



## Education and Transnational Nationalism: The Rhetoric of Integration in Chinese National and Moral Education in Hong Kong

Shui-Yin Sharon Yam

To cite this article: Shui-Yin Sharon Yam (2016) Education and Transnational Nationalism: The Rhetoric of Integration in Chinese National and Moral Education in Hong Kong, Howard Journal of Communications, 27:1, 38-52, DOI: [10.1080/10646175.2015.1080639](https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2015.1080639)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2015.1080639>



Published online: 20 Jan 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 19



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Education and Transnational Nationalism: The Rhetoric of Integration in Chinese National and Moral Education in Hong Kong

Shui-Yin Sharon Yam

Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, USA

### ABSTRACT

Given the fraught political relationship between Hong Kong and China for the last 10 years, China has been attempting to integrate the semi-autonomous region economically and ideologically. This article uses rhetorical analysis to examine how China strategically adapts its nationalist rhetoric in the Hong Kong education curriculum, in an attempt to integrate Hong Kong citizens politically and ideologically in a transnational context. It argues that China's rhetorical and political project in Hong Kong had failed because the Chinese government had underestimated cultural power behind Hong Kong's cultural history and its self-constructed identity as a transnational site.

### KEYTERMS

China; rhetoric; nationalism; transnationalism

Scholars in cultural studies and politics have argued that as national sovereignty begins to wane under neoliberalism, nation-states have responded anxiously with a resurgence of xenophobic nationalism that transgresses national borders (Brown, 2010; Calhoun, 2007; Doman, 2005; Harvey, 2007). Given this interaction between nationalism and transnationalism, Inderpal Grewal (2005) argued that nationalist discourse and the articulation of national identity are now produced “transnationally by cultural, political, and economic practices” (p. 8). In other words, heightened nationalism is produced in response to transnational activities that threaten to erode a sense of sameness and solidarity within a nation-state. As a result, nationalism should be examined in a transnational context that considers how nation-states negotiate global economic and political tensions to maintain control and unity within their boundaries. As transnational political and economic forces of globalization uncouple local cultural identification from state nationhood, scholars interested in nationalism must now consider how nation-states adapt its rhetoric to different cultural and political communities within its waning sovereignty (Mignolo, 1998). China's participation in the capitalist world economy and its insistence on maintaining a socialist and nondemocratic government lends itself as a germane case study on how state power adapts to transnational economic and political forces that challenge

**CONTACT** Shui-Yin Sharon Yam  [yam@wisc.edu](mailto:yam@wisc.edu)  Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Helen C. White Hall, 600 N. Park Street, Madison, WI 53706.

© 2016 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

the state's political ideology and sovereign control over several semi-autonomous regions and marginalized cultural groups within its borders.

Rhetorical scholars have long been interested in intercultural communication among cultural groups, with a particular focus on the national and political communications in China (Garrett, 1993; Kennedy, 1997; Kluver, 1996; Lu, 2004; Oliver, 1971; Shuter, 1999; Starosta, 1984). In particular, recent scholarships have focused on the way China responds to the transnational forces of global capitalism by redesigning its rhetoric of nationalism and ideologically reigning in the few transnational semi-autonomous regions within its sovereignty (Lu & Simons, 2006; Mao, 2012; Ong, 2006). As China becomes more anxious about maintaining sovereign control in a transnational context, it begins strategically adapting its nationalist discourse for nonlocal audiences. Chinese official rhetoric, therefore, provides communication scholars a rich base to examine how nationalizing rhetoric is strategically modified by the state to ideologically integrate within its sovereignty transnational locales that explicitly disidentify from the state. Examining the ways China redeploys nationalist rhetoric across cultural borders will also illuminate the double bind the state is in: It must adapt its discourse and mask its political agenda to suspicious, nonlocal audiences, while simultaneously retaining its core nationalist ideology.

Building from scholarship on Chinese nationalism from the fields of communication, rhetoric, and politics, I will demonstrate how China uses education as a tool to reclaim national integration with Hong Kong—a Special Administrative Region (SAR) within the Chinese state that has been heavily influenced by transnational forces and discourses—and for it to establish its global political and economic position against the West. My analysis on the rhetoric of Chinese state nationalism in Hong Kong examines the ways a sovereign state adapts its nationalist rhetoric to a transnational locale within its state border—in particular, I will focus on how dominant rhetorical features of Chinese nationalism are being modified by the government to accommodate this particular site and audience. By examining the Chinese government's unsuccessful attempt at implementing a Moral and National Education (MNE) curriculum in Hong Kong, I argue that the Chinese state is put in a double bind when it attempts to espouse nationalist ideologies in a transnational context that does not readily buy into its dominant logics. On the one hand, the state must repurpose its nationalist tropes for the new context, but on the other hand, the new discourse must still reflect dominant state ideologies. This case study, therefore, illustrates the rhetorical limitations states face when they attempt to deploy nationalist discourse in a transnational context.

In the following sections, I will describe the political tension between Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to contextualize the rhetorical strategies deployed in the MNE teachers' handbook—a text that drew international attention by sparking large-scaled protests and hunger strikes among students and educators in Hong Kong. Given that 62% of the Hong Kong population identifies primarily as Hong Kong instead of Chinese citizens (Public Opinion Programme, 2013), my analysis of the handbook will examine how the state strategically adapted the rhetoric of nationalism deployed in the mainland to integrate a community that—

albeit within state sovereignty—denied the sanctioned national identity. I will juxtapose the analysis of the handbook with the critique launched by the Hong Kong Teachers' Professional Union, which illustrates the rhetorical double-bind China faces when attempting to nationalize in a transnational context. The article concludes by discussing the implications of this case study on national and transnational rhetoric; in particular, the contextual and political limitations nationalizing states now face.

## Chinese nationalism

The rhetoric of Chinese nationalism is a subject of interest among comparative political scientists and communication scholars because it is able to uphold its seemingly contradictory nationalist ideology of “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” while allowing the state to participate in transnational economic transactions and to compete with the United States for hegemonic status (as cited in Lu & Simons, 2006, p. 267). Existing research on Chinese nationalism examines the subject from either an international or a national perspective. On one hand, researchers have examined how China negotiates its fraught sovereign and political relations in the international arena with the United States and its neighboring countries (Guang, 2005; Hartnett, 2011; Lu, 2012). On the other hand, many communication scholars have also examined the characteristics of state-sanctioned Chinese nationalism within the mainland, where the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has relatively stronger cultural and political power (Guo, 2004; Kang, 1998; Lu & Simons, 2006). However, as China selectively develops different regions under global capitalism, certain cities have become “strategic sites in the global economy [that] tend, in part, to become disconnected from their region and even nation” (Sassen, 1998, p. 73). In other words, in addition to examining how China mobilizes the rhetoric of nationalism within its mainland stronghold, we must also consider how the government strategically adapts its nationalist discourse in transnational cities that distinguish themselves from the state historically, culturally, and politically.

Domestically, Chinese state nationalist rhetoric is usually deployed in government propaganda materials, and also in the CCP “Patriotic Education” curriculum (Guo, 2004). Stylistically, the type of rhetoric often relies on “highly formalized, politically correct language [that] tended to be ambiguous and abstract in meaning, and, therefore, open to different interpretations” (Lu, 2004, p. 161). It also emphasizes loyalty toward the CCP by “portray[ing] the state as the embodiment of the nation’s will, seeking for its goals the kind of loyalty and support granted the nation itself and trying to create a sense of nationhood among all its citizens” (Townsend, 1996, p. 18). To persuade the domestic audience that national stability can only be guaranteed by the CCP, the Party constructs its nationalist argument through what Mao (2012) and Guo (2004) referred to as *Chinese postcolonialism*. Key to this argument is a sense of national victimhood inflicted by Western powers, particularly the United States. By emphasizing China’s victimization by foreign powers in the past century and in recent times, the Party can form “a collective cultural memory

that contributes directly to a contemporary sense of victimhood” (Calhoun, 1998, p. 20). This sense of shared victimhood allows the Party to persuade the Chinese people that they should all target the external enemy instead of scrutinizing domestic politics (Lu, 1998).

The Chinese state also conjures up cultural rhetorics of nationalism based on the celebration of traditional Chinese cultures and what the authority sees as authentic Chineseness to create a sense of cultural solidarity and deference toward historical traditions and values (Guo, 2004; Lu, 2004). For example, the CCP celebrates what are widely considered as national cultures and rituals and deploys Confucian tropes in their political statements and slogans, such as the famous motto “Putting people first” (Lu & Simons, 2006).

As mentioned above, existing research on Chinese nationalism focuses on rhetorical deployment either within the Chinese nation-state or in relation to other sovereign states; it, however, does not account for how the Chinese government is strategically adapting its nationalist rhetoric to integrate within its sovereignty a transnational audience and locale that actively resists state ideologies. Such a project reveals the rhetorical challenges that even politically powerful states will face when attempting to nationalize under a transnational landscape.

## Background

China’s state nationalist rhetoric becomes increasingly relevant as the leadership of the CCP attempts to reposition and rebrand the Chinese state as a global political and economic leader that could rival the United States, while maintaining its authority and legitimacy as the ruling party of China (Guo, 2004; Kang, 1998; Lu & Simons, 2006). As a result, the Party-state has been actively deploying and adapting the rhetoric of nationalism to remain legitimate and relevant both domestically and internationally. To secure its current political position, the Chinese government must ensure political integration within its border to prevent further dissent. The CCP is therefore anxious to secure political and ideological control over semi-autonomous regions such as Hong Kong. As a designated SAR and a transnational locale with relatively independent economic, political, and legal systems, Hong Kong poses a political threat to the Chinese government. Hong Kongers’ increased demands for universal suffrage and active disidentification from China have also heightened the tension between the city and the Chinese state (Degolyer, 2014).

The denial of Chinese national identity among Hong Kong citizens began during the colonial era. Because of their relative economic success, Hong Kong citizens often perceived the city and themselves as exceptions to the rest of China (Lo, 2006; Ma, 2002). Hong Kong citizens’ denial of the Chinese nation-state posed a tremendous challenge for the Chinese government as it began to consider the re-integration of Hong Kong in 1997. After the return of sovereignty, Hong Kong was designated as a Special Administrative Region with independent legal, financial, and political systems that resembled the British framework. Despite such an agreement, many Hong

Kong citizens continued to fear the encroachment of the CCP and began applying for foreign citizenships in countries across continents (Ong, 1999).

After the return of sovereignty, Hong Kong remains attractive to transnational investors who use Hong Kong as the intermediary to conduct trade with the PRC (Harvey, 2007). In addition, Hong Kong has also been under the influence of transnational human rights and political campaigns that circulate liberal tropes such as liberty, democracy, and freedom of speech. In the past few years, Hong Kongers have orchestrated multiple large-scaled protests against the Chinese government over their violations of human rights. They also became increasingly discontent with China's suppression of electoral democracy in the SAR by appointing key officials in the Hong Kong government, which culminated to the current and ongoing Umbrella Movement. China's continuous persecutions and tortures of mainland activists have motivated Hong Kong people to mobilize dominant transnational human rights tropes against the regime. Although these tropes are commonly used by the United States to criticize China, Hong Kongers have also used similar human rights discourses to criticize the U.S. government for violating the civil rights of its citizens (Lai, 2013). By appropriating Western-oriented human rights and liberal discourses to criticize both the United States and the Chinese government, the Hong Kong public has demonstrated its propensity for constructing strategic transnational arguments that challenge a rigid state-centric framework.<sup>1</sup> The discourse of democracy, in particular, is especially salient in the city as a response to China's continual suppression.

As He (2003) argued, the PRC could not allow the rhetoric of democratization in Hong Kong for two reasons: China sees the concept of democracy as part of Western indoctrination, and it could not allow the democratization of Hong Kong to derail the CCP's rhetoric of pan-Chinese nationalism. In other words, to demonstrate its relevance and legitimacy, the CCP must maintain political stability through reuniting with Hong Kong ideologically and politically (Guo, 2004). China, therefore, engaged in what Ong (2006) called "zoning technologies" as a detour toward political integration by treating Hong Kong as an economic enclave of China (p. 103). For the PRC, the economic ties between China and Hong Kong served the political purpose of eventual ideological integration. The increasingly close economic and political connections between the PRC and Hong Kong have prompted more frequent protests in the city using transnational tropes such as democracy, liberty, and freedom of speech. As economic relations prompted further resistance from Hong Kong citizens and failed to integrate the SAR politically, the Chinese government resorted to education as a means to enhance Chinese national identification in Hong Kong.

### **Context, texts, and analysis procedure**

Because of China's precedence in using education as a tool for political indoctrination (Guo, 2004), Hong Kong citizens were extremely wary of the proposal of MNE, fearing that China would use this curriculum as a means to indoctrinate the

youth. In September 2012, thousands of Hong Kong students, parents, and teachers surrounded the government headquarters to protest the introduction of an official MNE curriculum in Hong Kong schools. Under this proposal, by 2015 all schools must implement MNE as a mandatory subject independent from existing social science and history courses. Although the protest had caused the Hong Kong government to formally shelf the curriculum guide for MNE, many worried that the Chinese government would continue to integrate the city ideologically within the state.<sup>2</sup>

Although the proposal for MNE initially went unnoticed by the public, it led to heightened public outcry when the Hong Kong Education Bureau distributed a newly published teacher's handbook in Chinese, titled *The Chinese Model*, to all elementary and secondary schools in the city. Published by two organizations heavily subsidized by the government, and sponsored by the Hong Kong SAR Education Bureau, this handbook was seen by the Hong Kong public as the official pedagogical guidelines for MNE and as a reflection of Chinese state ideologies.

This 34-page handbook discusses what a Chinese Model entails in terms of governance, economy, foreign policies, and culture. In particular, this handbook focuses on China's economic superiority in the global economy. Although the Hong Kong government insisted that teachers could freely design the curriculum for national education, the government-sponsored MNE handbook was seen by most citizens as reflecting the ideology of the pro-China Hong Kong government. Teachers, particularly those who worked in public schools, worried that if they did not follow the curriculum outlined by the handbook, they would suffer political consequences. At the same time, many educators and activists criticized the handbook for ideologically indoctrinating Chinese students through the soft power of education.

Using Hesford's (2011) framework of intercontextuality, I deploy a theory-driven rhetorical analysis to examine the way discourses travel and get appropriated or reinterpreted across cultural contexts (see Leff, 1980; Jasinski, 2001). According to Hesford (2011):

To read intercontextually is to ... become reflexive about the social codes and habits of interpretation that shape the composition or performance's meaning and that it enacts, and to comprehend how texts are formed by the institutions and material contexts that produce them and through which they articulate. (p. 11)

This theoretical framework is particularly useful in studying transnational rhetoric because it reminds us that transnational communicative acts are produced and take place within an interconnected network of institutions and geopolitical contexts. A thorough rhetorical analysis, therefore, must take into account not only the rhetorics deployed in local primary texts, but also the social, historical, and political contexts surrounding the texts and the events. In addition, this framework calls for greater attunement towards the positionalities of the various agents—either as individuals, institutions, or states—who produce, consume, circulate, and respond to the texts.

To understand how the rhetoric of Chinese nationalism is redesigned and received in a transnational context through this theoretical lens, I trace moments in

the text where the authors of the MNE handbook actively repurpose both Western and Chinese discourses to accommodate a transnational audience that has developed a separate cultural and national identity from the dominant Chinese nation-state. In particular, I examine how dominant rhetorical features of Chinese nationalism were redesigned in the handbook according to the shifting cultural contexts, geopolitical relations, and material conditions on a transnational scale. Driven by Hesford's model of intercontextuality, I pay close attention to the social, political, and historical relationships among China, Hong Kong, and the United States to situate the primary text within a transnational network. Finally, I take into account audience reception by closely analyzing passages of the handbook that elicit in-depth criticism from the Hong Kong Professional Teacher's Union (HKPTU; n.d.) press release. Because the HKPTU was one of the two main organizers of the city-wide protest and hunger strike, this widely circulated document was representative of the arguments made against the handbook during this social movement.

### **A rhetorical analysis of the MNE handbook**

Even though the document was promoted as teaching recommendations for teachers, the design and content of the handbook resembles that of a subject textbook for students: suggested lesson plans and pedagogical recommendations occupy only four pages of the handbook, and the main text is punctured throughout with colorful pictures and short, overly simplified definitions of key political concepts such as “democratic centralism” and “unilateralism.” In the Hong Kong context, textbooks are taken as an authority that students cannot deviate from without getting penalized (Lilley, 2001). In other words, the audience is encouraged to interpret the content as facts, rather than disputable recommendations. As Hong Kong students who are initiated into the mainstream education system are often trained to answer seemingly open-ended questions using only the arguments and “facts” provided by the textbook, many class activities, and discussion questions in the MNE handbook are likely to be interpreted by its readers as a test for fact recitation rather than as opportunities to form opposing arguments (Lilley, 2001). For example, after learning about the alleged advantages and popularity of the Chinese Model, and the way Washington Consensus “destroyed the economic and social structure of Latin America” (p. 4), students are asked to explain what makes the former a better system in general. In another instance, the handbook asks students to answer “whether it is fair for China to be criticized by the West for ignoring human rights violations in other countries, when China is only respecting the sovereignty of others” (p. 14). Such seemingly open-ended but ideologically guided questions foreclose the opportunity for students—and even public school teachers—to diverge from China's ideological agenda.

In addition to using the textbook genre strategically to further state-sanctioned logics, the author(s) of the handbook also repurpose global economic arguments against the United States to simultaneously bolster China's image and appeal to the interests of the Hong Kong public. Although Hong Kong people have historically

focused mainly on capitalist economic activities, instead of on political and human rights issues because of their lack of political agency under colonialism (Abbas, 1997), they have recently shifted their attention towards civil rights activism against state governments. The author(s) of the handbook, therefore, are placed in a rhetorical double-bind: They either risk being irrelevant to the Hong Kong audience, or they may jeopardize the state's nationalizing agenda by mentioning too many taboo topics. As a result of such high political stakes, the handbook focuses almost exclusively on repurposing economic arguments—which can seem more politically neutral at first glance. The overall framing of the handbook, therefore, does not address the most pressing concerns among the Hong Kong people at the current moment. On the contrary, the text focuses primarily on the dichotomous power struggle between China and the United States, which has more resonances in mainland China than in Hong Kong.

To repurpose economic claims to make a nationalizing argument, the handbook on the one hand places most of its emphasis on the economic superiority of China in the capitalist market, and on the other hand attempts to downplay the economic and political significance of the United States as it is widely seen as the leader of the global economy. Premised on the concept of the Chinese Model, the handbook builds its foundation on the theory that the economic model of Beijing is now more superior and relevant than that of the United States. The introduction of the handbook is largely based on Joshua Cooper Ramo's 2004 paper "The Beijing Consensus: Notes on the New Physics of Chinese Power," published by the Foreign Policy Center—a European think tank sponsored by Tony Blair. In the paper, Ramo (2004) argued that the Beijing Consensus is now overtaking the United States economically, using formalized discourse and ambiguous concepts that closely resembles those of the Chinese government.

Here, the handbook attempts to bolster the credibility of Ramo's (2004) economic—and in fact, ideological—argument by strategically repurposing the ethos of Western scholarship. For example, Ramo's professional background as the former editor of *Time* and an international affairs analyst for CNN is used rhetorically in the MNE handbook: his credentials and experiences in Western media outlet allow him to be seen as a more credible source among Hong Kong readers, even though his argument resembles that of the PRC. Even though the reliance on Western research to promote the legitimacy of Chinese economic model against United States dominance poses a political and rhetorical paradox, it was seen as potentially effective in the Hong Kong context. Because citizens of the SAR distrust the Chinese government and its publications, the authors of the MNE handbook must rely on Western scholarship to demonstrate the alleged superiority of the Chinese Model in the global arena. As a result, the first chapter of the handbook is filled with select quotes from U.S. scholars—such as Arif Dirlik, John Williamson, and Niall Ferguson—that are taken out of context to persuade the Hong Kong audience of the handbook's alleged intellectual rigor and political neutrality. For example, the handbook mentions that Dirlik (2006) criticized Ramo for underplaying China's historical background and existing problems but emphasizes with a direct quote that

Dirlik also agrees that China's unique foreign policies "may provide the world with a new international order" (p. 2). What the handbook does not and cannot mention, however, is Dirlik's severe critique of Ramo. By selectively quoting Dirlik and dismissing the larger aim of his paper, the handbook repurposes Dirlik's scholarly status and his work to fulfill China's ideological purpose.

Attempting to mask its ideological agenda with economic arguments, the Chinese Model is rhetorically positioned in the handbook as superior to the existing Western economic paradigm through a dialectic comparison. In particular, the handbook carefully describes the historical background and critiques of the Washington Consensus. It points out that the Washington Consensus encourages free market economy, which has given multinational corporations and financial firms the ability to control national politics. The handbook then uses the downfall of the Washington Consensus and the capitalist global economy to construct a binary comparison: "The difference between the Beijing Consensus and the Washington Consensus is that while the former aims to help the common citizens, the latter seek to help bankers; some also argue that this is the difference between socialism and capitalism" (p. 2). Considering that Hong Kong has been actively participating in the capitalist economy dominated by neoliberal ideology, the Chinese government attempts to persuade Hong Kong audiences that the dominant Western model is, in the long run, damaging towards them. The binary between dominant neoliberalism and the China Model also demonstrates how the Chinese state rhetorically negotiates the economic and ideological paradox behind the allegedly communist state's participation in the global capitalist market: by distinguishing China's ideological model from that of North American and European countries while attributing China's economic success solely to "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the Chinese government is able to assert its political and economic dominance over Western nation-states and protects the CCP's claim to legitimacy.

In addition to repurposing economic arguments as a nationalizing tool, the handbook also adapts anti-American discourses that, while proven effective in mainland China, will likely be criticized in Hong Kong (Guo, 2004; Lu, 1998). As a result, while the handbook continues to us the us-versus-them dichotomy when describing Sino-American relationships, it shies away from making overt denigrating claims against the United States. Instead, the handbook redeploys Confucian tropes—concepts that are widely accepted by the Hong Kong public—as a way to deliver its anti-American and nationalizing logics.

For example, in the chapter "Content of the Chinese Model," the handbook offers a general discussion of the political characteristics of the Chinese state. The introduction draws extensively from the Confucian trope of "putting people first" (p. 5), which allows the CCP to brand itself as a benevolent government that practices the traditional virtue of *ren zheng*—compassionate policies (Lu & Simons, 2006). Direct quotes from classical Mencian and Confucian texts are then followed by a picture of the former Chinese president Hu Jintao warmly conversing with a group of farmers in Henan, an agricultural province in mainland China that

has suffered significantly from the widened wealth gap under capitalism. That section emphasizes that, “The Chinese Model, when manifested politically, becomes a socialist democratic system,” and that “A democratic system with Chinese characters comprises of the persistent leadership of the CCP, the agency of the people, and the rule of law” (p. 5). These Confucian tropes, together with the imagery of a benevolent Party leader, are frequently deployed within mainland China to maintain the moral economy of the party-state and to prevent subordinate populations from rebelling against the regime (Scott, 1977). As Ong (1999) pointed out, “Confucian moralism legitimizes the state framing of its paternal order as a necessary response to the social changes—including objective realities such as the rising number of dysfunctional families—engendered by capitalism” (p. 71). Because Hong Kong readers are largely familiar with Confucianism, authors of the MNE handbook can make use these tropes to create a connection between the audience and the Chinese state.

Building on the positive representation of the Chinese regime supported by Confucianism, the chapter later constructs a binary between China and the United States to highlight the superiority of the Chinese political system and foreign policies, while critiquing the downfall of American democracy and its unilateralism. After describing the United States as a unilateral state that “pursues national interests against the will of its citizens, and forcefully imposes its power on other nation-states” (p. 13), the handbook introduces Chinese foreign policies in terms of tolerance of difference and non-intervention. Particularly, the author(s) used the term *tou gwong yeung fui* (韜光養晦), which evokes the classical Chinese imagery of a wise hermit choosing seclusion out of humility (p. 13). The handbook also points out that at the end of the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping had used this concept to describe China’s peaceful and strategic foreign policies. Therefore, this concept allows the Chinese-Hong Kong government to evoke not only traditional Chinese culture in the handbook, but also to reassert the relevance of CCP’s ideology in the current context.

Elaborating on this concept in opposition to the United States, the handbook emphasizes that, “Because Chinese foreign policies, unlike American unilateralism in the past ten years, respect the political, cultural, and economic differences of other nation-states, China has recently garnered a great deal of recognition from foreign countries” (p. 13). The chapter describes the Chinese ruling party as practicing a centralized democratic system that is “progressive, altruistic, and communal” (p. 10); these characteristics are essential in “maintaining long-term political stability, ensuring the integrity of the sovereign state, enhancing the communal sentiment of Chinese people both in and outside China to resist separatist movements, and in preserving Chinese national traditions” (p. 10). The handbook further states that these political characteristics are considered the “ideal type” by social scientists (p. 11). After describing of the positive features of the CCP—such as its “commitment to maintaining traditional Chinese cultures and enhancing the solidarity of diasporic Chinese”—the handbook then dedicates one-third of the page to criticize the American political system (p. 10). Titled “Nasty Fights between Political Parties, Citizens Suffer,” the passage states that the United States democratic system is

inherently inferior to China's one-party model because party politics often result in public economic and political chaos that brings harm to the citizens (p. 10).

Although the author(s) of the handbook have been careful in scaffolding anti-American arguments with Confucian tropes and cultural values that are widely accepted by the Hong Kong public, they nevertheless provoke harsh criticisms. In defending American democracy, the HKPTU (2012) wrote that "the handbook one-sidedly vilify the multi-party system in the United States. Titling the section 'War between Parties, Citizens Become Victims,'" the section points to the economic loss that results from party politics without mentioning the benefits and advantages of universal suffrage. It is shameful that the handbook blatantly twists the facts and diverges so severely from mainstream arguments" (n.p.).

Although the Union never clarifies what it means by "mainstream arguments," its position here closely mirrors that of the "Hong Kong Core Values Declaration" (Wai Woo Heung Gong Hut Sum Ga Jik Suen Yin, 2004), a public statement signed by 300 local professionals and intellectuals that proclaims the importance of "liberty, democracy, human rights, rule of law, fairness, social justice, peace and compassion, integrity and transparency, plurality, respect for individuals, and upholding professionalism" (n.p.). In fact, recently Hong Kong intellectuals have even coined these "universal values" that must be protected and practiced both globally and locally ("Yin Gau Yuen," 2013). These concepts closely align with liberal tropes espoused by different transnational actors that are not limited to the United States. Even though what Hong Kong people are calling "universal values" have been criticized by scholars as inherently neocolonial (Grewal, 2005; Hesford, 2011), when deployed as rhetorical tools they nevertheless allow Hong Kong to define itself as a part of the transnational discursive and ideological network that transcends state borders. Hong Kongers' transnational identification, coupled with their long-standing suspicion towards China, create tremendous rhetorical restrictions for the Chinese state.<sup>3</sup>

Given Hong Kongers' animosity and suspicion toward overtly political statements from the Chinese state, the handbook appropriates and redeploys statistics to mask the ideological nature of its nationalizing claims. For example, it explicitly uses historical record of the American government shut-down as evidence that a multi-party system is severely flawed. Here, America is used as a scapegoat to highlight the superiority of the Chinese political system and to legitimate the CCP as the only ruling party of the state. Unlike the anti-Americanist rhetoric deployed in mainland China that relies heavily on an audience that already sees America as the perpetrator (Lu, 1998, 2012), the handbook uses actual party conflicts in the United States and statistics on the United States' decreasing GDP as evidence of the comparative superiority of the Chinese political system.

In another instance, the handbook uses poll numbers to back up its critique of U.S. foreign policy, while emphasizing the peaceful and pragmatic nature of the Chinese counterpart. For instance, the handbook cites the BBC Country Rating Poll that showed that an increasing number of citizens from developed countries such as Canada, Germany, and Australia, view the United States in a negative light;

the handbook then explains that most countries, except China's economic competitors, view China favorably (p. 14). The appropriation and redeployment of numbers and polls from a credible source allows Chinese-Hong Kong government to further strengthen its credibility while passing the ideological interpretations of statistics as value-neutral facts.

Even though the author(s) of the handbook has strategically redeployed economic arguments, Confucian tropes, and statistics to mask its ideological and nationalizing agenda, the Hong Kong public remains suspicious and unconvinced. In its official press release, the HKPTU—one of the key protest organizers—mounted a series of critiques against the ideological nature of the handbook. In particular, the HKPTU (2012) criticized it for the following:

Blindly flattering the current Chinese regime, concealing existing political problems, representing biased information that reinforces the official narrative, directing students to uncritically follow current policies, vilifying other nation-states, promoting mainland political framework, and poisoning students by convincing them to obey the oppressive regime. (n.p.)

These critiques are important in illustrating the rhetorical restrictions the Chinese state faces when attempting to nationalize a transnational audience that actively denies Chinese national identification. Two observations can be made here. First, while these pointed criticisms point to the handbook's use of vaguely positive terms and concepts, the omission of existing political problems in China, and the use of misleading official images to conjure up the illusion that the Party does "put the people first," the Union did not attack the Confucius tropes cited in the introduction of the chapter. Second, although the Union was unable to counter the American historical records and statistics cited by the handbook to undermine the value of democracy as exemplified by the United States, it nevertheless defends the American political system and electoral process as they are largely seen as the exemplar of democracy.

These two observations demonstrate that although traditional Chinese thoughts can be repurposed by the Chinese government as a rhetorical commonplace that bridges the political and ideological difference between the regime and the Hong Kong audience, the soft power of dominant transnational human rights tropes and pre-existing animosity continues to dominate Hong Kongers' public imagination of China. This case study illustrates the rhetorical double bind that China is in: On the one hand, it must be careful not to trigger the suspicion harbored by the Hong Kong audience, but on the other hand, it must also clearly deliver its nationalizing message. In this particular context, given such rhetorical limitations the state is unable to write itself out of the preexisting local frame of interpretation.

## Conclusion

Hong Kong's transnational position and semi-autonomous status has made China's ideological integration project a difficult endeavor. In its attempt to integrate Hong

Kong, the Chinese government has demonstrated a keen sense of rhetorical awareness towards the Hong Kong audience and context. However, the handbook has proven to be both a rhetorical and political debacle for the Chinese government as it undermines the United States and the transnational liberal tropes that Hong Kongers commonly deploy against the state. Attempting to undermine the United States while being oblivious to Hong Kong's strategic deployment of dominant liberal tropes, China's adapted nationalist rhetoric only serves to fuel further resistance from the Hong Kong people.

In other words, China's rhetorical strategies reflect an international perspective that sees nation-states as key actors, while dismissing the way tropes and ideas travel and get appropriated transnationally over state borders (Dingo, 2012; Heford, 2011). Given this rhetorical phenomenon, states need to negotiate the double bind of neoliberalism and transnational practices within their sovereignty: they must rely on the rhetoric of nationalism to maintain a sense of unity and legitimacy, while working with—instead of against—transnational tropes that transcend their borders. To examine how states adapt their rhetorical practices, therefore, rhetoricians must refrain from seeing states as the sole actors, and must instead situate them and their communicative acts within a larger transnational network of other institutions, material forces, and flows.

## Notes

1. Hong Kongers' repurposing of Western human rights discourse to challenge both China and the United States was most prominent when Edward Snowden sought protection in the city in June 2013. Carrying banners that decried both the U.S. and Chinese governments for violating civil rights, many Hong Kongers took to the street demanding the protection of Snowden (see Lai, 2013; Tang, 2013).
2. The Hong Kong government's attempt to forcefully implement MNE is now cited by Taiwanese activists as a cautionary tale of China's insidious ideological strategy. Referencing MNE and other integration policies in Hong Kong, Taiwanese activists have developed the popular slogan "Tomorrow's Taiwan will be today's Hong Kong" (see Li, 2013).
3. Although transnational liberal tropes have recently gained valence in the Hong Kong, they are not consistently hailed as the guiding values of the Hong Kong public—instead, they are often strategically deployed by Hong Kongers to achieve different rhetorical goals. For example, while the Hong Kong citizens often mobilizes these tropes to criticize the Chinese government, they also do not hesitate to renounce values such as plurality and human rights in recent immigration and citizenship debates regarding South Asian migrants and Southeast Asian domestic workers (see Cheung, 2012; Choi, 2013). In my analysis, therefore, I treat the evocation of transnational human rights concepts as political tropes and rhetorical tools, rather than as guiding principles that the Hong Kong public subscribe to unwaveringly.

## References

- Abbas, M. A. (1997). *Hong Kong: Culture and the politics of disappearance*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Brown, W. (2010). *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. New York, NY: Zone Books.
- Calhoun, C. (1998). *Nationalism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

- Calhoun, C. (2007). *Nations matter: Culture, history and the cosmopolitan dream*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cheung, S. (2012, September 11). Indian-born professor Shekhar Kumta angry over Chinese citizenship denial. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1033605/indian-born-professor-shekhar-kumta-angry-over-chinese-citizenship>
- Choi, C. (2013, December 10). Domestic workers rally for labour rights. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1106841/domestic-helpers-demand-recognition-labour-rights>
- Degolyer, M. (2014, May 14). Hong Kong's rising cry. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/15/opinion/hong-kongs-rising-cry.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/15/opinion/hong-kongs-rising-cry.html?_r=0)
- Dingo, R. (2012). *Networking arguments: Rhetoric, transnational feminism, and public policy writing*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Dirlik, A. (2006). Beijing consensus: Beijing “gongshi”: Who recognizes whom and to what end? *Globalization and autonomy online compendium*. Retrieved from [http://www.globalautonomy.ca/global1/position.jsp?index=PP\\_Dirlik\\_BeijingConsensus.xml](http://www.globalautonomy.ca/global1/position.jsp?index=PP_Dirlik_BeijingConsensus.xml)
- Grewal, I. (2005). *Transnational America: Feminisms, diasporas, neoliberalisms*. Durham, NC and London, England: Duke University Press.
- Guang, L. (2005). Realpolitik nationalism: International sources of Chinese nationalism. *Modern China*, 31, 487–514.
- Guo, Y. (2004). *Cultural nationalism in contemporary China: The search for national identity under reform*. New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Hartnett, S. J. (2011). Google and the “twisted-cyber spy” affair: US–Chinese communication in an age of globalization. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 97, 411–434.
- Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- He, B. (2003). China's national identity: a source of conflict between democracy and state nationalism. In L. H. Liew & S. Wang (Eds.), *Nationalism, democracy and national integration in China* (pp. 170–195). New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Hesford, W. (2011). *Spectacular rhetorics: Human rights visions, recognitions, feminisms*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union. (n.d.). Faan dui sai lo sic gau choi chit wui gwok mun gau yuk fou [Against brainwashing teaching materials, abolish moral and national education]. Retrieved from <http://www.hkptu.org/education/?p=5835>
- Jasinski, J. (2001). The status of theory and method in rhetorical criticism. *Western Journal of Communication*, 65, 249–270.
- Kang, L. (1998). Is there an alternative to (capitalist) globalization? The debate about modernity in China. In F. Jameson & M. Miyoshi (Eds.), *The cultures of globalization* (pp.164–190). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kennedy, G. A. (1997). *Comparative rhetoric: An historical and cross-cultural introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kluver, A. (1996). *Legitimizing the Chinese economic reforms: A rhetoric of myth and orthodoxy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Lai, A. (2013, June 16). Hong Kong rallies in the rain for Edward Snowden. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/15/world/asia/hong-kong-snowden-protest>
- Leff, M. C. (1980). Interpretation and the art of the rhetorical critic. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 44, 337–349.
- Li, Y. F. (2013, April 15). Din si sun mun juen bo jung gwok jit muk jung yi [The controversy on broadcasting Chinese TV programs]. *Liberty Times Net*. Retrieved from <http://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/paper/670638>
- Lilley, R. (2001). Teaching elsewhere: Anthropological pedagogy, racism and indifference in a Hong Kong classroom. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 12, 127–154.

- Lo, W. L. (2006). “Mui gaai lai oh hung—taam heung gong din ying din si dai luk yan yin jeung chaa yi [Media Laocoön: A discussion on the image differences of “mainlanders” in Hong Kong films and TV shows]. Retrieved from [http://rthk.hk/mediadigest/20061114\\_76\\_121193.html](http://rthk.hk/mediadigest/20061114_76_121193.html)
- Lu, L. X. (1998). Rhetoric of nationalism and anti-Americanism: A Burkean analysis of China can say no. *Intercultural communication studies*, 8, 163–176.
- Lu, X. (2004). *Rhetoric of the Chinese cultural revolution: The impact on Chinese thought, culture, and communication*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Lu, X. (2012). A Burkean analysis of China is not happy: A rhetoric of nationalism. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 5, 194–209.
- Lu, X., & Simons, H. (2006). Transitional rhetoric of Chinese Communist Party leaders in the post-Mao reform period: Dilemmas and strategies. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 92, 262–286.
- Ma, K. W. (2002). “Din si mun fa dik lek si fun sik” [A historical analysis of TV culture]. In C. H. Ng & C. W. Cheung (Eds.), *Yeud dook heung gong poo kup mun fa: 1997–2000 [Reading Hong Kong popular culture: 1997–2000]* (pp. 681–694). Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Mao, L. (2012). The economies of writing writ large: the rhetoric of cultural nationalism. *JAC*, 32, 513–540.
- Mignolo, W. D. (1998). Globalization, civilization processes, and the relocation of languages and cultures. In F. Jameson & M. Miyoshi (Eds.), *The cultures of globalization* (pp. 32–53). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Oliver, R. T. (1971). *Communication and culture in ancient India and China*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ong, A. (2006). *Neoliberalism as exception: Mutations in citizenship and sovereignty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Public Opinion Programme, The University of Hong Kong. (2013). *People’s ethnic identity [Data file]*. Retrieved from <http://hkupop.hku.hk/english/popexpress/ethnic/index.html/>
- Ramo, J. C. (2004). *The Beijing consensus: Notes on the new physics of Chinese power*. London, England: The Foreign Policy Center.
- Sassen, S. (1998). Introduction and The state and the global city. *Globalization and its discontents*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Scott, P. J. C. (1977). *The moral economy of the peasant: Rebellion and subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Starosta, W. (1984). On intercultural rhetoric. In W. Gudykist & Y. Kim (Eds.), *Methods for intercultural communication*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Shuter, R. (1999). The cultures of rhetoric. In A. Gonzalez and V. T. Delores (Eds.), *Rhetoric in intercultural contexts*. (pp. 11–18). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Tang, K. (2013, June 19). Hong Kong residents rally behind Edward Snowden. *Buzzfeed*. Retrieved from <http://www.buzzfeed.com/kevintang/snowden-hk>
- Townsend, J. (1996). Chinese nationalism. In J. Unger (Ed.), *Chinese nationalism* (pp. 1–30). New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Wai woo Heung Gong Hut Sum Ga Jik Suen Yin [Hong Kong core values declaration]. (2004). Retrieved from <http://hkspeech.wordpress.com/2004/06/07/%E7%B6%AD%E8%AD%B7%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E6%A0%B8%E5%BF%83%E5%83%B9%E5%80%BC%E5%AE%A3%E8%A8%80>
- Yin Gau Yuen: Po Sai Ga Jik But Si Ling Daan Mui Yeuk [Researchers: Universal values aren’t the magic bullet]. (2013, May 29). *Wenweipo.com*. Retrieved from <http://news.wenweipo.com/2013/05/29/IN1305290004.htm>