

**Naming Strategies for Organizational Communication:  
The *Ch'i-Shih* Approach\***

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**Abstract**

This research is not only a pioneering effort to categorize *ch'i* and *shih* according to their properties, but also one of the earliest attempts to apply the *ch'i* and *shih* concepts to communication study. It is postulated that, just as humans can exercise internal *ch'i* or exploit external *shih* to maximize communication effects, organizations can exert *ch'i* and acquire *shih* to enhance their internal or external communication. This study explores how *ch'i* and *shih* function, interact in strategies of organizational naming, renaming, and business transactions of names. It is theorized that an aspect of organizing is the maneuvering of *ch'i* in communication to complement the *yin* and *yang* natures of an entity of people with coherent efforts to stabilize the evolutionary process of the entity.

*Ch'i* theories suggest that the universe was first formed by *ch'i*, consisting of two aspects, *yin* and *yang*, which interact with each other to produce all things in the universe. The *ch'i* in action is *yang*, while the "cloudily unclear" part is *yin* (Liu, 2000). The two are alternate and inseparable. *Ch'i* permeates every part of the universe (Wang, 1989); thus, all human beings and materials have their own individual *ch'i*. While *ch'i* theory founders and scholars in all ages agree that *ch'i* exists in all tangible materialistic artifacts, *ch'i*'s existence and functions in human organizations are rarely studied. In Chinese languages, however, the word "*ch'i*" is used as a suffix to combine with other words to refer to climate, atmosphere, morale, and other human relation concepts as if *ch'i* exists in all human communication contexts – interpersonal, group, and organizational. This article contends that all human organizations, as in all communication contexts and all social institutions, possess *ch'i*, which is not merely a metaphor but is a substance.

This paper first discusses the concept of *ch'i* and its closely related concept, "*shih*." It then relates *ch'i* and *shih* to communication and reports how human

organizations can employ *ch'i* principles to maximize effectiveness in organizational communication. Employing the naming practices by organizations, the paper demonstrates how *ch'i* and *shih* can be used to analyze internal and external organizational communication in shaping and redefining organizational identities. Specifically, we examine how *ch'i* and *shih* can be maneuvered by employing naming practices in internal and external organizational communication. The analysis is concluded with a *ch'i* theory of organizing.

### The Concept of *Ch'i*

*Ch'i* is the most ubiquitous concept in East Asian cultures of China, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The word *ch'i* has taken on varied meanings, but those with the modern day connotations are approximately 2,200 years old. Modern scholars have attempted to bridge the philosophical and scientific perspectives in the study of *ch'i* with increasing vigor. Studies in literary criticism, medicine, kinesiology, etc. have yielded impressive results. *Ch'i* study in the field of communication has just recently begun, but it shows ample theory-building potential and heuristic value in communication studies.

In *ch'i* theories, *ch'i* is the most fundamental component of the universe and is omnipresent. It exists in the natural environment, especially in mountains and in waters. It flows in the human body. It emanates from artifacts such as common buildings, architectures, paintings, calligraphy, and other art works. The concept of *ch'i* has guided specific activities, such as personal conduct, acupuncture, *taich'i* (shadow boxing), swordsmanship, calligraphy, and painting. *Ch'i* is most commonly translated into English as energy flow, vital force, "passion nature," breath, power, ether force, or "the great breath of the universe" (Siu, 1974, p. 256). According to Chu Hsi, a neo-Confucianist, the universe is formed by the *ch'i*, as activating essence putting the *li* as ultimate reason or purpose into concrete form (Siu, 1974). Needham (1954) views "*li*" in Neo-Confucianism as an organizational principle, while *ch'i* is matter-energy. *Li-ch'i* then is the principle of organizing matter-energy.

An etymological investigation traces the word "*ch'i*" back to as early as China's *Shang* dynasty (ca. 1766-1223 B.C.) as found in oracle bone inscriptions. The modern notion of *ch'i* took shape in the *Chin* dynasty (221-206 B.C.). Since the ancient days of China, *ch'i* has been studied in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Legalism, and other philosophical or religious systems. It also has been studied, applied, and developed in literary criticism, arts, medicine, *ch'i gung*, martial arts, *feng-shui*, and other fields. Because scholars in various schools of thoughts emphasized various nuances, *ch'i* has taken on different connotations in different fields of studies and applications. As it evolved during

the past two millennia, this concept has taken on many additional dimensions of meaning. Before we define the concept of *ch'i* for this study, we will review various interpretations and connotations of *ch'i* as the concept is viewed in different fields, including the life applications and philosophies.

### ***Ch'i* in Various fields**

The *ch'i* concept is applied in various popular fields related to life such as medicine, *chi-gung*, and *feng-shui*. The notion of *yin* and *yang* is contained in all of them. *Ch'i* in Chinese medicine is considered the most basic element of all living things and of all human behavior. Between 3,000 BC and 2,000 BC, the concept of *ch'i* as an energy vital to human life was said to be developed in China (Hung, 1994). In Chinese medicine, the human body is classified into three categories: spirit (mind), *ch'i* (emotion), and form (organ). According to Hung (1994), a physician by Western training who spent several decades studying Chinese medicine, this typology is similar to the one given by Haniman, a German medical scholar in the 17th century who classified the human body into mind, emotion, and organ. The concept of *ch'i* in the human body is further broken down into negative *ch'i* (*yin ch'i*), including endocrine and exocrine glands which produce secretion (secretion), and positive *ch'i* (*yang ch'i*) such as body heat, the energy produced by metabolism and feelings through the nerves. As in the general theory of *I-Ching*, *yin ch'i* in the human body contains a certain seed or potential that will develop into *yang ch'i*, and vice versa. Acupuncture is a medical technique developed according to the *ch'i* concept in Chinese medicine, in which practitioners use needles to unlock *ch'i* flow when it is stuck.

In anatomy, the human body consists of several subsystems such as the respiratory system, the nervous system, the circulatory system, and the digestive systems, among others. *Ch'i* is said to flow in the body to carry out the coordination of subsystems. *Ch'i gung* practitioners can point out their principles and their experiences of exercising *ch'i* which flows through meridians in the body. Thus, *ch'i* is considered a higher-level system than those organic subsystems. In practicing *ch'i gung*, such as meditation, a person maneuvers *ch'i* in the body to "enhance health" (*yang seng*) or to "cultivate one's character" (*shu tsi*).

*Feng-shui* is an art of space arrangement to attune human life to the moods and rhythms of nature and to provide the sense of security and continuity (Chen, 1996). The purpose of *feng-shui* is to create an environment in which *ch'i* flows smoothly to achieve physical and mental health (Chang, 1993; Hale, 2000). According to Liu's 1995 study, (as cited in Chen, 1996), the theory of *ch'i* influences the practice of *feng-shui* in three aspects: First, the concept of *ch'i* is used in *feng-shui* to explain the creation of the universe. Second, based on the

principle of mutual penetration between *ch'i* in human body and the natural environment, the theory of "living *ch'i*" is developed in *feng-shui*. Third, the concept of "living *ch'i*" becomes the overall criterion of *feng-shui* to judge whether the environment is appropriate for occupying. Lip's 1991 study (as cited in Chen, 1996) indicates that the balanced *ch'i* (with balanced *yin* and *yang* elements) can revitalize the environment in a place with ideal *feng-shui*, and interactants can feel a sense of physical well-being and emotional equilibrium.

In Confucianism and certain branches of Taoism, *ch'i* has been studied not only as a philosophical system, but also as a set of concepts in self-cultivation. Since Confucianism has dominated Chinese scholarship and politics for more than a thousand years, *ch'i* has become an essential element of the nurture of the gentry class. Mencius, the first prominent Confucianist after Confucius' days, claimed that he was skilled in nurturing a *hao lahn* (grand) *ch'i*. His concept of nurturing *ch'i* contains two levels. At the first level, he proposed "reducing desires" to achieve an unshakable mind (*bu dung shin*) in daily life. At the higher level, he used *ch'i* nurturing to recall the distracted mind (Chiang, 1982).

According to Cheng Tze of Sung Dynasty, Mencius was the first Confucian scholar to propose the concept of *ch'i* (Zu, 1991). Although Mencius tried to define *ch'i*, he joined other early philosophers in admitting that *ch'i* is difficult to describe, if not ineffable. His remarks regarding *ch'i* recorded in the book of Mencius, however, shaped the concept of *ch'i* in Confucianism. Mencius' descriptions of *ch'i* can be reorganized and summarized as follows:

First, the *hao lahn* (grand) *ch'i* is "great and unbending." When nurtured with righteousness without being damaged (by selfishness), the *hao lahn ch'i* can fill (one's) world. Second, *ch'i* is under the command of will (*jhi*). When one's goal is set, *jhi* comes, and *ch'i* follows. But Mencius emphasized that one needs to use *jhi* to hold on to one's will and should not allow *ch'i* to run amok. He said that focusing on the will can move one's *ch'i*, but if one allows the *ch'i* to go in full swing, the *ch'i* may move the will. Third, *ch'i* needs to be complemented by two basic elements: "*i*" (righteousness) and "*tao*" (the law of nature).

#### **Major Schools of *Ch'i* Studies**

Contemporary study of *ch'i* can be classified into three major schools: the philosophical, the scientific, and the literary. Scholars in the philosophical school mostly deal with *ch'i* from the perspectives of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (Li, 1980). The Taoist Chuang Tzu's *ch'i* transformation theory contains philosophical and methodological bases for transcendence and for naming practice (Lin, S., 1993).

Scholars in the second category of *ch'i* study, the scientific school, discuss *ch'i* from the perspective of biochemistry or kinesics. A number of Chinese and

Japanese scholars have given insights to the theoretical frameworks in this regard (Yang, 1997). Siu (1974) contends that “living systems possess a unique capability of marshalling *ch'i*, which is not present, in inanimate systems” (p.260). Siu maintains that the living organism processes *ch'i* in conjunction with the energy transformations, which are characteristic of inanimate reactions. Death sets in when the capacity to process *ch'i* is disrupted and the corpse reverts to the inanimate world of energy exchanges, pure and simple.

Siu (1974) further explains that energy is “the essential stuff for structural integrity and mechanical and chemical processes, while *ch'i* is the essential stuff for pattern perpetuity and thinking and feeling” (p. 261). While energy-metabolism accounts for the vigor of health in the physical sense, *ch'i*-metabolism accounts for the well-being of the person in the psychic sense. A smoothly operating cross-feed exists between energy and *ch'i* in the normal and serene human being. Thermodynamic and tempodynamic forces join in harmony. He quotes D. T. Suzuki in explaining the workings of the *ch'i* by means of Chuang Tzu's “mind-fasting”: When Chuang-Tzu defines “mind-fasting” as seeing and hearing with *ch'i*, the idea is to transcend the centripetence of the ego-consciousness. Wang's (1995) and W. Lin's (1993) study on transcendence in kinesiological experiences of *ch'i*, also based on Chuang Tzu's theory of *ch'i*, brings the *ch'i* concept closer for understanding for modern investigators.

The third category of study, the literary school, is the most relevant to communication study. Chang (1976, 1994), for example, focuses on literary criticism with *ch'i*, an approach that can be regarded as the study of *ch'i* from the perspective of written communication. *Ch'i* studies are extended to the oral communication aspect when Chung (1995, 1996) explores the role of *ch'i* in leadership communication, especially in the nonverbal communication perspective.

#### **The Western Counterpart of the *Ch'i* Concept**

The 19th century British literary critic, William Hazlitt, uses “gusto” to refer to power emanating from artistic works (Hazlitt, 1930). Other words that carry close connotations, but are different from the meaning of *ch'i*, include: “atom,” as used by Epicurus in 400 B.C.; “arer” (air); “pneuma” (breath or spirit); and “psyche” (spirit or soul), as used by Diogenes of Apollonia, a Greek philosopher of 500 B.C.; and the “nous” (spirit or soul) by Archelaus, also of 500 B.C. The concept of *ch'i* is often compared with the concept of ether, a hypothetical medium formerly postulated to fill the atmosphere and outer space and supposed to account for the propagation of electromagnetic radiation through space (Soukhanov, 1999). *Ch'i* differs from ether in that *ch'i* is full of life and is maneuverable, while ether is lifeless and unmaneuverable.

The most relevant Western comparison to “*ch'i*” is “sublime” as proposed

by Dionysius Cassius Longinus, a Greek rhetorician living in Rome approximately during the third century. Longinus listed essential elements that can “transport” readers: expression must instinctively uplift the soul to be sublime; the soul must take “proud flight” “filled with joy and vaunting, as though it had itself produced what it has heard.” To Longinus, sublimity meant excellence of expression, the expression of a great spirit, the power to provoke ecstasy, and the ability to move others (see Roberts, 1899, p. 55). Kant further differentiates that which is “mathematically sublime” and “dynamically sublime” (Chang, 1994). In addition to Kant’s two sublimities at the conceptual level, Nicholson proposed that which is “rhetorical sublime” at the technical level (Nicholson, 1965, p. 29). Rhetorical strategies such as asydeton, balance, and antithesis fall into this category. These concepts of sublimity are rich resources for building *ch’i* theories and for constructing *ch’i*-related strategies.

#### **Definition of *Ch’i* for This Study**

Based on her study of the works on Chuang Tzu (399-295 B.C.), one of the early founders of Taoism, Wang (1995) points out four characteristics of *ch’i* that are considered the origins of *ch’i*’s utility for transcending techniques in sports: liveliness through mobility, softness toward tranquility, cohesiveness with the spirit, and innerness to the flow.

We propose that *ch’i* has the following properties: First, *ch’i* is ubiquitous, though invisible, because it is the most fundamental element of the universe. Second, *ch’i* is mortal. It may die out (disperse) eventually and need to be regenerated or condensed. After *ch’i* wanes or dies, a new one needs to be regenerated to act or communicate effectively. Third, *ch’i* is circular. Without intervention (such as regenerating), the “*yin*” element of *ch’i* may wane and the “*yang*” element may rise, and vice versa, forming a cycle. Fourth, *ch’i* is dialectical. The *yin* and *yang* elements balance each other to maintain equilibrium for a certain period before they switch places. Five, *ch’i* is fluctuational. It ebbs and flows, and is affected by an individual’s mental state, the environment, or others. Sixth, *ch’i* is perceivable. When person A comments that person B has a certain kind of *ch’i*, the “*ch’i*” may be merely a *ch’i* perceived by this commentator. Another observer, say, person C, may not necessarily perceive any kind of “*ch’i*” in person A. Seventh, *ch’i* is maneuverable. This is what is valuable about learning *ch’i* because by changing *ch’i*, we can act and communicate more effectively. Eighth, *ch’i* is developable. With cultivation, *ch’i* can grow. The emphasis on relative long-term development of *ch’i* is a major characteristic of the Eastern way of self-growth as differentiated from the Western way of self-growth which tends to stress fast learning of techniques and knowledge. In this paper *ch’i* is defined as a vital force possessed by individuals or social systems in the communication process.

In spite of enormous differences among various definitions, applications, and judging criteria of *ch'i* quality, some general conditions appear necessary to achieve the ideal state of *ch'i*. These conditions, all in the perspective of communication, are based on interviews with *ch'i* scholars and practitioners, reviews of *ch'i* literature, and observations of people who are considered full of *ch'i*. The first requisite for an ideal state of *ch'i* is forcefulness. A person full of *ch'i* appears vigorous or vital. To be forceful, one needs to strive to be focused. Distractions or the inability to ignore distractions will hurt forcefulness. Second, fluency. A person or a communication artifact with the ideal *ch'i* communicates smoothly like navigating in smooth waters. Third, coherence. Unity of *ch'i* is too idealistic because it does not always stay, but it is a desirable state. The ideal *ch'i* should be unified rather than fragmented. Fourth, profundity. Stability, rather than haste, is desirable for this state. Fluency without profundity renders *ch'i* voluble or overcopious. This explains why martial artists, *ch'i* gung practitioners, scholars, Buddhists, and Taoists all value meditation. Fifth, morality. *Ch'i*, especially which is emphasized by all Confucian scholars discussing *ch'i*, is veneration-commanding. Without morality, even a vigorous *ch'i* appears glib. An ideal state of *ch'i*, then, may be described as forceful fluency that is coherent, profound, and moral.

### **The Concept of *Shih***

Closely related to the concept of "*ch'i*" is the concept of *shih*, rendered as "strategic advantage." *Shih* is a word often combined with the word "*ch'i*" to form an expression that shares the same connotation as "*ch'i*" itself in popular Chinese language usage. So closely related in the mundane usage of modern day East Asian languages, the terms *ch'i*, *shih*, or *ch'i-shih* often are treated as synonymous. In modern Chinese language, *shih* refers to situation or position. *Ch'i* and *shih* often, combined together as "*ch'i-shih*," refers to strong appearance, posture, or momentum. But the *shih* concept has origins independent from those of *ch'i*.

*Shih*, first discussed by Shen Tao (born about 360 B.C.), was explained and magnified by a contemporary scholar, Han Fei Tzu, whose works were compiled in the middle of the third century B.C., entitled Han Fei Tzu. When translated into English *shih* means "strategic situation" or "strategic advantage." Hsu (1994) states that *shih* is the formation of a potentially powerful situation. Shen Tao's concept of *shih*, according to Han Fei Tzu, refers to strategic tools, points, situations, or positions. Shen Tao offers several metaphoric frames to explain *shih*. First, he says, "Flying dragon mounts cloud; drifting snake cruises with fog." But when the clouds dissipate and the mists clear, they are as powerless as earthworms and ants. The cloud and fog are *shih*, strategic vehicles or tools, and

the dragon and the snake are two presumptive animals. This metaphor implies that a ruler needs a *shih*, such as a position or authority, to rule. Second, Shen Tao illustrates a strategic point: a water buffalo's nose. A water buffalo is a balky animal, difficult even for a strong man to move. Once the buffalo's softest spot, the nose, is pierced and a rope is threaded through it, even a child can guide the water buffalo around. Here, the nose is *shih* or a strategic leverage point. Third, Shen Tao refers to a one-inch piece of wood on a cliff, compared to a one-hundred-foot tall tree in a valley. Even though the wood is much shorter than the tree, it is in a strategically higher position or a better *shih* and appears taller than the tree.

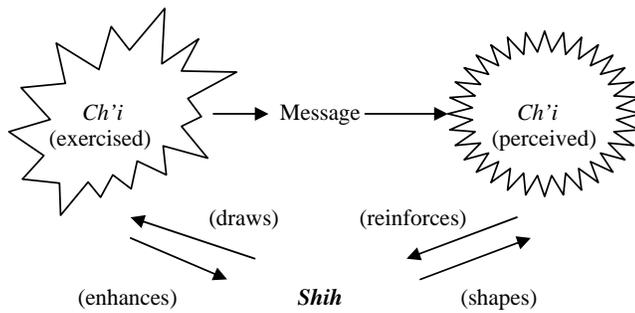
According to Hsu (1994), Shen Tao's metaphors explain how *shih* could be a strategic situation created by using a good tool or by holding the right leverage point. As Hsu points out, *shih* used in Shen Tao's days was a very difficult concept, and it had a different denotation from that in modern Chinese language. Even in the early days of the development of the *shih* concept, Han Fei Tzu said the term "had numerous varied meanings" (Sau, 1995, p. 61). *Shih*, developed as a special military term, can be rendered as advantageous terrain, condition, circumstances, disposition, configuration, deployment, or shape (Ames, 1994). In discussions of politics, however, the term *shih* as a special legalist term can be rendered as "political purchase" or "strategic political advantage." The most frequent usage refers to the acquisition of a strategically superior position and its inherent advantage (Ames, 1994).

#### **Reciprocity between *ch'i* and *shih***

Managing *ch'i* and *shih* is a reciprocal process in which *ch'i* can enhance or inhibit *shih*, and vice versa. *Shih*, or strategic advantage, situation, position, or vehicle, is external to a person. It complements *ch'i*, which is exercised internally. A person needs to nurture *ch'i* internally to own it, but needs to create, garner, or control *shih*, an advantageous environment, to manipulate or enhance it (see Figure 1).

Tseng Guo-fan, a well-known military commander with Confucianist training in Ching dynasty who quelled the Taiping Rebellion, wrote in 1865: "*ch'i* leads to *shih*; knowledge leads to fortitude, passion leads to rhythm; and interest leads to taste" (Chang, 1994, p. 479). Tseng, in critiquing an article, faulted the article for "lacking heroic *ch'i* and galloping *shih*" (p. 450). Here, "*ch'i*" and "*shih*" may seem synonymous, but there is a difference: The "*ch'i*" described with the word "heroic" is an inner state or a perceived inner state, but the "*shih*" delineated by the word "galloping" points out an exterior "tendency," a typical word for "*shih*." This critique exemplifies the close but dissimilar meanings of the two words.

Figure 1. Process of *Ch'i* Communication



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***Ch'i, Shih, and Communication***

*Ch'i*, as applied in communication, needs to be viewed from two perspectives: the *ch'i* in a person and the *ch'i* in an artifact. In communication terms, the former is “*ch'i* in the communicator” and the latter is “*ch'i* in the message.” *Ch'i* in the message, however, is a result of the mental state of *ch'i* in the communicator. It also can be a result of the messaging strategies enhancing *ch'i*. In the discussion of literary *ch'i* by prominent scholars in Chinese history, one of the main themes is that “A message reflects the author” (*wen lu chi ren*). Over thousands of years, prominent literary writers adopted *ch'i* as criteria for evaluating literary works.

In modern days, Yun Lin (Rosebach, 2000), a renowned professor/practitioner in *ch'i*, used psycho-analytic methods to classify a person's *ch'i*. His typology of *ch'i* appears similar to oral communication styles, and it may be the first effort to address oral communication from the perspective of *ch'i*. His categories include “bamboo *ch'i*,” “pre-nervous breakdown *ch'i*,” “suspicious *ch'i*,” “choked *ch'i*,” “talkative *ch'i*,” “porcupine *ch'i*,” and “ideal *ch'i*.” For example, when “*ch'i* is not enough,” a person of “bamboo type” would talk with sudden pauses – resembling a bamboo, which has many rings on the joints preventing the stem from being smooth.

One of Tseng Guo-fan's literary criticisms provides an example of relating *shih* to communication. In critiquing an article, he contends that the author excels in grabbing the “*shih*”; therefore, the article was “terse” and “tidy.” Here,

the “*shih*” apparently refers to “key points” – in other words, strategic points of the article. *Shih* on some occasions refers to a strong trend, or a popular sentiment, which can create the “bandwagon effect” in communication.

### ***Ch'i, Shi, and Organizational Communication***

If human beings and their artifacts all have flowing *ch'i*, and human beings can manipulate *ch'i* flow, then it would be reasonable to infer that human organizations which they build with networks of relationships and which they work in also possess and generate *ch'i*. In other words, if organic systems and the ecological systems in which they dwell and work all have *ch'i* available and manageable, it is logical that *ch'i* exists and also is manageable in the social systems humans establish. *Ch'i* exists in humans and the physical environment, but it can be transformed into a psychological being. In the context of a person, when exercised, it is similar to, though not exactly the same as, the Western concept of “energized vigorous spirit.” In the context of a group or an organization, it is usually referred to as the collective motivated or harmonized spirit. It can reflect an aspect of group or organizational climate or culture. *Ch'i* has the properties of mortality, circularity, and dialectics. For an organization to survive and to increase its life span, its *ch'i* needs to be constantly regenerated by invigorating one of its elements of *yin* or *yang* to maintain a symmetrical state.

### **Names, *Ch'i* and Organizational *Ch'i***

Maturana and Varela (1980), as cited in Morgan (1997), argue that living systems strive to maintain an identity by subordinating all changes to the maintenance of their own organization as a given set of relations. In *ch'i* terms, organizational *ch'i* needs to maintain its coherence and unity, the desirable states of *ch'i*. Morgan (1997) points out that Maturana and Varela's perspective helps to understand that “many of the problems organizations encounter in dealing with their environments are intimately connected with the kind of identity they try to maintain” (p. 256).

Burke (1941/1973) considers names as strategic answers to the complexities of life. Names are strategic because they attempt to address and remedy perceived problems in a situation; they provide an orientation or a way of coping with a difficult and complex problem (Burke, 1954/1965). Names, a kind of symbol, when appropriately employed, can bring *ch'i* to an organization and its members. In terms of *ch'i* and *shih*, names are strategic *shih* for an organization to foster *ch'i*.

Names can confer *ch'i* to organizational members and enhance organizational communication. First, names or titles in an organization confer

responsibilities to members, including leaders. Viewed in a positive light, responsibilities are privileged missions, which can motivate office holders. In the perspective of *ch'i*, names can inspire an office holder and develop *ch'i* to merit the position, especially when the title is associated with leadership or other prestigious positions. Secretaries, for example, given a new title of "administrative assistant" or "office manager" may feel motivated or "*ch'i* enhanced," regardless whether a pay raise is commensurate with the changed title. "Cool" job titles are increasingly common in the cyberworld to boost the *ch'i* by adapting to individual, organizational, or professional culture. The cool title is believed to be able to whip up a sense of passion among organization members and customers as well as boost company morale. When it comes to the company's legal documents, however, names "revert to the more traditional appellations of chief executive officer and chief financial officer" (Ackerman, 2000, p. B3).

Secondly, on group and organizational levels, names can help management or the leadership communicate an intention of changing the organizational climate. By so doing, names help groups or organizational members develop a desirable *ch'i*. Some organizations, for example, facilitate their corporate communication by naming their conference rooms. One organization dubs otherwise stuffy rooms funny or playful names to change their organizational climate. They hope names such as Play Doh, Frogs, Bugs Bunny, or King Kong would create a more interesting environment, promoting a relaxed atmosphere and encouraging creative ideas (Beckett, 1998). This positive organizational climate is close to the concept of the organizational *ch'i*.

The two approaches discussed above illustrate ways "naming" helps a person and an organization develop *ch'i* from within themselves. Another situation in which names confer *ch'i* to a person is from outside an organization or its members – in the perception of others. Credibility, for example, accompanies the title of a superior. In *ch'i* terms, names may enhance *ch'i* in the superior or enhance the subordinate's perception of *ch'i* in the leader. A newly promoted superior, for example, may not appear to possess the leadership *ch'i* but can become more so later. The perceived *ch'i* is conferred to the leader by the title or the name. (Notice that the *ch'i* of the superior here is not the actual *ch'i* a person generates, but the *ch'i* perceived by subordinates. The actual *ch'i* is to be nurtured within the person.) The *ch'i* is actually generated by the name itself, a title with certain degree of "sublimity." To the person occupying the position, the title is a *shih* or a strategic advantage, which is capable of facilitating the person's *ch'i*.

Some names are created to generate *ch'i* for the name itself and for the organization when conveying its identity. Exxon, for example, coined its name to be pronounced close to "excellent," which meets the criterion of *ch'i* because

“excellent” is a word that possesses the denotation of “quantitatively sublime.” Other names have cultivated *ch'i*. The name IBM, for example, was exposed to people with great frequency, a function of “quantity.” And the name IBM has associated itself with success. The name IBM has acquired both quantitative and dynamic sublimity. That a certain employment consultant recommends titles and business cards for everyone in a company to build self-esteem (Ackerman, 2000) suggests that names can enhance *ch'i*.

### **Names, *Shih*, and Organizational *Ch'i***

*Shih* can be defined as strategic advantage potentially facilitating or inhibiting *ch'i*. Certain circumstances in communication constitute *shih*: current mega trends, predominant values, strong social powers, useful political positions, large quantity of audience, et cetera. Names can confer *shih* to an organization to enhance the organization's *ch'i* and facilitate organizational external communication. Given the strategic advantages the name creates or fosters, the organization can generate stronger ideal *ch'i* when conveying its messages. For a deeper insight into the *shih* strategies, we create a category of *shih* strategies including four items: suck *shih*, buck *shih*, duck *shih*, and construct *shih*. With this framework, we explain how names or naming practices can enhance *shih* to facilitate *ch'i*.

The first kind of *shih* strategy is to suck *shih*, which refers to absorbing a *shih* by taking advantage of an existing situation to boost one's own *ch'i*. The “sucking *shih*” strategy involves two approaches. First, riding *shih* is to absorb *shih* by going along with other stronger *shih* in the environment such as general trends or advantageous positions. An organization, for example, can associate its names with the positive value or a very popular name to elevate itself to a higher *shih* or advantageous position and enhance *ch'i* for itself. The organization may adopt for itself or its products a name similar in spelling or pronunciation to positive famous names. Or it can take actions to associate the organization's name with another name which is receiving broad attention. “Stealing the spotlight” is typical of this strategy. An organization can associate itself with well-known names and increase its credibility in the eyes of its external public, including business partners. Office Depot, for instance, bought the right to claim on its TV commercial that it is “the official school-supply headquarters” of Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), a years old nonprofit organization (PTA, 1998). Another method of riding *shih* by taking advantage of names is to advocate a popular cause, such as environmental protection, to associate its own name with the cause.

The second approach to sucking *shih* is driving *shih*, which involves manipulating one's own *shih* to foster or maintain one's *ch'i*. For example, after

the box office success, the producer of the Disney movie Hercules produced TV programs such as Hercules in cartoons, Young Hercules, Hercules: the legendary hero (played by real persons in traditional costume). It is considered much less expensive and efficient to build off an existing brand than to create a new one (O'Connell & Vranica, 2000). The producer "sucks" the existing *shih* to enhance *ch'i* for communicating its promotional messages to its target audience.

The second *shih* strategy is to buck *shih*. *Ch'i* also can be gained by going against a greater *shih*. For example, a less well known or reputable person or organization can attack or fight a well-known or reputable person, organization, or trend to increase one's own recognition or reputation. By playing David versus Goliath, one can win admiration from the audience for the courageous *ch'i*. Bucking the trend or an overwhelming *shih* would be more effective in generating a positive *ch'i* when equipped with a justified or even dignified cause such as in the extreme cases of martyrdom. This favorably perceived *ch'i* may in turn boost one's own *ch'i* on the communicator as a result of the self-fulfilling prophecy effect. Bucking *shih* would demand a great effort yielding an unknown result. A case in point is the Hyundai automobile company, which, at the will of its president, Chung, attempted to make the company's name a household word in America. The common English pronunciation is a gigantic *shih*. Making Americans pronounce the brand name "Hyundai" is a difficult task of twisting English speaking habit -- bucking *shih*. It is no wonder that Hyundai invested millions of advertising dollars to help Americans rhyme the name with "Sunday" (Nakarmi & Holstein, 1986). Chung might have his own agenda behind the move, but such a practice of bucking *shih* is costly.

Ducking *shih* is the third kind of *shih* strategy, which is to avoid association with an unfavorable *shih*. Employing this strategy in naming would require a communicator, an individual or an organization, to evade exposure when a similar name is suffering from a negative reputation or image. Or, one should prevent the audience from associating one's name with an adverse *shih* - trends or situations. Kentucky Fried Chicken Corporation, for example, changed its logo from its full name to an abbreviated "KFC" because of the overwhelming trend of resisting unhealthy foods, including fried foods. Companies with Internet or dot-com in its name seemed destined for Wall Street stardom at the turn of the century. Then, when dot.com became "dot.gone," anything that says Internet only or dot-com only has warning and hazard signs all over it (Bryan-Low, 2001). Avoiding negative *shih* also is seen in the time-honored practice: immediate removal of airline advertising from mass media such as TV, radio, and newspapers when there is a loss of life by a domestic air carrier (Beer, 2000). The sensation reflected on and reinforced by mass media is a *shih* from which all organizational names need to shun.

The last item in the *shih* strategy category is constructing *shih*. An

organization can increase its public name recognition and brand identity and create an advantageous position or *shih* for enhancing *ch'i* in its communicating messages to the public. For example, Intel Corporation, a computer company, launched an unprecedented \$250 million advertising campaign to bolster its name recognition and competitive brawn (Myers, 1991). Network Associate, a Silicon Valley company in California that makes virus-sniffing software for network computers, bought the naming rights to the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum stadium in California (DeVecchio, 1998). Business organizations spent billions of dollars on advertising to build brand awareness (Pender, 2001). Constructing *shih* to facilitate *ch'i* in communication partly explains why corporations acquire naming rights sponsorship by paying tens or hundreds of millions of dollars to have their names plastered on a ballpark or arena (Pope, 2000).

### Discussion

The analysis employs the framework of *ch'i* and *shih* to investigate naming practices as organizational communication. A fledging *ch'i* theory of organizing and organizational communication in particular emerges from the analysis.

As Chang Tsai (1020-1077), a prominent *ch'i* scholar, points out, *ch'i* is a vital force in a perpetual process of change following a definitive pattern of activity according to two principles, *yin* and *yang* (Huang, 1988). *Yin* represents the relatively weak, soft, or passive element, and *Yang* stands for the comparatively strong, tough, or active component. As Figure 2 indicates, the two form a rotational symmetry making a continuous cyclic movement: *Yin*, when reaching the extreme, returns to its beginning, *yang* attains its maximum and gives place to *yang*. The rotation of *yin* and *yang* activates changes of every phenomenon and situation along the cyclic path. All entities, including dyads, groups, and organizations, have these two opposite yet complementary forces.

Two major states are ideal for a human organization: unity and dynamism. Unity is characterized by accord, harmony, and submissiveness, which maintain stability. Dynamism, on the other hand, is featured by ambition, expansion, power, and forcefulness, which generate growth. In the *yin-yang* perspective, the unity is of *yin* nature and the dynamism the *yang* nature. The two needs to be complementary to each other for an organization to survive. Communication is essential to coordinate the two as can be seen in socio-emotional messages: The *yin* aspect of *ch'i* in communication is exemplified by caring or petting messages which give warm or touching, feeling, and the *yang* aspect can be observed in motivational messages, which promote strong morale.

Figure 2. Rotary symmetry of *yin* & *yang* *ch'i*



Dark pole = *yin* (containing the *yang* seed)  
 Bright pole = *yang* (containing the *yin* seed)

Two seemingly opposing camps staff the organizations: employees and the management. The former belongs to the *yin* (the relatively powerless), and the latter falls into the *yang* (the relatively powerful). When the employees' *yin ch'i* goes to extreme (e.g., overly submissive), changes also are looming (e.g., suppression or exploitation may be tempted to escalate). Or, if the management's *yang ch'i* is too strong (e.g., too dominant or too arrogant), changes or turbulence are imminent (rebellion or strike will arise). To complement the two, they can coordinate the *yin* and *yang* elements in communication. For example, the management can either reduce its *yang ch'i* (e.g., humble themselves), or give employees' *yang ch'i* (e.g., confer an empowering title to employees as illustrated in this research). The naming strategy illustrates how *ch'i* can employ communication to achieve unity and stabilize the evolution of the organizational process.

A second phenomenon that reflects the evolution of an organization is its continuous cyclic movement of segmentation and integration, which results from or results in, for example, product changes. Moving from segmentation to integration (or vice versa) brings about an identity change. Communicating the organizational image to the environment would be more effective if the *ch'i* in communication is focused, an ideal state of *ch'i* as pointed out earlier in this essay. Naming, a *shih*, or an advantageous situation, can help focus *ch'i* in this communication, as shown in the analysis.

In addition, the organizational environment, as Maturana and Verela (1980) contend, can be envisaged as a part of the system itself. The environment is the *yin* (the passive) element, and the organization itself is the *yang* (the active) element of the system. Naming or name change reflecting the identity change of the organization can help the two elements communicate with coherent *ch'i*.

In sum, *yin ch'i* and *yang ch'i* can be maneuvered in communication to form complements in both organizational phenomena and organizational components (See Table 1). It can complement phenomena such as unity (*yin*) vs. dynamism (*yang*), and integration (*yin*) vs. segmentation (*yang*). It also can complement components such as employees (*yin*) vs. management (*yang*), and environment (*yin*) vs. the organization itself (*yang*).

Table 1. Organizational Elements in the Perspective of *Ch'i*

Property of <i>Ch'i</i>	<i>Yin</i>	<i>Yang</i>
Property of Organization		
Phenomena	Unity	Dynamism
	Integration	Segmentation
Components	Employees	Management
	Environment	Organization

### Conclusion

This study, characterized by bringing the *ch'i* theory to organizational theory, initiates the analysis of the properties of *ch'i*, deduces methods of enhancing *ch'i*, demarcates a boundary between *ch'i* and *shih*, and builds a taxonomy of *shih* exercises. It explores *ch'i*'s relationships with communication, organizational communication, and naming practices. This study conducts an organizational communication analysis by employing *ch'i*'s properties of circularity, dialectics, fluctuation, maneuverability, and perceivability, and its ideal state of forcefulness and coherence.

A *ch'i* theory of organizing and organizational communication emerges upon the completion of the analysis: a process of organizing is the maneuvering of *ch'i* in communication to complement the *yin* and *yang* natures of an entity of people in coherent efforts to stabilize the evolutionary process of the entity. The theory hinges on two premises: First, organizations possess *ch'i*, and the *ch'i* is shaped and carried by the interplay of the *yin ch'i* and the *yang ch'i* in organizations. Second, the idealist state for organizations is with unity and dynamics, which can be achieved by communication with *ch'i*. The thousands-year-old *ch'i* concept and theory are thus married with organizational communication studies.

Given its rich cultural implication, it is very difficult to interpret *ch'i* concept to the Western people. Future research can compare the perception of *ch'i* by Chinese or other Eastern Asian speakers with Westerners' respective cognitive/perceptual configurations of various linguistic terms closely related to *ch'i*, including "charisma," "vitality," and others. Future studies also may compare *ch'i* theories with some Western approaches to human communication

theory. For example, Susanne Langer's theory of the body as a complex of organic acts, may contribute to the understanding of the dynamic of *ch'i*.

To embark on further tasks of studying communication from the perspective of *ch'i* theory, more research methods can be employed to continue the journey beyond the new frontier. For example, in-depth case studies would shed more light on how organizations use *ch'i* to facilitate communication, and how *shih* enhances *ch'i* in organizational communication, both external and internal. Above all, the *ch'i* theory of organizing needs to be further developed to become a mature alternative theory of communication, organizing, and organizational communication.

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