

Interpreting China Post-1989 Tiananmen Square Protests: Discursive Formation of “Sinicization of Everything”

Wai-Kwok Benson **Wong***
University of Hong Kong

Abstract

This article introduces and conceptualizes “sinicization of everything”, meaning that everything and everybody under Beijing’s control must be rendered Chinese by manipulating the cognition, selecting and extracting the positive elements about domestic politics and practice under the Chinese Communist Party for promotion. By deploying discourse analysis, sinicization of everything has four features: devaluation, manipulation, partiality and sinocentrism. Two cases, namely China is the largest democratic country in the world, and China contributes to the sustainable growth of global economy, are employed to interpret how sinicization is in place through repetition – excessive positivity of China and negativity of the West – over the text. This article provides an alternative in approaching Chinese politics by exploring the premises, logic and belief as well as loopholes behind official propaganda.

Keywords: *sinicization of everything, Chinese politics, Chinese-style, democracy, global economy, Chinese characteristics*

1. Contexts: Political Climate and Landscape in the Post-1989 Communist China

In approaching China after the Tiananmen Square student protests in 1989, several themes are widely discussed, including state capitalism (e.g., Hseuh, 2016; Li, Liu and Wang, 2015; Naughton and Tsai (eds.), 2015) and globalization (e.g., Yang, 2016; Nolan, 2004; Zheng, 2004). China as a world factory has been in place that contributes to the sustainable economic growth, then becoming the global economic power in the 21st century. Such a transformation, in the main, reshapes the international image of China locally and globally from a communist regime to a regional power in the name of the peaceful rise. China has been regarded as a potential partner contesting the American hegemony. However, while its economic power is in full swing, the political project about the understanding of China is in parallel undertaking.

Undoubtedly, after the protests organized by students in 1989 and followed by the massacre terminating the whole movement, China was facing international isolation in the first half of the 1990s. The authorities understand that (1) the international image of Deng Xiaoping as well as the party-state has been undermined severely in perception after the suppression, (2) such political issues as human rights, democracy, rule of law have been criticized sharply by the Western media given that suppression has been in place, and (3) the nature of authoritarian regime endorsed and upheld by the Chinese Communist Party remains after its establishment in 1949. China adjusts its tone in response to such criticisms in such a way from keeping silence or denial to advocating “Chinese exceptionalism” (*Zhongguo guoqing* / 中國國情) (Walt, 2012), highlighting the uniqueness of China in historical, societal, economic, political and institutional practices in comparison with the Western world, so the West should not imposed their own lens

to understand and even criticize China as this is unreasonable and senseless. However, Chinese exceptionalism is proposed with the following premises. First, its advocacy is not aimed to embrace diversity, tolerance, differences and flexibility; it is only the excuse used to refute the condemnations and criticisms made by the West about China’s violation of political freedom and civic rights. With regard to the ethical policy of the Beijing authorities, “sinicization” and “anti-religion” are two crucial features and diversification is not the core value of the current regime. Lastly, the assertiveness of the Beijing authorities in criticizing party politics and elections under the democratic system (e.g., Xinhua, 2017) as actually power game manipulated by the businessmen and interest groups, and then proposing that “Chinese-style democracy” is so efficient in enhancing governance, including the competence to execute and implement. Above all, such assertions reveal that the Chinese authorities deploys artful language to confuse the nature of democracy and cover up its authoritarian rule.

This article aims to analyze and interpret the official indoctrination formulated and delivered by the Beijing authorities, then featuring how the party-state alters the political language over the past decades, and recently, the official imposition of the belief and values upon those being ruled. Sinicization of everything, in this regard, is articulated to conceptualize the process whereby the Beijing authorities deploy language to manipulate politics in terms of shaping cognition, perception and judgment of the audience, thereby establishing hegemony that it is the only authoritative and correct version in approaching China.

2. Emerging and Conceptualizing Sinicization of Everything

In relation to wide coverage of media in the West about Chinese politics, focusing on belief and values, sinicization of everything is designed to

set up an authoritative version of understanding China about its domestic politics and practices, and then use the negative lens to judge and devalue those (especially the West) criticizing China.

Francis Moriarty (2019), a Hong Kong-based commentator, makes the following observation in the light:

Beijing's wrath is traditionally aimed at the U.S., but in a significant change Beijing's ambit of anger is widening, and its purpose is more pointed and strategic.

Here's the new point: China is staking out a position of moral equivalency, aggressively insisting that its systems of governance are every bit the equal of – and even superior to – those of its critics. It's presenting this case with escalating stridency and populist rhetoric.

China's leaders are pursuing a national policy that could be called the "Sinicization of Everything." That's to say that everything – and everybody – under Beijing's control must somehow be rendered Chinese.

This includes, for example, the forcible eradication of the ethnic Uighurs' language, culture and religious faith. It means selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders according to traditional ceremonies administered by Beijing. It means yanking crucifixes off Christian churches, while reaching a deal with the Vatican giving the state-run patriotic church a role in ordaining clergy. It means obliging Hong Kong to legislate a ban on even symbolic displays of anti-China sentiment.

Similar observation is also made by Anders Corr (2019), an American commentator, indicating that "Chinese characteristics" is employed deliberately by the Beijing authorities to distort the nature of the universal values and alter the meanings of human and civil rights in

such a way that justifies the repressive and suppressive measures used and enforced by the party-state:

China's human rights violations are notorious and many. Included in what is a long list are an estimated 1 to 2 million Turkic Muslims illegally detained in re-education and labor camps in the Xinjiang region, and attempts to eradicate Tibetan and Uyghur languages. There's a lack of free speech, elections and assembly, arrests of human rights lawyers and the use of torture. There's also been ongoing credible reports of organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience. Such violations, and the global public criticism they have caused, drives an increasingly powerful and assertive Beijing to promote what it calls "human rights with Chinese characteristics". The Chinese Communist Party's notion of human rights prioritizes development and national sovereignty over individual rights, which is to say, the party is committed to globally destroying the core principle of human rights that protects the vulnerable individual from the powerful excesses of government and business.

China is a ringleader globally in actions designed to erode these universal human rights. It uses its growing economic power to influence countries in the United Nations and intimidate, harass, and censor civil society such that the ability of the United Nations to protect human rights is increasingly hampered.

Another article, entitled "Never disclosing the whole truth" in Chinese version, and "A major threat for democracies around the world" in English version, reveals that the Beijing authorities deploy media to buttress its soft power, aiming to resist the influence of the West, and even becoming superior in political discourse through the manipulation of the cognition, selecting and extracting the positive elements for

promotion, and then covering up and eliminating those information that discloses the dirty politics of the communist regime, using a remark of “telling China stories well and spreading positively China’s voice” (*jianghao Zhongguo gushi; chuanbohao Zhongguo shengyin* / 講好中國故事；傳播好中國聲音) (Mantesso and Zhou, 2019):

When the international arm of China Central Television (CCTV) news rebranded and became CGTN in 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping urged the media organisation in a congratulatory letter to “tell China stories well” and spread China’s voice.

The message was seen as part of Beijing’s ambition to build a new global narrative around China while also challenging liberal democracy as the ideal developmental and political framework. ...

The CCP’s aspiration has grown beyond just controlling news domestically – where many Western media outlets, including the ABC, are now blocked in one of the most restrictive media environments in the world – it now wants to create a “new world media order” beyond its borders.

Not only media, but also religion is another salient area for coverage, with the objectives to manipulate the religious groups domestically. Sinicization can be regarded as a practice that party-state ideology and values are in place over every facet of religion in China. Father Bernardo Cervellera, editor-in-chief of AsiaNews, the official press agency of the Roman Catholic Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) discusses this issue, arguing that:

Sinicization “is a trap”, a way to “intimidate the Catholic Church”; it has the purpose of “distorting the creed of all religious communities” in China. These are the thoughts of two Chinese Catholics, Peter of

Hebei, and Paul of Shaanxi referring to the program wanted by Xi Jinping to assimilate religions to Chinese culture and society, a program that provides for submission to the Communist Party and verification of assimilation by the Patriotic Association (PA), the Party's long arm over religious communities. The PA and the Council of Bishops have already prepared a five-year plan for the implementation of sinicization. By the end of August, every diocese in China will have to present its plan at a diocesan level ...

[Paul of Shaanxi:] Sinicization is a trap indeed. It forces the Catholic strictly to obey government. On the other hand, sinicization will be a standard for judging what is wrong or not according to the government's desire. Sinicization is also an intimidation for Chinese Catholic. Because it will be compelling our mind to fear them on everything.

(AsiaNews.it, 22nd August 2018)

By synthesizing the above discussion and interpretation of sinicization of everything in China, four features are proposed:

1. *Devaluation*: In relation to social, political, cultural and religious control imposed by the party-state, the authorities make severe criticisms toward the foreign powers. However, such criticisms may not be logical and substantial. For example, when the foreign powers criticize the human right's violation in China, the authorities respond to them aggressively by saying that the party-state strives for the right for survival, maintains national security, prevents the infiltration of the external forces and answers back those ridiculous assertions (*shuosan daosi* / 說三道四) made.
2. *Manipulation*: Surveillance, censorship and ban made by the party-state in different ways and in different aspects, covering religious to

political activities. The exclusion of the non-official assertions, perspectives and findings aims at monopolizing the understanding of reality. The deployment of the threatening remarks in response to them produces fear.

3. *Partiality*: The selective use of facts and observations to distort the reality so as to articulate the cognition and perception – use of such terms as efficiency, competence, ample food and clothing (*wenbao* / 溫飽) and right to survival to feature Chinese-style democracy. Instead, such terms as checking the government, check and balance, peaceful transfer of power are not mentioned intentionally.
4. *Sinocentrism*: Despite inconsistency, contradictions, distortion or illogic in justifying the practice made by the party-state, the official insistence is in place when addressing criticisms. To show the confidence, the affirmative views are reiterated. Also, the authorities criticize the foreign powers as deliberately imposing their own views on domestic affairs.

By selecting the representative texts, this article proposes two themes, namely (1) “Democracy with Chinese characteristics” and (2) the contribution of China to promote sustainable economic growth, examining how sinicization of everything is in operation in order to make meanings politically, aiming to alter, challenge and subvert the understanding of universal values, such as democracy, freedom and human rights. Such representative texts with thick description are taken from the official media to enable the deconstruction of sentences or words and exploring the logic behind, and then inferring the premises, values and intentions in production.

3. Sinicization of Everything in China: Two Cases

Case 1: As an efficient implementation of “democracy”

Adopting the online article entitled “China is the largest democratic country in the world” written by Zhen Han, the following techniques are deployed in discursive formation (Han, 2017). First, democracy is a term that can be divided into two styles: the Western-style and Chinese-style and both types are exclusionary. Second, emphasizing that the Western-style democracy leads to political instability and then praising the Chinese-style one as the excellent demonstration of democracy, meaning that the former is inferior, and the latter is superior. By interpreting the text below, the features of sinicization of everything is manifested. In interpreting the democratic experience of the West, partiality and devaluation are manifested over the text in order to justify that democracy in the West is regarded as a power game that powerholders share the interests of their own, and as a means of which the American imperialist intervenes in the domestic affairs of other countries:

When the anti-American Palestinian Hamas organization won the Palestinian election in 2006, the United States simply did not recognize the legitimacy of Hamas. The Iranian president is directly elected by the people, but Europe and the United States have never regarded Iran as a ‘democratic country.’ What is more, in 1973, the US Central Intelligence Agency once supported the Pinochet Group to launch a bloody military coup and overthrew the elected government of Chile’s Allende.

(Han, 2017)

By interpreting the above text, democracy is equated arbitrarily to elections in the Chinese context, but whether the elections in practice in

different countries have the necessary properties of democracy is deliberately ignored, and such traits as being fair, just, open, and equal are not mentioned. Given the dominant nature of the Iranian electoral system, elections and voting are only forms, but the nomination of candidates is discriminatory and violates the principle of democracy. By citing the above examples that are both lopsided and untrue, party-state media criticizes the foreign powers interfering with democracy in other countries, thus accusing them of not respecting democracy at all, a common way used by the pro-government media to define the “Western-style democracy”.

In history, democracy of Athens was based on the so-called “free people” enforcing enslavement upon a large number of slaves. At that time, not only did women have no democratic rights, but slaves were only “speaking tools” and were not treated as human beings. When the United States was founded, it put forward the values and principles of democracy. But it was not until the end of the Civil War in 1865 that American blacks were granted the freedom of rights by the Constitution. In 1920, women gained voting rights after nearly a hundred years of struggle. For decades, the American politics is characterized to be cliquey, family-based, and aristocratic which has become increasingly apparent. The Kennedy, Bush, and Clinton families have prominent positions in American politics. At least three presidential candidates in the history of the United States won most of the popular votes but lost the election. The superior party representatives in the primary election within the party in the United States plays a role in preventing candidates like (Bernie) Sanders who are favored by the lower classes. The contemporary Western democratic system is only a staged evolution of the capitalist political system under the economic and technological conditions of the 21st

century. Its essence is still the political arrangement for safeguarding the bourgeoisie and monopolizing capitalist interests.

(*ibid.*)

In constructing the discourse, the following aspects are produced intentionally. First, democracy is actually *not* in place for such democratic countries in respect of their historical developments in the past: highlighting the women, the black and the slaves without the right to vote. Second, democracy is only the power game manipulated at the backstage by the powerholders, such as businessmen and capitalists. The United States is notably mentioned in illustrating the assertion, with the premise that the general public is vaguely and even not knowledgeable about democracy. Democracy does serve for the powerful claiming themselves as people (*min* / 民) and then deciding (*zhu* / 主) everything for the powerless as mentioned above. In this context, by employing the decontextualization and partiality in narration, it highlights that democracy in the West is only an illusion in order to put forward the assertion that the "Chinese-style democracy" is the desirable proposal. By distorting the nature of democracy in such a way of democracy being equivalent to election, it misleadingly argues that the weaknesses of electoral system means that democracy is fragile and incompetent, and shows its superficiality and even misunderstanding of democracy, while totally disregarding such features as liberty, equality and fraternity, and even the implementation of participatory democracy at grassroots such as schools, churches, and workplaces.

With regard to the "Chinese-style democracy", the adoption of positive and assertive approach is salient in order to ensure its feasibility in response to the negative remarks of the "Western-style democracy":

General Secretary Xi Jinping clearly points out in the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: China's socialist democracy is the most extensive, authentic and useful democracy that safeguards the fundamental interests of the people. As the most populous country in the world, China is the largest democracy in the world today.

(ibid.)

The deployment of the authoritarian approach in promoting the “Chinese-style democracy”, including the acknowledgement of the speech made by the national and party leader, emphasizes that China is a populous and democratic country in the world. This creates a perception that China has produced a role model for practicing democracy that other democratic states cannot be capable of, which is useful for buttressing its own superiority and pride. Hence, such misunderstanding and misconception toward democracy is a key element by which indoctrination can be put in place, during which the meanings of democracy can be altered in respect of the official views, while injecting such elements as stability, prosperity, dream and glory so that the people are dependent on such an affirmation given the satisfaction of personal desires, and then shaping their cognition and perception, hence becoming for them the only single authoritative version of democracy without having them thinking of the huge gap between discourse and contexts therein in reality:

After more than 60 years of hard work in exploration and practice, China has made historic achievements in the construction of democratic politics. Through the reform and improvement of the party and state leadership system, the existence and practice of the permanent system of cadres has been abolished, and the

institutionalized and orderly change of the leadership from the central to local levels has been achieved. We will revise and improve the Constitution, continuously consolidate and improve the people's congress system, expand orderly the political participation of citizens, and promote the autonomy of the grassroots. The people have become the masters of their own house (*dāngjiā zuòzhǔ* / 当家作主) in a comprehensive and sophisticated manner. We will uphold and improve the multi-party cooperation and political consultation system under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, conduct in-depth political consultations, make democratic supervision, and participate in and discuss political issues, promote the extensive and multi-layered institutionalization of socialist deliberative democracy, and develop a unique socialist deliberative democracy. Efforts will be made to build a decision-making mechanism that understands the people's feelings, reflects public opinion, and focuses on the collective wisdom, ensuring that decisions are in line with the interests and aspirations of the people. We will reform the personnel system of cadres, establish and improve a mechanism for recruiting talented people, capable and being able to work, and being energetic. We will implement the basic strategy of governing the country according to law, form and perfect a socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics under the Constitution and promote the integration of a country ruled by law, a government under the rule of law, and a society ruled by law. We will establishing the sound restrictions on exercising the full power and mechanism for supervising power, improving the system of punishing and preventing corruption, and ensuring that party and government organs and their cadres exercise their powers in accordance with legal authority and procedures.

(ibid.)

By considering the Chinese contexts, the above text is aimed to prove that the authorities put democracy into practice, using the following keywords to guide the audience in order to shape their cognition and perception:

- Appreciation: historic achievements, unique, the master of their own houses
- Verb (with noun): consolidate, improve, orderly change, participate in and discuss political issues, ensuring, institutionalization, democratic supervision, understand the people's feelings, reflects public opinion, focuses on the collective wisdom – to demonstrate the accomplishments in a vivid manner
- Adjective: comprehensive, sophisticated, multi-layered, sound (restrictions), energetic – to shape the people's impression in concreting the ideas

With regard to political developments, such keywords in relation to “democracy” as:

- Abolishing permanent system of cadres, institutionalized and orderly change of the leadership, autonomy of the grassroots, multi-party cooperation, political consultation system (under the leadership of the Communist Party of China), sound restrictions on exercising the full power and mechanism for supervising power, system of punishing and preventing corruption, exercising their powers in accordance with legal authority and procedures

Of course, the Beijing authorities reiterate that institutionalization has been in place, including the reform and improvement of the party and state leadership system, socialist deliberative democracy, a country

ruled by law, a government under the rule of law, and a society ruled by law. The imperial practice of selecting talents is mentioned as well, like setting up a mechanism for recruiting talented people, capable and being able to work, and being energetic.

In connection with the one-party dictatorship, totalistic control, and the elimination of dissidents, official propaganda discussed above aims to construct the Chinese-style democracy as an ideal and utopian type of governance, guiding arbitrarily the people under the repressive rule in such a way that they should accept, adapt and even internalize themselves under the lying society (Havel, 1978) where stability and dominance are paramount. Under such a huge gap between the propaganda and reality, of which the former is illusionary and the latter is suppressive, the people are getting adapted to know how to survive under such a distorting and dehumanizing environment sustained by the communist regime, thereby shaping the cognition and perception in such a way that being abnormal is part of their normal life, and showing the unconditional support for the ruling of the regime which is regarded to be reasonable, legitimate and moral apart from being subservient and incapable, given the fact that the regime is the most powerful agent within.

Case 2: As a country contributing to the sustainable growth of global economy

Since the reform and opening up in 1978 and then China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2000, China has become a “world factory” under industrialization and development of special economic zones. The party-state system continues controlling the market under the socialist system and monopolizes production tools. Such officials, cadres, and businessmen with party-state background have quickly got rich and accumulated wealth through power. In addition,

globalization has created a national and private enterprise to invest overseas. Since the 2000s, it has invested heavily in Africa, using economic incentives and cultural exchanges to develop political influence, and then also invested heavily in Western countries and acquired local properties, businesses and infrastructure projects (e.g., Lumumba-Kasongo, 2011; Zhao, 2014; Cabestan, 2015). The strong consumption power of Chinese tourists has created a sense of “Chinese tourists save your domestic economy” and strengthened China’s image of sustaining global economic growth. Behind this remark, however, it is neglected that tourism is only a mutual economic and cultural transaction, neither means nor ends of giving benefits, not a benevolent offering of the rich to the needy.

Unfortunately, in order to recognize and promote China’s influence assertively, state-party media even propose that due to the efforts put by a single country, an economic expansion is in place domestically and globally. In the context of “sinicization of everything”, China has successfully been regarded as a savior of global economy, as manifested in the implementation of free individual visit in Hong Kong and Macau, and then the reception of mainland Chinese visitors under global tourism industry. In such places as airports, railway stations and road signs simplified Chinese characters are provided, and even in some countries, Putonghua-speaking staff, mainly the overseas mainland Chinese students or immigrants, are available to serve those mainland customers who can afford the extravagant items in the shopping malls and arcades, buttressing the perception that “without the mainland Chinese tourists, the local economy cannot be sustained”, and then furthermore that “without the sustainable economic development of China, the global economy will be in decline.”

The following extract is from a junior high school textbook, then taken by a netizen and posted in *LIHKG*, one of the leading social media

platforms in Hong Kong, talking about the contribution of the Chinese authorities to the Asian countries and regions during the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997:

In 1997, the Asian financial turmoil broke out. At that time, too many Asian countries and regions depreciated their currencies to enhance the competitiveness of their goods, which led to the collapse of the Asian currency and financial markets. However, China insisted on not depreciating the renminbi and protecting other East Asian economies from further shocks. China even provides loans worth \$4 billion to those Asian countries and regions in need. These measures helped Asian countries and regions overcome difficulties. This is the first time since the founding of New China in 1949 that the Beijing government played a decisive role in international crisis.¹

For those who lack understanding of the financial turmoil and political economy, the text directs the assertion that “China insisted on not depreciating the renminbi” and “China provided a total of \$4 billion in payments to Asian countries and regions in need”, which is considered in which “the Beijing government played a decisive role in the first international crisis”, fully exerting a one-sided understanding of Beijing’s role in maintaining regional financial stability, as its role may be exaggerated.

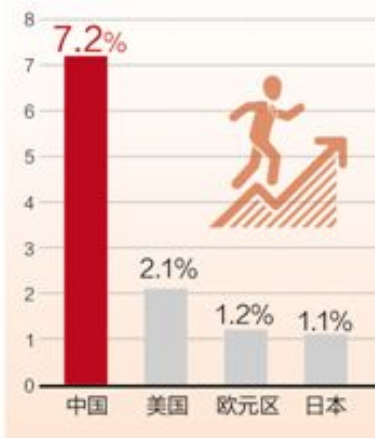
Another article from *People’s Daily Online*, titled “The contribution of China’s economy to world economic growth in 2017 is about 34%”, gives the impression that “China has a certain influence on the world economy”. By emphasizing China’s “achievements” and “impact”, different expression techniques are employed.

To establish the perception, the diagram shown below in the report effectively highlights China’s outstanding performance. In the picture,

China is marked in red with the percentage, and the font is enlarged to highlight China's brilliant achievements, and especially in the diagram on promoting the global economic recovery, that China is unique in performance, as shown by the arrow of moving forward and upward on the steps. A male portrait is used, meaning that its recovery is faster. By comparing the performance of different systems in the world, the economic performance of other regions is shown to be not good, while highlighting its own superiority in both areas of global economic growth and world consumption growth. Of course, there is no explanation about the particularities of different regions depending on such factors as geography and population, which cannot be simply comparable.

推动全球经济复苏

2013—2016年
经济年均增长



拉动世界消费增长

2013—2016年
最终消费对世界消费增长的年均贡献率



Translation:

推动全球经济复苏 : Driving the global economic recovery

经济年均增长 : Annual average economic growth

拉動世界消費增長 : Driving world consumption growth

最終消費對世界消費增長的年均貢獻率 : Annual average contribution rate of final consumption to world consumption growth

中國 : China

美國 : The United States

歐元區 : Euro Zone

日本 : Japan

Source: Lu Yanan (陸婭楠) (2018).2017年中國經濟對世界經濟增長貢獻率34%左右 [the contribution of China's economy to the world's economic growth in 2017 is about 34%], 人民網 (*people.cn*), 13th April 2018 <<http://money.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2018/0413/c42877-29923421.html>>, with charts illustrated by Zhang Fangman (張芳曼) <http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/res/2018-04/13/10/rmrb2018041310p23_b.jpg>.

In interpreting the numerical data shown above, China has been shaped as a savior to save the world economy, as described in the following excerpt:

The sustained and steady China economy has effectively promoted the recovery of the world economy, effectively promoted the development of world trade and brought unprecedented opportunities for development for the people of the world. President Xi Jinping's speech at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia has stated a series of major measures to further expand China's opening up, which means that China will bring more dividends openly to the world.

China's development has not only benefited the vast number of Chinese citizens, but also created development opportunities for all developing and developed countries. The person-in-charge said that China's Belt and Road Initiative has received positive responses from many countries. At present, more than 100 countries and international organizations have participated in the construction of the Belt and

Road in different forms, and more than 80 countries and international organizations have signed cooperation agreements with China.

China's huge population and stable economic growth have provided space for development for companies all over the world. More and more developed countries have entered the Chinese market, strengthened cooperation with China, and obtained huge profits.

The opening of China's door will not be closed, and it will only grow wider. President Xi Jinping's speech at the Boao Forum for Asia clearly expressed China's position to the world. As a responsible big country, China adheres to openness, mutual benefit and win-win situation, advocates building a community of human destiny, and promotes common prosperity of the world, which will bring more and more opportunities for development to countries around the world.

(Lu, 2018)

From the discursive perspective, the text deliberately creates the perception of party-state competence in developing and shaping the global economy, including vigorously promoting the recovery of the world economy, bringing unprecedented opportunities for development for the people of the world, bringing more open dividends to the world and benefiting the vast majority. By creating opportunities for development, Chinese citizens, all developing countries and developed countries can enjoy stable economic growth. They also have provided space for enterprises from all over the world, strengthened cooperation with China, obtained rich profits, and advocated the construction of human destiny. The community, by promoting the common prosperity of the world, will bring more and more development and opportunities to the countries of the world.

Behind the deployment of these well-chosen terms arbitrarily, China is assumed to be the only economic opportunity in the world, the only

hope of economic development, and even the only continuous driving force. Second, this expectation is based on the fact that when the global economy is volatile and unstable, China is the only economic entity in the world that has been expanding without decline. In response to the above analysis, power relations between China and other countries are not equal: China places itself in the position of economic hegemony offering benefits and manufacturing opportunities to other economically weak powers in order to help them get rich. Therefore, in China's view of the world economy, China is the only economic power, and other countries are economically weak, being eager to accept and dependent on China's benevolent offering. Therefore, the global economic growth should also be attributed to China's contribution, and China is the center of its sustainable growth. The collective perception of China's economic hegemony is thus constructed and then reflected in the uncivilized behavior of Chinese tourists in foreign countries, where Chinese netizens claim that "Chinese people have money, that is, are to let outsiders know that they have money. When you speak, you have the confidence, hence your voice is louder than other people's. There are foreigners who are also like that. Don't demonize us." (HK01, 15th April 2017)

4. Discussion and Conclusion: Limits and Limitations of "Sinification of Everything"

This article draws relevant texts, and interprets their use of words, the premises behind them and the beliefs and values embodied. The texts' intention is to establish a set of ideologies based on the positive remarks of the Chinese Communist regime, emphasizing the strength of China under the current leadership. Therefore, being a Chinese should be glorious and proud, even if individual and collective freedom and human rights continue to be violated and undermined in order to maintain the

glory and privileges under social and political stability. As a result, the economic dividends and opportunities claimed by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party have achieved the prosperity of the nation. In this context, the discourse on distorting freedom and human rights is in place. This is also in line with the collective memory of the Chinese who had experienced a series of political turmoil in the past 100 years, and the chaos associated with a series of political movements since 1949, and hence are eager for stability and in fear of turmoil. When the Tiananmen Square protests broke out in 1989, the Chinese Communist Party had officially used a similar tone to accuse the student movement of being “turmoil”, then turning it into a “reason” for future military repression and massacres to restore order. Afterwards, the term “stability maintenance” began to appear in the 1990s, a term created in response to this official initiative and the “collective values” of the people. Another well-known political term “hiding and keeping a low profile” which refers to the officials deciding to be humble by sweeping assertiveness under the carpet at that moment in preparation for future growth.

After 2000, “stability maintenance” and “hiding and keeping a low profile” could no longer restrain China’s influence. The assertiveness of party-state leadership is in place. The concept of “peaceful rise” emerges: peace serves as a means of concealing its rise while the superiority of the CCP remains without fundamental change; in other words, peace and development are emphasized intentionally to hide its ambition. When the CCP feels confident that such a humbleness is no longer useful, it can reveal its original form and undertake the official dictatorship and exclusive values. Therefore, the CCP has tried to improve its political image through foreign public relations companies, and even to buy overseas media to promote the CCP in the past ten years. Touching upon political events, especially on the inadequacy and incompetence of current leadership, however, cannot be tolerated. By

understanding the international impacts associated with “sinicization of everything”, the mentality of sinocentrism is projected in which racism is having impact throughout the course, as observed below:

A video produced by Xinhua’s official YouTube channel New China TV at the height of China’s border stand off with India in 2017 highlighted the sometimes clumsy and unsophisticated nature of China’s media apparatus.

Titled the Seven Sins of India, it used racist language and depictions; many thought it revealed a level of ignorance to social conventions acceptable on the world stage.

CGTN was also criticised for a racist rant against foreigners and Jews in 2012 on Weibo by the host of its leading talk show Dialogue – Yang Rui is still presenting the show.

The scale and, at times covert, nature of China’s push has rattled security pundits across the Western world – but questions remain over how effective Beijing’s media projections are.

It has developed a more robust and sophisticated media strategy but its broadcasters appear hamstrung by the requirements of toeing the party line which hinder its ability to produce widely appealing content.

But Peter Mattis warns this is not fundamentally a soft power campaign.

“I think a really key thing to remember about this is that it’s often referred to as a soft power push – and this isn’t soft power,” he said.

“Soft power as it was defined is innately passive, it’s about the attractiveness of one’s culture, values and political systems, and the behaviours that result from those things.

What China’s doing is not soft, it’s actually active and it’s invasive.”

That may be the real kicker.

Beijing is yet to shake off global perceptions that it's an authoritarian state, without a message of hope or change, to sell to the world.

Instead its tactics are increasingly bullish in attempting to control the medium – not just the message.

(Mantesso and Zhou, 2019)

From the above observation, the fatal blow of “Chinese-style” or “sinicization” is that it is only a set of CCP’s officially constructed monograph, with the aim to hide and beautify its authoritarian dictatorship with illusionary language such as economy, development, cooperation and win-win. It intends to lure countries and the international community with material attractions. In recent years, the Belt and Road Initiative advocated by Xi Jinping is regarded as Chinese-style economic colonialism. It is built through the development of local infrastructure and borrowing to establish and maintain the economic and political dependence on the CCP, and then sustain a political and economic power centered on China. In response to material interests, these countries dare not offend and criticize the CCP, and hence the CCP officials can claim that “sinicization of everything” is recognized by all countries. Therefore, Peter Mattis proposed that “sinicization of everything” is not a soft power campaign, but a sharp one, as political propaganda is only superficial (as cited in Mantesso and Zhou, 2019). In fact, through material control and economic dependence, China forces various countries to keep silent regarding its various immoral acts, then being labeled by party-state media as considering and respecting the Chinese values.

In the discursive perspective, “sinicization of everything” is not a cultural movement constructed in order to address the problems of

practicing democracy and development. It only borrows the body of democracy and development, and then injects the pro-Beijing values during the process, while at the same time, by criticizing the ills of Western-style democracy, regards it as a failed political and economic experiment (Wong, 2017). As a result, “sinicization” is portrayed as the only way out for future global development. Behind the development, however, the position of party-state in extracting and manipulating resources is not mentioned deliberately; democracy is only a core term for political propaganda. Party-state has achieved its highest status in terms of power and control during the course. The CCP’s mouthpiece will inevitably promote “sinicization of everything” which can be regarded as a manifestation of domestic and international influence, and as an intention of consolidating its own discursive capacity. The production of political propaganda film *Amazing China*² filmed by party-state is evidence. At the same time, the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative is articulated, advocating “to go out of Western-style centralism, breaking it; reshaping the right to speak under economic globalization.” The Belt and Road Initiative is being shaped in such a way that “globalization of inclusive economy will be in force, then transcending injustice, irrationality of economic globalization and unsustainability.” (Wang, 2016) Of course, the key to approaching discourse analysis is how the government can reshape and influence people’s perceptions of reality and worldview through language and/or images, and examining how the process links powers and how the government produces the specific political language with impacts on cognition and perception. In this regard, “sinicization of everything” can be seen as a project of deploying language, visualizing China as a model of global sustainable development in the new era, capable of challenging hegemony of the West, and then demonstrating the global impacts through political spinning.

Notes

- * Dr Benson Wai-Kwok Wong (黃偉國) formally taught at Hong Kong Baptist University, Education University of Hong Kong and Chu Hai College of Higher Education. Dr Wong's main research interests are cultural politics, Internet and politics, identity politics, and visual and discourse analysis. Recently, he is conducting a project on how Internet politics shapes political culture and political developments of Hong Kong in the past two decades. <Email: bkwong06@life.hkbu.edu.hk>
1. <https://forum.hkgolden.com/view.aspx?message=7053317&fbclid=IwAR2PB--B16OFN_vt3Z8vSG-WsJL8A4Fq_duSEt0HRq_zPgW1eehlDgoUjXY>. The extract is taken from *New journey through history* (Chinese, 2009), p. 124.
 2. CCTV (中國中央電視台) (2018, May 9), 電影《厲害了，我的國》 (*Amazing China*). <<https://youtu.be/CT3ZdsSxgbM>> <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CT3ZdsSxgbM&feature=youtu.be>>

References

- AsiaNews.it* (22nd August 2018). Chinese Catholics: Sinicization is a trap to block the Church and distort the religions. (Reported by Bernardo Cervellera.) <<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Chinese-Catholics--Sinicization-is-a-trap-to-block-the-Church-and-distort-the-religions-44721.html>>
- Cabestan, Jean-Pierre (2015). China-Cameroon relations: Fortunes and limits of an old political complicity. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, pp. 67-91.
- Corr, Anders (2019). Beijing's global efforts to destroy core principles of human rights. *la Croix International*, 23rd January 2019. <<https://international.la-croix.com/news/beijings-global-efforts-to-destroy-core-principles-of-human-rights/9300>>

- Han Zhen (韓震) (2017). 中國才是當今世界最大的民主國家 [China is the largest democracy in the world today]. 人民網 >> 中國共產黨新聞 >> 理論 (people.cn>>cpcnews.cn>>theory), 16th November 2017 (source: Qiushi / 求是). <<http://theory.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2017/1116/c40531-29649697.html>>
- Havel, Václav (1978, October). The Power of the Powerless. *International Journal of Politics*, 1979. ICNC website. Washington, D.C.: International Center for Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC). <<https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/resource/the-power-of-the-powerless/>>
- HK01 (香港01) (15th April 2017). 40 條建議教裝得不像一個「中國遊客」網民：有錢有底氣就要大聲 [40 suggestions on how to act not like a "Chinese tourist": you have to be rich and confident with loud voices] (updated 16th April 2017). <<https://www.hk01.com/中國/84626/40條建議教裝得不像一個-中國遊客-有錢有底氣就要大聲>>
- Hsueh, Roselyn (2016). State capitalism, Chinese-style: Strategic value of sectors, sectoral characteristics, and globalization. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 85-102.
- Li, Xi, Xuewan Liu and Yong Wang (2015, August). A model of China's state capitalism. *SSRN*. <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2061521>>
- Lu Yanan (陸婭楠) (2018). 2017 年中國經濟對世界經濟增長貢獻率 34% 左右 [the contribution of China's economy to the world's economic growth in 2017 is about 34%], 人民網 (people.cn), 13th April 2018. <<http://money.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2018/0413/c42877-29923421.html>>
- Lumumba-Kasongo, Tukumbi (2011). China-Africa relations: A neo-imperialism or a neo-colonialism? A reflection. *African and Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, Issue 2-3, pp. 234-266.
- Mantesso, Sean and Christina Zhou (2019). China's multi-billion dollar media campaign 'a major threat for democracies' around the world. *ABC News*,

- 8th February 2019 (*China Watch*: Part 1). <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-08/chinas-foreign-media-push-a-major-threat-to-democracies/10733068>>
- Moriarty, Francis (2019). China: The Sinicization of everything. *The Berkshire Eagle*, 5th February 2019. <<https://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/francis-moriarty-china-the-sinicization-of-everything.563758>>
- Naughton, Barry and Kellee S. Tsai (eds.) (2015). *State capitalism, institutional adaptation, and the Chinese miracle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- New journey through history* (新歷史旅程) (2009). Hong Kong: Aristo Educational Press Ltd. (雅集出版社有限公司).
- Nolan, Peter (2004). *Transforming China: Globalization, transition and development*. London: Anthem Press.
- Walt, Stephen M. (2012). The myth of Chinese exceptionalism. *Foreign Policy*, 6th March 2012. <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/03/06/the-myth-of-chinese-exceptionalism/>>
- Wang Yiwei (王義桅) (2016). “一帶一路”：重塑經濟全球化話語權 [Belt and Road Initiative: reshaping the discursive power of economic globalization]. 求是網 (*qstheory.cn*), 4th November 2016 (source: 《紅旗文稿》2016/21). <http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwq/2016-11/04/c_1119849672.htm>
- Wong, Wai-Kwok Benson (2017). Chinese-style democracy as a political project for meaning-construction: Old wine in a new bottle? *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, July/August 2017, pp. 819-847.
- Xinhua News Agency (10th March 2017). Xinhua Insight: What does China-style democracy matter to its people? <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/201703/10/c_136118749.htm>
- Yang, Fan (2016). *Faked in China: Nation branding, counterfeit culture, and globalization*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Zhao, Suisheng (2014). A neo-colonialist predator or development partner? China's engagement and rebalance in Africa. *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 23, Issue 90, 1033- 1052.
- Zheng, Yongnian (2004). *Globalization and state transformation in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Transborder Reverberations

