resources (Fiske, 1992). Researchers have emphasized the proactive and change-oriented nature of voice behavior (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009; Liang, Huang, & Chen, 2013), and we note that voice is generally incompatible with the deferential norms of authority ranking. Thus, when employees need to coordinate with the supervisor due to low job control, those employees who emphasize strong deference to the supervisor guanxi should consider respectful obedience as the appropriate way to coordinate with the supervisor, and they should be less likely to engage in voice. Speaking up with change-oriented suggestions might imply a lack of loyalty and restrict access to resources in hierarchical relationships (Burris, 2012). Taken together, the relational norm of deference in China involves “respecting

the superior" (Hwang, 1999, 2000), and so employees with deference to the supervisor guanxi should manage their need for coordination by deferring to and obeying the supervisor.

Empirical research provides indirect support for these arguments. When employees value asymmetric relationships (high power distance beliefs), salience of differences in power—the defining attribute of deference to the supervisor guanxi—inhibit employee voice and participation in Chinese cultural contexts (Brockner et al., 2001; Li & Sun, 2015; Liang et al., 2013; Y. Zhang, Huai, & Xie, 2015). For example, employees who strongly endorse power distance believe that they should not question the supervisor or make suggestions, even when requested to speak up (Brockner et al., 2001). In addition, recent investigations demonstrate that Chinese employees who view the supervisor's behavior as authoritarian are less likely to offer their change-oriented ideas (Li & Sun, 2015; Y. Zhang et al., 2015). Furthermore, Wei and colleagues (2015) showed that power distance beliefs negatively predicted voice efficacy and subsequent voice of employees, but this occurred only when employees needed to coordinate with the supervisor because supervisor delegation was low. Building on this indirect empirical evidence and the above conceptual arguments, we predict a negative relationship between guanxi based on deference to the supervisor and voice, when job control is low.

> **Hypothesis 4:** *Perceptions of job control moderate the relationship between the deference to the supervisor guanxi and upward constructive voice, such that the relationship is negative when job control is low and absent when job control is high.*

Considering the system of relationships implied by the first four hypotheses, we also predict second-stage moderated mediation where relational self-concept has mediated effects on voice, via guanxi, only when perceptions of job control are low. These predictions derive from Fiske and Haslam's (2005) proposition that individual traits (e.g., facets of relational self-concept) influence interpersonal behaviors (e.g., upward constructive voice) because these traits cause

individuals to adhere to specific relational models and their associated behavioral norms and rules (e.g., dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi) (for a similar rationale, see Khatri, 2011).

However, just as traits and identity influence behavior only under certain conditions (Farmer & Van Dyne, 2010), relational self-concept and supervisor–subordinate guanxi should influence voice behavior only when perceptions of the situation (e.g., low job control) trigger the need for coordination with the supervisor and make the relational self-concept and supervisor–subordinate guanxi salient. More specifically, when employees feel unable to control important aspects of their work, strong concern for others self-concept and the guanxi dimension of affective attachment to the supervisor motivate them to speak up and engage in voice. In contrast, when employees have a low sense of job control, strong relational identity self-concept and the guanxi dimension of deference to the supervisor motivate them to avoid speaking up. These predicted conditional effects are consistent with prior empirical evidence in Chinese cultural contexts demonstrating that individuals only adhere to the behavioral norms associated with culture-specific traits, when interdependence with others is salient (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2012; Nouri et al., 2015). Taken together, we hypothesize:

> ***Hypothesis 5:*** *Perceptions of job control moderate the indirect relationship between concern for others self-concept and upward constructive voice (via affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi), such that the relationship is positive when job control is low and absent when job control is high.*
>
> **Hypothesis 6:** *Perceptions of job control moderate the indirect relationship between relational identity self-concept and upward constructive voice (via deference to the supervisor guanxi), such that the relationship is negative when job control is low and absent when job control is high.*

## Method and Results

### Participants and Procedure

The sample for this study comprised relatively new sales employees and their supervisors at a large Hong Kong-based telecommunications company. Following prior work, we focused on relative newcomers to the organization because they have varied expectations for control (Ashforth, 1989) and are motivated to develop an understanding of what they can and cannot influence in their jobs (Ashford & Black, 1996). In addition, sales people are paid for their output and are expected to influence sales and customer satisfaction (Miao & Evans, 2013), but their daily workflow can be variable and is difficult to influence (Chowdhury & Endres, 2010). Therefore, job control is especially salient to them and we expected that perceptions of job control would be relevant to the effects of relational self-concept and guanxi on voice.

We translated and back-translated the questionnaires (Brislin, 1980) from English to Chinese. We collected data from employees (with at least one month of tenure) and their supervisors, in two waves, over six weeks. At time 1, 360 employees (86% response rate) completed online questionnaires on relational self-concept, supervisor–subordinate guanxi, job control, demographic characteristics, and controls. At time 2, supervisors rated employee upward constructive voice. We obtained matched responses for 262 employees working in 90 stores—each operated by a single, unique supervisor (average number of employees rated by each supervisor: 2.91 (*SD* = 1.30)), for an overall response rate of 63%. The employee sample (n = 262) was 58% male; average age was 21 years (*SD* = 2.43). A minority of employees (22%) had a college degree and most were relatively new to the company: 86% had worked at their store less than one year. The supervisor sample (n = 90) was 88% male; average age was 25 years (*SD* = 2.56); and 46% had a college degree. Most supervisors (62%) had worked for the

organization between one and two years, and 9% had more than 3 years of organizational tenure.

**Measures**

All measures were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Table 1 provides descriptive statistics, correlations, and Cronbach's alpha.

**Upward constructive voice behavior.** Supervisors rated subordinate voice with five items from Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) adapted to fit our sales context. A sample item is "Comes up with new and practical ideas to improve performance" ($\alpha = .90$).

**Relational self-concept.** Employees rated concern for others self-concept (five items; $\alpha = .73$) and relational identity self-concept (four items; $\alpha = .74$) with the corresponding subscales from Selenta and Lord's (2005) Levels of Self-Concept Scale. A sample item for concern for others self-concept is "Caring deeply about another person such as a close friend or relative is very important to me." A sample item for relational identity self-concept is "My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am." Following Weijters and Baumgartner's (2012) recommendations to avoid reverse-coded items in East Asian surveys, we reworded two items. Selenta and Lord's (2005) validation study supports multidimensionality of the Levels of Self-Concept Scale, and research supports validity of the scale in Western (e.g., Fehr & Gelfand, 2010) and Chinese samples (e.g., Yang, Johnson, Zhang, Spector, & Xu, 2013).

**Supervisor–subordinate guanxi.** Employees rated affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi with four items each (Y. Chen et al., 2009). A sample affective attachment to the supervisor item is "If my supervisor has problems with

his/her personal life, I will do my best to help him/her out" (α = .85), and a sample deference to the supervisor item is "I am willing to give up my goals in order to fulfil my supervisor's goals" (α = .85). Smith et al.'s (2014) investigation of this multidimensional scale in Chinese (e.g., Taiwan) and non-Chinese (e.g., United Kingdom) cultural contexts supports the validity of affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi. Their findings also suggest that Y. Chen et al.'s (2009) supervisor–subordinate guanxi scale—originally developed in mainland China—can be valid in the Chinese cultural context of the current Hong Kong sample.

**Perceived job control.** Employees rated their sense of job control with three items from Ashford, Lee, and Bobko (1989), negatively worded. A sample item is "In this organization, I do not have enough power to control events that might affect my job" (α = .83). For ease of interpretation, we recoded responses so high scores reflected high job control.

**Controls.** Because prior work shows that demographic characteristics can influence voice behavior (e.g., Tangirala, Kamdar, Venkataramani, & Parke, 2013; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), we controlled for organizational tenure, educational level, and gender. Given that affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi may share variance with the affect and professional respect subdimensions of leader-member exchange (Y. Chen et al., 2009) and LMX can influence voice behavior (e.g., Burris et al., 2008; Van Dyne et al., 2008), we also controlled for LMX-affect and LMX-professional respect. We measured each subdimension with three items from Liden and Maslyn (1998). A sample LMX-affect item is "I like my supervisor very much as a person" (α = .92), and a sample LMX-professional respect item is "I respect my supervisor's knowledge and competence on the job" (α = .90). Controlling

for demographics and LMX subdimensions sets a high standard for the incremental predictive validity of guanxi above and beyond the controls.

**Analytical Strategy**

We used confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the discriminant validity of the variables. Fit of the 8-factor measurement model (voice, concern for others self-concept, relational identity self-concept, affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi, deference to the supervisor guanxi, perceived job control, LMX-affect, and LMX-professional respect) ($\chi^2$ = 767.61, *df* = 406, *p* < .001, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .92, TLI = .91, SRMR = .06) was satisfactory (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Plausible alternative models that combined the relational self-concept scales ($\chi^2$ = 869.72, *df* = 413, *p* < .001, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .90, TLI= .88, SRMR = .07; $\Delta\chi^2$ = 102.11(7), *p* < .01) and the guanxi scales ($\chi^2$ = 1086.12, *df* = 413, *p* < .001, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .84, TLI= .83, SRMR = .07; $\Delta\chi^2$ = 318.51(7), *p* < .01) had significantly poorer fit.

Given that each supervisor rated the voice of multiple sales employees, we evaluated the level of non-independence of these supervisor ratings. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with voice as the dependent variable showed that supervisors differed systematically in how they rated the voice of their sales employees (*F*[89, 172] = 3.40, p < .01; ICC[1] = .45). To account for this non-independence in voice ratings, we followed recent methodological recommendations for using path analysis (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010) within the general framework of multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) in Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). We tested a second-stage moderated mediation model where the indirect effect of the independent variable on the outcome, via the mediator, changes as a function of the moderator (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). MSEM accounts for the hierarchical nature of data and avoids inaccurate standard errors and biased statistical

conclusions due to non-independence (Bliese, 2000). It also allows for simultaneous estimation of the parameters in multiple mediation models and provides more comprehensive parameter estimation than piecemeal approaches such as analyzing a series of hierarchical linear models using more conventional multilevel modelling paradigms (e.g., MLM, Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

Following recommendations of Preacher and Selig (2012), we utilized Monte Carlo resampling to construct 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects and conditional indirect effects based on 20,000 resamples (see web utility from Selig & Preacher, 2008). The Monte Carlo method yields asymmetric confidence intervals consistent with the compound nature of indirect effects which tend not to be normally distributed and produce skewed sampling distributions (Preacher et al., 2010). We group-mean centered predictors, mediators, and moderators (Snijders & Bosker, 2012) based on supervisors[5]. Group-mean centering was necessary because our focus was on level 1 substantive predictors (which, in our study, were the dimensions of relational self-concept, the dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi, and job control) and interactions between level 1 variables (which, in our study, were interactions between affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and job control, and between deference to the supervisor guanxi and job control) (Enders & Tofighi, 2007; Ryu, 2015). Our theoretical model is situated at the individual level, so we specified all substantive structural relationships at the individual level. Following Preacher et al. (2010), however, we allowed the unit-level variance portions of the mediator, moderator, and outcome variables to freely correlate. We estimated the covariances between these unit-level variances and the random slopes. We allowed the relational self-concept subscales (i.e., concern for others self-concept and relational identity self-concept) to covary and we allowed the guanxi subscales (i.e., affective attachment to the

[5] Because each supervisor supervised one store, this also corresponds to group-mean centering based on stores.

supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi) to covary. This is because prior empirical work demonstrates that the relational self-concept subscales are related (Selenta & Lord, 2005) and the guanxi subscales are related (Y. Chen et al., 2009).

**Results**

Figure 2 reports the unstandardized path coefficients for the hypothesized model. Results support Hypothesis 1 and show that concern for others self-concept was positively related to affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi (H1a: $B = .47$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 2 also received support as relational identity self-concept was positively related to deference to the supervisor guanxi (H1b: $B = .37$, $p < .01$). As expected, concern for others self-concept was not related to deference to the supervisor guanxi ($B = .06$, *ns*), and relational identity self-concept was not related to affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi ($B = .10$, *ns*). Hence, each dimension of self-concept was uniquely related to a different dimension of supervisor–subordinate guanxi, supporting our predictions based on Relational Models Theory.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that perceived job control would moderate the relationship between affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and voice, such that the relationship would be positive when job control was low. Figure 2 reports these results and shows a significant interaction ($B = -.11$, $p < .05$). Figure 3 illustrates the form of the interaction and shows a positive relationship when job control was low (simple slope = .33, $p < .01$) and not when job control was high (simple slope = .08, *ns*). Hypothesis 4 predicted that perceived job control would moderate the relationship between deference to the supervisor guanxi and voice, such that the relationship would be negative when job control was low. As reported in Figure 2, the interaction was significant ($B = .12$, $p < .01$). Figure 4 shows a negative relationship when job

control was low (simple slope = -.19, $p < .01$) and not when job control was high (simple slope = .08, *ns*). In sum, results provide full support for Hypothesis 3 and 4.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that perceived job control would function as a second-stage moderator of the indirect relationship between concern for others self-concept and voice, via affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi, such that mediation would be significant when job control was low. We constructed a 95% confidence interval for the indirect effects of concern for others self-concept on voice at high and low values of perceived job control. These results show that the indirect effect of concern for others self-concept on voice, through affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi, was moderated by job control, such that the indirect effect was positive when job control was low ($B = .15$, $p < .05$; 95% CI [.04; .29]) and not significant when job control was high ($B = .04$, *ns*; 95% CI [-.10; .19]). The difference between this pair of conditional indirect effects was significant ($\Delta B = .11$, $p < .05$; 95% CI [.005; .22]), and so results support Hypothesis 5.

We used a similar approach for testing Hypothesis 6 which predicted a negative relationship between relational identity self-concept and voice, via deference to the supervisor guanxi, when perceived job control was low. Results support this prediction and show mediation only when job control was low ($B = -.07$, $p < .05$; 95% CI [-.15; -.01]) and not when job control was high ($B = .03$, *ns*; 95% CI [-.03; .10]). The difference between this pair of conditional indirect effects was significant ($\Delta B = .10$, $p < .05$; 95% CI [.18; .02]). Thus, results also support Hypothesis 6.

## Discussion

In this paper, we drew on Relational Models Theory (Fiske, 1992) to develop a model of how two aspects of relational self-concept (concern for others self-concept and relational identity

self-concept) predict two dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi (affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi). We also predicted that relational self-concept would have mediated effects on voice, via guanxi, only when perceived job control was low. Analyses of multi-source, lagged field data provide strong support for the model. Concern for others self-concept had positive mediated effects on voice, via affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi, when job control was low. In contrast, relational identity self-concept had negative mediated effects on voice, via deference to the supervisor guanxi, when job control was low.

## Theoretical Contributions

**Voice Literature.** The present paper sheds light on the meaning of two key concepts in the voice literature—the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships and employee's perceived job control in a Chinese cultural context. We drew on Y. Chen et al.'s (2009) theorizing and scale development of supervisor–subordinate guanxi and Relational Models Theory (Fiske, 1992) to suggest a more nuanced perspective on the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships for understanding employee voice in Chinese cultural contexts. Prior research in Western cultural contexts has established that the reciprocal, tit-for-tat LMX relationships (which parallel Fiske's equality matching relational model) encourage employees to speak up with change-oriented ideas, but our results show that two fundamentally different relational logics (i.e., communal sharing as affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and authority ranking as deference to the supervisor guanxi) have critical implications for employee voice in Chinese cultural contexts. Even though affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi are part of one multidimensional conceptualization of supervisor–subordinate guanxi, they had opposite effects on employee voice because they involve distinct norms for appropriate employee behavior. Our contrasting findings for

affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi resonate with recent empirical evidence that different dimensions of paternalistic leadership can have opposing effects on employee voice in Chinese cultural contexts (Chan, 2014; Y. Zhang et al., 2015). Accordingly, it is important for future voice research to account for the nuanced complexity of supervisor–subordinate relationships that sometimes act as a double-edged sword.

Furthermore, our application of RMT to supervisor–subordinate relationships in Chinese cultural contexts and the effects on voice is theoretically important beyond Chinese cultural contexts. This is because communal sharing and authority ranking relational models are broadly applicable to many cultural contexts (for example, other contexts that emphasize personal relationships and hierarchical responsibilities; e.g., Latin and Middle Eastern cultures) but have received less attention from researchers. Fiske's (1992) initial theorizing and subsequent empirical work took place in different cultural contexts (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Thomsen, Sidanius, & Fiske, 2007), and he proposed that individuals throughout the world use the four fundamental relational models, albeit to a different extent or in different domains. For example, Smith and colleagues (2014) demonstrated the relevance of guanxi to supervisor–subordinate relationships in non-Chinese cultures.[6] The insights from studying guanxi in Chinese cultural contexts can be applicable more broadly and contribute to a more well-rounded understanding the nature and consequences of supervisor–subordinate relationships in general. Thus, indigenous concepts, such as guanxi, can offer new insights that may be applicable and useful in other contexts to enhance our understanding of the nuances organizational behavior (Y.-R. Chen et al., 2009; Tsui, 2006). For example, the insights from

[6] Affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi showed metric invariance across all eight cultural contexts (Taiwan, Singapore, Saudi, Russia, Turkey, India, Brazil, and the United Kingdom) and also showed invariant relationships with specific outcome variables across these samples.

the present research could help Western scholars shed light on the paradox that "high-quality relationships may be double-edged swords" (Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009, p. 187). As another example, our theorizing may elucidate prior work showing that power distance reduces the positive impact of LMX on voice in Latin cultural contexts (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009).

We also contribute to the voice domain by demonstrating that supervisor–subordinate guanxi had implications for upward constructive only when job control was low. Our rationale is that low job control heightens the need for employees to coordinate with their supervisor to get the job done, and hence strengthens the salience of guanxi-related norms for appropriate behavior. The finding that low job control facilitates—rather than inhibits—voice when employees describe their guanxi in terms of affective attachment to the supervisor deserves some discussion in the light of the current state of the literature. Within the voice literature (Morrison, 2011, 2014) and general proactivity literature (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010), low job control is generally considered an important inhibiting condition of proactive behavior because it indicates that employees have a low sense of personal efficacy which prevents proactivity. As Parker and colleagues (2010, p. 840) argued, "situations of low job control leave little scope for individual antecedents to influence behavior."

Job control and the sense of *personal* efficacy, however, may not be necessary for proactive behavior in all cultural contexts. For example, our results demonstrate that low job control combined with affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi positively predict voice. Thus, in Chinese cultural contexts, individuals can gain a sense of efficacy by being embedded in close relationship networks—such as affective attachment with the supervisor guanxi (Menon & Fu, 2006). Similarly, Yamaguchi and colleagues (2005) showed that individuals in East Asian

cultural contexts perceived effectiveness in controlling the environment as a collective group capability. Thus, efficacy and control need not be predicated on personal control, and low personal job control may not inhibit proactive behavior if it directs employees to another route for getting things done (i.e., by means of affective guanxi). Contrasting our findings with the literatures on voice and proactivity suggests that low personal control may not imply a lack of control and may leave room for dyadic or collective control—either from supervisor–subordinate guanxi or peer relationships. In view of these insights, future research on the role of job control and proactive behaviors in different cultural contexts may prove insightful.

**Guanxi Literature.** The present research responds to recent calls to expand our understanding of antecedents of guanxi (Chen et al., 2013; Chen & Chen, 2004). To date, the scarce research on antecedents of guanxi has focused predominantly on shared social identities, such as kinship, surname, and birthplace (Chow & Ng, 2004). Consistent with the proposition that relationship construction allows people to define their own roles and the roles of others (Chen & Chen, 2004) and resonating with recent work on the link between proactive personality and guanxi (X.-A. Zhang, Li, & Harris, 2015), we show that individual characteristics (i.e., facets of relational self-concept) also relate to supervisor–subordinate guanxi. In addition, our findings further build the nomological network of supervisor–subordinate guanxi. Whereas prior research shows largely similar effects for affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi on a range of important outcomes (e.g., turnover intentions, affective commitment, normative commitment; Y. Chen et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2014), our findings show that these dimensions of guanxi have opposite implications for employee voice when job control is low. More generally, by demonstrating differential antecedents and consequences for these two dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi, we expand current empirical evidence supporting the conceptualization and operationalization of

different dimensions of guanxi (Y. Chen et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2014) and confirm the value of multidimensional approaches to guanxi (Chen et al., 2013).

Additionally, we drew on RMT to contrast supervisor–subordinate guanxi with LMX (see, Y. Chen et al., 2009). This is important because it allows comparisons between the dimensions of guanxi and LMX without denying their distinctive characteristics. This also allows links between the indigenous and novel aspects of guanxi and the general domain of supervisor–subordinate relationships (i.e., making the novel appear familiar; Tsui, 2006, p. 499). This approach should encourage future research on the more novel particularistic and hierarchical dimensions of relationships as a way of acknowledging the complexity of relationships across different cultures. Indeed, as Pruitt (2004, p. xii) argued: "characteristics that are dominant in one culture tend to be recessive in another, and vice-versa. By studying other societies where these features are dominant, they can develop concepts and theories that will eventually be useful for understanding their own." For example, examining the deferential nature of dyadic relationships may be useful in some peer-to-peer relationships and in some command-and-control Western cultural contexts (see Fragale, Sumanth, Tiedens, & Northcraft, 2012; Joshi & Knight, 2015).

**Practical Implications**

Our results also have implications for practitioners. First, the research should help employees, managers, and organizations operating in Chinese cultural contexts to understand that high-quality relationships can sometimes paradoxically facilitate and inhibit speaking up behavior. Even if managers think they have excellent relationships with their employees, they may miss out on important improvement-related suggestions if employees emphasize deference and obedience in their guanxi relationships. Supervisors may view their interactions with

employees as smooth and uneventful, but this does not guarantee that employees' silence indicates they agree with the supervisor's decisions, policies, and procedures. Thus, supervisors and their organizations in Chinese cultural contexts need to be attuned to the subtle nuances of affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi if they value the ideas and suggestions of employees.

Second, results showed that deference to the supervisor guanxi inhibits voice when perceived job control is low. Accordingly, managers need to develop strategies for helping employees gain a sense of job control. This could include structuring reward systems, feedback processes, and leadership practices so they clarify the scope of employees' work responsibilities and identify the types of events that are beyond their control. Delineation of these boundaries should allow employees to take control and work independently—except under extenuating circumstances. These practices should be especially important in Chinese work contexts given the salience of guanxi (Chen et al., 2013) and the cultural imperative of showing deference to the supervisor (Huang, Van de Vliert, & Van der Vegt, 2005).

A final practical implication is that multinational companies operating in Chinese cultural contexts need to select and recruit Western expatriate managers carefully because they will need to use their cultural intelligence (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008) to encourage their Chinese colleagues to share change-oriented suggestions. They also need to make sense of seemingly paradoxical employee behavior, such as having favorable relationships with subordinates who are reluctant to provide feedback. In addition, they may need to flex their leadership style to build guanxi with their employees (Chen & Chen, 2004) and influence their employees' relative emphasis on affective attachment and deference toward them.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Notwithstanding the strengths of our culture-specific theorizing and rigorous design, limitations of our study have implications for future research. First, although we assessed predictors and criterion at different time points according to their theoretically proposed causal ordering, this lagged design does not allow us to make causal inferences. Hence, future research should complement our field study with experimental designs. This type of designs can also adequately address the possibility that common-method bias may confound the relationship between the IV (i.e., aspects of relational self-concept) and mediator (i.e., dimensions of guanxi) in our sample (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Furthermore, the limited tenure, age, and experience of the employees in our sample suggest the importance of future research that uses samples with more tenure and experience to check the generalizability of our findings. Nevertheless, we note that many organizations and industries are characterized by young employees and high turnover so our results have special relevance to these organizations and situations. For example, results shed light on factors that have positive and negative implications for voice and this should apply to many retail and service organizations throughout the world. Results also indicate that the supervisors in our sample recognized the positive intentions of employees and valued their suggestions because we used supervisor ratings of employee upward constructive voice behavior.

Second, our model is necessarily incomplete and so future research should consider additional, theoretically-based moderators and mediators. This could include different boundary conditions that may amplify, reverse, or suppress the implications of supervisor–subordinate guanxi for employee voice. For example, although our results supported our arguments about the salience of low job control, future research could build on Shteynberg and colleagues' (2009) theorizing about the amplifying role of need for cognitive closure, the reversing role of

low accountability, and the suppressing role of strong situations where behavioral expectations are clearly prescribed (e.g., role expectations). Research could also extend our model by examining the implications of supervisor-subordinate guanxi for different types of voice (Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). For instance, recent research has identified perceived efficacy as a predictor of promotive voice and perceived risk as a predictor of prohibitive voice (Wei et al., 2015). Similarly, it is possible that the dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi we studied may have differential implications for efficacy and risk and this could suggest differential relationships with promotive and prohibitive voice. Furthermore, prior work shows that leader behavior and leader characteristics are important predictors of voice (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007). Thus, future research could expand our model by considering leader characteristics and behavior as predictors of guanxi and employee voice.

Third, our results suggest that deference to the supervisor guanxi can inhibit employee voice when perceived job control is low. Although this may prevent organizations from benefiting from employee ideas, we are not suggesting that deference to the supervisor guanxi is entirely dysfunctional. Employees who emphasize deference to the supervisor guanxi may be especially conscientious and exert high levels of effort within the scope of their assigned work roles. Likewise, they may demonstrate high levels of affiliative organizational citizenship behavior, such as helping and loyalty. Thus, we recommend that future research should consider other outcomes and other moderators that may shed light on when and how deference to the supervisor guanxi predicts positive outcomes.

It also would be interesting to manipulate role expectations (speaking up is or is not an expected role obligation; Van Dyne et al., 2008) and type of guanxi (affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and deference to the supervisor guanxi) and assess the extent to which

deference to the supervisor guanxi facilitates upward constructive voice when it is internalized as a role expectation. For instance, it is possible that deference to the supervisor guanxi combined with role expectations to speak up positively predicts voice behavior. This would shed light on ways to enhance upward constructive voice so that organizations have the opportunity to benefit from the ideas of a broader array of employees. This sort of approach would be consistent with research in Taiwan that demonstrated creativity expectations motivate creative behavior when employees integrate the expectations into their role identity (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003).

It would also be useful to consider situational factors that cause affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi—which is positively related to voice in our study—to have negative implications for organizations. For example, Hwang (1999, 2000) suggested that the principle of "favoring the intimate" may cause supervisors to allocate resources unfairly and this may, in turn, account for some of the negative effects of guanxi on third party observers and the larger organization (C. C. Chen & Chen, 2009; Chen, Friedman, Yu, & Sun, 2011). In sum, future research should examine additional outcomes and boundary conditions that shed light on negative outcomes of affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi and positive outcomes of deference to the supervisor guanxi.

A fourth limitation of our research is our focus on the employee's perspective of supervisor–subordinate guanxi. Although our approach made sense for an initial study on relational self-concept, guanxi, and voice, we note the value of future research that considers the supervisor's perspective on guanxi relationships. This is important because individuals socially construct their relationships based on the reactions of others to their behavior (Stryker & Statham, 1985). Thus, the leader's perspective on guanxi may be especially important in Chinese cultural

contexts. It also would be useful to consider the congruence between employee and supervisor perceptions of guanxi relationships because guanxi relationships are inherently reciprocal. They depend on the mutual exchange of affect and obligation (Chen & Chen, 2004) and research shows that employee and supervisor perceptions of voice are not necessarily congruent and have performance implications (e.g., Burris, Detert, & Romney, 2013). In sum, future research should model both supervisor and subordinate perceptions of guanxi to provide a more comprehensive and balanced view of the relationship and subsequent implications for voice behavior.

Finally, although our study provides insights into how different RMT relationships can influence employee voice, our approach remains dyadic and subjectivist. It does not capture the structural aspects of social relationships that may also facilitate and constrain employee behavior (Morris, Podolny, & Ariel, 2000). Thus, future research should go beyond the dyadic level and use cross-level and social network perspectives as another way of researching Relational Models Theory. For example, the extent to which the quality of supervisor–subordinate guanxi relationships differ within the team may be an important contextual factor that influences the roles of guanxi and perceived job control on voice (see the research on LMX differentiation; e.g., Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006). In addition, as suggested by Morris and colleagues (2000), a more structuralist social network approach should further the understanding of guanxi by going beyond the perceptual approach. A structural approach would also extend existing research on guanxi (Chen et al., 2013) and voice (see Venkataramani & Tangirala, 2010).

## Conclusion

The introduction to this paper highlighted the observation that supervisor–subordinate relationships or guanxi in Chinese cultural contexts are guided by particularistic and hierarchical characteristics that can paradoxically help and hinder employees in Chinese cultural contexts to speak up with change-oriented suggestions. To elucidate this phenomenon, we drew on Relational Models Theory (RMT; Fiske, 1992) to note that most prior research on the effects of supervisor-subordinate relationships has adopted a social exchange perspective and advanced arguments based on contributions and reciprocity. Although this research has been insightful, it emphasizes an equality matching relational model based on in-kind reciprocal exchanges and this type of relational model is typically characteristic of Western relationships. In contrast, much less research on supervisor–subordinate relationships has acknowledged the importance of other relational models such as communal sharing and authority ranking (for exceptions, see Y. Chen et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2014). Responding to the call of this special issue for research on Chinese cultural contexts, we advanced a model where supervisor-subordinate relationships are guided by guanxi which emphasizes affective ties (communal sharing) and hierarchical deference (authority ranking) with opposite implications for upward constructive voice when job control is low. We hope our model and results stimulate future research on when, how, and why supervisor–subordinate relationships in Chinese and other cultural contexts affect upward constructive voice and other work behaviors.

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Table 2.1
*Relational Models Theory, Self-Concept, and Supervisor-Subordinate Guanxi*

| **Type of Relational Self-Concept** | **Causal Mechanism** | **Type of Relational Model** | **Supervisor-Subordinate Guanxi** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Concern for Others Self-Concept | Benevolence in General | Communal Sharing | Affective Attachment to the Supervisor |
| Relational Identity Self-Concept | Respectful Obedience In Chinese Hierarchical Relationships | Authority Ranking | Deference to the Supervisor |

Table 2.2
*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations*

| Variable | Mean | s.d. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Organizational Tenure [a] | .40 | .49 | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Education [b] | .22 | .41 | .04 | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Gender [c] | .42 | .49 | .06 | -.22** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 4. LMX – Affect [d] | 5.45 | 1.10 | -.06 | .06 | -.15* | *(.92)* | | | | | | | |
| 5. LMX – Professional Respect [d] | 5.50 | 1.10 | -.05 | .03 | -.03 | .71** | *(.90)* | | | | | | |
| 6. Concern for Others Self-Concept | 6.02 | .60 | .02 | .11 | -.04 | .11 | .10 | *(.73)* | | | | | |
| 7. Relational Identity Self-Concept | 5.25 | .94 | .01 | .08 | -.09 | .07 | .09 | .37** | *(.74)* | | | | |
| 8. Affective Attachment to the Supervisor | 5.49 | 1.01 | -.01 | -.02 | -.07 | .68** | .61** | .30** | .26** | *(.85)* | | | |
| 9. Deference to the Supervisor | 4.40 | 1.21 | .17** | .11 | -.02 | .34** | .30** | .14* | .39** | .50** | *(.85)* | | |
| 10. Job Control | 4.58 | 1.35 | -.03 | -.02 | -.06 | .18** | .14* | .11 | -.01 | .22** | .13* | *(.83)* | |
| 11. Upward Constructive Voice [e] | 5.45 | .90 | .01 | .10 | .05 | .08 | .13* | .08 | .11 | .18** | .15* | -.08 | *(.90)* |

*Note*. $N = 262$. Internal consistency reliabilities appear in parentheses along the diagonal.

[a] Dummy coded: 0 = less than 6 months; 1 = more than 6 months. [b] Dummy coded: 0 = no college degree; 1 = college degree. [c] Dummy coded: 0 = male; 1 = female. [d] Leader-Member Exchange dimensions. [e] Rated by the supervisor.

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

Figure 2.1
*Hypothesized Model*

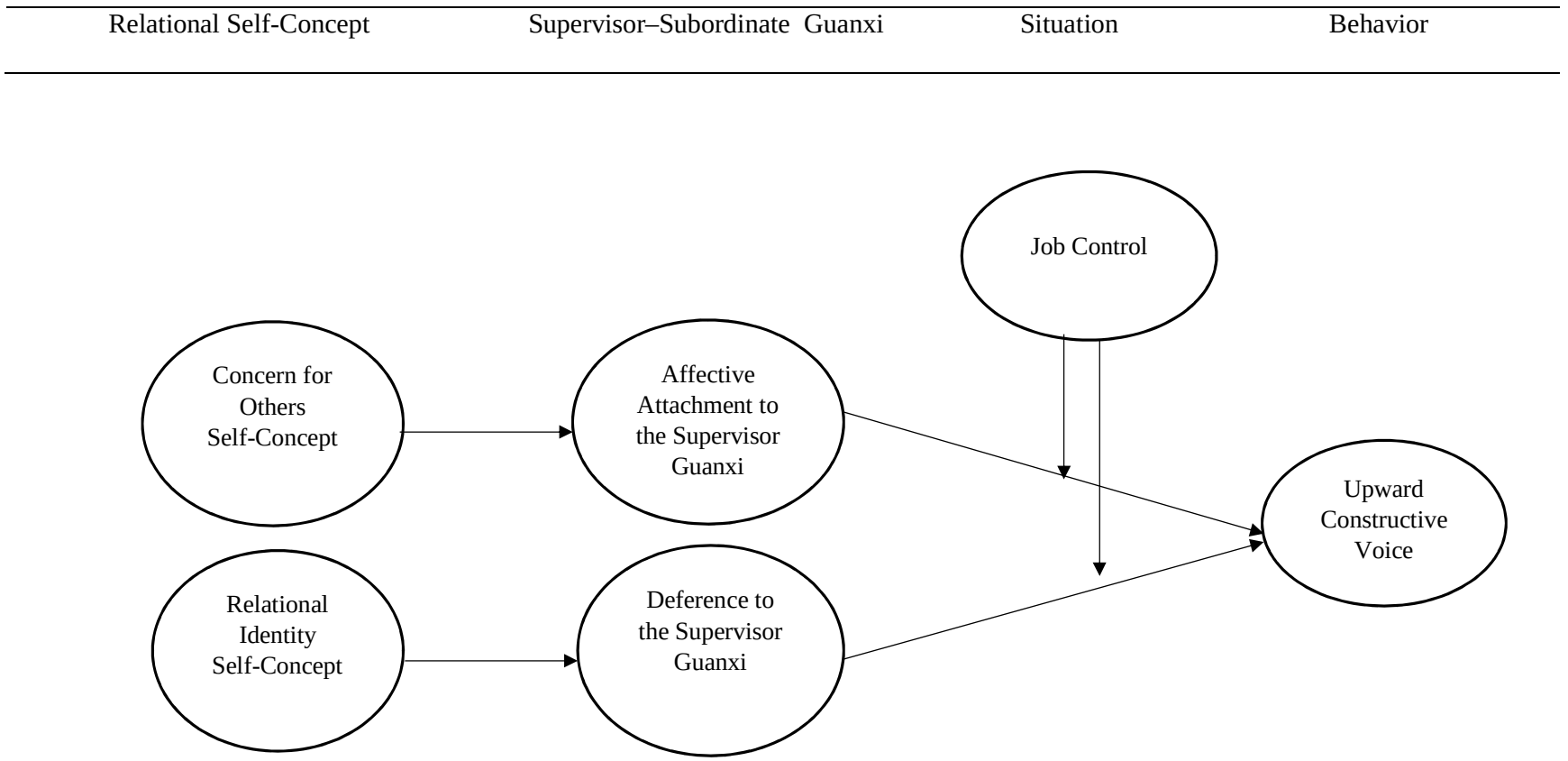
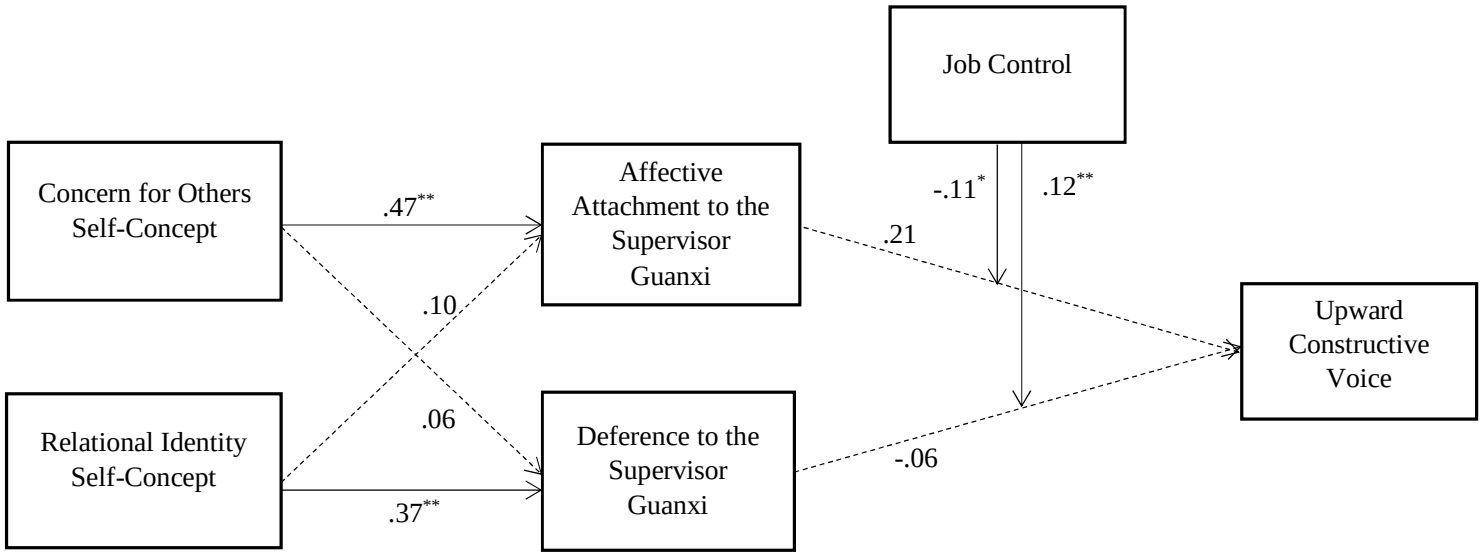


Figure 2.2
*Structural Model with Study Variables*




*Note*. $N = 262$. Reported values are unstandardized path coefficients. Dashed lines represent $p > .05$. For simplicity the covariation between concern for others self-concept and relational identity self-concept and between affective attachment to the supervisor and deference to the supervisor, as well as the control variables, are not represented in the figure.

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

Figure 2.3
*Interaction of Affective Attachment to the Supervisor Guanxi and Job Control*

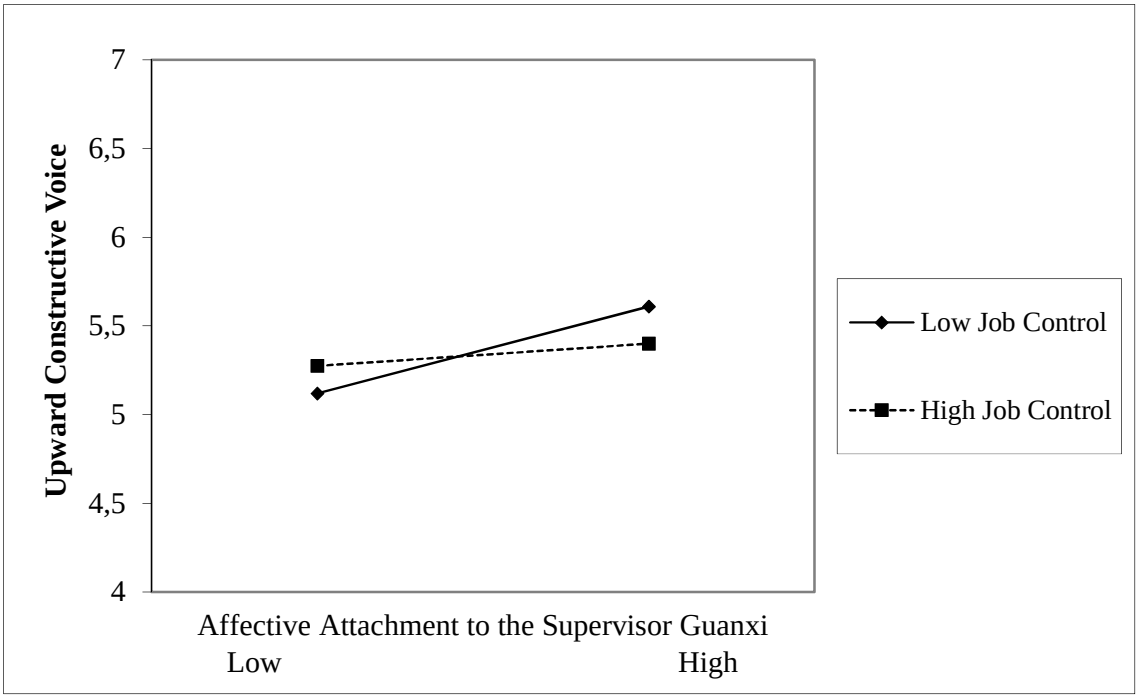
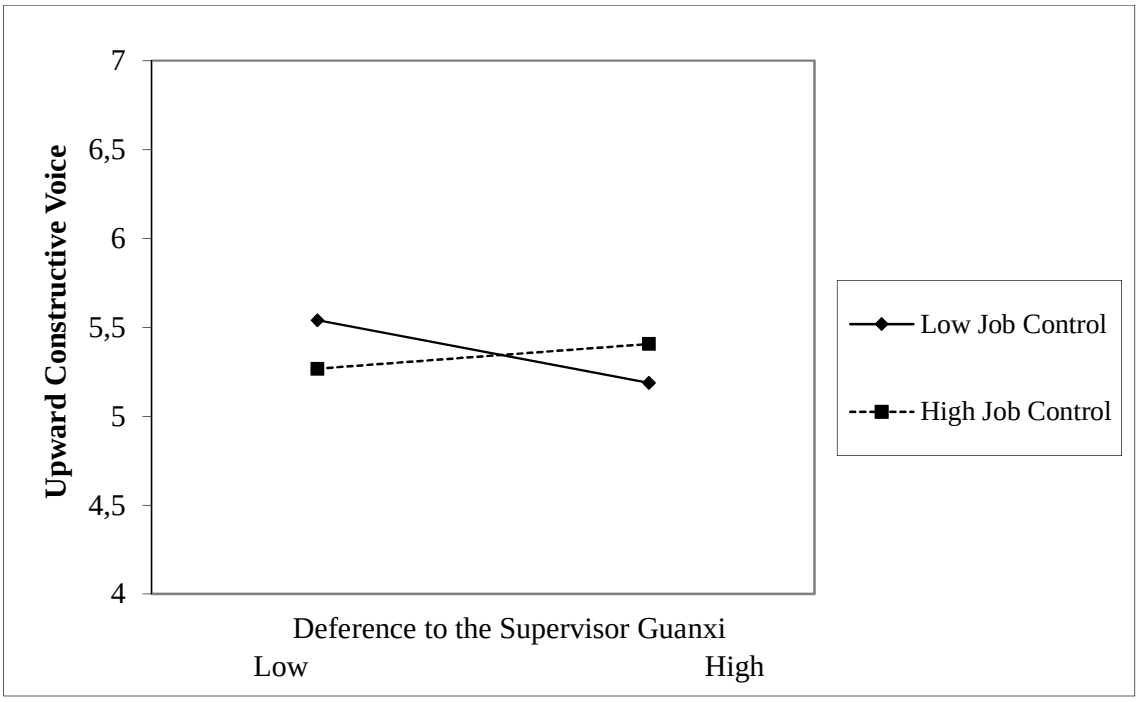


Figure 2.4
*Interaction of Deference to the Supervisor Guanxi and Job Control*



# CHAPTER III

## Obliged To Speak:
## An Accountability Model of Upward Constructive Voice in Chinese Cultural Contexts

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### Abstract

The present research draws on accountability theory to build a conceptual model of upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. In these cultural contexts a person's face (i.e., one's respectability and self-worth as conferred by others) is important. Given the importance of face, our theorizing situates voice accountability (i.e., subjective experience that one feels accountable to others to speak up with change-oriented ideas, suggestions, and opinions) as a central driver of upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. Taking an accountability lens, we explicate why employees in these cultural contexts generally feel accountable to *not* speak up with change-oriented ideas and we identify antecedents and boundary conditions that foster voice accountability, and thereby promote employee's obligation to speak. This model complements voice research by offering a novel theoretical lens to understand upward constructive voice and extends accountability theory by applying it to Chinese cultural contexts.



*Keywords*: upward constructive voice, Chinese cultural contexts, face, voice accountability

## Introduction

Technological innovation, globalization, competitive pressures, and the shift toward service and knowledge economies have made today's workplace increasingly uncertain and dynamic. One way that employees can help their organizations compete in volatile environments is by speaking up with constructive voice (e.g., MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). Constructive voice is the voluntary expression of ideas, information, or opinions that aim to benefit the organization (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995). When employees speak up with suggestions for change, they can contribute to important organizational processes, such as innovation (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Nemeth & Staw, 1989), learning (Edmondson, 1999, 2003), error detection, and decision making (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

Prior work greatly enhanced our understanding of the antecedents that help employees to speak up with change-oriented ideas (e.g., employee personality, LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; leader behaviors, Detert & Burris, 2007). One recent view on the literature has identified two considerations that are important for employees: whether speaking up is likely to be effective (voice efficacy) and whether they can remain unharmed when speaking up (voice safety) (Morrison, 2011). These key considerations can explain the effect of several contextual and dispositional antecedents on voice behavior (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

While insights into these two levers for voice (i.e., voice efficacy, voice safety) has been useful to structure and direct research efforts, these insights have largely been developed and tested based on Western theoretical perspectives. In Western cultural contexts an individual's self-worth does not depend on the esteem of others (Leung & Cohen, 2011), and individuals are not

so much held answerable by others for their behavior (Gelfand, Lim, & Raver, 2004). Not surprisingly then, the two key levers for voice identified in these cultural contexts are focused on personal concerns: can my behavior be effective? (voice efficacy); can I be safe when engaging in such behavior? (voice safety) Along the same lines, antecedents of these key considerations have focused on breaking away boundaries for individuals to feel effective (e.g., personal control, transformational leadership) and feel safe (e.g., high-quality leader-member exchange).

Scant research suggests however that Western practices to encourage voice and other proactive behaviors may not be so effective in Chinese cultural contexts (e.g., Liang, Huang, & Chen, 2013; Zhang & Zhou, 2014). In these cultural contexts individual's face (i.e., self-worth and respectability) is conferred by others (Leung & Cohen, 2011), and individuals feel accountable to uphold one another's face by adhering to the cultural imperatives of maintaining harmony, respecting hierarchy, and being humble (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Lee, Kam, & Bond, 2007; Leung & Cohen, 2011; Leung, Koch, & Lu, 2002). As a consequence, researchers have argued that—rather than *personal* considerations—*others'* expectations may be paramount for individuals' attitudes (Riemer, Shavitt, Koo, & Markus, 2014), choices (e.g., Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008), and behaviors (e.g., Gelfand, Leslie, & Fehr, 2008; Gelfand, Lim, & Raver, 2004). For example, Liang and colleagues (2013) found that—prototypically Western—participative management practices did not consistently encourage Chinese employees to speak up. On the other hand, more directive leadership styles which have typically been assumed to stifle creativity and voice, have proven effective for promoting proactive behavior in China (Leung, Chen, Zhou, & Lim, 2009). Taken together, these observations imply that we may further our understanding of key considerations for voice

(beyond voice efficacy and safety) by addressing the question of when and why employees in Chinese cultural contexts are most likely to engage in upward constructive voice.

In the present paper we use accountability theory (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) to develop a model of upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. We draw on accountability theory to reflect that individuals in Chinese cultural contexts—where face is important—are typically answerable or *accountable* to others for their behavior (Gelfand et al., 2004), and voice accountability therefore should be a key consideration or driver of voice behavior. On the one hand, this accountability lens allows us to make sense of the expectations that individuals in Chinese cultural contexts find themselves answerable to, and that lead them to generally avoid speaking up. On the other hand, accountability theory also provides levers to identify novel antecedents and boundary conditions that promote voice accountability and thereby facilitate upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts.

Our theorizing on upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts contributes to the organizational behavior literature in two major ways. First, and as alluded to above, we contribute to the voice literature (for recent reviews, see Morrison, 2011, 2014) by making critical distinctions between commonly studied drivers of upward constructive voice in Western cultural contexts and voice accountability as a key driver of such behavior in Chinese cultural contexts. Taking an accountability lens we first argue that employees in Chinese cultural contexts—where face is important—find themselves answerable to their supervisor and work group to respect hierarchy, maintain harmony, and display humility (Leung & Cohen, 2011), all of which generally discourage upward constructive voice. Building on this understanding we then identify novel antecedents to upward constructive voice in Chinese cultures. In so doing, we draw attention to the possibility that creating a mere opportunity to

voice may not be enough to overcome sociocultural norms that discourage speaking up. Rather, a strong moral obligation to bring about change may be crucial to support upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. Thus, our theorizing heeds calls for improving our understanding of the impact of national culture on upward constructive voice (Morrison, 2014), and thereby also builds a more well-rounded and global understanding of the key considerations that facilitate and drive upward constructive voice (Chen, Leung, & Chen, 2009).

Second, we advance the accountability literature in several ways. Building on Gelfand et al.'s (2004) theorizing, we argue that individuals in Chinese cultural contexts find themselves in accountability webs (i.e., cognitive maps of expectations within the social system) that consist of tight, multiple, and cross-level ties. Consequently, our theorizing extends the current focus on individual task accountability (for a review, see Hall, Frink, & Buckley, In Press) to consider accountability standards emanating from sources at multiple levels of analysis (e.g., work group). In so doing, we heed calls for more multilevel theorizing within the accountability domain (Frink et al., 2008). In addition, in identifying culturally relevant antecedents that may shift initial cultural accountabilities to avoid speaking up, toward a determination to engage in upward constructive voice, we also further our understanding of culture-dependent predictors of voice accountability. Finally, our theorizing suggests that—at least in some cultural contexts—it may be helpful to create accountability standards for important work-relevant behaviors that are typically considered extra-role and self-starting (see Chen, Zhang, & Wang, 2014 for similar complementary effects of control and empowerment).

Our paper unfolds as such: first, we discuss the main tenets of accountability theory (Frink & Klimoski, 1998). Then, as a backdrop for building our conceptual model, we elaborate on the

importance of face in Chinese cultural contexts in order to identify the accountability dynamics that generally discourage upward constructive voice. Next, we develop a model of upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. Our model introduces voice accountability as the predominant driver for upward constructive voice and identifies important culture-specific antecedents that facilitate the internalization of a sense of voice accountability. Finally, we conclude the paper with a discussion of implications for research and practice.

## Accountability Theory

Accountability Theory (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) explains when and why individuals are likely to feel accountable to certain standards (i.e., perceive themselves being answerable for actions or decisions, in accordance with these standards), and when—and to what extent—they are likely to comply. In other words, this theory delineates the antecedents of felt accountability, and its likely consequences. Felt accountability is defined as "the *perceived* need to justify or defend a decision or action to some *audience(s)* which has potential reward and sanction power, and where such rewards and sanctions are perceived to be contingent on accountability conditions" (Frink & Klimoski, 1998, p. 9, emphasis added). Importantly, accountability is distinct from responsibility because—compared to responsibility—accountability has the additional requirement of having an external audience (Hall, et al., In Press). Accountability theory specifies *where* felt accountability emanates from (i.e., so-called accountability sources such as supervisor, work group, performance evaluation systems), *what* standards employees feel accountable to (e.g., performance standards, organizational norms or values, safety guidelines), the scenarios where standards or expectations from different sources are (mis)aligned (e.g., supervisor's vs. work group's expectations), the *resources* that help versus

hinder compliance (e.g., social capital, support), and the range of likely *outcomes* (e.g., reputational consequences, behavioral consequences)

Accountability—as a fundamental norm enforcement mechanism (Tetlock, 1992)—has been the subject of study in various disciplines such as healthcare (Emanuel & Emanuel, 1996), safety management (Dekker, 2012), and performance management (Wallace, Johnson, Mathe, & Paul, 2011), and it is an important topic in the domain of organizational behavior (for a recent review, see Hall et al., In Press). We propose that there are several reasons why accountability theory is useful to think about the core question of our theorizing: when and why individuals in Chinese cultural contexts are likely to engage in upward constructive voice?

This is because the function of face—much like accountability—revolves around external valuation and social control (Kim & Nam, 1998). In addition, recent theorizing has begun to employ accountability theory to understand how individuals are typically held accountable in different cultures (cf. taxonomy in Gelfand et al., 2004). Additionally, we propose that accountability theory may also be applied to hold individuals answerable to proactive, anticipatory behaviors, such as upward constructive voice. Indeed, whereas the majority of accountability research has focused on the use of accountability for attributing blame after some event occurred, felt accountability can also serve in a self-regulatory and anticipatory manner whereby employees comply to manage their impressions toward others, to learn new behaviors, or to develop themselves (Hall et al., In Press). In this more proactive sense, accountability serves as a "safety net" because it legitimizes specific employee behaviors (Frink et al., 2008). For example, when employees are held accountable for customer satisfaction, this accountability standard legitimizes customer-focused behaviors, even at the cost of other important goals such as speed or productivity. Taken together, because accountability changes the meaning attached to behavior (e.g., from inappropriate to required),

we expect it to be especially useful in Chinese cultural contexts, where upward constructive voice is traditionally considered less appropriate.

**Default Implications of Face for Upward Constructive Voice**

As a backdrop to the development of our conceptual model, we first draw on Gelfand et al.'s (2004) theorizing and the nature of face (Kim & Nam, 1998) to elaborate on the default implications of face for upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. The face *cultural logic* weaves together various scripts, behaviors, practices, and cultural patterns around the central theme of face, giving them meaning and a certain logical consistency and coherence for people of these cultures (Leung & Cohen, 2011, p. 2). Face refers to "the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim…by virtue of [his or her] relative position" in a hierarchy and the proper fulfilment of his or her role (Ho, 1976, p. 883). Because face is socially conferred depending on fulfilment of role obligations, meeting the expectations of others is essential to secure one's face and social legitimacy (Kim & Nam, 1998). Thus, face serves as an effective social control mechanism whereby individuals are obliged to conform to others' expectations. Three facets are core to the cultural logic of face: hierarchy, harmony, and humility (Kim & Cohen, 2010; Kim, Cohen, & Au, 2010). *Hierarchy* refers to the charge of showing appropriate deference to people higher-up in the hierarchy. *Harmony* indicates that individuals should pursue, or at least not disturb, the harmony of the system. *Humility* then, prescribes that individuals should not overreach their status claims. Together, these three facets comprise the 3 Hs (Leung & Cohen, 2011), to which individuals in Chinese cultural contexts are accountable in order to maintain their self-worth or face. Because upholding one's face is essential to maintain one's position in the social structure (Ho, 1976; Hwang, 1987) and avoid social sanctions, such as social ostracism (Xu & Huang, 2012), employees in Chinese cultural

contexts should have a strong motivation to regulate their behavior according to these 3 Hs (Gelfand, et al., 2004; Leung & Cohen, 2011).

In this sense, the function of face is similar to accountability systems in general which also serve to control and regulate behavior. According to Gelfand et al. (2004) individuals develop cognitive maps of how various individuals groups, and organizations are answerable or accountable to one another. More importantly, socialization in particular sociocultural contexts specifies the unique expectations (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) and linkages among entities (i.e., individuals, groups, or organizations) in these cognitive maps or so-called accountability webs (Gelfand et al., 2004). Building on Gelfand et al.'s (2004) work and meaning of face and dignity (Leung & Cohen, 2011), we argue that the structure and content of accountability webs in Chinese cultural contexts (where face is important) generally inhibit upward constructive voice, whereas this is much less the case for accountability webs in Western cultural contexts (where dignity is important). Below we discuss attributes of accountability webs in Chinese and Western cultural contexts and the extent to which they allow for upward constructive voice (see Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 for an overview).

We propose that accountability webs in Chinese cultural contexts reflect the importance of face and the 3 Hs (hierarchy, harmony, and humility) in their *structure* and *content*. Structurally, the immediate supervisor, the group, and the organization are key loci of accountability in Chinese cultural contexts (Gelfand et al., 2004). In addition, because of the importance of hierarchy in Chinese cultural contexts, accountability standards are often unidirectional. For example, individuals are held accountable to their supervisor and group, but not the other way around. Content-wise, many of the implicit standards that individuals are accountable to revolve around the 3 Hs (hierarchy, harmony, and humility). Therefore, employees in Chinese

cultural contexts may generally believe that voice is inappropriate and risky because it conflicts with the need to defer to one's supervisor, it disrupts social harmony, and it may lead oneself to be judged as a show-off. Thus, we expect that the structure and content of accountability webs in Chinese cultural contexts generally discourage upward constructive voice, and even hold individuals accountable to *not* speak up.

Following prior theorizing, we propose that the structure and content of accountability webs is different in Western cultural contexts (Gelfand et al., 2004). Structurally, individuals are accountable primarily to themselves (i.e., there is high self-accountability or personal responsibility). In addition, because Western cultural contexts are more egalitarian, there is mutual (rather than unidirectional) accountability between individuals and their supervisor and accountability standards are negotiable. Employees can engage in a larger amount of role sending (rather than role taking), compared to those in Chinese cultural contexts. As a consequence, they can more easily alter the standards they are accountable to and bring those in line with their internal standards (self-accountability). Therefore, we expect that the structure and content of accountability webs in Western cultural contexts generally allow for more self-initiated change efforts such as upward constructive voice.

Conceptualizing culture's implications for upward constructive voice by means of the concept of the accountability web provides an important backdrop for building our conceptual model. In view of our accountability lens, the accountability webs in Chinese cultural contexts serve as the prescriptions to which employees in Chinese cultural contexts generally hold themselves accountable when contemplating whether or not to engage in upward constructive voice. In general, then, the tight, multiple, and cross-level ties in these webs should hold people accountable *not* to engage in upward constructive voice. Indeed, in the absence of competing

standards, rather than constructively challenging the status-quo, employees should feel personally obligated to maintain the status-quo (i.e., accountability to maintain the status quo). Table 3.3 (top row) illustrates this default pathway, in addition to the altered pathways which will be discussed throughout our model development.

## An Accountability Model of Upward Constructive Voice in Chinese Cultural Contexts

In this section we introduce our accountability model of upward constructive voice and provide theoretical and empirical evidence to support its propositions (Figure 1). In view of the discussion in the previous sections, we further specify our earlier broad research question for our theorizing: given the tight, unidirectional, and cross-level accountability standards for the 3 Hs (hierarchy, harmony, and humility) toward several important others (e.g., supervisor, coworker, group), when and why would individuals in Chinese cultural contexts be most likely to speak up?

### Drivers of Upward Constructive Voice in Organizations: Review of Previous Research and Extension to Chinese Cultural Contexts

Scholarly work on the antecedents of voice has identified many contextual and dispositional factors that predict employee voice (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007). One recent review has looked at two key perceptions that may strengthen the motivation to engage in upward constructive voice: voice efficacy and voice safety (Morrison, 2011). Voice efficacy refers to "individual's judgment about whether speaking up is likely to be effective" (Morrison, 2011, p. 382). This consideration is rooted in well-established theories of motivation which assume that individuals are more motivated to engage in those behaviors that are most likely to yield valued benefits (Vroom, 1964). In other words, according to this view, engagement in upward constructive voice depends on the perceived likelihood that voice efforts will result in desired

outcomes (i.e., whether the target will listen and take appropriate action). Supporting this perspective, research has found relationships between voice and efficacy-related cognitions such as personal control and empowerment (e.g., Frazier & Fainshmidt, 2012; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Voice safety refers to "individual's judgment about the risks or potential negative outcomes associated with speaking up" (Morrison, 2011, p. 382). More specifically, research has shown that individuals are less likely to speak up with change-oriented suggestions if they believe that they cannot freely express their personal opinions and that doing so would harm them (e.g., Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012). Thus, self-protectionist motives are important for employees' decisions of whether or not to engage in voice behavior.

Whereas voice efficacy and safety clearly are important drivers for upward constructive voice, we propose that voice accountability should be a central driver of upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts (for an overview, see Table 3.4). In general, felt accountability refers to the "subjective experience that one's actions are subject to evaluation and that there are potential punishments based on these evaluations" (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006, p. 1229). It is a psychological mechanism through which external societal constraints ultimately influence behavior (Gelfand et al., 2006) and it inherently invokes the expectations that others have for one's own behavior. More specifically then, we define voice accountability as the subjective experience that one feels accountable to others to speak up with change-oriented ideas, suggestions, and opinions.

We propose there are several reasons why voice accountability is a key driver of upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. First and foremost, acting in accordance with others' expectations is at the heart of the concept of face. Indeed, face refers to "the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim…by virtue of [his or her] relative

position" in a hierarchy and the proper fulfilment of his or her role (Ho, 1976, p. 883). In Chinese cultural contexts, expectations of others serve as an informal but legitimate guide for one's behavior and failure to meet these expectations may cause one to lose face. In this sense, face, much like accountability, serves as a social control mechanism (Kim & Nam, 1998). Thus, felt accountability or answerability to others to speak up with change-oriented suggestions should be a more important driver for voice compared to voice efficacy and safety. Indeed, Kim and Nam (1998) have argued that organizational behavior in Asia is better predicted by external attributes such as face than internal attributes such as desires, emotions, and cognition.

A second reason why voice accountability should be a key driver for upward constructive voice is that acting in accordance with the expectations of others—rather than with private wishes and attributes—has a moral component to it in Chinese cultural contexts (Kim & Nam, 1998). Thus, when employees engage in upward constructive voice under the guise of others' expectations for them to do so (i.e., voice accountability), they can safeguard their face and thereby assure the confidence of others in the integrity of their moral character. Taken together, when individuals in Chinese cultural contexts are expected to speak up with change-oriented ideas, opinions, and suggestions—in other words, when they are accountable for such behaviors—this should considerably alter the meaning of upward constructive voice and render it appropriate and even necessary for employees to engage in this behavior. This echoes Johns' (2006) assertion that "changes in accountability are often important events that considerably alter the meaning that is attached to behavior" (p. 394). Taken together, we propose the following:

> ***Proposition 1:*** *Voice accountability is a stronger predictor of upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts than voice efficacy and voice safety.*

**Accountability Sources, Salience, and Alignment**

Given that employees in Chinese cultural contexts generally perceive a strong accountability to *not* engage in upward constructive voice, strong alternative standards would be necessary to motivate employees to *do* engage in this behavior. We propose that such alternative standards are most likely when they emanate from the leader and the group (rather than from the self). Indeed, prescribing subordinates' behavior is inherent to the role of a leader (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). In addition, because leaders are a source of valued social and economic resources (Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1994; Tangirala, Green, & Ramanujam, 2007), subordinates should be motivated to abide by their leader's behavioral expectations. Furthermore, considering the importance of deference to the leader in Chinese cultural contexts (Leung & Cohen, 2011) and the unidirectional nature of accountability ties (Gelfand et al., 2004), employees in Chinese cultural contexts are more likely to engage in role taking (i.e., accepting the expectations that are communicated to them), rather than role making (i.e., proactively shaping these expectations through subsequent role episodes) (Frink & Klimoski, 2004; Gelfand, et al., 2004).

Next to the leader's expectations, employees are also accountable to their (in-)group's expectations. Indeed, as Kim and Nam (1998) noted, there are "strong pressures for each member to meet the expectation of others to secure his/her social legitimacy in the organizational community" (p. 530). This is because group members may lose face by not only their own misconduct but also the misconduct of their group members. Because it is bad form to cause others to lose face, employees in Chinese cultural contexts should thus be closely attuned to the expectations of their group members. Therefore, we propose that the extent to which other group members feel answerable to speak up is also an important antecedent of whether individuals feel they are expected to speak up with change-oriented ideas, suggestions,

and opinions. Considering the arguments above, we introduce two antecedents of voice accountability that are key to create strong accountability standards for upward constructive voice: voice role sending (by the leader) and (group-level) shared voice accountability.

**Voice role sending (by the leader).** Drawing on the broader accountability literature on role sending (Frink & Klimoski, 2004; Gelfand, et al., 2004), we introduce the construct of voice role sending as the process by which a leader transmits standards and norms for upward constructive voice in order to elicit employees to speak up with change-oriented ideas, suggestions, and opinions. Specifically, voice role sending entails a number of specific leader behaviors that clarify that voice is a priority. This construct is especially relevant in Chinese cultural contexts considering the general tendency of subordinates for role taking, rather than role making (Gelfand, et al., 2004). While such prescriptive role sending may seem at odds with the initial discretionary nature of more proactive and change-oriented behaviors, such as upward constructive voice, recent theoretical and empirical work has begun to recognize that voice behavior, and the general class of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), are not always perceived as discretionary and may be integrated in employees' role cognitions (Bolino, Klotz, Turnley, & Harvey, 2012; Kim, Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Johnson, 2013). Importantly, the prescriptive nature of voice role sending does not imply that this process should necessarily be explicit. On the contrary, considering the preference for indirect communication in Chinese cultural contexts (Hall, 1976) and the tendency to embed standards for behavior in the social context (e.g., roles, duties, group norms) (Gelfand, et al., 2004), voice role sending should consist of both explicit role sending, such as setting priorities and giving feedback (Avolio, et al., 2009; Zohar & Polachek, 2014), and implicit role sending, such as modelling and non-verbal feedback (Yaffe & Kark, 2011).

Voice role sending is different from other related constructs, such as intellectual stimulation, change-oriented leadership, and role making and role taking aspects of leader-member exchange. First, intellectual stimulation, as a subdimension of transformational leadership, uniquely refers to explicit inquiries on part of the leader to encourage subordinates to re-examine some of their assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). As such, it only subsumes a small part of the behaviors associated with voice role sending. Change-oriented leadership, characterized by more strategic behaviors, such as scanning the external environment, strategy reformulation, and political activities to build support for change, resides more at the strategic level, and is thus distinct from the dyadic focus of voice role sending (Yukl, 1999). Finally, while the conception of "role sending" bears resemblance to the role making process in leader-member exchange (LMX) (Graen, 1976), voice role sending is different in that it is prescriptive and unidirectional, while LMX implies mutual role making. In addition, voice role sending includes behaviors that specifically convey expectations for employees to speak up, while LMX remains silent as to which specific performance standards are negotiated. In sum, voice role sending is distinct from related constructs and sets clear prescriptions for upward constructive voice. Prior work has suggested that the absence of a clear charge for constructive change in each of these alternative constructs may be one of the reasons for their limited predictive validity for voice behavior (e.g., Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009; Detert & Burris, 2007).

*Voice role sending – Individual-level effects*

There are several reasons why voice role sending should result in individual voice accountability, especially in Chinese cultural contexts. First, voice role sending conveys to employees that leaders prioritize speaking up over deference. Whereas employees may assume that leaders expect deference from them and the perceived sharedness of this deference charge

may cause employees to withhold their change-oriented ideas, we propose that voice role sending can shift perceived priorities and role expectations emanating from the leader. For example, when leaders want to hear employee's suggestions first and intentionally withhold their own prejudice or biases, when leaders question the status quo and themselves, and when leaders consistently show that they expect employees to come up with solutions (e.g., by keeping more quiet at meetings, by sharing and championing employee's solutions and decisions), they eradicate uncertainty regarding whether they expect employees to bring up change-oriented ideas or be deferent and withhold voice. This reasoning is in line with empirical evidence showing that employees make sense of priorities and standards by observing their leader's behavioral patterns (Zohar & Luria, 2004) and discourse (Zohar & Polachek, 2014). Given the importance of honoring leader's expectations in Chinese cultural contexts, we expect that employees should be especially likely to look for their leader's priorities to support them in making appropriate choices (Kim & Nam, 1998).

A second reason why voice role sending should promote employee voice accountability is that it signals to employees how they may convey their suggestions for change. By defining who should do what, when, and how (see Frink & Klimoski, 2004), voice role sending provides structure and a clear context for speaking up. Such a context in turn can reduce the anxiety and uncertainty that often accompany interactions that bear interpersonal risk (Avery, Richeson, Hebl, & Ambady, 2009) and therefore voice role sending can support employees' upward constructive voice. Thus, the new routines, tasks, and structures that leaders establish by means of voice role sending facilitate taking up this new role and accepting answerability for bringing about change. Taken together, the above arguments and associated empirical work suggest that role sending can clarify priorities and reduce uncertainty, thereby facilitating voice accountability. Thus, we propose:

***Proposition 2:*** *Voice role sending (by the leader) is positively related to (individual) voice accountability.*

*Voice role sending – Group-level effects*

Given the multilevel nature of leadership (Yammarino & Dansereau, 2008), we propose that voice role sending also affects voice accountability at the group level. Consideration of those effects is essential because individual employees in Chinese cultural contexts find themselves answerable to both their supervisor as well as their group (Frink & Klimoski, 1998; Gelfand et al., 2004). Thus, to the extent that voice role expectations of the leader and perceived performance standards in the group converge or diverge individual employees should respectively feel more or less accountable for voice.

Whereas prior work has generally conceptualized felt accountability at the individual level of analysis, recent theoretical and empirical efforts conceptualized and evaluated felt accountability at the group level (Gelfand et al., 2004; Wallace et al., 2011). Extending this work, we conceptualize shared voice accountability as the collective experience of being answerable to others for speaking up with change-oriented ideas, suggestions, and opinions. Similar to the individual level effects of voice role sending, we propose that in their dealings with group members, voice role sending (by the leader) signals that engaging in voice is expected and is a task priority. When leaders establish the expression of change-oriented ideas as a focal goal for their group members they can shift members' shared voice accountability such that voice accountability trumps traditional deference norms. Prior work on the impact of leader behavior on group safety climate demonstrates that group members indeed infer shared performance standards from supervisory action, reaction, and discourse (Zohar & Luria, 2004; Zohar & Polachek, 2014). For example, Zohar and Luria's (2004) findings showed that leader's

priority of safety, relative to competing goals such as production speed or cost, informed employees about the type of role behaviors that were likely to be rewarded or supported, and stimulated shared perceptions of safety climate. Similarly, we propose that voice role sending promotes shared voice accountability.

> ***Proposition 3:*** *Voice role sending (by the leader) is positively related to shared voice accountability.*

*Voice role sending variability*

Accountability theory emphasizes the importance of consistency in the standards that individuals are held accountable to (Frink et al., 2008; Frink & Klimoski, 1998). To the extent that employees are consistently held answerable to the same standards by their supervisor, employees should be more likely to experience accountability and comply. Similarly, we argue that for voice role sending to be effective and salient at the individual and the group level, leaders need to consistently (i.e., across situations and employees) signal the importance of sharing change-oriented ideas. Indeed, when a leader expects employees to speak up with change-oriented ideas in one situation and demands deference in another or expect one employee to speak up but not another, voice role sending at the individual and the group level is less likely to be effective: employees are less likely feel individually accountable (voice accountability) and are less likely to agree collectively on their level of answerability to speak up (shared voice accountability). This general tenet resonates with empirical work on leader behavioral consistency (e.g., Johnson, Venus, Lanaj, Mao, & Chang, 2012; Zohar & Luria, 2004). This work suggests that the extent to which leaders show consistency in their behavior matters for whether they are effective in conveying role expectations and affecting employees. In view of above arguments, we extend the following propositions:

***Proposition 4a:*** *Voice role sending variability (across situations) moderates the relationship between voice role sending and (individual) voice accountability, such that this relationship is weaker when voice role sending variability is high versus when it is low.*

***Proposition 4b:*** *Voice role sending variability (across employees) moderates the relationship between voice role sending and shared voice accountability, such that this relationship is weaker when voice role sending variability is high versus when it is low.*

**Cross-level effects and alignment between supervisor and work group standards.** As has become clear in the previous section, shared voice accountability determines the level of the group's expectations. In this section, we propose cross-level effects of this group norm or standard on individual's voice accountability because, next to leaders, groups are an important source of accountability standards in Chinese cultural contexts (Gelfand et al., 2004). In analogy with climate research (Zohar & Luria, 2003; 2005) and team motivation research (Chen, Kanfer, DeShon, Mathieu, & Kozlowski, 2009; Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007), we propose that group-level perceptions and motivations are likely to trickle down to the individual level. More specifically, shared voice accountability is expected to relate positively to individual voice accountability. Especially in Chinese cultural contexts, where individuals are likely to be more sensitive to group expectations (Kim & Nam, 1998), employees should be attentive to any discrepancy between their own felt voice accountability and the extent to which their group members feel accountable to speak up (shared voice accountability). In view of above arguments, we extend the following proposition:

***Proposition 5:*** *Shared voice accountability is positively related to (individual) voice accountability.*

As alluded above, both the leader and the group are important accountability sources in Chinese cultural contexts (Frink & Klimoski, 1998; Gelfand et al., 2004). Therefore, the degree of alignment between the expectations emanating from the leader and the group is important (Frink & Klimoski, 1998). Accountability Theory posits that employees should feel most accountable to the expectations and standards communicated by those with whom they interact most or to which the behavior is most prominent. Because upward constructive voice primarily takes place between the employee and the leader, we expect that supervisor cues will trump group-level cues when it comes to voice accountability.

**Face Management Strategies – The role of Humility, Hierarchy, and Harmony Resources**

Accountability Theory (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) posits that there is a myriad of ways in which individuals can respond to the experience of accountability. For example, response strategies could include conformity, avoidance, and negotiation. Overall however, Frink and Klimoski (1998) posited that these "responses to accountability pressures involve efforts to manage the building of one's reputation" (p. 31). Thus, individuals in Chinese cultural contexts should respond to accountability pressures in ways that allow them to manage and maintain their respectability in the eyes of others (i.e., their face). This is also why accountability theory is closely linked to impression management and self-presentation literatures (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). Given these considerations, what will determine employees' responses to voice accountability? Will it be advisable for employees to honor the charge for upward constructive voice and speak up? What other strategies are available to them to manage and maintain their face in the eyes of others?

Following general accountability theorizing (Frink et al., 2008), we propose that notwithstanding a clear and self-implicating charge for upward constructive voice, and subsequent feelings of voice accountability, employees may still refrain from speaking up due to lack of resources for dealing with accountability expectations. In the present theorizing, resources refer to characteristics of employees or their workplace that help them deal with the pressures of accountability (Hall et al., In Press). Given the importance of face, and its related components (humility, hierarchy, and harmony), we propose that resources that alleviate humility, hierarchy, and harmony concerns, are central to strengthen the relationship between voice accountability and upward constructive voice.

Building on recent work on humility and modesty in Chinese cultural contexts (e.g., Bond, Lun, Chan, Chan, & Wong, 2012; Chen, Bond, Chan, Tang, & Buchtel, 2009) we propose that humility resources could include situations or settings wherein the employees can speak up with change-oriented suggestions without seeming to pursue self-interest, without attracting attention to the self, and while expressing concern for others and elevating others. For example, such situations could include—but are not restricted to—events where employees can speak up with change-oriented suggestions to the benefit of others (e.g., coworkers, clients) (Maynes, Podsakoff, & Morrison, 2013) or private situations in which they are less likely to be seen as attracting attention or showing off (Bond et al., 2012).

We propose that hierarchy resources emanate primarily from the nature of the supervisor–subordinate relationship. More specifically, attributes of this relationship that reduce hierarchical distance and the salience of deferential norms, should help employees to act upon voice accountability by speaking up. For example, affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi may facilitate acting upon voice accountability in this way (Y. Chen, Friedman, Yu,

Fang, & Lu, 2009). Affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi refers to the degree to which the supervisor–subordinate tie is personal and involves emotional expressiveness and concern. Another hierarchy-related resource which may help employees to act upon their charge for speaking up is the quality of their leader's relationship with his own leader or supervisor (Liu, Tangirala, & Ramanujam, 2013).

Harmony resources, then, refer to those contextual factors that reduce the harmony concerns that may keep employees from acting upon voice accountability. Social harmony refers to the relationship between an individual and a group of other individuals (Lun, 2012, p. 468). As such, harmony is intimately related to face and maintaining harmony with others is an effective way of earning or preserving one's face. Building on prior work on harmony orientations (Leung, Brew, Zhang, & Zhang, 2011; Wang, Leung, & Zhou, 2014), we propose for example that value harmony beliefs, whereby employees and their coworkers believe that harmony is a valuable end in itself and harmony striving entails genuine problem solving could serve as such a harmony resource. In contrast, instrumental harmony beliefs should impede the accountability–voice linkage because it causes employees and their coworkers to try to prevent any possible disruption, such that the focus would be on the disruptive nature rather than the constructive nature of voice.

Overall, drawing on accountability theory (Frink et al., 2008) and considering the above examples and indirect empirical evidence, we propose that voice accountability is most likely to result in upward constructive voice when these resources are high. Thus, we propose:

> **Proposition 6:** *Voice Accountability (of the employee) positively predicts upward constructive voice when resources for hierarchy, harmony, and humility are high.*

When these resources are low however, we propose that employees attempt to manage their face by engaging in particular coping behaviors: accounting strategies. An account is defined as "the use of language to interactionally construct preferred meanings for problematic events" (Buttny, 1993, p. 21). Accounts are "statements made to explain untoward behavior and bridge the gap between actions and expectations" (Scott & Lymann, p. 46). Prior taxonomies of account-giving have included 4 primary categories: 1) concessions/apologies; 2) excuses; 3) justifications; and 4) refusals (see Greenberg, 1990; Scott & Lyman, 1968). In the present theorizing, we propose that employees may use accounts to avoid the pressures of voice accountability. More specifically, when constructive change is expected but employees feel they lack the resources to speak up with change-oriented suggestions, they may use account-giving as a coping strategy. This is because account-giving can help them to maintain and protect the reputation of a "moral" actor (in other words: maintain face).

> **Proposition 7**: *Voice accountability (of the employee) positively predicts voice accounts when resources for hierarchy, harmony, and humility are low.*

## Discussion

In this article we have extended past voice research by using accountability theory to explicate the accountability standards to which people in Chinese cultural contexts hold themselves accountable and to describe a new domain of antecedents and boundary conditions to upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. In our theorizing we elucidate how different combinations of these antecedents interact to lead employees to be more or less likely to engage in upward constructive voice. In so doing, this article offers valuable contributions to our understanding of voice behavior, accountability, and culture in organizations.

## Theoretical Contributions

**Voice Literature.** While voice behavior has attracted considerable research attention over the previous years (Greenberg & Edwards, 2009), there is a clear need for more coherent theory building within the voice domain (Morrison, 2011). Taking a Chinese cultural perspective, our theory building contributes to the voice literature by broadening and deepening our understanding of when and why individuals speak up. Indeed, following Y.-R. Chen and colleagues (2009) we purport that the theoretical insights from this theorizing may extend beyond applicability in Chinese cultural contexts because indigenous theorizing oftentimes sheds light on dynamics which may be less visible—but nevertheless relevant—in more often-studied settings (Tsui, 2004, 2006, 2012; Whetten, 2009).

First, in taking an accountability perspective to voice behavior, we shift attention to the possibility that voice behavior can, and may sometimes need to be, driven by strong *obligations*. This emphasis on obligation is in contrast with the majority of voice research which has, perhaps implicitly, largely focused on how managers may create *opportunities* to speak. For example, researchers have examined how leader openness and ethical leadership create trusting environments for employees to voice (Detert & Burris, 2007; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). Our theory building suggests that, in the presence of a strong imperative *not* to voice, merely creating opportunities may not be effective in promoting voice behavior. Rather, external obligations to speak and active management of boundary conditions (e.g., resources), may be necessary. In other words, whereas role making (i.e., creating one's own voice role expectations) is explicitly and implicitly emphasized in the voice literature, role taking (i.e., accepting voice roles communicated or conveyed to oneself) may in some instances be more effective. Beyond Chinese cultural contexts, this accountability perspective should prove insightful in other contexts where voice behavior does not come naturally (e.g.,

bureaucratic or military environment) (Morrison, 2011) or for employees who generally would want to avoid speaking up with suggestions or concerns (e.g., neuroticism, agreeableness) (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). We propose that further applications of this perspective in other contexts may bring other novel antecedents into play.

The above-described extension of prototypical voice drivers (voice efficacy and voice safety) with voice accountability, also raises questions about the nature of voice. Indeed, to what extent can speaking up, in response to requests by a supervisor or norms of the group be considered "proactive" and "voluntary?" Whereas a complete discussion of this issue may go beyond the scope of this paper, implicit and explicit streams in the voice and general proactivity literatures do not necessarily exclude the possibility that these behaviors are driven by others or external standards. For example, within the voice literature researchers have implicitly examined both more proactive (e.g., emanating from dispositional orientations; Tangirala, Kamdar, Venkataramani, & Parke, 2013) and more reactive forms of voice (e.g., in response to consultation; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). Furthermore, within the creativity literature, several researchers have demonstrated the effectiveness of creativity-related expectations and norms (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung McIntyre, 2003; Goncalo, Chatman, Duguid, Kennedy, 2015; Goncalo & Duguid, 2012).

Our theorizing also contributes to the voice literature by explicating and delineating the potential conflict that employees may experience when speaking up. Our focus on voice accountability, more than prior research's focus on voice efficacy and voice safety, sheds light on the multiple sources that employees feel accountable to and the potential misalignment across these sources. This is important because it reflects a decidedly more social and more embedded view on voice. Whereas prior perspectives (voice efficacy, voice safety) largely

focused on a reconciliation of personal concerns with the context, our accountability model highlights how employees may receive diverse and conflicting signals from different sources, keeping them silent, urging them to speak up, or causing them to manage their reputation toward these different sources by means of voice accounting. In so doing, we also emphasize a somewhat more diverse set of response strategies which may allow scholars and practitioners to assess voice in more nuanced ways. A final implication of the socially embedded nature of our accountability approach is that it can help researchers address calls for furthering our understanding of the multilevel influences on voice behavior (Morrison, 2011).

**Accountability Literature.** The present theorizing also speaks to the accountability theory in important ways. More specifically, it expands prior theorizing at the structural and content level.

Structurally, a common critique of accountability theory has been its unique focus on individual level task accountability, largely ignoring cross-level and informal sources of accountability (Frink et al., 2008; Frink & Klimoski, 2004). In applying accountability theory in Chinese cultural contexts and extending Gelfand et al.'s (2004) taxonomy, this article sheds light on the role of tight, cross-level accountability webs, emanating from cultural, rather than task-related imperatives, and how these accountability webs drive felt accountability, and subsequent strategies to deal with this accountability charge.

At the content level our theorizing extends accountability theory by explicitly recognizing and modelling the possibility that employees are accountable for upward constructive voice. This is important for several reasons. First, prior work on felt accountability has rarely specified the standards or norms that individuals are accountable to (Hall et al., In Press). As becomes

apparent from our theorizing merely increasing felt accountability (i.e., general answerability to others) would likely *reduce* the likelihood that employees in Chinese cultural contexts would speak up. In contrast, some have argued that such general accountability would positively (rather than negatively) predict proactive behaviors in Western-oriented cultural contexts where dignity is important (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Thus, general felt accountability could have opposite implications depending on prominent cultural norms (e.g., Gelfand & Realo, 1998; Liu, Friedman, & Hong, 2012). A second reason why our specification of the content of accountability standards is important, is that it extends typical performance-focused accountability standards to include the possibility that employees are held accountable for proactive endeavors. Most accountability research has emphasized accountability as a way of assessment of blame for past events. Our theorizing however, draws attention to a less often-investigated facet of accountability: ex-ante, anticipatory standards for guiding and learning important work behaviors, such as voice.

**Practical Implications**

Because today's employees, teams, and organizations increasingly find themselves operating in multicultural and multinational contexts (Gelfand, Leslie, & Fehr, 2008), and organizations increasingly rely on employee initiative (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992), our theorizing also has implications for managers and employees. First, this article suggests that managers in Chinese cultural contexts need to lay out explicit expectations for voice behavior. Due to the implicit nature of cultural beliefs, transmitting such expectations may be challenging and supervisors may inadvertently send out cues (e.g., power cues, conflict avoidance) that reinforce rather than weaken employees' deference expectations (Locke & Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, this article draws managers' attention to the importance of maintaining consistency in their own

voice role sending behaviors and the alignment of their expectations with the general group's expectations for voice.

Second, our theorizing also has implications for employees. Because upward constructive voice is not only a resource for the organization, but may also constitute a resource for employees (e.g., cater support for important process improvements, draw attention to issues that hinder their work performance), it is often in employee's best interest to be able to voice their concerns, suggestions, and solutions (Ng & Feldman, 2012). This research, in explicating the implicitly held beliefs that may keep employees from acquiring important resources through voice, may help employees become more aware of such beliefs and encourage them to check whether these actually apply to the specific situation they find themselves in (e.g., given my manager's earlier behavior, would he/she really think this suggestion is inappropriate, or am I just assuming this would be the case?). Furthermore, extending the implications of this theorizing to intercultural team settings, the contextualized nature of this research may make team members more attuned to the default accountability to not speak up that individuals from Chinese cultural contexts may bring with them and that may keep them from actively contributing to joint decision making. Such awareness may at the same time prevent faulty attributions of team members' silence (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003) and motivate informed action to foster voice.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Beyond a formal test of the conceptual model, future research may be directed toward making this model more complete. More specifically, we see opportunities to further specify the model through the exploration of additional antecedents, time implications, and contexts.

**Other antecedents.** First, future research should consider what factors could serve as harmony, humility, or hierarchy resources in the present model. For instance, employees with higher organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), defined as individual's beliefs about his/her own capabilities and social worth in the workplace (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989), may overall be less concerned about humility (see also Frink & Klimoski, 1998 on status; and voice literature on influence, Janssen & Gao, 2013). As such, high levels of OBSE may be another important resource. As a second example, supervisor–subordinate similarity on important demographic or value-related attributes may serve as a hierarchy-related resource by increasing trust and connection between the employee and the supervisor (Farh, Tsui, Xin, & Cheng, 1998). Thus, future research may also explore supervisor–subordinate (dis)similarity effects as a boundary condition in our model.

With its focus on cognitive and motivational inhibitors and drivers of upward constructive voice, our theorizing has largely left out the role of affect. Because prior work identified mood, emotions, and emotion regulation as important antecedents of OCBs in general, and voice behavior more specifically (Edwards, Ashkanasy, & Gardner, 2009; Grant, 2013; Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009; Spector & Fox, 2002), future research should explore how affect and emotion regulation may influence the extent to which employees in Chinese cultural contexts act upon feelings of accountability, especially, considering surmounting evidence regarding differential experiences of emotions across cultures (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006; Matsumoto, Yoo, & Nakagawa, 2008).

**Time.** Future research should also explore the role of time in the proposed model. Indeed, the specific costs or benefits that accrue to an employee may strongly influence his or her willingness to engage in voice, notwithstanding voice role sending. For instance, when

supervisors are not responsive to the ideas voiced by employees, over time, employees may not find this supervisor's voice role sending credible anymore (Janssen & Gao, 2013). This may lead to avoidance of voice accountability (e.g., voice accounting), rather than further facilitating upward constructive voice.

**Other contexts.** A final topic for future research lies in the extension of the proposed model to other contexts. Indeed, while prior work in the voice domain has increased our understanding on voice behavior in Western cultural contexts where dignity is important, and the present theorizing provides insights on upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts where face is important, future research should further extend this body of research toward voice behavior in Latin American contexts where honor is important. The honor cultural logic bears differences as well as resemblances with both dignity and face cultural logics (Leung & Cohen, 2011), thus allowing researchers to draw on existing work, as well as derive culture-specific features of voice.

## Conclusion

Our primary purpose in writing this article has been to shed light on the unique factors that motivate employee upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. By means of contextualized theorizing we have shown how an accountability lens to upward constructive voice, is uniquely fit to bring into scope covert assumptions in the voice literature, and helps identify several factors that may be unique in the Chinese cultural context, yet globally relevant. In so doing, our theorizing draws attention to the possibility that voice can, and sometimes should, be driven by an *obligation* to voice, thereby extending the current focus on antecedents that are largely focused on creating an *opportunity* to voice. Explicating such diverse perspectives on voice behavior is not only important from a theoretical point of view, but may also shed light on inconsistencies in prior empirical work and inform managerial

practices to encourage voice. In view of an increasingly multicultural workplace and continuing calls for more global management knowledge, we hope that our theorizing may help guide future research on voice behavior within and across cultures.

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Table 3.1
*Cultural Accountability Configurations – Implications at the Organizational Level*

| **Organizational Level** | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cultural Configuration** | **Locus of most Accountability Sources** | **Standards (explicit or implicit)** | **Number of Cross-level Connections** | **Strength of Accountability Webs** | | | **Overall Alignment within the Organizational System** |
| | | | | Number of standards | Clarity of standards | Degree of monitoring | |
| **Chinese Cultural Contexts** (collectivistic, tight, hierarchical) | The immediate supervisor, group, and organization | Explicit | High | Comparatively more | High | High | High |
| **Western Cultural Contexts** (individualistic, loose, egalitarian) | The self and peers/supervisor | Implicit | Low | Comparatively fewer | Low | Low | Low |

*Note:* Adapted from Gelfand et al. (2004)

Table 3.2
*Cultural Accountability Configurations – Implications at the Interpersonal, Group, and Individual Level*

| **Interpersonal/Group Context and Individual level** | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cultural Configuration** | **Amount of Role Sending** | **Nature of Role Episodes** | **Degree of Role Conflict** | **Felt Responsibility to External Standards** | **Amount of Self-Accountability (internal standards)** | **Strength of Reactions to Violations of Standards** |
| **Chinese Cultural Contexts** (collectivistic, tight, hierarchical) | Low | Greater role taking | Low | High | Low | High |
| **Western Cultural Contexts** (individualistic, loose, egalitarian) | High | Greater role making | High | Low | High | Low |

*Note:* Adapted from Gelfand et al. (2004)

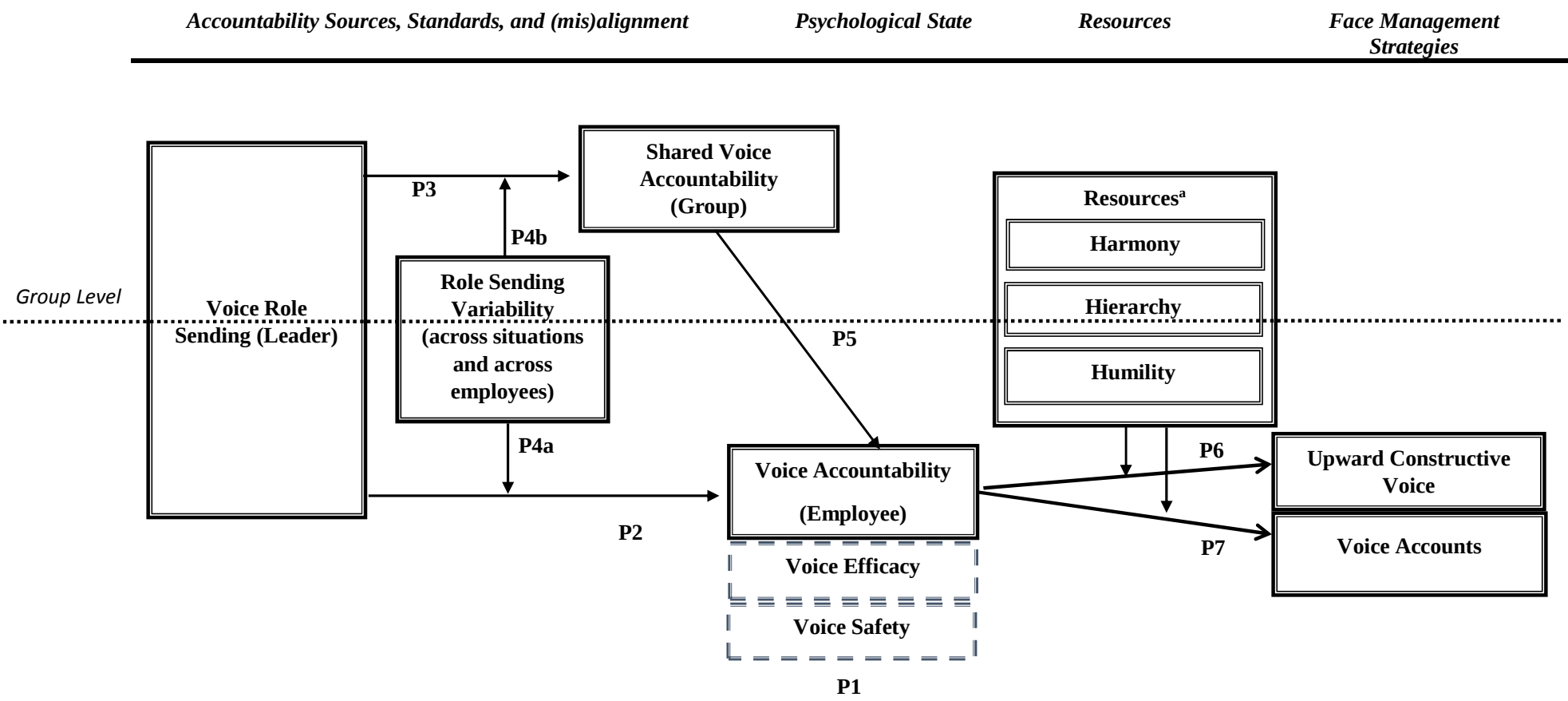
Table 3.3
*Default, Partly, and Fully Situated Pathways regarding Upward Constructive Voice*

| | **Accountability Standard** | **Felt Accountability** | **Behavioral Strategy** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Chinese Cultural Contexts (default)** | Hierarchy, Harmony, Humility toward Supervisor and Group Members | Accountability for Maintaining the Status Quo | Silence |
| **Partly Altered Affordance** | Voice Role Sending; Shared Voice Accountability (P1-P5) | Voice Accountability | Silence; Accounting |
| **Altered Affordance** | Voice Role Sending; Shared Voice Accountability; Hierarchy, Harmony, Humility Resources (P6-7) | Voice Accountability | Upward Constructive Voice |

Table 3.4
*Characterization of Different Drivers of Upward Constructive Voice*

| **Driver** | **Theory** | **Motivational logic** | **Focus** | **Key Consideration** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Voice efficacy | Expectancy-value (Vroom, 1964) | Instrumental | Self | Is it *useful* to speak? |
| Voice safety | Engagement (Kahn, 1990) | Self-protectionist | Self | Is it *safe* to speak? |
| Voice accountability | Accountability (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) | Normative | Others | Am I *expected* to speak? |

Figure 3.1
*An Accountability Model of Upward Constructive Voice in Chinese Cultural Contexts*




[a] These resources can be situated at the individual level or the group level.

# CHAPTER IV

## Hitting the Right Notes:
## Peer's Reactions to Constructive Voice as a Function of Voice Style and Cultural Agency Beliefs

# CHAPTER IV - Hitting the Right Notes:

# Peer's Reactions to Constructive Voice as a Function of Voice Style and Cultural Agency Beliefs


## Abstract

The present study takes a Chinese cultural perspective to address some of the current challenges in the realm of voice evaluation (e.g., types of voice consequences, tactics, and target characteristics) from a relatively novel angle. More specifically, we draw on Self-Presentation Theory to examine when and why individuals react more or less positively toward change-oriented suggestions delivered in different self-presentational voice styles by their peers. Our selection and conceptualization of voice styles (self-promoting vs. self-effacing), outcome domains (behavioral and relational), and target characteristics (individual vs. group agency beliefs), capture the diversity of prototypically Western and Chinese perspectives on these concepts. Results from a laboratory experiment in China provide general support for the proposed second-stage moderated mediation model, whereby the indirect effect of voice style via denigration of the voicing peer's competence affects behavioral and relational outcomes, especially for those targets holding group agency beliefs. We discuss the implications of our findings for research on voice, culture, and self-presentation in general.



*Keywords*: peer-to-peer voice, self-presentation, Chinese cultural contexts, denigration of competence, agency beliefs

## Introduction

Throughout recent years, there has been a great deal of scholarly interest in voice behavior – the expression of constructive opinions, concerns, or ideas about work-related issues (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). This interest is largely spurred by the central premise that voice entails a range of benefits for organizations, work groups, and individuals (Morrison, 2011). For example, several voice scholars demonstrated that the performance of employees who engage in voice behavior is evaluated more positively (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; Whiting, Podsakoff, & Pierce, 2008). In addition, it has been argued that voice behavior is quintessential to team learning and performance since the very nature of group work requires that group members "share ideas, knowledge, and insights so that multiple viewpoints are considered in making decisions" (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, p. 853). Finally, at the organizational level scholars have argued that employees' suggestions, concerns, and ideas feed into important organizational processes, such as innovation (Zhou & George, 2001),process improvement and error detection (Edmondson, 1999), thereby taking the role of an important bottom-up resource for those at the top who otherwise would lack information for organizational improvement.

Despite these initial insights in the consequences of voice, scholars have recently called for a broader and more in-depth understanding of voice effectiveness (Morrison, 2011). Indeed, because the value of the burgeoning research on the antecedents of voice is ultimately premised on the subsequent consequences of voice, furthering our understanding of voice effectiveness is critical. More specifically, a recent review on voice behavior highlights a range of important avenues for future research (Morrison, 2011), which the present research aims to address. First, prior work has demonstrated that employee voice has important and consistent effects on performance- and career-related individual-level outcomes of voice (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012). However, notwithstanding calls to

broaden and deepen the outcome domain of voice (Morrison, 2011), it remains unclear whether voice matters beyond these performance- and career-related consequences. In addition, whereas there is initial evidence that voice types and tactics influence voice effectiveness (e.g., Burris, 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014), prior work has mostly focused on the content of the voice message (e.g., challenging vs. supportive). Thus, we know less than we should about other voice characteristics which may be important in determining voice effectiveness (Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, whereas scholars expect that voice effectiveness depends on the interpretive mindset of the target of voice (Chiaburu, Farh, & Van Dyne, 2013), our understanding of target characteristics that facilitate versus hinder voice effectiveness remains limited. Taken together, it seems that whereas prior work has identified a number of key building blocks of voice effectiveness, these building blocks are still developing and therefore ripe for more elaborate and refined theorizing, definition, and investigation.

Our purpose in this article is to shed new light on the question of when and why voice is more or less effective. To explore this question we draw on Self-Presentation Theory (Jones & Pittman, 1982), which is concerned with delineating how individuals present themselves and whether these self-presentational strategies are effective to influence the evaluations and behaviors of others. Furthermore, to provide structure to our theorizing and as a way to bring relatively novel building blocks to the prototypically Western-oriented domain of voice outcomes (Morrison, 2011), we incorporate both current (implicitly) Western perspectives and Chinese cultural perspectives for developing and testing our conceptual model (Chen, Leung, & Chen, 2009; Tsui, 2012).

We suggest that applying Self-Presentation Theory in Chinese cultural contexts generates several important emphases and predictions about voice effectiveness. First, it allows us to

identify two self-presentational strategies (self-promotion vs. self-effacement; Rudman, 1998) which are likely to be differentially effective in peer-to-peer settings and across cultural contexts: self-promoting voice style and self-effacing voice style. Self-promoting voice style refers to communication of change-oriented suggestions in a manner that is self-focused and direct. Self-effacing voice style refers to communication of change-oriented suggestions in a manner that is other-focused and indirect. Whereas a self-effacing voice style may overall be more expected in Chinese cultural context, given the importance of accounting for others' expectations (Kim & Nam, 1998) and behaving in a modest manner (Chen, Bond, Chan, Tang, & Buchtel, 2009; Leung & Cohen, 2011), especially in peer-to-peer interactions, more indirect interaction patterns have also proven desirable in Western cultural contexts (Fragale, Sumanth, Tiedens, & Northcraft, 2012). Therefore, this proposed voice style distinction should be helpful for broadening our global understanding of voice tactics and effectiveness. Second, given that using "alternative dependent variables is a good way to explore and highlight the operation of context" (Johns, 2006, p. 397), our Chinese cultural perspective helped us broaden the outcome domain of voice to include a key relational outcome: desire for future interaction (see Brockner, De Cremer, van den Bosch, & Chen, 2005; Chen, Chen, & Portnoy, 2009), beyond behavioral and intentional adoption. Finally, our theorizing draws attention to a key interpretive difference between more Western-oriented versus Chinese cultural contexts, which may act as a boundary condition for voice effectiveness: cultural agency beliefs. Agency beliefs refers to a person's understanding of what makes things happen: whether agency is vested primarily in individuals (individual agency beliefs) or groups (group agency beliefs).

Taken together, the present study develops and tests a context-sensitive model of when, how, and why speaking out (to peers) with change-oriented suggestions is more versus less effective (see Figure 4.1), thereby providing a deeper—and more nuanced—scholarly understanding of

this issue. In what follows we discuss Self-Presentation Theory and introduce the two proposed self-presentational voice styles. Then, we develop our hypotheses and test our proposed second-stage moderated mediation model by means of a laboratory experiment in the People's Republic of China, whereby we activate different cultural agency beliefs by means of priming. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical contributions and delineate avenues for future research.

## Theory and Hypotheses

### Self-Presentation Theory

The present study offers a self-presentational approach to the examination of voice effectiveness. Self-presentation is defined as "the conscious or unconscious attempt to control self-relevant images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions" (Schlenker, Forsyth, Leary, & Miller, 1980, p. 554). Because conveying the "right" or "appropriate" impression is key in social interaction, self-presentation constitutes one important means of social influence (Arkin & Shepperd, 1989). Self-presentation theory is concerned with delineating the nature of self-presentational strategies (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982), examining the factors that cause individuals to use particular strategies (e.g., Bye et al., 2011; Tice et al., 1995), and investigating the relative appropriateness and effectiveness of these strategies in varied settings (e.g., Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Wosinska, Dabul, Whetsone-Dion, & Cialdini, 1996). We argue that there are several reasons why self-presentation theory is applicable and relevant to delineate different voice styles, and when and why these styles are more or less effective in bringing about change.

First, voice is inherently subjective and open to interpretation (Chiaburu et al., 2013). This implies that those who deliver change-oriented suggestions have latitude in the *way* they present their suggestions. In addition, they should be especially motivated to try to influence

how others perceive themselves and their ideas because of the image risks involved in trying to change the status quo (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Thus, voice behavior is susceptible to self-presentation, and it is important to examine which self-presentational styles can help individuals get their ideas accepted and protect their desired image. A second reason why self-presentation is applicable and relevant to voice, is that voice entails a high-stakes interaction aimed at influencing others in an ambiguous and uncertain setting. In this way, a voice event is similar to other situations in which the self-presentational lens has proven useful, such as the employment interview (e.g., Paulhus, Westlake, Calvez, & Harms, 2013; Sandal et al., 2014), negotiation (e.g., Pfeffer, Fong, Cialdini, & Portnoy, 2006), and performance attribution (e.g., Bond et al., 1982). Finally, effectiveness of self-presentation is typically constrained by the audience's knowledge, preferences, and beliefs. Similarly, recent theorizing within the voice literature has called for more research regarding the role of receiver's characteristics in voice effectiveness (e.g., Chiaburu et al., 2013). We contend that a self-presentational lens can also further inform and stimulate research in this regard. Taken together, we believe that a self-presentational lens is applicable and relevant in examining voice effectiveness.

**Self-Presentational Voice Styles**

Whereas a lot of different self-presentational strategies have been delineated and investigated in the self-presentation literature (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982; Sandal et al., 2014), the present research focuses on self-promotion and self-effacement (Rudman, 1998). This is because these two strategies or styles capture prototypically Western (i.e., direct, self-focused) versus East Asian (i.e., indirect, other-focused) ways of presenting issues and oneself (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 2003), can be easily transferred to the situation of voice (i.e., presenting a change-oriented idea in these styles), and have been found to yield differential consequences (e.g.,

Wosinska et al., 1996). In what follows, we introduce and describe the characteristics of a self-promoting voice style and a self-effacing voice style.

Self-promotion refers to "playing up one's abilities or accomplishments in order to be seen as competent" (Turnley & Bolino, 2001, p. 352). In analogy with this definition, we define a self-promoting voice style as the communication of change-oriented suggestions in a manner that is self-focused and direct, with an emphasis on the benefits of the idea. Thus, much in the same way as job applicants self-promote by playing up their skills and abilities, individuals may deliver change-oriented suggestions by emphasizing that their ideas are better than and will improve the status quo. In contrast, self-effacement refers to downplaying one's positive traits, contributions, expectations, or accomplishments (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989). Analogously, we define a self-effacing voice style as communication of change-oriented suggestions in a manner that is other-focused and indirect, with less of an emphasis on the benefits of the idea. Thus, much in the same way as job applicants self-efface by downplaying their skills and prior accomplishments, individuals may speak up in a self-effacing way by modestly providing their suggestions as one possible option in going forward. In what follows, we set out to build our conceptual model and formulate our hypotheses.

**Self-Presentational Voice Styles and Behavioral and Relational Consequences**

Prior work on lateral, peer-to-peer interactions, suggests that such interactions easily elicit perceptions of threat (Fragale, Sumanth, Tiedens, & Northcraft, 2012; Menon et al., 2006). This is because the greatest threat to self-worth is likely to come from similar others who are comparable and whose attributes are self-relevant (Fragale et al., 2012; Overbeck, Correll, & Park, 2005). In addition, compared to cross-rank interactions, interactions between same-status peers involve greater ambiguity regarding the relative position of these peers, rendering actual

and perceived threat more likely (Fragale et al., 2012; Menon et al., 2006). Furthermore, threat appraisals in peer-to-peer interactions are also likely to result in retaliating behavior, such as criticizing, denigrating, confronting, and rejecting the threatening peer (e.g., Fournier, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2002).

Building on these general insights, we contend that receiving change-oriented suggestions from a peer similarly has the potential to be threatening and may elicit negative judgments and reactions. More specifically, the present study examines voice style's negative implications for willingness to implement the ideas (intention), actual idea implementation (behavior), and desire for future interaction (relational). Whereas the above-mentioned arguments on peer-to-peer interactions suggest a general negative effect of voice on these outcomes, we draw on self-presentation theory to posit that the effect of voice depends on self-presentational voice style. We argue that there are several reasons why receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered by a peer in a self-promoting voice style causes targets to be less willing to implement the ideas, less likely to actually implement the ideas, and less likely to desire to work with this peer in the future, compared to receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered in a self-effacing voice style.

When peers deliver change-oriented suggestions in a self-promoting voice style, their communication is self-focused and direct, emphasizing the benefits of their ideas. In the context of peer-to-peer interactions, such a self-promoting voice style may cause the target to feel threatened. Indeed, when individuals find that similar others do better than them, their self-worth is at risk (Fragale et al., 2012; Kilduff, Elfenbein, & Staw, 2010; Menon et al., 2006). In order to restore one's self-worth, we argue that the target of self-promoting voice style is likely to retaliate by rejecting the proposed ideas, and avoid future threat by refusing future

interaction. In other words, we expect that targets addressed in a self-promoting (vs. self-effacing) voice style, attempt to maintain and protect their own self-worth by rejecting the competence claim of their peer, causing them to be less willing to implement the proposed ideas, less likely to actually implement the ideas, and less likely to want to work with this peer in the future. Our hypothesis resonates with the power restoration hypothesis (Gergen & Wishnov, 1965), which posits that interacting with others who claim high levels of competence can be intimidating and motivates targets to "counter in kind" by rejecting the other's claims and presenting the self more positively (Gergen & Wishnov, 1965). Similarly, we propose that self-worth maintenance and restoration cause targets of self-promoting voice style to reject their peer's ideas and avoid interacting with this peer. Indeed, implementing ideas of someone who intimidates or challenges one's competence, may imply that one admits personal inadequacy (Fast et al., 2014).

In contrast, when receiving change-oriented suggestions in a self-effacing voice style, we expect that targets of voice should feel less threatened, and hence should be less likely to feel they need to restore self-worth. This is because in this case, change-oriented suggestions are communicated in a manner that is other-focused and indirect, without claiming the benefits of the ideas in contrast to the status-quo. The modest nature of self-effacing voice style should be especially appreciated given the inherently threatening content of constructive voice. This contention resonates with prior work demonstrating that sensitive treatment confirming or at least not denying other's worth, can compensate unfair or disadvantageous outcomes (e.g., Brockner et al., 2000; Chen, Brockner, & Greenberg, 2003). Thus, notwithstanding the fact that target's personal ideas are being challenged by their peer, self-effacing voice style can help affirm and maintain the target's self-worth, such that there is less need to restore one's self-

worth. In this way, the target should be more willing to implement the peer's ideas, more likely to actually implement these ideas, and desire to work with this peer in the future.

Empirical evidence in the domains of self-presentation and peer-to-peer interaction provides indirect support for our arguments. Menon and colleagues (2006) showed that threat appraisals among peers, such as those emerging from interpersonal challenge, caused individuals to devalue their peer's knowledge and be less willing to spend time and resources to implement the plans of their peers. In addition, within the self-presentation literature, research demonstrates that those who self-promote and accentuate their accomplishments, are more likely to be denigrated in private (i.e., targets rate the self-promotor's competence as relatively lower compared to their own), and targets are less willing to work with self-promotors in the future. In contrast, those who are more self-critical and present a more balanced overview of their accomplishments, are less likely to be denigrated (i.e., targets rate the self-critical and neutral interaction partner higher compared to themselves), and targets are more willing to work with them in the future (Gergen & Wishnov, 1965; Platt, 1977; Powers & Zuroff, 1988). Furthermore, in the general domain of peer-to-peer interaction Anderson and colleagues (2006) similarly demonstrated that those who self-enhanced in a group setting were less likely to be socially accepted, whereby desire for future interaction was one indicator of social acceptance. Building on the above-mentioned arguments and associated empirical findings, we hypothesize the following:

> ***Hypothesis 1:*** *Receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered by a peer in a self-promoting voice style causes targets to be a) less willing to implement the ideas (intention), and b) less likely to actually implement the idea (behavior), compared to receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered in a self-effacing voice style.*

***Hypothesis 2:*** *Receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered by a peer in a self-promoting voice style causes targets to be less likely to want to work with this peer in the future, compared to receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered in a self-effacing voice style.*

**The Mediating Role of Denigration of the Peer's Competence**

Building on prior work on threat to self-worth and competence (e.g., Fast et al., 2014; Menon et al., 2006), we posit that denigration (i.e., unfavorable evaluation) of the peer's competence mediates the effect of voice style on outcomes. Denigration has typically been studied as a defensive reaction to threat (e.g., Cho & Fast, 2012; Fast et al., 2014). For example, in the face of threatening upward social comparison (i.e., other's performance is superior) individuals denigrate the other person (Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988) or the validity of a performance test on which they underperformed (Dunn, Ruedy, & Schweitzer, 2012). As another example, supervisors low in managerial self-efficacy compared to those high in managerial self-efficacy were more likely to denigrate the competence of subordinates who spoke up to them, supposedly because of the greater level of threat that voice entailed for them (Fast et al., 2014). Thus, prior work suggests that denigration is a cognitive coping strategy that enables individuals to manage their self-worth in the face of threat.

Building on this work, we argue that denigration of the peer's competence mediates the effect of self-presentational voice style on outcomes. More specifically, we posit that receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered by a peer in a self-promoting (vs. self-effacing) voice style causes targets to denigrate the peer's competence more and therefore be less willing to implement the ideas (intention), less likely to actually implement the idea (behavior), and less likely to want to work together in the future. In other words, in order to cope with the relatively

higher threat to self-worth and competence that self-promoting (vs. self-effacing) voice style entails, we hypothesize that targets' initial cognitive coping strategy is more likely to consist of denigration of the legitimacy of the peer's competence claim, which in turn is likely to drive negative downstream behavioral and relational outcomes.

Empirical evidence within the self-presentation domain demonstrates that targets of self-presentation indeed downgrade self-promotor's competence (e.g., Platt, 1977; Powers & Zuroff, 1988). For example, Powers and Zuroff (1988) demonstrated that subjects interacting with a self-promoting confederate raised their self-evaluations and downgraded the self-promotor's performance. Thus, the subjects denigrated or devalued the self-promotor's performance. Interestingly, the opposite pattern emerged for those subjects interacting with self-effacing confederates. Those subjects reduced their self-evaluations and upgraded the self-effacer's performance. Much in the same way, we argue that denigration of the peer's competence is more likely when peers employ a self-promoting (vs. self-effacing) voice style and that this defensive denigration in turn inhibits willingness to implement the ideas, actual idea implementation, and desire for future interaction. When addressed in a self-effacing (vs. self-promoting) voice style however, targets should feel less threatened and see much less reason to denigrate the competence of the peer. On the contrary, because self-effacing voice style is other-enhancing, targets may even feel obliged to value, rather than denigrate, their peer's competence, and take action accordingly. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize the following:

> ***Hypothesis 3:*** *Denigration of the peer's competence mediates the relationship between voice style and a) willingness to implement the idea; and b) idea implementation. More specifically, receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered by a peer in a self-promoting (vs. self-effacing) voice style causes targets to denigrate*

*the peer's competence more and therefore be a) less willing to implement the ideas (intention), and b) less likely to actually implement the idea (behavior).*

***Hypothesis 4:*** *Denigration of the peer's competence mediates the relationship between voice style and desire for future interaction. More specifically, receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered by a peer in a self-promoting (vs. self-effacing) voice style causes targets to denigrate the peer's competence more and therefore be less willing to work with this peer in the future.*

**The Moderating Role of Agency Beliefs**

In this section we introduce a boundary condition for the influence of self-presentational voice style on outcomes through denigration of peer's competence. More specifically, following the voice (Chiaburu et al., 2013) and self-presentation literatures (Gardner & Martinko, 1988), we contend that the effectiveness of voice and self-presentational styles depends on target characteristics. In other words, the ultimate meaning and effectiveness of the self-presentational voice styles is "in the eye of the beholder." Indeed, prior research demonstrates that target characteristics, such as individualism/collectivism (Bond et al., 1982; Chen & Jing, 2012), and relationship with the self-presenter (Tice et al., 1995; Wosinska et al., 1996), play a role in determining the effectiveness of self-presentational strategies. Extending this work, the present study examines the role of target's agency beliefs as a potential boundary condition for the appropriateness and effectiveness of self-presentational voice styles.

Agency beliefs constitute one facet of individualism/collectivism (Brewer & Chen, 2007) and refer to a person's understanding of what makes things happen: whether agency is vested primarily in individuals (individual agency beliefs) or groups (group agency beliefs). Because group and individual agency beliefs include different expectations for appropriate behavior, we

expect these beliefs to serve as an important boundary condition for self-presentational voice styles. More specifically, we hypothesize that group agency beliefs strengthen the indirect effect of voice style on outcomes which we have hypothesized up till now, whereas individual agency beliefs weaken it.

Individuals espousing group agency beliefs assume that groups determine what happens in the social world and achievement depends on others. From this perspective appropriate behavior may best be described as behavior that is attuned to other's needs, references others, and conveys a receptive stance (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). In view of such behavioral standards, targets of voice espousing group agency beliefs may consider a self-promoting (vs. self-effacing) voice style as less expected and less appropriate and so denigration because of this voice style should yield more negative behavioral and relational reactions. Indeed, from a group agency beliefs perspective, it may seem inappropriate and ineffective to propose change and claim competence one-sidedly, because any outcome is believed to be jointly determined and controlled. Compared to those espousing group agency beliefs, targets espousing individual agency beliefs may consider self-promoting voice style as somewhat more appropriate because from their perspective appropriate behavior can be independent from others and geared toward influencing others (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). Taken together, we hypothesize the following second-stage moderated mediation:

> ***Hypothesis 5:*** *Agency beliefs moderate the indirect effect of voice style on a) willingness to implement the idea; and b) idea implementation, via denigration of the peer's competence. More specifically, denigration of the peer's competence, as a consequence of the change-oriented ideas delivered by a peer in a self-promoting (vs. self-effacing voice style) causes targets espousing group agency beliefs to be a) less*

*willing to implement the ideas (intention), and b) less likely to actually implement the idea (behavior), compared to targets espousing individual agency beliefs.*

***Hypothesis 6:*** *Agency beliefs moderate the indirect effect of voice style on desire for future interaction, via denigration of the peer's competence. More specifically, denigration of the peer's competence, as a consequence of the change-oriented ideas delivered by a peer in a self-promoting (vs. self-effacing voice style) causes targets espousing group agency beliefs to be less likely to want to work together in the future, compared to targets espousing individual agency beliefs.*

## Methods

### Participants and Design

Participants were 139 students at a large university in Beijing, China. In order to ensure the quality of the data, we excluded 15 participants due to failed attention checks (n = 10), potential suspicion (n = 3), missing data for core variables (n = 1), and a technical distribution error (n = 1). Thus, the final sample consisted of 124 students (43 male, 81 female) and the average age was 22.64 (*SD* = 2.46). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions in our 2x2 between-subjects design: self-promoting voice style/individual agency beliefs, self-promoting voice style/group agency beliefs, self-effacing voice style/group agency beliefs, and self-effacing voice style/group agency beliefs. Upon completion participants received a monetary compensation for their participation (50 RMB).

### Experimental Procedure

For our experimental design, we drew on Baer and Brown's (2012) experimental set-up. This is because their design has been employed in an East Asian context (Singapore), promotes participant involvement, and allows for the assessment of idea implementation (behavioral).

Notably, we revised the materials in view of our experimental conditions, the assumptions inherent to our theoretical framework, and the local context.

Upon their arrival in the lab, participants were seated, back-to-back and at a distance of one another. We informed participants that a local business owner was planning to set up a new restaurant close to the university campus and was seeking student input. Participants were told that an initial—yet unfinished—marketing strategy had been developed by some other university students and that they had the opportunity to revise and complete this initial proposal prior to sending it in for review by the local business owner. Participants were told that a class of marketing students at a renowned university in Beijing, China, was simultaneously participating in the experiment and that the system would link them with one of those students. This person would be their virtual partner for the session, providing them with change-oriented suggestions later on. In reality, however, one of the experimenters took on the role of virtual peer for all of the participants. We still opted for a distant set-up (other university and location), rather than telling them another student in the room was their virtual partner, because pilots suggested this was less credible and could distract the participants more.

In a first phase, participants were instructed to complete the initial strategy proposal and then send it via email to their virtual partner at the other university for feedback. In reality, however, all participants sent their proposal to the same experimenter-owned email address and received experimenter-composed suggestions to carry out changes in their proposal (for details, see *Manipulation of voice style*). In the second phase of the experiment, participants got the opportunity to revise their proposal based on the suggestions they received and then to send their proposal to the local business owner. The experimenter emphasized that they did not have to change anything in response to the feedback if they did not want to.

Following this general introduction, participants were told to access a survey link which guided them through the experimental procedure. First, they recorded the number of their computer, supposedly for the system to link them to their virtual partner. Second, they reviewed the general instructions and objectives for the task again and downloaded the unfinished marketing strategy proposal. This unfinished marketing strategy proposal was identical for all participants. Then, they had 25 minutes to review the proposal, complete important facets of the proposal (e.g., restaurant name, target audience rationale, menu composition, celebrity representative), and send it to their virtual partner at the other university. While waiting for their partner's suggestions, they completed a reading comprehension and writing task which supposedly was unrelated to the main objectives of the session. In reality, however, this task contained the agency beliefs priming (for details, see *Manipulation of agency beliefs*).

Ten minutes after emailing the proposal, participants received the feedback on their ideas presented in either a self-promoting or a self-effacing voice style. Participants then completed a questionnaire about their impressions of the peer (including the denigration measure) and then had the opportunity to revise the proposal. After sending their proposal to the local business owner, they filled out a final questionnaire reporting on their willingness to implement, desire for future interaction, and demographics.

Following the self-presentation literature, we provided all participants with identical and generally positive information about their virtual partner (e.g., Kim, Kim, Kam, & Shin, 2003; Wosinska et al., 1996). This is important for our voice style manipulations to be accurately perceived as either self-promoting or self-effacing (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989). More specifically, by introducing their virtual partner as a marketing student from a renowned

university in China, it should have been clear to students that a partner using a self-promoting voice style capitalized on and emphasized his/her expertise and knowledge. In contrast, a partner using a self-effacing voice style should have seemed careful to present his/her expertise and knowledge in more modest ways. In addition, the name of the virtual partner was unisex and identical for all participants to account for possible gender effects in the effectiveness of self-presentational strategies (e.g., Rudman, 1998; Wosinska et al., 1996).

***Manipulation of voice style.*** We created two self-presentational voice styles by varying the *way* in which the change-oriented suggestions were conveyed. To create the self-promoting and self-effacing voice style conditions, we drew on prior work in the domain of self-presentation (Mast, Frauendorfer, & Popovic, 2011; Rudman, 1998). In the self-promoting voice style condition, the virtual partner communicated in a direct, self-confident manner, highlighting the quality and value of the change-oriented ideas. For example, this included references to personal accomplishments (e.g., having the right background to provide good suggestions) and direct language (e.g., "you really need to consider my expert judgment"). In the self-effacing voice style condition, the virtual partner communicated in a more indirect, modest manner, highlighting reservations about the quality and value of the change-oriented ideas. For example, this included neutral and modest references to personal accomplishments (e.g., general background comments) and tentative language (e.g., "Don't you think?").

The content of the change-oriented suggestions, and the greeting and ending of the e-mail were kept constant across voice style conditions. More specifically, the change-oriented suggestions challenged four facets of the proposal which the participants had been asked to complete previously and proposed a revision for that specific facet. In brief, the suggestions implied the following 1) the restaurant name insufficiently represents the vision of the restaurant, with a

suggestion to change to a different name; 2) the chosen celebrity to represent the restaurant was not felt appropriate, with a suggestion to include a more active, sporty, and energetic celebrity; 3) the target audience was deemed not very effective, with a suggestion to shift to a different target audience; and 4) the menu was deemed very complex (with associated operational costs), with a suggestion to simplify the menu items.

***Manipulation of agency beliefs.*** Agency beliefs were primed by means of Liu's (2015) priming procedure. Participants carefully read a science-based news article under the guise of a reading and comprehension task. The article described a key statement and a range of supporting scientific findings that either reflected individual agency or group agency. Subsequently, participants were asked to respond to manipulation checks. As an additional reinforcement of the priming, they wrote down a personal experience that attested to the key statements in the article.

In the group agency condition, the key message of the scientific article was "Social groups play the strongest role in shaping society" and research findings in the scientific article reported supporting evidence. For example, that research indicated that group characteristics determined the group's outcomes and individual outcomes, and that individuals collaborating with others and aiming for common goals were more successful. In contrast, the key message of the scientific article in the individual agency condition was "Individual action plays the strongest role in shaping society" and research findings in the article reported empirical support for key features of individual agency. For example, that research indicated that individual's characteristics determine one's outcomes and that individuals making independent choices were more successful.

***Pretest.*** We pretested the materials on a group of 20 students to verify the effectiveness of our manipulations. With regard to the agency beliefs manipulations, participants in the individual agency condition reported that the key point of the article was the importance of individual agency ($M_{IA}$ = 5.55), rather than group agency ($M_{GA}$ = 3.50). In contrast, those assigned to the group agency condition reported that they had read about group agency ($M_{GA}$ = 6.45), rather than individual agency ($M_{IA}$ = 2.20). The mean of the individual agency manipulation check ($M_{IA}$) varied significantly across the conditions ($t(18) = 6.91$, $p < .05$, d = 2.77), as did the mean of the group agency manipulation check ($t(18) = -5.03$, $p < .05$, d = -2.25). Consistent with our manipulations, participants in the self-promoting voice style condition reported that their peer's voice style was more self-promoting ($M_{SP}$= 6.00) than self-effacing ($M_{SE}$ = 3.25). Participants in the self-effacing voice style condition reported that their peer's voice style was more self-effacing ($M_{SE}$ = 5.90) than self-promoting ($M_{SP}$ = 5.60). However, whereas the mean of the self-effacing voice style manipulation check ($M_{SE}$) varied significantly across conditions ($t(18) = -5.03$, $p < .05$, d = 2.27), the mean of the self-promoting voice style manipulation check ($M_{SP}$) did not ($t(18) = .79$, *ns*, d = .35).

Further exploration of the items comprising the self-promoting voice style check showed that the voice style manipulations did not differ significantly on the item "This person conveys his/her ideas in a determined and confident way." We suspected that the reason why the voice style conditions did not significantly differ on this item was that they shared constructively challenging content, which may inherently render the style more confident and decisive. Still keeping the content constant across conditions, we subsequently slightly adapted manipulations and manipulation checks in view of our main study. First, we suspected that the differences in style needed to be more clear, so for the self-promoting voice style, we further emphasized decisiveness and confidence, the benefits of the idea, and the peer's reliance on

his/her expert background. Second, we added additional manipulation check items "This person overly exaggerates the value of his/her ideas" and "This person is overly confident about his/her ideas", which better probed the claim to competence which should be present in the self-promoting voice style condition, but not in the self-effacing voice style condition.

**Measures**

Unless reported otherwise, the scales employed in this research were measured on 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The materials were translated to Chinese by means of a committee approach (Douglas & Craig, 2007). More specifically, four translators were involved in the initial translation from the English source materials to the Chinese target materials. One translator conducted the initial translation from English to Chinese. Another translator reviewed this initial translation. Subsequently the two remaining translators (one of which being very proficient in English) checked the equivalence of the translation with the English source text and verified cultural adequacy. Finally, the four translators discussed the translation and decided on the final version.

The local research team at the Chinese university where the research was planned reviewed this translation and proceeded to a final check in view of 1) prospective participant's comprehension of the text; 2) accuracy of the translation in view of their background in organizational behavior; and 3) realism of the voice styles (i.e., was it realistic that these change-oriented suggestions would come from other students?).

***Denigration (of the peer's competence).*** Drawing on prior work in the voice domain (Fast et al., 2014), we measured denigration of the peer with four items adapted from the competence dimension of trustworthiness (Mayer & Davis, 1999; Elsbach & Elofson, 2000). In contrast to Fast et al. (2014) we worded the items so that high scores reflect denigration of the peer. The

items are: "This person is not knowledgeable about the proposal", "This person is not qualified to provide suggestions regarding the proposal", "This person does not really understand the subject of the proposal", and "This person's change-oriented suggestions about the proposal are unreliable" ($\alpha$ = .83).

***Idea implementation.*** We trained two Chinese doctoral students (blind to the hypotheses) to code whether participants incorporated each of the four suggestions (1. change the restaurant name; 2. simplify the menu; 3. focus on a different target audience; and 4. use a different celebrity to promote the restaurant) in their recommendations to the restaurant owner. Upon training completion, the coders each coded half of the proposals and also coded 10% of the proposals initially assigned to their fellow coder. Based on the 18 proposals coded by both coders, agreement ($r_{wg}$) and inter-rater reliability (ICC(1); ICC(2)) for the different categories were found to be appropriate (see Table 4.1). Because the idea implementation categories did not correlate consistently with one another (see Table 4.2), we opted to examine the associated hypotheses separately for each of the four idea implementation categories.

***Willingness to implement.*** We measured willingness to implement the change-oriented suggestions by means of a measure adapted from Menon et al. (2006). Participants took the perspective of the business owner and indicated to what extent they were willing to 1) spend time to implement the proposed ideas; 2) spend money to implement the proposed ideas; and 3) use the proposed ideas ($\alpha$ = .91). The scale ranged from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

***Desire for future interaction.*** We measured desire for future interaction by means of a dichotomous measure. Participants responded to the question "Based on your interaction with

this student, would you like to work with this student again in the future?" with 0 (no) or 1 (yes).

***Manipulation checks.*** Participants indicated the extent to which their partner's voice style was self-promoting or self-effacing by responding to several items designed to tap into these voice styles. Items assessing self-promoting voice style are "This person's speech style is decisive and direct", "This person overly exaggerates the value of his/her ideas" and "This person is overly confident about his/her ideas" ($\alpha$ = .80). Items assessing self-effacing voice style are "This person's speech style is very polite", and "This person modestly presents his/her ideas" ($\alpha$ = .94). To assess the effectiveness of our agency beliefs manipulation, we employed items from Liu (2015). More specifically, participants reported the extent to which a number of statements reflected the article they read. The statements assessing individual agency were: "In most organizations, individual choices and decisions are key to achieving results" and "Individual actions determine organizational development and change" ($\alpha$ = .91). The statements assessing group agency were: "In most organizations, group choices and decisions are key to achieving results" and "Group actions determine organizational development and change" ($\alpha$ = .94).

***Realism.*** Following Farh and Chen (2014) we assessed the realism of the experimental session by means of two items. The items are: "The task setting I just experienced was realistic" and "The experiment I just completed was realistic" ($\alpha$ = .87). The mean score across these items ($M$ = 5.51; $SD$ = 1.15) indicated that participants generally agreed that the experimental session and tasks were realistic.

### Description of Data Analytic Method

We employed regression analyses to test our hypotheses. This is because regression analysis is equivalent to a 2x2 factorial analyses of variance (Hayes, 2013) and can accommodate conditional process analyses allowing for a test of our indirect effects and moderated mediation hypotheses. More specifically, we employed simple multiple regression to test for Hypotheses 1, 3, and 5 and logistic regression for Hypothesis 2, 4, and 6 to accommodate the binary nature of desire for future interaction. We employed Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro to arrive at the bootstrapped estimates for our indirect effects hypotheses (Hypotheses 3-4; PROCESS Model 4) and moderated mediation hypotheses (Hypotheses 5-6; PROCESS Model 14). Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro recognizes and accommodates binary outcome variables, so these analyses could include our binary outcome variable, desire for future interaction. In view of recent methodological developments positing and showing that Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal-steps approach for testing mediation has low power and may be overly conservative (see MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002; Shrout & Bolger, 2002), we assume that non-significant total effects from IV to DV do not preclude the presence of an indirect effect. Indeed, recent recommendations suggest that a significant total effect (X→Y) may not be strictly necessary to establish mediation, especially when relationships are more distal (Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

## Results

Table 4.2 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables included in the analysis.

### Manipulation Checks

In analyzing our results, we first compared the responses to the manipulation check measures across conditions to verify the effectiveness of our manipulations. Consistent with our

manipulations, participants in the self-promoting voice style condition reported that their peer's voice style was more self-promoting ($M_{SP}$ = 5.71) than self-effacing ($M_{SE}$ = 3.19). Participants in the self-effacing voice style condition reported that their peer's voice style was more self-effacing ($M_{SE}$ = 6.12) than self-promoting ($M_{SP}$ = 3.74). The mean of the self-promoting voice style manipulation check ($M_{SP}$) varied significantly across voice style conditions ($t(122) = 8.25$, $p < .05$, d = 1.50), as did the mean of the self-effacing voice style manipulation check ($t(122) = -12.98$, $p < .05$, d = 2.31). With regard to the agency beliefs manipulations, participants in the individual agency condition reported that the key point of the article was the importance of individual ($M_{IA}$ = 6.16), rather than group agency ($M_{GA}$ = 2.31). In contrast, those assigned to the group agency condition reported that they had read about group agency ($M_{GA}$ = 6.41), rather than individual agency ($M_{IA}$ = 1.99). The mean of the individual agency manipulation check ($M_{IA}$) varied significantly across agency conditions ($t(122) = 28.68$, $p < .05$, d = 5.18), as did the mean of the group agency manipulation check ($M_{GA}$) ($t(122) = -29.97$, $p < .05$, d = 5.23). Taken together, these results provide evidence for the effectiveness of our manipulations.

**Discriminant Validity**

To verify the discriminant validity of the measures included in our study, we conducted a confirmatory factor analyses including denigration and willingness to implement items. The hypothesized two-factor model (Mplus 7.0; Muthén, & Muthén, 2012) provided acceptable fit ($\chi^2(12) = 19.98$, p > .05; CFI = .97; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .10; SRMR = .04). In addition, this model provided a better fit than the competing one-factor model ($\chi^2(13) = 65.82$, p < .01; CFI = .79; TLI = .66; RMSEA = .26; SRMR = .18; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 45.84$, p < .01). Taken together, these results support the discriminant validity of the constructs in our study.

**Tests of Total and Indirect Effects**

Table 4.3 displays the regression results for Hypotheses 1-4. Hypothesis 1 posited that individuals receiving change-oriented suggestions in a self-promoting voice style would be a) less willing to implement the ideas; and b) less likely to actually implement the ideas, than individuals receiving those suggestions in a self-effacing voice style. In support for hypothesis 1a, self-promoting voice style caused individuals to be less willing to implement the change-oriented suggestions compared to self-effacing voice style ($B$ = -.53, $p < .05$). As can be seen in Table 4.3 however, this main effect of voice style was not found for the different facets of actual idea implementation. Thus, Hypothesis 1b did not receive support. Hypothesis 2 posited that individuals receiving change-oriented suggestions in a self-promoting voice style would be less willing to work with the peer in the future, than individuals receiving those suggestions in a self-effacing voice style. In support for Hypothesis 2, individuals were less likely to desire future interaction when receiving change-oriented suggestions in a self-promoting (vs. self-effacing) voice style ($B$ = -1.95, $p < .05$).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that denigration of the peer's competence mediates the relationship between voice style and a) willingness to implement; and b) idea implementation. As can be seen in Table 4.3, the indirect effect of voice style on willingness to implement via denigration of the peer's competence was only marginally significant ($B$ = -.10, $p < .10$; 95%CI [-.26; .00]). In addition, the indirect effect of voice style on idea implementation via denigration of the peer's competence was significant for adoption of the restaurant name ($B$ = -.23, $p < .05$; 95%CI [-.41; -.06]) and adoption of the target audience ($B$ = -.15, $p < .05$; 95%CI [-.29; -.04]). However, the indirect effects of voice style via denigration of the peer's competence on adoption of the menu simplification ($B$ = -12, $p < .10$) and adoption of the celebrity representative ($B$ = -.05, *ns*) are respectively marginally significant and non-significant. Thus,

Hypothesis 3a and 3b only received partial support. Hypothesis 4 predicted that denigration of the peer mediates the indirect effect of voice style on desire for future interaction. In support for Hypothesis 4, the indirect effect of voice style via denigration of the peer on desire for future interaction was significant ($B$ = -.73, p < .05; 95%CI [-1.75; -.17]).

**Tests of Moderated Mediation**

As a final step in our hypothesis testing, we examined whether agency beliefs moderated the indirect effect of voice style on the outcome variables via denigration of the peer (Hypotheses 5-6). As can be seen in Table 4.4, the relationship between denigration of the peer's competence and willingness to implement the ideas was moderated by agency beliefs ($B$ = -.40, p < .05). Simple slopes analyses of the significant interaction between denigration and agency beliefs on willingness to implement demonstrated that the effect of denigration of the peer on willingness to implement the ideas was significant and negative in the group agency beliefs condition ($B$ = -.40, p < .01), and was non-significant in the individual agency beliefs condition ($B$ = .00, *ns*). Figure 4.2 further illustrates the pattern of this interaction. Furthermore, the indirect effect of voice style via denigration on willingness to implement the ideas was significant in the group agency beliefs condition ($B$ = -.23, p < .05; 95%CI [-.51; -.04]), but not in the individual agency beliefs condition ($B$ = .00, *ns*; 95%CI [-.14; .16]). In addition, as reported at the bottom of Table 4.4, Hayes' (2015) index of moderated mediation confirmed that the difference between these conditional indirect effects was significant. Thus, Hypothesis 5a received support.

Moving to the idea implementation outcomes in Table 4.4, the results show that the relationship between denigration and change facets is moderated by agency beliefs for adoption of restaurant name ($B$ = -.38, p < .01), but not for the other change facets. Simple slopes analyses

of the significant interaction between denigration and agency beliefs on adoption of the restaurant name demonstrated that the effect of denigration of the peer's competence on adoption of the restaurant name was significant and negative in the group agency beliefs condition ($B$ = -.63, p < .01), and was only marginally significant in the individual agency beliefs condition ($B$ = -.24, p < .10). Figure 4.3 further illustrates the pattern of this interaction. In addition, the indirect effect of voice style via denigration on adoption of the restaurant name was significant in the group agency beliefs condition ($B$ = -.35, p < .05; 95%CI [-.65; -.10]), but not in the individual agency beliefs condition ($B$ = -.14, *ns*; 95%CI [-.30; -.01]). In addition, Hayes' (2015) index of moderated mediation confirmed that the difference between these conditional indirect effects was significant. Thus, Hypothesis 5b received support for one of the change facets (i.e., adoption of the restaurant name). Finally, agency beliefs did not influence the relationship between denigration of the peer's competence and desire for future interaction ($B$ = -.23, *ns*). Thus, Hypothesis 6 did not receive support.

## Discussion

Inspired by the peculiarities of voice in Chinese cultural contexts, the present study has shed new light on the prototypically Western-oriented domain of voice outcomes (Morrison, 2011). More specifically, the present study examined when and why two self-presentational voice styles affected important behavioral and relational outcomes of peer-to-peer voice. Our findings demonstrate that receiving change-oriented suggestions delivered in a self-promoting voice style generally causes individuals to be less willing to implement the ideas (intention), to be less likely to actually use the ideas (behavior), and to be less likely to want to work with the peer again, compared to receiving those ideas in a self-effacing voice style. In addition, we showed that denigration of the peer's competence was one mechanism underlying these effects. Furthermore, we found that the mediated effects of voice style on willingness to implement the

ideas and one facet of idea implementation, were stronger for those who believed that groups, rather than individuals, typically get things done and are able to realize change.

## Theoretical Contributions

**Voice Literature.** A first contribution to the voice domain lies in the introduction of two self-presentational voice style (i.e., self-promoting and self-effacing voice style) and an initial exploration of their relative effectiveness. In this way we heed calls to further our understanding of the tactics and strategies which voicers may use and the implications of these tactics for voice effectiveness (Morrison, 2011). Our results provide preliminary evidence that self-presentational voice style matters in Chinese cultural contexts. In concert with recent findings regarding the differential effectiveness of voice types with varying content (see Burris, 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2013), our results further highlight the importance of going beyond general conceptualizations and operationalizations of voice. In addition, our theorizing and findings show that taking a cross-cultural lens can be helpful in generating novel, and theoretically meaningful distinctions in this regard (see also, Davidson & Van Dyne, 2015). Indeed, whereas a self-effacing voice style may overall be less common and more recessive in Western cultural contexts, this style may still prevail and be more effective than a self-promoting style in specific settings (e.g., whenever the group identity is predominant; or individual status is uncertain and easily threatened) (see Fragale et al., 2012) such as Chinese cultural contexts.

Our investigation of the moderating role of cultural agency beliefs also constitutes a contribution to the voice literature. As noted by several authors (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) voice is open to interpretation and reactions to voice should therefore be subject to a subjective process of sensemaking. In the

present research, we found initial evidence for the role of cultural agency beliefs as one interpretive factor and a boundary condition for voice effectiveness in Chinese cultural contexts. Furthermore, although we have taken a monocultural approach and we have primed participants with either individual or group agency beliefs, our findings may still further our understanding of voice effectiveness across cultures, which is also considered an important avenue for future research within the voice domain (Morrison, 2014).

In several reviews of the voice literature, researchers have pointed to the relative dearth of research on the outcomes of voice and called for more comprehensive investigations in this regard. Our findings broaden the domain of voice consequences with an important relational outcome: desire for future interaction (with the voicer). This is important because the extent to which peers in a group support or avoid one another has implications for effectiveness (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Furthermore, because voice is iterative, relational consequences for the voicing peer may motivate or inhibit voice in the future. For example, prior work shows that individual's centrality in a social network determines the likelihood of voicing (Venkataramani & Tangirala, 2010). In addition, our research also contributes by examining behavioral idea implementation, in addition to the more commonly used intentional measure (willingness to implement; see Burris, 2012; Fast et al., 2014). This is important because adoption of improvement-oriented suggestions is a key prerequisite for voice to affect team and organizational functioning.

**Self-Presentation Literature.** The present study contributes to the self-presentation literature by expanding self-presentational strategies beyond traditional settings (e.g., employment interview; Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992) to the setting of constructive peer-to-peer voice. We have theorized that because providing and receiving voice involves risk and the value of

proposed suggestions is ambiguous (i.e., open to interpretation), self-presentation should be relevant and make a difference in peer-to-peer voice. Our results provide initial evidence that self-presentational styles apply to peer-to-peer voice and matter for effectiveness and relational outcomes. Our findings that self-effacing (vs. self-promoting) voice style was generally more effective in this peer-to-peer setting resonates with prior work examining hierarchical differences in the self-presentation literature (Wosinska et al., 1996) and the general status literature (Fragale et al., 2012).

Furthermore, our finding that cultural agency beliefs serve as a boundary condition for the effectiveness of self-presentational styles expands prior work on self-presentation across cultures (e.g., Chen & Ying, 2012; Sandal et al., 2014). More specifically, albeit in a novel setting (i.e., peer-to-peer voice), our findings confirm prior research demonstrating that more accommodating and self-effacing self-presentations are preferable in more collectivistic or embedded cultural contexts (Chen & Jing, 2012; Sandal et al., 2014).

**Cross-Cultural Research.** The present study also adds to our understanding of the causal role of culture in organizational behavior. More specifically, we manipulated agency beliefs as a specific facet of individualism/collectivism (Brewer & Chen, 2007) and theorized about how agency beliefs influence target's interpretations and reactions toward voice behavior. This is important because it heeds calls for more specific theorizing in view of individualism/collectivism (Brewer & Chen, 2007) and expands recent work on agency beliefs (Liu, 2015). Furthermore, whereas our use of experimental manipulation of a cultural facet within a monocultural context (China, Beijing) may be short of external validity, it allows for causal inference about the role of cultural agency beliefs in self-presentational effectiveness.

This is important because assessing and establishing causality of culture's effects is a long-standing challenge in (cross-)cultural research (Leung & van de Vijver, 2008).

**Limitations and Future Research**

The present research also has a number of limitations that require us to qualify our findings and call for future research. First, whereas our experimental approach can safeguard internal validity, it may limit the generalizability of our findings. For example, agency beliefs as activated experimentally within a Chinese cultural context, may not fully reflect the richness of individual versus group agency beliefs which chronically operate in Western versus East Asian settings. Therefore, future research replicating our findings across cultures that typically espouse stronger individual versus group agency beliefs can strengthen our results and contribute to the generalizability and ecological validity of the current findings. In addition, such research efforts can shed light on an important question that remains, and that has continued to intrigue cross-cultural researchers (see Cai et al., 2010; Heine & Hamamura, 2001; Kurman, 2001; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003): could it be that a more modest, self-effacing self-presentation is actually a way of promoting the self in East Asian cultural contexts? Thus, future research making use of between-culture variance to further contrast the effectiveness of these self-presentational styles should be insightful.

Similarly improving external validity, (quasi-experimental) field studies should allow the investigation of peer-to-peer voice in more naturalistic settings, where ongoing relationships may provide a boundary condition for self-presentational styles. Indeed, according to self-presentation theory, the use and effectiveness of self-presentational styles is circumscribed by the knowledge the target has about the self-presenter (Baumeister & Jones, 1978).

A second limitation is that we have conceptualized and operationalized cultural agency beliefs dichotomously. Whereas this is in accordance with much of the prior work in this domain in Western and East Asian settings (Liu, 2015), there is some evidence that agency beliefs in honor cultures (e.g., Turkey) are unique, and distinct from the individual versus group agency beliefs that are typically investigated (Güngör, Karasawa, Bolger, Dinçer, & Mesquita, 2014). Therefore, future research considering a broader variety of agency beliefs across a broader variety of cultural contexts should be insightful.

Third, our results showed some inconsistencies in our findings across outcomes. We believe it may be case that the different idea implementation dimensions—where most of the inconsistencies occurred—were not considered equally important to the participants or that the participants' reactions were strongest on the first change facet they received feedback on (i.e., adoption of restaurant name). Considering these inconsistencies in our findings, future research is needed to replicate our findings and future efforts may find it useful to improve or simplify the idea implementation measure we employed.

Finally, the present research constitutes an initial investigation of some of the factors determining voice effectiveness. Therefore, a great number of future research avenues remain. For example, following prior work on threat to self-worth in the context of voice (Fast et al., 2014), future research may examine the moderating role of self-affirmation in countering aversive effects of voice in a peer-to-peer setting within or across cultures. Furthermore, our research only focused on the interpretive role of a facet of individualism/collectivism (i.e., cultural agency beliefs) and future research may examine cultural dimensions beyond individualism/collectivism. For example, shifting voice to a typical hierarchical setting, power

distance comes into play and future research may shed light on the role of supervisor's power distance orientation in interpreting and reacting to subordinate voice.

## Conclusion

The present study has employed Self-Presentation Theory (Jones & Pittman, 1982) to shed light on some of the contingencies of peer-to-peer voice effectiveness. Our findings suggest that successful self-presentation in the context of peer-to-peer voice may require peers to employ a self-effacing voice style in order to get their ideas implemented and assure social acceptance. Furthermore, self-effacing voice style should be especially helpful for peers to avoid being denigrated when their targets are socialized such that they believe that groups—and not individuals—are the primary agents in society. We hope that the present study can further spur research attempting to gain a more global and nuanced understanding of when and why voice is more versus less likely to be effective.

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Table 4.1
*Inter-rater Agreement (rwg) and Inter-rater Reliability Indices for Idea Implementation Facets*

| **Change Facet** | $r_{wg}$ | ***ICC(1)*** | ***ICC(2)*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Adoption of Restaurant Name | .96 | .96 | .98 |
| 2. Adoption of Simplified Menu | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 3. Adoption of Target Audience | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 4. Adoption of Celebrity | 1 | .93 | .96 |

*Note:* Agreement and reliability of 2 raters over 12 cases.

Table 4.2
*Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations*

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Voice Style[a] | .52 | .50 | - | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Agency Beliefs[b] | .54 | .50 | -.03 | - | | | | | | | |
| 3. Denigration of Peer's Competence | 3.02 | 1.17 | .24** | -.11 | *(.83)* | | | | | | |
| 4. Willingness to Implement | 4.84 | 1.04 | -.25** | -.11 | -.23** | *(.91)* | | | | | |
| 5. Adoption of Restaurant Name | 1.35 | 1.28 | -.07 | -.08 | -.36** | .21* | - | | | | |
| 6. Adoption of Simplified Menu | .88 | 1.25 | -.08 | .13 | -.23** | .14 | .23** | - | | | |
| 7. Adoption of Target Audience | .77 | .82 | .01 | .06 | -.37** | .24** | .05 | .23* | - | | |
| 8. Adoption of Celebrity | .35 | .51 | -.02 | .06 | -.18* | .11 | .12 | .29** | .14 | - | |
| 9. Desire for Future Interaction[c] | .85 | .35 | -.30** | .03 | -.51** | .29** | .21* | .13 | .22* | .03 | - |

*Note: N* = 124. [a] Voice style coded: 0 = self-effacing voice style; 1 = self-promoting voice style. [b] Agency beliefs coded: 0 = individual agency beliefs; 1 = group agency beliefs. [c] Desire for future interaction coded: 0 = no; 1 = yes. Cronbach alphas are reported in italics on the diagonal.

Table 4.3
*Indirect Effects of Voice Style on Outcomes through Denigration of the Peer's Competence*

| | **Mediator** | **DV: Intention** | | **DV: Behavior** | | | | | | | | **DV: Relational** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Denigration* | *Willingness to Implement* | | *Adoption of Restaurant Name* | | *Adoption of Simplified Menu* | | *Adoption of Target Audience* | | *Adoption of Celebrity Representative* | | *Desire for Future Interaction* | |
| | | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 1 | Step 2 |
| Voice Style[a] | .56$^{**}$ | -.53$^{**}$ | -.44$^{*}$ | -.18 | .05 | -.18 | -.06 | .01 | .16 | -.01 | .04 | -1.95$^{**}$ | -1.43$^{*}$ |
| Denigration | | | -.18$^{*}$ | | -.41$^{**}$ | | -.22$^{*}$ | | -.27$^{**}$ | | -.08$^{\dagger}$ | | -1.30$^{**}$ |
| Indirect Effect | | | **-.10$^{\dagger}$** | | **-.23$^{*}$** | | **-.12$^{\dagger}$** | | **-.15$^{*}$** | | -.06 | | **-.73$^{*}$** |

*Note.* $N$ = 124. Reported regression coefficients are unstandardized values. All analyses controlled for agency beliefs. [a] Voice style coded as: 0 = self-effacing voice style; 1 = self-promoting voice style.

$^{\dagger}$ $p < .10$

$^{*}p < .05$

$^{**}p < .01$

Table 4.4
*Moderated Mediation Results for Idea Implementation*

| | **DV: Intention** | **DV: Behavior** | | | | **DV: Relational** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Mediator Model*** | | *Denigration* | | | | |
| Voice Style | | **.56**$^{**}$ | | | | |
| ***Dependent Variable Model*** | *Willingness to Implement* | *Adoption of Restaurant Name* | *Adoption of Simplified Menu* | *Adoption of Target Audience* | *Adoption of Celebrity Representative* | *Desire for Future Interaction* |
| Agency Beliefs[a] | .95$^{\dagger}$ | .85 | -.05 | .28 | .02 | .53 |
| Voice Style[b] | -.43$^{*}$ | .06 | -.06 | .16 | .04 | -1.42$^{\dagger}$ |
| Denigration | .00 | -.24$^{\dagger}$ | -.27$^{*}$ | -.23$^{**}$ | -.08 | -1.20$^{**}$ |
| Denigration x AB | **-.40**$^{**}$ | **-.38**$^{*}$ | .11 | -.08 | .00 | -.23 |
| Individual AB | .00 | -.13 | -.15 | -.13$^{*}$ | -.05 | -.67$^{**}$ |
| Group AB | -.23$^{*}$ | -.35$^{*}$ | -.09 | -.17$^{*}$ | -.05 | -.80$^{**}$ |
| Index of Moderated Mediation | **-.23**$^{*}$ | **-.22**$^{*}$ | .06 | -.04 | .00 | -.13 |

*Note*. $N$ = 124. Reported regression coefficients are unstandardized values. [a] Agency beliefs coded as: 0 = individual agency beliefs; 1 = group agency beliefs. [b] Voice style coded as: 0 = self-effacing voice style; 1 = self-promoting voice style.

$^{\dagger}$ $p < .10$

$^{*}p < .05$

$^{**}p < .01$

Figure 4.1
*Conceptual Model*

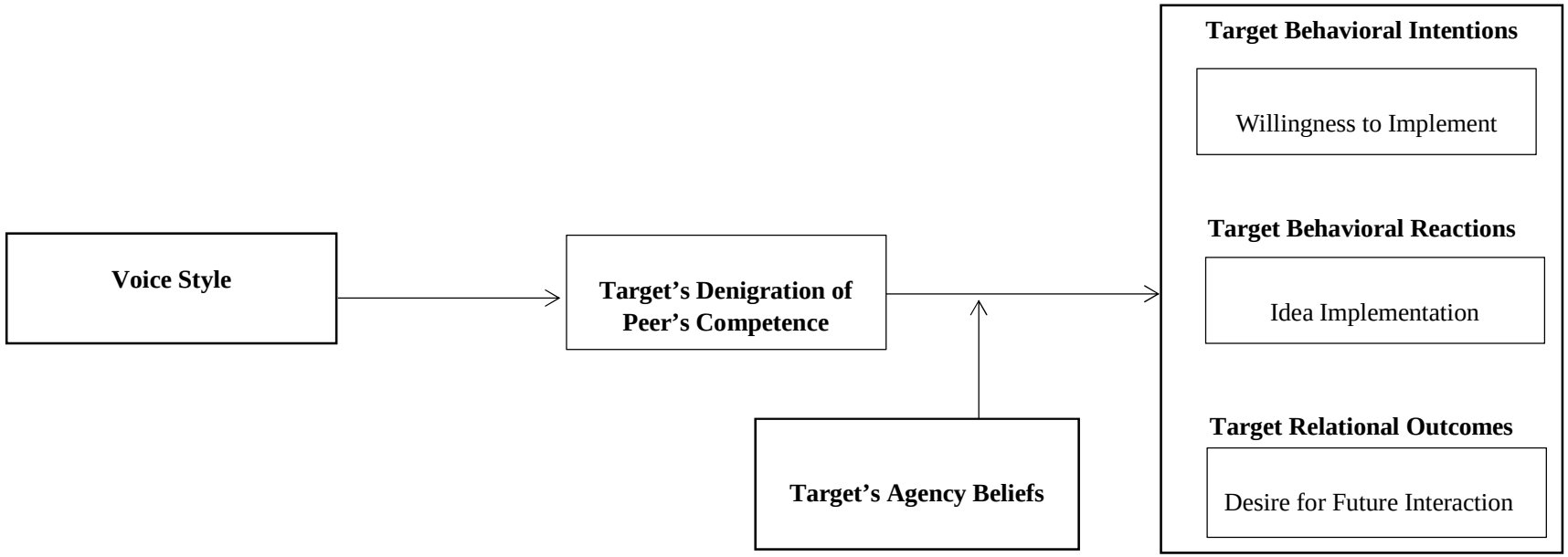


Figure 4.2
*Interaction of Denigration of the Peer and Agency Beliefs on Willingness to Implement*

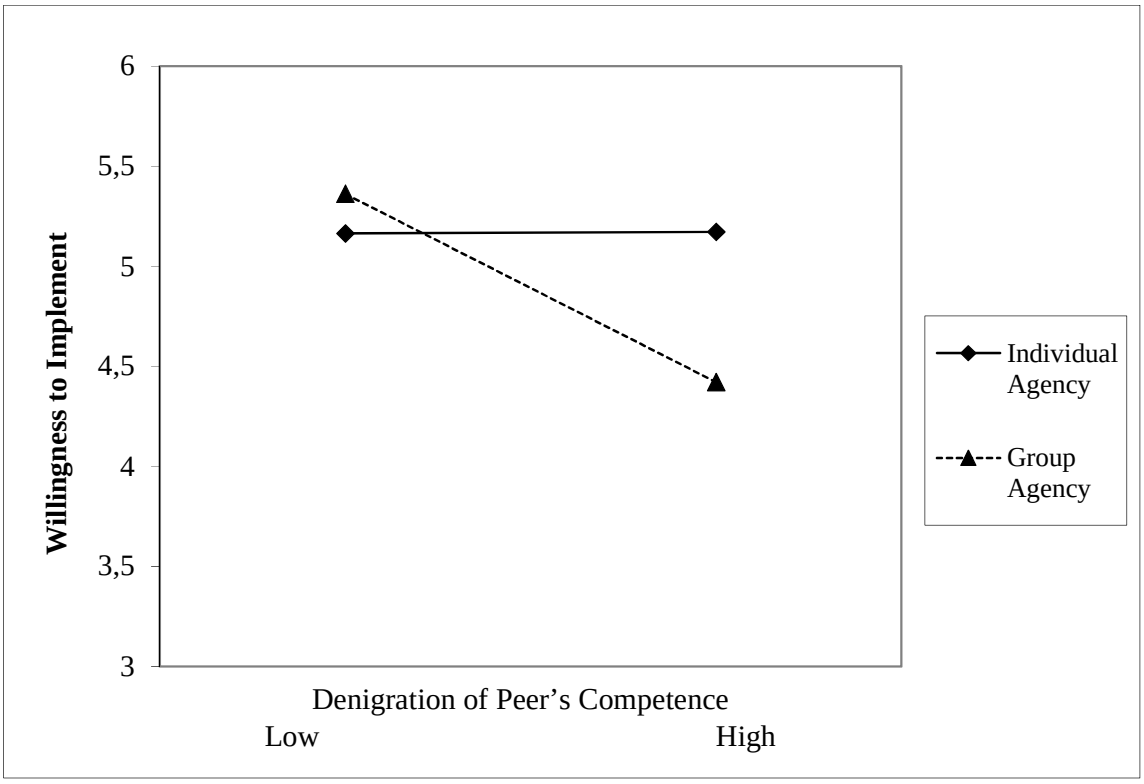
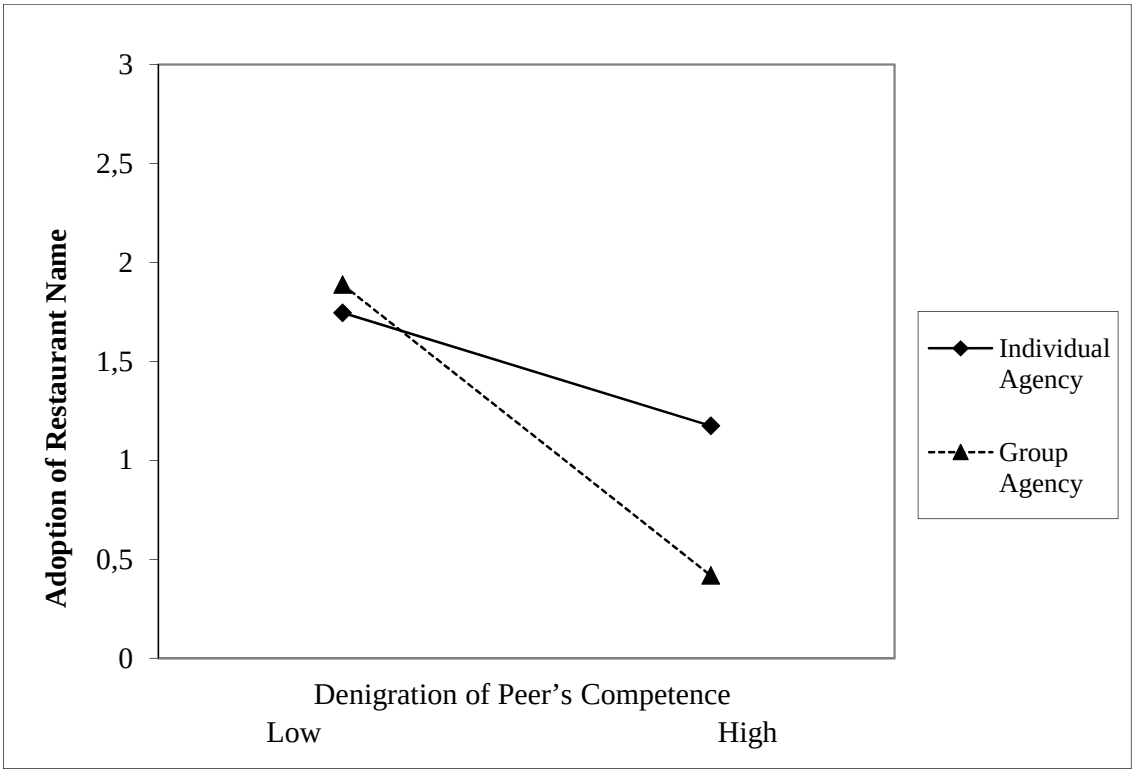


Figure 4.3
*Interaction of Denigration of the Peer and Agency Beliefs on Adoption of Restaurant Name*



# CHAPTER V

## Epilogue

# CHAPTER V - Epilogue

## Introduction

This dissertation set out to investigate the enactment and evaluation of voice behavior in Chinese cultural contexts. In these cultural contexts, cultural norms and beliefs can make it difficult for individuals to speak up with change-oriented ideas and to be willing to accept and implement ideas proposed by others.

The three papers comprising this dissertation addressed three key research objectives. The first research objective was to shed light on the paradoxical effects of supervisor–subordinate relationships on upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. Drawing on Relational Models Theory (Fiske, 1992), the first paper of this dissertation disentangled when and why high-quality supervisor–subordinate guanxi can promote and inhibit voice in Chinese cultural contexts. The second research objective was to extend our current understanding of the drivers of voice enactment by acknowledging that much of what people in Chinese cultural contexts do is guided by what others expect from them or what others would like them to do. Addressing this research objective, the second paper in this dissertation built on accountability theory to situate voice accountability as a central driver of upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. In addition, it identified antecedents, boundary conditions, and consequences of voice accountability, thereby paving the way for future empirical efforts. Finally, the third research objective was to examine the culture-bound effectiveness of diverse voice strategies. To this

end, the third paper of this dissertation examined the relational and behavioral consequences of self-promoting and self-effacing voice styles and how the effectiveness of these voice styles was circumscribed by cultural agency beliefs.

Taken together, the three papers in this dissertation employed three different research methods to paint a varied yet consistent picture of voice enactment and evaluation in Chinese cultural contexts. This concluding chapter discusses how this dissertation contributes to the voice literature, and to the general organizational behavior literature. It also delineates a number of directions for future research on voice enactment and evaluation. Furthermore, it addresses the methodological contributions and limitations of the research studies and concludes by reiterating and re-emphasizing the overarching theme and aim of this dissertation.

## Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

### Theoretical Contributions and Directions for Future Research

*Contributions to Voice Enactment*

Research on voice enactment has surged throughout the last few decades and has yielded a great many invaluable insights on the contextual and individual factors that predict employees' willingness to speak up with change-oriented ideas, suggestions, and opinions (Morrison, 2011). Taking a Chinese cultural perspective however, has allowed us to contribute to this domain by shedding a new light on some fairly well-established findings.

First, the present dissertation demonstrated that whether Chinese employees speak up to their supervisor in part depends on how they think about and construe their relationship with their supervisor (i.e., the quality of their supervisor–subordinate guanxi). This is because social interaction in Chinese cultural contexts starts from the role relationship between the interacting

parties and therefore is delineated by Confucianist relationship differentiation (Hwang, 1999). This relational focus contrasts with and extends the current emphasis on more general prosocial tendencies as antecedents of voice. More specifically, it complements the study of prosocial individual attributes (e.g., duty orientation, organizational concern motives) with the study of characteristics of the relationship between the individuals involved in the voice event (e.g., supervisor–subordinate relational norms, history). Thus, these findings bring into scope how *the nature of Chinese employees' relationships with a particularly relevant close other*—the supervisor—matters for the extent to which they are willing to speak up with change-oriented ideas and suggestions.

A second contribution lies in our investigation of the relationship between the multidimensional, indigenous concept of supervisor–subordinate guanxi and voice. This extends our understanding of the role of supervisor–subordinate relationships beyond the impact of LMX, which reflects only one–prototypically Western–way in which employees and supervisors relate to one another (Chen, Leung, & Chen, 2009; Hui & Graen, 1997; Khatri, 2011). Building on Relational Models Theory (Fiske, 1992) we have argued that an examination of the particularistic and hierarchical dimensions of supervisor–subordinate relationships is key for a *more well-rounded understanding of how the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships affects employee voice*.

Third, whereas prior work in the proactivity domain has positioned perceived job control as a key precondition for employees to engage in proactive behaviors (for a review and discussion, see Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010), the findings in the present dissertation demonstrate that low job control can also facilitate employee voice (for similar findings, see Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). The rationale is that, even if personal efficacy in the job is low, Chinese

employees can rely on efficacy by virtue of being embedded in close relationship networks—such as guanxi. This role of supervisor–subordinate guanxi as a source of control or relief when job control—and hence personal control—is low resonates with prior work on the cultural psychology of control (Menon & Fu, 2006; Yamaguchi, Gelfand, Ohashi, & Zemba, 2005). This theoretical and empirical work posits that in Asian cultural contexts individuals are more likely than their Western counterparts to attribute efficacy to their close relationship networks—such as guanxi. Taken together, our findings warrant and inspire a *more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the interplay between job control, personal efficacy, relational efficacy (embedded in guanxi), and voice.*

Fourth, our theorizing regarding upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts has introduced voice accountability as a key driver of voice in these contexts, next to several drivers already known in the literature (i.e., voice efficacy, voice safety). This is important because it draws attention to the possibility that upward constructive voice—whilst typically considered a *self*-starting behavior—is most likely to *emanate from others' expectations in Chinese cultural contexts*. Whereas impression management (i.e., management of one's reputation in the eyes of others)—has been examined within the domain of voice evaluation (e.g., Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009), much less attention has been devoted to impression management and general attention to other's expectations as a driver of voice (for an exception, see Fuller, Barnett, Hester, Relyea, & Frey, 2007). Therefore, theorizing about the drivers of voice from a Chinese cultural perspective and taking an accountability lens allowed for addressing this "blind spot" and building a more global understanding in this regard. Indeed, whereas the symbolic interactionist perspective purports that people generally consider how they are perceived by others and account for this when taking action (Blumer, 1969), research indicates that this tendency is much more pronounced for individuals in Chinese cultural contexts

(Cohen, Hoshino-Browne, & Leung, 2007). In this, much like other recent theorizing (e.g., Riemer, Shavitt, Koo, & Markus, 2014), our theorizing aims to demonstrate how taking a different cultural perspective can make an important theoretical contribution to the study of a specific phenomenon.

A final contribution to the domain of voice enactment lies in our *identification of antecedents, boundary conditions, and alternative outcomes for voice accountability*. This theorizing outlines how behavior in Chinese cultural contexts is the result of the accountability standards emanating from different sources (e.g., supervisor, coworkers), depends on important face-related cues (e.g., value harmony climate), and overall needs to be "scaffolded" by the positive meaning it takes on in the eyes of others. Our theorizing extends prior empirical work addressing the role of others' expectations (e.g., Farmer, Tierney, Kung-McIntyre, 2003; Qu, Janssen, & Shi, 2015) by identifying and conceptualizing new antecedents. For example, our elaboration on voice role sending begins to address the important question as to what specific leader behaviors may actually promote employee voice behavior (Morrison, 2011), especially in a Chinese cultural context. In addition, the multilevel nature of our theorizing can inform current multilevel research efforts within the voice domain.

*Future Research on Voice Enactment*

Based on the above insights on voice enactment, future research can fruitfully examine the *implications of employees' social network characteristics on their likelihood to speak up (toward their supervisor) or out (toward coworkers) with change-oriented ideas*. This research may go beyond prior research on workflow centrality (e.g., Venkataramani & Tangirala, 2010) by assessing the relational models by which individuals relate to one another (also see Haslam, 2004 on RMT and social networks; Joshi & Knight, 2015 on deference among coworkers)—

instead of the task-focused interactions reflected in workflow centrality. In addition, in view our theorizing on accountability webs and voice accountability, future research may examine the extent to which the nature and centrality of an employee's network relationships influences their voice accountability. Furthermore, because prior work has shown cross-cultural differences in the nature and effects of social networks (e.g., Chua, Morris, & Ingram, 2009), it is worthwhile to pursue the above-mentioned research avenues across Western and Eastern cultural contexts.

Second, it is important that future theoretical and empirical research further *disentangles the link between accountability and proactive behaviors, such as voice behavior, across cultural contexts*. Currently, diverging perspectives regarding this issue (e.g., Grant & Ashford, 2008; Patil & Tetlock, 2014) call for synthesis and integration. For example, Grant and Ashford (2008) positioned situational accountability as a likely antecedent of proactive behaviors. They reasoned that if employees are held answerable for their actions, they have nothing to lose by engaging in proactive behavior, assuming that proactive behavior can help them do a better job. However, as our theorizing and several authors (Gelfand & Realo, 1998; Gelfand, Lun, Lyons, & Shteynberg, 2011) noted, the effects of accountability on behavior depend on the key audience's perspective, which generally discourages individually proactive behaviors in Chinese cultural contexts. Thus, theorizing and empirical work on the accountability–proactivity link should take national and organizational climate and culture into account and should uncover what employees are generally held accountable for by their supervisor and coworkers. Furthermore, future research should also consider other contingencies of accountability and accountability types (e.g., process/outcome accountability in Patil, Vieider, & Tetlock, 2014; legitimate/illegitimate accountability, Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). For example, Patil, Tetlock, and Mellers (In Press) demonstrated that process and outcome accountability

respectively stimulate conformist and deviant behavior. Future research may fruitfully examine the impact of these contingencies across cultural contexts.

A third avenue for future research is *more elaborate theorizing and empirical work on the specific type of leader behaviors that cause employees to speak up with change-oriented ideas*. Prior qualitative and quantitative empirical work clearly demonstrates the key role of the leader in creating space for employees to speak up with change-oriented ideas (e.g., Frazier & Bowler, 2012; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Up till now researchers have only linked existing and more general conceptualizations of leader behavior to voice behavior (e.g., transformational leadership, Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010). If our field is to provide managers with strategies on how to elicit change-oriented suggestions from their employees, the field needs to move toward more focused theoretical and empirical work. Although our theorizing regarding voice role sending could be an initial step in this regard, more integrative theorizing and especially associated empirical evidence is necessary.

Finally, especially in those cultural contexts where harmonious relationships are important (e.g., Chinese cultural contexts), future research on the antecedents of voice enactment will find it *useful to account for peer's reactions and expectations as antecedents of employee voice*. This is important because peers' effects on employee behavior have generally been found to be substantial (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), yet understudied. Because voice may have positive, but also negative, consequences for peers (e.g., Bolino, Valcea, & Harvey, 2010; Morrison, 2011; Van Dyne & Ellis, 2004) and employees often act interdependently with these peers, peers' attitudes and perspectives regarding voice and specific issues should be important for whether and how employees voice.

*Contributions to Voice Evaluation*

Overall, research on voice evaluation and consequences is comparatively more scarce than research on voice enactment (Morrison, 2011). Nevertheless, this line of research is essential because it can verify when and why change-oriented ideas shared by employees can actually be effective (e.g., by changing the receiver's mind, by improving the workflow). The findings in the present dissertation also contribute to this line of research in several ways.

First, whereas reviews of voice have called for more research on *the effectiveness of different voice tactics* (i.e., *how* employees voice their ideas or suggestions, Morrison, 2011), research in this area is limited. The present dissertation has taken a Chinese cultural perspective and has drawn on Self-Presentation Theory to introduce two ways in which employees can provide their change-oriented ideas and suggestions (i.e., in a self-promoting versus a self-effacing voice style). In addition, it examined the effectiveness of these voice styles in the context of peer-to-peer voice. Taken together, the present dissertation contributes to the recent line of research conceptualizing different voice types (e.g., Burris, 2012) and tactics (e.g., Detert, Burris, Harrison, & Martin, 2013) and investigating their relative effectiveness.

Second, the present dissertation has *deepened our understanding of voice evaluation by examining cultural agency beliefs as an important target characteristic*. Whereas prior work on voice effectiveness has mainly examined the effect of employee characteristics for how change-oriented suggestions are perceived and interpreted (e.g., Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012), recent research has theorized and demonstrated that target characteristics also influence voice evaluation in important ways (Chiaburu, Farh, & Van Dyne, 2013; Chiaburu, Peng, & Van Dyne, 2015). This shift, and this dissertation's empirical contribution to it, is important because ultimately voice evaluation is likely to be "in the eye of the beholder" and target motives, beliefs, dispositions, and values should matter for voice effectiveness.

A third contribution of this dissertation is that it examines the *effectiveness of voice in terms of behavioral reactions* (i.e., behavioral adoption) *and relational consequences* (i.e., desire for future interaction). The investigation of behavioral reactions is important because it allows for an examination of the actual incorporation of the proposed ideas, thereby going beyond current intentional measures of idea adoption. Furthermore, our findings regarding the impact of self-presentational voice style on desire for future interaction are also critical. These findings heed calls to consider the social capital implications of voice (Morrison, 2011) and they indicate that employees keen on speaking out (to peers) with change-oriented ideas can manage the risk of harming their relationships by employing a self-effacing voice style. In other words, the well-known fear of disrupting one's relationship with the voice target may be unfounded as long as one is able to provide one's ideas and suggestions in a self-effacing style.

A final contribution to the domain of voice evaluation lies in our focus on *the effects of speaking out (to peers) versus the more often examined effects of speaking up (to the supervisor).* Examining the effectiveness of speaking out is important because employees may oftentimes test their ideas with their coworkers (Detert et al., 2013). Furthermore, compared to supervisor–subordinate relationships, status is less predefined and more malleable in peer-to-peer relationships, potentially rendering change-oriented ideas more personally threatening (Fragale, Sumanth, Tiedens, & Northcraft, 2012). In addition, in the light of current developments in the workplace, such as self-managing teams, and the importance of learning for organizational effectiveness, the extent to which employees can both effectively speak out and effectively adopt ideas and suggestions from their peers is increasingly important.

*Future Research on Voice Evaluation*

A fruitful avenue for future research in the domain of voice evaluation is the *identification and investigation of additional theory-based voice tactics*. Whereas prior research has conceptualized and examined a range of important voice types (i.e., categorization of issues employees speak up about, Burris, 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2013), there remain a number of possible dimensions along which voice conceptualizations and effectiveness may vary. For example, building on the importance of collective efficacy and the other-oriented nature of one's actions, employees may speak up with ideas from their group or from specific others (for initial insights, see Maynes, Podsakoff, & Morrison, 2013). As another example, researchers may examine how employees' tone of voice influences the effectiveness of their change-oriented ideas and suggestions (for initial insights, see Burris, 2012).

Second, contributing simultaneously to the cross-cultural literature and the voice evaluation domain, researchers may *investigate supervisor's power distance orientation* (i.e., the extent to which the supervisor considers status inequality as appropriate) *as a target characteristic influencing voice effectiveness*. This is because power distance beliefs are especially likely to be relevant to the effectiveness of speaking up (to the supervisor) and the strength of these beliefs can determine the perceived appropriateness of employee voice in the eyes of the supervisor. Furthermore, compared to cultural attributes related to individualism-collectivism (e.g., agency beliefs), power distance orientation has received less research attention, resulting in calls for more research on this cultural orientation (Daniels & Greguras, In Press).

Third, future work should *identify and elaborate on integrated theoretical frameworks that may guide research efforts in the realm of voice evaluation*. Current efforts are often fragmented and do not explicitly and clearly draw on integrated theorizing (Morrison, 2011). Whereas several scholars have recently introduced theoretical frameworks to address this issue

(Chiaburu et al., 2013; Davidson & Van Dyne, In Press), future empirical work in this regard remains important.

Finally, synthesizing several insights from this dissertation, future research may also investigate the *level of supervisor–subordinate (dis)agreement regarding relationship quality along key relational models*. Prior empirical work demonstrates that not only the type or quality of the supervisor–subordinate relationship is important for employee outcomes, but also supervisor–subordinate level of agreement regarding the relationship quality, whereby the more employees and supervisors disagree, the more detrimental the effect on key employee outcomes (Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015). Because (dis)agreement in supervisor–subordinate perspectives has proven important for voice evaluation (Burris, Detert, & Romney, 2013), examination of the effect of supervisor–subordinate (dis)agreement regarding relationship quality along key relational models may be a fruitful avenue for future research. For example, it may be that voice is perceived more positively when the employee and supervisor agree their relationship is best reflected in an equality matching relational model versus when the employee perceives the relationship as communal sharing and the supervisor perceives it as authority ranking. Such mismatches would be especially likely in intercultural supervisor–subordinate relationships.

*Contributions of Context to General Voice and Organizational Behavior Literature*

More generally, the indigenous cultural lens taken in this dissertation, also makes a number of contributions to the general voice and organizational behavior literatures. The aim of this section is to demonstrate how taking a cultural perspective has allowed for a number of theoretical contributions of this dissertation (see Chapter I; Chen et al., 2009; Whetten, 2009), thereby emphasizing the theoretical value of (cross-)cultural research and encouraging future

research in this regard. More specifically, we employ Chen et al.'s (2009) and Davis' (1971) work to frame this discussion and summarize the key points in Table 5.1.

In the first paper of this dissertation taking a Chinese, indigenous supervisor–subordinate guanxi perspective demonstrated how prior work linking supervisor–subordinate relationship quality to voice has singularly relied on only one of Fiske's (1992) relational models (i.e., equality matching in the form of leader–member exchange) and how the quality of supervisor–subordinate guanxi in Chinese cultural contexts reflects two other relational models (i.e., communal sharing and authority ranking). Furthermore, results showed that the dimensions of supervisor–subordinate guanxi cut different ways when it came to upward constructive voice and were more predictive of voice than the prototypical Western conception of leader–member exchange. Taken together, taking a guanxi perspective has contributed by showing that *"what seems to be a single phenomenon"* (i.e., supervisor–subordinate relationship quality) *"is in reality composed of assorted heterogeneous elements"* (i.e., leader–member exchange, affective attachment to the supervisor guanxi, and deference to the supervisor guanxi) (Davis, 1971, p. 315), with distinct consequences for employee voice enactment.

The second paper of this dissertation develops an accountability model of upward constructive voice in Chinese cultural contexts. Taking a Chinese cultural perspective urged us to consider that voice—considered as a typically *self*-starting behavior—is most likely to emanate from others' expectations in Chinese cultural contexts where face is important. In other words, our theorizing proposed that in Chinese cultural contexts, *"what seems to be an individual phenomenon"* (i.e., voice behavior), *"is in reality a holistic phenomenon"* (i.e., driven by expectations of others) (Davis, 1971, p. 316).

In the third and final paper of this dissertation taking a cultural agency perspective led us to theorize that a self-promoting voice style—in which employees play up their abilities or accomplishments in order to be seen as competent—is less effective in Chinese cultural contexts overall, and especially when group agency beliefs are primed. This is because personal attributes are not typically claimed and promoted in a cultural context where group agency is paramount and actions need to be adaptive to other's needs, perspectives, and concerns. This is in contrast to Western, individual agency cultural contexts where individuals are expected to show and advocate for their unique traits and self-promotion has been found to be more common and effective than self-effacing self-presentational styles. Thus, taking a group agency perspective, paramount in Chinese cultural contexts, contributed by demonstrating that *"what seems to be a phenomenon that functions effectively as a means for the attainment of an end"* (i.e., self-promoting (vs. self-effacing) voice style), *"is in reality a phenomenon that functions ineffectively"* (Davis, 1971, pp. 319-320).

In all, the above discussion aims to demonstrate that culture is an important tool to improve theoretical insights and build more global knowledge, rather than a purpose "an sich." In that sense, any field and any study can benefit from context-sensitive theorizing by creating awareness about implicit assumptions and specific context-bound characteristics of the phenomenon under study (see Johns, 2006; Whetten, 2009).

The theoretical value of cultural perspectives is further corroborated in two more higher-level and more fundamental shifts in perspective that this dissertation offers regarding 1) the proactive nature of voice behavior; and 2) the drivers of individual behavior in general.

First, the aggregated insights from this dissertation—with its emphasis on the relational and embedded nature of voice enactment and evaluation—challenges the current conceptualization

of voice behavior as the *(individual) voluntary* expression of change-oriented ideas, opinions, or suggestions aimed at making the workplace and the organization more effective. Indeed, when voice is a function of the nature of one's supervisor–subordinate relationship or of one's felt accountability to others, voice behavior seems more *normative* than personal, more *obligatory* than voluntary or discretionary, and more *reactive* than proactive. The findings in this dissertation suggest that the current conceptualization and operationalization of voice may be "emic" or (culture-)specific to the North-American cultural context in which the cultural model of the independent self is predominant (Gelfand, Leslie, & Fehr, 2008).

The Chinese indigenous perspective taken in this dissertation questions the typical depiction of an independent, self-determined individual verbally expressing personal opinions or ideas to bring about change at work. It surfaces some critical questions that voice researchers want to ask themselves when studying voice across cultural boundaries. Does it still count as "voice" when the expression of change-oriented ideas is driven by others' expectations or when these ideas are expressed in a self-effacing way? Is voice behavior—as a *verbal* expression of change-oriented ideas—also the predominant way for people in other cultures to make a change and communicate change-oriented ideas? Could it be that the typical expression of change-oriented ideas is done more implicitly (see Adair, Buchan, Chen, & Liu, In Press, on context-dependent communication) or more collectively in other cultural contexts? Although the present dissertation cannot offer conclusive answers to these questions, its empirical evidence and theoretical insights can provide a stepping stone to begin to address these questions in the future.

Second, the findings in this dissertation corroborate previous calls for the importance and significance of *building a more global perspective on organizational behavior and*

*psychological research in general* (Gelfand et al., 2008). This is important because current research questions—implicitly and explicitly—often prioritize the "cultural model of the independent self" (Gelfand et al., 2008). Recent special issues focusing on how organizational behavior pans out in "the East" (e.g., Arvey, Dhanaraj, Javidan, & Zhang, 2015; Barkema, Chen, George, Luo, & Tsui, 2015) and calls to increase global voices in management research attest to the need for and potential contribution of a more inclusive perspective on organizational behavior and management in general. Each of the papers in this dissertation contributes to this overarching goal by theorizing about and demonstrating how and why the enactment and evaluation of voice is driven and circumscribed by others and behavior in Chinese cultural contexts is inherently relational and social. Our hope is to inspire more research that contributes to building such a more inclusive and global perspective on management and organizational behavior. Paradoxically, as several scholars have argued—and as surfaced in this dissertation—contributions to global management knowledge may most benefit from dedicated, indigenous perspectives—so-called "deep contextualization" (Tsui, 2006)

*Future Research on Culture's Implications for Voice and Organizational Behavior*

First, future research may contribute to the voice and general organizational behavior domain by *examining the impact of more and novel cultural dimensions on voice enactment and evaluation*. For example, our examination of the effect of deference to the supervisor guanxi hints at the salience and importance of hierarchical differences in voice enactment (see also, Morrison, See, & Pan, 2015). Therefore, future research may fruitfully draw upon recent developments in the realm of the related cultural dimension of power distance (for a recent review, see Daniels & Greguras, In Press) to further examine the role of supervisor and employee power distance orientation in the domains of voice enactment and evaluation.

Cultural tightness/looseness is another cultural dimension that is increasingly receiving theoretical (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006) and empirical attention (e.g., Aktas, Gelfand, Hanges, 2016), and which has been fruitfully related to proactive endeavors (e.g., Chua, Roth, Lemoine, 2015). A final cultural dimension that may explain variance in employee voice across cultures is context dependence (i.e., individuals' attention and reliance on the communication context while communicating, Adair et al., In Press). Taken together, these avenues for future research should spur theoretical contributions by the culturally divergent perspectives they entertain (Chen et al., 2009).

A second key avenue for future research is the *examination of voice enactment and voice enactment in intercultural settings*. This is important because the way employees perform interculturally within the organization (e.g., supervisor–subordinate, multicultural teams) or external to the organization (e.g., in meetings with overseas clients) influences their own effectiveness, as well as the organization's performance (e.g., Ang et al., 2007; Imai & Gelfand, 2010). The present dissertation highlights a number of cross-cultural differences in voice enactment and evaluation, which—if left unaddressed in intercultural interactions—may result in flawed decision-making, errors, and employee disengagement. For example, in intercultural supervisor–subordinate relationships, employees and supervisors should be more likely to have a different view of the quality of their relationships (e.g., along authority ranking vs. along equality matching), leaving both parties dissatisfied about the amount of employee voice and performance implications (also see, Burris et al., 2013). As another example, members of a multicultural team may experience that information is not shared constructively and/or used adequately within the team, due to diverse perspectives on how to voice (e.g., self-promoting vs. self-effacing style) and a diverse set of cultural beliefs (e.g., individual vs. group agency beliefs). Taken together, research on voice enactment and evaluation in intercultural dyads and

multicultural teams is a fruitful avenue for future research with important managerial implications.

Finally, in view of this dissertation and calls for a shift toward more global management knowledge (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2008), future research on organizational behavior may benefit by considering more extensively how even typically "*self*-starting" behaviors can be driven by others more than by the self, especially in cultural contexts in which other's view on the self are predominantly important (e.g., cultural contexts where face or honor are important). For example, current frameworks on proactive motivation (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010)—while very insightful—implicitly focus on individual answers to key motivational questions: "can do" motivation (e.g., self-efficacy); "reason to" motivation (e.g., intrinsic motivation); and "energized to" motivation (e.g., individual's positive affect). However, contemplating the same key motivational questions (can do/reason to/energized to) from a Chinese cultural perspective may result in different answers. Employees may be motivated to engage in voice behavior when they can do it without embarrassing others or they know close others can deal with it (can do). They may engage in voice behavior when others expect them to (reason to) and when others show positive affect (energized to). Taken together, similar to recent developments in other domains (e.g., Riemer et al., 2014), future research on proactive behavior and organizational behavior in general should attempt to bring into light the current North-American bias in studying these domains and broaden these domains accordingly.

**Methodological Contributions and Limitations**

Next to the above-mentioned theoretical contributions, this dissertation made some methodological contributions as well. In addition, it also acknowledges some methodological limitations and ways to address them.

*Methodological Contributions*

First, the three papers in this dissertation have gone beyond those more well-known ways of conceptualizing and measuring culture (e.g., Hofstede, 1980), thereby showing alternative ways to incorporate culture in theorizing, conceptualization, and operationalization. More specifically, the first paper in this dissertation shows how facets of the relational self-concept typically studied in cross-cultural research, play out in the supervisor–subordinate relationships and how this specific, contextualized relationship has implications for behavior. In cultural contexts where relationship differentiation is important and meaningful (e.g., hierarchical, ingroup/outgroup) and norms for appropriate behavior change with relationship context (e.g., Adair et al., In Press; Riemer et al., 2014) capturing culture by means of internal dispositions only (e.g., cultural values) may in some cases have limited predictive value (also see, Morris, Podolny, & Ariel, 2000; Taras et al., 2011).

The second paper in this dissertation has drawn on the recent distinction between face, dignity, and honor cultures to theorize about face cultural logic as a syndrome (i.e., "a constellation of shared beliefs, values, behaviors, practices, and so on that are organized around a central theme" (Leung & Cohen, 2011, p. 2)). In the case of face, this constellation includes the so-called 3 Hs (hierarchy, harmony, and humility) and implies tight norms to adhere to these 3 Hs. This approach allows for more comprehensive theorizing and heeds calls for more configural approaches to culture, comprising several cultural facets as a pattern (Tsui et al., 2007).

The final paper in this dissertation contributes by theorizing and testing a specific, understudied facet of the individualism-collectivism syndrome: individual vs. group agency beliefs (see

Brewer & Chen, 2007). Such specific investigations—compared to the configural approach mentioned above—are also important to distinguish which facets of the individualism–collectivism syndrome count as the "working ingredient" in view of a specific phenomenon. In addition, in this last study, agency beliefs were primed, rather than measured, challenging the implicit internalized and static nature of culture by means of a so-called dynamic constructivist approach (see Morris & Fu, 2001). Taken together, this dissertation thus capitalizes on the benefits of some of the relatively more novel perspectives on culture's consequences.

Finally, the methods used in the empirical chapters in this dissertation aid in corroborating the causality of the findings. In the first study of this dissertation, a multiple source, cross-lagged design increases confidence in the causal effects of guanxi on voice and reduces concerns for common-method bias. In the third study of this dissertation, the causal effect of voice style and cultural agency beliefs is established by means of an experimental design. Verifying causality of culture's effects is an important challenge in (cross-)cultural research (Leung & van de Vijver, 2008).

*Methodological Limitations*

First, whereas the present dissertation has provided insights into the intricacies and logics of voice enactment and evaluation in Chinese cultural contexts, it has not empirically compared this setting with other cultural contexts, as is typically done in traditional cross-cultural research studies. Replicating and extending our findings by means of cross-cultural comparative research is important to further corroborate our findings and empirically attest to some of the implicit and more explicit comparisons made (e.g., guanxi vs. LMX; face vs. dignity; individual vs. group agency beliefs). At the same time, we have drawn upon prior work (Chen et al., 2009; Schaffer & Riordan, 2003) to note that reaping the theoretical benefits of

culturally divergent perspectives, does not necessarily require cross-cultural comparisons, nor do cross-cultural comparisons guarantee (reliable inference of) these theoretical contributions (e.g., due to lack of measured cultural differences, due to confounds, etc.).

A second methodological limitation of this dissertation is the lack of multilevel examination of voice antecedents and consequences. Because our theorizing (see Chapter III) highlights this as a key influence for voice enactment (e.g., leadership, shared voice accountability, harmony climate perceptions), future research into voice enactment and evaluation in Chinese cultural contexts should consider multilevel effects. At the same time, such investigations would heed calls for multilevel theorizing within the voice literature (Morrison, 2011).

Finally, notwithstanding the iterative and temporal nature of voice enactment and evaluation, the present dissertation has not examined these processes together nor investigated how one voice event has implications for the next. For example, it is possible that the way in which supervisors react toward voice, alters the nature of guanxi, and subsequent voice. As another example, it may be the case that the social exclusion following the use of a self-promoting voice style (due to reduced desire to interact with the voicer), subsequently cause the voicer to alter his/her voice style. Therefore, future research may fruitfully explore theoretical (Shipp & Cole, 2015) and empirical (e.g., longitudinal, Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010) advances to further our understanding in this regard (for an example, see Lin & Johnson, 2015).

## Conclusion

In trying to make sense of different cultural worlds and phenomena, cross-cultural researchers shed light on key assumptions and this gives rise to more integrated and global insights on issues at hand. The present dissertation in specific demonstrated how relational considerations

are key for voice enactment, especially when coordination with the supervisor is inevitable and important to get the work done. In addition, it theorized about the ways in which behavior is other-oriented and driven by close other's expectations, and why voice accountability should be a predominant driver for voice in Chinese cultural contexts. Finally, examining voice evaluation in China advanced our understanding of the peer-to-peer effectiveness of self-presentational voice styles that employees may use and how this effectiveness is circumscribed by their peer's cultural mindset. In all, in this dissertation, we have aimed to listen in more closely to better make sense of voice behavior in Chinese cultural contexts, with a willingness to be changed by what was heard, and with the purpose of "making the novel appear familiar." In taking part in this conversation, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of culturally diverse perspectives knowing that such insights can avoid misunderstandings, errors, and conflict in the corporate world and beyond.

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Table 5.1
*Overview of the Papers by Cultural Perspective, Theoretical Framework, and Nature of Theoretical Contributions*

| | **Cultural Perspective** | **Theoretical Framework** | **Davis (1971)** | **Chen et al. (2009)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Paper 1 – Guanxi-Voice** | Supervisor–subordinate Guanxi | Relational Models Theory (Fiske, 1992) | Composition | Elaboration Approach |
| **Paper 2 – Obliged to Speak** | Face | Accountability Theory (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) | Abstraction | Proliferation Approach |
| **Paper 3 – Hitting the Right Notes** | Agency Beliefs | Self-Presentation Theory (Jones & Pittman, 1982) | Function | Proliferation Approach |