

Cheng Zeng

Exploring Organizational Dissent in a Global Setting



JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN HUMANITIES 343

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ABSTRACT

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The current research project focuses on a distinctive form of employee voice: organizational dissent.

Dissent is the key to correcting organizational misconduct, facilitating group innovation and enhancing both employee satisfaction and organizational performance. Although organizational dissent has garnered substantial scholarly attention over the last two decades, most of these studies were developed in and for the domestic US environment; little is known about how dissent is conceptualized, expressed and received in a different cultural setting. This dissertation aims to complement previous research by investigating the relationship between organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech in non-US settings: five European countries, Singapore, and China. This research project consists of one literature review and three empirical studies that make use of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

This study showed that employees conceptualize dissent differently across cultures. Latent dissent, for example, has previously been conceptualized as the product of the suppression of upward dissent. However, in collectivistic cultures latent dissent could be perceived as a crucial way of building and maintaining co-worker relationships. In addition, this project suggests that dissent strategy is shaped by economic factors such as the stability of the national economy, the unemployment rate, people's perception of job security and individual socioeconomic status. This study proposes, further, that dissent is essentially linked with organizational power. Migrant groups in this project tend to express less dissent and perceive a more constrained workplace than the dominant group. Ultimately, this project asserts that generalizing results obtained from the US to other settings warrants caution. Developing cultural-specific theories and measurements is urgently needed in today's globalized economy.

Keywords: Organizational Dissent, Workplace Freedom of Speech, Cross-Cultural Management, Cultural differences

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LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

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- II Croucher, S. M., Parrott, K., **Zeng, C.**, & Gomez, O. (2014). A cross-cultural analysis of organizational dissent and workplace freedom in five European economies. *Communication Studies*, 65, 298-313.
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- III Croucher, S. M., **Zeng, C.**, Rahmani, D & Cui, X. (2017, online first). The relationship between organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech: A cross-cultural analysis in Singapore. *Journal of Management & Organization*.
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- IV **Zeng, C.**, & Croucher, S. M. (2017). An exploration of organization dissent and workplace freedom of speech among young professional intra-urban migrants in Shanghai. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 10, 201-218.
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ABSTRACT

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1 INTRODUCTION

"It is dangerous to be right in matters on which the established authorities are wrong."
— Voltaire, The Age of Louis XIV

1.1 Background and motivation for the study

Dissent is a "necessary devil" in modern organizations. Employees are confronted with the daily choice of whether, or not, to voice their opinion. On one hand, employee voice can signal organizational wrongdoings, thus serving as a crucial form of corrective feedback in organizations. On the other hand, the risks associated with the expression of dissent are also evident. Consciously withholding information, suggestions, ideas, questions or concerns about work-related issues is very common among employees. Employees choose to remain silent for various reasons, such as believing that speaking up would not make a difference, not wanting to be viewed negatively by others, not wanting to damage a relationship, avoiding upsetting or embarrassing someone else, and fear of retaliation (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). When the climate of silence becomes dominant, the quality of decision making and innovation processes in the organization are very likely to be compromised.

One major factor that contributes to organizational silence is group-think. Group-think is a common phenomenon because organizations tend to recruit like-minded people and cultivate shared values and purposes. Organizations are also interested in fostering employee commitment and loyalty, which often implies conformity (Redding, 1985). That is, a "good" employee is expected to internalize the organization's values and not rock the boat. Intuitively, expressions of contradictory opinions are likely to lead to conflict and prolong decision-making processes. Many organizations are therefore inherently intolerant of dissent and implicitly discourage its expression (Ewing, 1977; Sprague & Ruud, 1988). In addition, the premise that management knows best is widely adopted in many organizations, and there, employees must either put up or shut up (Ewing, 1977). As a result, remaining silent

appears to be a safe strategy; dissenters could be perceived as trouble makers and then face retaliation. When most members of an organization do not dare to speak up, individual silence can gradually develop into organizational silence and alternative views are automatically filtered out. The absence of dissent is often a dangerous sign and may have fatal consequences. For instance, the root causes of two NASA tragedies, the Challenger accident in 1986 and the Columbia accident in 2003, have been shown to be group-think, self-censorship, and the pressure for unanimity at NASA (Dimitroff, Schmidt, & Bond, 2005).

Some empirical studies have argued that employee dissent is beneficial for both employees and organizations. For instance, employees are more satisfied and demonstrate more commitment to the organization when their voices are positively received. Furthermore, employee dissent could serve as a watching mechanism that monitors and corrects potential organizational conduct. Organizational performance and the quality of decisions reached are positively associated with employee dissent. In addition to the economic benefits, dissent, closely associated with the notion of freedom of speech, is also a moral necessity in organizations.

Freedom of speech always carries a strong meaning, both politically and culturally. Freedom of speech is recognized as a human right; that is, citizens should not suffer retaliation for their speech. Historically, employees were largely deprived of the right to freedom of speech in the workplace, along with many other rights, such as protest and privacy. Recognizing the growing importance of dissent, modern organizations have started to cultivate the atmosphere of a democratic workplace that welcomes employees' opinions. An important question then arises: Will people voice their opinions if they feel free to do so? The answer to this question appears to be "Yes" in most of the studies on employee voice conducted in a Western setting. Speaking up, then, is regarded as the "default" behavior and people remain silent only because they are constrained in some way or fear negative consequences. However, this is not necessarily the case in East Asia, which is deeply influenced by the Confucian emphasis on group harmony. People may voluntarily choose to self-censor their opinions for altruistic reasons; there, reserving one's opinion is often encouraged, as it can be regarded as putting the common good before the individual good. This means that in some cultures, silence might be the default mode. Thus, the applicability of findings generated from previous studies in the United States needs to be examined. It is essential to explore how voice and silence are conceptualized and operationalized in different cultural settings.

My two-year experience of working in a Finnish company helped spark my interest in studying dissent in a global setting. Finnish organizations tend to be very egalitarian, with little power distance between supervisors and subordinates. For example, I always addressed my Finnish boss by his first name. Once when my Finnish boss was clearly getting ahead of himself in a meeting with our Chinese business partner, I told him "Shush, you are talking too much right now". Afterwards he thanked me for correcting him and encouraged me to continue doing so in the future. When I later reflected on this incident, I could not picture myself speaking to a Chinese boss in the same way. Ever since then I have been very eager to understand how people with different cultural backgrounds voice their opinions and what fac-

tors shape their behavior in this respect. Thus, the empirical studies included in this dissertation recruited participants from an array of national and cultural groups.

1.2 Aim of the study & Research Questions

Overall, the present research project set out to explore organizational dissent in non-US settings. More specifically, it aimed to explore how dissent is conceptualized and expressed in European and Asian organizations. Although the expression of dissent is essentially an individual decision, it is profoundly shaped by various organizational, relational, and personal factors. The current project studies dissent together with organizational climate and workplace freedom of speech to extend our understanding of employees' decisions whether or not to express dissent. To complement previous research on organizational dissent, the present dissertation asks:

1. What is the relationship between workplace freedom of speech and organizational dissent in non-US settings?
2. How will expression of organizational dissent differ in cross-cultural settings?
3. How are organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech conceptualized by Chinese professional workers?

Each article included in the dissertation answers these questions in a specific setting. Paper I, "Employee dissent: A means to facilitate constructive conflicts in organizations", is a theoretical piece that aims to clarify the role the expression of dissent plays in organizations and puts paid to the myth that dissent leads to damaging conflicts and group dysfunction. A proactive approach to dissent is the key to correcting organizational misconduct and facilitating group innovation. The second piece explores organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech in five European countries: Finland, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom. The study reported mixed results in terms of the relationship between organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech in each nation. Nationality has a significant effect on organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech, for example, Germany scored the highest while Spain scored the lowest. The differences among these European nations are likely to be due to factors such as high- and low-context culture, and the economic situation, varied employment protection policies and diverse conversation styles in each country.

Paper III examines the relationship between organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech in Singapore. To reflect the context more closely, the paper studies these issues among members of the dominant and immigrant groups: Chinese Singaporeans, Chinese immigrants, Malay immigrants, and Indonesian immigrants. The findings indicate that nation of birth exerts a considerable influence on articulated dissent and latent dissent, but not on workplace freedom of speech. Singaporeans scored higher than all immigrant groups on organizational dissent. This

study suggests that employees' dissent strategy could be directly associated with socioeconomic status.

Paper IV uses a qualitative approach to study the dissent behavior of young domestic migrant workers in Shanghai, China. The findings indicate that in Chinese organizations there is generally pressure to maintain group harmony. Upward dissent is associated with problem-solving rather than seen as an employee right or moral obligation among Chinese employees. Furthermore, latent dissent is often a strategy employed by Chinese employees to foster interpersonal trust with other colleagues in the workplace.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Although the flow of information within the organization has always been a focus of attention in organizational studies, employee voice is a relatively new term in the field. Hirschman's (1970) model of "Exit or Voice" serves as the foundation for studies that explore employees' responses to work-related issues. Expressions of dissatisfaction can be expressed to external or internal audiences. In the 1980s there was a clear imbalance in the focus of research: while whistleblowing received substantial scholarly attention, dissent expressed within an organization was little studied (Stewart, 1980; Sprague & Ruud, 1988). As the literature on organizational dissent started to mature, discrepancies in the conceptualization of organizational dissent appeared. In an attempt to summarize previous research and to provide clarity in both the conceptualization and operationalization of dissent, Kassing (1997) proposed a theoretical model of organizational dissent and developed a measurement entitled the Organization Dissent Scale (ODS) in 1998. In this chapter, I will focus on employee voice, organizational dissent, and workplace freedom of speech.

2.1 Employee voice

A primary research interest in management studies is the relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover. While many organizational theories have supported the view that dissatisfied employees are more likely to quit the organization, empirical research has consistently demonstrated a weak relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover (Spencer, 1986). Many studies have been interested in exploring the factors that mediate the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover rate. Hirschman (1970, 1974) posited an "exit or voice" framework, suggesting that employee turnover rate is high when employees' efforts to change unsatisfactory work situations are neglected or taken amiss. When encountering unsatisfactory work-related issues, employees are confronted with two choices: to voice their dissatisfaction to help improve the situation or to exit the organization to withdraw altogether from the situation. The "exit or voice" framework has been exten-

sively cited in the field of organizational studies such as: organizational behavior (Farrell, 1983), absenteeism (Hammer, Landau, & Stern, 1981), and organizational dissent (Graham, 1986). In this line of research, employee voice is mainly viewed as attempts to challenge the status quo and to improve unsatisfactory organizational situations.

An obvious drawback of Hirschman's (1970) "exit or voice" model is that it fails to consider a third option in problematic situations, when employees choose to be passive and withhold their opinions. This option is commonly referred to as employee silence, which means employees' conscious withholding of work-related information. Employee silence has been mainly associated with employee voice in two ways: 1) silence and voice are on the opposite ends of a continuum, and 2) silence and voice are two distinct constructs. In supporting the former, studies suggest employees choose to either speak out or remain silent when confronting problematic issues in organizations (Frazier & Bowler, 2009; Harvey, Martinko, & Douglas, 2009; Milliken & Lam, 2009; Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011). In this sense, factors that have a positive relationship with voice would have a negative relationship with silence. On the other hand, the negative relationship between silence and voice is criticized for being too simplistic; critics argue that silence and voice should be treated as two different constructs, since employees could choose to speak out about certain issues and remain quiet about others (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Trevino, & Edmondson, 2009; Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). That is, voice and silence can co-exist and employee choices may vary across issues and over time.

A significant body of research on employee voice is interested in exploring the factors influencing dissent strategy. Among these factors, two have been the particular focus of scholarly attention: perceived efficacy of voice and perceived safety of voice (Glauser, 1984; Detert & Trevino, 2010). Perceived efficacy of voice refers to an employee's judgement about the likelihood of the effectiveness of speaking out. When the probability that doing so will result in changes is low, employees are more likely to experience a feeling of futility and will avoid speaking out. In reference to the perceived safety of voice, on the other hand, as the motive of expressing one's opinion is to challenge the status quo, employees who speak out may be perceived as trouble-makers or unsupportive team players. In addition, voicing their dissatisfaction might damage interpersonal relationships in the organization, which might lead to tangible losses: negative performance evaluation, undesirable job assignments, or even termination of employment (Milliken et al., 2003; Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2015). In fact, the fear of negative consequences is the main reason why many employees withhold their opinions in organizations.

Many scholars have attempted to identify different types of employee voice. Morrison (2011) described three types: suggestion-focused voice, which is improvement-oriented; problem-focused voice, which is oriented toward preventing harm; and opinion-focused voice, which refers to expressing disagreement or contradictory opinions. Similarly, Liang, Farh, and Farh (2012) classified employee voice into promotive voice and prohibitive voice. Burris (2012) further categorized suggestion-focused voice into two subcategories: challenging voice and supportive voice. Or-

organizational dissent with a focus on disagreements and contradictory opinions is considered to be a subset of employee voice, which aligns closely with the opinion-focused voice category (Kassing, 2011; Morrison, 2011). The next section aims to define organizational dissent and make sense of why dissent is relevant in modern organizations.

2.2 Organizational dissent

The expression of dissent has intrinsic moral value. As Sprague and Ruud (1988) stated, "The expression of dissent in an organization can be conceptualized as a moral obligation, a political right, an enlightened management practice, a minor inconvenience, or a punishable violation of loyalty" (p. 190). Many organizational concepts, such as organizational conflict, upward influence, employee resistance, employee voice, and whistleblowing, are closely related to organizational dissent. Many previous organizational scholars have proposed different definitions of organizational dissent (Graham, 1986; Hegstrom, 1990, Redding, 1985). These definitions collectively have five assumptions: 1) Dissent is triggered by a current unsatisfactory situation, 2) dissent challenges the organizational status quo, 3) dissent entails open protest, 4) dissent is inherently confrontational, and 5) dissent messages are mostly about issues of principle. Recognizing that dissent can vary in intensity, that it does not necessarily entail open objection, and that it may involve both principle and personal issues, Kassing (1997) argued that a reconceptualization of dissent is needed to avoid the confusion surrounding the concept. Kassing (1998) defined organizational dissent as "expressing disagreement or contradictory opinions about organizational practices, policies, and operations" (p. 183). This definition has three focuses: dissent must be expressed, involve disagreement or contradictory opinions, and be about organizational practices and policies. It is often risky and complex to express dissent and the dissent process only begins when an employee's tolerance is exceeded by triggering agents. Triggering events, as the catalyst for dissent expression, can be brought about by various causes, such as ethical issues, harm to the self, organization or others, poor decision making and so forth.

The three primary types of dissent classified according to its recipients are articulated (upward), latent (lateral), and displaced. Dissent can be expressed directly to supervisors (articulated dissent), to co-workers or other members of similar status in the organization (latent or lateral dissent), or to individuals outside the organization such as friends, family, or the media (displaced dissent).

Employees differ in their tendency to express dissent and their dissent decisions are influenced by various factors at the individual, relational, and organizational levels. The individual factors are one's values and expectations adopted from outside of the workplace, such as communication traits and predispositions. For example, employees who have an internal locus of control tend to express more upward dissent while individuals with an external locus of control are more likely to express latent dissent (Kassing & Avtgis, 2001). Similarly, upward dissent is found to

be positively correlated with argumentativeness and negatively correlated with aggressiveness (Croucher et al. 2009; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999). The relational factors focus on the form and quality of the relationship the individual has with others in the organization. The supervisor-subordinate relationship is positively related to upward dissent and the co-worker relationship is positively related to latent dissent (Kassing & McDowell, 2008; Payne, 2014). Organizational factors refer to the employee's relationship with and perception of the organization in question. Employees tend to express upward dissent to management when they are committed to the organization (Kassing, 2000a), when they perceive high levels of workplace freedom of speech (Croucher et al., 2014; Kassing, 2000b,) when they are in management positions (Kassing & Armstrong, 2002; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999), when they are more engaged in work (Kassing, Piemonte, Goman, & Mitchell, 2012), and when they demonstrate a higher level of organizational assimilation (Goldman & Myers, 2015; Croucher, Zeng, & Kassing, 2016).

In addition to studies exploring the audiences to whom the dissent is expressed, some studies have attempted to examine the functions and messages of dissent. Kassing (2002) identified five strategies employees use to express upward dissent. Direct-factual appeal refers to forming dissent arguments based on factual information. Repetition involves repeatedly dissenting until the audience is amenable. In the adopting-a-solution presentation strategy, employees include solutions in their dissent messages. Circumvention occurs when employees strategically dissent to a higher management member rather than to their immediate supervisor. Finally, threatening resignation is a risky move used only when employees crave an immediate response and action on the part of the management. Building on previous research, Garner (2009) developed a Dissent Message Scale which identified 11 message types: solution presentation, direct-factual appeal, inspiration, coalitions, repetitions, circumvention, humor, venting, ingratiation, exchange, and pressure. These message types were further categorized into three clusters: the rational category, including direct factual appeals, exchange, and presenting a solution; the soft category, including ingratiation, inspiration, humor and venting; and the hard category, into which Garner placed pressure, coalitions, circumvention, and threatening resignation.

2.3 Workplace freedom of speech

The organizational climate regarding employee voice is largely created and shaped by the organization's management practices (Hegstrom, 1990). When employees perceive a strict climate, they tend to remain silent and only dissent in response to clearly unethical issues (Hegstrom, 1999). Workplace freedom of speech refers to the organizational climate under which employees feel free to express crucial opinions without fear of retaliation (Gorden & Infante, 1991). Freedom from retaliation is crucial in the definition, to differentiate freedom of speech from the concept of openness. Freedom of speech carries a societal constitutional guarantee: "Citizens should not

suffer retaliation or disenfranchisement for speech” (Gorden & Infante, 1991, p. 146). Employees are more likely to demonstrate higher performance and commitment to working life when working in a democratic organization (Gorden & Infante, 1987). Freedom of speech in the workplace is positively related to other workplace elements such as profitability, organizational dissent, whistleblowing, equality, and workplace friendship (Gorden & Infante, 1991; Kassing 2000, 2006).

Employees typically perceive organizations with higher levels of workplace freedom of speech as more economically stable (Kassing, 2006). A democratic organizational climate helps invite different opinions, which often leads to the making of better decisions (Janus, 1982). In organizations, democratic discourse is more important than democratic structure (Kassing, 2000a). In other words, simply having official channels for expressing opinions in the organization does not necessarily foster a democratic climate; a free atmosphere in which employees feel unconstrained about speaking up is more important. When freedom of speech in the workplace is perceived as high, employees are likely to produce argumentative rather than aggressive messages (Gorden & Infante, 1991).

The scholarly attention given to workplace freedom of speech started to decline after 2000. One possible reason is that the term “freedom of speech”, a recognized international human right, inherently carries strong political meanings. The controversy over and limitations on the term might now be is baggage scholars must carry when they study freedom of speech in the workplace setting. To avoid such controversy, many studies with a similar research interest have used different terms, such as organizational participatory culture (Richardson, Wheelers, & Cunningham, 2008) and organizational climate (Kassing, 2008). The term ‘workplace freedom of speech’ is used in this project to highlight the moral aspects of employee voice in organizations. The freedom individuals have in an organization has a positive correlation with their perception of overall freedom of speech in the society (Russomanno, 1996; Wyatt & Katz, 1996). This means that ensuring freedom of speech in the workplace is an essential step towards building a more open and civil society.

3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.1 Framework and methods

This research project consists of one literature review and three empirical studies. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are employed to explore organizational dissent in different cultural settings. Decisions on the methodological approach for each paper were based on the nature of each study and the respective research questions. Qualitative studies take an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the research topic while quantitative research aims to establish general laws of behavior and phenomena across contexts. In the field of human and social science, qualitative and quantitative approaches are historically rarely merged due to their differences in epistemological and ontological assumptions. Jick (1979) was one of the first scholars to acknowledge the potential value of seeking convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods to facilitate an improved understanding of certain phenomena. The current research project did not use both methods together in any single study. The data collection and analysis were carried out separately. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to integrate the findings from both qualitative and quantitative studies to better understand organizational dissent conceptually and empirically.

3.2 Instruments

Organizational Dissent Scale. Kassing's (1998) Organizational Dissent Scale (ODS) is a 24-item scale that measures how organizational members express disagreement about organizational policies and practices to three audiences: management and supervisors (articulated), co-workers or people on a similar level (lateral/latent), and individuals outside of the organization (displaced). A modified version of the ODS, with 18 items that measure upward dissent and latent dissent, was used in the quantitative studies in this project. Displaced dissent is often excluded in organizational studies as it is considered a non-organizational communication behavior (Croucher

et al., 2014; Garner & Wargo, 2009; Kassing & Armstrong, 2002). All items are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranges from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The ODS has shown consistent reliability in previous research. For articulated dissent, alpha reliabilities have ranged from 0.70 to 0.91 (Croucher et al., 2009, 2014; Kassing, 1998, 2009). For latent dissent, alpha reliabilities have ranged from 0.76 to 0.89 (Kassing, 2008, 2009; Croucher et al., 2009, 2013, 2014). An alpha value that is greater than 0.7 is acceptable for the internal consistency test (Cronbach, 1951).

Workplace Freedom of Speech Scale. Gorden and Infante's (1991) Workplace Freedom of Speech Scale (WPFS) and two additional items created by Kassing (2000b) were used to measure the degree to which people perceive that their organization or employer either or both permits and encourages feedback and input from employees or members. All the items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. A sample item includes: "In my workplace, I feel I have freedom of speech." Alpha reliabilities for the WFSS have ranged from 0.74 to 0.91 (Gorden & Infante, 1991; Kassing, 2000, Croucher et al., 2014).

3.3 Participants and procedure

Article II

In total, 1184 people participated in the study: Finland ($n = 181$), France ($n = 179$), Germany ($n = 271$), Spain ($n = 217$) and the U.K. ($n = 336$). Data were collected through self-administered online questionnaires in 2011 and 2012 after appropriate institutional approval. Participants were recruited through previously established social networks in each nation, with the assistance of various non-profit organizations, and through various corporations. The questionnaire was originally prepared in English and then translated into Finnish, French, German and Spanish. Native bilingual speakers of the respective language translated it from English into Finnish, French, and German. Separate bilingual speakers then back-translated the questionnaire into English to check for accuracy. All the translations were checked for accuracy using Cohen's Kappa. The kappas for each translation are .83 for the Finnish survey, .86 for the French survey, .91 for the German survey and .87 for the Spanish survey.

TABLE 1 Items of Organizational Dissent and Workplace freedom of Speech.

<i>Scales</i>	<i>Items</i>
<i>Upward dissent</i>	1. I am hesitant to raise questions or contradictory opinions in my organization
	2. I do not question management.
	3. I'm hesitant to question workplace policies.
	4. I don't tell my supervisor when I disagree with workplace decisions.
	5. I bring my criticism about organizational changes that aren't working to my supervisor or someone in management.
	6. I speak with my supervisor or someone in management when I question workplace decisions.
	7. I make suggestions to management or my supervisor about correcting inefficiency in my organization.
	8. I do not express my disagreement to management.
	9 I tell management when I believe employees are being treated unfairly.
<i>Latent dissent</i>	1. I complain about things in my organization with other employees.
	2. I criticize inefficiency in this organization in front of everyone.
	3. I join in when other employees complain about organizational changes.
	4. I share my criticism of this organization openly.
	5. I make certain everyone knows when I'm unhappy with work policies.
	6. I let other employees know how I feel about the way things are done around here.
	7. I do not criticize my organization in front of other employees.
	8. I hardly ever complain to my coworkers about workplace problems.
	9. I speak freely with my coworkers about troubling workplace issues.
<i>Workplace freedom of Speech</i>	1. In my workplace, I feel I have freedom of speech.
	2. In my workplace, superiors do not encourage subordinates to argue corporate issues.
	3. In my workplace, employees are penalized if they disagree with management practices.
	4. In my workplace, employees who speak up about job related matters are team players.
	5. In my workplace, there is fear of expressing your true feelings on work issues
	6. In my organization, there is commitment to quality
	7. In my organization, there is more concern for quantity than quality.
	8. In my organization, achieving excellence is an important goal
	9. In my organization, there is talk about quality, but not much action
	10. In my organization, pride is taking in what is produced

Article III

This study was conducted in Singapore, which is a diverse nation consisting of numerous ethnic groups. Singapore's economy relies largely on foreign workers particularly from Malaysia, China, Indonesia and India. However, the growing foreign population has triggered many social issues, including fierce job competition, overcrowding and an overburdened infrastructure. This study aimed to explore differences in organizational behavior between ethnic Chinese Singaporeans and immigrants to Singapore.

Data were collected through self-administered online and paper questionnaires in 2013 after appropriate ethical approval. Participants did not receive any kind of financial incentive for their participation. Over a period of four months, 384 individuals in Singapore participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 57 ($M = 28.66$, $SD = 7.53$). Men accounted for 51.3% ($n = 197$) of the sample, and women made up 48.7% ($n = 187$) of the sample. The sample was religiously diverse: 39.8% ($n = 153$) Buddhist, 39.1% ($n = 150$) Muslim, 11.5% ($n = 44$) Hindu, 9.4% ($n = 36$) Christian and 0.3% ($n = 1$) Jewish. The sample's educational level was also diverse: 1.8% ($n = 7$) elementary school, 8.9% ($n = 34$) middle school, 34.6% ($n = 133$) high school, 17.7% ($n = 68$) 2 years of college, 22.9% ($n = 88$) 4-year degree, 8.6% ($n = 33$) some graduate education, and 5.5% ($n = 21$) graduate degree. The first language of the participants was 45.1% ($n = 173$) English, 27.3% ($n = 105$) Malay, 17.4% ($n = 67$) Mandarin, 7.6% ($n = 29$) Indonesian and 2.6% ($n = 10$) Cantonese. Finally, the participants' organizational tenure varied extensively, from 1 to 30 years with the organization ($M = 6.88$; $SD = 5.26$). All the questionnaires were administered in English or Malay, two of the official languages of Singapore. Although questionnaires were also prepared (translated and back-translated) in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Indonesian, no participants wanted to answer in these languages. A back-translation method was used to develop the Malay version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was first created in English and then translated into Malay by a native speaker and then independently translated back into English. The reliability of the English-Malay translation was ($\kappa = 0.83$).

Article IV

This study focuses on young intra-urban professional migrants in China because, firstly, few studies have investigated the organizational behavior of migrants in China, and secondly because young professional migrants are more likely to settle in major cities compared to blue collar workers. This study was based on semi-constructed interviews. After receiving appropriate university ethical approval, 14 participants were selected for online interviews through convenient snowball sampling method. The criteria for inclusion in the study were that respondents were well educated intra-urban workers of 25-30 years old with a middle-income job and without local citizenship in Shanghai. Eight of the interviewees were female and six were male. The semi-structured interview questions were based on Kassing's (1998) Organizational Dissent Scale and Gorden and Infante (1991)'s Workplace Freedom of Speech Scale. The principal investigator consulted two other Mandarin-English speakers to design the interview questions and translate important concepts from

English to Mandarin. This process involved discussion between all three of the people concerned over the meanings and translations of the Kassing (2000) and Gordon and Infante's (1991) items. At the beginning of each interview, Kassing's (1998) classification of dissent types - articulated dissent, latent dissent, and displaced dissent - was explained to the participants. Interview questions were designed to probe three main areas: (1) dissent strategy, (2) perceived workplace freedom of speech and (3) intra-urban migrant identity in workplaces and daily life. The interviews ranged in length from 25 to 90 minutes, with an average of 42 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. As there is no corresponding translation for "organizational dissent" in Chinese, "dissent" was explained to respondents as expressing dissatisfaction or disagreement (biaoda bu man huo yiyi 表达不满或异议). All the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

TABLE 2 Method, context and participants

Article	Methodology	Study Context	Number of Participants
II	Quantitative survey	Five European countries: Germany, France, UK, Finland, and Spain.	Germany: 271 France: 179 UK: 336 Finland: 181 Spain: 217
III	Quantitative survey	Singapore: Singaporeans, Chinese immigrants, Malay immigrants, and Indonesian immigrants	Singaporeans: 209 Chinese immigrants: 41 Malay immigrants: 105 Indonesian immigrants: 29
IV	Qualitative interview	China: Intra-urban migrants	Intra-urban migrants: 14

It is important to clarify my contribution in the co-authored pieces included in the dissertation. In Article II, I participated in research conception, data interpretation, manuscript preparation, and critical revision of the article. I was not involved in data collection. For Article III, I am the second and the corresponding author. I was in charge of the overall development of the article and played a leading role in every stage of this project except for data collection. The first author gathered the data and conceived the research idea. The other co-authors helped with data analysis and writing and revising the discussion of the article at different stages. For Article IV, I am the first and the corresponding author. I spearheaded all stages of this research project. The co-author helped with the development of the theoretical framework and data analysis.

4 SUMMARIES OF ARTICLES

4.1 Article I

Zeng, C. (2017). Employee dissent: A means to facilitate constructive conflicts in organizations. In B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, P. Wilson, & S. M. Croucher (Eds.), *Approaches to conflict: Theoretical, interpersonal, and discursive dynamics*, (pp. 67-80). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

The first piece of this project is a theoretical discussion of the nature of dissent and its role in organizations. Specifically, dissent is discussed together with a term that is often considered taboo in organizations, and that is, conflict. Employee dissent is essentially the expression of disagreement and dissatisfaction which could lead to conflicts and retaliation. Before discussing the relationship between dissent and conflict, a vital question that needs to be posed here is, "Are all conflicts detrimental?" One objective of this article is to answer this question by discussing the role of conflict and different forms of conflict in organizations. When engaging in conflicts, disputants may experience physical and mental exhaustion, develop a negative attitude towards work and colleagues, and become less confident of their competence. Taking a closer look at organizational conflict, two forms of conflict, that is, cognitive and affective, can be categorized based on what issue triggers the conflict – the triggering event. Cognitive conflicts are work/task-related debates that foster constructive dialogue and lead to effective problem solving, whereas affective conflicts are socioemotional and personal, which often produces negative emotions between the disputants, undermines interpersonal relationships, and leads to group dysfunction.

Conceptually, dissent and conflict are interrelated in numerous ways. First, conflict could be both the result and the triggering event of dissent expression. In organizations, conflicts are more often swept under the carpet than properly handled. When the amount of dissatisfaction exceeds an employee's threshold of tolerance, he or she has no other choice but to bring the hidden conflict to light by voicing it to other organizational members. There are three stages of organizational conflict: (a) disagreements among and between members of the organization, (b) disputes

involving formal complaints, and (c) litigation including lawsuits and charges. Dissent is linked with disagreement and disputes. The litigation stage, which involves costly lawsuits and has a negative impact on organizational image, can be prevented if employee dissent is appropriately managed. The presence of dissent and conflict is an indication of organizational democracy. When freedom of speech is suppressed, organizations lose their self-correcting functions and misconduct is likely to escalate and lead to more serious consequences.

Encouraging employee dissent can lead to constructive conflicts in organizations. The expression of emotion in the workplace is mostly considered unprofessional, so dissenters tend to use a logical approach to unsatisfactory issues in order to effectively solve the problem: dissenters are likely to engage in cognitive conflicts which are work/task-related instead of affective conflicts which are harmful to interpersonal relationships. In addition, a logical and constructive approach to workplace issues is more likely to provoke a constructive response from the audiences. The importance and necessity of dissent expression in organizations are now becoming more and more evident, and many modern organizations purposely assign opposing roles to group members to stir up debate and identify potential hazards.

Affective conflicts in organizations may escalate into workplace bullying, harassment, and uncivil behavior. It is essential that such workplace aggression is exposed promptly and handled properly. Employee voice, then, can serve as a means of helping to maintain a healthy and productive working environment by revealing hidden organizational issues. In addition, inviting internal employee voice helps decrease whistleblowing, which does significant harm to the organizational image. Whistleblowers overwhelmingly seek to report organizational wrong-doings internally before venting to an external audience; potential whistleblowing and its detrimental consequences can be avoided if organizational wrong-doings are identified and handled internally.

4.2 Article II

Croucher, S. M., Parrott, K., **Zeng, C.**, & Gomez, O. (2014). A cross-cultural analysis of organizational dissent and workplace freedom in five European economies. *Communication Studies*, 65, 298-313.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2013.811430>

With continued globalization, understanding dissent and workplace freedom of speech in international settings is an increasing imperative. This study compares organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech in five European nations: Finland, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, all of which are performing differently as Europe grapples with the euro-zone economic downturn. In addition to economic factors, national differences in conversational style may also help to explain the differences in their citizens' propensity to express dissent and the per-

ceived level of freedom of speech in organizations. Thus, the following hypothesis and research questions are posed in the study:

- H: There is a positive relationship between workplace freedom of speech and organizational dissent.
- RQ1a: To what extent will the expression of organizational dissent differ between Finland, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom?
- RQ1b: To what extent will the expression of workplace freedom differ between Finland, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom?

In total, 1184 people participated in the study. To test the Hypothesis, Pearson correlations were conducted. Workplace freedom of speech was found to be positively correlated with articulated dissent and latent dissent among the entire sample in the case of the French sample and the German sample. In the Finnish sample, workplace freedom of speech was negatively related with articulated dissent and positively correlated with latent dissent. As for the U.K., workplace freedom of speech was negatively correlated with both articulated dissent and latent dissent. The results from Spain were non-significant. Previous studies conducted in the US have demonstrated that workplace freedom of speech is positively correlated with upward dissent and negatively correlated with latent dissent. The findings generated from the studies in the US are incongruent with the results of the current study. To test the universality of organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech, more studies in different cultural contexts are called for.

A multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed on the research question. On articulated dissent, the Germans were significantly higher than all of the other groups except the French, while the Spaniards scored the lowest. On latent dissent, the Germans scored the highest while the Spaniards scored the lowest. On workplace freedom of speech, too, the Germans scored the highest while the Spaniards scored the lowest.

National culture and differences in conversational styles may contribute to the differences in the expression of dissent and perception of workplace freedom among the nations. For example, the fact that Germans tend to express the most amount of upward and latent dissent in the study might be associated with Germans' direct conversation style. On the other hand, Finns scored relatively low on the dissent expression might be because Finns tend to avoid confrontation as they favor politeness over directness especially in work-related conversations. In addition, it is not surprising that Spain as the least individualistic country with high power distance in the sample scored the lowest on upward dissent. Collectivistic and hierarchical cultures have a heavy emphasis on group harmony and are more tolerant of unequal power distribution, which makes it more difficult for a subordinate to voice opposition to a higher authority. The effects of national culture on organizational behaviors can be profound and need to be further explored.

The unemployment rate in Spain is extremely high, so job security could be a major concern for Spanish employees. This being the case, Spanish employees are perhaps less likely to favor voicing contradictory opinions in their organization

which might result in retaliation or even losing one's job. On the other hand, Germany, the strongest economy in the sample, has the highest expression of dissent and perceived workplace freedom of speech. In addition to economic factors, this may be explained by Germans' direct conversation style. Future studies are called for exploring factors such as national economic stability and employment security in the context of organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech.

4.3 Article III

Croucher, S. M., **Zeng, C.**, Rahmani, D & Cui, X. (2017). The relationship between organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech: A cross-cultural analysis in Singapore. *Journal of Management & Organization*.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2016.73>

This study is a test of the relationship between organizational dissent and the perception of workplace freedom of speech in Singapore. Singapore was chosen as the research site for three main reasons. First, no similar investigations have ever been conducted in Singapore. Second, Singapore is an exceptionally diverse nation with numerous ethnic groups: 75% ethnic Chinese, 15% ethnic Malays, 7% ethnic Indians, and so forth. The sociopolitical and economic imbalance among different ethnic groups is highly visible in Singaporean society, which may affect an individual's perceptions and behavior in the organizational context. Third, although Singapore's economy is largely based on foreign workers, immigrant groups often feel rejected by the dominant culture. Thus, in addition to studying organizational dissent in Singapore, we also aimed to explore the differences between ethnic-Chinese Singaporeans and immigrant groups in Singapore. Two hypotheses are put forward in this study:

- Hypothesis 1a: There is a significant positive relationship between articulated dissent and workplace freedom of speech in Singapore.
- Hypothesis 1b: There is a significant negative relationship between latent dissent and workplace freedom of speech in Singapore.
- Hypothesis 2: Immigrants to Singapore will report lower levels of dissent (articulated and latent), and lower levels of perception of workplace freedom of speech than ethnic Chinese in Singapore.

In total 384 individuals in Singapore were recruited for the study through self-administered questionnaires. One-tailed Pearson's correlations were performed to test H1a and H1b. H1a was supported. A significant positive correlation was found between articulated dissent and workplace freedom of speech in Singapore. This is

in line with previous research conducted in the US and Europe, suggesting that the positive relationship between upward dissent and workplace freedom of speech could be a universal phenomenon that transcends cultural boundaries. H1b was not supported in this study. In fact, the findings of this study suggest the opposite: that latent dissent is positively related with workplace freedom of speech in Singapore. The perception of workplace freedom of speech might be shaped by the hierarchical organizational culture in Singapore. As communicating critical issues to the management could be seen as inappropriate in organizations with high power distance, the democratic atmosphere of a workplace in Singapore could be constructed mainly on communication among co-workers. In addition, it is of great importance for employees from collectivistic cultures like Singapore to develop and maintain co-worker relationships. Thus, being able to share critical opinions with co-workers is crucial and can be positively associated with the overall perception of workplace freedom. This article supports the claim that national cultural dimensions such as individualism/collectivism and power distance are essential in shaping employees' dissent strategies and perception of workplace freedom. Most of the existing studies on dissent were predominantly carried out in a western setting which is characterized by individualistic and egalitarian orientations, generalizing the results from these studies to collectivistic and hierarchical cultures may not be appropriate.

Regarding H2, the multiple analysis of covariance analyses (MACOVA) revealed that nation of birth exerted considerable influence on articulated dissent and latent dissent, but not on workplace freedom of speech. The dominant group, Singaporeans, scored higher on upward and latent dissent than all the immigrant groups. The higher tendency for Singaporeans to engage in the rather risky organizational behavior of expressing dissent might be explained by the differences in the socioeconomic status of the dominant group and the immigrant groups. As retaliation is a possible outcome of dissent expression, immigrants in Singapore, who are under huge economic pressure and have a greater fear of losing their job, may feel reluctant to voice their critical opinions.

This study reveals that both articulated dissent and latent dissent are positively correlated with workplace freedom of speech in Singapore. Moreover, nation of birth significantly influences articulated and latent dissent, but not workplace freedom of speech. Future research is needed to examine dissent in different cultural settings and to continue exploring the potential influence of economic factors on organizational behaviors.

4.4 Article IV

Zeng, C., & Croucher, S. M. (2017). An exploration of organization dissent and workplace freedom of speech among young professional intra-urban migrants in Shanghai. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 10, 201-218. doi: 10.1080/17513057.2016.1272706

This article aims to explore the organizational dissent strategies adopted among young domestic migrant workers in Shanghai, China. While the work ethics of employees in the West is typically characterized by Judeo-Christian values, Chinese employees are known to adhere to a distinct set of work values that are largely shaped by Confucianism. Confucian values, which can be traced back 2,500 years, put the emphasis on harmony, face, interpersonal connections, and compassion. Influenced by these traditional values, Chinese organizations are known to be highly hierarchical and collectivistic. The management in China is mostly top-down with a wide distance between leaders and subordinates. Thus, rank-and-file employees in China could be more reluctant when it comes to expressing critical opinions to the management.

Previous research has found that employees with poorer socioeconomic status have higher concern for their job security and thus are more likely to choose to remain silent about organizational issues. To explore this claim, this study aimed to examine intra-urban migrants, an economically and socio-politically disadvantaged group in China. Internal migrants in China commonly experience institutional and everyday discrimination. Professional life is of great importance, especially for workers from a rural background who have migrated to big urban centers primarily for material advantage. Studying organizational dissent in China is important for the following reasons: 1) Organizational dissent has been studied predominantly in the US over the last two decades; studies are needed in other cultures to understand dissent in a global setting. 2) Studies on Chinese migrants have typically focused on public policies and administration while the professional life of migrants has received little scholarly attention. To study migrants' organizational behaviors is one way to begin to fill this research gap and to grasp their organizational life and psychological well-being in large conurbations. 3) Urbanization is a universal phenomenon and it is closely associated with a range of social, economic, political and cultural issues. This is particularly evident in developing countries. In addition to contributing to Chinese migration literature, the results of this research can provide valuable information for studies conducted in other developing economies. The following research questions are posed in this study:

- RQ1: How do young professional migrant workers perceive workplace freedom of speech?
- RQ2: What strategies do young professional migrant workers use to express dissent?
- RQ3: What is the relationship between residential status and a professional migrant's professional life and daily life in Shanghai?

The role of the immediate leader appeared to be significant in employee's perceptions of workplace freedom of speech. In addition, employees were often suspicious of the safety and effectiveness of the official channels designated to solicit opinions. Chinese employees were also found to associate workplace freedom of speech with the tangible organizational structure rather than with the workplace climate. In addition, this study found that Chinese employees have a unique perception of organiza-

tional dissent. A modern definition of dissent puts the emphasis on employee conscientiousness and moral principles. However, these moral elements seem to be missing in the perception of upward dissent among Chinese employees. In the study, participants predominantly took a pragmatic approach to upward dissent. That is, upward dissent was expressed to the management only to solve concrete problems. The absence of moral elements in upward dissent can lead to disastrous consequences as employees may choose to remain silent on unethical issues which they deem unsolvable. It is essential for Chinese employees to be able to discuss critical issues with colleagues in the workplace. The expression of latent dissent, instead of the result of the suppression of upward dissent, could be a crucial means of building and maintaining co-worker relationships in Chinese organizations. Among migrant workers, displaced dissent is largely avoided in order not to make family members worry back home. In addition, in its attempt to understand migrant workers' organizational life in Shanghai, this study also discovered that there is a very clear division between locals and migrants in workplaces. Migrant workers are largely marginalized in both their organizational and daily lives.

5 DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION

5.1 Summary of the findings

This research project complements previous research by investigating the relationship between organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech in different settings. Both similarities and differences between the results from this project and those from previous literature are found. While each article makes a unique contribution to the existing literature, the following section will focus on the findings that are collectively supported in the articles. The results from this research project can be summarized into 4 main points:

1. Upward dissent is positively linked with workplace freedom of speech

Previous studies in the US reported a positive relationship between up-ward dissent and workplace freedom of speech. In Article II, workplace freedom of speech is positively correlated with articulated dissent among the entire sample. In Article III, upward dissent is positively correlated with workplace freedom of speech in Singapore. One conclusion is that the positive relationship between upward dissent and workplace freedom of speech seems to be universal. The definition of workplace freedom of speech emphasizes a democratic atmosphere instead of a democratic structure. To demonstrate that the organization welcomes opinions, management often establish official channels such as an anonymous mailbox and feedback meetings. However, the safety and effectiveness of using these official channels are rarely guaranteed. Employees quickly become disheartened when the promise of empowerment is not delivered (Harlos, 2001). In other words, having ineffective systems for making one's voice heard could be worse than having no voice channels at all. This project shows it is common around the world for employees to be likely to voice their disagreements to the management in a democratic workplace climate that invites meaningful participation. In addition to establishing democratic structures, modern organizations need to facilitate an authentic democratic culture in which employees believe their participation is meaningful, not just a pretence on the part of the management.

2. Different conceptualization of dissent in cross-cultural settings

While the expression of dissent to the management is essentially considered a moral obligation in the western literature, Chinese employees predominantly take a pragmatic approach and merely consider upward dissent as a way to solve problems. Thus, dissent is expressed not because it is the right thing to do, but because it brings about organizational change. In other words, Chinese employees tend to focus more on the instrumental value than the intrinsic value of dissent expression. As a consequence, they may remain silent when confronted with unethical and seemingly irresolvable issues. In a study exploring differences in whistleblowing behaviors between American and Chinese managers, Keenan (2007) found that Americans are much more likely to report major fraud, minor fraud, and harm to others than are Chinese managers. It is possible that dissent from a subordinate to a higher authority is perceived more negatively in a more hierarchical culture. This is especially true in China, where forbearance and neutrality are highly valued. Thus, extra efforts are needed particularly from Chinese organizations to encourage the expression of dissent and to positively encourage dissenters.

Previous studies in the US reported a positive relationship between upward dissent and workplace freedom of speech, and a negative relationship between latent dissent and workplace freedom of speech. The quantitative studies in the current research project generated some incongruent findings. In Article II, workplace freedom of speech is positively correlated with latent dissent among the entire sample, although these relationships are different in each country. In Article III, latent dissent is positively correlated with workplace freedom of speech. One explanation for the positive relationship between latent dissent and workplace freedom of speech is that the perception of latent dissent may vary across cultures. Latent dissent was rated higher than articulated dissent in high context cultures such as Spain and France. Thus, it is possible that latent dissent, as opposed to upward dissent, is a way to build in-group harmony and solidarity among co-workers in high context cultures. This could also be the reason for the positive relationship between latent dissent and workplace freedom of speech in Singapore. Latent dissent has an intrinsic destructive nature and has often associated with duplicity and bad-mouthing in previous studies conducted in the US (Kassing 2011). In this sense, latent dissent is expressed only when employees are not able to express dissent upward. This, however, might not be the case in other cultural settings. Drawing on a qualitative approach, Article IV aims to further explore the possible different conceptualization of dissent in the Chinese context. Discussing critical issues with colleagues could potentially facilitate trust and interpersonal relationships in Chinese organizations. Chinese employees are more likely to express ideas to peers than to supervisors when identifying themselves as members of an organization or group (Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010). Thus, latent dissent expression in Chinese organizations could be a crucial means of building and maintaining co-worker relationships, which might take place regardless of the suppression of upward dissent. This suggests that the perception of latent dissent might be very different in high power distance and collectivistic

cultures. Caution should be applied by future organization scholars when they think of applying results from US studies to other cultural settings.

3. Dissent is linked with many factors at national level

One particularly contribution this project makes is linking organizational dissent with macro-economic factors and the socioeconomic status of a social group. Previous research on organizational dissent predominantly took place on three levels: the individual (e.g. locus of control, argumentativeness), the interpersonal (e.g. supervisor-subordinate relationship, co-worker relationship), and the organizational (e.g. organizational justice, organizational reputation). Little is known about influences at the national level, such as national culture and the national economy, on dissent behavior. This research project proposes that dissent is closely linked with external factors such as economic stability, national culture and employees' socioeconomic status. The national macroeconomic situation has a direct influence on companies, particularly on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up mostf companies worldwide. Employees' perception of job security could vary in accordance with the national economy. When the unemployment rate is high, fear of losing one's job is likely to increase as the chance of re-employment is perceived as low, and so employees may avoid any risky organizational behavior. This may put organizations in an even worse position: dissent is vital for enabling organizations to benefit from a range of opinions and to stay innovative, which can be the key to survival in times of economic hardship. When unemployment is high and lay-offs are common, organizations may end up in a vicious circle in which less employee dissent leads to worse organizational performance and in turn, worse organizational performance leads to less voice. Organizations therefore need to put extra effort into inviting dissent and reassuring employees of the safety of dissent especially during economic downturns.

There has been a considerable body of research on the impact of national culture on employee organizational behaviors. This project further proposes that national culture needs to be studied together with macroeconomic factors to better understand employee behaviors. In Article III, the results show that Chinese migrants in Singapore are treated as outsiders there despite their shared language and cultural values with the locals. National culture alone, then, cannot sufficiently explain organizational dissent behaviors. Future dissent studies are needed to consider historical influences, the socioeconomic status of employees, and perceptions of job security. Although organizational dissent has received considerable scholarly attention for the last two decades, our understanding of dissent remains rather limited. The full complexity of employee dissent needs to be explored in terms of the factors that influence it at the national level.

4. Dissent is linked with power

A critical approach to organizational communication is based on the assertion that communication is organization: power is embedded in the organizational structure

and reproduced in daily interactions (Mumby, 1988). Organizational dissent, which entails disagreement or contradictory opinions, can be seen as a form of employee resistance (Kassing, 2011). The claim that dissent is linked with power is not new, as many dissent studies have already pointed out that managers, who have more power, are more likely to express dissent than rank-and-file employees (Kassing & Armstrong, 2001; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999). This research project approaches power with a focus on the relationship between organizational behaviors and the socioeconomic status of migrant workers. In Article III, the dominant group, native-born Singaporeans, scored higher on upward and latent dissent than all the immigrant groups. In Article IV, their migrant status is one of the main factors contributing to the disadvantaged position of Chinese migrant workers in their professional lives. Direct and indirect discrimination against migrant workers are pervasive in organizations (Bergbom, Vartia-Vaananen, & Kinnunen, 2015). This study shows that migrant groups, as opposed to the dominant group, tend to express less dissent and perceive a stricter workplace climate. Job security is the paramount concern for economic migrants. It is not surprising that fear of losing one's job is more common among migrant workers, because the job often has a direct link to their legal status in the host society. Organizational dissent as a form of resistance is essential in contesting and correcting unethical organizational policies and conducts. Migrants, who cannot afford to resist, tend not to rock the boat and choose to avoid challenging the status quo. This, in turn, may contribute to the discriminatory discourse. Employee empowerment is crucial in improving workplace productivity and increasing employee job satisfaction. Inviting opinions especially from disadvantaged groups could be a way of truly empowering employees and eliminating discrimination in the workplace.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical implications

Findings about different conceptualizations of dissent in different cultural settings indicate that it is urgent to develop cultural specific theories and measurements which better explain employee behavior in cross-cultural settings. There is a crisis in terms of replication in all fields of science: studies are often difficult to replicate and significant results from one study may become insignificant in a replication study or vice versa (Harzing, Reiche, & Pudelko, 2013). The scientific community needs to examine the reliability and validity of measurements more closely. This is especially needed in the field of cross-cultural research, in which studies rely heavily on questionnaires developed in the US setting. Through acculturation, individuals hold different values, beliefs and worldviews. It is quite easy for cross-cultural studies to overcome linguistic barriers by providing participants with translated versions of measurements, but not enough effort has been made to ensure that concepts are understood the same way across cultural settings. For example, in this research project, there is no direct equivalent for the term organizational dissent in Chinese and it can thus be readily interpreted in different ways by Chinese employees. Dissent can

hardly be meaningfully measured across cultures if it is not a universally applicable concept. A scale originally designed for one country or one culture may need to be reconstructed and items altered to achieve conceptual equivalence when it is applied in a different setting. Cultural-specific scales have already been developed in the field of cross-cultural psychiatry. Kinzie et al. (1982), in an attempt to study depression among the Vietnamese, initially started by translating an existing depression scale and found it unreliable with these new participants. The authors then developed and validated a Vietnamese Depression Scale (VDS), which better captures the Vietnamese' unique understanding of concepts such as "desperation" and "shame". It is imperative for cross-cultural studies to follow this line of thinking and strive to develop measurements that take culture into consideration. The current project provides some insight into studying organizational dissent in China. While upward dissent is often seen as an indispensable individual right in individualist cultures, employees in collectivistic cultures tend to find it detrimental to group harmony. Sharing dissent is more common among colleagues in China, to foster co-worker relationship and trust. This means that an emphasis on workplace relationship and group harmony is required when studying organizational dissent in Chinese organizations.

Organizations may reap substantial benefits by attending to employee dissent. Consequently, many organizations invest in installing different kinds of channels for employees to express their opinions. These channels include suggestion boxes, ombudsmen, grievance procedures, employee feedback meetings, ethics hotlines, open-door policies and devil's advocates (Kassing, 2011). In reality, the security of these channels is often highly questionable. One example can be seen in the recent scandal around the Wells Fargo bank. Many former Wells Fargo employees had voiced their concerns on the widespread opening of unauthorized accounts through internal reports to the management (Cowley, 2017). However, these courageous dissenters were mostly penalized, some of them even fired. For example, Bill Bado, a former employee of Wells Fargo, had called the internal ethics hotline to report fraudulent activities and was fired eight days afterwards (Egan, 2016). Another example comes from China: Xie (2005) reported that a village committee in the Fengtai district of Beijing decided to set up a suggestion box to receive anonymous feedback and comments from villagers. However, the next day a camera was also installed, facing the suggestion box. Many villagers reported that they were frightened by the camera and lost the courage to speak up. In both cases, the general organizational climate was highly authoritarian, despite the availability of voicing channels. In fact, former employees in Wells Fargo described the organizational culture as "toxic" (Egan, 2016). This doctoral research project advocates that organizations need to pay more attention to cultivating a democratic climate than the democratic structure. This is very clear in the aforementioned cases. Organizations are likely to foster a silent culture when the voice channels are ineffective in soliciting and accommodating employee opinions. When silenced in the organization, employees may be driven to report unethical misconduct by whistleblowing to the public, as in the Wells Fargo case. Instead of focusing on the number or the form of voice channels, organizations need to facilitate a genuinely participative culture in which "dissent, then, becomes

incorporated into the organizational fabric of what is acceptable, condoned, and even expected" (Kassing, 2000 p. 390).

The outcomes of this research project also shed light on the organizational behaviors of migrant workers. Migrants often report lower levels of happiness, job satisfaction and health in the host society. As organizational life is closely associated with one's mental and physical health, it is vital for migrant studies to pay more attention to the organizational life of migrant workers. Migrant groups in this project tend to voice less organizational dissent. This is not surprising: migrants may choose to "play safe" and avoid putting their career and livelihood at risk. However, the fact that disadvantaged groups are more silent in organizations is problematic and can even be catastrophic from both the moral and economic standpoints. Workplace bullying is a serious and pervasive social problem and minority group members are more likely to be its targets (Bergbom et al., 2015). Organization dissent serves as a form of employee resistance that is essential for ensuring employees' dignity (Kassing 2011). This project encourages employees to use dissent as a protective function to fight against bullying and other forms of incivility in the workplace. It is an ethical necessity that employees can speak out, especially in the light of the recent revelations of the #metoo movement, which aims to demonstrate the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. In addition to the shocking prevalence of these incidents, the bigger issue here is that the victims were unable to make their voice heard when the harassment was taking place. Organizations must empower employees, especially minority group members, by seriously inviting and ethically handling their opinions. From an economic perspective, organizations that embrace dissenters show higher team performance and productivity: employees often choose to express dissent with the purpose of correcting wrongdoings and improving the organization. Thus, dissenters are usually employees who are highly loyal and committed to the organization. Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran (2008) showed that whistleblowers tend to hold higher positions, demonstrate higher competence and have longer tenure in the organization. When their voices are sufficiently heard and properly handled, dissenters are likely to become even more loyal to the organization. A loyal workforce is an extremely valuable asset and could be the key to organizational success. It therefore makes good economic sense for organizations to receive dissent more positively. On the other hand, organizational morale and commitment will suffer greatly when loyal employees who voice disagreements as a result of their integrity are punished. All of this leads to the conclusion that dissent is both a moral and an economic necessity for organizations in today's world.

5.3 Limitations and direction for future studies

This research project makes significant contributions to the current body of literature by exploring organizational dissent in non-US settings. However, it clearly has many limitations. First, the reliability of the scales used was not thoroughly tested in the studies. Revised versions of the Organizational Dissent Scale and Workplace Free-

dom of Speech Scale were first translated into the relevant languages and then used in the quantitative studies in this dissertation. Intercoder reliability was measured for each translation to ensure the quality of translations. Nevertheless, the conceptualization of these two constructs may vary across language and cultural contexts. This is confirmed in Article IV, which claims that Chinese employees have a unique perception of dissent and workplace freedom of speech. This project would have been significantly complemented by conducting Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the scales used in each country. That way the extent to which the theorized factor model can be replicated in cross-cultural settings would have become clear. CFA was only performed in Article III on the Organizational Dissent Scale and 5 out of the 18 factors were dropped due to low factor loadings. Items that cannot be retained in the model could also provide valuable information on how the constructs may be understood differently across cultures. The study could have benefited from an in-depth discussion on the dropped items and why they failed to work in a different cultural setting. Future studies should seek to develop culture-specific theories and measurements. In addition, cross-cultural studies that use existing measurements are encouraged to run and report factor analyses to provide more information on the universality of these measurements.

Five European countries and two Asian countries are included in this research project. Most contemporary cross-cultural studies are undertaken in North American, West European and East Asian countries while Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America are largely under-researched. Furthermore, the over-use of national affiliation may mean that insufficient attention is paid to the existing and increasing cultural diversity within many nations. Future studies are called for that take place in under-researched nations and smaller social systems within them.

Dissent research has predominantly studied dissent as a one-time event and focused on the initial stages of dissent; the accommodation and aftermath of dissent are not known. Longitudinal studies, which can better capture the development and settlement of dissent, are likely to yield fruitful results. Additionally, dissent, as an essentially co-constructed event, needs to be studied from different perspectives: besides focusing on the dissenter's perspective, managers and co-workers need to be included to fully understand how dissent messages are received and perceived in the organization.

SUMMARY

Dissent is ubiquitous in our society. While employees devote a significant amount of time and energy to organizations, they often have very little say in decisions about organizational policies and practices. As the benefits of employee feedback and involvement have become recognized, modern organizations are starting to build a more democratic and participative organizational culture. Organizational dissent has received considerable scholarly attention over the past 20 years. One major limitation to the current body of research, however, is that few studies have explored dissent in non-USA settings. The USA has been in the forefront of communication studies for decades and most studies on organizational behaviors focus on the domestic US environment (Adler 1983, Harzing et al, 2013). It is imperative to test the applicability of theories developed in and for the USA in other cultural settings. This research project aims to complement previous research by investigating the relationship between organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech in five European nations, Singapore, and China. Essentially, the following research questions are posed:

- 1: What is the relationship between workplace freedom of speech and organizational dissent in non-US settings?
- 2: How will the expression of organizational dissent differ in cross-cultural settings?
- 3: How are organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech conceptualized by Chinese professional workers?

To examine the research questions, this project used both quantitative and qualitative methods. While each study is unique in examining dissent in terms of context and approach, these studies collectively provide a comprehensive depiction of organizational dissent from a cross-cultural perspective. The first finding of the project is that the positive relationship between upward dissent and workplace freedom of speech seems to be universal. Employees are likely to voice their disagreements to the management under a democratic and participative workplace climate. Organizations need to create an authentic democratic organizational culture to solicit meaningful participation from employees. Secondly, the study found that employees conceptualize dissent differently across cultures. Latent dissent, in particular, was rated higher in high-context and more collectivistic cultures. Previous studies conceptualized latent dissent as the product of the oppression of upward dissent. However, the expression of latent dissent in collectivistic cultures could be a way to build and maintain co-worker relationships, which may take place regardless of the suppression of upward dissent. Third, this project proposes that dissent is linked with macro-economic factors and the socioeconomic status of a social group. Previous research has mostly examined dissent at the individual, relational, and organizational levels. The findings of this project indicate that the stability of the national economy, the unemployment rate, a person's perception of his or her job security and socioeconomic status may all have an influ-

ence on employees' decisions to dissent. Fourth, there is an underlying link between dissent and power. Migrant groups in this project tend to express less dissent than the dominant group. Minority group members are often marginalized in the workplace and their voice is critical in combating injustice and wrongdoings in organizations. To achieve employee empowerment, modern organizations need to make extra efforts to invite the opinions of disadvantaged group members. This project confirms that results from the USA are not generalizable to non-USA settings. The project also provides insights into developing cultural specific theories and measurements in today's globalized world. Organizational dissent is crucial from both ethical and economic perspectives. From an ethical standpoint, dissent can be seen as a moral right and a way to support human dignity. Economically, embracing dissent is beneficial to both organizations and employees because dissent is positively linked with innovation, quality decision making, employee job satisfaction, team performance, organizational commitment and employee empowerment. A democratic and participative workplace climate is a competitive advantage that will help organizations thrive in the modern business world.

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I

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II

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III

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IV

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