

## Review of the relationship between Mianzi, SSG and employee's behaviour in family enterprise

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**ABSTRACT:** At present, voice behaviour under Chinese culture should be emphasized, and is in need of full consideration of Mianzi, supervisor-subordinate Guanxi and other factors influencing employee's voice behaviour. This paper, from the perspective of psychological cognition, takes Chinese family business employees as research object to seek the mechanism of employee voice behaviour. This paper gathers more than fifty literatures in China and abroad to tease out the research model, and finds out Mianzi can positively predict the family enterprise employee's voice behaviour, and play further influences on employee's voice behaviour by affecting SSG, so SSG plays an intermediary role in the relationship between Mianzi and employee's voice behaviour. This paper finally concludes that, organizations can increase the frequency of voice behaviour and improve the organizational performance by enhancing employee's Mianzi and optimizing SSG.

**Keywords:** Mianzi; SSG; voice behavior; family business

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Mianzi is the key to understanding Chinese psychology and behaviour, and it has a unique way to influence employees' voice behaviour. Voice behaviour is constructive interpersonal interaction, employees express their views for organization's policies and issues, and it is conducive to organization to correct errors, improve the performance. High Mianzi values and feelings of human consciousness prompt employees to pay more attention to their own and other people's Mianzi protection, and tend to retain their own views<sup>[1]</sup>; The desire to get Mianzi can promote employee's promotive voice behaviour<sup>[2]</sup>.

Guanxi is the foundation of Chinese society<sup>[3]</sup>, and plays an important role in the field of management. Currently, Internal Guanxi of organization is focused on Supervisor-Subordinate Guanxi. SSG in China has a strong personal emotional color, and it can penetrate into the organization<sup>[4]</sup>. In order to establish and maintain the Guanxi, employees tend to consider Mianzi of both sides in interpersonal interaction, especially under low SSG condition, too much consideration of Mianzi will inhibit employees' voice behaviour<sup>[5]</sup>.

The function of family business to promote our country's economy cannot be ignored; its development has also led to widespread concern. In family business, non-family members are always lack of trust and democracy, and parent style management makes a lot of family business decline<sup>[6]</sup>. Therefore, SSG has become an important factor for family enterprise employees to take voice behaviour. When non family members believe they cannot interfere with the core members of decision-making, they will make less advice and rarely insist. So this paper selected family enterprises as the research objects, engaging in the investigation of the effect of Mianzi for the family employees' voice behaviour and the role of SSG has played in, thus putting forward some suggestions for management practice.

### 2 PRESENT RESEARCH STATE

#### 2.1 Mianzi

The definition of Mianzi can be broadly divided into two categories<sup>[7]</sup>: One focuses on its social value, thinking Mianzi is derived from social interaction. From a static perspective, Mianzi is widely regarded as people's reputation in China, and need to rely on

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the external environment, demanding others show respect and obedience towards him, thus to maintain strict level gap and stable relationship of social consciousness. From a dynamic perspective, the essence of Mianzi should lie in the negotiation and interaction, personal Mianzi is the function of its social status or prestige and a psychological process and its result to judge whether the evaluation of others is consistent with self-expectation.

The other emphasis on psychological meaning is regarded as a kind of self-image in personal psychology and self-image formed according to social standard or the evaluation from important person, also the social dignity or public image recognized by others, which can be divided into qualitative Mianzi and social identity<sup>[8]</sup>. In a social interaction situation, Mianzi of all individuals is expressed through a series of actions, interaction between the two sides through consultations to determine whether other side support individual's Mianzi.

To sum up, we can find that most scholars analyse or decompose Mianzi from the moral and social aspects, but scholars from different cultural backgrounds and research perspectives have different definitions of Mianzi.

In order to introduce Mianzi to the theoretical research, scholars in various fields have studied its concept dimensions, the criteria of classification are mainly based on the following two aspects: the point and the source of Mianzi. Empirical research on Mianzi is more difficult as variables are hard to control, thus most of the researches are in the theoretical discussion stage. The existing researches are always about the idea, the need and behaviour of Mianzi. Mianzi scales are as shown in Table 1:

Gongmin Bao<sup>[9]</sup> developed a Mianzi need scale, which is divided into Mianzi of ability, relational Mianzi and moral Mianzi. Mianzi of ability is the desire to seek others' acceptance of your own ability and all the accessories derive from the ability (such as success, wealth, status.); Relational Mianzi mainly comes from the desire of harmonious interpersonal relationship

(especially between colleagues) and wide network of contacts, playing a positive influence in the group; Moral Mianzi mainly comes from the desire of individuals to recognize their own characters, moral standards and internal control of themselves.

Gongmin Bao in the follow-up study reduced the scale to 35 items, the reliability and validity of the scale were good, and therefore this study uses the reduced Mianzi scale to measure.

To sum up, Mianzi does not have a unified definition due to the tough empirical research, unmanageable variables, the small scale and rare quantitative studies. Therefore, in the future research, to develop higher reliability and validity scale will greatly promote the development of local cultural studies.

## 2.2 Voice behaviour

Studies abroad on employees' voice behaviour abroad are mainly divided into two kinds. The first one is that the employees dissatisfy with the reality and make every effort to change the status fundamentally<sup>[10]</sup>, it is defined as a passive behaviour, and the purpose is to serve the employees. Another kind of voice behaviour is a challenging spontaneous behaviour which can improve the organizational effectiveness<sup>[11]</sup>, and it is a constructive interpersonal and change-orientated behaviour for the purpose of improving the working environment rather than the dissatisfactions<sup>[12]</sup>, and it is to improve the efficiency, management effectiveness and the decision-making ability of the organization<sup>[13]</sup>, which may challenge the "status quo" or make the superior "embarrassed".

Although the definitions of voice behaviour are not the same, they are common in three aspects: voice behaviour is a kind of communication behaviour, and transmits information from the sender to the receiver; voice behaviour is a kind of spontaneous behaviour, individuals make choices based on self-willingness; the content is related to the organization work for the purpose of putting forward the questions and improving the current situation of the organization. Based on

Table 1. Mianzi measurement scales

Research angle	Scholar	Scale	Dimension Division
Point of Mianzi	Goffman(1955)	None	Self-/ other-Mianzi
	Brown & Levinson(1987)	None	Negative Mianzi and positive Mianzi
	Ting-Toomey(1988)	None	Self-/ other-Mianzi and other Mianzi concern
Source of Mianzi	Lim(1994)	None	Independent Mianzi, relationship of Mianzi, ability of Mianzi
	Ruiling Zhu(1987)	Mianzi event scale	Mianzi of ability, Mianzi of moral
	Meiling Zhou(1997)	Protective and acquisitive Mianzi scale	Protective and acquisitive Mianzi
	Spencer(2002)	None	Quality Mianzi, Mianzi of social identity
	Yinan Wang(2005)	Protective Mianzi scale	Mianzi of ability, share Mianzi
	Zhizhao Chen(2006)	Need of Mianzi scale	Be concerned about Mianzi, losing Mianzi
	Gongmin Bao and Zhuojia Zhao(2009)	Need of Mianzi scale	Mianzi of ability ,relational Mianzi and moral Mianzi
	Xinan Zhang(2010)	Mianzi perspective scale	Save Mianzi and afraid of losing Mianzi

the above analysis, this article defines the voice behaviour as: the behaviour to improve organizational status by putting forward constructive opinions or pointing out the existing problem.

Voice behaviour is mainly defined from four dimensions: content, direction, motivation or intention. Though the experts do not put forward uniform classification criteria, various types of voice classification enrich the theoretical study on voice behaviour.

Liang<sup>[14]</sup> extends the connotation of suggestions and points out that voice behaviour in China includes the promotive voice and prohibitive voice as well. Employees put forward suggestions or ideas and thoughts to positively improve the production efficiency of the organization; this behaviour is named as promotive voice. When employees do not want certain things happen or take prohibitive attitude, they dare to point out the existing problems to the organization; this behaviour is named prohibitive voice. Liang's dimension division is more appropriate for the situation in China, so this study will apply his theory for voice behaviour. The voice behaviour scale is as shown in Table 2.

The early measurements for voice behavior in dimension are simple, and Le pine<sup>[11]</sup> develops a single dimension scale with a total of 6 items. With continuous exploration and amendment of the definition of the voice, its characteristics of multi-dimensional are gradually developed. Liu<sup>[15]</sup> develops a scale of 15 items according to the objects of the voice (the voice to supervisors and co-workers); Liang and Farh<sup>[16]</sup> develops a scale with a total of 11 items, including 5 items of promotive voice and 6 items of prohibitive voice. When employees do not want certain things happen and take prohibitive attitude towards, they dare to point out the existing problems to the organization; this behaviour is named prohibitive voice. Employees put forward suggestions or ideas and thoughts with positive effects to improve the production efficiency of the organization; this is named as promotive voice.

Based on the results of current researches, the structure and dimensions of voice behaviour are still relatively simple; the measuring tools and multi-dimension table still have several defects; the exploration of the voice behaviour under Chinese cultur-

al background needs a reinforcement, it requires a full consideration of the influences of collectivism, harmony and power distance; cross-level researches are rare; voice behavior the cognitive motivation researches of voice behavior remain to be improved.

## 2.3 SSG

### 2.3.1 The necessity of introducing SSG

Establishing native SSG structure is the recent development trend; this orientation is still in the early stage of development, currently in Chinese organizations, it still have some fundamental differences in the basic structure of SSG study: on the one hand, it is reflected on a class and thematic construal differences; on the other hand, it is reflected on the differences of various thematic structure.

The necessity of adopting SSG is embodied in the form of Guanxi as well as the principle of reciprocity between China and western countries, and the limitations of LMX. LMX in Western countries is based on equality and SSG in the China is based on parental authority, so LMX and SSG have some differences: the differences between the exterior and interior and the differences of subordinate's self-presentation. LMX emphasize that the social exchange is not the only reason for the interaction between supervisor and subordinate. In the principle of mutual benefit, western culture emphasizes the rational factors, and follows the principle of equality, whereas the emotional level of Guanxi in China is more valued and the exchange principle is based on human feelings. In China, The most important factor to promote a subordinate to become a leader is more likely to be emotion and loyalty<sup>[17]</sup>.

Therefore, it is necessary to establish SSG based on Chinese local context and theory<sup>[18]</sup>. Even if the intersections of LMX and SSG exist, the intersections only compose partial connotation of SSG in China.

### 2.3.2 SSG

The early SSG research focused on the base and effectiveness of Guanxi, that is to explore the influences of the specialty in the relationship between leaders and subordinates on which the quality of the relationship

Table 2. Voice behaviour measurement scales

Research angle	Scholar	Scale	Dimension Division
Single dimension	Van Dyne, LePine (1998)	Advocate participation scale	Interpersonal communication behaviour
Reaction mode	Hagedoorn, Buunk (1999)	None	Caring and aggressive voice
Conflict management	Hagedoorn M(1999)	None	Aggressive voice and considerate voice
Suggestions of motivation	Van Dyne(2003)	None	Acquiescence, defensive and pro social voice
Nature of voice	Liang and Farh (2008)	Voice scales	Promotive and prohibitive voice
Objects Of voice	Liu,Zhu and Yang(2008)	Voice scales	Voice to supervisor and voice to co-workers
Organizational change	Jinzhao Deng(2013)	Voice scales	Tropism voice and evasion type voice

and the leaders' performance assessments of subordinates. Corresponding to the research on Guanxi, the study of SSG also has following opinions: (1) from the basis of Guanxi, SSG is defined as the special connection between the supervisors and subordinates who have some common experiences; (2) from the objectives of Guanxi, Wong<sup>[19]</sup> et al. believe that SSG is the established social connection between the direct supervisors and subordinates based on common interests and benefits; Chen<sup>[17]</sup> believes that SSG is very likely to Guanxi between family members, and it can be evaluated by the emotional depth and involvement of private life between the supervisors and subordinates; (3) from quality of Guanxi, SSG is defined as quality of private Guanxi through non-work activities between the supervisors and subordinates<sup>[20]</sup>.

This paper focuses on the quality of SSG and its influences on the corresponding output variables rather than the basis of SSG or the objectives of the establishment of SSG, and it concerns about the influences of the quality of SSG on the careers of subordinates, so this paper adopts Chen's definition of SSG.

There are two major methods to measure SSG: one is from the classification perspective, in which SSG is regarded as a dichotomous variable to define whether these Guanxi exist in superior and subordinate; the other one is from dynamic perspective, mainly used to measure the quality of SSG. Law<sup>[20]</sup> develops a single dimension table with six items, which emphasizes the frequency of social interaction in the non-work environment between the supervisors and subordinates, but it does not separate the emotional function of Guanxi from its instrumental function; Chen proposes three dimensions to measure SSG, namely emotional connection, personal life involvement and obedience to the supervisors, which include 12 items with application of Likert 7-point scoring method, and highlight the importance of the emotions in SSG. The SSG scale is as shown in Table 3.

This study focuses on the quality of SSG. Chen develops a more comprehensive three-dimension measurement table with good reliability and validity and matching the objective of this paper, so this study intends to apply Chen's<sup>[17]</sup> scale to the measurement.

### 3 A SUMMARY OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VARIABLES

#### 3.1 Mianzi and Voice behaviour

The existing researches about voice are based on

western culture and rarely from the perspective of Mianzi, and the existing literature always reached different conclusions. Mianzi often refers to the self-control and self-debugging of individuals in a variety of interpersonal communications, aiming at maintaining his own Mianzi and the Mianzi of others as well to realize the benign development of interpersonal relationships and achieve a balanced win-win status. Some literatures show that one of the reasons employees are not willing to offer advice is afraid of causing negative effects on others' Mianzi<sup>[5]</sup>; Mianzi has negative prediction function on voice behaviour, and middle managers are unlikely to offer advice in order to give others Mianzi or avoid offense; The employee do not want to take voice behaviour because of the fearing of questioning leader's ability or challenging leader's authority, thus damaging the interpersonal relationships<sup>[12]</sup>. But some literatures show that the employee who wants to get Mianzi or maintain others' Mianzi would enhance his promotive voice behaviour<sup>[2]</sup>.

Thus, voice behaviour will be affected by Mianzi, but the results of the effects are difficult to predict, and the affecting process mechanism is not clear yet.

#### 3.2 Mianzi, SSG and Voice behaviour

The studies about the relationships between Mianzi, voice behaviour and SSG are very rare, and even the exploration of bilateral relationships between each other are also less seen. In addition, some scholars have verified that Mianzi plays a key role in the mixed bilateral interactions<sup>[21]</sup>; the employees who are more in want of Mianzi will pay more attention to the social reputation of their leaders, and inclined to establishing harmonious interpersonal relationships with others and promoting positive impression management<sup>[22]</sup>, thus establishing good "social" images in the eyes of others.

SSG have influences on employee's trust and identity toward the supervisor, so the quality of SSG affects employee's participation in decision-making and the quality of the advice.

Employees who have high demand of Mianzi will be more willing to make efforts to establish SSG with higher quality, indicating that employees show more respect, dependence and tolerance to supervisors, which will motivate supervisors emerging higher evaluation and recognition to the employees, and the employees obtain more trust, information sharing and other social exchange, thus being more willing to participate in the management and offering advice; Em-

Table 3. SSG measurement scales

Research angle	Scholar	Scale	Dimension Division
Single dimension(static)	Fsrh(1998)	SSG scales	dichotomous variable
Single dimension(dynamic)	Law(2000)	SSG quality scales	the frequency of social interaction
Various dimensions	Chen(2009)	SSG scales	emotional connection, personal life involvement and obedience to supervisor

ployees with low demand of Mianzi maybe in lower quality of SSG, there may exist voice context with potential conflict, and employees will to reduce the frequency of voice behaviour. In conclusion, the influence of SSG on Mianzi affects employee voice behaviour, and SSG plays an intermediary role in the relationship between Mianzi and employee's voice behaviour.

According to the above researches, the research model in this paper is proposed as Figure1:

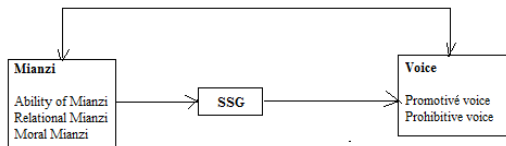


Figure 1. Research model

#### 4 SUMMARY

Through the collection and rearrangement of the literatures about Mianzi, voice behaviour and SSG, the current research status of are summarized as follows: (1) the study of Mianzi is mainly about theoretical discussion and lack of empirical researches at home and abroad. In China, the empirical researches concern more about the structure and current situation of Mianzi, and the study of effect of Mianzi on behaviour is lack of empirical researches; (2) under Chinese culture, the characteristics of the organizations and the performance of the employees under different circumstances should be different. Voice behaviour in China needs to take full considerations of collectivism, harmony, and power distance; (3) the study of the effects of Mianzi on employees' voice behaviour is less. Although the researches have verified Mianzi has an effect on employee's voice behaviour, the conclusions are not the same and the exploration of its internal mechanism is not enough. The empirical researches on whether SSG plays an intermediary role in the relationship between Mianzi is very rare.

To sum up, in China, poor SSG, high sense of Mianzi and human sentiment may impact on employee's voice behaviour, and organizations can increase the frequency of voice behaviour and improve the organizational performance by enhancing employee's Mianzi and optimizing SSG.

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