Patriotic Rhetoric in Chinese Public Space

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Abstract
This paper begins with the analysis of the socio-cultural phenomenon known as "public space." This analysis is followed by the reflection on distinctive features of public space in contemporary China. Subsequently, I focus on the use of the public space by the authorities for spreading of official political and ideological discourse. For this purpose, I analyse form and the content of the message displayed in the places of public utility. I conclude by showing what, how and why is being displayed and widely promoted by authorities. I argue, that the public space in China, on the one hand is "public" in the sense that is accessible and used by citizens; on another is "arrested by authorities" and used for their socio-political and ideological purposes. Such an arrangement is a statement of the unvocalised agreement between the authorities and citizens that allows the former to avoid major conflicts and legitimise political power. In return, the latter enjoy a wide range of socio-cultural freedom and are being provided with psychological comfort resulting from identification with a greater endeavour of restoring the glory of the Chinese nation.

Keywords: Chinese rhetoric, Chinese Nationalism, Ideology, Chinese Values, Socio-political Slogans

Introduction

In 20th-century China propaganda and rhetoric force of the slogans used by authorities, have played a major role in establishing and legitimising political and ideological leadership. Besides newspapers, radio, television and recently the internet, the public space have also been employed as a mean of communication between the authorities and the society. The analysis of the form and the content of the message displayed in the public space is then not less important that studying newspapers, tv news or official speeches. It not only reveals the content, and motivation behind socio-political discourse promoted by the authorities but also show how public accommodate the space employed by the authorities for their political and ideological purposes. Concluding from the data obtained in several geographically distant location in China, we can then state that the public space in China, is "public" in the sense that is accessible and used by citizens to conduct non-political socio-cultural activities. However, the design and control of socio-political and ideological messages displayed is entirely controlled by authorities. Such an arrangement rarely if at all challenged by the public, is a display of the unvocalised agreement between the authorities and citizens. It allows the former to avoid major conflicts and keep political power. In return, the latter enjoys a wide range of socio-cultural freedom and psychological comfort of identification with a greater good of "nation's rejuvenation".

What Is "Public Space"?

Public space is a term that appears across a wide range of academic disciplines. The idea as such does involve quite a few aspects of the physical and social life, and single approach could hardly exhaust the meaning of the concept. The adjective "public" turns our attention to the socially shared nature of the space, and the noun "space," on its behalf indicates the necessity of the spatial factor for the social interactions to happen. "Public" then includes roads, squares, parks, beaches, government and privately owned buildings, places of religious cult and all access-free zones and buildings with all instalments that are accessible to members of the society. Even if some of them are not equally available to everyone, the message presented in their visible and accessible parts does influence the society. It brings us to another feature crucial for the space to be considered "public" which is its relation with "public sphere," understood as "forums of public discussion" (Habermas, 1998). It has even become a task for the practitioners and academics alike, to "conceive spaces that are at once accessible to everyone and which also foster a sense of shared concern, the emergence of a local public sphere" (Tonellat, 2010). Any form of fully -, or partially opened space that "fosters a sense of shared concern" can then be considered public. The accessibility of public can be moderated or negotiated. Especially in the era of the on one hand appreciation of the private property, and growing regulatory efforts of governments on another, what makes space "public" is more a shared image than a physical "here and now." Another interesting observation of researchers in recent years is the fact that the "focal" point somehow moved from the open space towards accessible "zones" with clearly marked boundaries and limited capacity of accommodating participants. Schools, hospitals and even public buses are good examples here. Despite all these limitations, public space must be in some way

accessible to an at least certain number of citizens who are not the owners of that particular place. French philosopher Henry Lefebvre went even further arguing that public space is what he called "right to the city," the right of the inhabitants to have better control over the production of the space of their daily life. In Levebre thinking, public space is then an object of creative transformation remaining in a dialectical relation with the notions of power and control. It is not just a physical vacuum that can be utilised by the society for certain purposes but is the *sine qua none* condition for the emergence and existence of a particular type of society (Levebre, 1991).

To conclude, public space is then an arena of social interactions for which the presence of actual space is desirable. However, public space to be considered truly "public" must be more of a part of the shared mental landscape of the attendees than just a physical place that human beings pass through.

Public Space in China

Without a doubt, the concept of the public space is a product of western civilisation derived from the notion of Agora, the place of citizens interactions in ancient Greece. Habermas argued that it was the Agora, the spatiotemporal and mental construct with all the socio-political interactions taking place that led to the emergence of the public sphere and phenomena like civil society and democracy (Habermas, 1989). Public space as phenomenon also occurred in other time zones as well, but at different times and not in the quite the same forms. In China, for instance, despite the long history of its civilisation, public space as a publicly used and imagined place is a quite recent invention. A family oriented lifestyle, ruled by the strict socio-ethical code to a large degree limited citizens' activity to strictly drawn boundaries beyond which the world often virtually did not exist (Sun, 2004). It is not to say, that people in the Imperial China did not know the concept of a greater, going beyond the boundaries of their family business world. Quite to the contrary, the notion of *tianxia*, "under the heaven," had been a concept recognisable to most of the even poorly educated Chinese. However, the concept itself was referring to such a geographically and mentally broad scope that it remained somehow "aloof" (Sun, 2004). As the famous proverb says, "The Heaven is high (above us), the Emperor is far away (from us)," is and exemplification of such thinking. The proverb then "recognises" the importance of these two factors for the perseverance of the very existence of the cosmos. However, their significance for the everyday matters seems to be of little importance. Such perception of *tianxia* contributed to a further expansion of the realm of a family on the cost of the space shared by the members of different households. The model of Changan, the ancient capital, displayed at the City Musem in Xi'an provides us with a visual representation of the way the urban space was arranged and perceived in Imperial China. The massive city walls surround the city. Inside the city walls, we see the space divided by smaller walls creating separate segments with the Imperial Palace that overlooks the entire city from behind another wall. The everyday day experience of a common citizen was then confined to the boundaries of walled part of the city they lived in. He, and even to a greater degree she, rarely was leaving their compounds making the encounters with the individuals from beyond these inner walls sporadic. Streets, markets, temples and schools that were certainly used by the public

could hardly compare with Athenian Agora. For instance, the markets that emerged during Tang dynasty (618-907 AD) were controlled by guilds and "native-place associations" (*xiangtong hui*) (Gaubatz, 2008). Temples on their behalf were either family-owned, or they belonged to a particular religious denomination. Moreover, starting from the times of Ming dynasty (1368–1644), they were put under strict control, that furtherly limited the free exchange of ideas and possibility of creating an independent public sphere. The actual civic public space emerged in China as a result of modernisation movements of early 20th century. The event that could be classified as a first example of an active participation of the citizens from different classes that utilised larger space for public purposes was May 4th Movement. On 4th May 1919 students of universities in Beijing, followed by the merchants and ordinary citizens brought up their political agenda to the streets. Soon, the people of Shanghai and other larger cities followed them. May 4th Movement paved the way towards wide usage of the open space for socio-political movements and propaganda. Situation rather unknown in Imperial China, soon became a norm leading to the great concern of the ruling class. As a result, the open space for socio-political activity was soon "arrested" by the government forces (Zarrow, 2005). The similar situation repeated few more times in the following history of China with three instances of the particular importance. The first one was the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when the groups of young Red Guards took the streets making them a scene for the display of their political agenda. Originally not very well controlled by the central government, young "guards" soon ignited a quasi-civil war. The authorities had not much choice but to take over the control of the public space again and send most of the "active" participants out of towns and cities. The second was the so-called Wall of Democracy between November 1978 and March 1979. Citizens were then encouraged to put forward petitions and critique of the ruling regime. Shy at the begging but soon growing, the critical tone of the petitions and street banners makes authorities to retake the control again (Vogel, 2011, pp. 250-257). The public space in a sense presented in the first part has emerged in China one more time in the 1980's when after the era of hard-core communist intellectuals, partly supported by the authorities were searching for a "new identity" (Schoppa, 2006). As Philip C.C. Huang has pointed out, it was "a space intermediate between state and society in which both participated," "a third realm" (Huang, 1993: 224). According to Edward Gu, it was "an intellectual space comprising (1) state generated public space, (2) society-originated, officially-backed public space, (3) societal public space and (4) dissident public space." (Gu, 1999, p. 391) The Tiananmen tragedy was, on the one hand, a culminating point of display and utilisation of such understood public space. At the same time, it was a final breakaway from it. As a consequence, it meant eliminating of "dissident public space," or at least restricting its scope to the secret, underground zones.

The doubts about the applicability of the Habermas theory of public sphere in regards to China put forward by Huang, can easily be applied to the public space as well. Public space in China, at least to a degree, is designed, overlooked and simply controlled by the authorities. It is almost impossible to find a place of public use, especially in urban China that has been designed without a state permit. The state strictly controls any, public or private, display of pictures, art, written messages and

slogans. No art or music performance, not to mention any religious activities, can happen without an involvement of local government. With occasional exceptions, this rule is generally observed by citizens. Such an observation corresponds with the theory that Asian cultures have a collectivist element playing a greater role and are inclined towards authoritarian (Pye, 1988). However, it would be an oversimplification to conclude with such a statement. A short look at the variety of activities in the public places and the way they are being performed brings us to a slightly different conclusion.

Writing about the use of public space in China, Stephen McDonell, a BBC reporter, quite correctly noticed a core feature of the Chinese public, namely *renao* (lit.: "hot-noisy"). As he put it: "To be 热闹 (*renao*) is to be bustling with noise and excitement" (McDonell, BBC News, 11 March 2017). The space in China to be called "public" must be loud and ideally full of people. One visit to Starbucks or McDonald"s, must-go places for Chinese middle-class is always full of people speaking loudly, making their phone calls equally loudly, provides a sufficient proof of such a claim. Public squares, streets are not different. It is quite difficult to see an empty street in any even mid-size city or town, and there are always people dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, doing *Taiji* or simply chatting or conducting commercial activity in public parks. Shopping malls, markets and even hospitals are the places of public encounters were the all sorts of social interactions can be seen and heard. In short, in China, there are always people where there is any place or a zone that they can or must go. Moreover, those people are visible, hearable and not shy to interact with others. Even the interactions are usually limited to the group of familiar acquaintances (Sun, 2004), the public space in China is very much "alive," *renao*. The number of participants often organised in groups spending their times and money on a specific activity, the obvious opportunities for interactions and deliberation could then suggest that the public space in China is very close to the Habermas"s ideal type. Some researchers then would like to see the public space in China as a place of the display of the individuality of the citizen, and even the birthplace of the future "democratisation." However, the design and control of this flooded with citizens who use it to display their lifestyle, aspirations and individuality space, is in the hands of authorities. Moreover, the authorities, following the steps of the past regimes, do not hesitate to use it for their particular purposes that we try to analyse below.

Patriotism in Chinese Public space

Methodology

In China, the access to public space is opened to every citizen. However, we would call this access "passive" or at least "conformed", since the right to design it and determine the message that can be spread through it is in the hands of authorities. The focus of the present research is then on the official slogans promoting patriotism and appreciation of Chinese culture and current politics. These slogans are widely distributed and can be seen in the parks, public squares, buses, streets and public buildings. The banners, posters, plank and similar displays of official propaganda have been photographed and translated by the author. The acquired results were

consulted with other (native) Chinese speakers with a high command of English for accuracy. Another source of the material for the current study were the talks, discussion and short verbal exchanges of ideas between Chinese citizens that can often be heard in the parks, public squares and other places of public use. All the material analysed in this study had been collected during author's trips to different locations in China, such as Fuzhou, Xi'an, Chengdu, Shanghai, Xishuangbanna and Suzhou between Feb 2015 and March 2017. For the sake of accuracy, the author consulted the transcribed content and acquired translations with Chinese native speakers with a high command of English.

Findings

So what is the message that the authorities try to disseminate among the citizens with slogans displayed in public space? How is the message justified? What is the motivation of such actions? What do the banners, posters, plank and similar displays of official propaganda tell us about the authorities that put so much effort into popularising particular values? Probably the most appeal slogan that is being constantly reproduced through the entire spectrum of public space is *Zhonghua Minzu de Weida Fuxing* (中华民族的伟大复兴), that can be translated as a *The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*. In recent years it is usually paired with a main ideological slogan of the current administration *Zhongguo meng* (中国梦)*, The China Dream*. It was originally mooted by Jiang Zemin after he came into power, replacing *Invigorating China* (振兴中华) that was used by Sun Yat-sen back in 1894, and later by CCP (Ho, 2014: 176). The original slogan of Sun Yat-sen was a call for "awakening" a sense of Chinese national identity among the subjects of Qing Empire (Harrison, 2001). Nation-building rhetoric was never actually abandoned by Chinese Communists (Wu, 2014, p. 63). However, for Jiang Zemin, who took over the power from Deng Xiaoping in 1990's, appeal to "rebirth of nation" became necessary for at least two reasons. First, it legitimised him as the one in the line of "great leaders of new China." Second, it justified his departure from the communist principles and further development of market economy. The thing that was making him "great," was his work towards "rejuvenation" of the most precious Chinese nation. This "great" task could have been accomplished only through proper socio-economic policies. Even though Jiang Zemin is probably the less favourite leader in the recent history of China, his call for national revival seems to find a resonance among citizens (Link et al., 2013, p. 3), and the current administration made it also into a crucial element of its ideological agenda.

Another essential term commonly used in regards to making China into a "strong country" (强国, *qiangguo*) is t*uanjie* (团结), "unity" or "solidarity", almost indispensable element in public space in China, especially in regions populated with ethnic minorities. One of the commonly seen banners then reads *Jiaqiang minzu tuanjie, cujin minzu jinbu* (加强民族团结，促进民族进步，*Strengthen national unity, expedite national progress*). The term *minzu* in the first part of the sentence refers to all ethnic groups living in China. In the second part means the Chinese nation in general. The People's Republic of China, as its constitution states "unitary multi-

national state built up jointly by the people of all its nationalities" (Preamble). China then currently recognises 55 ethnic minorities, besides dominant Han (Macceras, 2011, p. 111). The authorities that often face socio-cultural and political conflicts in some areas inhabited by minorities try then to spread the message that only through "unity and solidarity" among different ethnic groups the "progress", economic and political can be achieved. Knowing the level of tension in areas such as Xinjiang, and Tibet (Xizang), the message and the purpose of such slogan is clear. Not only the "solidarity" between ethnic groups will bring prosperity to the entire nation, including those minorities, but also, since the "progress" is the most desired historical necessity, such a "unity and solidarity" is also an unavoidable historical necessity.

*Zhongguo jingshen, zhongguo xingxiang, zhongguo wenhua, zhongguo biaoda (*中国精神，中国形象,中国文化，中国表达) that renders as *Chinese spirit, China"s image, China"s culture, Chinese expression*, is another example of the appeal to the Chineseness as the value of utmost importance. This appeal to Chinese values, national character and Chineseness in general, has become an integral part of the socio-political agenda of the regime after Jiang"s call for national rejuvenation. Chinese values, lifestyle, a way of communication and culture in general, have been officially recognised as if not superior so at least equal to their western counterparts. Through slogans like the one above, the authorities try then provide the psychological comfort to the citizens who on the one hand are "proud descendants of Yellow Emperor", on another face the hardships of everyday life. A socio-psychological aspect of such move is apparent. However, there is also a political consideration hidden behind this appreciation of Chinese values, culture and lifestyle. Chinese ambitions to become a world superpower, to a great extent can be realised using soft-power. Language and culture are primary tools that can be utilised. It is then the concern of the utmost importance to preserve and cherish this language and culture among Chinese themselves. Another worth notice fact is the appreciation of hierarchy and social inequality in traditional Chinese culture (Pye, 1985). Despite claiming equal status for every citizen, starting from the time of Deng Xiaoping Chinese authorities accepted not the only market economy, but also social inequality, expressed in Deng's claim that some must get rich first. Following administration went further and put way more emphasis on "harmony" than "equality." An appeal to Chinese character of such an arrangement seems to be a very handy justification of such shift.

Renmin you xinyang, minzu you xiwang, guojia you liliang (人民有信仰， 民族有希望，国家有力量)，is another slogan that can be seen in many places around China. It renders as follows *(If) People have faith, there is hope for the nation, and the country is powerful.* As we can see the future of the nation, its prosperity and very existence depend on the "faith of people." The "strength of the country" also can only be assured by the faith of the "people." However, what faith is this slogan referring to? For those living in China, this "faith" refers to the policies pushed forward by the current regime. Not always popular reforms marking the transition from the centrally planned to the market economy "reinstalled" the class division (Goodman, 2013), and left many citizens economically and socially behind. This faith in the right direction of the socio-economic changes is presented as necessary for the happiness and success

of the entire nation and the country. Even the one left behind, struggling with day to day survival citizen should recognise the utmost importance of such endeavour.

Another slogan, which has been around for decades and still is visible in many parts of the country. *Mei you gongchangdang, mei you xin zhongguo* (没有共产党，没有新中国*), without Communist Party, there would not be/is no new China,* is interesting for at least two reasons. First of all, it emphasises the value of this "New China," that in Mainland is equal with PRC, the state established by Mao Zedong. "New China," a term widely used since then, means the state of equal rights and opportunities when the exploitation of one class by another has been/will be eradicated. PRC is then this "New China," the promised land of equality and happiness. The second interesting feature comes from the enigmatic character of Chinese grammar in which the tenses are not very distinct. The second part of the slogan can be then translated as "there would not be" or as "there is no new China." As the first translation praises CCP's contribution to establishing this "promised land of Chinese people," the second bears a strong political message. Although indirectly, it states that without CCP the New China, to remind so much desired by everyone, is impossible to exist. In other words, the leadership of CCP is unreplaceable, and any move towards such a replacement would endanger the entire project.

Due to the limited scope of this paper, the transcripts from the discussion regarding the importance of Chinese nation, identity, patriotism and China in general recorded cannot be fully presented here. It is worth a notice though that if the "officials" are often subjects of criticism from the common citizens, the historical role of a great Chinese nation is almost never questioned or denied. Quite to the contrary, Chinese across classes, genders and different age groups are almost unanimously proud of their Chineseness, cherish Chinese values and believe that China and Chinese nation should play a greater role in the future history of the world. It does not mean, that common Chinese is aware of the nature of Chinese values or knows the history. It does not also mean that often ostensive demonstration of class differences and despise for the compatriots of lower status is inexistent. It is not also the case that Chinese is not keen on obtaining foreign passports. Quite to the contrary. Many Chinese know very little about "Confucian values." Chinese also love to display their social status and are not shy to let everyone around feel their superior position. Finally, Chinese are more than keen to become citizens of a foreign country. However, all this does not prevent them from "being proud of being Chinese." It leads us to the conclusion that this appraisal of Chinese is a result of an unwritten agreement with authorities and peers and it does not stem only from the official discourse.

Discussion

From the message displayed in places of public utility, we can learn quite a few things about the aims and objectives of authorities. First of all, it becomes apparent that the appeal to the "traditional" culture is a vital element of the current regime's socio-political agenda. The appraisal of Confucian values such as family and social harmony stays very much apart from the basic principles of communism. Except for remains of old murals, often remembering the times of Cultural Revolution and barely

readable, we could not find any examples of call for the class-struggle, overthrowing bourgeoisie elites or call for social and economic equality. Instead, the emphasis on harmonious (hierarchical) family and harmonious (economically unequal) society is overwhelming. Moreover, the love of the country and the nation, the concern of the future and international recognition are also leading themes to be pushed forward by the authorities. At the same time, the leading role of CCP is being emphasised. CCP is then presented as a guard of the interests of the masses, the only guarantor of socio-political stability. Moreover, CCP and the government is praised as the only power struggling for the honour and international recognition of the "Great Chinese nation" (Gries, 1996). Any sign of counter-arguments can be barely, if at all, found. It is mainly due to the fact that authorities design and control the physical aspect of the public space. However, authorities also do grant citizens the certain level of freedom in the way the use public space. It makes places *renao*. The audience then becomes bigger and the peer pressure overwhelming.

The citizens on their behalf, remain self-restrained and respect the boundaries in exchange for the freedom to perform the activities that make place *renao* that on its behalf satisfies they need of affiliation. Intentionally or not, citizens by physical presence in the places of public utility do consume, digest and reproduce the message from the authorities. Even they do not always find it plausible and convincing; they seem to be quite cosy with most of the ideas presented to them. In result, both parties attain their goals. Authorities spread their message through which they legitimise their right to rule and control the public space by drawing the boundaries for citizens' activities. Citizens on their behalf, through at least verbal and superficial acceptance of such arrangements, are granted considerable level of freedom to use the public space the way it suits their needs (entertainment, socialising, commercial activity). Moreover, the content of the message that is no more an appeal to the class-struggle, but directs citizens' attention to the "greatness of Chinese Nation" provides a sense of belonging and psychological comfort (Ho, 2014). Of course, the whole process is an ongoing "negotiation" and a result of an un-vocalised compromise between two parties. Looking at the content of the internet discussions, still largely dominated by the official discourse reproduced by the authorities and the citizens alike, the different voices can be heard. They might be difficult to identify, especially for ones unfamiliar with the modes of Chinese communication that are very much fond of indirect speech, using euphemisms, quotations from the literature and applying numerous nicknames (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2012). The authorities, on the one hand, draw the bottom line of the acceptable criticism, on another take over the anti-establishment discourse by informing almost every day about another high-rank state or party official being investigated for "corruption and other crimes." Authorities then apply the well-tested strategy of controlling the discourse and the criticism directed towards themselves. Especially since current leader assumed the post and the anti-corruption campaign became a vivid element of his political agenda, the anti-establishment, voiced as "anti-corruption," discourse has been incorporated into a state-sponsored propaganda. Similarly, the authorities leave some room for the unhappy voices, designing and controlling the shape and the size of it. The citizens intentionally or not reproduce the official discourse procured by the authorities and make it the integral part of their political and socio-cultural perception.

Conclusion

Contemporary Western inquiry into the nature of public space in China focuses much more on the specific exemplification of the public space than on the utilisation of commonly accessible places for a specific political and cultural purposes. The structure of shopping moles, public parks, and the social dynamics of these places have become the object of numerous studies and reporting (Jewell, 2016; J.P. Sniadecki, 2012; 2015). With some notable exceptions (Pan, 2011), most of them pay more attention to the activities performed by the attendees and discursive interrelation between the physical setup and these activities, than to the way the public space is being used for the political purposes. What I tried to do in above verses, was to pay some attention to the message transmitted through arrangements of the public space and with the specific instalments that are being deployed. We then investigated the content and sources of the message, the rationale behind particular instances and the intended aim/purpose. The importance of such an analysis lays in the fact that, through ages, politicians, educators and religious leaders use all the possible channels of communication to propagate their doctrines and ideologies. Through the analysis of the relation between the message itself and the mode of its presentation, not only the addressee of the message can be identified, but also the motivation behind the specific instances can be revealed. Political elites in contemporary China, employing *renao* places of public utility, through semantically simple message try, on the one hand, spread the official cultural and national discourse. On another, they try to provide socio-psychological comfort to prevent masses from focusing on the ideological and practical contradictions of the system. Citizens, on their behalf, prefer not to go openly against the official discourse, finding it often quite appealing and in a way being in line with their necessity of higher self-esteem. In other words, psychological comfort of "gaining face" prevails over freedom of (anti-government) speech, and the authorities do not hesitate to utilise this socio-psychological need for their agenda.

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