Myth of identity

Styling the authentic "Hong Konger" in Wong Tze-wah's standup comedies

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This study delves into the stylization of a unique and dynamic Hong Kong identity through examining a series of Cantonese standup comedies performed by the Hong Kong comedian, Wong Tze-wah, from 1993 to 2003. It explains the ways that Wong's standup comedies become the stylistic and semiotic resources which not merely iconically and symbolically represent the reality of Hong Kong society; rather, they index many modalities of Hong Kongers' questioning of authenticity and the relationship between China and Hong Kong. It suggests that the comic performance, as a meaning-making process, helps to shape and reproduce the local ideologies of identity, and to challenge the power underlying the discourse of China-Hong Kong relations.

Keywords: identity, comedy, authenticity, stylization, semiotics

1. Introduction

Standup comedy has been regarded as a stylized performance which generates social and interpersonal meanings, as well as effectively shapes the cultural identity of a certain locality or community (Coupland 2007; Chun 2009). This study explores the stylized language and performance in the Hong Kong-based standup comedy of Wong Tze-wah. Precisely, it intends to address the following questions: How does Wong's performance discursively construct the authentic identity of "Hong Konger"? How does the construction of a local identity perceive and cope with the conflicts and struggles in the Britain-Hong Kong and China-Hong Kong relationships? How do the Hong Kongers (re)evaluate their identity and society over the decades after the Handover? In answering those questions, Wong's standup comedy needs to be treated as a discursive speech act, through which one can evaluate the sociocultural knowledge and identity in terms of their

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signification in the Hong Kongers' life. This study aims to engage with the stylistic and semiotic study of comic discourse by demonstrating how the comedian's languages become the meaning-making resources to construct the innovative linguistic style which is further used to index social identity, as well as effect changes in social identities and ideologies.

1.1 Standup comedy in Hong Kong

Hong Kong, located in southern China, was ceded to the British Empire in 1842 after the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing between Qing China and Britain at the end of the first Opium War (1840–1842). On July 1, 1997, the entire territory was reverted from British rule to a separate administrative region of the People's Republic of China (PRC), marking the end of its history as a British colony for over 155 years. Yet, the political and sociocultural development of Hong Kong took a different path from the Mainland China since the establishment of the PRC in 1949.[1] While Mainland China "instilled socialist values" under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Hong Kong "transformed itself into a financial centre and an international metropolis" following the values of capitalism (Lai 2011, 249). The Mainland China, although, had already transformed itself into a post-socialist society by the 1980s, the over a century British rule of Hong Kong – and particularly its adoption of democratic institutions in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 90s – continued to contrast with the political and economic system in Mainland China (Lai 2011). As a result, it is unneglectable that the 97' Handover caused turbulence on various levels in the Hong Kong society because of the ideological conflicts, as well as the separate sociohistorical processes between Hong Kong and Mainland China since the cession. Being a British colony for 155 years resulted in the specific Hong Kong identity marking by "its sense of superiority over the mainland and sentiments against the Communist regime" (Lai 2011, 250), which then came into tension with the national identity of Chinese shaped in the discourse of China.

Those tensions, conflicts and transformations in the Hong Kong society before and after 1997 have been discussed and performed in a series of standup comedies produced by the well-known Hong Kong comedian, Wong Tze-wah (黃子華). Comedy, as Davis (1993) accurately points out, is the flip side of culture and society, whereas what people laugh at is always social. Humor in the comic discourse has become the focus of analysis in recent scholarship, because of its

1. Mainland China is a geopolitical term referring to the territory governed by the PRC, excluding Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. "China" used in this article refers to Mainland China ruled by the Chinese Communist Party.

intrinsic relationship with various aspects of social relations. For example, Chun (2009) argues that using racializing language style in standup comedies indexes a stereotypical racial identity. By using the stereotypical racial speech, the comedian successfully authenticates him/herself as a valued member of a particular community, which legitimates his/her critique of the racist ideology. Meanwhile, Chan's works unveil the functions of humor and laughter in public spheres, and their impact on interpersonal relationships in the society. He suggests that jokes help us to better understand not only "the interior workings of the mind, but also the exterior truth of social relations" (Chan 2019, 147). Therefore, humor and jokes jointly recalibrate the unfair social relationships. By sharing the same joke, people laughing together "can express a joyful form of solidarity" (Chan 2019, 151) and eventually contest the conventionally-perceived social hierarchy.

Among various types of comic linguistic practices, standup comedy as a genre of "high performance" (Coupland 2007, 15), precisely, provides a "topical and social commentary" of the masked "cultural complexities, changes, and concerns" (Mintz 1983, 137). Standup comedy did not enter Hong Kong until 1990 when Wong became the first comedian who introduced this new form of performance to his Hong Kong audience. Soon, he gained fame for his Hong Kong-rooted standup comedy (棟篤笑), especially for the poignant irony of and critique on sociopolitical issues in Hong Kong and China. Normally, each show lasts for 150 minutes and is performed solely by Wong mainly in Cantonese, one of the official languages in Hong Kong.[2] In the context of Wong's standup comedy, Cantonese serves not only as a tool of communication, but the means to articulate the local culture and construct the place identity. Precisely, the pro-Cantonese Hong Kongers regard Cantonese as a more authentic token of traditional Chinese culture, which helps them to legitimate their local identity and defends them against the encroachment of Putonghua (Wong 2015). In addition, Tsang and Wong (2004) analyze the language techniques used in Wong Tze-wah's comedies and explore their functions to involve the audience so that to construct a shared Hong Kong identity.

1.2 Indexicality and language identity

Indexicality, both a semiotic and sociolinguistic terms, plays a pivotal role in understanding the social meanings of a linguistic practice. The idea of indexicality stems from the Peircean theorization of tripartite sign (Johnstone 2010). Charles

2. Before 1997, English and Cantonese were the two most-frequently-used languages in Hong Kong. After the 97' Handover, Hong Kong transformed into a trilingual society, with Putonghua being introduced into Hong Kong's sociolinguistic scene (Lai 2011).

S. Peirce (1867; 1908; repr., 1994) divides signs into the trichotomy of icons, indices, and symbols, based on respective relations between the sign and its object. Then, Johnstone (2010) introduces this semiotic concept to the realm of sociolinguistics. She mentions that if a phenomenon (including linguistic ones) is related to its meaning by resemblance, it functions as an iconic sign; if by convention, the sign is symbolic; if by *co-occurring* (my emphasis), the sign is indexical. She further proposes that any linguistic form could be called an index if it serves to connect with a particular social style or event, and then further "evoke and/or create a social identity" (Johnstone 2010, 31).

In linguistic practices, indexicality refers to "the link between an expression or form and what it meaningfully stands for" (Coupland 2007, 22). Notably, Silverstein's conceptualization of "indexical order" (2003) profoundly contributes to the current study of indexicality. Silverstain's model calibrates the orders of indexicality based on language use and "the 'appropriateness' of its usage in [the] context" (Silverstain 2003, 193). Then, Johnstone and Kiesling explain it is when the indexical correlation "is imbued with meaning drawn from local ideology" that the orders of indexical correlations become socially meaningful (Johnstone and Kiesling 2008, 7). In this light, recent studies on linguistic variation illustrate how the macro-social categories are indexically linked to the micro-contextual realm (Johnstone and Kiesling 2008; Zhang 2017). Johnstone's studies on Pittsburghese (Johnstone and Kiesling 2008; Johnstone 2014) precisely showcase how the framework of indexicality bridges linguistic practices and the shaping of a place-based identity. More importantly, her studies reveal that speakers are able to self-consciously construct a socially meaningful place identity and claim a valued membership of their community through the use of language. The following section will discuss style, an important conceptual tool to understand the process of authentication within the framework of indexicality.

1.3 Styling identity and indexing authenticity

Style, as ways of speaking, has attracted scholarly attention and evoked discussion over the past decades. In such context, style refers to the "process of meaning making whereby language users position themselves vis-à-vis others in their local communities situated within broader sociocultural-historical landscapes" (Zhang 2017, 22). Furthermore, contextualizing social styles – or styling – usually makes indexical type of personal or interpersonal meaning (Coupland 2007). When indexical links between forms and social meanings stabilize and become reusable, they accrete into styles (Johnstone 2010). Recent scholarship has dedicated to developing a stylistic approach to analyze language variation and social identity. According to Coupland (2007), styling social identities commonly involves the

processes of entextualisation and recontextualization. Recontextualization refers to the process when people "replay or reconstruct cultural forms," and work them "into new contexts" (Coupland 2007, 108). Entextrualisation is defined by Silverstein and Urban (1996) as "the process of rendering a given instance of discourse a text, detachable from its local context" (as cite in Yang 2013, 64). In such process, the text is still indexically linked to its context, yet transforms the context through metapragmatic use. Those processes suggest that styling social identities is a discursive social practice which disrupts the backdrop of social norms and effects social changes (Coupland 2007; Zhang 2017). Above all, styling social identities implies that identity-construction is a dynamic and discursive process in the continual refinement (Coupland 2007).

Furthermore, approaching styling as a social practice sheds light on the conceptualization of authenticity and its relation to sociolinguistic performance. As a process of meaning-making which engages language users of particular local community, styling indeed involves with the crucial idea of acting authentic in the sociolinguistic system. It has been argued that dimensions of authenticity allow one to decode how social styles, including linguistic styles, are considered to be authentic or not (Coupland 2007, 2010). The conceptualization of authenticity, therefore, provides an effective model to evaluate how language speakers perform their identities and position themselves within the local society. Yet, authenticity is a claim rather than a set of enduring qualities (Eckert 2014), which means it is crucial to de-essentialize the process of shaping the authentic identity and to uncover its reflexivity and fluidity.

Wong Tze-wah's standup comedy performance utilizes many metaphors and parodies to not only constitute his stylization, but to create the authenticity of his speech and identity. The frameworks of indexicality and stylization allow us to understand Wong's construction of a place-based identity, Hong Konger, as a meaning-making process. Furthermore, they are critical for us to perceive the interacting relationship between a society and its members.

2. Methodology and data source

This study will adopt a style-based approach to analyze the comic discourses of Wong's performance. A style-based approach treats "linguistic variation and innovation as emergent meaning-making resources" (Zhang 2017, 32). In other words, via such approach, the linguistic and rhetoric patterns in Wong's shows could be treated as stylistic resources which connect to particular social identity or attributes through ideological links. The data in my study will be collected from two standup comedies performed by Wong Tze-wah in 1993 and 2003. All the sources

used in this study come from the officially published DVDs by Fitto Mobile Laser Distribution Co., Ltd with the sound track in Cantonese and subtitles in standard Mandarin.

In *What's Next?* 跟住去邊度 (1993), major topics are centered on the upcoming 97' Handover and the response from the Hong Kong society, including the sociopolitical issues in Hong Kong and the struggling relationship between Hong Kong and the Mainland China since the beginning of the 1990s. The show is usually regarded as the zenith of Wong's career before 1997, since it discusses the pre-1997 political issues poignantly and critically.[3] The second show, *The Coal Went Out* 冇炭用 (2003) is concerned with the predicament of Hong Kong after 1997. This show mainly deals with Hong Kong's socioeconomic conundrum at the beginning of the 2000s, and delineates the conflict and inequality within the Hong Kong society.

The data analysis will be divided into two parts, examining the comedian's use of metaphors and parodies respectively. The study will analyze the data from three excerpts. The first excerpt uses one major metaphor to reveal the public opinions in Hong Kong towards the Handover. The second excerpt, right following the first one, uses a different yet related metaphor to discuss the conflicting ethic and social identity of Hong Konger. The third excerpt has several parodies to make sense of the social and economic conundrum that Hong Kong faced in the early 2000s. The three excerpts, altogether, constitute the linguistic resources that allow the comedian to not only comment on the sociopolitical environment of Hong Kong, but also shape the meaningful identity of "Hong Konger."

Apart from the verbal elements in those linguistic resources, the analysis will further take into consideration the comedian's facial expressions and embodied actions. As Goodwin (1999) rigorously argues, both gesture and talk are semiotic resources which can index entities in the participants' surround. Therefore, analyzing the comedian's gesture together with his utterance makes the performance a sign system, in which those diverse resources are deployed semiotically by the comedian to "accomplish courses of action that constitute [his] lifeworld" (Goodwin 1999, 1508). In the study, I will transcribe three excerpts drawn from the shows. Since Wong's utterance is mostly in Cantonese (except for some sentences and phrases in English), the script will be transcribed in written Cantonese with corresponding English translation.

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3. Lu, L., 陸離. (2010, Nov 4). 神仙模樣的黃子華回來了 [The god-like Wong Tze-wah is back]. *Apple Daily* 蘋果日報. Retrieved from http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/supplement/columnist/14407261/art/20101104/14623354

3. Analysis

3.1 Articulating the Handover by metaphors

Excerpt 1. My "foreign devil" friend. From *What's Next?* 跟住去邊度 (1993)

Wong	我最憎嘅就是有啲鬼佬，唔識趣嘅朋友，在你飲茶灌水嘅時候，大庭廣眾之下問： Hey, what do you think about ninety-seven?	I really hate some *gwai-lo* (foreigners), those who are insensible. When you were eating and chatting, they would ask you in the public: *Hey, what do you think about ninety-seven?*
Audience	Laughed	
Wong	大佬，呢啲切膚之痛，可以隨便攞出來講嘅咩？所以我呢個鬼佬朋友抵死啊，佢只狗仔被人標咗參。	Dude, it's really painful (literally, painful as cutting skin). How can I talk about it casually? So, my *gwai-lo* (foreigner) friend deserved it. His dog was kidnapped.
Audience	Laughed and applauded	
Wong	唔系你哋諗果個。	That guy is not the one you're thinking about.
Audience	Laughed loudly	

The excerpt above is towards the end of Wong's 1993 show. The analysis of this excerpt will mainly focus on Wong's use of metaphors to articulate the Britain-Hong Kong-China relationship at the eve of 1997. In discussing the use of metaphors, the analysis will specifically focus on how Wong constructed the identity of Hong Konger, and how he evoked the social anxiety associated with such identity and the 97' Handover.

To begin with, Wong depicted the image of insensible "foreigners" who enjoyed asking how Hong Kongers would think about their future after 1997. Here, Wong used the Cantonese slang term "*gwai-lo* 鬼佬" referring to the foreigners, especially the white Westerners. "*Gwai-lo*" is literally translated as "foreign devil," as "*gwai*" is the Cantonese pronunciation of the Chinese character 鬼 (devil). The use of "*gwai-lo*" in Hong Kongers' daily vocabulary has a solid connection with their postcolonial identity and Hong Kong's history as a former British colony. This deprecating and racialized term is iconically, symbolically, and indexically linked to Hong Konger's perception of foreigners. The common physical appearances of white Westerners (i.e., red hair and green eyes) iconically relate to the Chinese traditional image of devil. But more importantly, the pejorative connotations of devil, such as evilness and greed, symbolically and indexically unveil the local Hong Kongers' contempt towards foreigners in the (post)colonial context. In addition, as May Wong (2017) observes, Hong Kongers'

use of culturally-oriented indigenous words, such as *gwai-lo*, at least partially reflects their ethnic awareness. Arguably, the use of *gwai-lo* correlates with Hong Konger's ethnic identity in addition to the emotional and ideological elements attached to this term. Interestingly, Wong purposefully used English ("what do you think about ninety-seven") when quoting from this *gwai-lo* friend. Wong's using of both Cantonese and English in the same context indexes two distinctive types of person: the insensible *gwai-lo*, and the local Hong Konger who were offended by the foreigner for his insensibility. As Zhang aptly reminds us, style could be treated as "system of distinction" which is "constituted by linguistic and other semiotic resources and practices that make distinction meaningful" (Zhang 2017, 24). As a result, Wong's code-switching, here, styles the ideological incompatibility between Hong Konger and *gwai-lo*, as well as the shared emotional response to the Handover among the local Hong Kongers who are ethnically Chinese; as a result, those mixed feelings form a Hong Kong identity that perceives the British as outsiders. Code-switching in Hong Konger's speaking of Cantonese, as May Wong (2017) observes, strengthens the interpersonal bonding and solidarity. By evoking the solidarity, the use of *gwai-lo* and the English utterance indexes not only the localness of Hong Kong identity, but the ethnic authenticity as well.

In those lines, Wong established the indexical links connecting *gwai-lo*, antagonistic feelings of the insensible foreigner, and Hong Konger's authentic ethnic and cultural identity. When Wong spoke of his "*gwai-lo* friend", he, in fact, was alluding to the British governors and officials at the moment. The antagonism is expressed more explicitly in the second paragraph of the excerpt, when Wong criticized those foreign (British) officials mainly for their callousness and indifference to Hong Kong's situation. In what follows, the antagonism is further reinforced by Wong's second allusion: his *gwai-lo* friend's dog was kidnapped. For the audience who are native Hong Kongers, their immediate applause and laughter indicate that they have grasped Wong's metaphor. In November 1992, Chris Patten, the last British governor of Hong Kong, lost his dog "Soda." It was reported that the police department sent out policemen to look for the dog, thus was criticized by media for wasting the public resources.[4]

The devotion to find the pet dog is in stark contrast to the governor's indifference to Hong Kong's future. In this regard, Wong's sarcasm and criticism of British Hong Kong government is apparent. Moreover, apart from the acute criticism, using the metaphor of losing dog has another connotation – to index the

4. Unknown author. (2015, Apr 5). 特首特辦? 前港督彭定康92年走失愛犬,曾強調不出動警力搜索免浪費公帑 [Chief Executive had privileges? The former governor, Chris Patton, lost his dog in 1992 and used to emphasize that no police force would be dispatched to avoid wasting public resources]. *Ming Pao* 明報. Retrieved from https://news.mingpao.com/

relationship between Britain and Hong Kong. In other words, the precise using of "dog" not only alludes to Chris Patton's lost-dog incident, but connotes the owner-pet-alike relationship between Britain and Hong Kong. In this regard, the colonial Hong Kong is owned and petted by Britain. Such complicated relationship suggests both inequality between the superior and inferior, and the mutual care and affection. However, to be noted, Wong's accusation of the indifferent *gwai-lo* implies that the owner (British government) no longer cares about the pet (Hong Kong), thus Hong Kongers do not acknowledge or identify with this owning-petting relationship. Wong's metaphor reflects Hong Kong's estrangement from Britain, which contradicts with the taken-for-granted description of Britain-Hong Kong relationship, such as obedient and submissive.

Excerpt 2. The son is kidnapped by his mother. From *What's Next?* 跟住去邊度 (1993)

Wong	我個朋友叫 Robinson。[Five lines omitted] 我同 Robinson 講, Robinson, 你只狗被人標參。你咁大把，我哋就黎全香港被人標參，咁條數點計啊！但唔可以咁講嘅。我哋只不過系回歸母親嘅懷抱嘅，咁即系被母親標參了喔?	My friend was called Robinson. [Five lines omitted] I told Robinson, "Robinson, it is just your dog which is kidnapped. What is so serious about that? Our Hong Kong is almost kidnapped! Then how would you evaluate this?" But it cannot be said that way. We just return to our mother's embrace. Then, is that we are kidnapped by our mother?
Audience	Laughed	
Wong	阿媽標仔參，邊個俾贖金? 死梗了!	The mother kidnaps her son. Then who will pay for the ransom? We are doomed to be dead!
Audience	Laughed loudly and applauded	

The analysis of this excerpt will highlight another metaphor Wong used to explain the China-Hong Kong relationship: kidnapping. After condemning the British governors and officials for their indifference to Hong Kong's future, Wong manifested that the situation of Hong Kong was much more serious than losing the governor's dog – Hong Kong would soon be "kidnapped" by his "mother." Here, Wong employed another metaphor: the relationship between China and Hong Kong is like mother and son. The metaphor of the separation between mother and son, probably, stems as early as from *The Classic of Poetry*, where the poem

depicted seven filial sons missing their mother from afar.[5] The metaphor was then borrowed by the modern poet, Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899–1946), to describe the China-Hong Kong relationship in his serial poems, "The Song of Seven Sons 七子之歌" (1925). Each poem depicts a place which was once belonged to China but was later ceded to foreign countries;[6] and all together, these seven places, including Hong Kong, are metaphorically compared to sons who are longing to reunite with their separated mother – China.

At the eve of 1997, China frequently used this metaphor – "returning to mother's embrace" (*huigui zuguo muqin de huaibao* 回歸祖國母親的懷抱) – to describe Hong Kong's Handover. Specifically, the metaphor aims to demonstrate the bonding between the two regions, so that to enhance the closeness and reduce the anxiety from Hong Kong society. In fact, using kinship metaphor to demonstrate the mechanism of nation is not uncommon in other cultural contexts. Lakoff (2006) suggests that the "nation as family" metaphor structures the government as parent and citizens as children. A nation, according to Lakoff (2006), should be like a nurturing parent or a strict parent/father. In such model, the parent (the nation or the government) provides protection and resources to the children (the citizens); yet on the other hand, also has authority over them. In the case of China-Hong Kong relationship, the "nation-as-family" metaphor not merely indexes the supposedly intimacy between China and Hong Kong; more subtly, it intends to legitimize China's sovereignty and authority over Hong Kong to Hong Kong's residents.

In the above expert, Wong recontextulized the mother-son metaphor to invoke its pejorative connotations by associating the mother-son relationship with kidnapping. When Wong reappropriated the metaphor commonly used by the Mainland China, he concurrently recontextualized it – relocating it from the context of China's celebrating the Handover to Hong Konger's suspect and resistance of the Handover – so that to reconstruct the indexical link between mother-son and China-Hong Kong. By reworking the indexical link, Wong compared the Handover of Hong Kong to kidnapping, which resonated with his earlier metaphor of "the kidnapped dog." Such comparison elicits not only humor, but a strong sense of irony. By drawing the comparison, Wong attempts to unveil the power imbalance between China and Hong Kong, in particular China's control over Hong Kong in and after the Handover. On the other hand, the connota-

5. The poem is entitled "Kai Feng" (凱風), which is belonged to the section of "Airs (feng)" in *The Classic of Poetry*. The *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing*) is the earliest anthology of Chinese verses, dating back to 7th century BCE.

6. The seven places are: Macau, Hong Kong Island, Taiwan, Weihaiwei, Kowloon, Guangzhou Wan, Lüshun district in Dalian.

tion of mother-son metaphor is changed through entextualisation. Here, Wong's metaphor of mother-son relationship entextualises the source domain (kidnapping) to the target domain (the Handover), which allows the audience to make sense of Hong Kong's pre-Handover situation while he was making the assertion – "we (Hong Kong) are doomed to be dead!" If Hong Kong's reversion to China is compared to the mother kidnapping her son, then it will unavoidably lead to the unpredictable and deadly consequence – "who will pay for the ransom?"

If the Handover is equivalent to kidnapping, paying for the ransom clearly refers to results of the Handover, or, the post-Handover situation. Interestingly, the debate over the post-Handover situation is an intertextual discourse, in the sense that China negotiates with Hong Kong regarding the post-Handover issues in a different context. At the beginning of the 1990s, China promised Hong Kong with economic and financial support.[7] To highlight the China's superiority, Wong referred to China as "Invincible China (*zhongfang bubai* 中方不敗)." Apparently, it is a parody of "Invincible East (*dongfang bubai* 東方不敗)," the fictional character for his ruthless and overbearing character in the martial art novel by Jin Yong 金庸 (1924–2018). The parody, "Invincible China," reveals China's dominance when negotiating with Hong Kong about the Handover. Wong's metaphor and parody hence indexes two competing discourses about the Handover – one is "returning and reuniting," whereas the other is "force and coercion." Such contrast elicits not only laughter, but also Hong Kongers' precariousness triggered by the uncertainty to predict Hong Kong's future after the Handover. Therefore, the metaphor captures the uneven relationship between China and Hong Kong before the Handover, and allows Wong to ridicule the superiority of China in the context of pre- and post-Handover. The metaphors skillfully used in Wong's performance style a unique yet complicated Hong Kong postcolonial identity: so far as the Hong Kongers identify with the ethnic identity of Chinese, they actively renounce the social identity as Chinese; by the same token, the resentment towards Britain indicates their hesitation to "remain" British after the Handover. Consequently, a stylistic social identity of "Hong Konger" is constructed in the context of 97' Handover. The following section will take a closer look at parodies in Wong's performance to further explore the authentication of Hong Konger's social identity.

7. For instance, People's Bank of China signed the agreement with Hong Kong Monetary Authority on the repurchase of national treasury to stabilize the exchange rate of Hong Kong dollar after the Handover. See Xu and Xu, 1999.

3.2 Parodying the economic crisis

Excerpt 3. Structural unemployment. From *The Coal Went Out*冇炭用 (2003)

Wong	[6 lines omitted] 因為你以前失業，系俾老闆炒，而家你失業，系老闆俾人炒! 點解老闆都會俾人炒，因為你呢行都俾人炒咗。你唔知點同阿媽解釋。"阿媽，唔關我事喔，我表現幾好，但系我呢行都俾人炒咗!" "啊？你個行俾人炒咗？系唔系你個行得罪咗人啊？啊呀朝早要同人講 'Good morning' 啊你個行！" "阿媽，唔系啊，我哋而家呢啲系叫做結構性失業啊!"	[6 lines omitted] When you were unemployed before, it was because you were fired by your boss. But now you lost your job, it was because your boss was fired. How come your boss was fired? Because your whole industry was fired! You don't know how to explain it to your mother. "Mom, it had nothing to do with me. I behaved well, but it was my industry that got fired!" "Ah! Your industry was fired? Was it because your industry offended someone? *Aya*, your industry should say '*good morning*' to people in the morning!" "No, mom. What happened to us now is called structural unemployment!"
Audience	Laughed and applauded	
Wong	大家知唔知咩叫做結構性失業？有一日，你男友會同你講"我哋分手啦!" 你會話"今次又咩事啊？" [2 lines omitted] 你男朋友會更正你: "有啲唔同今次。上一次、下一次，果啲離離合合，三日講一次果啲呢，果啲叫做週期性分手! 我哋今次系結構性分手! [Audience laughed] 由於今次系結構性分手，我願意一次過俾多啲掟煲費卑你。如果你肯參與依個自願性分手計劃，我可以再加多3個 percent. 今次唔同嘅了，冇得傾，冇得再起埋一齊了，除非你能夠做出結構性嘅轉型! ——隆胸啊！"	Does everyone know what structural unemployment is? One day, your boyfriend told you, "I want to break up with you." You said, "What happened this time?" [2 lines omitted] You boyfriend would correct you, "It is slightly different this time. Last one, next one, those breakups we once had every 3 days are called cyclical breakup! But this time, it is structural breakup! [Audience laughed] Because it is structural breakup, I'm willing to pay you more compensation. If you are willing to join in the voluntary breakup plan, I can add by 3%. This time is really different. It is impossible for us to get back again, unless you can make the structural transformation – a boob job!
Audience	Laughed loudly and applauded	

2003 was a challenging year for Hong Kong. During this year, the SARS epidemic killed 299 people in Hong Kong, while the deterioration of Hong Kong's economy

since the 1997 financial crisis still remained (Hung 2003). As a result, the property prices kept dropping and the unemployment rate reached its peak. According to a government report in 2003, the SARS caused a significant decrease in the job demands and the job market did not recover until the fourth quarter of 2003.[8] In Cantonese, "burning the coal" is a metonymy for committing suicide, since burning coal will produce carbon monoxide that is fatal to people. By entitling his show "the coal went out", Wong implied that the coal was sold out because desperate Hong Kongers were buying it for suicide, unveiling Hong Kong's difficulties in 2003.

In the first half of the excerpt, Wong performed an interlocution between an unemployed man and his mother in order to set up the topic of structural unemployment. Wong's dialogue vividly represents the miscommunication between the younger and the elder generation regarding how to make sense of the financial predicament. The parody of the "mother" is key to Wong's stylization. In the video recording, one could clearly discern that Wong's voice quality changed: he used the high-pitched voice, nasal and velar sounds, and the modal particle "aya." All these linguistic elements iconically and indexically denote the stereotypical persona of an old Hong Kong lady. The vocal pitch could be served as acoustic cues to perceive the talker's sex (Watt 2010), and the raised pitch indexes femininity of the character Wong was parodying. In addition, Wong also used the modal particle "aya" in nasal and velar sounds, together with a fingering gesture. The stylization is set off from Wong's voice qualities and evokes the social stereotype – an old Hong Kong lady nagging about her child, which is could be found in some old Hong Kong movies.[9]

Not coincidentally, code-switching occurred in the utterance of the "mother" when Wong pronounced "good morning" in English but with a highly salient Cantonese accent. In the dialogue, the "mother" believed that the reason why her son's industry was fired was because the "industry" behaved offensively at working

8. The data was drawn from the Hong Kong 2003 Yearbook and a report from the Census and Statistics Department of Hong Kong SAR.
Retrieved from
https://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2003/tc_chi/chapter03/03_00.html https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/press_release/pressReleaseDetail.jsp?charsetID=1&pressRID=-2884

9. Such characters are more commonly seen in a specific movie genre in Hong Kong, the Cantonese Long Film (*yueyu changpian* 粵語長片). This genre was popular in Hong Kong from the 1950s to 70s. It was funded, produced, and filmed solely in Hong Kong. These days, scholars of Hong Kong studies believe that the Cantonese Long Film stands for the authentic Hong Kong popular culture. For more information, see this interview by Tianhui Pan, "Study the Cantonese Long Film; Ng Jeun-hung, the Scholar of Popular Culture Studies: This is Treasure." Retrieved from https://lj.hkej.com/lj2017/artculture/article/id/1594284/

places. Such misunderstanding indicates that the appropriate behavior at work is to greet the co-workers with "good morning" in English. Wong's parody shows that the old lady fails to make sense of the current (un)employment situation where the take-for-granted industrial standards cease to function because of the economic recession and how to keep the job is beyond one's control. In this way, the old lady in Wong's performance is represented as confused and helpless. Precisely, she is distant from and misunderstood by those outside of her community on the one hand; on the other hand, she has little voice in the current social environment. Such portrayal, in fact, is analogous to the authentic Hong Kong identity that Wong intends to index. The Hong Kongers, echoing with my earlier arguments, is portrayed as both distinct from (yet cannot be understood by) the British or Mainlanders. Although Hong Kongers identify themselves with the ethnic Chinese, they do not identify themselves with the Mainlanders. Therefore, they are in the need of seeking a unique identify – Hong Konger – that can differentiate themselves from the mainland Chinese or British. At the same time, they have little power to confront the political, economic, and social turbulence after the Handover. The sense of precariousness and the desire to voice out matches with the way which Wong stylized the old lady: not only is she nagging about the child; she is mundane and frustrating – the characteristics that strikingly identify with Hong Kong.

In the last punchline of this excerpt, the humor resides in Wong's parody of the economic terms, such as "cyclical unemployment" and "structural transformation." Here, Wong explained structural unemployment through using the metaphor of breakup. In Wong's metaphor, he drew on the heterosexual relationship and used it as a conceptual model (Danesi 2013) to explain the unfamiliar notion of structural unemployment. The table below shows how Wong's conceptual model works to draw an analogy between the heterosexual relationship and the socioeconomic predicament Hong Kong was facing.

Context 1: heterosexual relationship	**Context 2: socioeconomic predicament**
Cyclical breakup 週期性分手	Cyclical unemployment 週期性失業
Structural breakup 結構性分手	Structural unemployment 結構性失業
Breakup compensation 掟煲費	Severance pay 遣散費
Voluntary breakup plan 自願性分手計劃	Voluntary separation 自願性离职
Boob job 隆胸	Structural transformation 結構性轉型

In a romantic relationship, it is unreasonable and absurd if someone requests his/her partner to have plastic surgery in order to maintain their relationship. Further, it indicates that the parties involved in the relationship do not share equal

status. The one who wants a "structural breakup," pays for the "compensation," and requests a "boob job" apparently has greater power over the other. Through the stylization, Wong performed such an overbearing male who has the power in a heterosexual relationship. It seems like he was reproducing the discourse of gender inequality; however, it is precisely the comic performance that enables Wong to mock and criticize the very discourse. As Chun puts it, "[by] evoking a frame of stand-up comedy, comedians are often sanctioned to break with social conventions of politeness or political correctness that restrict, for example, uses of overtly stereotypical language" (Chun 2009, 281). In Wong's case, he employed a gendered speech, yet simultaneously contested the one who overpowers in the gendered discourse.

Further, through drawing the analogy, Wong decontextualized the metaphor of heterosexual relationship, and recontextualized it to the socioeconomic predicament. In such process, what Wong contested and criticized switches from the powerful one in the gendered discourse to that in the socioeconomic and political discourse. Such power imbalance reminds us of the kidnap metaphor in the second excerpt, where Wong poignantly criticized the control of China over Hong Kong. In the 6 years after the Handover, China remained its power, yet Hong Kong was aware of the powerlessness as the society was exposed to the socioeconomic crisis. Arguably, the metaphors and parodies constitute Wong's stylization, which allow him to not only authenticate the identity of Hong Konger, but reconceptualize the relationship between China and Hong Kong after 1997.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the construction of an authentic Hong Kong identity – "Hong Konger" – in the context of postcolonial Hong Kong, through analyzing Wong Tze-wah's standup comedies. Wong's discursive construction of a local identity further criticizes the China-Hong Kong power dynamics and creates the intra-group distinctions within the Hong Kong society. In Wong's performance, metaphors pinpoint the interconnectedness between anxiety and identity construction; at the same time, enable Hong Kongers to ridicule the governance of Britain and question the unequal power relations underlying the discourses that China used during the 97' Handover. Parodies, on the other hand, unveil the social conundrum and conflict faced by the Hong Kongers in the post-97 context, which continues to reflect the challenges in constructing the Hong Kong identity. Altogether, those stylistic resources are employed to create indexical type of meanings, and index the precariousness, anxiety, authenticity as associated with identity construction. As the indexical meanings transform into styles, the language user

constructs the social identity in an agentive and reflexive manner, contesting the ideologies with regard to the local culture and society. The analysis of in this study reveals the ways in which Wong's linguistic practices become the semiotic resources and accrete into styles. Such process sheds light on how the language user appropriates sociolinguistic styles to effectively project a socially-meaningful place-based identity. Therefore, Wong's comic performance provides an example that linguistic practices play a pivotal role in shaping the local identity and questioning the sociopolitical inequality, meanwhile developing new variations in the supposedly enduring and homogeneous group identity.

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