DISCOURSE, DEMOCRACY AND DIPLOMACY: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE OCCUPY CENTRAL MOVEMENT IN HONG KONG

by

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Wars over words have raged for centuries, and in recent months, a pragmatic war about the meaning of words has played out in the debates in the media and other public fora in Hong Kong. In the present article, we attempt to analyze the discourse of democracy in Hong Kong. We shall look at contentious words, and how they are being used by the opposing sides in these debates, and we shall attempt to explain why it is impossible to have a meaningful debate about 'democracy' until both sides have reached a consensus about what it is they are talking about. In a pragmatic view, language not only reflects reality, but also creates it. Therefore, when words mean different things to different people, they both create and sustain different versions of 'reality', and we shall argue that these competing versions are at the core of the problem in the debates about democracy and universal suffrage in Hong Kong. We argue that a pragmatics-based, intercultural approach to the discourse of democracy may offer some insights into how and why the opposing sides in the Hong Kong democracy debates keep communicating at cross-purposes. Finally, we argue that the ideological and socio-cultural differences between Hong Kong and Mainland China, which are the root causes of the conflict, need to be acknowledged and discussed in order for the debate about democracy and political reform to move forward.

1. Introduction

Wars over words are not a new phenomenon, but have arguably been more prominent in recent years. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, language issues have been a catalyst for animosities and a deepening inter-ethnic conflict where each ethnic group (Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, and Muslims) is trying to carve out a new ethnolinguistic identity and

create a 'pure' language, free from any influence of the other ethnic groups (see Greenberg 1996). And in the ongoing dispute between the Ukraine and Russia over the control of the Crimean peninsula and Eastern Ukraine, language also plays a key role. Attempts to remove the status of Russian as a second official language in Ukraine alarmed Russian speakers in the region, and the desire to protect the Russian language was later cited by pro-Russian separatists as a reason for military intervention (Ghosh 2015). Canada provides yet another example of a country where wars over words have given rise to heated debate and have triggered passionate feelings. No country has spent more money and resources on language laws than has Canada, and particularly the province of Quebec, whose controversial pro-French language laws have been contested and debated for at least three decades (see Bourhis 1984; Edwards 2010 for evidence).

Hong Kong, a former British colony and now a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), is also familiar with language-related conflicts. After the handover to China in 1997, new language policies were adopted, including a controversial medium of instruction policy, which stipulated that at least 75% of secondary schools in the territory should be Chinese-medium schools. Subsequently, 307 secondary schools were forced to give up English as their medium of instruction and adopt Chinese; a controversial move which left many parents frustrated not only about the lack of choice but also with the prospects of seeing their children lose out on university education which is still largely English-medium (see Tsui 2004 for more details).

A different kind of war over words has raged in recent months in Hong Kong. It is not an ethnolinguistic war over 'pure' dialects, or a war over English or Chinese medium-of-instruction policies, but a semantic war about words. Who can decide what words mean when opposing sides in a conflict apparently attach completely different meanings to the same concepts? In accordance with the framework laid out in the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the people of

Hong Kong are supposed to elect the Chief Executive in 2017 through universal suffrage. However, when the current government presented their proposed framework for political reform, a war over words broke out in the media, and later in the streets of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong government, aided by mainland government officials, claimed that the people of Hong Kong would be given a unique opportunity to elect their own leader through a fair and impartial one-person-one-vote electoral system. The pro-democracy camp and various student organizations, on the other hand, claimed that the government's political reform proposal had nothing to do with democracy, because it ruled out civil nomination and because only pre-approved candidates who had to be patriotic and 'love the country' [PRC] could run for Chief Executive.

Thus, in the autumn of 2014, heated debates about words and what they mean were carried on in public, particularly after the PRC National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee published their decision on Hong Kong's political reform framework. The framework ruled out civil nomination, stipulated that Chief Executive candidates must be patriotic, and must receive support from at least 50% of the nomination committee. The pro-democracy camp vowed to veto the proposal in the Hong Kong Legislative Council, arguing that the people of Hong Kong want '*real* democracy' and '*genuine* universal suffrage', not 'democracy with Chinese characteristics.' The conflict escalated and, in September 2014, led to a civil disobedience campaign during which thousands of people occupied the streets of Hong Kong in a fight for what they called 'true democracy.'

In the present paper, we attempt to analyze the discourse of democracy in Hong Kong. We shall look at contentious words, and how they appear to be used by the opposing sides in the debate, and we shall attempt to explain why it is impossible to have a meaningful debate until both sides have reached a consensus about what it is they are talking about. Language not only reflects reality but it also creates it. Thus, when words mean different things to different people, they both

create and sustain different versions of 'reality', and we shall argue that these competing versions of 'reality' are at the core of the problem in the debates about democracy in Hong Kong. We propose that a pragmatics-based, intercultural approach to the discourse of democracy in Hong Kong may offer some insights into how and why the opposing sides in the democracy debates kept (and keep!) communicating at cross purposes.

2. Some background information

In June 2014, the PRC State Council released a White Paper on the 'One Country, Two Systems' policy in Hong Kong. The paper outlined some of the overarching principles that should govern the political reform process in Hong Kong. One requirement, mentioned repeatedly, is that the people who govern Hong Kong must be patriotic: "Loving the country [PRC] is the basic political requirement for Hong Kong's administrators" (including the Chief Executive, government officials, members of the Executive and Legislative Council, and judges). This requirement was strongly criticized by particularly the judiciary in Hong Kong, which proclaimed their independence from the government in public statements. The White Paper also stipulates that Hong Kong must work, with Mainland China, to build a common home for all Chinese; it thereby reinforces the 'One-Country, One-People, One-Language'-ideology, which has been promoted by the Chinese government since the 1950s (Wang and Ladegaard 2008). A final contentious issue is that government officials "have on their shoulders the responsibility of correctly understanding … the Basic Law". In a response paper, the Hong Kong Bar Association points out that the courts in Hong Kong neither can nor will take instructions from anyone as to a definitive 'correct' interpretation of the Basic Law.

The release of the White Paper gave further support to the idea of a civil disobedience campaign. This had previously been proposed by

the 'Occupy Central with Love and Peace' campaign initiated by Dr Benny Tai, a Hong Kong University law professor, Dr Chan Kin-man, a Chinese University sociology professor, and the Reverend Chu Yiu-ming. The trio, with their supporters, proposed a peaceful non-violent civil disobedience campaign in case the government failed to come up with a democratic reform package that would meet international standards. The objective of the campaign would be to occupy key areas in Hong Kong's business district in order to force the government to work towards what was referred to as 'genuine democracy' that give people 'real choice'. As Martin Lee, founder of the Democratic Party, put it: "What's the difference between a rotten apple, a rotten orange and a rotten banana? We want genuine universal suffrage and not democracy with Chinese characteristics" (*The Guardian*, 31/8-2014).

In September 2014, two student organizations, the Hong Kong Federation of Students (for university students) and Scholarism (for secondary school students) announced a week-long class boycott. The idea was for students to show their discontent with the government's political reform proposal by boycotting classes in universities and secondary schools across Hong Kong, and by holding mass rallies and downtown protests. An estimated 13,000 students gathered at Chinese University on 22 September to kick off the action. The students demanded that the Hong Kong government should renegotiate the reform proposal with the Chinese government and propose a new framework, which should include civil nomination and the abolition of functional constituencies. They also demanded that C. Y. Leung, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, and other responsible ministers, should step down. The class boycotts continued, at least for many university students, and on 28 September, the organizers behind Occupy Central declared the official launch of the Occupy Central campaign1, initially planned for the October 1 (China's National Day) demonstrations.

In the following days, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Hong Kong in support of the Occupy movement. During the first days of the protest, there were violent clashes between demonstrators

and police. The police used tear gas and pepper-spray to disperse the protesters, who defended themselves by using umbrellas. The umbrella (and the yellow ribbon attached to one's clothing, backpacks, and even vehicles) became symbols of the peaceful, non-violent protests; therefore, when the organizers behind Occupy Central became aware that Occupy was no longer a single concerted effort by a group of people, but had spread throughout central parts of the city, they renamed the movement and referred to it as the 'Umbrella Revolution'. The police were severely criticized for their heavy-handed response during the first days of the protests, and consequently adopted a more complacent approach during the following weeks.

The protesters, who would soon include not just students but people from all walks of life and across all age groups, occupied streets in the districts of Admiralty and Causeway Bay on Hong Kong Island, and in Mongkok and Tsim Sha Tsui on the Kowloon Peninsula. Social media like Twitter and Facebook were used to coordinate activities; consequently, the trio behind Occupy now could claim that the campaign no longer represented the actions of a disgruntled few, but had become 'the people's protests', without leaders or organizers. Streets were barricaded and blocked, and slowly filled up with tents as many simply moved to the streets and lived there. As the protests dragged on, some students went back to school, and people went to work, but they would come back and occupy the streets at night. No traffic was allowed in the occupied streets, and shop owners and restaurants started to complain that business was affected. Several university lecturers went to the occupied areas at night to offer tutorials to students; others brought food and water. Public toilets near the protest sites were converted into proper washrooms that the protesters could use, and first-aid marquees were set up for those in need of medical attention.

As the protests dragged on, lawmakers and members of the public insisted that the government meet with representatives of the students. On their part, the students claimed that they were keen to meet with the Hong Kong Government's Chief Secretary Carrie Lam to discuss

political reform. A meeting was scheduled for 10 October, but on 9 October, the government called the meeting off, arguing that the students had stepped up the civil disobedience campaign and thereby "undermined the basis for constructive dialogue" (Carrie Lam in the *South China Morning Post*, the main English-language newspaper in Hong Kong, hereafter SCMP, 10/10-2014). In response to the government's cancellation of talks with students, thousands of new protesters took to the streets and this prompted the government to schedule new talks with students. On 21 October, representatives from student organizations met with government representatives in a televised debate on political reform. In a press release after the meeting, the government referred to the talks as 'candid and meaningful'; the students, on the other hand, described them as 'disappointing' and 'lack[ing] concrete results'.

As Occupy continued, there was also mounting frustration in the business community about the alleged loss of revenue. An anti-Occupy group, Alliance for Peace and Democracy, wearing blue ribbons, collected signatures denouncing the Occupy movement; they staged anti-protest rallies in support of the government and the police, and in early November, the first court injunction was issued for the protest sites to be cleared. Bailiffs and police started clearing tents and barriers from the Mongkok protest site in Kowloon on 25 November. Scuffles broke out and arrests were made, but the police eventually managed to clear the streets. More injunctions followed, leading to the clearance of the remaining protest sites. On December 15, the police cleared the last protest site in Causeway Bay with virtually no resistance and thus brought Occupy to an end in all of Hong Kong after 78 days of continued occupation.

In terms of what Occupy Central accomplished, there were of course widely different accounts in the media. In Mainland China, censorship was vigilant during the protests: "All websites must immediately clear away information about Hong Kong students violently assaulting the government and about 'Occupy Central'" *(China Digital Times*, 28/9-

2014). Thus, internet posts containing words like 'Occupy Central', 'Hong Kong', 'barricades', and even 'umbrella', were deleted *(New York Times*, 30/9-2014). If mentioned at all, the Mainland Chinese media would refer to Occupy as a small group of disgruntled students "bringing shame to the rule of law" (*BBC News*, 31/10-2014). Mainland media also alleged that 'foreign forces' had meddled in Hong Kong's internal affairs by instigating the student protests. Similar allegations were made by the Chief Executive, C. Y. Leung, who was surprisingly quiet during Occupy, except for one interview with the foreign media. During this interview, he noted that Hong Kong was 'lucky' that Beijing had not intervened in the Occupy protests, and he defended the screening of Chief Executive candidates proposed by the central government, arguing that if the debates entirely revolved around numbers, then important political decisions would be left to people who made less than US$1,800 a month—a comment which gave rise to widespread criticism both in Hong Kong and overseas *(New York Times, 20/10-2014).*

When the protest sites were cleared in December 2014, protesters vowed that they would be back. During Occupy, massive yellow banners with slogans, such as "I want true universal suffrage", were repeatedly hung off Lion Rock, the iconic mountain that separates the New Territories from the Kowloon Peninsula. In most of the cases, the banners were quickly removed by order of the Government; however, they made it into the media on the first pages of papers such as the *SCMP*. At the time of our current writing, banners and collections of umbrellas are still on display on university campuses across Hong Kong, suggesting that the battle for democracy is not over yet. As Mary Hui (2015) argues, perhaps more than anything, Occupy Central has redefined a generation previously referred to as "the strawberry generation: soft, faint-hearted and easily bruised" (p. 15); it signified its 'coming of age', with the non-violent fight for democracy becoming a top priority for the city's youngsters. Furthermore, as expressed by several commentators, the fact that the movement was almost totally unbloody and mostly

nonviolent compared to what had happened some twenty years earlier in Beijing's Tian-an-men Square, inspires hopes that some things did change, and that (as some local and foreign newspapers have expressed it), "Hong Kong will never be the same after Occupy".

3. The Basic Law and a Basic Question

The basic question in the dispute over Occupy can be boiled down to interpretations of the Basic Law, and specifically, its conception of 'democracy'. Two leading contemporary quotes are useful to situate the question: 'What kind of democracy for Hong Kong'?

- In the words of PRC President Xi Jinping (and many other pro-government spokespersons): "We practice Chinese democracy, not western style democracy".
- But an anonymous retort from Occupy (quoted in SCMP) has it that: "There is no such thing as Western or other democracy, there is just big D Democracy".

The next section will provide some historical backdrop for these quotes and their use of the term 'democracy'.

4. A historical highlight: The Greek 'roots' of democracy

Historically, the concept 'democracy' has had various different (and wildly diverging!) 'incarnations.' Often, reference is made to the Greek origin of the term 'democracy' ('people power') and to the 'democratic' institutions of ancient Greece. Here is what one of the leading spokesmen of Athenian democracy had to say on the matter.

In his 431 BC speech in Athens, commemorating the fallen soldiers in the First Peloponnesian War's initial skirmishes, Pericles defines

democracy as an elitist activity: people "doing philosophy without strings attached, seeking beauty without being effeminate"[2]; the 'absence of strings attached' is expressed by the Greek ateleia, 'freedom from imposed burdens' (as in the modern case of the postage stamps, small documents guaranteeing the 'free of charge' (*franco*) delivery of the mail across places and times)[3]. Such 'freedom of charges' levied locally and globally is typical of the elite (business class and up): the (super-)rich 'zero-tax' individuals, or companies posing as persons. In contrast, democracy in the 'original' Greek sense is altogether a 'gentleman's occupation', not appropriate for Joe Sixpack or Wally Worker, and certainly not something we would immediately associate with 'democracy' as currently practiced in the Western world, and elsewhere on the planet.

5. Variations on a theme: What is democracy?

We cannot argue about social measures/counter-measures solely on the basis of some historically 'correct notion', cf. the case of ('natural') philosophy, democracy, freedom, republic, etc. – all these concepts have to be situated, and understood in their connections, local and empirical (which is the view held by proponents of pragmatics). Farelly (2015: 17) claims that representations of democracy must always be a simplification; it's simply impossible to say everything that could be said about democracy. What often happens therefore is that democracy is defined in terms of what it conventionally means in the West; and by focusing on the mechanisms through which citizens are said to be able to control their political leaders (such as periodic elections and pressure-group politics), critical questions about the essentially undemocratic nature of political decision-making in democratic states are ignored (cf. Held 1996). The rationale, Farelly (2015:18) argues, is that "participants in a debate can close-down arguments on the substance of an issue by claiming that a decision was sound because it was that

of a 'democratically' elected government."

So, even if President Xi is 'historically' right in claiming that democracy is not just one thing, carved in stone and forever right – the big question is what does that pragmatically imply with regard to the present situation? In particular, what does 'Chinese style democracy' mean, then? Is there such a thing? The next section will delve into this thorny subject.

6. Democracy: A Chinese view

Former PRC President Hu Jintao has talked and written extensively about democracy, as it is viewed and practiced in China. Here is what he said in a speech celebrating the 50th anniversary of the founding of the National People's Congress, in Beijing:

> The people's congress is responsible to the people and is under the supervision of the people. Through universal democratic elections, it produces the people's own representatives. The people's congress effectively ensures that people of all ethnic groups in China have democratic elections, democratic decisions, democratic management and democratic supervision, and that they enjoy extensive democracy, freedom and rights under the constitution and the law. (Hu Jintao, 15 September 2004).

In this short segment, President Hu mentions 'democracy' no less than six times, thereby highlighting the importance of this concept for his audience and for the occasion. It is almost tantamount to a declaration of principle, a constitutive document defining the liabilities and responsibilities of the People's Congress. However, what is really meant by 'democracy' is not explicitly spelled out here. To discover the real meaning (in practice) of the concept, one has to go to another passage in the same speech by Hu Jintao:

> We must promote democracy and ensure that the people are the masters. To have the Chinese Communist Party in power is to lead, to support and to ensure that the people become the masters, to safeguard and to realize the fundamental interests of the majority of the people… [to ensure this] we must strengthen the party's governing ability. (Hu Jintao, 15 September 2004).

In other words, to vary an often quoted, but probably apocryphal quip by Lenin, 'democracy is good, but control is better.' In the Chinese vision of democracy, one can only allow for 'democratic' procedures as long as they are guided and kept in check by the real governing instance, the 'locus' of power, the Party. Clearly, there is a lack of harmony between the two concepts: 'freedom', as ensured by democracy and democratic procedures, and 'power', as instituted by, and embodied in, a minority of people who have the obligation to 'lead' the people to become 'masters' – but of what? The people can only exercise their 'mastership' under the guidance of, and in subservience to, the views and dictates of the Party, which itself is controlled by a small number of people in the Central Committee (not even by the 1400 members of the People's Congress, which itself is under the control of the Party). It is a bit as if one were in a mirror cabinet, where the pictures are reflected, and reflect themselves, everywhere and infinitely, such that it is impossible to localize the 'original' and 'leading' picture, the one that is the mother and origin of the rest.

7. A View from 'The East'

Much of the debate about 'democracy' is reminiscent of how the term was used in the former Eastern block of Europe. In the Soviet Union, much was made of the notion of 'democratic centralism', as defined by Lenin, and realized in the 'people's democracies' popping

up everywhere following the end of WW II in the East of Europe and several places overseas – one wonders if this is the kind of 'democratic' model that Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping are thinking of, when they say they are pursuing a Chinese type democracy?

'Centralism', even if called 'democratic', implies *control*: things have to be organized by, and in accordance with the views of, the 'center' (read: the powers that be). Furthermore, such control can be either direct or indirect; in the latter case, one has to be sure that the people on the intermediate levels are behaving 'correctly': control has to be extended downwards, so that even the popular vote becomes representative of the center's viewpoints. Accordingly, the Hong Kong 2017 Chief Executive election, even when based on the 'universal suffrage' enshrined in the Basic Law of the SAR, is not envisioned in the same way by the central government and by the pro-democracy opposition, the people supporting Occupy. The difference, and the resulting divergent interpretations of 'democracy', turn around the question whose interpretation is the more correct one; in practice, this boils down to questioning the degree to which the elections are controlled by the PRC Central Government.

Doesn't then President Xi's claim, cited above, imply that a 'democracy' of the aforementioned Chinese type has to be imposed wherever the Chinese control the situation, irrespective of the wishes and claims of the people they control? (The case of Tibet is an egregious example).

But why can't the Mainland Chinese see this, when it is so patently obvious to millions of their compatriots in Hong Kong? One (perhaps the main) reason is that the very Constitution of the PRC has, in its Article 3, the words: *"The state organs of the People's Republic of China apply the principle of democratic centralism"* (italics in original); and, according to Lenin, this principle is realized as "freedom of discussion, but unity in action" (from the pamphlet *What is to be done*, 1901/1902). But what is this freedom worth, if the only action that is allowed is the one controlled by the 'center'? The principle has been inculcated in the minds of several generations of Mainland Chinese, and this may

explain their failing '(in)sight'.

8. (In)sights and beliefs: What can we afford?

The familiar slogan 'Seeing is believing', and its different variants (like 'A picture says more that a thousand words'), seem to imply that what our eyes (or other senses) perceive is ipso facto evidence for a certain true state of affairs. The Neopositivists of the Vienna School even elevated this view into a principle: true intersubjective understanding can only be attained when different subjects 'see' the same, and can verify the 'seen' by reading off a value produced by a physical indicator (e.g. the litmus strip indicating a pH value).

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière (b. 1941) has in many of his works questioned the very limits of this 'seeing', when it comes to agreeing or disagreeing. In his book La mésentente (1996; English translation Disagreement; 2004), he argues that when people disagree, it is not because they do not want to agree, but because they simply are not able to. And the reason? That one person cannot see what the other person sees. In Rancière's words, the reason

> … why a person understands, yet does not understand another person [is that] while he perceives clearly what the other tells him, he also doesn't *see* the object of which the other person speaks; … he understands and must understand, sees and wants to make seen, *another object* represented by the same words, another reasoning contained in the same argument. (Rancière 1996: 13, our translation; italics added).

St. Thomas Aquinas, following in the footsteps of Aristotle, has coined the dictum 'Whatever is perceived, is perceived in accordance with the perceiver's way of perceiving' (*Quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur*)[4]. When it comes to seeing, this dictum fits in well with what

the US psychologist James J. Gibson (1904-1979; 'the seer of Ithaca', as one reviewer of his 1979 work called him; Restle 1980) has taught us: that we only can *see* within the limits and allowances of what our senses 'afford' us to perceive; moreover, the senses (in Gibson's case, the eyes) are creative, inasmuch as they actually promote a particular way of perceiving, of seeing. For instance, upon entering a room, I expect to see one or more windows (the default case). A luminous square projected on the wall in front of me will by default be perceived as a window: I see what I expect/believe/to be seeing.

Consequently, our initial slogan, 'Seeing is believing' may be turned around: 'Believing is seeing', or: 'What I believe to be true is what I (can) see.' So, the philosophers and poets (from Plato onwards) were right when they told us that 'beauty is in the eyes of the beholder'; in the same way, the default value of 'truth' is in the mind of the believer. Hence to 'convert' a believer to one's own 'truth' is a daunting task, and one that can only be successfully performed by minimally placing oneself in the other's mind, by adopting (or at least temporarily adapting to) his or her mindset. But minds and their 'sets' are not isolated entities, to be manipulated at will; to change a mindset, one has to 'reset', not just the mind, but the entire personality, body and soul.

Dr. Michael Sullivan from the Chinese University of Hong Kong recently recounted an example of the way 'believing' conditions 'seeing'; and in addition, how this 'seeing' involves the entire belief system of a person or societal unit.[5] An article of his that was accepted for appearance in a volume of essays to be released by a major publisher in China had to be withdrawn at the last moment, since the government censor had found an objectionable expression in his work. The wording in question had to do with the historic status of Hong Kong, an SAR ('Special Administrative Region') of the People's Republic of China. In his chapter, Sullivan had made mention of Hong Kong as 'a former British colony'. Not so, the censor had opined: 'Hong Kong is not now, and has never been, a colony; because, if it had been a colony, it would have a claim to independency.' And not only that: the very fact

of referring Hong Kong's (erstwhile) colonial status was considered a 'serious political offence' which would lead to not just the book being banished, but to the closing down of the publishing house that was responsible for this distortion of history and for not reporting the 'correct' course of events that happened a century and a half earlier.

Further in this connection, there recently have been debates in Hong Kong on the future of education in the SAR, in particular with regard to the accelerated teaching of so-called 'patriotic classes'. Here, President Xi Jinping has (among other things) strongly advocated the need for a better educational approach to history. The students should be taught the truth about the motherland (China) and its relationship with Hong Kong – and not a distorted version of history, such as that propagated by the misled participants in the recent 'Occupy' movement. By contrast, a correct view of history (that is, what a Chinese citizen ought to be seeing as historical truth), is what the leaders in charge of guiding education and staking out future educational policies have recognized as 'truthful.'[6]

In the case of Hong Kong, these policies imply that a part of the former colony's history is 'erased'; the incorrect 'view' of Hong Kong as a former British colony is adjusted in accordance with what the PRC pundits and educational luminaries can 'see'. It will not be possible to agree on this matter, nor on anything else that is not in accordance with the view of history professed by the leaders; which bodes ill for the possibility of a constructive dialogue between the 'reformist' Hong Kong opposition and those who accept the official view of the Central Government of China, representing and protecting the true seers and believers. Indeed, 'believing is seeing'.

9. Seeing and 'reality'

A further question with relation to what a person *really* sees is, more generally, whether the 'seen' itself is real. Here, we could adopt one of

the criteria for truthful observation and reporting (the Nr. 1 criterion of reality as postulated by the Vienna School Neopositivists), that the 'seen' be objectively and intersubjectively verifiable.

To make the question more tractable, let's consider the case of people having observed constellations like the Big Dipper, Orion, Cassiopeia and so on for millennia, and delivered their 'seeings' to us through the ages without much change (except perhaps in nomenclature).

Now we all know that constellations are not 'real': they are products of the perceiving, 'seeing', human mind. What we observe are collections of stars in the skies, which look as if they belong together and make up a pattern. In the case of a particular formation, such as the Big Dipper (itself part of the greater formation 'Big Bear', *ursus maior*), some will see a 'dipper' (US), others a 'plough' (UK) or a 'fish net' (Finnish *otava*); still others call the same formation 'King Charles' chariot' (Danish *karlsvognen*), and so on. On the other hand, there may be cultures whose inhabitants see nothing at all, except for the presence of an overwhelming number of stars in the nocturnal skies. Even so, people belonging to the same 'lingua-culture' will have no difficulty agreeing that what they see is correctly expressed by the name of the constellation in question, even if the 'seen' is not *real* in the sense that it can be measured in terms of physical units, or tested for laboratory results.

What happens in these cases is akin to what James Gibson was talking about when he described the notion of 'affordance' as a possibility for action, and especially its importance for the activity of seeing. Visual perception depends on the seer's affordances; but those affordances vary from culture to culture, and are expressed linguistically in vastly divergent ways, as the cases adduced above clearly demonstrate.

So, even if that which is seen by one person appears to be the same as that what the other person sees, it is not at all certain that we have a case of real identity. The thing I see and name, merely calling it a 'Big Bear', need not be the same thing my interlocutor sees, names (using an identical appellation), and believes in: viz., the reality of a

big ursine mammal way up in the heavens. One could of course object that a person who thinks there is a bear in the skies is 'underdeveloped' with respect to his or her astronomical knowledge, and that (if we take the trouble to successfully enlighten him or her), the other will immediately accede to our view as the correct one. However, such a 'conversion-cum-correction' would run counter to the ways the person's culture and history have defined a certain phenomenon – in our case a constellation with a pattern which has been established as 'real' by generations of people living in a particular culture.

Applying these observations to the Hong Kong case with its divergent views of 'democracy', one arrives at similar results: even if people from the region's various political cultures mention and use the same term, it is not at all certain that they 'see' the same thing; on the contrary, it is more likely that they will continue to unilaterally define their own 'seen' as the 'real' thing, while the others' object of perception is relegated either to an erroneous view (which will have to be corrected), or to a misconception due to lack of correct information (which then will have to be supplied though the system of education).

10. The importance of education and the role of the educated segment of the population

It has been observed that 'Occupy' originated in university circles, and initially was mainly supported by students. This could indicate that their education has taught them to see things differently from what holds as the 'common opinion' held in the PRC and valid in certain non-academic portions of the Hong Kong population, first of all the business community.

Recently, the Beijing-instated 'adviser' to the PRC Central government on educational matters in Hong Kong, Chen Zuoer, has laid the blame for the "lack of national democratic and civic awareness" at the Hong Kong educators' door, saying that many young people had

been "brainwashed" into support 'Occupy' (*SCMP* 9/1-2015, article by Adrian Wan in Beijing and Shirley Zhao in Hong Kong). Singling out and naming the Secretary of Education for Hong Kong, Mr. Chen revealed that this particular official was "in the crosshairs of the Beijing government at all times", and that he should understand his task "correctly", namely, to infuse the educational processes in Hong Kong with "knowledge, responsibility and national identity." In other words, the students should behave like "adults", not as "spoiled brats" – the latter term had also been used by Mainland students to characterize their HK colleagues in conversations carried on with the latter while on vacation or visiting family in China (as reported on a Hong Kong Baptist University student's blog, November 2014).[7]

Moreover, there seems to be a companion trend to expand this view of 'education' to all levels of intellectual and other formation, i.e. by introducing more 'patriotic classes' in the curriculum. However, "this is not what we understand about the spirit of the 'one country, two systems' policy", as the chairman of the Hong Kong Liberal Studies Teachers Association, Jacob Hui Shingyan, remarked in a comment on Chen's suggestions (from an article in SCMP 9/1-2015, by Shirley Zhao).

11. Reading the signs of the times: 'Be correct, or else…'

It is perhaps not coincidental that President Xi Jinping, in his commemorative speech in Hong Kong, 22 September 2014, omitted the usual reference to the "government of Hong Kongers by Hong Kongers", a phrase traditionally used by PRC presidents when making speeches in Hong Kong (observation due to Alex Lo in *SCMP*, 23/9-2014). Moreover, on December 14, 2014 in Macao, President Xi said that Hong Kong should learn from Macao, the adjacent 'sister' SAR, how to be "correct in their understanding of the relationship to the Motherland" (otherwise put, the idea of 'one country, two systems' itself has to be understood 'correctly'). Using a Chinese proverb, President Xi further

remarked that some people are making a big mistake when "they try to put the left shoe on the right foot" – and that such behavior has to be "corrected" (the *SCMP* journalist commenting on this interprets President Xi's utterance as a thinly concealed warning to Hong Kong, especially to the Occupy activists).

In Nanjing, likewise on December 14, 2014, President Xi Jinping observed that "the days when China could be bullied by foreign countries were long gone" (*SCMP* 14/12-2014; article by Laura Zhou). Xi Jinping was obviously referring to the 1937 Japanese invasion and the commemoration of the Nanking massacre; but in the context of the 'Occupy' happenings, the subtext could be taken as marking a hidden warning to students "waving the UK national flag when storming into our [sic!] military camps and governments", in the words of Chen Zuoer. So, the not-so-subtle hidden message reads: Hong Kongers better watch out!

In the same vein, spontaneous manifestations of patriotism should always be 'correct', not 'wrong-footed', Xi Jinping said (for instance, one doesn't sing the Chinese National Anthem at weddings or funerals, as recently stipulated by decree of the PRC State Council on December 12, 2014; quoted *SCMP* 14/12-2014)8. With respect to the students' and their associated activists' recent trouble-making, the subtext (when properly situated) reads: "Anybody saying that 'Occupy represents true patriotism' manifests a mistaken opinion which obviously has to be corrected". And overall, any such incorrect behaviors, no matter what their context, need to be likewise 'corrected' (can one miss hearing Orwellian undertones?).

12. *A future discourse?*

Against the backdrop of what has been said so far, one might well question the possibility of establishing a dialogic rapport between Hong Kong and China, such as it was envisioned by the original movers of

Occupy Central. The timid initial optimism that surrounded the 1997 handover in certain circles (among other things, entertaining the idea that China would be more open to reform, now that the Hong Kong reality had come within reach, so to speak) did not bear out as expected. Yet, it cannot be denied that some of the past decades' developments in the PRC have been accelerated by the increased contacts with the Hong Kong population and the perceived commonalities of their way of life. In an ironic twist, one could perhaps maintain that if the authorities in the PRC would allow to hold an all-China popular plebiscite today, a majority of PRC residents would probably opt for Hong Kong citizenship – a statement as one has heard it offered frequently in discussions with Hong Kongers and Mainlanders alike.

The key word here is 'discussion', or, to use a term from critical intercultural communication research, 'intercultural dialogue' (Phipps 2014). The Occupy movement has always insisted on having a discussion on equal terms with the Mainland authorities, but these talks were either preliminarily aborted or became a purely performative 'going through the motions'. The Hong Kong government has welcomed 'dialogue' about political reform with students and members of the pro-democracy camp, but, at the same time, emphasized repeatedly that future dialogue about political reform will be based on the NPC Standing Committee's decision on Hong Kong's 2017 election framework. So, the question is if it is possible to have 'dialogue' if the terms and conditions are given, and if any prospects of compromise or negotiation are ruled out beforehand. Thus, we have come full circle and we are back where we started: with war over words and what they *really* mean, and with competing versions of 'reality'.

Bredella (2003: 228) argues that "an indispensable feature of the intercultural experience is that we refrain from imposing our categories and values on others but instead learn to reconstruct their frame of reference and see them *as they see themselves*" (emphasis added). Bredella continues and claims that intercultural understanding disappoints any narcissistic belief by making us realize that things which appear

irrational (and, we might add, undemocratic) from our perspective may be seen as rational (and democratic) from the others' perspective. Therefore, the "narcissistic disappointment is an essential presupposition for tolerance" (p. 226). However, being intercultural also comprises another experience: that there are people who suffer under their own or other people's culture-bound belief and therefore, want to change them. With this in mind, Bredella concludes:

> The intercultural experience is in danger of justifying injustices and humiliations if it forbids us to criticise the beliefs and values of another culture because each culture defines for itself what is rational and humane. This implies that we cannot rest content in relativism but must mediate between different frames of reference in order to create a better one. (Bredella 2003: 238)

Currently, there is a deadlock in Hong Kong's political reform process. The Hong Kong government has vowed that any 'dialogue' must be based on the pre-established norms and pre-defined criteria set forth by the NPC Standing Committee; the pan-democrats in the Legislative Council, on the other hand, have vowed to veto any political proposal that does not live up to international standards for universal suffrage. We propose that the only way forward in the current deadlock between the pro-democracy camp and the Chinese/Hong Kong government is the painful mediation between different frames of reference in the attempt to create a better one. Part of the problem, we argue, is that the uncomfortable, politically sensitive issues, which are the root causes of the conflict between Hong Kong and Mainland China, are not being addressed. And in order for intercultural dialogue to achieve any change, these potentially painful issues must be addressed (see Phipps 2014).

  There are two competing discourses in Hong Kong about Sino-Hong Kong relationships: the public discourse, which praises the 'one-country, one-language, one-people' ideology and where Mainland China is presented as the in-group (or 'the motherland'); and the private discou-

rse(s) where Mainland China is presented as an out-group, and where inter-group differences, prejudices and animosities are reinforced (see Ladegaard 2011 for examples). In order for the dialogue on political reform to move forward, the social and cultural barriers that exist in people's minds must first be dismantled. If we rely on the public discourses, as presented by the government and other public figures in Hong Kong, "the opposing discourses about self- and other-categorization, and what it means to be Chinese, will never be reconciled" (Ladegaard 2011: 18). Taboos need to be verbalized and painful issues, animosities and prejudices acknowledged in order for any reconciliation to take place (Ladegaard and Cheng 2014). If ideological differences are ignored and inter-group animosities sugar-coated (in the name of Confucian or other ideological discourses), and if power is used as the only means to rule out dialogue and silence the minority, true democracy in Hong Kong will remain as illusive as it has been historically.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1) It is not clear whether the term 'Occupy Central' was picked by members of the pro-democracy movement, or the name was 'invented' by the government or the media. Whatever the etymology, the term turned out to be unfortunate, both for the student activists and the pro-democracy movement, because it allowed the Hong Kong and Central Government to buy into an existing discourse of unlawful occupation (presumably inspired by the earlier events of 'Occupy Wall Street'). Thus, the government repeatedly referred to Occupy as 'an unlawful occupation'

committed by a minority with no respect for the rule of law (referred to in the Mainland Chinese media as the 'deluded few'). Therefore, the pro-democracy movement's own characterization of Occupy as a 'peaceful civil disobedience campaign' was often drowned out by the government's 'unlawful occupation' rhetoric.

2) Philological note: the original Greek term signifies simply 'weakness' (*malakia*), but most English translators converge towards interpreting this as 'being woman-like', or even 'womanish' (with its clearly negative connotations).

3) Ever since British Postmaster General Sir Rowland Hill (1795-1879) invented the 'pennypost' and the world's first paper 'stamp', the 'Penny Black' of 1854, this 'freedom of charges' for the receiver of a postal item has been guaranteed by an official paper receipt, the 'stamp', issued by the postal administration to the pre-paying sender; from this comes phil-ateleia 'philately' (literally 'love of stamps'). (As to 'freedom', cf. also Italian franco bollo, Danish frimærke, German frankieren, etc.).

4) Summa Theologiae 1a, q. 75, a. 5; 3a, q. 5; 1a, q. 12, a.

5) Talk given at Hong Kong Baptist University, Department of English, on January 19, 2015.

6) In an interview with author and China expert Evan Osnos, Henry Paulson, the former US Treasury Secretary, observes (referring to his forthcoming book, Dealing with China, based on a decade of contact with Xi), that "Xi has been very forthright and candid—privately and publicly—about the fact that the Chinese are rejecting Western values and multiparty democracy" (The New Yorker, 6/4-2015, p. 45).

7) Notice that the common metaphor of 'brainwashing' is, in this sense, unsatisfactory and misleading, as it is not just the brain that is affected by the 'cleansing' process, but the entire person.

8) Interestingly, the notion of 'adult' also used to turn up in the official discourse of the former people's democracies of the East: one of the criteria employed to determine a person's eligibility for foreign travel being whether the applicant was 'politically adult' (in Czech, *politické dospělý*), implying that the individual in question supported the State and the Party and whatever they decided. It seems as if the same no-

tion of 'educating people to adulthood' (in this special sense) is being promoted and taking root again in the HK context.

9) Historically (and ironically), the National Anthem was originally a Nationalist (Kuomintang) army song, delivered spontaneously by Chiang Kai-Shek's militiamen on whatever occasion seemed suitable.

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