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**SPACE FOR COLLABORATION FROM NON-WESTERN
PERSPECTIVES: COMMUNICATION IN AN ORGANIZATION**

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UUM

Universiti Utara Malaysia

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITI UTARA MALAYSIA
2016**



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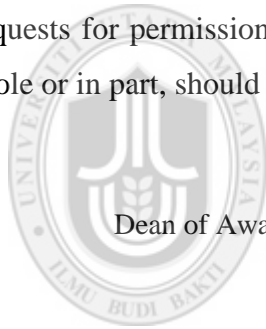
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Abstrak

Perbezaan ontologi dan epistemologi antara 'Occident' dan 'Orient' merupakan titik permulaan bagi menghurai penerangan mengenai 'Orient', masyarakatnya, budaya, dan minda. Khususnya, perbezaan tersebut membentuk asas falsafah yang berbeza bagi konsep ruangan dan masa antara Timur dan Barat. Merujuk kepada kajian Eurocentrism dalam bidang organisasi yang telah dijalankan, kebanyakan konsep ruangan telah dikomodifikasi dan dirasionalkan secara mutlak (absolut) bagi tujuan pentadbiran and kawalan; konsep ini bertentangan konsep ruangan dari Timur yang berasaskan kerelatifan. Akibat dari intelek imperialisme, kajian atas Timur yang menggunakan paradigma dan hasil pengetahuan dari Barat adalah tidak wajar. Kekurangan resonansi bagi paradigma bukan-Barat (*Non-Western*) dalam kajian komunikasi merupakan satu jurang ketara yang perlu dikaji. Oleh itu, kajian ini bermatlamat mengkaji kemampuan organisasi ruangan untuk kolaborasi daripada perspektif bukan-Barat. Kerja lapangan etnografi telah dijalankan di sebuah syarikat dalam bidang Teknologi Maklumat dan Komunikasi selama enam bulan. Data telah dikumpulkan melalui kaedah pemerhatian turut serta, temu bual separa berstruktur dan tidak berstruktur dengan 42 penganalisis berbangsa Cina bersama dengan sumber dokumentari dan artifak material. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa terdapat lima jenis nilai yang bukan berasal Barat dalam andaian komunikatif berkaitan dengan nilai utama keharmonian yang menekankan perhubungan antara satu sama lain, saling bergantung dan kebersamaan. Penemuan turut membentuk pandangan kitaran bagi organisasi ruangan serta menunjukkan kemampuan organisasi ruangan dapat menjana nilai kemasyarakatan dan sosial untuk menjadikan ruangan sebagai 'destinasi' bagi kebersamaan dan kesepaduan. Dapatan kajian ini juga menyumbang kepada kajian atas ruangan untuk mengkaji ruangan dari pandangan kitaran bukan-Barat dan bukannya representasi linear yang telah lama digunakan.

Kata kunci: Organisasi ruangan, *Non-Western*, Harmoni, Komunikasi, *Henri Lefebvre*

Abstract

The ontological and epistemological distinction made between the ‘Orient’ and the ‘Occident’ has been largely accepted as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, culture, and mind. Particularly, such distinction has led to a fundamentally different philosophy of space and time in East and West. In most of the Eurocentric organization studies, space has been commodified and rationalized as absolute for the pursuit of governance and control which stands a sharp contrast to the East relativism perspective of space. As a result of intellectual imperialism, placing East in the West paradigm through borrowed material and the eyes of others is impractical. The lack of resonance of non-Western paradigm in communication study is an apparent gap to be filled. Therefore, this research aimed to examine affordance of organization space for collaboration from non-Western perspectives. A six-month ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in an ICT company. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interview with 42 Chinese research analysts, documentary sources and material artefacts. Findings identified five underlying key values in non-Western communicative behaviour pertinent to Chinese cardinal value of harmony which emphasized on interrelationship, interdependence and mutuality. Results also demonstrated a cyclical view of space and the notion of spatial affordance afforded sense of community and sociality which making space a ‘destination’ for togetherness and cohesiveness. Lastly, the research contributed insights to study spatial production from a non-Western cyclical view rather than the long (mis)representation of linear way.

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Keywords: Organization space, Non-Western, Harmony, Communication, Henri Lefebvre

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, my deep appreciation is extended to my supervisor, Prof. Madya Dr. Norhafezah Binti Yusof for being a dream supervisor and supporting me in the best possible ways. I would like to thank her for her trust and motivation during the whole period of my study, and especially for her patience and guidance during the writing process. I am greatly indebted to her. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Prof. Dr. Che Su Bt Mustaffa for guiding me and offering valuable advice and comments throughout the years. Not to mention each and every one from Awang Had Salleh Graduate School, especially to Mr Mohd Azri Bin Md Nadzir, thank you for their kindness, support and countless assistance given to me.

A special thanks to Hooi San, a good friend of mine, for the sleepless nights, late suppers, laughter and tears we have had over the past ten years. It would have been a lonely journey without her. Also, I offer my regards and blessings to all other friends who supported me in any respect during my study.

Lastly, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my family. I warmly thank and appreciate them, especially my mama and sister for their unconditional love and care and for they have provided assistance in all aspects of my life.

Table of Contents

Permission to Use	ii
Abstrak.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgement	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Figures.....	ix
List of Appendices	x
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	11
1.1 Overview	11
1.2 Problem Statement	14
1.3 Research Aims	32
1.4 Research Questions	34
1.5 Summary	35
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW	38
2.1 Introduction.....	38
2.2 Discourse on the Formation and Development in Social Science Research.....	40
2.3 Placing the East in the West Paradigm: Critiques of Eurocentrism.....	47
2.4 Cultural Approach in Communication.....	77
2.5 Space, Place and Time	88
2.6 Theorizing Organization Space.....	96
2.7 Henri Lefebvre’s Triad Concerns.....	116
2.8 Space and Collaboration	121
2.9 Theory of Affordance.....	136
2.10 Summary	145
CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY.....	147
3.1 Introduction.....	147
3.2 Why Ethnographic Approach?.....	147
3.3 Selection of Research Site.....	157
3.4 Data Collection.....	159

3.4.1 Role of Researcher	160
3.4.2 Research Method	167
3.5 Data Analysis	174
3.6 Trustworthiness of Findings.....	179
3.7 Summary	182
CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS	184
4.1 Introduction	184
4.2 Setting	185
4.3 Entry into the field	186
4.4 Five Dimension of Organization Space	190
4.4.1 The Constructed Space.....	191
4.4.2 The Collaborative Space	196
4.4.3 The Symbolic Space.....	207
4.4.4 The Cultural Space - the “Chinese” Space.....	210
4.4.5 The Socially Lived Space	214
4.5 Value of Harmony Materialized in Day-to-Day Action	226
4.6 Collaboration.....	237
4.6.1 Characteristics of Collaboration.....	238
4.6.2 Types of Collaborative Work.....	242
4.6.3 Social Requirements for Collaboration.....	245
4.6.4 Spatial Condition for Collaboration.....	248
4.7 Four Types of Spatial Affordance for Collaboration	252
4.7.1 Intended Affordance	252
4.7.2 Perceived Affordance.....	253
4.7.3 Utilized Affordance.....	253
4.7.4 Shaped Affordance.....	254
4.8 Summary	255
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION	256
5.1 Introduction	256
5.2 Redefined Value of Harmony	256
5.3 Production of Space	264

5.3.1 Cyclical View of Space from Non-Western Perspectives	270
5.4 Affordance of Space for Collaboration	274
5.5 Summary	279
CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION	281
6.1 Introduction	281
6.2 Overall Findings.....	281
6.3 Significance of the Study	282
6.4 Limitation of the Study	286
6.5 Implications for Future Research	287
6.6 Relevance of the Study: Consequences and Ramifications	289
REFERENCES	294



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List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Contrastive worldview of East's polytheistic and West's monotheistic.....	55
Figure 2.2. Interplays between spatial planning, spatial practice and spatial experience	119
Figure 2.3. The Workplace-interaction model	132
Figure 2.4 Linear view of Lefebvre's spatial production.....	271
Figure 2.5 A cyclical view of space from non-Western perspective	271



List of Appendices

Appendix A Semi-Structured Interview Questions.....	338
Appendix B Personal and Professional Details of Informants.....	340
Appendix C U-Shaped Three Zonings in CCE.....	341
Appendix D CCE Office Layout.....	342
Appendix E The Researcher’s Route & Workstation.....	343
Appendix F The Locality of Lived Space.....	344
Appendix G The Distribution of Directors and Managers.....	345
Appendix H Routes without Access to Back Door.....	346
Appendix I Routes with Access to Back Door.....	347



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Space and time are always at the central in human activities. Yet, its epistemology and ontology views raised uncertainty in whether space and time exist independently one another; does the future exist and wait us to meet; what is space; what is time; where is the past, are among the common ambiguities in them. There are fundamental different approaches to view space and time in the observed world (epistemology) and the existed world (ontology). Studying the two entities from the epistemological and ontological aspects and Occidental-Oriental worldview would contribute in constructing different roles of space and time in organization practice.

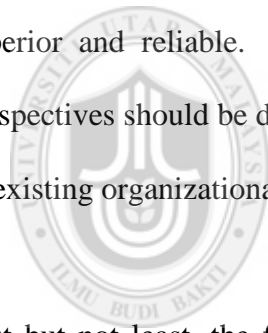
Although space has been studied in a rich body of literature from organization and environmental psychology discipline for more than 30 years, changes in today's workforce caused by the advancement of technology, coupled with the evolution of organizational structure and societal ideas, call for a reconsideration of the importance and role of space in work setting (Hua, 2010; Sailer, 2010; Peltonen, 2011; Wapshott & Mallett, 2011). More contemporary research is needed to not only reflect the current trajectories for space, as well as investigate the present workplace communication pattern and behaviour.

'Bring space back', mentioned by Clegg and Kornberger (2004) and Fayard and Weeks (2007), clearly suggested a need and interest in reconsidering spatiality for

organization social behavior for its conceptions are fragmented, and the discussion of spatial production leans towards a ‘petrifying’ take. Most researchers have reified the triad model of spatial production into three facets, rather than as a totality (Zhang & Beyes, 2011; Zhang & Spicer, 2013). To attend the organization of space in a systematic way, Taylor and Spicer (2007) made an effort to construct spaces into ‘organization space’ which may be categorized into three forms, namely space as distance; space as materialized power relations; and space as experience. The interplay between these three dimensions may be summarized in terms of space as empowering resources to promote and/or inhibit desired behaviour and interaction (Allen, 1997, 2007; Binyaseen, 2010; Serrato, 2001; Stryker, 2004); maintain and reinforce social order and social relationships (Beckwith, 2009); and encourage organizational power relations (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004; Zhang & Beyes, 2011).

Communication is always at the heart of management; it is the blood stream of an organization. However, the drastic changes in communication style in most of the modern organizations today have threatened the traditional workplace practice and communication pattern. The heavy use of tools of information and communication technology (ICT), high dependency on mediated communication and establishment of virtual team have shifted boundaries between home-and-work across space and time. Collective behaviour which requires intensive coordination and frequent face-to-face interaction to enhance organizational productivity is now becoming more challenging in virtual space. Hence, it is imperative to examine the current function, view and value of ‘space’ in organization.

The need to study space from a non-Western perspective is primarily driven by the current predominance of Eurocentric nature in communication discipline. Theorizing about communication from the dominant perspective, which means placing the East in the West paradigm, is impractical, problematic and irrelevant. Such incompatibility is mainly caused by the West epistemological and political constitution and their intersections within the non-West social structure; it is also one of the consequences from intellectual imperialism. More manifestations of these problems can be found in academic dependency, imbalanced knowledge production and a rising of captive mind which encourages imitation, mimicry, repetition and dependency because of the obsession and belief that Western knowledge is more superior and reliable. Therefore, an advocate of the idea of centering Eastern perspectives should be drawn on for intellectual necessity and to broaden the horizon of existing organizational communication studies.



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Last but not least, the fundamental cultural and philosophical differences between the East and West, from its ontological, axiological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of human communication must be examined to investigate how comparable the existing findings from Western-centric study would be in a fair summation across cultures.

In conclusion, this research aims to examine the influence of space on communication and collaboration from non-Western perspectives using Henri Lefebvre's triad model of spatial production and James Gibson's concept of

affordance in scrutinizing the affordance of socially produced and cultural concerned organization space for collaboration.

1.2 Problem Statement

First and foremost, there are two aspects of the world highly pertinent to human activities: the observed world (epistemology) and the existed world (ontology). While time and space are two essential concepts in questioning the nature of the observed and existed world, the perplexity is around the confusion of “do the past and future really exist?”, “where are the past and future?”, “is time or space absolute in the universe or not?” (Ma, 2003).

A vast variety of definitions is found for time and space. Ma (2003) explained the characteristics of the observed (measure) and existed (duration and extension) in time and space through several references from dictionary. For instance, time is known as the sequential relations that any event has to with any other, in the past, present or future; it is the continuum of experience in which events pass through the past, present and future; its indefinite and continuous duration helps to define in which events succeed one another; it is also the measure of duration, a particular part or point of duration. While space is the limited extent in one, two-, or three-dimension yet it is also a boundless or incalculably great three-dimensional realm in which all objects are located and all events occur. Space is also an extension; the internal between points or objects.

Epistemological speaking, the observed world is more related to empiricism, idealism, mentalism, immaterialism, spiritualism, subjectivity and measurement. As for the existed world, it is more to ontology of naturalism, materialism, physical entity, and existence. In most of the Western studies, both from science or social science perspectives, concerned more on measured and mechanistic view of time and space using a clock and a ruler for observation and mathematical calculation (Hawking, 1996; Ma, 2003; Cairns, McInnes & Roberts, 2003). It places time at the epistemological or empiricism level while ignoring the existed time and space.

According to Ma (2003), the absolute and relational theories of space and time vary from diverse scientific notions and different schools of thought. Scientifically, classic Newtonian mechanics position space and time as one of the fundamental quantities in physics where both are at definite positions and condition. Meanwhile, Newton's time and space concept is absolute from ontology angle; both are independent dimension. The assumption made is that time always flows in one direction-forward and space stretches from infinity to infinity, nothing in the universe affects the time's flow. On the other hand, Ernst Mach and Albert Einstein weaved time and space together into the very fabric of the universe where Einstein proposed that the laws of physics should be based on the principle of relativity and supposed that space, time and motion are relative to one another to cause momentum or consequences and mathematically combined into one object called '*spacetime*'.

Philosophically, the above absolutism and relativism perspectives are also two common struggles found in the West and East scholarship. Communication studies

from the Western viewpoint would usually put emphasis on an atomistic and mechanistic view which rejects relativism and between-ness. Unity is not necessary as everything is a discrete unit present in an independent sequential; which has little commonality to the East holistic view that considers the universe as a greater whole. From the East viewpoint, everything is relative and everything is perceivable only in relation to one another; unity is desired in the infinite process of interaction in generating different and diverse interpretations. Reality constructed in Eastern study is non-dualistic, they are plural.

One of the old Zen parables could be referred to show that time, space, and mind are related. Two men were arguing about a waving flag. The first man said, "It is the wind that is really moving, not the flag." The second man said, "No, it is the flag that is moving, not the wind." A Zen master, who happened to be walking by, "Neither the flag nor the wind is moving," he said, "It is your mind that moves." For the East, realities are open for interpretation; relativism is present as knowledge is not absolute. With this, Buddhist view of reality and *Bhartrihari's Vakyapadiya* view in linguistic meaning possess the concept of relativism for placing communication at a spontaneous level and on the notion of process which transcends time and space boundaries in the dynamic world; things are constantly becoming and perishing in the processual nature of life without fixed and absolute knowledge. The East knowledge is then, very different from the knowledge generated by scientific methods under Western positivist philosophy.

The same conceptions of space and time can be found in organizational literature as well. Modernist theories usually assume that spatial and temporal resources are pre-existing ‘natural’ resources that provide a setting for human action (Cairns, McInnes & Roberts, 2003). This assumption is evident in most of the organizational studies where they see space/time relations in the context of human thinking/acting; space is expected to be manipulated in order to attain more organizational outputs in a singular, unidirectional and linear-quantitative time (Hassard, 1996). In the sense, space and time are treated as *a priori* categories that have been commodified, rationalized and considered deterministically for control and manipulation. It then develops a complex understanding of how time and space, as resources, enable and constrain organization action.

Having said that, space would be allocated as a measurable setting for organizational practices and subjected as a structure for governance and control while time is absolute, true, linear and mathematical-based available as a commodified resource for planning and control (Goodsell, 1993; Baldry *et al.*, 1998; Chia, 2002). It is apparent that contemporary organization is endlessly trying to control both context and actors within it through the “...creation, reconfiguration and destruction of spatial and temporal resources.” (Cairns, McInnes & Roberts, 2003, p.127).

Such ontology view of time and space as an absolute existed world fails to capture the complexity of its roles in organizational practice (Hassard, 2002). It is important to understand that space and time are socially constructed through the interplay

between the space (physical setting) and social interaction (emotional response) in numerous times existed within the organizational context, from the past to the present and future. Space and time are more than mere resources, but also possess social meaning (Hassard, 1990). For example, Ford and Harding (2004) found that while non-managerial employees conceive of the organization as a place from the material territory which they worked; managerial employees (such as managers, directors, chief executives) would see organization as space based upon a sense of an immaterial space occupied in the organization for control and identity construction. Besides, Cunha (2004) study on organizational time revealed a dialectical view of time in organizations that synthesizes opposite perspectives based on different strategic orientation to the 'dependent', 'independent' and 'interdependent' perspectives of the environment. Generally, 'Action' strategies which rely on event time to handle scheduling view time as linear. 'Planning' strategies use even time to handle scheduling, impose their internal pacing upon the environment would view time as cyclic. Last but not least, 'improvisational' strategies which use 'even-event' time to handle scheduling synchronize via 'internal- external' pacing would then hold a spiral view of time. Therefore, it is worth considering epistemologies of space and time from the East and West perspectives and their impact on the understanding of organizational space.

Secondly, according to Lefebvre (1991), philosophical thought of space and social space depreciated and attenuated with the growing recognition of treating space scientifically. Ever since the word of 'space' had gained its geometrical meaning and mathematical concept; speaking of 'social space' was then a strange idea for

mathematics emerged as the proprietors of science which clearly detached from philosophy. The decisive point of turning the concept of space to its mature form was the rise of Descartes thinking. Descartes logical and mathematical style of investigation in separating mind from body, material from non-material brought to an end of Aristotelian tradition which enumerated space and time as two out of the ten categories which facilitated the classing of the evidence of the senses. The proliferation of mathematical theories is doubtful for its ability to justify and explain the transitions from mathematical spaces to nature, followed by practice and thence to the theory of social life; not to mention the space of (energy) flows or the Chinese idea of *Qi*, the vital energy that forms the essence of all materials. This is assuredly the fundamental problem of knowledge construction. Nevertheless, in the eyes of proponent of Cartesian rationality, epistemological-philosophical thinking still failed to furnish the basis for a science, even 'generate a discourse of space, cannot ever give rise to knowledge of space' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.7).

Lefebvre (1991) also talked about the idea that capital and capitalism would influence practical matters relating to space, such as the construction of the buildings, distribution of investments and the worldwide division of labour. While many may reject his idea of influence of capitalism on space, Lefebvre (1991) committed to his viewpoint by explaining the multifaceted of capitalism ranging from the most common aspects of commodities, labour, capital, and land to the less common aspects such as knowledge and hegemony - these are what together constitute capitalism. The concept of hegemony is more than an influence, more even than a dominant power but it is exercised over society as a whole, generally

through human mediation (leaders, intellectuals and experts) in all aspects including culture and knowledge. It is therefore exercised in both thoughts of institutions and ideas; its effect is pervasive. One of the consequences was the dominance of Western art and philosophy in the form of the city and town and more importantly, the egocentric thinking of Western intellectuals in demonstrating 'space' as something 'real' (Rogers, 2002).

In addition, Lefebvre's production of space induced a 'unitary theory' to discover and construct a theoretical unity between fields - the physical, the mental and the social aspect of space. Such interrelationship is concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice and the space occupied by sensory phenomena and imagination. For him, '(social) space is a (social) product' (Lefebvre, 1991, p.26). The key rationale was the assumption of that physical space has no 'reality' without the energy that is deployed within it. And social relation exercised among the actors within it. Meanwhile, to study and understand the production space, the coming-together of all field of space must be considered.

While Lefebvre views space as a product of social relations and as a process of coming-together through the triad model of conceived-perceived-lived; many current discussions on space in management and organization have divided the triad into three different parts, rather than a whole (Zhang, 2006; Zhang & Spicer, 2013). Space tends to be atomized (Taylor & Spicer, 2007) and being reified into three different modalities (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011). It focuses only on a singular aspect of space (Watkins, 2005) or the combination of the second and third approach of space

(Zhang, Spicer & Hancock, 2008). The crux of the issue here is the existing research has ignored the importance of seeing the three phrases (conceived, perceived and lived) in the spatial triad model as simultaneously and irreducibly affecting each other to ensure the levels of cohesion in the production of space (Dobers & Strannegård, 2004; Watkins, 2005; Löw, 2008; Haan & Leander, 2011).

Besides Lefebvre's triple concerns on spatial production, Fayard and Weeks (2007) also proposed Gibson's theory of affordance to study organization space more than a linear way of causality. The concept of affordance provides an integrative theoretical approach to study a property relative to the properties of some other perceiving and acting entity (Keane, 2014). Affordance then has become a useful way to understand space from its physical qualities while also taking other social elements into consideration. For instance, incorporate symbolic and cultural meaning of space interpreted by different spatial users into the investigation for richer understanding (Gieryn, 2000). Therefore, organization space should be given close examination through its affordance for allowing or shaping behaviour, rather than its impact on determining the occurrence of interaction event (Fayard & Weeks, 2007). As such, this research employed theory of affordance as a complementary model to better understand Lefebvre's production of space through the coming-together of the triad space, as suggested by Zhang and Beyes (2011).

Throughout the reading of Lefebvre's work, some of his arguments have shown a less rigid European perspective and thus, it provides an opportunity to study his triad model of spatial production from non-European viewpoints. Among the arguments

are: (1) the rejection of defining space in a strictly geometrical and mathematical form for it would place space as absolute and fixed which subject to manipulation and control; (2) rejection of epistemological-philosophical thinking in scientific knowledge construction; Lefebvre questioned the appropriateness and applicability of the only accepted paradigm for it must be clearly detached from philosophy; (3) the idea of hegemony found in all aspect of society usually exercised from the more powerful to the less powerful had constructed a dominant power over the construction of ideas and institution; which mostly dominated by the West; (4) the 'unitary theory' in considering all interrelated fields in the production of space are coming-together, be it in material or nonmaterial form such as physical space, social space, social practice and even the flowing energy in space. The above arguments construct a holistic view of spatial production which permits plural conception of reality. It somehow echoes a similar philosophical stand from the East. Also, the concern of culture is a *sine qua non* for the social production of space as explained by Lefebvre (1991), "...it is not at all clear *a priori* that is can legitimately generalized. Whether the East, specifically China, has experienced a contrast between representations of space and representational spaces is doubtful in the extreme." (p.42). In his book, *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991) claimed that:

Each society offers up its own peculiar space, as it were, as an 'object' for analysis and overall theoretical explication. I say each society, but it would be more accurate to say each mode of production may subsume significant variant forms, and this makes for a number of theoretical difficulties [...] How much can we really learn, for instance, confined as we are to Western conceptual tools, about the Asiatic mode of production, its space, its towns, or the relationship it embodies between town and

country - a relationship reputedly represented figuratively or ideographically by the Chinese characters?(p. 31-32).

Meanwhile, the lack of resonance of non-Western paradigm is difficult to reflect the production of space and realities in other parts of the world, especially non-West society, accurately.

Thirdly, picturing space as a frame or container is impractical and also a big mistake to treat an office building as having no other purpose than housing people in a three-dimensional territory, a factor known in Cartesian rationality philosophy (Clegg & Kornberger, 2004). Imagine a walled building with eye-catching flooring, modern ceiling design, innovative design of individual office space and interactive team space equipped with advanced communications technology; it remains in its furnished architectural features until at least someone entered the building, used the space, experienced the space, assigned meaning to the space and perhaps named it as 'office'. Therefore, space is a mental and material construct (Elden, 2004) which enables space to be interpreted and seen, and hence be lived in by inhabitants within their particular preferences. This is very much akin to Lefebvre's view of space as social practice and social relation. Lived experiences and social meanings are thus evolved from the struggles between the idealism and materialism in space and between conception and perception of space. As such, space serves as both medium and outcome of the social activities which offers a range of exciting possibilities for social construction within it.

Among the possibilities, social implication of space is one of the key ideas which have long been studied in organizational social behaviours such as interaction, collaboration, face-to-face communication, and knowledge sharing. These collective behaviours are vital intellectual capital and resources that associated to organization productivity especially in today's knowledge-based hybrid workspaces (Hecker, 2012; Hua, 2010). However, the growing popularity for virtual teams or virtual organization across boundaries of time and space via modern computer-driven technologies, not only provides organizations with unprecedented level of flexibility and responsiveness; it also challenges the traditional communication pattern and preference for collaboration (Ebrahim, Ahmed & Taha, 2009). Today, we have moved away from working with people who are in our visual proximity to working with people around the globe; as such, it gives even more impact over the traditional value of space (Johnson et al., 2001). Hence, there is a need and interest to reconsider the roles of space in modern organizations (Hua, 2010).

Fourthly, the acknowledgement of space in understanding management and organization has produced a burgeoning interest in organization space across a great diversity of disciplines (Tyler & Cohen, 2010). However, as Hubbard (2012) tried to encourage researcher to 'thinking spaces, differently' (p.1); he commented that the demand and efforts to link the discussion of space to the subjects across social sciences and humanities is still needed to generate theoretical knowledge that corresponds to the multiplicity and complexity of communicative experience.

One of the apparent issues in the existing communication studies is the problem of irrelevancy and disconnectedness by placing the Orient in the Occidental paradigm (Merican, 2005a). This is primarily driven by post-colonial intellectual imperialism. The almost exclusive influence of the West could be seen in the knowledge system where the intellectual works on ideas, models, problem selection, research priorities and academic curriculum have remained firmly Euro-American in character (Gunaratne, 2010). Such imbalanced knowledge production and academic dependency facilitate a neglect of indigenous historical and philosophical tradition as sources for developing non-Western social theories (Alatas, 2006). Moreover, studies with Eurocentric orientation have shown their limits and have begun to face challenges and criticism from other cultural groups for the East and West have very little commonality in their worldviews, knowledge production and their respective ontology, axiology, epistemology and methodology assumptions, especially in human communication. There are at least four fundamental differences distinguishing the East from the West; discriminating the Oriental scholarship from the Occidental.

First, the inclusion of the East's philosophical-religious tradition in knowledge production and human communication studies is crucial. Descartes's scientific system of Cartesian dualism and rationalism work in concert with the West's capsulation of religion and thus stands a sharp contrast to the East paradigm (Ishii, 2003).

Second, the East upholds an ontology theme of holistic and circularity where mutuality and interdependency between all beings in the universe are most wanted. However, the West's atomistic view of linear communication has rejected relativism and interpenetration between all beings and substances (Chen, 2011).

Third, Chinese axiology of harmony shows a definite contrast against the Western axiology of freedom and control is believed to cause difficulty in reflecting the genuine communication discourse and reality of the East for the reason of Eurocentric scholarship may 'disregard, downplay, or overshadow certain values and elements that have been historically embraced in' non-Western culture and communication (Miike, 2010, p.3). In addition, while most of the Eurocentric organization studies stressed the major role of physical environment or organization space is primarily for governance and control (Cairs, McInnes & Roberts, 2003; Elsbach & Pratt, 2008); Elsbach and Pratt (2008) questioned the extent to which findings from previous Eurocentric studies can be generalized across cultures, especially from the Chinese art of space arrangement – the ideas of *feng shui*. *Feng shui* represents a traditional Chinese worldview which emphasizes harmony, particularly the harmonious relationship between human beings and the environment; harmony can only be achieved through a searching process, rather than creating (Chen, 2007).

Fourth, the West's way of treating time and space as absolute has developed a single reality for all through a linear, clear, analytical and manipulative process of communication and knowledge production. It is in contradiction to the East's reality

which is always open for interpretation for its approaches of non-linear, ambiguous, ritual and accommodative pattern of communication and cyclical worldview that advocates processual nature of life via mutually defined relationship of all. All these fundamental differences found in the East and West worldviews encourage careful and critical engagements of non-West scholars with their own cultural tradition and beliefs to develop local, native and indigenous study by placing the East in the East, not inserting the East in the West paradigm.

Fifth, the large majority of Chinese Malaysian may not be intellectually familiar with Confucian philosophical teaching as they have been influenced by their respective culture and religion traditions in Malaysia's multi-ethnic society; the influence of Confucianism has indeed left its deep imprints at every level of Chinese society today, including Malaysia (Wong, 2008). The first generation of Chinese who settled in Malaysia may not well-school in the Confucian classics but they still live under the influence of Confucianism as their forefathers did since many generations ago. Till today, there are many of us who still practice Confucian teaching without realizing it (Wong, 2008). Besides that, the 'miracle' made by the Asian countries, particularly Japan and the emergence of four Asian tigers - Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea - who marked exceptional economic growth through the late 1970s and 1980s as well as the "Rising Asia" - China and India, who witnessed high economic growth rates in the last two decades; has generated popular and academic arguments on Confucianism, the core Asian cultural values, as an explanation for the miracle growth (Raghuram, Noxolo, Madge, 2014; Nair-Venugopal & Lim, 2012). Thus, there is a growing interest in Confucian thought

and studies, including in Malaysia aimed to better understand the Chinese community (Wu, 2000). Among the Confucian philosophy, cardinal value of harmony in social context and the principle of finding a balance between the needs of the individual and the orderly society are known as intrinsic to Asian values and the most predominant intellectuals and philosophies that have penetrated all strata of Chinese society and have heavily influenced the thought and behaviour of people in Asian countries (Yun, 2012; Nair-Venugopal & Lim, 2012).

Furthermore, to compare value clusters of people from the same ethnic group living in different circumstances and conditions, Soontiens (2007) conducted an international project covering Chinese youth from East Asian countries (Hong Kong, China, Malaysia and Singapore). Despite the findings indicating a significant overlap in values between most countries, there were also prominent differences. For example, Singapore and Malaysia overlap with Hong Kong's society and environment cluster, while Singapore, Malaysia and China generate a cluster around the value of maintaining a balanced life. However, there are remarkable differences reflected in each country. For instance, Singapore has a more materialistic focus; Hong Kong values lifestyle the most; China is the only one has a clear cluster reflecting the importance of family life; and Malaysia is said to be relationship oriented. The minor divergence of Chinese value in each country, especially in Malaysia, shows that studying Chinese in Malaysia may lead to a different outcome compared to research studies on the Chinese in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China, as these countries are predominantly Chinese in ethnic composition (Loo, 2011). Chinese in Malaysia represent less than 25% of the population and live

in a multiracial country where Malays, Chinese, Indians and other minority races coexist in a single social system (Department of Statistic, Malaysia, 2012). Malaysian Chinese is thus a significant group to be examined in terms of how they negotiate the use of space to strike a balance of harmony in a multicultural country with a rich mix of ethnicity and historical influences.

Lastly, as specified by Becker (2007), one of the challenges in examining organization space is that there is often a wide discrepancy between self-reported behaviour and use of space versus to what is observed by researcher. Such phenomenon has been known as methodological difficulty in studying space as pinpointed earlier by Yanow (2006). Hence, the use of observation should be employed to observe, identify and understand how people use the environment to generate a thorough investigation of spatial use (Fritz, 2014; Giuliani & Scopelliti, 2009; Chan, Beckman & Lawrence, 2007).

To study social research is indeed complex and sophisticated. In analyzing the 'double social life of method' or the multifaceted of methods, John (2010) claimed that although many agreed in employing research methods to answer social research question for it is a technique to learn about social world and allowed the researcher to describe it for practical purposes, the problem is we may frame the dynamic social world in a particular and technical manner. Methods and research findings are somehow both embedded in the social world and they can't be easily separated but we must also understand each of them have a life of their own too. The two assumptions are: (1) methods are social because they are shaped by the social world

in which they are located; (2) methods are also social because they in turn help to shape that social world. These assumptions are based on the basic arguments of: (1) methods don't come into being without a purpose; (2) they also don't come into being without sponsor; (3) they draw upon the existing resources, methodological, cultural and social.

He listed out four examples to explain the two-facets of methods. First, when the states wanted to know about their population in the late eighteenth century, censuses (rather than other methods) were conducted by classifying and categorizing the characteristics of individuals and then, aggregating them. Second example refers to the notion of 'population' was aligned with techniques of sample statistics in the twentieth century. For instance, sample surveys on education inequality became crucial to the policymaking that led to the growth of comprehensive education and the establishment of universities in the UK survey in 1960s. Moving to 1970s, sample surveys had then become a core tool for knowing the society; a tool that was indeed shaped by the social. Third example suggests the importance of studying colonized people qualitatively, in 'their own terms' using anthropological ethnography. The reason being is that it was important to understand the difference between the West and the rest. However, as post-colonized studies always relate to the ideas of imperialism, governing, civilizing and controlling; it was equally important to understand the logics of the colonized. Since the connection was inescapable, it is necessary to understand from both stands. The fourth example refers to the technique of focus group explored by Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton to evaluate a radio programme during World War II. John's (2010) concern

on focus group is that what does the talk in a focus group actually tell us; does it tell us about their attitudes or does it tell us something about how people negotiate and make positional arguments because of the power relation?

The idea of presenting the above four examples is to demonstrate that all these techniques - censuses, surveys, ethnography and focus group - have been socially shaped according to the research purposes; methods are social, they are shaped by the social world in which they are located. On the other hand, the story of focus group also tells us that methods may be shaped in ways that do not reflect the concern of the research sponsor or research purposes. Hence, perhaps the biggest contemporary social science challenge is 'how to handle methods being shaped in places that don't share the critical concerns of social science?' (John, 2010, p.3).

As a response to it, ethnomethodology is particularly significant because it concerns the ways which actors explain (describe, criticize, and idealize) specific situations based on their past interactions and during interaction with others in order to provide multiple perspectives to make sense of its physical, cultural and practical dimensions (Peltonen, 2012) and a subjective reality of interaction (Garfinkel, 1967). By suspending the preconceived notions of how the social order is maintained, we are then able to witness the actual social order in real-time production, which may be different from what is expected. Ethnomethodology asks for not how order is possible but how sense of order is possible in everyday situation (Garfinkel, 1967).

1.3 Research Aims

First and foremost, the research intends to respond to the predominance of Western-centric study in communication discipline by centering the non-West perspectives and philosophical assumptions in studying organization communication and organization space. The core aim of this research is to examine space for collaboration from non-Western perspectives through the investigation on communication pattern and behaviour in an organization.

The motivation of studying space from non-Western perspectives is mainly driven by the fundamental differences between the East and West from their respective approach in knowledge construction and paradigmatic assumptions of human communication. The impact of intellectual imperialism and globalization have created a state of agitation in every aspect of human society (Chen, 2011) where on one hand, the issue of academic dependency instigates the need for a strong self or individual identity since understanding ourselves through borrowed material and through the eyes of others are impractical. On the other hand, globalization provides an opportunity for different ways of life to be integrated since the distinct worldviews are colliding as people began to communicate closely to different people in the world.

Nevertheless, the fundamental paradigmatic assumptions (ontological, axiological, epistemological and methodological) of human communication between the East and West perspectives remain unchanged. Since the lack of resonance of non-Western paradigm in the communication study is an apparent gap to be filled; it is crucial to

study the epistemologies of space and time from a non-Western perspective and examine their social implication in organizational communicative and collaborative efforts. Besides, Henri Lefebvre's triad model of spatial production is also employed to bring space back into organization studies by joining its physical, mental, social and cultural construction. Furthermore, a careful investigation is required to revise the current reified notion of spatial understanding, while Gibson's theory of affordance is used to avoid the idea of determinism and linear causality view of space-collaboration relationship.

More specifically, the research aims to first examine the non-West communication pattern in the organization through the method of interviewing and observation. From the data collected, the researcher would explore the underlying philosophical roots of the observed communication pattern, whether there is any prominent constitution of non-Western philosophical principles or values within it. Of all, the cardinal value of harmony in social context is given emphasis for it is inseparable from the most influential non-West philosophy - Confucianism. Also, emphasizing on non-Western social harmony and social relationship is the most appropriate aspect in human communication, if one has to study the main differences between the East and West perspective on communication (Yum, 1988).

Next, by identifying the underlying or constitution of non-Western philosophical principles or values in the everyday situations; the research would further examine and investigate the construction of organization space based on the participants' common-sense knowledge, procedures and considerations to gain an understanding

