



Hety, a PhD Candidate at the NUS

Visiting Our Department

By Hety Wong

This is Hety Wong, the honorary research assistant at the department this semester. I graduated from the sociology department at CUHK with a bachelor's degree in 2009. I was teaching in Hong Kong and the US before I embarked on graduate studies. My Hong Kongese and amateur musician background inform my research interests: music (sound in general), meanings of space, and identity construction.

Cantonese popular music ("Cantopop") is my main research object. I study Cantopop as a marginalized musical genre within the mainstream Chinese popular music, particularly after the handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty in 1997, which led me to pursue a Ph.D. degree in cultural studies. Cultural studies, especially with Stuart Hall of Birmingham School's thoughts, have a strong connection to Marxism – to study the counter-hegemonic relationship (if not struggles and conflicts) between two groups. In addition to Cantopop's subordinate

position among Chinese popular music in the post-1997 era, it originated from the grassroots. Still, it was discriminated by the locals before it got popularized in the early-1970s when a dominant portion of the local population was low-income grassroots laborers! Cantopop has been a product of cultural struggles that places itself best in the cultural studies framework.

Of course, I have been using my sociological imagination in my Cantopop investigation – to understand the music by reading it with Hong Kong history and culture. In my dissertation, I argue Cantopop as the sound of Hong Kong, which is not only voice for/serve as a communication medium among Hong Kongese, but also provide a sonic environment for Hong Kongese to identify with and even anchor at regardless where they are. I chose to further my studies in Singapore, in addition to the faculty members' expertise in Asian popular culture, I hope to learn "on-site" about Cantopop's impact in Nanyang from the 1950s. That was when popular cultural products produced in mainland China were banned in Malaya, now Malaysia and Singapore, and made unavailable due to the subsequent Cultural Revolution – Cantonese music produced in Hong Kong was then imported to fulfill the diasporic Chinese market. Moreover, since I started my program, I have always been encouraged to conduct research on Singapore culture and its connection to other ASEAN/Asian countries. I would not have thought about extending my research scope in terms of geography if I study in Hong Kong. I should thank Cantopop for leading my research career.

PRESENTATIONS

Yvan Yonaha has been accepted to present his paper "*Investigating Interactions in Metro Manila Local Government Units' Facebook Pages in Relation to Covid-19*" at the 2020 Philippine Sociological Society National Conference. October 2-9, 2020.

PUBLICATIONS

Olivos, Francisco, Gonzalo Palomo, Pablo Olivos-Jara, and Minhui Liu. 2021. "Educational attainment and environmental concern in China: an instrumental variable approach." *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*. Accepted. ([read the abstract](#))

Social structure and attitude change: a brief introduction

By Peng Wang



For the past years, polarization in politics and public opinions has emerged in many countries and regions, which has aroused scholars' interest in how social attitudes change and what social forces affect this process. Attitude is a person's evaluation of an object on a favorable to unfavorable continuum, while comprised of cognitive, affective, and conative components. When people's attitudes move in the direction of their initial tendency and lead to extreme disagreement between groups, we can call this phenomenon of attitude polarization. As a psychological term similar to value and belief, attitude is so important and special because of its more direct and close association with people's behavior.

There are lots of structural factors that change people's attitudes at different levels. According to modernization theory, the process of industrialization has brought about pervasive social consequences such as occupational specialization, rising educational levels, etc., leading to changes in attitudes toward authority, gender roles and sexual norms, and so on. The economic situation is another crucial factor. Economic development is linked to the increasing satisfaction and happiness of people, while inequality can counteract this positive effect, damaging public's support for redistributive policies, confidence in democracy, and social trust. On the other hand, partisan politics and polarization in politics can also aggravate polarization among the public and further affect their behavior. That is, political institutions can influence individual attitudes and trustworthy behavior through different incentives.

The factors mentioned above are macro-structural variables, potential intermediate mechanisms need to be identified for understanding how the macro-level factors affect individual-level attitudes. For example, the legitimization mechanism interprets that social inequality can be legitimated as a consequent result of the market competition and meritocracy, thereby becoming a social norm accepted by the public and influencing people's attitudes toward redistributive policies. Other mechanisms include psychological processes, such as social comparison, social contact and social identity. E.g. the relative deprivation theory explains that if one's standing is relatively disadvantaged and this disadvantage is believed to be undeserved, it can lead to the experience of personal relative deprivation and invoke feelings of anger and resentment, thus negatively affect individuals' happiness.

Besides the traditional research based on survey data, computational social science's fast growth also provides new tools and methodology for studying social structure and attitude change. In a rapidly changing world, capturing the link between macro-structure forces and individual attitudes remains an exciting and challenging work for us sociology researchers.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

✓ Publication opportunity:

- Special Issue of American Journal of Cultural Sociology. **Deadline: October 15, 2020.** ([see the ad](#))
- Special Issue of Health Sociology Review. **Deadline: August 31, 2021.** ([see the ad](#))

✓ Call for papers (Conferences):

- First Doctoral Conference on the Social and Political Constitution of the Economy (online), International Max Planck Research School. March 24–26, 2021. **Deadline: November 8, 2020** ([see the ad](#))

✓ Job ads:

- Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at Lingnan University. **Deadline: October 18, 2020.** ([see the ad](#))
- Postdoctoral Fellow, NTU Institute of Science and Technology for Humanity, Singapore. **Deadline: October 23, 2020.** ([see the ad](#))
- Professor / Assistant Professor / Associate Professor in Sociology at Duke Kunshan University, Shanghai. **Deadline: October 15, 2020.** ([see the ad](#))